GENDER, MIGRATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE:

The Return of Filipino Women Migrant Workers

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

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SUMMARY

This study is about the consequences of feminised migration on migrant women workers, on their families and on the Philippine society as a whole. The continued dependence on migration and increasingly, women's migration, by the Philippine government to address unemployment on one hand, and by the Filipino families on the other hand, to secure employment and a better life, has led to social change: change in migrant women's sense of identity and personhood; restructuring of households and redefinition of families and gender relations and the rise of a culture of migration. To understand these social changes, the study focuses on the return phase of migration situated within the overall migration process and adopts a gendered and feminist approach. Existing theories of return migration cannot adequately capture the meanings of the return of migrant women workers. Studying return through a gendered approach allows us to reflect on the extent migration goals have been achieved or not, the conditions under which return takes place for a migrant woman worker and various factors affecting life after migration for the migrant women and their families. Return of the women migrant workers cannot be neatly categorised as voluntary or involuntary. It is gendered. It is involuntary, voluntary, and mainly ambivalent. Involuntary return was influenced by structural limitations arising from the temporary and contractual type of migration in jobs categorised as unskilled. Voluntary return was mainly determined by the achievement of migration goals, the psychological need to return after prolonged absence and by the need to respond to concerns of families left behind. Ambivalent return was caused by the desire to maintain the status, economic power, freedom and autonomy stemming from the migrants' breadwinning role; the need to sustain the families' standard of living; as well as the apprehensions of a materially insecure life back home.

The socio-psychological consequences on families and children of migrant women are deep and wide-ranging. Similarly, women migrants, though empowered at a certain level, had to face psychological and emotional consequences upon return influenced by persistent gender roles and gender regimes. By analysing the impact of gendered migration and return on the societal level, the study has broadened and deepened the conceptualisation of the phenomenon of culture of migration by bringing other elements and factors such as the role of the state, human resources, sustainable livelihood, national identity and governance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

ADB   Asian Development Bank

DAWN Development Action for Women Network

DOLE Department of Labor and Employment

DFID   Department for International Development

FGD   Focus Group Discussion

GATS   General Agreement on Trade and Services

ILO   International Labour Organization

INSTRAW International Institute for Training and Research for the Advancement of Women

LEARN Labor Education and Research Network

LS   Life Story

MDGs   Millenium Development Goals

NCR   National Capital Region

NGOs   Non-Government Organisations

NOVA   Network Opposed to Violence Against Migrant Workers

OFWs   Overseas Filipino Workers

OWWA Overseas Workers Welfare Administration

POEA   Philippine Overseas Employment Administration

SEAPAT South-East Asia and the Pacific Multidisciplinary Advisory Team

TESDA Technical Education and Skills Development Authority

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF   United Nations Children's Fund

UNIFEM   United Nations Development Fund for Women

UNRISD   United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

WHO   World Health Organization

ZOTO   Zone One Tondo Organization

In loving memory

for my beloved parents, Tino and Pat Tobia

and my husband, Sri

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Migration is a crucible for individual social development and for wider social change. Undoubtedly, it brings sorrow: but it also needs to be celebrated. (Thompson, preface to Benmayor and Skotnes 1993: vi)

The introductory chapter provides the rationale and scope of my study. It also situates my research in the theoretical literature of migration and return migration, underscoring the shortcomings of the literature in explaining the migration and return of Filipino women migrant workers1 and indicating how my study seeks to address these limitations. A summary of the theoretical framework, research methodology, and the thesis structure is also made in this chapter. Finally, my personal motivation in the study and my potential original contribution to the literature are presented.

1.1.   Rationale

Migration presents a rich, complex and fascinating field of study, particularly for a country like the Philippines, with its long history of generations leaving the country to work, live or settle elsewhere, and where the phenomenon has taken different forms over time. Official statistics estimate that of the total national population of 88 million, about 8 million are overseas migrant workers, of whom 5 million are temporary workers, meaning they are on contract for a specified period of time (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration 2007). The migrant workers are in more than 190 countries of the world, in the developed countries of the First World and in the rapidly developing countries of the Third World, as well as in the Gulf countries, and the industrialising nations in East and South-East Asia (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration 2008).

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[1] I have chosen the phrase Filipino women migrants rather than Filipina because over the years, 'Filipina' has assumed a derogatory connotation. According to Pauline Barber (2002:44), 'Filipina' is becoming negatively coloured by the demeaned class and status connotations accorded paid domestic labour'.

Clearly, the Philippines has come to rely heavily on the global export of its women and men to respond to unemployment and underemployment concerns.

Moreover, the overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) as they are generally referred to, have been hailed as economic heroes for their remittances.

In 2008, they sent home a record US $16.4 billion (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). These remittances have, therefore, kept the economy afloat and have also been utilised for the repayment of foreign debt.

At the same time, the experience of about 30 years of exporting labour and increasingly women's labour in mainly unskilled and so-called 3-Ds type of work (dirty, dangerous and demeaning), has brought about ambivalence in the attitudes of the Philippine government, from one of aggressively encouraging overseas migration to one of reducing dependence on migration or advocating for an outright end to it. The 1995 Gancayco Commission Report of the Philippine government (a fact-finding commission created in the aftermath of the hanging of Flor Contemplacion, a Filipino maid in Singapore found guilty of double murder) underscored the position that an '…irreparable damage has been inflicted to the reputation of the Filipino woman in the international scene because of the indiscriminate deployment of our women as domestic helpers (DHs) and entertainers'. Hence, the 'embarrassing reputation that we are a country of DHs, entertainers and even prostitutes'. 'The Commission strongly feels that it is about time we phase out if not stop the exportation of our women into slavery' (Gancayco 1995 cited in Beltran and Rodriguez 1996:73).

Rashid Amjad (1996) of ILO/SEAPAT (International Labour Organization/South-East Asia and the Pacific Multidisciplinary Advisory Team) refers to the Philippine government's engagement in an 'intense soul searching… on its status as one of the leading exporters of labour in the world' (Saith cited in Amjad 1996:340). Increasingly, he argues, 'governments from labour sending countries recognize that migration has not in any real way contributed to the

overall development effort in such countries…its impact may have been more negative than positive, delaying or providing the cushion to procrastinate importantly needed economic and structural reforms in the country' (Amjad 1996:340).

Notwithstanding this 'soul searching', export of Philippine labour remains unabated and through the years, women have increasingly dominated the scene. More than 20,000 work permits have been issued to Filipino nurses since 2002 in Britain, which according to Labour Secretary Patricia Sto. Tomas of the Philippines, is the 'new growth area for overseas employment'. (Inter-Press Service 2003). In 2007, the top occupational group for the new hires was household and related work, of which 98 per cent were women. Hence, increasingly, over the years, labour migration from the Philippines has become feminised and partly deskilled, partly skilled.

Studies (Boyd 2006; Lim and Oishi 1996; Parrenas 2006; Piper 2005) on the migration experience of women have shown that its effects on the women themselves are unclear, ambiguous and even contradictory. 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, because it is an under-researched area in the Philippine migration literature (see Ofreneo 1996) and 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— social, political, and economic, one impinging on the other such as: the implications and ramifications of the growing numbers of women migrating; 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— two forces which can be conflicting; the debates on the impact of remittances on poverty alleviation and sustainable growth and development, and the social consequences of migration.

My study seeks to bring to the centre the debate on the social consequences of prolonged migration of women, in particular, and dependence on migration in general, for employment and well-being, both at the individual and wider societal level.

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, expressed through the restructuring of households and the 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 subject women to vulnerabilities to abuse and exploitation, and at times involve deskilling for educated and skilled women taking on such jobs.

In order to understand the social changes in the Philippines arising from women's migration, I have undertaken to study the return phase of migration.

The return phase completes the full cycle of the migration process. Return is an integral part of temporary labour migration since migrants work for a specified period of time, after which they have to return to their country of origin. Women returnees bring to the study their insights and experiences of the different

phases of migration. As they perform their economic roles in a foreign country, the women undergo change, in their identities and in their relationships. They demonstrate ways of coping and forging identities in day-to-day struggles, all the while keeping in mind that at some point in their migration journey, there will be a return to their family and homeland. Studying return allows us to reflect on the extent to which migration goals have been achieved or not, the circumstances under which return takes place for a migrant woman worker, and the macro forces which help explain the circumstances of return and life after return.

1.2.   Situating the study in the literature

Russell King (2000:7) noted that 'return is the great unwritten chapter of migration'. While return is an integral facet of the migration process, it has not been treated adequately in the migration debate (Ghosh 2000). Fran Markowitz and Anders Stefansson offer two possible reasons why the theme of homecoming is visibly absent from much of the anthropology and migration research: firstly, that the conceptual and practical issues of concerns are at the periphery of assimilation, multiculturalism and transnationalism studies and secondly, that 'homecoming is an act of unproblematic and natural reinsertion in the local or national community once left behind' (Markowitz and Stefansson 2004:5). I maintain that the latter assumption applies well to temporary migration where return is a given and therefore often remains unproblematised. In contrast, Satvinder Juss (2006) asserts that any understanding of international migration needs to recognise the multi-faceted nature of migration, including temporary, circular or seasonal migration and that just, ethical and fair migration policies would consider the specific concerns of this type of migration such as the absence of protective legal frameworks and vulnerability to exploitation.

The theoretical literature on return migration is generally subsumed under international migration theories: neoclassical economics theories; new

economic labour migration theories; structuralist/dependency theories; and social network theories.

A review of migration theories (see Arango 2000; Castles 2003; Massey et al. 1998; Stahl 1995) shows that overall, these provide an understanding of the causes of migration, and the factors contributing to its self-perpetuation. The theories explain why people move and what determines the volume of migration. Hence, according to neoclassical theory, individuals from countries where labour is abundant and wages low, move to countries where labour is scarce and wages, high. Migration in this sense is viewed as a result of an individual rational decision. The new economics of labour migration theory enhances the neoclassical theory by emphasising that migration is a decision made by families and households and that the primary motivation is to diversify sources of income rather than to maximise income per se. The role of remittances is thus made central in this theory. As opposed to these theories, the structural/dependency theory or the core-periphery model, argues that migration is a mechanism by which the core exploits the periphery and therefore it perpetuates the inequalities between countries especially through brain drain. The social network theory brings to the centre the role of social capital, of social relations in facilitating access to employment and to higher wages. It is through networks then that migration becomes a self-perpetuating phenomenon. The above theories tend to be limited and can explain only certain facets of migration or are applicable only to certain types of migration (Arango 2000). The nature and characteristics of international migration have undergone profound changes since the 1970s and existing theories are not adequate to explain such changes, for example, why some countries have high outmigration while others, though structurally similar, do not. The forces of globalisation and its attendant current financial turmoil render international migration much more complex.

Therefore, the time has come to pay attention beyond the causes of migration into other dimensions which are of paramount interest and importance both in intellectual and policy terms such as: 'processes and consequences… and

societal transformations associated with international migration'; the 'unsettled relationship between migration and development' (Papademetriou and Martin 1991 cited in Arango 2000: 294).

My study focuses on the individual and social consequences and social change spurred by the international migration of women. It thus addresses a need and a concern expressed above by Arango (2000).

Just as there exist several factors explaining international migration, there also exist various micro and macro factors that motivate return and shape its configuration under specific circumstances. Overall, the literature analyses who returns, what motivates the returnee to return, what financial and human capital the returnee acquires and brings home (Cassarino 2004).

The neoclassical and new economics of labour theories explain that motivations for return are determined by financial or economic factors but no consideration is made of the social, economic and political environment at the home country which affects the return experience (Cassarino 2004). In this regard, the structuralist theory makes up for this inadequacy. Structuralist theories argue that the returnees' migration experience, skills and income earned have very little impact because of the entrenched dynamics of power relations in the home country, that hardly any skills are brought back, and that returnees mainly use remittances for consumptive purposes such as building houses mainly to keep up with the image of a returned migrant worker. The transnationalist and social network theories place importance on sustaining linkages between receiving and sending countries to enable the migrant to return at a point when enough resources, both financial and non-financial, are mobilised and when conditions in the home country are favourable (Cassarino 2004). Other typologies of return migration include return as failure (migrants return when they are unable to earn the desired level of income or when they are unable to integrate with host countries); return as conservatism (return is motivated by migrants' families and households decisions rather than by the migrants themselves); and return as innovation (migrants return with new knowledge and skills and financial capital such that they are able to become agents of change in their home country)

(Cerase 1974 in Cassarino 2004). Return is also categorised as either forced or voluntary.

Voluntary return would refer to return without force, a clear and open choice on the part of the migrant worker (Black et al. 2004). For a migrant worker, forced return occurs when they are physically forced to leave the country of employment due to unforeseen situations such as civil unrest or war or for whatever reasons there is no longer a choice to remain in the country of migration. My study shows that the return of women migrant workers cannot be easily defined as voluntary. Many factors come into play in the decision to return, rendering it a complex phenomenon.

I contend that these migration return theories and typologies only partially explain the phenomenon of the return of Filipino migrant women workers. They do not adequately capture the nuanced circumstances and conditions under which return takes place for a migrant woman worker nor her situation following return. For example, when a woman returns home unplanned in order to care for a sick child or a troubled son, is her return voluntary when one considers that an element of voluntariness is free choice? (see Black et al. 2004).

Therefore, I assert that the line between voluntary and involuntary return is blurred. I take the position of Juss (2006:292) when he argues that 'most movements of "forced" or "voluntary" migrants are often difficult to rationalise in such a straightforward way because 'forced migrants may retain some choice as to where they flee; voluntary migrants may be escaping depths of poverty and insecurity which give little room for choice'.

I argue that a gendered approach in understanding return (as well as the entire migration process itself) is necessary in order to move the analysis beyond the economic and financial dimensions to include socio-psychological and cultural elements. Gender is a key constitutive element of migration. 'Gender not only matters to migration but also contributes substantial added value…' (Mahler and Pessar 2006:50). A gendered approach enables one to have a greater awareness of the broader social factors that influence women's and men's

motivations and roles, the dynamics of gender relations, and a better understanding of the effect of migration on women's and men's position with reference to the temporal and spatial contexts as well as to life circumstances (Mahler and Pessar 2006; Piper 2005).

Situating the study in the Philippine literature on women and migration, Rosalinda Pineda-Ofreneo et al. (1996) observed that much of the literature dwelt on the problems faced by the women migrant workers, especially as their numbers rose. Other studies presented baseline data and profiles of women overseas workers, where they come from, which countries they go to, their educational attainment, income levels, among others. As well, policy studies were made putting forward recommendations to address problems related to the growing number of overseas Filipino workers, their welfare and protection, before departure, on-site and upon return to the home country. While recognising the increasing literature on Philippine migration, the review nevertheless identified several research gaps such as: insufficiency of gender-disaggregated data; the lack of longitudinal, interdisciplinary studies to investigate the social costs of female labour migration; the effects on the family, the children and community; the impact on marriage as a social institution, issues and problems of reintegration; as well as the effectiveness of government agencies dealing with the issue of migration. Addressing the social consequences of women worker migration on the individual, family, and societal levels will be the focus of my study, thus contributing to a vital dimension in the gender and migration literature and providing original fieldwork data and analysis.

1.3.   Research aims and scope

This research seeks to determine the gendered impact of international migration of Filipino women on their lives, their families left behind and on the Philippine nation as a whole. While most studies (see Constable 2004; Parrenas 2001; Tacoli 1999: Zontini 2004) dwell on the migrant women's conditions in the country of destination, this research focuses on the

consequences or outcomes of the growing phenomenon of feminised international labour migration, particularly the long-term migration and return of women. I therefore raise the following questions:

What does the return of women migrant workers demonstrate with regard to migration motivations, goals, agencies, identities, and outcomes?

What are the gendered meanings of return? What happens to the women when they return to their country of origin in terms of: a) the effects of migration experience on their positions and roles, their identity, and sense of empowerment; b) the impact of migration on their families, relationships within families and households?

What are the gendered outcomes of long-term migration and return of women migrants for the Philippine society as a whole?

In terms of scope, my study is limited to the temporary international labour migration of Filipino women who have occupied mainly unskilled work, whether as domestic helpers or factory workers. Skilled migrant workers (for example, Filipino nurses in the United Kingdom and United States) often have the option to remain in their country of migration and settle permanently with their families and may even become citizens. For unskilled workers, their movement is temporary since they work under contract for a limited period of time, normally two years, but renewable. Return to home country is therefore stipulated for unskilled workers. As my study shows, the 'temporary movement' can be as long as 23 years. Another feature of this movement is that women migrate on their own as independent economic agents, without their families and with hardly any scope or space for family reunification.

1.4.   Brief theoretical framework

My theoretical chapter (Chapter 2) discusses the development of migration literature pointing out its shortcomings and how this study contributes to overcoming them. The conceptual and theoretical framework for the research study draws upon migration theories including return migration; notions of

identity, agency and empowerment; and the concept of a culture of migration. Gender is the overarching organising construct and analytic concept for my study.

Gender is a social construct and thus organises ways of 'structuring power in all human relationships, including those among people on the move' (Donato et al. 2006:6). It is a dynamic concept so that 'gendered ideologies and practices change as human beings cooperate or struggle with each other, with their pasts, and with the structure of changing economic, political and social worlds linked through their migrations. Migrants often become particularly aware of the relational and contextual nature of gender as they attempt to fulfil expectations of identity and behaviour that may differ sharply in the several places they live' (Donato et al. 2006:6).

The framework I adopt seeks to uncover and understand the complex phenomenon of return in international labour migration and its consequences through a multi-level analysis: the micro-level focuses on women's migration and return and its consequences for the women themselves; the intermediate or meso-level dwells on the impact of women's migration on families; and the macro-level highlights the structural and institutional changes brought about by women's migration for the Philippine society as a whole. I chose to emphasise the micro-level analysis because it is at this level where understanding of the intermediate and the macro experiences and processes converge. The individual migrant navigates and acts within particular social, political and economic contexts of institutions, which in turn impact on her position and condition and the extent to which her migration goals are achieved. The individual migrant worker's life is embedded in the dynamics of family life and is also influenced by the wider society so that the changes and processes occurring also reflect macro forces. A study, therefore, of the micro, meso and macro forces and consequences of long-term feminised migration and return seeks to provide a coherent and holistic analysis.

In studying Filipino women domestic workers in Rome and Los Angeles, Rhacel Parrenas (2001) employs three levels of analysis: the macro level, the

intermediate level and the subject level. She contends that the macro processes of globalisation spawn the demand for low-wage labour of women from traditional Third World countries in the secondary tiers of manufacturing sector and in the service sector of advanced capitalist economies. In the process, the migrant domestic workers are placed in a disadvantaged position within the global political economy exposing them in various vulnerabilities to exploitation and violations of economic and social rights.

At the intermediate level of analysis, migrants are depicted in a manner that they respond to larger structural forces through the manipulation of institutions (such as social networks) in the creation of migrant communities, in the maintenance of migration flows or in securing one's social and labour incorporation upon settlement. Parrenas (2001) argues that transnationalism and gender studies are most useful in directing us to the identification of dislocations. Migrants turn to transnational institutions to 'negotiate their stunted integration in settlement' and to help them cope with emotional dislocations…they create transnational institutions because they have not been fully incorporated into the host society (Parrenas 2001:27). By situating themselves in the 'transnational fields', migrants counteract their marginal status in the host society. Gender studies help us to understand the migration patterns and experiences of men and women, their labour market incorporation, the social networks they create, their experiences in the migrant family; and changes in their position in households.

The subject level of analysis focuses on the constitution of the subject and their dislocations which are shaped by multiple forms of oppression. This accounts for the intersections of race, class, gender and citizenship in the lives of migrant Filipino women domestic workers. By defining the subjectivity of migrant Filipina domestic helpers, Parrenas seeks to identify their multiple subject-positions which she refers to as 'dislocations' or 'narratives of displacement' (Parrenas 2001:31). Her analysis of migration as a process of subject formation does not end with the documentation of dislocations but also takes into account the actions taken by Filipina domestic workers to 'resist their dislocations'

(Parrenas 2001:34). The subject-level of analysis seeks to integrate the macro and intermediate levels of analysis.

Whereas Parrenas' study focuses on dislocations of migrant domestic workers, my thesis focuses on the consequences of feminised migration. Like her study, my work employs three levels of analysis: the macro level seeks to illuminate the impact of feminised migration on Philippine society manifested in the development of a culture of migration. In my study, the intermediate level of analysis dwells on the effect of women's migration and prolonged migration on families left behind. Similarly, Parrenas' study at this level looks at the dynamics of transnational institutions including transnational families and how they are affected by women's migration. At the individual level of analysis, my research underscores how migration has affected the migrant woman's sense of agency and empowerment. Parrenas refers to the migrant woman's agency in resisting dislocations although she clarifies that 'agency is conditioned and therefore limited by the social processes from which it emerges and takes place' (Parrenas 2001:34). In my thesis, I refer to bounded agency, the forces difficult to overcome and usually beyond the control of the migrant woman worker. Whereas Parrenas emphasises the role of gender in the intermediate level of analysis, gender remains as the overarching social construct framing all three levels of analysis in my study.

Jon Goss and Bruce Lindquist (1995: 319) argue that a more appropriate intermediate -level concept in explaining international labour migration is that of migrant institution defined as 'a complex articulation of individuals, associations and organizations which extends the social action of and interaction between these agents and agencies across time and space'. Their conceptualisation is informed by the structuration theory of Anthony Giddens (1984). 'Structures are rules and resources which both enable and constrain the actions of human agents as they are drawn upon in their everyday lives (Giddens 1982:30). 'Social agents employ their varying knowledge of structures to realise their goals, and it is through individual and collective actions that these structures are reproduced and transformed' (Goss and Lindquist 1995:331).

A key component of recent large-scale international migration is 'the complex of international and national institutions that transcend the boundaries of states and locales, linking employers in the developed or rapidly developing economies with individuals in the furthest peripheries of the Third World' (Goss and Lindquist 1995:336). In the process, migration is institutionalised so that an international migrant institution is a 'relatively permanent feature of social life that results from the regularization of social interaction for the purposes of overseas employment and which in turn regulates interaction and structures access to overseas employment through the operation of institutional rules and resources' (Goss and Lindquist 1995:336).

Goss and Lindquist (1995) further argue that private capital and state are involved in the active recruitment of labour to address labour demand. The employer and the complex networks of recruitment agencies that link with the migrant are absent in most accounts of international labour migration. The local patron, the returned migrant and the private recruiter are critical to the functioning of the migrant institution – they exploit the institution for their individual benefits but in so doing play roles as institutional agents by enforcing rules and distributing its resources. While Goss and Lindquist (1995) contend that overseas labour migration is the outcome of a complex combination of individual actions and social structures, I argue in my study that in the Philippine context, it is the aggressive role of the state in promoting international migration as a means of reducing unemployment and underemployment which is the key factor in the pervasiveness of the phenomenon thus resulting in a culture of migration.

Migration theories such as the neoclassical, new economics of labour migration and migration networks theories partly explain the return migration of Filipino women in terms of the ability of some to achieve their economic goals of earning higher incomes (than that obtained in the home country) and fulfilling their families' economic needs and aspirations. For many of the returning migrant women however, non-economic factors explain their return (Chamberlain 1994; King 2000). Gender ideologies and gendered roles greatly

influence the reasons for return. Philippine society as a whole still regards the home as the woman's place and although more and more women have become co-breadwinners or even main breadwinners, the view still prevails that women should remain as the primary carers and nurturers of families. Women migrant workers are thus thrown into competing demands: to provide for families; and at the same time respond to society's expectations of a caring and self-sacrificing mother, wife or daughter.

A central feature in the return of the Filipino women migrants is ambivalence, an aspect not covered much in the theoretical literature. The conceptualisation of ambivalence in return by Nicole Constable (2004) explains the factors delaying return, making it elusive or even imaginary. Such factors include changing and increasing aspirations of the migrant women and of their families; the economic conditions in the home country; and changing identities of the migrant women themselves. Identities, according to Stuart Hall (1996), are multiplied and constructed across different discourses, practices and positions. Thus, the migration experience of the Filipino women has led them to carve out new identities and new meanings attributed to their roles as worker, wife, daughter or mother.

The consequences of the migration experience of Filipino women on the women themselves are assessed in terms of the theory of agency and capability as expounded by Amartya Sen (1999) and the concept of empowerment developed by feminist scholars like Srilatha Batliwala (1994), Naila Kabeer (1995) and Jo Rowlands (1998). According to Amartya Sen, an agent acts and brings about change to achieve functionings, goals and the various things that she values, hence, in this study, in relation to the goals the migrant woman sets during the course of her migration journey. Women's agency is therefore a means to remove the 'inequities that depress the well-being of women' (Sen 1999:191). Women's agency leads to empowerment, a dynamic, on-going process. Jo Rowlands (1998) makes a distinction between personal empowerment, collective empowerment and empowerment in closest personal relationships, that is, with husbands and family members. The core

elements constitute a sense of agency, (to negotiate, communicate, to organise, to hold opinions, among others) of dignity, of self and personhood. At the end of the woman's migration journey, this study examines to what extent the women are empowered and how.

R. W. Connell's theoretical conceptualisation of gender relationships as structured by labour, power and cathexis (emotional attachments) probes the impact of women's migration on households and families. The family is perceived as an institution where 'relationships [are] so extended in time, so intensive in contact, so dense in the interweaving of economics, emotion, power and resistance' (Connell 1987:121). Women's migration has brought about economic impact mainly through remittances. Prolonged absence of the woman migrant from her family impacts on the structures and processes of family life, reorganisation of households, parenting, childcare, household chores and affects the emotional and psycho-social roles of individual members of households, husband-wife power relationships, and migrant mother-children relationships.

The family as an institution is also embedded in socially constructed, gendered ideological norms such as those pertaining to what it is supposed to be, what roles members take upon themselves and how they are expected to behave. In many ways, the migration of Filipino women has not followed the conventional family norm and gender expectations where the father is the breadwinner and the mother, the nurturer. Rhacel Parrenas' (2006) notion of gender paradox illuminates the rigidity of gender regimes or gender boundaries such that women's migration does not necessarily transform the gender inequities in roles and relationships so that the men who are left behind by their migrant wives do not assume the traditional roles of their spouses and even if they do, families and the society itself still regard household work and responsibilities as women's work.

As I argue in my thesis, one consequence of long-term migration and return on Philippine society is the phenomenon of a culture of migration. The theoretical literature on culture of migration is scant and limited in its scope and

comprehension (Ali 2007). I have indicated earlier that one potential original contribution of my study is broadening the scope and deepening the level of comprehension of the phenomenon of the culture of migration.

Syed Ali (2007), Douglas Massey et al. (1998), and Takeyuki Tsuda (2003) essentially explain how a culture of migration develops over time through social networks and cumulative causation. The values associated with migration become part and parcel of the community's values so that 'ideas, practices and cultural artefacts reinforce the celebration of migration and migrants' (Ali 2007:39). I contend that these conceptualisations are inadequate in studying the migration culture in the Philippine society, particularly because they do not dwell on the consequences of such a culture on the nation as a whole and they lack the gendered dimension. They cannot explain, for example, how a feminised international labour migration could erode the sense of national identity (see Einhorn 2006a).

In further assessing the consequences of women's long-term migration and return, concepts such as sustainability, including sustainable livelihood and deskilling, are utilised (see Black et al. 2004).

1.5.   Methodological approach

My study adopts a multi-level approach in order to provide an integrative perspective on the topic of return migration of Filipino women and its gendered consequences. I explained in the theoretical framework that my main focus of analysis is at the micro level, that of the migrant women's lives and experiences. As a woman migrant narrates her life of being away from home for several years, she is able to look back and to reflect on the meanings of her experiences as a migrant worker in a globalised environment, on her work (mainly as domestic work) in a foreign land; on her identities as a woman, non-citizen in the receiving country; on her relationships with her employers, with fellow nationals and with others. She assesses how she views the world, and how migration has changed and benefited (or not) herself and her family. The

migrant woman worker examines the meanings of return in terms of her relationships with the family left behind, the community of which she is a part and the country of her birth, her origin. Is she able to fit back and resettle? What does coming home mean? Has the home to which she returns changed?

The choice of the research method is shaped by the aims of the study, the topics of inquiry and the perspectives that the researcher brings into the research. I contend that it is only through a qualitative method, specifically, the life story/narrative that one can unearth and understand fully the dynamics of change that migration has brought to bear on the lives of the migrant women workers. Quantitative surveys elicit static responses. These do not allow one to delve into the meanings of experiences. The life stories seek to unearth the processes and experiences of migration from the perspective of the women migrants themselves. Narratives are central to identity formation and selfhood. They convey processes of change over one's life course or life cycle (Gardner 2002).

Collecting life histories enables the women and the researcher to explore questions of gender and migration in a reflexive manner. The use of life history method springs from the position that 'knowledge is grounded in the everyday, common-sense world, and in the constructions and explanations, members of that world [the migrant women] describe their reality and actions' (Jones cited in Illo 1997:13). Often, the voice of the migrant woman is suppressed or muted because of the circumstances of her life in a foreign land, working usually as a domestic helper and therefore stratified in the lower if not lowest rung of society. Hence, telling one's story upon return can be empowering, validating the importance of the migrant's life experiences, uncovering the complex web of feelings, of pains and satisfaction as well as contradictions, the dislocations (see Parrenas 2001) or discontinuities and continuities in their lives.

Listening to women's voices and learning from women's experiences are vital to the feminist reconstruction of our understanding of the world. Women's personal narratives illuminate several facets of gender relations such as the construction of a gendered self-identity, the relationship between individual and

society in the creation and perpetuation of gender norms as well as the dynamics of power relations between women and men (Gluck 1991; The Personal Narratives Group 1989).

The use of narratives is not without criticisms: the over-emphasis on the role of the verbal in the construction of meaning (Wolf 1996); the authorial control, that is, what words to include or to edit, to frame women's words. However, these issues do not render the narrative invalid, 'it just makes it one kind of truth amongst others' (Gardner 2002: 29).

I have triangulated the main method of life stories/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 study also draws upon information and insights gathered from my participation in several workshops and conferences related to migration at national, regional and international levels. In addition, my years of experience as migrants' rights and welfare activist have been a rich source of knowledge for identifying the issues that I need to look at in my study.

1.6. Thesis structure

The introduction provides the rationale, aims, scope and brief theoretical framework and potential original contribution of my study. In Chapter 2, I situate the context and focus of this thesis by examining three areas of theoretical-conceptual literature that guide my research: a) migration theories including return migration; b) gender, identity, and empowerment; and c) the culture of

migration. I discuss the salient aspects of these theories and indicate to what extent they illuminate my research. In doing so, I seek to identify what the theories explain and what they miss out and how the gaps may be addressed.

In Chapter 3, I describe and examine the research methodology, in particular the feminist approach and epistemology, the value of life histories in placing women and gender at the centre of migration study, and my positioning as an activist and a researcher at the same time. In addition, the chapter describes the strategies and activities of the entire research process; the concerns and challenges encountered in the course of the research such as the dynamics of power between the researcher and the interviewees/narrators of life stories, the issues of memory and reliability in the documentation of their life stories.

Chapter 4 provides the background and context of my study. It discusses the trends in Philippine labour migration and analyses the phenomenon of the feminisation of migration, and the macro factors— political, social and economic that explain this phenomenon. The role of the Philippine government in promoting a gendered labour migration policy is highlighted. The implications of the feminisation of migration on women's labour and women's status are examined. The chapter provides the context for the life stories of Filipino migrant women workers which are analysed in Chapters 5 and 6.

In Chapter 5, the analysis moves to the consequences of the feminisation of migration in the return phase of migration. Based on the empirical findings of the research, the notion of return, the reasons for return and what return means for the individual migrant worker and her family are examined.

The narratives of return start with the narratives of departure in order to provide a holistic understanding of the migration of the Filipino women workers. The narratives seek to unearth migrants' motivations and goals of migrating, the interplay of factors shaping the life and identity of the women migrant workers, and ways of coping to attain the goal of return.

Chapter 6 is an extension of the analysis in chapter 5. The home that the migrant worker returns to is analysed in terms of family situations, relationships,

changes in life cycles as well as social and economic roles. Dynamics of gender and power relationships within the families and households are carefully studied. It examines life after migration, for the migrant woman worker and her family, the emotional and psychological consequences of migration on the children both while left behind and when returned to on account of shifts in gender roles and power relationships and the sense of security and insecurity that the migration experience of the mother has brought to bear on the family. The chapter considers the extent to which migration has brought about changes in the migrant workers' and families' well-being and the migrant workers' sense of empowerment. The varied meanings of life after migration are discussed, the socio-psychological adjustments, the difficulties of rejoining the formal workforce, the consequences of deskilling while working overseas.

Chapter 7 examines the consequences of long-term migration and return as leading to a phenomenon of culture of migration; how it developed over the years; and what are its effects on the fabric and institutions of Philippine society including erosion of national pride and aspirations, distortions in the value and system of education, distortions in policy-making, brain drain and deskilling.

In the concluding chapter, Chapter 8, I seek to integrate my field work findings and the analysis of secondary sources within a framework that combines the macro, meso and micro perspectives in studying the lives of migrant women workers, specifically, the return phase of their migration experience. In the process, the contributions to the theoretical field of gender and return migration are delineated. I explain how a gendered approach to studying return migration, when combined with the mainstream migration theories, elicits the economic and non-economic causes and consequences of return migration. The chapter also demonstrates how the research undertaking has broadened and deepened the concept of gendered culture of migration.

Finally, the concluding chapter identifies what issues are worth pursuing for future studies. I contend that continued dependence on international labour migration to address national economic concerns would mean in the long-run that the government would need to address the following issues: loss of vital

human resources needed to propel economic growth and development of the country; addressing structural problems in the home economy and adopting strategies for sustainable growth and development; redefining families and redressing expectations of women's persistent burden of responsibility for productive and reproductive roles; how to counter the erosion of peoples' trust and confidence in good governance; erosion of the ideal to live and work in one's own country and directly take part in nation-building and development.

1.7. Personal motivation in the study

This research provides me with the opportunity to reflect on my years as an activist, the advocacy that my co-activists and I have persistently pursued through the decades and to uphold and protect the basic rights of migrant workers, promote their welfare and to address the root causes and effects of migration. My activist self, therefore, enables me to identify with the subject of study passionately.

From 1985 until the middle of the 1990s, I was part of a volunteer support group in Malaysia which extended various types of assistance to Filipino women migrant workers, mainly domestic workers, faced with distress and crisis situations such as physical, emotional and verbal abuse from employers, non-payment of salaries, withholding of passports, absence of rest days, long working hours, and premature and indiscriminate dismissal from work. My analysis then was that these women were clearly victims of oppressive and exploitative employers, recruitment agents, and insensitive, anti-migrant structures and processes. Through the years, however, I had also encountered women migrants who appeared to me as survivors and as confident and empowered individuals who worked for several years and acknowledged a positive, 'successful' migration experience. At the same time, my colleagues and friends in migrant support groups also became conscious of the effects of the long-term migration of women on families left behind in the Philippines and on the vital institutions of Philippine society. Over the decades, we have thus consistently argued that the social consequences of

international labour migration, particularly that of women occupying the so-called 3-Ds type of work, are deep and wide-ranging and with long-term detrimental effects on the fabric of society as a whole.

This research, therefore, provides me with the impetus to understand more deeply the meanings of the migration journeys of Filipino women migrant workers. My research questions revolve around migration motivations, goals and outcomes and the various factors influencing such; the impact of the migration experiences on the women's sense of identity, personhood and empowerment; the dynamics of their relationships with children and spouses and their communities; and the meanings of the return of the migrant women to their home country including the consequences of their long-term migration on the Philippine society. In order to capture the breadth, depth and intensity of these experiences, the 14 life story narrators were chosen to represent women of varying social and economic backgrounds: unmarried, married, single parent, and widowed; women of primary, secondary and college education; women with formal and informal employment in the home country; women with employed and unemployed or irregularly employed spouses and women from urban and rural areas. Chapter 2 on research methodology gives a more detailed account of these backgrounds. It is hoped that the findings of my research can give further credence, force and urgency to our advocacy of addressing the root causes and effects of migration and can be brought into the migration policy-making process for policy changes or reforms.

Finally, this research builds on a small study I undertook in 1989 on Filipino women domestic workers in Malaysia as part of a pioneering regional study on *The Trade in Domestic Workers: Causes, Mechanisms and Consequences* (APDC 1989). At that time, my study focused on why Filipino women moved to other countries to work as domestic helpers and how they moved. The consequences of their migration were unclear and findings, tentative, then. This research, therefore, enables me to achieve a substantial measure of confidence in stating the consequences of long-term migration particularly for the social cohesion of the sending country.

1.8. Potential original contribution

My theoretical contribution is to point out that the existing migration literature particularly on return migration needs to take into account the dynamics of change brought about by gendered migration experience. Return cannot be neatly categorised as success or failure, voluntary (autonomous) or forced. Motivations for return, the conditions under which return takes place, and the outcomes of return for the migrant woman worker are influenced by a variety of factors such as gender ideologies and regimes, gendered roles and relationships, gendered state policies, and macro forces beyond the control of the migrant women.

My study also aspires to contribute to building knowledge on the culture of migration and the institutionalisation of migration and its gendered aspects and consequences in terms of sustainable livelihood, brain drain and deskilling, notions of national pride and aspirations, and state accountability for peoples' security and well-being. These consequences encompass economic, social, cultural and psychological aspects at all three levels: individual, family and society. The existing literature on the culture of migration aims mainly to explain the phenomenon at the level of individuals and communities and often in mainly economic terms. My contribution is to widen the notion and conceptualisation of the culture of migration to the level of its effects on society and extend its ramifications beyond economic concerns and to highlight the role of the state in developing and perpetuating such a culture.

CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the theoretical and conceptual framework of my thesis. In doing so, I discuss and analyse three areas of theoretical-conceptual literature that guide my research: migration theories covering both return migration and women, gender and migration; theories of agency, capability and empowerment; and the concept of the culture of migration.

2.1.   Introduction

The literature on migration is vast and richly reflective of the complexity of the phenomenon. As Ronald Skeldon (1997: ix) puts it, 'the increase in migration has been matched by the growth in writings about the topic, and analyses from every conceivable point of view continue to pour out'. Caroline Bretell and James Hollifield (2000) state that each discipline brings a theoretical and empirical contribution to the subject of migration. For example, anthropologists study households, families, social networks and transnational communities; sociologists and economists tend to dwell on the importance of social and human capital and the issues of settlement and integration; political scientists concern themselves with questions of public policy, citizenship, governance; and demographers study how migration movements affect population dynamics in both the sending and receiving countries. What is needed, however, is an interdisciplinary approach to understand deeply the complexity of the migration phenomenon and view it as a dynamic whole and as a 'lifelong process which affects all aspects of a migrant's existence… there has been a loss of comprehension of the overall migratory process because of the fragmentation of research into fields of study, a fragmentation which conflicts with the lived reality of migrants' (Castles 2000:15-16). Migration itself is a difficult field of study because of its wide diversity in forms and processes as well as socio-cultural and economic contexts. As a complex phenomenon, it 'needs to be

"unpacked" so that each part can be seen in its proper historical and social context' (Fielding 1983:3 cited in Arango 2000: 295).

My thesis aims to study one part of the international labour migration phenomenon: the return phase of temporary labour migration of Filipino women. By drawing upon the three fields of literature stated above, I seek to 'unpack' the meanings and motivations of return and its consequences for the women migrants themselves, their families and for the Philippine society in general.

The first field of conceptual literature highlights the way migration theories treat the dimension of return and how these in turn are applicable or not to my study. I argue that such theories remain inadequate in explaining the return of Filipino women labour migrants in a type of work categorised as unskilled. Moreover, there is a need to capture the various dimensions of their migrant lives and to do so, I engage the concepts of agency and identity to illuminate how the women navigate through their day-to-day life experiences as migrant workers to ultimately attain their migration goals and return to their home country. Finally, I assess to what extent their migration goals have been realised and to determine the consequences of their migration journey on themselves, their families and the Philippine society as a whole. Hence, the concepts of empowerment, gender roles and relations, and culture of migration are useful in my analysis.

2.2. Migration theories

As a sub-process and a facet of international migration, return migration can be understood and analysed by looking at international migration theories. Several theories of migration have been developed treating the subject from various levels of analysis, perspective and approach.

Economic theories

Economic modernisation theory (see Castles and Miller 2003; Massey et al. 1989; Stahl 1995), often known as push-pull theory, emanates from neo-

classical economics based on rational choice factor, mobility and wage differentials. It perceives the causes of migration to lie in a combination of push factors, impelling people to leave the areas of origin, and pull factors attracting them to receiving countries. People move from areas abundant in labour and low wages, to areas where wages are high but labour is scarce. Migration seeks to eliminate wage differentials and ultimately contributes to economic development in both sending and receiving (host) countries. The theory further assumes that migration is a voluntary act and the result of individual decisions made by rational actors. The shortcomings of this theory are that it is both individualistic and ahistorical (Castles 2000). It is unable to explain or take into account the barriers that curtail the movement of labour or how is it that some countries have high outmigration, while others, although structurally similar, do not; or why certain groups of people move and where they move to (Arango 2000). The theory is also unable to capture the non-economic reasons behind people's mobility.

Examination of historical and contemporary migrations shows that states play a major role in initiating, shaping and controlling movements (see Lim and Oishi 1996; Tyner 2000). The structural institutional aspect is seriously under-acknowledged in neo-classical economic theories. In my thesis, I highlight the role of the state, the Philippine government, in promoting the international migration of men and women, in particular. Family, media, social networks of migrants themselves and other institutions in society are other important determinant factors for migration and migrants' behaviour. While high wages constitute a major factor for people to move, there are non-economic considerations which motivate people to move, as I argue in my study.

In terms of motivations for return, the above theory assumes that migrants return when they fail to earn higher wages or earnings as expected, or maximise their stay abroad to achieve permanent settlement and family reunification (Cassarino 2004). The theory is not able to explain the factors, particularly structural elements that deter migrant workers from attaining their economic goals. Permanent settlement and family reunification do not apply to

temporary migrant workers. Very little space or opportunity for either settlement or reunification is afforded them (for example, by certain countries like Italy and Spain) by the category of their work, unskilled that is, and a contract which stipulates a certain period of time to work.

An enhancement of the neo-classical approach is the new economics of labour migration which views return as a success if the migrant is able to achieve her goals as shown by the remittances to her family or household (Cassarino 2004). Migration is viewed in this approach as temporary and that the period of time a migrant works abroad depends on the needs of the household or family left behind. While this approach is able to explain the experiences of some of the women migrants in my study in terms of their ability to send remittances, it is still limited because it does not consider how remittances are utilised, how return is affected by the social, political and economic environment obtaining in the home country or more importantly, the socio-cultural impact of migration and return on the individual migrant, her family and the society.

Structuralist/dependency theory

The structuralist approach draws broadly from Marxist thought and dependency theories and world systems theorists such as Immanuel Wallerstein (Castles and Miller 2003). The approach contends that capitalism has given way to an international order such that we have a core, the industrialised, developed countries and a periphery, the agrarian, developing, Third World economies, linked by asymmetrical relations. Advancement of the core rests on the exploitation of the periphery, reflective of colonial and neocolonial relationships. Migration exacerbates and perpetuates inequality especially through brain drain, that is, the movement usually of the most productive and educated workers from the developing country to serve the needs of the developed countries (Goss and Lindquist 1995).

The structuralist approach 'often saw the interests of capital as all-determining and paid inadequate attention to the motivations and actions of the individuals and groups involved' (Castles and Miller 2003:26). Migrants are portrayed not

as active agents but as passive reactors manipulated by the world capitalist system. Women migrants are particularly represented as victims or dutiful mothers or daughters. The economic or neo-classical approach focuses and favours the individual rational economic actor but elides social factors, while the structuralist perspective highlights social and political factors but tends to elide the individual actor (Stahl 1995; Murphy 2002).

The structural approach to return migration contends that return is not only a personal issue but a social and contextual one, affected by situational and structural factors (Cassarino 2004). For example, the skills and financial capital gained by the migrants would influence their capacity to innovate and become actors of change. Likewise, local power relations, traditions and values and a supportive economic environment in the country of origin also affect the impact of return migration on development. Structuralists argue in particular that returnees have limited impact on social change and development because of deeply-entrenched power dynamics, of persistent traditional values and of consumptive and unproductive investments of migrants and their families (Cassarino 2004). I contend that one needs to assess to what extent these assumptions are applicable to women migrant workers in a temporary type of labour migration. Categorised as unskilled workers, what type of skills do they bring home when they return? Can they be agents of change for development? Can their remittances be utilised for productive investments and contribute to a more vibrant economy in their communities?

Integrative theory: transnationalism, social networks, structuration

In an effort to bridge the divide between the economic, modernisation theory and the historical-structural approach, a new form of theorising has emerged. Eleonore Kofman (2004:648) observes that 'in the past fifteen years, one of the most notable theoretical developments in research on international migration has been the search for integrative theories, usually including a meso level that links the agency of the individual with economic, social and political structures across space and time'. Integrative approaches seek to move away from the

unilinear movement of migrants from sending to receiving countries and thus conceive such movements as constituting fluid relationships between two or more countries. Furthermore, the inclusion of families and households, networks and institutional arrangements, and the connections between sending and receiving countries have placed migration in broader socio-cultural fields. The approach also seeks to view migrants as social actors, as agents and not as passive victims but at the same time also considers the social, political and economic structures limiting their agency (Goss and Lindquist 1995; Kofman 2004, Tacoli 1999; Zontini 2004).

Transnationalism allows us to understand that migrants are more and more able to construct their lives across borders, creating economic, social political and cultural activities which allow them to maintain membership in both their immigration country and their country of origin (Salih 2002). It mainly refers to sustained ties of persons, networks and organisations across borders and across multiple nation-states (Zontini 2004). Rubah Salih (2002), however, cautions us that transnational relations do not always seem to forge the sense of belonging simultaneously to two countries. On the contrary, they may paradoxically reinforce migrants' feelings of living in more than one country but belonging to neither place, hence, the sense of rupture and of fragmentation between two countries as that shown in her study of Moroccan women migrants' lives in Italy.

Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) raise three objections to transnational perspective: 1) emphasis on circulation and the indeterminance of settlement; 2) the celebratory nature of transnationalism such that the power of the nation-state is often underestimated and the costs to the individual, financial, social and emotional may be overlooked and 3) ignoring gender, meaning treating it as a variable rather than a social construct.

In transnational households, one parent or both parents may be producing income abroad while other family members carry out the functions of reproduction, socialization and rest of consumption.

Zontini's (2004) study of immigrant women from the Philippines underscores the changes that migration produces on the structure of the family, its functions and the roles of women within it. Hence, living in different and distant geographical locations spawns new ways of articulating family relationships, particularly spousal and maternal. She contends that to sustain family connections and to ensure group survival, women have to simultaneously contribute to productive, kin and care work. In the process, such roles give them new strains and worries of being transnational mothers like commodifying relationships with children such that money becomes a substitute of physical and emotional care.

Transnational mothers, in performing child rearing and domestic duties for others, radically break with deeply gendered spatial and temporal boundaries of family and work. When men leave their families behind and go overseas to work, they are seen as fulfilling familial obligations, the traditional breadwinning roles. Whereas, the women are seen as embarking on a 'radical gender-transformative journey … initiating separations of time and space from their communities of origin, homes and children' (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997:552) and in the process must cope with stigma, guilt and criticism from others.

Definitions of motherhood are expanded to encompass breadwinning that may require long term physical separations and transformed to mean that traditional care giving responsibilities can best be carried out through income earning by providing children with better nutrition, clothing and schooling (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997)..

My study does not utilise transnationalism per se as a framework for analysis in as much as the women migrants in the research have clearly recognised and articulated that they were in a temporary type of job abroad and that returning to their home country was the final phase of their migration journey. Hence, their movement is not circular and settlement is not indeterminate (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). Moreover, their sense of belonging was clearly to their home country having left their families behind and also conscious of their

inability to be reunified with their families at the country of work because of immigration and labour policies pertaining specifically to their type of work, mainly unskilled and domestic work. Therefore, the structural conditions and limitations of their overseas work do not render them as transnationals as such.

Similar to the phenomenon of transnational motherhood as critiqued by Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997), my research places emphasis on how motherhood has been redefined by migrant women workers and in turn how this has brought about feelings of guilt of being physically absent from families as well as ambivalences of returning to their home country. More importantly, my study has highlighted the social costs of prolonged migration of women on children left behind. Hence, 'the alienation and anxiety of mothering organized by long temporal and spatial distances should give pause to the celebratory impulses of transnational perspectives of immigration' (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997:567).

My study also dwells on the meso-level analysis since the migration of the women is mainly motivated by the need and desire to promote the families' welfare and well-being. In the course of meeting these needs, the women migrants are away from home for a prolonged period of time. In the process, the family has been reconfigured and re-structured by the migration of women. Their return is to a large extent influenced by the needs and aspirations of their families and conditions obtaining in their households as well as their personal agendas and aspirations. Herein lies a site for tension and potential conflict.

Conceptualising return

Lynellyn Long and Ellen Oxfeld (2004) conceptualise return as encompassing a range from temporally short visits to permanent repatriation, spatially from one's original place of origin to a reconstructed homeland, and legally from voluntary to coerced movements. Thus, they refer to the return of refugees, asylum seekers, temporary labour migrants, retirees and others. Return reflects historical, social and personal contexts. As an analytic category, return allows us to comprehend the 'larger processes in terms of people's own systems of

meaning and experiences and to discern the particular human consequences of these larger forces in everyday lives and actions' (Long and Oxfeld 2004:4). It also enables us to understand the political, social, economic and cultural consequences, not only for those who return but also for the sending and receiving communities. Studying return allows us to examine the conditions necessary for people to decide to return voluntarily and when, and on what basis they then decide to return and to determine ultimately what happens to people in the sending (and receiving) countries or communities. These questions put forward by Long and Oxfeld frame the context of my study, emphasising the consequences of return on the individual migrants, their families and on society as a whole in the sending country.

Ambivalence to return by the migrant women figures prominently in my study. Nicole Constable (2004) powerfully develops the notion of ambivalence toward physical return as it appears in the narratives of return of Filipino women from Hong Kong. Economic goals remain paramount in the women's decision to remain working overseas. But, as she argues, beneath such economic motivations, are other concerns and factors for delaying return. I argue further that these factors are gendered. In many ways, according to Brenda Yeoh and Shirlena Huang (2000), the anticipated journey may be postponed and even seem illusory when the migrant develops new goals and hopes and when new dreams emerge from the needs and desires of families back home. In the process, basic assumptions of what it means to be a worker, a wife, and a mother are questioned and new identities are carved out (Constable 2004). In my thesis, I seek to tease out the layers of meanings of return, the reasons why the return remains so distant and finally, the process of deciding to return. In so doing, I analyse a host of factors, economic, psycho-social, cultural and political.

2.3. Why women, gender and migration?

Writing in 1993, Hania Zlotnik pointed out, 'the extent of women's involvement in international migration has generally been overlooked, mainly because

women have been viewed as dependents, moving as wives, mothers or daughters of male migrants. Such stereotypes are evident in statistical systems used to measure migration and, not surprisingly, have pervaded the study of international migration' (Zlotnik 1993:229). In the same vein, Gina Buijs (1993:1) remarked that there have been 'few attempts to look beneath the surface of the mass movement of people and to disentangle the specific experiences of women'. Historically, women migrants were almost invisible and even when they were not, it was readily assumed that they did not play an economic role. For example, in Ireland, from the 1870s, more women than men migrated to the United States and though portrayed as leaving to find marital partners, they were expected to find an occupation to enable them to secure an income of their own (Sharpe 2000). Pamela Sharpe also contends that '…until the mid-1980s, the circumstances of female migration were little discussed by anthropologists, sociologists or policy-makers. Since then, substantial accounts have been written about the invisibility of the female migrant and the ingrained assumption that the typical migrant was young, single and male with economic motivations for moving' (Sharpe 2000:4).

In reviewing gender and migration in the European Union, Kofman (1999) refers to the study done by Morokvasic a decade earlier and the latter's conclusion that the 'existing literature had had little impact on policymakers and the media and that the main body of academic literature on migration has persisted with its male bias' (Morokvasic 1984 cited in Kofman 1999: 269-270). Although Stephen Castles and Mark Miller (2003) refer to the feminisation of migration as one 'general tendency likely to play a major role in contemporary migration,' much more discussion and analysis could have been provided in their treatise, *Age of Migration* (2003). Similarly, a chapter on 'Theory and Reality in Asia and the Pacific' which appears in a volume by Douglas Massey et al. (1998:185), contains just two paragraphs under Gender Perspectives.

Eleonore Kofman (1999) contends that in understanding European patterns of post-war migration, the heterogeneity of women's migratory experiences must be made central as well as diverse forms of family reunification and formation,

and that changing patterns of employment, households and social structures should be accounted for. A final plea from Kofman is that it is 'time that migration theories and models embraced the multiple aspects of women's lives and caught up with the reality of changes of the last few decades in employment, household and social structures' (Kofman 1999:289). Annie Phizacklea (1996) specifically raises the need for a more serious and analytical account of the gendered dimension of migratory processes, that is, how a world market for women's labour and service continues to be mediated by the policies of individual nation-states and thus contributes to the reproduction of women's subordination and dependency in traditional forms.

Gender is a fundamental organising principle of everyday life. It is a social construct as well as an analytic concept which enables us to understand social roles and processes. Moreover, as Kabeer (1995:65-66) contends, it focuses on 'social relations' and analyses the 'broader interconnecting relationships through which women are positioned as a subordinate group in the division of resources and responsibilities, attributes and capabilities, power and privilege'. Asymmetrical relations of power exist between men and women as a result of gender beliefs and practices and are in turn embedded in societal institutions ranging from families to education, the economy, law and politics (Boyd 2006). Gender is also interwoven with other social inequalities such as class and race, and has to be analysed through a holistic framework for one to be able to understand the concrete conditions of life for different groups of women and men. It is 'one of the most important social forces shaping migration patterns, and migration is a powerful catalyst of social change' (Parrado and Flippen 2005:606).

Increasingly, migration is now viewed as a gendered phenomenon and it is recognised that the mobility of women now deserves a separate field of study in itself rather than being subsumed or in the shadows of many disciplines (Piper 2005). Hence, a gender approach to migration seeks to increase awareness of broader social factors that influence women's and men's roles and to provide us with an understanding of the effect of migration on women's and men's position

with reference to temporal and spatial contexts as well as to individual life circumstances. Migration is not merely an economic or political process but also a socio-cultural process mediated by gendered and kinship ideologies, institutions and practices (Donato et al. 2006; Mahler and Pessar 2006).

While increasingly considerable attention has been paid to women migrants and to the gendered dimension of migration, gaps still remain in the field in a number of respects. Katy Gardner and Filippo Osella noted in *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (2003) that knowledge of migration remains patchy and focuses largely on places that receive the migrants rather than the places they have left behind. Ninna Sorensen and Karen Olwig (2002:7) argue further that '…the phenomenon of migration has been defined in the light of issues that are accorded significance in the receiving Western countries, where most researchers live and work, rather than from the vantage point of the migrants themselves or from the sending countries…less attention has been paid to how migration and its causes are structured and articulated within the overall pattern of global, political, and economic relations.' The ways in which household relations and more generally, gender relations are destabilised through migration, have received only little attention, at least in South Asia and yet, 'gender is one of the most important axes along which encounters with new places and the modernity they may represent differ' (Gardner and Osella 2003: xvii).

Much of the existing literature on women and migration (Constable 2002, 2004; Parrenas 2001; Tacoli 1999; Zontini 2004) in the main analyses the situations and conditions of women migrants in countries of destination (receiving or host countries), the majority of whom are placed in so-called unskilled jobs, particularly domestic work. They examine how this work is positioned within the global political economy, within the dynamics of the relationships between the developing countries and the developed, highly industrialised countries and in turn how it impacts on the migrant woman worker. The interplay of gender, class, race and ethnicity is also captured in these studies. Despite the rich and powerful contributions of such studies, there remains a need to look into what

happens to the women when they return to their country of origin in terms of the effects of their migration on their positions and roles, their being and well-being, their outlook on the world and migration and how it has affected their families and society, as well as relationships within and outside families and households. An analysis of the implications of the feminisation of migration on Philippine society as a whole is also lacking. This thesis will make a contribution toward addressing these important issues and concerns.

A review by D. L. Cox et al. (1994) of the literature on Asian migrant workers observed, among other things, that study on the outcomes of migration is scant and study on the re-integration phase lacks depth. Only a few researches have explored post-return relationships with spouse and children and more studies have focused on post-return employment and plans for further employment abroad. Finally, an assessment of the impact of the overall process is mostly limited to the issue of household economies. Not much work has been done to investigate the impact of migration on the main actors or on the family unit as a whole. Even fewer researches concentrate on impact on a community or on the society (see Heyzer et al. 1994).

2.4.   Identity, agency and empowerment

Studying return allows us to assess the consequences of the migration experience on the women migrants themselves, on their families, and on the society of the home country. I contend that the notions of identity, agency and empowerment are useful concepts in explaining the meanings of return and its consequences on the women migrants themselves. I refer to the literature and conceptualisation below which prove useful in my discussion and analysis.

The experience and effects of migration are critical in shaping and reshaping identities. Identities in turn are multi-faceted, negotiated, situational (Benmayor and Skotnes 1994) and increasingly fragmented and fractured (Hall and du Gay 1996). As the women migrants perform their economic roles in a foreign country, the women experience change, in their identities, their personhood and

in their relationships. They display day-to-day struggles to create new material possibilities and meanings in their lives (Barber 2000; see Gibson et al. 2001) and ways of resisting (Scott 1985), coping and forging identities to sustain them through the migration journey and eventual return home. The multiple and new identities in turn, explain why return becomes elusive and ambivalent for many of the women migrants. While they may appear to be diligently responding to the expected gender roles of altruistic mother and dutiful daughter, they also make choices affecting control over their lives, thus combining filial or parental obligation with their own interests, goals and ambitions (Asis 2002; Tacoli 1999). The latter could be construed to encompass the desire to keep the new-found freedom or the pleasures that working in a place like Hong Kong provide (Constable 2004).

Amartya Sen conceptualises freedom to be the end as well as the means of development and argues that:

> Development has to be more concerned with enhancing the lives we lead and the freedoms we enjoy. Expanding the freedoms we have reason to value not only makes our lives richer and more unfettered, but also allows us to be fuller social persons, exercising our own volitions and interacting with and influencing the world we live (Sen 1999:14-15).

An important facet of Sen's theory of development is people as agents of development processes and change. To him, individuals if given adequate opportunities, 'can effectively shape their own destiny and help each other' (Sen 1999:11) and can be active agents who can promote and achieve social and political transformation. A distinction is made between promoting well-being and promoting agency in that the former treats persons as passive recipients while the latter views individuals as active agents and shapers of their lives, who are able to act and make changes. Thus, the migrants' ability to make such choices in their lives refers to their sense of agency which Sen (1999:191) regards as a means of 'removing inequities that depress the well-being of women'. Agency and well-being are influenced by factors such as employment outside the home and earning an independent income, ownership rights, literacy and education, freedom from violence and others.

Well-being stems from substantive freedoms, the capabilities to choose a life one has reason to value, to which Sen (1999) refers as functionings. These could be adequate nutrition, freedom from avoidable diseases, taking part in community life and having self-respect.

Well-being and quality of life are intertwined. According to the WHO (cited in Vazquez et al (2007: 336), quality of life is defined as 'an individual's perception of his or her situation in life, given the cultural context and values by which he or she lives, and in relation to his or her objectives, expectations, standards, worries and interests'. The important indicators of quality of life are: people's perception of their own social, mental and physical well-being and the satisfaction experienced from family relations, work and home. The extent of a person's well-being is highly subjective as it is perceived largely in relation to one's own daily experience. Thus, for example, among elderly rural male Mexicans with contact of migration to the United States, well-being constitutes: interesting life, high standard of living, satisfaction with successful achievements in life, happiness with current living situation, security and ability to resolve problems, positive relations with children, trust that relatives would take care of them in time of illness, and sense of tranquillity in life (Velazquez et al 2007). I contend that to many migrant women workers, well-being would mean decent living standards for their families and adequate resources to meet their housing, health and educational needs. Attaining well-being of their families, therefore, remains paramount in the migration journey of the women. In the process, agency becomes crucial.

However, I contend that while it is important to consider the agency of the migrant women, I seek to problematise this in my thesis when I consider the macro forces which frame and limit this agency, particularly in the accounting of forced return. Hence, I refer to this agency as bounded agency or restricted agency. I argue that macro forces obtaining in the receiving and host countries like the absence of legal protection under national employment laws of domestic work would drastically affect the migrant worker's work status and conditions just as the outbreak of civil unrest could negate whatever resources

the migrant woman worker has accumulated over the years of her migration experience. Sudden change in migration and labour policies of both origin and host governments would also affect the migration goals of the migrant worker. The central point to consider then are the ways global forces of power and local systems of oppression impact on women's freedom and agency even when they have paid work (Koggel 2003).

The question as to whether the migration experience has contributed to women's empowerment be it at the individual or collective level is paramount in my study. Has migration changed the woman migrant's sense of self and personhood? Has it brought about a capability to challenge patriarchal norms and other norms constraining her life and tilt the balance of power in families and households?

The existing literature presents a mixed outcome of migration and women's empowerment (Ghosh 2009; Lim and Oishi 1996; Piper and Yamanaka 2006): some point to it as a liberating experience, providing greater sense of autonomy and power in view of better economic opportunities. As women become heavily involved in the wage labour force, they use their earnings to assert their rights to greater autonomy and equality. Other studies maintain that migration has not changed unequal gender relations and that gender inequality persists within the larger context of race, social class, ethnicity and legal status (see Ghosh 2009; Hugo 2002). The study of Emilio Parrado and Chenoa Flippen among Mexican women migrants in the United States is important in that it systematically investigates which gender domains (labour, power and cathexis) are associated with gains and losses for migrant women and analyses the factors conditioning these outcomes. Their finding is that the structural position of the women within the American society including their 'precarious legal status, unfavourable work conditions and lack of social support undermined their well-being and power within relationships' (Parrado and Flippen 2005:628).

On women with migrant husbands, a study in Bangladesh showed that with the infusion of remittances and secular values from overseas, women left behind had relative control of resources, increased freedom, and autonomy in

managing households. Girls' education also increased in the migrants' household. All these point to changes in the traditional domains of men and women and significant modification of gender roles (Hadi 2001). However, we need to move the analysis forward and also consider whether changes in gender roles bring changes in gender regime, meaning the 'patterning of relations within an institution' (Connell 2000:29).

Various frameworks have been put forward for gender analysis (such as gender roles, triple roles, social relations approach, gender analysis matrix and empowerment) and these are premised on efficiency or empowerment objectives (Warren 2007). For my study, I chose the empowerment approach as conceptualised by Srilatha Batliwala (1994), Naila Kabeer (1995) and Jo Rowlands (1998). The empowerment process entails various stages, from individual to collective consciousness-raising, to mobilisation for structural changes to end women's oppression (Batliwala 1994). Jo Rowlands (1998) conceptualises empowerment as constituting a sense of agency, ability to negotiate, communicate, organise, and hold opinions. She distinguishes between personal empowerment, collective empowerment and empowerment in closest personal relationships. Naila Kabeer (1995) emphasises that empowerment strategies for women must build on the power within women's selves expressed in terms of their ability to control resources, determine agendas and make decisions affecting their lives. Thus, intervening in broader policy-making agenda to address women's strategic interests would be necessary for sustaining long-term strategies for women's empowerment. Beyond analysing the empowerment process as it applies to the lives of the women migrants in my research, I also seek to investigate whether their sense of empowerment (if empowered) can be sustained and using Connell's (1987) structure of gender relations, identify the structure or domain of their empowerment, that is, whether migration has a differential impact on the gender structures of labour, power and cathexis.

2.5.   Female migration and families left behind

Two main themes appear in the 2002 special issue of the *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* which is devoted to 'Migrations and Family Relations in the Asia Pacific Region': one, that migration as a 'life-changing decision and process is deeply embedded, and must be understood in the context of family norms, relations and politics and two, that migratory moves often reconstitute the Asian family in ways which are sometimes destabilising and sometimes affirming (Yeoh et al 2002:1). Issues that resonate with my study are the social, cultural, economic and emotional consequences of migration on 'left-behind families' as well as the reconfigurations of gender roles and identities of the migrants themselves. Hence, questions of empowerment (or disempowerment) come to the fore not only in terms of equal sharing of domestic burdens but also of shared decision-making roles and access to and control of resources, sense of autonomy, and of being in control of one's life.

As argued by Estrella Dizon-Anonuevo and Augustus Anonuevo (2002), no other social change in the country (Philippines) has affected the family more and heightened the issue of role reversals between men and women than the feminisation of migration. The absence of the wife and mother has not only resulted in role shifts but also altered traditional family arrangements. In the process, the family can become a contentious site that involves both conflicting interests among its members (Parrenas 2001) and the persistence of rigid gender boundaries (Parrenas 2006). Judith Gerson and Kathy Peiss (1985:317-331) refer to gender boundary as 'the complex structures – physical, social, ideological, and psychological – which establish differences and commonalities between women and men, among women, and among men'.

In addition to gender role shifts, I explore the differential impact of migration on the various members of families and households, for example, in terms of household and caring responsibilities, access to and control of remittances, decision-making power and the psychological-emotional side particularly of prolonged separation from the mother/wife in the family.

2.6. Culture of Migration

My third level of analysis is looking at the impact or consequences of women's migration and return on the Philippine society. My key argument is that the long-term dependence on migration by families and by the Philippine government as a means for securing a family's well-being and addressing the economic problems of employment and unemployment, has led to a culture of migration. As contended by Ali (2007), no clear definitions or elements of the culture of migration, have been advanced in the literature. He thus proposes one: culture of migration refers to 'ideas, practices and cultural artefacts that reinforce the celebration of migration and migrants' (Ali 2007:39). Existing studies on the phenomenon dwell on particular dimensions such as the economic factors and social network ties to migration (Massey et al. 1998).

The Caribbean culture of migration (see Simmons and Guengant 1992) was a response of workers to look for jobs abroad because this is what their ancestors did; cultural and ideological forces in sending countries are often deeply rooted in the past. Alan Simmons and Jean Pierre Guengant (1992) further state that the culture of migration aptly describes the period in which Caribbean peoples have viewed migration as integral to socio-economic mobility. Hence, they moved in search for socio-economic opportunities. Similarly, for Takeyuki Tsuda (2003), 'culture of migration' in the Japanese-Brazilian sending community in Brazil exemplifies positive attitudes and a high regard for the economic benefits of out-migration. In turn, 'these have developed and become firmly entrenched, creating a cultural propensity to move abroad for economic reasons' (Tsuda 2003: 94). Over time, migration becomes prevalent and routine, culturally approved and valued as an effective strategy to overcome economic hardships, attain financial goals and achieve socio-economic mobility. Wayne Cornelius (1991:112) offers us a comprehensive definition of the phenomenon, culture of migration — 'a set of interrelated perceptions, attitudinal orientations, socialization processes and social structures including transnational networks, growing out of international migratory experience, which constantly encourage, validate and facilitate participation in this movement.'

Return migration within a culture of migration would thus imply a return of a migrant with financial success, enhanced status and prestige as a symbol of socio-economic mobility (Brettell 2003). Mary Chamberlain (1994) refers to the central role of families (Barbadian families) in creating, promoting and sustaining the culture of migration, a culture exemplifying social networks, cultural tolerance, employment mobility and exploitation of opportunities.

We need to broaden and deepen the conceptualisation and understanding of the culture of migration phenomenon to include other elements of the phenomenon beyond the economic, its consequences, and to adopt a gendered approach. I seek to achieve this aim by bringing in the concepts of deskilling, brain drain, feminised migration and gendered sense of national pride and identity, and also highlighting the government's role as an active promoter of overseas employment that thrives on women's labour.

Culture of migration and human resources

Deskilling according to the ILO is a labour market term that describes skilled or highly-skilled workers who obtain jobs not commensurate with their qualifications and experience and considered to be over qualified for jobs they are occupying. Their qualifications are not recognised and they end up working in lower-skilled jobs, often poorly paid (Chammartin 2008). What are the ramifications of deskilling on women migrants' identity and that of the Philippine society as a whole? What are its implications in terms of valuing education?

According to Massey et al. (1998), the brain drain phenomenon became a major point of contention between the First and Third World countries following decolonisation in view of the selected migration of talented and educated people from poor to wealthy nations. By depriving the developing countries of vital human capital, prospects for development are grossly undermined. As argued by dependency theorists, migration exacerbates and perpetuates inequality (Goss and Lindquist 1995). My thesis analyses this phenomenon arguing that the culture of migration has exacerbated brain drain and deskilling. Gloria Moreno-Fontes Chammartin (2008) contends that the emigration of

skilled migrants is a loss in human capital stock which can be critical to a country's productivity and economic growth. I argue further that the impact is not only on loss of human capital for economic growth but more profoundly, on the depression of human capability, of the peoples' well-being, of the quality of human life (Sen 1999).

Women migrants and the nation

Identities, according to Stuart Hall are produced in specific historical and institutional sites and are the product of the marking of difference, through the relation to the Other, to what they are, to what they lack, 'the constitutive outside' (Hall and du Gay 1996:4). In addition, identities are increasingly fragmented and fractured – constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions. Moreover, the concept of nation itself is gendered and the processes of nation-building rely on 'gendered discourses and symbolic representations of women-as-symbols and affected women-as-victims' (Einhorn 2006a:196-198). The nation as the mother country embodies the nation as a woman. 'Women lose their "own identity" when used as markers for the nation' and 'become a "metaphor" for what they represent rather than what they are' (Eisenstein 2000:43). Using this frame of understanding, I seek to analyse how the increasing and persistent migration of Filipino women has affected the Filipino's sense of national pride and identity.

Sustainability of outcomes

In further assessing the consequences of women's migration and return on families and the Philippine society, I refer to the concept of sustainable livelihood, meaning that an 'individual or family livelihood can be maintained without external inputs and if it is sufficiently robust to withstand external shocks' (UK, DFID quoted in Black et al. 2004:26). A comparative study on the impact of labour migration on households (Gunatilleke 1992:177-178) equates sustainability with economic reproducibility, meaning the 'capacity of a household to sustain asset acquisitions and general improvements in the

family's quality of life beyond the period of overseas employment'. Couched mainly in economic terms, the concept is operationalised in terms of availability of savings and productive investments that can generate sufficient income for the household without relying on overseas earnings. While I accept that this is a key element of sustainability, I posit that non-economic indicators are equally important to consider such as positive changes in gender relations and roles and sustained empowerment of women. The question of sustainability goes beyond sustainable livelihood. The concept extends to whether empowered migrant women are able to sustain their empowerment (if they have been empowered in the first place) upon return and after return.

Women's migration and governance

Finally, my study of the culture of migration aims to analyse the implications of women's migration and return on good governance. Good governance constitutes in part accountability of government officials for their actions and for the decisions they make in managing the affairs of the nation in a way that promotes people's realisation of human rights and human security. A gender-responsive governance means greater voice for women in decision-making processes, in articulating their interests and exercising their rights (Nussbaum et al. 2003; INSTRAW 2005). I therefore seek to examine these notions of good governance against two concerns: first, the desire of the Philippine government to sustain the global competitiveness of the Filipino migrant worker and second, the growing articulation among various sectors of Philippine society that one's home country is no longer perceived as a place that provides security for its own people. Extending this position, how can migrant women claim or demand accountability from the state (see Einhorn 2006b), not only by virtue of their being citizens (and therefore with entitlements), but more by being key contributors to the nation's economy in the form of their migrant labour which bring in remittances. What claims can they demand, for example, with respect to the kind of support services to them to make their return, fitting back, 'starting over' productive and sustainable?

For migrants' remittances to continue to propel the nation's economy, the government adopts a policy of sustaining global competitiveness (Bengco 2004). Ronaldo Munck (2002) contends that to compete in the global economy is the watchword of national political leaders, business sectors and media. In the context of liberalised market forces and deregulated capital, to compete is the way to survive. Competition stimulates the search for cheaper and better processes, products, and services. 'In practice, however, the notion of competitiveness is flawed… the market simply does not represent the only factor determining economic success and well-being, nor can it deal with social inequality…' (Munck 2002:181). 'Thinking in terms of competitiveness leads directly and indirectly to bad economic policies…' (Krugman 1994 cited in Munck 2002:181).

Given the above concept and the Philippine government's desire to maintain the Filipino workers' niche in the global market, what are the gendered implications of this policy with respect to the protection and return of women migrants? My study seeks to probe this question.

2.7.   Conclusion

Summing up, first, my theoretical and conceptual framework brings perspectives and analyses from the vantage point of a sending country and the migrants themselves. Second, the study places at the centre the gendered dimension of migration focusing on the return phase. Third, the study adopts an integrated approach by employing three levels of analysis, the micro, the meso and the macro levels in analysing the consequences of the international migration of Filipino women and their return on their lives, their families left behind, and on the Philippine nation as a whole. In my analysis, I weave the concepts of identity, agency and empowerment of the women migrant workers. I examine the interplay of labour, power, psycho-social elements, and gendered ideologies and regimes in assessing the gendered consequences of women's migration and return on families. Finally, in determining the consequences or impact of women's migration on the Philippine society as a whole, I utilise the

concept of culture of migration and bring in other elements and dimensions such as brain drain and deskilling, notions of national pride and esteem, good governance, and sustainable livelihood.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In 1989, I wrote a chapter on 'Filipina Maids in Malaysia', in a book, The Trade in Domestic Helpers (APDC 1989). In writing, I tried to capture observations and reflections arising from two years' interaction with Filipina domestic workers (in ordinary language, referred to as maids or servants) in the course of my being a volunteer worker in a centre responding to their various concerns and problems. In the process, I had listened to a myriad of personal stories of their plight and sufferings, abuse, misery and exploitation. I had also listened to their reasons for leaving home to work in a foreign land, their hopes and their dreams for themselves and for their families left behind. At the end of the chapter, I wrote:

> I propose to compile a book on what it means for the women to work in a foreign country as a domestic help. The book will record their experiences, the happy ones, the not-so-happy… It will seek to capture the motivations and reasons for seeking employment outside their country, their hopes and fears, the realities of their own experience as well as that of their families left behind. The book shall aim to bring out…various experiences and what they mean in terms of the role and position of women in the country where they work, their home country and the Third World in general.
>
> The words of the book will be the words of the women themselves (Tharan 1989: 286)

Seventeen years after this chapter was written, I chose to listen again to the personal stories of women migrants who worked in various parts of the world for several years and who have now returned to their home country, the Philippines, "for good". Most of the questions I raised in 1989 have now been answered in the life stories related and shared with me by the women themselves.

These questions were:

- What factors lie behind the decision of these women to leave their country and in some cases even their young children to work merely as domestic help in a foreign land?

- Are there real benefits, meaningful attractions and incentives out 'there'?

- Or are these benefits only illusions that hide the real costs of the misery of women labour?

- Why do governments so willingly and readily encourage the outflow of labour that is cheap and prone to exploitation?

- How has the phenomenon of international migration affected the Filipino family and the nation as a whole, which is fast turning into a society of separated spouses and single or absentee parents? (Tharan 1989: 273).

3.1. Introduction

My research methodology is briefly introduced in Chapter 1. In order to provide an integrative perspective to my study, return migration of Filipino women and its gendered consequences, I adopt a multi-level approach covering the micro, the meso and the macro. My main focus of analysis is at the micro level, that of the migrant women's lives and experiences. I contend that it is only through a qualitative approach that one is able to unearth and understand fully the dynamics of change that migration has brought to bear on the lives of women migrants. A qualitative approach, according to Ann Oakley (2000) involves ways of knowing that require attention to individual perspectives and circumstances and that allow us to seek patterns, generalities and associations. To achieve this, the research employs multiple methods such as life stories, focus group discussions, interviews and dialogues with women migrants as key informants. Insights were also drawn from interactions with policy-makers, academics, local officials and civil society organisations in the course of attending workshops and conferences. These are integrated into an analysis that draws on several bodies of theoretical literature.

The life stories form the core of my research method. I maintain that the life narratives and stories are powerful tools in bringing out the richness of a migrant's experience and uncovering the complex web of relationships, structures and processes which frame such experience. In the life story, 'the social nature of the self is dramatized in the narrative…' (Chanfrault-Duchet 1991:8). Rina Benmayor and Andor Skotnes (1994:14) emphasise that personal testimonies allow us to get to know the 'lived interior of migration processes' and to understand how social forces affect individuals and in turn how they deal, cope with and manage such forces in their lives.

Below, I explain the meanings and characteristic features of feminist methodology and the life stories approach and why and how these are best suited to the kind of study I have embarked upon.

3.2. Feminist methodology

I have utilised a feminist methodology in my research work, an approach rooted in feminism. In feminist research, gender constitutes a 'basic organizing principle which profoundly shapes/mediates the concrete conditions of our lives' as well as our … 'consciousness, skills and institutions and the distribution of power and privilege' (Lather 1998:571 cited in Gottfried 1996: 1). Feminism presents us with difficult questions that force us to think about 'what it means to be a woman in our society, whether we want to change that meaning and if so, how, as fully conscious human beings, struggling with the contradictions of our existence' (Marshment 1997:151). As Liz Kelly, Sheila Burton and Linda Regan (1994:28) clearly enunciate, 'feminism for us is both a theory and practice, a framework which informs our lives. Its purpose is to understand women's oppression in order that we might end it'. Feminist research, therefore, is an integral part of the process of discovery and understanding and includes the responsibility for creating change, for liberating women from subordination and oppression.

Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1993:32) argue that research by women is fundamental to feminist research, seeing women possessing feminist consciousness 'as rooted in the concrete, practical and everyday experiences of being, and being treated as, a *woman*'. Feminist research illuminates 'how the social world would look different when seen from the standpoint of women… a new sense of the everyday world as problematic – a thing to be explained' (Smith 2002:311).

In as much as feminist research is by women, it is also research for women geared towards political change. More than this, Stanley and Wise (1993:43) further argue that feminist research is 'seeing reality differently' with a distinct

value orientation. It is concerned with reflexivity, 'turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference' (Davies 1999:4), with reflecting and critically assessing and exploring analytically the nature of the research process in order to examine gender relations. The researcher is also a subject in her research and her personal history is part of the process through which understanding and conclusions are reached.

Feminist methodology however, is sometimes criticised for its over-emphasis on gender, reliance on personal experience rather than scientific method, rejection of hierarchy, and emancipation as a goal of research (Hammersley 1995). Specifically, Martyn Hammersley argues that privileging gender removes other aspects of the phenomenon being studied; that the goal of emancipation is not unique to feminism, and that emphasis on direct experience rather than method is premised on the idea that women have uniquely valid insights. I argue that women do have uniquely valid insights derived from their feminist consciousness rooted in the everyday experiences of being a woman (Stanley and Wise 1993). Moreover, the focus on experience as a method does not mean not being critical, accurate and rigorous; rather, interpretive schemes derived from experience do contribute toward producing good quality knowledge. Caroline Ramazanoglu (1992:209) maintains that feminist methodologies are not 'privileged ways of accessing "reality" but are varied explorations of validating knowledge produced from different standpoints' which are also expressions of political commitment for women's empowerment. Besides, there is not one social standpoint that is superior in all forms of knowledge (Smith 2002) and what is important is that we are able to examine our personal standpoint and its ramifications.

I further contend that the use of gender as an analytic category and a social construct enables us to understand, for example, why migrant women predominate in more vulnerable jobs than migrant men, or why in some countries of destination, migrant women are deported if found pregnant or if they marry local men. As Lourdes Beneria and Martha Roldan (1987) express, gender involves ranking traits, activities, beliefs and behaviours, and almost

universally accords greater value to those associated with men, or with the roles they occupy. Thus, such asymmetries generate male privilege and female subordination.

I also argue that although my focus is on the lives of migrant women workers, gender remains as the central analytical principle of my study in as much as I examine the subject positionings of the migrant women within structures and institutions of socio-economic power in their families, the households where they are employed (often as domestic helpers), the states and societies in both the countries of origin and destination of the migrant women. At the same time, I recognise that gender needs to be interwoven with other axes of differentiation such as race, age, class and ethnicity to render a more comprehensive analysis of power and women's subordination. Infusing gender analysis with an understanding of power and patriarchy enables us to develop a framework that encompasses the totality of women's lives (Abeysekera 2004).

3.3.   Life stories as a method

Constructing knowledge

The choice of the research method is shaped by the aims of the study, the topics of inquiry and the perspectives that the researcher brings into the research. Collecting life stories allows one to go deep into the meanings of experiences. The life stories in this study seek to unearth the processes of migration and the migration experience from the perspective of the women migrants themselves. Narratives are central to identity formation and selfhood; they surface ways in which such identities shift and are questioned, the evolving ways in which migrants make sense of their lives and 'the stories are themselves constantly evolving and moving, presenting living histories in every sense of the term and a unique resource and opportunity for social and historical understanding' (Thomson 1999:36).

The method springs from the position that 'knowledge is grounded in the everyday, common-sense world, and in the constructions and explanations,

members of that world [the migrant women] describe their reality and actions' (Jones 1983 cited in Illo, 1997:3). The focus is on women's knowledge and experiences, thereby taking an epistemological position that women can be 'knowers', that their beliefs can be 'legitimized as knowledge and that women's beliefs and ways of knowing and thinking (their "subjective truths") can count as knowledge' (Harding 1987:3).

I contend that often, the voice of the migrant woman is suppressed because of the circumstances of her life in a foreign land, migrating by herself with no accompanying family, working mainly as a domestic helper within the confines of a household with total strangers, and usually without adequate protection of national laws. Hence, I argue that telling one's story upon return can be empowering, validating the importance of the migrant's life experiences, and uncovering the complex web of feelings (see Parrenas 2001).

The process of relating one's life history is important as it focuses on the '…dynamic unfolding of the subject's viewpoint and goes behind the conventional expected answers to the woman's personal construction of her own experience' (Anderson and Jack 1991:23). A hallmark of feminist methodology is that it is a purposive and difficult to measure process so that the woman (the 'researched', narrator, oral historian of her own life) should be encouraged to be herself '... to be the subject of her own life, to express her feelings, to reinvent herself, to reinvent history, especially to interject herself into history and to act. Her answers will not always fit her questions, nor "ours" either' (Hale 1991:125).

The use of narratives is not without its critics who point to the over-emphasis on the verbal in the construction of meaning which in the process makes the dynamics of social relations invisible, as well as the authorial control of the researcher, what words to include or to edit, to frame women's words. Responding to the first criticism, my study situates and contextualises the lives of the women migrants within the larger social forces and processes of migration which I dwell on in Chapters 4 and 7 specifically. As to the second point, this is reflective of the power imbalance inherent between the researcher

and the researched. I am conscious of the limitation and the power inherent in translating, in deciding what to include and what to omit. It can only be minimised by trying to be faithful to the women's voices as closely as possible but because the ultimate analysis and writing is the responsibility of the researcher, something or many things are lost in translation. 'Women's voices are always mediated through the filter of the researcher and conventions of language' (Gottfried 1996:15). Moreover, as Ken Plummer (2001) contends, writing lives goes beyond capturing reality, it is constructing reality and the process is inevitably bound up with self, power and values.

Listening to women's voices and learning from women's experiences are vital to the feminist reconstruction of our understanding of the world. Women's personal narratives illuminate several facets of gender relations such as the construction of a gendered self-identity, the relationship between individual and society in the creation and perpetuation of gender norms as well as the dynamics of power relations between women and men. While social constructions of gender impact on the individual, they are themselves shaped by human agency. 'Women make their own lives (and life histories), but they do so under conditions not of their own choosing' (The Personal Narratives Group 1989:5). The Personal Narratives Group further maintains that personal narratives reveal the logic, the rationale, the working out within a specific life situation of individual courses of action and the effects of system-level and structural constraints within which these life courses evolve.

Memory, reliability and validity concerns

Memory is crucial in telling life stories and is inevitably influenced by the present and the story teller's analysis of the past. Thus, there is concern about the reliability and validity of memory as an historical source and therefore a limitation of the life history approach. But we must accept that 'all life stories are composed − constructed, fabricated, invented' (Plummer 2001:238) − and that it is for us, the researcher, to find ways of assessing what is being constructed (Plummer 2001), to make sense of what is being shared and revealed and for

what purpose. Moreover, life stories are not and cannot be objective: they are always 'artificial, variable and partial' (Portelli 1998:72 cited in Plummer 2001:238). What is remembered is an important knowledge itself. In the course of studying women refugees in Canada, Helene Moussa emphasised: 'I wanted to listen to what they valued and de-valued in their past and present life... to identify how their past was woven, what shaped and unthreaded their identities... to listen to what they said and did not say... sharing life stories... was not just about remembering but a means of acknowledging their existence' (Moussa 1993:35). To oral historians, the 'peculiarities of oral history might be a resource rather than a problem' (Thomson 1999:33). By listening to the myths, fantasies, errors and contradictions of memory, and paying heed to the subtleties of language and narrative form, we might better understand the subjective meanings of historical experience.

Ultimately, life stories give coherence to one's life, some sense of unity and purpose by threading the past, the present and the future. Life stories also inform others, move others to reflect on their own lives and learn from the experience and finally, life stories illuminate the dynamics of communities and societies (Plummer 2001). A key event in a person's life is linked to wider issues of history and culture, a method of 'totalization'; 'of man's understanding of himself, a Truth which *becomes*, something which *emerges*' (Sartre 1963: x). Herein lies the richness of the life story method of research so that the standard evaluative research tools of reliability, validity and representativeness are not necessarily the appropriate measures to apply (Atkinson 1998). Representativeness in the context of life story method should be understood in terms of seeking out informants who have a profound and central grasping of a particular cultural world (Blumer 1979), not representativeness as 'dominated by statistical conception' (Plummer 2001:154). Reliability and validity concerns can be addressed by awareness of the sources of bias arising from the subject of the research, the researcher and the subject-interviewee interaction and how these enter into and affect the process of making sense of the life stories.

In undertaking my research, I have been guided by the importance of building rapport, trust and confidence with the migrant women and also involving them in contextualising the questions, exploring various situations of their lives as well as assessing accuracy of interview notes and identifying gaps. In the end, what I had hoped to achieve is that I (the researcher) and the researched (the migrant women) are able to piece together the various parts of the puzzle and make a meaningful whole of the world of the migrant woman worker.

I take the position that each life story is unique in itself, with all its complexities, contradictions and ambiguities. My role as a researcher is to construct viewpoints which inevitably are only approximations to reality (Stanley and Wise 1993:57). Although I have also used focus group discussions in my research, these were meant to complement the life stories. On their own, individual life stories offer us a richer and a more forceful testimony than that of a group experience. By contending that life histories or life stories are personal testimonies, these lend themselves to a potential activist, political role. Personal testimonies not only build or reaffirm identities, they are also intimately linked with struggles and resistance, hence, they are more than research methodologies (Benmayor and Skotnes 1994). To illustrate, the life stories of two of the migrant women in my study unearth situations of their being subjected to violent acts within the confines of the households where they worked as domestic helpers or under state authorities themselves in detention centres. Clearly, this calls for advocacy of upholding and protecting the basic human rights of migrant workers, of migrant women and of struggle against patriarchal domination and state-led violence.

Reflexivity and Research Ethics

Our ways of constructing knowledge can be influenced by our personal and social worlds (Plummer 2001) or by our biases, be they social, academic or intellectual (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Reflexivity opens up the possibility of critical self analysis and political awareness. It is consciousness of the intellectual research process: 'of the subject of the research… the social spaces

in which the research knowledge is produced… and a much fuller sense of the spaces/locations– personal, cultural, academic, intellectual, historical– of the researcher in actually building the knowledge' (Plummer 2001:208).

Diane Wolf (1996) emphatically states that feminists in fieldwork are confronted with a key dilemma which is power and the unequal hierarchies or levels of control discernible in three interrelated dimensions: differences in power due to different positionalities of the researcher and the researched; power exerted during the research process such as defining the research topic and power manifested post- field work, that is, in writing and representing the respondents' lived realities.

In the course of my research, I reflected on the meanings of power between myself and my narrators, I, coming from a middle class background, a feminist and an activist, with a high level of formal education. A few of my narrators were also well educated, with college degrees but the majority completed high school and a few had reached only a primary level of education. Realising this gap between myself and my narrators, my research subjects, I needed to bridge this gap by making them, the women migrants, my centre of research, keeping in mind my feminist consciousness. I was therefore careful and sensitive in my interactions mindful always of the richness of the migrant worker's long years of experience. I listened attentively and diligently to their stories, their narrations. I was sensitive to their pauses and silences. I laughed with them and when they cried, my eyes swelled as well. My focus was not on asking the 'right questions' [or seeking the 'right answers'] but on our interactions, 'on the dynamic unfolding of the subject's viewpoint' (Anderson and Jack 1991:23). Moreover, we focused on the meanings of their experiences, their reflections and insights arising from their migration journey, making sense of it, their own lived experience. In the process however, I also shared what I felt needed to be shared in my experience as a woman and my activism in migrants' concerns and issues.

The balance of power relationship in an interview could be influenced by a number of factors such as race and class as well as differences in social,

cultural and personal backgrounds (Tang 2002). My close identification with my researched subjects, coming from the same region of the country and speaking the same local language as well as my age, were key factors in overcoming our differences in class and educational background.

Having been an advocate of the rights of migrant workers and a crisis worker helped me to be easily accepted by my women narrators, thus, narrowing the power differential between myself and them. However, as an activist, I bring into the study the perspective that migrant Filipino women have been subjected to all sorts of abuses, dehumanised conditions and violations of their rights mainly because they are women, because they perform so-called dirty and demeaning jobs and because they are strangers, foreigners coming from a Third World developing country. My activist self projects the migrant more as a victim and consequently advocates appropriate policy responses from the states and governments. On the other hand, as a researcher, I consciously bring into the study the diversity of migrant women's voices and life experiences, be they victims or agents able to resist and refashion their lives. In so doing, I needed to alert myself to what critics of qualitative research and life history method call "analyst bias" deemed manifested in stressing only the findings and cases that support the researcher's favourite viewpoints or framing the life stories in a manner that stresses the analyst's advocacy issue of choice, or passing off as the subject's opinions those that are in reality those of the analyst (Illo 1997).

Distinguishing my voice as the analyst or writer from the migrant women is a necessary step in responding to the above criticism. At the same time, I am very much a part of the process in the construction or formation of knowledge in the study. The researcher is as engaged in the inquiry as the women being interviewed and as she engages the life stories, she also reflects on the particular moments or positions in her own life, particularly as they relate to her being an advocate of migrants' rights and perhaps, more importantly, to being part of a family of different generations of migrants.

My paternal grandfather belonged to the first wave of Filipino immigrants, having gone to the United States in the 1920s to work in the plantations. He left

behind my father and my uncle to the care of my great-grandparents. My grandfather never returned to the Philippines as he set up a second family in California. My sister, a nurse who graduated with honours, was immediately recruited in 1971 to work in the United States and thus became part of the brain drain phenomenon, which characterised the second wave of Philippine migration. I was also a migrant myself but not a labour migrant per se, since I joined my foreigner-husband in his home country, Malaysia, upon our marriage. It was my privileged status (spouse of a professional) and class which led me to be conscious of the problems and concerns of my co-Filipinos, particularly Filipino women who came as migrant workers to Malaysia.

My activism in the realm of migration issues began in the mid-1980s in Malaysia in the course of responding to crises (such as physical, verbal and emotional abuse, non-payment of salaries, arbitrary termination of contract, depression, attempted suicide and others) faced by migrant Filipino women who had come to work mainly as domestic helpers. Such crisis interventions were combined with advocacy for policy and programme responses from the host (receiving country) government as well as the sending country and government. Through the years, my activism culminated in helping to institutionalise a forum for advocacy for migrants' rights and thus becoming a founding member of a wide and coordinated network of migrant support groups and migrants' organisations in both sending and receiving countries in Asia.

Hence, my family background and my activism have played an important role in motivating my study to search for deeper and more nuanced meanings and understanding of migration and social change phenomena. While very much conscious of this position and the manner in which it influences my perspectives in the study, I contend that ultimately, the voices, the stories of the migrant women, and the metaphors they define are the most important part of my study.

Reciprocity

The issue of reciprocity also needs to be confronted. Reciprocity, according to Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (1996) offers the researcher a way to lessen the

asymmetry of doing research with people lacking basic resources, rights, and power in society. One does not merely 'enter the field and 'pillage raw data' for export'; one engages in a mutual exchange, compensating with your resources, the research participants' time, efforts and energy (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1996:109). What do our research subjects derive in return for being researched? For the time and effort given by the participants in the research, both in the life story method, the focus group discussions and other sharing sessions, I compensated them for the costs of transportation and provided meals for the duration of the meetings. I also gave gifts to my life story narrators as a token of my gratitude for their time and willingness to be interviewed. My two assistants who helped me organise the various sessions and made notes during the Focus Group Discussions were adequately compensated. What I felt and observed was that though the material and financial compensation was appreciated, it did not matter so much to my research participants. They expressed that there was a psychic reward to being part of the entire process of sharing, of meeting and being with women who have gone through the migration journey.

The preliminary findings of my study were presented at a forum (University of the Philippines, *Balay Kalinaw*, December 1, 2005) where I was invited as a speaker. I had hoped that my study would be utilised in some ways by the policy-makers and the NGO representatives present at this forum, hence, my way of giving back to my researched subjects. At the forum, a technical staff from the country's legislative body commented that what I presented was precisely the kind of knowledge and information that they needed for their policy formulation task. A journalist at the said forum expressed her readiness to write a story about my story. Being an activist for migrants' rights and welfare, the results of my research would necessarily serve as yet another 'weapon'. Hence, the stories of the migrant women workers have become my stories as well. Whether it was joyful or tortuous; throughout, there was a sense of shared emotions and feelings.

3.4.   Other research methods employed

While the life history feminist method of research proved valuable in studying the impact of international migration on women, in this case, Filipino women, it needed to be complemented by other qualitative methods such as focus group discussions with a wider group of returning migrants, families of migrants, guardians left behind to take care of households. I therefore employed these methods and also utilised a wide range of secondary data including newspaper clippings, films, video documentary as well as watching theatre plays dwelling on migration issues. The micro approach of studying the individual lives of the migrant women needs to be combined with studying the macro, the larger forces which help to explain the complex phenomenon of migration especially as it relates to social concerns such as poverty, development and social change.

A more complete picture of the impact of the migration of the Filipino women on Philippine society can only emerge if the views of the various sectors and groups in society are considered, such as policy-makers and administrators of migration-related agencies and various concerned civil society groups. I therefore gathered these views by participating in panel discussions and several forums which tackled migration issues such as migration of skilled workers, migrants' rights, decent work and decent pay, Filipino diaspora, the return home, migration policies and prospects for the future, and General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS). I served as a panelist/speaker and facilitator in six panel discussions and as a participant in others. These meetings were attended by policy-makers and administrators from the concerned and directly involved Philippine government agencies (such as Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, Overseas Workers Welfare Administration and Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of Labor and Employment), academics, migrant workers and families and civil society representatives, such as labour unions, labour research and education centres and NGOS directly involved with migrants' welfare and human rights. Views and insights from this broad sector proved most useful particularly in identifying the

convergences and divergences on issues of import to Philippine society so far as migration is concerned. I explain this aspect in my succeeding chapters on the field work analysis.

At the Asian regional level, I participated in a 2004 regional conference with the theme, 'Migration for "Development" and its Feminization Process'. In this seminar, I gathered useful insights on issues such as sustainable development and remittances; human security in terms of fulfilment of basic human needs over national (physical) security; migration and the feminisation process and what migration means for the human rights and welfare of migrant women workers, whether they are domestic workers, entertainers, health workers, factory workers or women in intercultural marriages.

3.5. Conduct of the research: strategies and activities

My field work started in October 2004 and lasted for about 18 months. For the first four months, I engaged the assistance of two women: one helped me keep track of developments in the migration issue through newspaper clippings and gathered some basic data from government agencies involved with migration issues such as the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) and the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE). My other assistant had been an overseas worker and union leader of domestic helpers in Hong Kong for 13 years. I had known her over the years as we have been involved in a number of advocacy efforts for migrants' rights at regional and international levels. She has been a valuable person in my research because she has put me in contact with other women migrants who have since returned to the Philippines, at least in her province, Tarlac, in Central Luzon. She also assisted me in organising a series of focus group discussions (FGDs) which I conducted with various groups in her province.

In other areas where I conducted interviews and focus group discussions, I also relied on the help of friends and colleagues in the social movement, particularly

those who work with and for women in order to identify and make contacts with potential interviewees. This connection therefore greatly facilitated my work. Importantly, my interviews and sessions with the women in three sites were not one-off activities. These were part and parcel of the field of engagement of the women's groups and organisations which assisted my study. Hence, there were some follow-up interventions made by such organisations by utilising the outcomes of the sessions for their programme planning. This was specifically the case of a women's organisation in one of my field sites. In the course of a one-day sharing with returning migrant women, a number of problems surfaced pertaining to their trying to fit in or start their lives all over again. These were picked up readily by the two key persons in this organisation who participated in the sharing session as well. In this way, my study tried to avoid a problem posed by Kintanar (1997), that research projects and FGDs often lack continuity and while the discussions do lead to raising women's consciousness and possibilities for creating change, the process is abruptly ended.

Research Sites/Focus Group Discussions

Wishing to seek a sample of women coming from various parts of the country, both in the urban and rural areas, my research brought me to different regions of the Philippines travelling by airplane, by boat, by bus, by local jeeps and by pedicabs (a three-wheeler). My meetings and interviews in one site in the upland community were carried out only after dinner time when the women were freed of their farming work and household chores. Discussions and interviews in the other sites were held in training centres, school classrooms, hostel rooms and quiet outdoors.

In Mindanao island/region, I conducted a half-day sharing session/focus group discussions in Davao city, (FGD, Davao City) capital city of Davao del Sur. The participants were mostly employed in the Middle East and Southeast/East Asia. The women worked as caregivers, domestic helpers, seamstresses and hotel workers while the men were construction and factory workers as well as seafarers. Also present were representatives of a non-government organisation

concerned with migrants' issues. In this sharing session, we explored the meanings of their coming home and the situation of their families upon return. The participants also expressed their views on the government's policy on migration, whether it should be continued or not and why.

In the Visayas island/region, I relied on my close contact with a private school in Bohol province offering primary and secondary education to hold a meeting-discussion with some of the high school students (18) whose both parents are away working overseas. Sixty-per cent of the students in this particular school are children of overseas Filipino workers. In this school, I also had the opportunity to discuss with the guidance counsellors issues and concerns faced by the children of OFWs. The session with the high school students was the first ever conducted by the school. Hence, it was meant to be an opening for a close involvement of the school administrators, teachers and counsellors with this group of students. The guidance counsellors were present in this meeting and they assumed a key role in the discussions. The students provided us with information about their parents, where they are overseas, what they do, how long they have been away, who looks after them in their parents' absence, and how they cope with their parents' absence.

Most of my interviews, focus group discussions and sharing of life stories were carried out in the Luzon island, the main island of the Philippine archipelago (two other main islands are the Visayas and Mindanao islands to the south of the country), specifically in the National Capital Region (NCR) and the Ilocos Region, in the province of La Union and the Cordillera region, in Baguio City. The Luzon island represents the greatest number of overseas migrant workers in the country (Opiniano 2002).

Focus Group Discussions

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is an appropriate method for feminist research because it is highly dynamic, open and democratic in its character. It is a powerful tool not only to highlight similarities among participants but also

their differences and it gives the participants an opportunity to critically analyse and develop consciousness of their life situations (Conaco 2002).

Ten women returning migrants participated in the whole day sharing session in Baguio City. Three worked as nurses in the Middle East, and the rest as caregivers/domestic helpers mainly in Hong Kong and Singapore, followed by Taiwan and Malaysia. The sharing focused on their significant experiences while working overseas, the reasons for their return, the situation of the family upon their return and life after migration.

I chose the La Union province for the other FGDs because of my close relationship with a migrant support group/non-government organisation working in this area and their close involvement with a federation of overseas and returned migrant workers called *Bannuar* (meaning heroes). Our focus group discussions were therefore held with the members of *Bannuar*. It was in La Union province where I spent considerable time meeting, discussing and interviewing former overseas workers in a period of about eight months and with several trips of about 3-4 days each time (the week-end was the most appropriate time to do my study considering the women's work schedules). Six focus group discussions were held in six towns attended by about 80-90 women altogether and from this group, I chose 6 to share with me their life stories. The other women who also shared their life stories were from Tarlac province of Central Luzon (5) and Metro Manila in the National Capital Region (3). The women from *Bannuar* were employed as domestic workers, caregivers or factory workers in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Saipan, Malaysia, Singapore, Saudi Arabia and other Middle East countries. The FGDs largely explored use of their remittances, life after migration, the adjustments the women needed to make upon return and the various challenges they faced in fitting back to their families and their communities.

In Tarlac province, I organised a whole day meeting with 30 women, former overseas workers, mainly from Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and Middle East countries. Use of their remittances, costs and benefits of migration were the main topics discussed in the sessions. A half-day session with 15 children of

overseas workers (mostly of college and high school age, both male and female) was held in a school setting. Guardians were present at this meeting and prior permission was also sought from the parents or guardians of the children. A separate meeting with 5 guardians left behind to take care of families was also conducted. In the session with the children, discussions centred mainly on what they perceive as the costs and benefits of the migration of their parents. The meeting with the guardians was meant to explore their experiences with taking care of the children left behind and how the children in turn coped with their parents' absence. I also had another half-day session with local government officials and representatives (10) of civil society and migrants' support organisations. This meeting was mainly to explore what the local government officials viewed as important issues and concerns with migration and the migrants and their communities. In two urban poor communities in Metro Manila, National Capital region, I had a session with about 15 women who shared their significant experiences while abroad and life after migration.

The workshops and focus group discussions provided a rich sharing of the experiences of the migrant women in the years they worked overseas in terms of relationships with employers, adjustments made to cope with exposure to a strange land, with different culture and ways of living; ways of dealing with separation from loved ones and from one's own country; the demands of long-distance parenting; and their lives after migration, that is upon return to the Philippines, the kinds of adjustments they had to make with families, in the community and society as a whole. The migrant women reflected how migration has affected them and their families, the benefits they have derived while at the same time, also taking stock of the social consequences in view of their long absence from home. The families left behind, especially the children, shared how they felt growing up without their parents, how they coped with the extended years of separation and also how they benefited from their parents' work overseas and how they were also disadvantaged.

Overall, the meetings and discussions were well received by the migrant women and men themselves and the children, the young people as well. In

Tarlac province, at the one-day session it was noted by many that it was the first-ever kind of meeting they attended after returning to the home country, and since many of the women had worked in Hong Kong before, they felt like they were still in Hong Kong. Apart from the socialising factor, what was appreciated most was the opportunity to reflect on the meanings of their migration experience to their own selves, their families and Philippine society as a whole. In Baguio city, Mountain Province, the whole day session was intensive with deep reflections on the individual women's lives. A wide range of feelings and emotions were expressed—satisfaction, anger, pain and laughter particularly at the point where the women shared their coping strategies for dealing with demanding employers. The poignant moments in the narratives were those of wayward husbands and delinquent children as well as the years of physical separation from loved ones. Similar moments were present in the sessions with the children left behind by parents working overseas. Several expressed the pain of growing up into adolescence without parental presence and direct care. A 13-year-old high school girl expressed though with much difficulty, her yearning for freedom, freedom from the burden of having to account weekly to her mother in Hong Kong, being responsible for the household finances and having to deal with a stubborn older brother. At the same time, there were a few who seemed comfortable living on their own (another form of freedom) without direct parental supervision.

Summing up, the focus group discussions and workshops were effective methods for validating the reactions, feelings and understanding of the experiences of the migrants and their families. These sessions allowed the women to speak for themselves and articulate their thoughts and feelings in their own words. A sense of bonding and connectedness out of their shared experiences emerged paving the way for a collective effort toward addressing some of their concerns like those pertaining to securing jobs upon return to the country. At the end of the sessions with the high school students, they expressed the wish for follow-up meetings to discuss topics like handling problems and relationships, coping with loneliness and managing studies,

friends and family conflicts. The guidance counsellors of the school participated in the sharing sessions and committed themselves to deal with the issues and concerns faced by the students.

3.6.   Research ethics and choice of life story narrators

I prefaced all the meetings, discussions and interviews I conducted with a clear purpose of my research which was to produce a thesis leading toward an academic degree. I sought their consent to write their stories in my thesis and later perhaps in a publication. I assured them that I will not use their real names in the stories but most of them wished me to. I presented the drafts of the stories I wrote about them to ascertain their accuracy. However, I explained my long years of activism in migration issues and advocacy on migrants' rights and welfare and also that the results of my study would necessarily feed into my activist work. This position therefore allowed me to be easily accepted and trusted by my subjects and narrators. In only one or two instances, I was thought or perceived to be offering some jobs to the returning migrants and this therefore motivated some women to come for the sessions and meetings.

Aware of my advocacy work, I was asked for my views on migration issues as well as some general information which I readily shared. Another way in which I consciously tried to narrow this gap was by mingling freely with the women as 'one of them'. We ate together, we spent nights in the same room during the interviews, we went to the market together as we prepared to cook our meals during the days I spent in the field.

My close contacts with social development organisations, migrant workers' federation as well as individuals who were formerly migrant workers and leaders enabled me to identify and connect with my life story narrators. I constructed a purposive sample of the women based on the diversity and richness of their experiences, the not so rich and very rich experiences in life (mainly in terms of the struggles they faced), especially their migration experience. I also took into account their varying social and economic

conditions, initial motivations for migration, some economic, others, non-economic; duration of their stay abroad, ranging from at least 6 years to 22 years; and the conditions under which the return took place, both in a voluntary and forced manner. Altogether, I interviewed 14 women for their life stories. In addition, of the 14, I chose two women whom I have known for several years, ten years and more, and in a sense, journeyed with them in their lives as foreign migrant workers. The women worked overseas mainly as domestic helpers, in countries mostly in the Middle East and Asia where it was not possible to settle permanently. I did not find in my sample migrant women who returned for good to the Philippines after working in countries where there was scope for permanent settlement and even acquiring citizenship. The women migrants alternated as domestic workers and factory workers in their long years of work. One worked as a caregiver and also as hotel receptionist. Eight are married, 2 widowed, 2 separated, 1 single and 1 abandoned by husband. Of the married ones, I also considered the varying economic statuses of their spouses, whether they had regular or irregular jobs, employed or unemployed. The ages of the women range from thirties to sixties. Of these women, 3 had completed a bachelor's degree, 4 had completed two to three years in college but did not earn a bachelor's degree, 4 had completed high school and 3 had completed primary schooling (see Appendix II).

3.7 Conclusion

The sessions on life stories were long, each one lasting from one to three hours and therefore physically, mentally and emotionally taxing. We spoke in our national language, Pilipino. In my interviews in the Ilocos region, we used the *Ilokano* language which I am quite fluent in. I met the women not just once but twice and even thrice to fill in gaps, to include other details they wished and to check with them the accuracy of my written recording although I used with their permission a tape recorder. The sites we chose for most of the interviews were in quiet places under shady trees, others in my hostel room where there was

privacy. I also asked permission to visit their homes and meet other members of their family to which they gladly consented. One of the women even invited me to spend a night at her home which offered me an opportunity to speak with the husband and children. The visits were valuable for it enabled me to feel their homelife, see and observe the physical and social landscape constructed from a woman migrant's long years of absence and hard toil.

In the interviews, I had asked the women to narrate their life story starting from their birth until their current situation. It was up to them to choose which details of their lives they wanted to share, to highlight or to emphasise. I made clear that I was very much interested in knowing their reasons and motivations for seeking work abroad, their experiences overseas as migrant workers, their relationships and ways of coping with the demands of their work, their long absence from home and their eventual return to the Philippines. I probed what coming home meant to them, their reasons for deciding to return for good (that is to return and stay home and not leave again for overseas work), the process that went into making the decision and how it was understood by their families. Finally, I asked them to share with me their life after migration, their relationships with various members of families, with communities and also singling out the costs and benefits, the pluses and minuses of their migration experience, both in economic and non-economic terms. I asked them to reflect on the significance of this experience, how it figures in the overall context of their lives and what they considered the highlights of such an experience. Their overall views on migration and on migrant women were also solicited. In the process, I listened as attentively and as closely as I could. I took note of the pauses and silences, the negations and affirmations, the tones of their voices, the clear and audible and forceful as well as the inaudible and muted ones. For some women, at some point, there was also hesitation to relate details and I respected the narrator's position by not pursuing this. We stopped momentarily when a narrator was overcome with emotions. I offered my hand to reassure her that I understood and also felt what she felt. At the same time, I offered the opportunity for her to withdraw from the research if she desired.

At the end, the sharing, the narration was empowering and liberating for both the narrator and researcher— a number of the women expressed that they did not realise, until we had the sharing, that their life stories were worth telling, that the struggles they went through, the pains, the hurts, the humiliations as well as their small victories were finally verbalised, articulated and shared and that they felt important. Their life story, a testimony, at once personal and political, and my activist self became more pronounced because of my role as a researcher.

At the centre and core of the research is the migrant woman who has come home, weaves and frames her own story, her history.

CHAPTER 4
TRENDS IN PHILIPPINE LABOUR MIGRATION: THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

My grandfather left my father at a very young age when he travelled from the Philippines to the United States in the 1920s to work in the agricultural plantations of California. Having been widowed at the time of his departure, he later remarried and had a family of his own. My grandfather never returned to his place of birth except for a few occasional visits. My father and his only sibling were left in the Philippines in the care of their grandparents.

In 1970, my sister, a new nursing honours graduate was immediately recruited to work in a hospital in New Jersey City, United States.. She never returned to the Philippines to live and work.

In 1985, Siony, a small land-owner farmer, married with three young children, left her village in the Central Luzon region of the Philippines to work in Malaysia as a domestic helper. Finally, after 22 years of working as a domestic help, Siony returned home for good in February 2007.

4.1. Introduction

My grandfather, my sister and my friend Siony, all left the Philippines to work overseas.

Their movement represents different waves of labour migration in the twentieth century and onwards.

This chapter reviews and analyses trends in Philippine labour migration spanning three waves throughout the twentieth century. The phenomenon of the increasing feminisation of migration is central to my analysis: the factors explaining this phenomenon, and its various implications for women's labour and women's status. It sets into context and proper perspective the life stories of Filipino women migrant workers discussed and analysed in chapters 5 and 6;

the different waves of Philippine migration, the factors which influence the feminisation of migration, the meanings of feminisation as it affects women's type of jobs, conditions of work and finally, the implications of feminised migration on the return of the migrant women workers.

Philippine labour migration studies point to three waves beginning in the early twentieth century.

4.2. Historical waves of migration

First Wave

During the American colonial rule in the Philippines in the early 1900s, the United States systematically recruited Filipinos to serve as cheap labour in the sugar and pineapple plantations in Hawaii and later in the fruit and vegetable farm lands in California and salmon canning factories in Alaska. The number of migrant workers grew from a few hundreds to tens of thousands. Most of them were men from the impoverished provinces of the Ilocos region, north of the Philippines. Historical records point to the recruitment of fifteen young men, aged 14 to 30, who were contracted by the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association and sent to Olaa to work as the first group of migrant workers. These men arrived in Honolulu aboard the S.S. Doric on December 20, 1906 (Ocampo 2008).

The first wave runs from 1906 to 1934, almost entirely to Hawaii, which by 1934 had more than 120,000 Filipinos. The Immigration Act of 1924, which barred further Japanese immigration to Hawaii, stimulated the recruitment of more Filipinos so that altogether, between 1907 and 1926, about 150,000 Filipinos had left the Philippines, 52,810 were living and working in Hawaii and about 45,263 in the mainland United States (Bulosan 2006). In 1929, 41 per cent of the Filipinos left Hawaii, either to return to the Philippines, or to move on to the harvest picker trails in the US. There was a lull in population movement from 1934-65. By 1934, about 41 per cent of the workers in Hawaii were forcibly repatriated to the Philippines as the Great Depression ensued (Bulosan 2006).

The personal and economic hardships encountered by Filipino workers have been well-documented (Bulosan 2006; Melendy 1972; Takaki 1994) as well as the struggles they waged to improve their harsh conditions (Mitchell 1996). Most of the Filipinos were young, single men with low levels of education and skills and without social contacts and family ties. They faced difficult living conditions at the labour camps, earned low wages, worked gruelling hours and were subjected to oppressive rules and policies. Moreover, as colonial subjects of the United States, they had an ambivalent status. The age and sex imbalance among the Filipinos made them vulnerable to social conflicts with the dominant white majority as for example, when they attempted to date white girls. They were not immigrants as such and hence, could not be deported; neither could they be excluded but they were also not eligible for citizenship. Like their fellow Asian workers such as the Japanese and Chinese, they had to contend with racism and xenophobia from the local population. They were barred from hotels, bars, swimming pools and other facilities.

Yet the Filipinos were not passive agricultural workers. Amidst a harsh physical and social landscape, they were known for their militancy. They organised workers and led strikes to press for better wages and for better conditions at the labour camps (Mitchell 1996).

American immigration policies emphasised the importance of cheap labour and discouraged family reunification through restrictive quotas for women and children such that women were absent until about the 1950s (Ngan-Ling Chow et al. 1996).

Second Wave

The 1960s also saw the movement to the United States of Filipino professionals, largely nurses, followed by doctors, science technicians and engineers, thus signalling the brain drain phase in Philippine migration. Approximately 2,400 Filipino nurses on average registered in foreign countries annually since the beginning of the 1960. Thus, in 1967, the Philippines was regarded as the most significant donor nation for nurses (Ball 2004). Today, the

Philippines remains a major supplier of nurses to Western countries particularly to the United States. The United States is now faced with a critical shortage of medical professionals especially doctors and nurses, in part because of American women's reluctance to go into the field of nursing perceiving it as a difficult profession and with limited career opportunities (Ball 2004) but also because of the lack of financial incentives for colleges and universities to offer nursing education (Tancinco 2007). For the United Kingdom's National Health Service, recruiting nurses from countries like the Philippines, brought an immediate relief to the serious staffing problem clearly felt during the year 2000 for there was a pool of trained and experienced nurses readily available for overseas employment. It is estimated that from 1998 to 2002, around 35,000 Filipino nurses were recruited to work in the United Kingdom (Centre for Filipinos 2002).

While the movement of Filipino professionals to the United States was facilitated by the easing of immigration restrictions and the abolition of the quota system in the American immigration system, Catherine Ceniza Choy (2003) argues, its roots trace back to the colonial health education system put in place by the United States. An American type of training hospital system in the Philippines during the colonial epoch laid the foundation that enabled a Filipino nursing labour force to work in the United States. This foundation was later on developed through the establishment of an exchange programme which eventually transformed nursing into an international profession. Through the exchange programme, Filipino nurses came to appreciate the opportunities, earnings, travel as well as leisure that working abroad and in the United States meant to them. Their socio-economic success gave considerable prestige so that instead of earning American educational credentials and returning to work in the Philippines, subsequent generations of nursing graduates had set their goal of living abroad indefinitely. Nursing courses were pursued so that Filipino women could work abroad (Choy 2003).

Internal Migration

Internally, within the Philippines, by the late 1960s there was an increasing movement of population to urban areas and a marked mobility of women and young adults. A majority of the rural women who went to urban cities and suburban areas were either displaced farmers/workers or women in search of better opportunities. Displacement of women, particularly young, single women from the farms was due to a number of factors: fragmentation of land resulting in the preference for men to farm; inheritance practices which favoured men rather than women; and agricultural mechanisation which eased out women from farm work (Eviota 1992).

The export-led industrialisation policies in the Philippines starting from the 1970s contributed greatly to labour segmentation. The women who migrated to the cities mainly to Manila, the country's capital, worked in the formal sector as salesclerks, secretaries, garments and micro-chip factory workers and office clerks and in the informal sector as small- scale entrepreneurs, sales ladies and domestic helpers, among others. Male migrants were more gainfully employed, had more stable and remunerated jobs than the female migrants and were engaged in crafts or production process occupations, automotive and assembly plants work, clerical and sales work and professional work (Torres 1992). In order to achieve competitiveness of exports within the region, wages of workers, mainly women workers, were kept low especially in the garments sector and union activities were hardly encouraged (Torres 1992). Overall, employment was insecure, labour was casualised and productivity quotas were used (Eviota 1992).

Nevertheless, women's greater mobility from the 1960s marked a beginning of a new trend in Philippine migration. Women were starting to move on their own, mainly in search of job opportunities, and not as wives or children moving with husbands or families. This phenomenon brought about a new sense of independence and autonomy for the young women and a relief from the burden of household work and tasks. But what this meant was shifting the burden of greater household responsibilities to older women and even female children left

behind in the agricultural households (Eviota 1992). In the Philippine society, cultural ideals define female work as destined to be done for and in the home, while male work encompassed those undertaken outside the home. Such cultural norms are transmitted to children through chore assignments. Females and males thus tend to define themselves according to the gender division of work; the females associating themselves with the world of their mothers (caring for the family, cooking meals, doing laundry) and the males, with their fathers (fishing, farming, wage work) (Illo and Polo 1990). Thus, daughters are given tasks which prepare and affirm their femininity and sons are assigned chores which train them to take up dominant positions in their family homes upon reaching their adult lives (Sumagaysay 2003).

At the same time, while the mobility of young women provided a new sense of autonomy and work opportunities, nevertheless, it also subjected them to other forms of patriarchy obtaining in capitalist production systems such as sexism and sexual harassment (Eviota 1992).

Third Wave

By the mid-1970s there was a shift and large demand to send Filipino migrant workers to the countries in the Middle East. This was brought about by the oil crisis and strength of petroleum dollars and economic boom in the said region. The labour force was predominantly male and was based in construction, manufacturing and technical services. However, when the industrial construction phase declined in the 1980s, Filipino migrant women began to supply labour demand as administrative, health and domestic workers (de Guzman 1999). This movement is better understood within the context of population movement in Southeast Asia.

4.3.   Southeast Asian women on the move

One of the major evolving trends in labour migration of Southeast Asians over the last fifty years has been the movement of women (Lim and Oishi 1996) especially in the case of Indonesia, Philippines, and Sri Lanka, where women

outnumber men in the official outmigration of workers. Below, I trace the beginnings of the entry of these women in the international labour market.

In the early 1970s, with wealth generated from the increased price of oil, the Middle Eastern countries embarked on large infrastructure and development projects that required huge numbers of foreign contract labourers. In order to meet this demand, several hundreds of thousands of workers were recruited from South, Southeast and East Asian countries (Gunatilleke 1992). By the mid-1980s, the major construction projects were completed and this therefore led to a decrease in the need for contract labour in the Middle East. In search of alternative jobs, Asian migrants turned to the newly-industrialising economies (NIEs) in Asia such as Hong Kong, Republic of Korea, Singapore and Taiwan. Since the 1980s, Asia's major economic restructuring has caused a shift in technology and industry, and consequently labour has become more flexible and fragmented in Japan and the four NIEs. Technological advances led to rapid expansion of tertiary industries like services, information, finance and tourism which in turn provided ample employment opportunities for the educated work force (Piper and Yamanaka 2006). Educated women in these newly-industrialising economies assumed managerial and professional occupations. However, they were faced with the difficulties of managing their households and building their careers partly because of inadequate state support services for child care and also partly due to carrying the greater burden of reproductive roles. There was therefore a demand for domestic workers which could not be filled by the local labour force. Meanwhile, jobs requiring manual labour in construction and manufacturing were now shunned by the local labour force. Consequently, large numbers of foreign workers including domestic workers from neighbouring countries were recruited to fill in the labour shortages (Piper and Yamanaka 2006).

By the 1990s, women comprised 84 per cent of Sri Lankan migrants, and of this, 79 per cent were domestic helpers, 70 per cent of Indonesian migrants most of whom were also domestic helpers and 25 per cent of Thais working abroad either as domestic helpers or entertainers in Japan. In Japan, during its

financial boom in the 1980s, bar and night club hostesses euphemistically referred to as entertainers or performing artists (according to the terminology of POEA), were massively recruited from the Philippines. In 2002, Singapore employed some 180,000 male construction workers and an estimated 140,000 female domestic workers from Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. In Japan in 2001, 132,000 of the 157,000 Filipino migrants were women, most of whom worked as entertainers. By 2000, about 45 per cent of the 250,000 Japanese-Brazilians working in Japan were females and mainly working in factories (Piper and Yamanaka 2006).

From these statistics, one thus observes the gender-segregated Asian regional labour market. Jobs assumed by women are those traditionally associated with women's reproductive roles, thus lower paid, low status and low skilled. Women in these fields are excluded from the labour codes of the recipient countries and consequently, terms and conditions of their employment are not standardised leading to abuse and exploitation by employers. As expressed by migrant support groups in Asia, 'globalization and its offspring, the feminization of migration, have seen the reinstitution of patriarchy across new dimensions in race, class, and ethnicity, resulting in greater vulnerability of migrant women… and violence against women migrants' (Asian Migrant Centre 1996:38).

> 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 (Wille and Passl 2001, introduction).

The participation of Southeast Asian women in a gender-segregated labour market and its ramifications on the migrant women's sense of security can be better understood within the context of the forces of globalisation which I discuss in the next section.

4.4.   Forces of globalisation

Globalisation refers to the 'growing interconnectedness and interdependencies between countries on a global scale' (Perrons 2004:1); the 'global circulation of goods, services and capital but also of information, ideas and people' (The World Bank cited in Perrons 2004:1). Diane Perrons contends that because of the interconnected nature of the present world, it is important to frame our understanding of people and places within the 'economic, social, political and cultural processes shaping the global economy' (Perrons 2004: 3). Adopting a historical materialist approach allows us to analyse how people secure their daily needs and wants and how this process is shaped by capitalism, itself a dynamic system which explains changes in the way goods and services are produced, where they are produced, and these changes in turn profoundly shape the context of our lives (Perrons 2004). Ronaldo Munck (2002:2-3), in his treatise on globalisation and labour, argues that globalisation appears to be the new 'great transformation of our time. What we may call the Globalisation Revolution of this turn of century is also characterised by a seemingly miraculous development of capitalism, but also by an equally profound dislocation of the lives of ordinary people across the globe'.

One of the main features of a globalised economy is the increased employment of women workers in the world which led to a 'renewed surge of feminization of labor activity' (Standing 1989:107). But what this has meant is not only an increase in numbers. It also meant deregulation of labour standards, flexible and more disposable work and lower labour costs. According to Saskia Sassen, under a global economy, the low-wage labour of women from traditionally Third World countries in export processing zones is demanded along with women's labour from the secondary tiers of manufacturing and service sectors in advanced capitalist countries (Sassen 1998).

The *ILO Report on Global Employment Trends for Women* (2007) underscores the fact that in 2007, close to 1.2 billion women around the world worked, an increase of 200 million or 18.4 per cent more than ten years ago. However, the number of unemployed women also grew and for the women with work, they

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.

While in the global economy, high-tech sectors are made visible, majority of the working women in the South do so as workers in the informal sector and as home workers. 'If some women have been sucked into the maelstrom of the globalised, informationalised economy, many more are working in the informal sector and are the mainstay of the homeworkers' labour economy.' Work at home thus complemented and replicated women's domestic roles. In terms of basic household strategies, women's roles, therefore, harnessed the interests of capital accumulation. Hence, in the 'reproduction of labour-power (people's capacity to work), women's work both in the home and the labour market, thus acts as a substantive subsidy' (Munck 2002:120-121).

According to Manuel Castells (2000: 71, 368), global capitalism has led to the rise of a 'Fourth World' — 'segments of societies, of areas of cities, of regions and of entire countries' now confronted with social exclusion defined as 'the process by which certain individuals and groups are systematically barred from access to positions that would enable them to an autonomous livelihood within the standards framed by institutions and values in a given context'. Access to such a position would mean 'access to relatively regular, paid labour for at least one member of a stable household'. Clearly, migrant workers belong to the 'Fourth World'. They face social exclusion. They are discriminated in terms of poor working contracts, lack of access to basic social services especially health care; bear a huge financial burden in terms of exorbitant agency fees just to secure a contract for a year or two, unable to bring families, and unprotected by local labour laws.

As V. Spike Peterson argues and I concur, under a globalised political economy, employment has become feminised. Labour conditions have become less desirable, meaningful, safe or secure. '…feminisation devalorises not only women but also racially, culturally and economically marginalised men and work that is deemed unskilled, menial and 'merely' reproductive' (Peterson 2006:89). Globalisation has also brought about uneven effects between nations and between races/ethnic groups and between men and women. While it promises improved efficiency in the distribution of resources and higher standards of living for some countries, for others, particularly in developing nations, it means increasing inequality and poverty (Stiglitz 2006).

4.5.   Philippine labour export programme

The accumulation of debts, aggravated by worldwide recession in the early 1970s, became a major economic problem in the Philippines. As a response to this problem, the Philippine government was compelled to adopt measures to obtain foreign exchange, including the introduction of foreign investments and the promotion of export of raw materials. The promotion of emigration was another means to reduce its financial problem, since remittances would become vital financial revenue to the Philippine economy (*Asian Migrant Forum* 1996).

The oil boom in the Middle East in the 1970s and the huge unemployment problem in the Philippines led the Marcos administration to initiate the Labor Export Program. The government adopted 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. Though 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).

The labour migrants of the 1970s were largely seafarers (seamen) and unskilled male workers who went to oil-rich Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf states. From a modest number of 19, 221 workers in 1976, the number rose to 523,000 outflow of workers in 1989 and to 723,448 in 1992. By 2003, there were 3,385,001 Filipinos (referred to as temporary stock), whose stay overseas is employment related and were thus expected to return at the end of their contracts (Cohen 2006).

A shortage of live-in domestic workers in Hong Kong in the 1970s paved the way for the entry of Filipino women migrant workers at a time when the Philippine government launched its overseas employment programme. Women migrants and refugees from mainland China were drawn to the numerous, lucrative and more autonomous service and industry jobs that became available as Hong Kong joined the ranks of Asia's rapidly growing economies. The geographical proximity and the instituted minimum wage favoured Hong Kong as a destination for Filipino women seeking overseas employment (Gibson et al. 2001). In 1998, domestic workers earned the monthly minimum wage of HK$3860 (US$497), rendering it highly attractive even for women with college and university degrees. Between 1975 and 1991, the number of Filipinos working as domestics in Hong Kong jumped from 1,000 to 66,000 and by 1998, they numbered 140,000 making the Filipinos the largest non-Chinese community in Hong Kong (Gibson et al. 2001).

Increase in global demand and employment of Filipino women

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 the Philippine government (Ball 2004).

Statistics from the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE 2002) show that there has been a steady increase of female OFWs from 12 per cent in

1975, to 47 per cent in 1987, to 58 per cent in 1995. In 1999, women, mainly in the service sectors constituted 64 per cent of new hires abroad, with only 36 per cent being males. An estimated 600,000 documented female overseas workers were domestic helpers in 19 major worldwide destinations. In 1998, at least 47,017 Filipino entertainers were in five countries, namely, Hong Kong, Macau, South Korea, Saipan (United States territory) and Japan, with Japan accounting for 95 per cent of Filipino entertainers in Asia.

The entry of Filipino women entertainers in Japan can be traced back to a period in the 1970s when the tourism industry in the Philippines constituted a large part in providing for the needs of the Japanese tourists including entertainment and sexual services much to the angry protests of women's groups and organisations. Consequently, there was an outflow of Filipino women going to Japan and providing such services. The entertainment industry is well established and institutionalised in the Japanese society. The industry is also looked upon as necessary for Japanese men as a way of seeking release from a heavily stressed and pressured work culture. Since Japanese women are reluctant to enter this type of work in favour of more prestigious and better-paying occupations, other Asian women provide the services (Gulati 2004; Torres 1992).

Within a relatively short period, the gender structure of the global Philippine migrant labour force was significantly transformed (Ball 2004). By 2002, Filipino women comprised 72 per cent of migrant workers leaving the Philippines (POEA 2004). In terms of skill categories, there was an almost equal number of women hired as service workers and as professional and technical workers. In the latter category however, is subsumed the work as entertainers mainly in Japan. Male migrant workers were predominantly in the professional and technical skill category and production category (POEA 2004). Equally significant in the 2002 deployment is that of the professional and technical workers category, where 85 per cent are female and only 15 per cent are male (POEA 2008). A great proportion of work in this area belongs to nurses and entertainers (grouped under the categories of composers, musicians, singers,

choreographers and dancers) who are mostly women. The rest constituted medical, dental, veterinary related workers, artists and commercial designers, teachers, physiotherapists and occupational therapists, midwives, medical technicians and dental assistants.

Starting 2003 up to 2008 (Appendix IV), one observes that 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 and of these, close to half were domestic workers. 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 2008).

According to the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, OFWs are relatively young, with a median age of 32. The men are slightly older, with a median age of 35, than the women, with a median age of 29. Among the women, the age group with the biggest number of overseas workers is 25-29. But among the men, those 45 and over make up the biggest number. In terms of education, for every 10 OFWs, 4 reached college, 3 reached high school and 1 had an elementary education. A few OFWs had post-graduate schooling. Trends, however, in actual employment show a high level of deskilling with teachers becoming caregivers or domestic (Dungo 2008).

4.6.   Meanings of feminised labour migration

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. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 are devoted to examining these consequences.

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). Under what conditions does feminisation of migration occur and what forms does it take?

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).

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 (Boyd: 2006) as well as of male migration as in the outflow of male seafarers. 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.

Migration values and motivations are shaped within families (see 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 purposes 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).

The Filipino family

Chapters 5 and 6 of my thesis emphasise that Filipino women worked overseas to support their families and ensure a better future for their children as well as assist their extended kinship relations.

The family as the basic unit of Philippine society plays a pivotal role in providing financial and emotional support, pooling of resources and sharing of household responsibilities. It demands 'interest and loyalty' from its members more than any other institution in the larger society (Medina 2001:12). The family's influence is wide, pervading every aspect of life, be it social, political, religious, or economic. 'In its extended form, the Filipino family includes a wide range of relatives from both the husband's and wife's side' (Medina 2001:18) bringing together grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

While migrating for the sake of the family, for the betterment of the well-being of the family is the dominant theme in the lives of migrant workers, women and men alike (Asis 2002), I also argue in Chapter 5 that the women in my study migrated to work not only for their families but also to escape from unhappy relationships and to add more meaning and identity to their lives.

Studies on Philippine migration point to the significant role that families, both nuclear and extended, perform in the migratory process based on the concepts of obligation and reciprocity (*utang na loob* or debt of prime obligation). For example, the woman migrant who leaves behind her children in the care of relatives would feel a strong sense of *utang na loob* so that she will need to repay this in various ways such as sharing part of her remittances or sending gifts or even supporting her relatives' own children in their schooling. Commitments and obligations towards relatives are so strong that even older single migrants send substantial remittances to relatives as a sign that they fulfil family obligations and also hope that in the future, the relatives would provide support to the single migrant (Zontini 2004). As I discuss and analyse in Chapters 5 and 6, the Filipino family provides emotional, psychological, and social support to the migrant woman worker but at the same time it also exerts

tremendous pressure and burden on her to meet wide-ranging needs and demands of both her nuclear and extended families. In a significant sense, this delays the return of the migrant woman.

4.7.　Factors promoting female migration from the Philippines

Weak economy and poverty are the driving forces of female migration from the Philippines. But the aggressive role of the government in promoting migration is an equally compelling factor. Social networks too have grown over the years, facilitating the outflow of migrant workers.

Weak economy and limited opportunities

The weak economy has forced women to seek employment opportunities outside the country. In line with the government's labour export policy, programmes for women overseas workers are designed to secure and maintain deployment of women abroad. In contrast, there is no comprehensive programme for strengthening the local economy which can provide women with viable alternatives to overseas employment.

The government promotes self-employment or entrepreneurship alongside wage employment. Thus, it has supported various livelihood programmes albeit micro in scale and focus, with limited chances of sustainability, and rarely connected with structural problems like casual employment, absence of workers' benefits and social security. Also, programmes have often been limited to the financial and livelihood aspects, with little integration of a social services component like health or housing or education (The Philippine NGO Beijing +10 Report 2005). Overall, although Filipino women have been entering the labour force in increasing numbers, from 4.8 million (33 per cent) in 1973 to 10.1 million (47 per cent) in 1994 and reaching 13.4 million in 2003, fewer are finding gainful employment. In 2005, labour force participation rate of women was 49.8 per cent while that of men was 79.8 per cent (NCRFW 2009). Jobs for women are mainly provided by the private sector, with formal establishments absorbing 43 per cent of the wage workers. Fifty per cent are self-employed workers and

10 per cent are unpaid family workers in the agricultural sector and in the informal sector of urban centres. The low labour force participation reflects the persistent non-recognition of women's reproductive work to produce and sustain life, to maintain the family and household. Many women work in the informal sector which means work which is invisible, unrecognised, unprotected, low-skilled and low-paid. Those who work on a sub-contracting basis for example, are subjected to declining wages due to intense global competition and shift to higher technology. Micro-entrepreneurs are also constrained by lack of capital, declining demand and competition from cheaper imports under a regime of deregulation and open markets in a globalised economic system (Ofreneo 2005).

In a recent study on labour market outcomes and gender issues (Lazo 2008), an emerging concern has been noted: jobless males are increasing and unemployment is affecting the male more than the female work force. Furthermore, youth unemployment is high and the highest unemployment rate is among the 20-24 year-old cohort, which means the new college graduates and this partly explains the search for jobs overseas. A study done by Semyonov and Gorodzeisky (2004) on a representative sample of 2,346 households of migrant workers from the Philippines underscores the high rate of unemployment in the Philippine economy. Twenty-seven per cent of all men and 68 per cent of all women currently employed overseas were unemployed prior to migration. Clearly, the lack of economic opportunities in the country explains the outward movement of Filipino men and women.

Lucita Lazo's (2008) research further points to the trend of men dropping out of work force and more women now looking for jobs. What this means if the trend continues is that women will increasingly have to bear the burden of providing for their families. I contend that this is likely to be so if we also consider another trend which is that nationwide, there are more girls than boys able to complete primary school, high school and college education. In the academic year 2003-2004, the total number of graduates in both public and private schools was 386, 920, of which there were 226,639 females and 160,281 males (Department of

Education 2004). A future scenario then is that Filipino women will have to bear largely both productive and reproductive roles if there is no transformation of gender relations in the division of labour and no recognition by society that caring and nurturing roles are equally men's roles and responsibilities.

Poverty and impact of structural adjustment programmes

Continuing poverty is one major factor pushing Filipino women out of the country to work. According to the Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development 1995-2025, many Filipino women resort to migrating for work or for marriage as a strategy to overcome poverty (Ofreneo 2005). Hence, in the 1980s the 'mail-order-bride' business proliferated as thousands of Filipino women have been matched as brides of men from countries such as Australia, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, England and the United States. In the process, however, the search for a better life for the women meant falling victims to violence by foreign husbands or by unscrupulous syndicates who use the business as fronts for prostitution (Medina 2001).

Studies on poverty in the Philippines indicate that it is a multi-dimensional deprivation manifested in low incomes, inadequate human capabilities such as poor health and educational achievements. Education has become less affordable to the poor and access to health service is also inequitable. Moreover, the pace of poverty reduction in the country has been slow and income inequality remains high (Asian Development Bank 2008).

The Philippine government continues to pursue a development agenda based on structural adjustment prescriptions (SAPs) and have resulted in more poverty than less. SAPs are free market economic reforms imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF)-World Bank on developing countries as a condition for loans. Such programmes seek to improve a country's foreign investment climate by eliminating trade and investment regulations, enhance foreign exchange earnings through export promotion and reduce government deficits through cuts in public spending. In concrete economic terms, SAPs have been expressed in land conversion, cash crop promotion, withdrawal of

subsidies for farmers and consumers, privatisation of water and power services, and reduction of budget for social services. Higher costs of basic services would translate into difficulties for women who traditionally manage and budget household funds and ensure that basic needs are met (Ofreneo 2005). With limited health care activities, the burden of caring for the sick in the family falls on women. In effect, policies associated with SAPs have increased women's economic and social burdens as they struggle to deal with their productive and reproductive roles in the family and in the community (The Philippine NGO Beijing +10 Report 2005). Hence, poverty hits women more than men because of their care-giving roles and numerous household responsibilities. I contend further, that when resources are scarce, often women are compelled to devise strategies for survival or search for alternative livelihood. To many Filipino women, international migration has become one such main strategy.

While poverty is a major push factor for the outmigration of Filipino women, it is also the case that social networks play an important role in facilitating women's mobility. Above all, the dominant and aggressive position of the Philippine government in international labour migration has greatly contributed to its present scale. Below, I discuss these two issues.

Facilitative role of transnational networks

Female labour migration is usually facilitated by informal networks among friends and relatives from the same sending villages, towns and provinces. Such network connections constitute a valuable form of social capital and seek to lower the costs and risks of migration (Hugo 1997). However, as Wee and Sim (2003) assert, other networks such as the more institutionalised types do play a large role as well. These involve commercial agencies which ease recruitment and deployment of workers and non-governmental organisations which assist, organise and represent migrant workers in sending and receiving countries. The interplay of such networks enables millions of women workers to move back and forth from sending countries to receiving countries and from one receiving country to the other. 'As these networks actively shape and mobilise

labour migration, in time, a "self-perpetuating dynamism" is injected into migration that continues long after the original, usually economic reasons for the flow may have been reduced' (Wee and Sim 2003:171). It is important to point out however, that although intermediaries like recruitment agencies facilitate migration, it is also the case that dependence on them at various stages of the migration process spawns a range of exploitative practices such as charging exorbitant fees, falsification of working documents, or non-compliance with their responsibilities to the migrant workers (see *Asian Migrant Yearbook* 2001-2004; Ghosh 2009).

Role of the State

Starting from the 1970s when the overseas employment programme was launched, the state's labour migration apparatus and structures have grown and multiplied and we now witness a highly institutionalised system of the Philippine labour migration industry (Tyner 2000). Through the decades, the system has evolved from one that emphasised regulating a rapidly expanding industry and maintaining a high market share for Filipino labour, to that which strives for workers' empowerment and welfare, a policy thrust during the term of President Corazon Aquino. Under President Ramos administration from 1992 until 1998, policies directed at the workers' protection and welfare continued, culminating in the passage of Republic Act 8042. At the same time, it was also during this period that the trend towards deregulating the business of recruiting Filipinos for overseas job, started. As argued by Jorge Tigno et al. (2000), the two-pronged approach of pursuing labour market promotion and worker deployment on one hand, and workers' welfare promotion and protection do not complement each other and appear to be inconsistent.

Furthermore, Tyner (2000), in undertaking an institutional analysis of the Philippine labour migration industry, concluded that the marketing and recruitment strategies of Philippine government institutions and private recruitment agencies had been pursued in their desire to fully exploit the global labour market. In the process, gendered representations of occupations and

workers had taken place. Filipino workers are cast as cheap and docile, but skilled labour force. Occupations are represented as either masculine or feminine— women are depicted as domestic workers or nurses and men as professionals or construction workers (Tyner 2000).

4.8.   Implications of feminised labour migration on women's status, conditions of work and employment

Problems, constraints and vulnerabilities of women migrants

Asian women are moving in their own right as autonomous economic migrants, rather than as dependents of male migrants. However, such status brings about different sets of problems and constraints such as vulnerabilities to various forms of discrimination, exploitation and abuse, particularly for live-in domestic workers. This status is exacerbated by conditions such as temporary status, absence of support system and unfamiliarity with legislation (see Heyzer et al. 1994; Shah and Menon 1997). And yet, migrant domestic workers play a significant role in the reproduction of everyday life in societies in need of house care and with inadequate support for the care of the children and the elderly.

The discourse on migration of women, particularly those engaged in domestic work, often focuses on the abuses experienced or social problems generated. Hardly, if any discussion occurs on the socio-psychological and economic contributions of the foreign domestic workforce to the host country. For example, in Hong Kong, where there are about 240,000 foreign domestic workers, the Filipino women being the majority, thirty-six per cent take care of children thus saving employers more than HK$2.1 billion yearly in private school fees. Ten per cent look after the elderly, sparing families more than HK$2.5 billion a year in nursing care costs (Asian Migrant Centre 2000).

The wide array of vulnerabilities to abuse and exploitation faced by migrant women workers are related to the intersection of occupation and country of employment. For example, the Gulf states are host to thousands of Filipino women (as well as Sri Lankan and Indonesian women) who work as domestic

helpers but as experience of migrant support groups and studies show, workers are hardly protected— national labour codes do not cover domestic workers (as in most countries of the world) and laws that protect them in other ways are rarely enforced.

> Migrants are extremely vulnerable to exploitation because of their powerlessness within the legal system. Structural and cultural conditions serve to maintain and reproduce migrant vulnerability in power relations that enable abuse and exploitation of migrants. A cultural element provides ideological legitimation and reinforcement of power relations through derogatory stereotypes, prejudices, racism, xenophobia, ignorance and institutional discrimination. For example, the gender discrimination faced by domestic workers in Saudi Arabia can be understood partly as an extension of the discrimination faced by Saudi women (Manseau 2006:38-39).

Contract migration and erosion of rights

Contract migration, the type of migration that unskilled workers go through, stipulates a period of time to work with severely limited benefits and rights and few possibilities of bringing their families along (Gulati 2006). Leela Gulati further argues that this type of migration has two related effects: one, workers' rights are hardly recognised; and second, social integration does not usually occur under this system.

In studying migration in the Asia-Pacific region, Amarjit Kaur (2007), points out that whereas skilled workers in Singapore are granted access to subsidised health care, education and housing, 'Singapore has a poor track record in its treatment of the work permit category, particularly domestic workers' [unskilled] (Kaur 2007:149). Apart from lower pay, they are confronted with restrictions to their personal freedoms: no family reunification; marriage to a Singapore national is prohibited without prior permission from the government; and payment of about three months' salary to recruitment agents is required to obtain a contract. Foreign domestic helpers are also subjected to mandatory pregnancy tests and are deported if they become pregnant (Kaur 2007). She concludes that 'migration policy-making in the Asia-Pacific region is increasingly taking place outside a human rights framework' and migrants are treated with no perceived rights (Kaur 2007:154).

Migrant women workers are more at risk when it comes to violations of reproductive rights. People who face discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, class, gender or sexual orientation, also experience manifold problems related to sexuality, and those belonging to more than one oppressed group often face double discrimination (Interview with Tharan, cited in Tahmina, 2002).

Becoming undocumented

In Malaysia, the *Immigration Act of 2002* provides harsh penalties for immigration violation such as working without a work permit or visa and punitive measures, including the caning of workers. Abused domestic workers (even with proper documents and work permits and therefore considered legal workers) who run away from employers and seek alternative employers and overstay in the process are consequently regarded as illegal (among migrants' rights advocates, the term undocumented worker rather than illegal worker is used, on the position that workers can never be illegal) and detained in detention camps.

Undocumented migration (see Battistella and Asis 2003) is also partly a function of barriers to labour migration in several destinations but also influenced by the high costs, delays and difficulty of some official systems in labour origin nations, and also the existence of a well-organised international migration industry which involves a wide array of actors such as travel agencies, recruitment agents, sub-agents, and others. For women migrants especially, undocumented migration has made them vulnerable to cases of trafficking either for slave-like work conditions or sexual abuse and exploitation through prostitution (Gulati 2006).

Deskilling

In studying Filipino migration to Canada, Philip Kelly (2007) contends that Filipinos collectively experience one of the highest levels of occupational and sectoral segmentation, specifically into low-paying and insecure jobs in

healthcare, childcare, retail and manufacturing sectors. However, Kelly (2007) argues that occupation alone cannot adequately explain such class position. Class has spatial and temporal dimensions so that one needs to understand its formation and re-formation. Class as a position in a structured social hierarchy shows a deprofessionalisation and deskilling of the educated and experienced professionals. But within this downward mobility is also a scope for upward mobility within that hierarchy across a career or across generations. In viewing class as a process of surplus appropriation and distribution, Filipinos' movement to lower class service sector may also mean more regulated working conditions reducing formal exploitation. Finally, class as performance concerns consumption-based trappings of class achievement so that while Filipinos occupy working class employment, they nevertheless enjoy the lifestyle of upper middle class in the Philippines and an elevated status which overseas migrants enjoy. I concur with Kelly's contention in that through the years, overseas migrant workers have been associated with greater material success and are therefore regarded highly in the Philippine society even if migration for many would mean deskilling, taking up jobs for which they are over qualified or jobs where their education and skills are not put to use because they occupy unskilled or semi-skilled work.

Stereotypes, according to Geraldine Pratt (1997) structure expectations and job contracts of Filipino women working as nannies in Canada. They influence access to jobs, work conditions and wages. They act as important means of legitimising wages and work conditions, which otherwise, would not be acceptable to Canadian citizens. Thus, the 'Filipina nannies are constructed as servants, represented as uncivilized, and childlike but at the same time, also loving, patient and gentle with babies' (Pratt 1997:165). Agents and employers portray them as women who need to support their families and therefore become very loyal and dedicated workers.

The phenomenon of self-employment as evidenced in the emergence of Filipino-run businesses among Filipino migrants in Paris marks a 'departure from the stereotypical image of Filipinos in domestic work and also opens up a

new pattern of incorporation for Filipinos' (Flot and Pecoud 2007:1-2). More importantly, Flot and Pecoud (2007) contend that this phenomenon also underscores the dynamics of social transformation among a migrant population faced with vulnerabilities associated with uncertainties of the labour market. I add that this illustrates the agency of migrant workers to devise creative responses to overcome their marginalised status. .

Foreign domestic workers are categorised as low skilled workers despite the key role they play in social reproduction. Such construction goes to the heart of how skill is gendered so that skills associated with feminised work are typically undervalued. Christina Gabriel argues that one needs to interrogate, problematise and destabilise the often taken for granted categories, skilled and unskilled. Feminist scholars have argued that 'skill', 'far from being an objective measure of human capital is itself a socially constructed concept that is connected to the gendered division of labour' and ignores certain kinds of capacities and talents (Gabriel 2004: 164).

Concepts of skills and primary-secondary worker skills 'have at least as much to do with ideological and social construction as with complex, technical competencies… so that the processes whereby skills are constructed and certain groups of workers (women especially) have become associated with unskilled work need to be investigated' (Beechey 1988:49).

Bridget Anderson (2000:12) for one, contends that domestic work requires enormous skill in managing time and ensuring that several tasks are accomplished. Such tasks are perceived as inextricably linked, often operating as processes at the same time. Domestic work is 'more than the sum of these tasks and processes', involving not just physical work, but also mental and emotional work.

A characteristic feature of feminised labour migration is the deskilling of Filipino migrant women workers. A concrete illustration is the Live-in Care Giver Programme in Canada, which is predominantly undertaken by Filipino women. This programme expects them to have college-level qualifications in midwifery,

nursing or teaching. Being concentrated in the domestic work sector relegates the women in an inferior position, devaluing their skills and portraying them as unskilled and only fit for domestic work. While the Live-in Caregiver Programme is described as a 'low-skilled' temporary worker programme, the women who migrate are not necessarily 'low-skilled' considering that a number of nurses from the Philippines have entered this programme (Kofman 2004; Gonzalez et al. 2004).

Studies of domestic work highlight the severe degree of deskilling and disqualification that many migrant women with secondary and tertiary education suffer. In a study of Filipino migrant workers (123 women and 31 men) in Italy (Tacoli 1999), over half hold a university degree qualification. Similarly, of the twenty-six Filipino women domestic workers interviewed in Los Angeles, United States by Rhacel Parrenas (2001), eleven completed a university education. The same pattern of educational attainment showed among the forty-six Filipino women domestic workers she interviewed in Rome.

Domestic work is stratified by nationality, religion, race and language skills, leading to different conditions and pay. In European states (also in Asian host countries, my addition), Filipino women migrant workers are generally regarded as the 'most valuable domestic workers, being Christian, English-speaking and well educated. On the other hand, Albanians in Greece or Moroccans in Spain are considered less valuable and have less negotiating power with their employers' (Kofman 2004: 652). However, Eleonore Kofman (2004) further argues that deskilling and downward social mobility are also experienced by skilled and educated women migrating within a family context. This is an important phenomenon and certainly deserves further investigation but does not come within the specific scope of my study.

Changes in labour markets

Whereas in the last two decades, among the Asian migrant women, the Filipinos, Indonesians, Thais, and Sri Lankans dominated the labour scene, in recent years, in view of the increased demands for migrant women's labour in

the region, we now find Vietnamese and Thais in Taiwan, Cambodians in Malaysia and Mongolians, Russians, Uzbekistanis and Kazakhstanis in Korea. However, as argued by Piper and Yamanaka (2006), the demand is not only in numbers but also in the desire for a different kind of worker: less expensive, more docile and less 'rights' conscious. Hence, a great number of Filipino women working in Taiwan was replaced by less expensive Indonesians and Vietnamese. Similarly, in my experience in Malaysia, through the years, Filipino women are increasingly being replaced by Cambodians and Indonesians who are paid much less wages and often do not enjoy benefits accorded to the Filipino workers. Ultimately, these changes reflect migrant workers' vulnerabilities to changes in labour markets and governmental policy. Such changes in turn are influenced by the globalisation process and the need for capital to search for ever-cheaper labour (Munck 2002).

4.9. Conclusion

In the preceding section, I have investigated the ways in which the temporary and contractual international labour migration of women are fraught with difficulties in terms of the migrants' absence from home as well as lack of human rights as an individual and as a worker, stratifications among women in the same occupation, downgrading of their education and skills and consequently devaluing women's work.

Migration is a gendered process, gendered not only in the empirical sense but also analytically, stressing systemic and epistemological implications, allowing us to question dominant economic theorising which relies heavily on growth and quantifiable indicators rather than measures like overall well-being (Peterson 2006). In more concrete terms, I contend that we need to go beyond the economic foundations of migration theories with their emphasis on increased incomes and increased remittances and categories like skilled and unskilled work and look holistically at the phenomenon of international labour migration. We need to study how migrations are shaped by colonial histories, immigration policies, and changing labour markets as a result of economic globalisation.

We need to understand how peoples' movements disrupt traditional family structures and norms, how men's and women's identities are destabilised, and how gender relations are reconfigured (Peterson 2006). In the next three chapters I shall discuss and analyse these concerns.

I conclude that feminised migration impacts on the meanings of return for the migrant women workers. The structural limits to a contractual and temporary form of migration, where the migrant works for a stipulated time period and with hardly any scope for family reunion, cause heavy emotional stress on the part of migrant workers. The nature of work of the migrant women which is usually that of a domestic helper, factory worker or entertainer, renders them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, making return possible at any time. In addition, the gendered policies of receiving countries which in effect portray migrant workers as workers with hardly any rights, for example, compulsory pregnancy test and deportation if found pregnant; no marriage to a national of the country of work; affect their return as well. The stringent immigration rules and conditions of employment which influence the decision of migrants to resort to practices considered illegal, for example, running away from abusive employers, could mean forced return for the migrant workers. Finally, the changes in labour markets and government policies, for example, the demand for more docile and less 'rights' conscious worker coming from a particular country or nationality can spell the untimely return for temporary migrant workers.

In the next chapter, I will consider and examine the return of the women migrant workers, the conditions of their return, and the meanings of their return. I will analyse the interplay of structural, cultural, economic and social factors in explaining and understanding the phenomenon of the return of Filipino women migrant workers.

CHAPTER 5

THE MIGRANT WOMEN AND THEIR STORIES OF THE RETURN HOME

Migrant stories have always been a central part of the migrant experience — in the imagination of possible futures; during the physical process of passage; and as migrants have lived with and made sense of the consequences of their migration. At each stage, life stories articulate the meanings of experience and suggest ways of living. When we record these stories, we not only capture priceless evidence about prior experience and lived histories. The stories themselves represent constantly evolving ways in which migrants make their lives through stories. Viewed in this way, migrants' oral histories provide evidence both about past experience and about the life stories which are significant and material features of that migrant experience (Thomson 1999:35-36).

5.1.   Introduction

The following two chapters analyse the empirical data gathered during my field work. Chapter 5 focuses on the return of the Filipino migrant woman worker to her home country and thus constitutes the micro- level analysis. The lives of the individual migrant women are placed at the centre of my study so that changes in their personal lives are examined as important sources of social transformation with a profound impact on society at large. Such changes are influenced by the structures, institutions and processes at various stages of the women's migration experience: before they leave their country, on work-site, and finally their return. This chapter encapsulates the stories of the migrant women's migration journey starting with their social conditions prior to their movement, and their motivations and reasons for leaving. Significant facets of their lives as migrant workers in foreign lands are captured and finally, the return phase of their migration.

Specifically, this chapter examines the consequences of feminised migration by focusing on the return phase of migration - what constitutes the return, what meanings does it convey, what are the reasons for the return, the process of deciding when to return, and what return means for the individual migrant worker. As explained in the introduction, studying return allows us to uncover changes in the migrant women's identities as ways of coping with working in a

foreign country, taking on unskilled work, usually as a domestic helper, often undervalued, and susceptible to various forms of abuse and exploitation. It also enables us to bring to the fore the day-to-day struggles including 'everyday resistance' and 'weapons of the weak' (Scott 1985: xvi-xvii) and migrants' sense of agency in their migration journey, keeping in mind that at a certain point of the journey, there will be a return to their home, their family and their country. Studying return allows us to reflect on the extent to which migration goals have been achieved or not, the circumstances under which return takes place for a migrant woman worker and the various forces and factors affecting the lives of the migrant women and their families after their return. Lastly, investigating return enables us to assess the impact of the prolonged migration of women on themselves, their families and on the Philippine society as a whole.

In my discussion and analysis, I shall also argue that although return migration is typically categorised as either voluntary or involuntary, the line between the two is blurred. Moreover, as my study shows, much of the return of the women migrants is ambivalent. Therefore, I will discuss to what extent these distinctions are applicable or not to the return of the migrant women workers. When is voluntary, voluntary, meaning of free choice, of one's own decision, will and accord? Finally, I discuss why and how return is a gendered process.

Viewing return within the migration process

While the focus of this chapter is on the return phase of migration, it is important to consider that return can only be sufficiently understood if viewed within the entire migration process, hence, my analysis will start from the decision-making process entailed in seeking to work overseas by the migrant woman. The complexity of the migration phenomenon needs to be uncovered and migration itself must be viewed as a 'dynamic whole and as a lifelong process' affecting a migrant's existence (Castles 2000:15-16).

At this point it needs to be clarified that the subject of study is the phenomenon of temporary labour migration as opposed to a permanent type where people move and resettle in another country and in the process become immigrants.

The return phase is an integral part of the temporary or contractual labour phenomenon. However, the distinction between temporary and permanent is not absolute in as much as a temporary migrant worker can be away for as long as 20 or 23 years as shown in the life stories of my study.

Against this brief background, I shall now analyse the life stories of the women: their socio-economic background, reasons for working overseas, their narratives of struggling and coping with the demands of their work and situation, their carving of identities and sense of agencies and their eventual return to their home country, the Philippines.

Socio-economic background

For us to account for the 'multiple dimensions of women's lives' (Kofman 1999:289), it is important to recognise the socio-economic circumstances of the women migrants. Thus, in my study, most of the women came from poor and difficult backgrounds and while some were better off, they faced other barriers while growing up. Understanding these backgrounds and their specific situations prior to migration helps explain the motivations and goals of the migrant women and how they navigated their migration journeys.

Three women— Manang, Nena and Amy— stand out with difficult backgrounds in life. Manang, whose father was a carpenter and mother, a laundry woman, was the eldest in a family of five, and had to help her parents earn some money. She only reached primary school but her brothers went on to high school. At the age of 12, she worked as a domestic helper. Nena and Amy were born in one of the poorest provinces in the country and both were left behind at a very young age by their mothers: one, widowed and the other, abandoned by her husband. Their mothers moved to the country's capital city, Manila, to search for jobs. Later, Nena and Amy also relocated to Manila, lived with a relative and started working and schooling at the same time.

The other women in the life stories were better off economically than Manang, Nena and Amy. Edna's parents had a few hectares of land where they

harvested coconut, sweet potatoes, rice and vegetables. Nora's father was a soldier. Edna and Nora went to primary school easily. However, when Edna completed primary school, her father made her stop schooling because he believed that a woman's place is in the home and that she would therefore not need much education. Edna was devastated because she was keen to continue schooling, was bright and even dreamed of becoming an engineer one day. Through her own effort, Edna went on to study until second year high school. Nora was a top student in high school. But she could not go to college because her two other siblings were already in college and her parents could not afford to support another one. When she got married, Nora's husband supported her college studies but eventually she completed only two years. Ester, Marla, and Susan completed college education with the support of their parents and grandparents. Rita was one year short of completing her college education because she became deeply involved with student activism. Mila reached up to first year college after which she dropped out due to financial reasons. Siony went to high school. Her parents were small landowners who grew rice and vegetables.

Prior to migration, Ester and Marla had formal jobs with the private sector. Rita was self-employed and owned a small business which she and her husband managed. Siony helped her parents in their farming work. Trining and her husband were full-time farmers with a small land of their own. Nora worked as a dental assistant. Except for Ester and Marla who had regular incomes, the rest of the women in my study were self-employed with irregular incomes. This was particularly difficult for the farmers since their harvest and produce was affected by weather conditions in the country where floods and typhoons are a regular occurrence.

5.2. Economic and non-economic reasons for working abroad

Economic reasons predominate in the women's motivation to work overseas. The neo-classical, economic migration theory (see Arango 2000) contends that it is the desire for higher wages that propels people to move, and while this holds true for some of the women in my research, it is also the case for many of them that migration was the only source of a regular income. Earning enough to be able to better one's standard of life as well as to ensure children's education up to college level is paramount among the women in the life stories. This was also reaffirmed among the women in the focus group discussions.

Wages in the Philippines are low and can barely meet basic needs and necessities for day-to-day living, let alone finance children's education in private schools. Among migrants' families, entering private schools, which charge much higher fees than public institutions, has become a status symbol, denoting access to more resources, apart from the perception that they offer better quality education than that offered by public schools, which is not necessarily the case. In the past few years, for example, private nursing schools have mushroomed, a number of which have not been able to meet required levels of accreditation and standards (Divinagracia 2005).

Two women in the life stories perceived migration as a way out of poverty: for a single mother working in the informal sector and for a wife whose husband suffered from ill health and from having irregular jobs. Except for two husbands who had regular and secure paying jobs, the rest had irregular or contractual jobs.

However, women's migration were also motivated by non-economic factors such as escaping from unhappy marriages or seeking a change from a dreary and harsh rural life, or just simply trying out a different experience in life, specially since international migration implies excitement, adventure, travel or movement to a new place hitherto untried, uncharted.

The neo-classical economic theories of migration (Arango 2000; Castles 2000; Massey et al. 1998) emphasising push and pull factors and economic rationality do not capture the above motivations of people to migrate. None of those I interviewed referred to making the decision to migrate based on a rational calculation of costs and benefits of moving. Other than stressing people's tendency to move from low-income/low-wage to high –income/high-wage countries, the theory does not account for the specific motivations, circumstances and situations of people who move.

By adopting a gendered approach to migration and employing a life story methodology, it is possible to capture the non-economic motives of migration such as escape from oppressive relationships, search for new pleasures and a new world to attain freedom from the burden and drudgery of housekeeping and caring roles.

Trining (Life Story (LS) narrator) was convinced by a female recruiter that going to Singapore to work was an opportunity for a farmer like her in a remote upland community to see another world. In addition, the recruiter averred there were good jobs in Singapore for domestic help and for nannies. Thus, Trining felt it may be worthwhile trying. Besides, it was getting more and more difficult to get a good income from selling their agricultural produce and her children were in high school and also wishing to go to college and so the idea of working abroad in Singapore attracted her.

For Amy (LS), it was her niece who was then working in Qatar, who encouraged her to also 'try her luck'. 'I thought it was a good idea', quipped Amy, 'and my husband agreed to my travelling'. She was only 24 years old then. The recruitment agency working on her papers adjusted her age to 30 in the formal application documents, as this was the minimum age requirement then for those seeking domestic help jobs in the Middle East. Amy remarked that she did not have any concrete plans for her work abroad. She left home when her two children were just 5 and 2 years old. Her husband's aunt was called to help take care of the children as their father went to work as a soldier.

Still, for two of the women migrants, migration was considered a way out of an unhappy and violent marital relationship.

Mila was earning good money as a businesswoman supplying fruits and vegetables to three markets in her home province. She worked hard and was spending much time outside their household and before long, learned that her husband was having an affair with another woman. Clearly, this devastated Mila. 'I felt strangled and trapped,' she said. To free herself, she decided to leave and work in Dubai as a domestic help.

Siony (LS) was battered by her husband every time he got drunk. A deep scar on her upper right cheek is a testament to his violent acts. When she could no longer tolerate these beatings, she decided to join her cousin in Malaysia who was then working as a domestic help. Siony left behind three young children to the care of her parents, both farmers.

It is important to emphasise that for women like Mila and Siony, divorce is not an option in the Philippines. Being a predominantly Christian and Catholic country, under the law, only legal separation is allowed. But society still frowns on women separated from husbands, thus attaching a stigma to it (Tharan 1989). This makes it doubly difficult for separated women or single mothers to start new lives or to lead lives as normal as possible, and to gain community support and acceptance. In a similar vein, one can understand why it is not easy for women abused by husbands or partners to leave such a relationship. Society exerts a strong pressure to keep a family intact so that when a woman leaves the husband, often she is blamed for the break-up of the family. Annulment of marriage is an option but often afforded only to the well-off in society because of the heavy costs entailed in securing one.

For Manang, working abroad was clearly a means to rise above poverty. Abandoned by her husband of 13 years, she had to fend for herself and her four children. Armed only with a primary education but with grit and determination not to let the family go hungry, Manang tried various kinds of small business such as food vending, selling blankets and supplying toiletries and other

essentials to the soldiers stationed at an army camp near the place they lived. Her daily routine was getting up at 4 in the morning and working till late at night, rain or shine.

Women are more likely to be abandoned by their husbands than vice versa and behind this social phenomenon is the double standard of sexual practices and norms in the Philippine society which reinforce the persistence of patriarchy. While Filipino women have attained high educational status and position in the government, private sector and civil society (Philippine NGO Report on Beijing + 10 2005), traditional norms of femininity and masculinity persist. Thus, masculinity is still associated with (among others) virility and sexual exploits (Medina 2001; Pingol 2001). Women, on the other hand, are expected to be the loving and faithful partner who would endure all to keep the family intact. Migrant men expect their wives left behind to fulfil their caring and nurturing roles well and especially to be loyal to them. Migrant men in turn, can be unfaithful for so long as it is only in the places where they work, hence, the sayings, 'only in Saudi or Dubai', or '*hanggang pier lang*' (up to the port only). Interestingly, married migrant women who enter into same sex relationships, are perceived by some not to be unfaithful. Mobility in this sense, somehow contributes to a renegotiation of societal norms and as Katie Walsh et al. (2008:576) contend, 'the geographies of displacement…seem to be important in creating opportunities for the expression of heterosexual desires that transgress social norms and expectations'. I have derived these insights from my years of interactions with migrant Filipino women in Malaysia. Similarly, Kimberly Chang and John Groves' (2000:80-81) study of the discourse on sexuality among Filipino women domestic workers in Hong Kong points out that 'lesbianism is considered a "safe" alternative to potentially degrading relationships with men …a means of enjoying the romance and intimacy of a relationship while at the same time preserving marital vows…'. I argue, further, that lesbianism (where it is not possible to get pregnant in such a relationship) is a form of coping and resistance against a gendered and racialised migration policy in countries of work where a pregnant migrant woman worker can be deported.

Edna had a hard life after running away from home, eloping and getting herself pregnant by a man who could not hold on to a regular job because of ill health. In order to feed three young children, Edna and her husband tried all sorts of survival strategies— construction work in the city, farming and even gold panning when they moved back to their hometown, a rural area. For a while, when they returned once again to the slums in the city, Edna worked as a community health educator. During her training sessions, she tagged the children along to enable them have some food when snacks or lunch was served to the training participants. Witnessing her hardships, a friend who was working in Malaysia as a domestic helper, offered to help her secure a similar job and loaned her money to pay her agency fee. Edna remarked:

> It was a difficult decision to make, to leave my young children behind to work abroad, but this seemed to be the only option available and so I left for Malaysia with a heavy heart.

Edna's and the majority of the women's decision to leave the country and work overseas was hardly a voluntary act, contrary to the argument of economic migration theories. To a great extent, these women were forced by the circumstances of their lives to pursue overseas work.

As expounded by social network theories, the women's network of relatives and friends facilitated their migration by making contacts with prospective employers, by loaning money to pay for recruitment fees, and by providing assistance in helping them settle in their place of employment.

The decision to migrate was made by the families in some cases and although the new economics of labour migration theory explains that migration is primarily motivated by the desire to diversify income, it is the case in several families in my study that the expected income from migrating was the sole regular income. For Nena, the decision to go abroad and work was a way to improve her life and that of her family. Life was difficult since she depended only on her earnings from a small convenience store and her husband's irregular income as a construction worker. Nena added during the interview that

she dreamt of having a house of her own one day and sending her son to college.

As rightly pointed by the integrative theories of migration, the motivations for migration are often those that respond to the needs of families and households and at the same time, also take into account the individuals' desires and aspirations (Asis 2002; Tacoli1999).

For Ester and Marla, it was not due to poverty that they sought to work abroad but the desire to improve their lives. It was their hope to earn enough to be able to send their children to good schools and preferably up to college level. The Filipino family places a great value on education and no matter how poor a family is, various ways and means are made possible to enable children go to school. The 1987 Philippine Constitution (Article XIV) stipulates mandatory free education for all up to high school level but because of the high cost of living and day-to-day expenses, poor people are not able to provide for the daily needs of their school-going children.

Ester was a college graduate and was working as a finance clerk. Her husband was a taxi driver. They surmised that even with their combined income, they would not be able to send all their four children to college. Aware of opportunities for women to work abroad and earn good income, Ester's husband suggested that she apply and she agreed. With the help of a relative in Hawaii, she managed to pay the high agency fee (equivalent to about a month's salary) that enabled her to secure a job as a domestic help in Hong Kong.

Like Ester, Marla was a college graduate. She held a number of jobs and worked as a sales lady, a secretary, and later as an accounts clerk in a government agency. But after working for four years in this agency, she was still unable to secure a permanent status. Meanwhile, her husband who had worked in Iraq for a number of years returned to the Philippines when the war with Iran erupted. Subsequently, he fell ill, was hospitalised for six months and the money he had earlier saved was drained in meeting hospital bills. Under such circumstances, Marla explained that she was forced to find a job which would

enable her to earn much more than she was getting at her job in the Philippines to meet the family's needs, particularly the education of their two children. In 1980, she went to Hong Kong to work as a domestic help.

Marla's story is a reflection of a situation where even a formal job can create insecurity; of how hard-earned resources can be easily dissipated when ill health occurs because of the high costs of medical and hospital services in a country like the Philippines where health care and services are privatised. While a national health insurance scheme has been put in place, reimbursable expenses can be made mainly for costs of hospitalisation. Drugs have to be paid for and the Philippines is a country where prices are high and often beyond the reach of the poor and even the not-so-poor. Furthermore, the health care infrastructure is inadequate. People particularly from the rural areas lack access to timely and adequate health care and services (IBON 2007). The national budget allocation for health social service is only 2.5 per cent of the total national budget and 3.2 per cent of the GDP, below that stipulated by WHO (IBON Facts 2008) A greater percentage of the national budget goes to servicing foreign debt which explains why foreign exchange earnings, mainly derived from migrants' remittances, are so vital to the economy.

Susan's ambition in life was to be a good and devoted teacher. She grew up in the care of her grandparents who managed to send her to college where she finished a degree in Biology. After graduation however, she did not apply for a teaching job mainly because of the low pay offered. The idea of going abroad just like many other Filipinas in her community and in the country have done and possibly earning much more than in the home country, attracted her. As she expressed in her local language, '*Napigpigsa ti awis ti kuarta'* ('The attraction of earning more was a force much stronger than staying home'). Besides, she was informed that if she worked in a United States Territory like Saipan for five years, she would be able to go to the mainland United States and work there. Susan then left for Saipan and worked there as a domestic helper.

Overall, the specific circumstances of the women before they migrated to work were that: most of them were self-employed, having their small business, with irregular incomes. Three worked in the farms as unpaid agricultural workers whose income was derived from the sale of their produce. Two women had regular paid jobs in the formal sector. One was a full-time housewife and another, a new college graduate. Two spouses worked as soldiers in the armed forces and the rest were self-employed or contractual workers.

Of those who had clear migration goals, they were expressed as follows: lift the family out of poverty, improve the family's welfare, send the children to good schools and up to college, escape from an unfaithful husband, and from an abusive husband.

The above circumstances and situations of the lives of women migrants elucidate that the migration decision for the women was a deliberate strategy (hence, voluntary) to better the lives of their families, but under difficult circumstances like leaving their young children behind. For others, it was a decision forced by oppressive and violent marital relationships.

5.3.   Migrants' situation in country of work

What is remembered is that which is valued, that which gives meaning and coherence to one's migration experience, and therefore, an important knowledge in itself. Such coherent narratives are constructed and created out of the welter of occurrences and relationships that characterise most lives (Moussa 1993).

In the narratives, the women shared stories of hardships and difficulties, of coping and forging identities to sustain them through their migration journey and eventual return home. The narratives are those of dislocations faced by migrant workers in a globalised world which in turn become signifiers of their identities (Parrenas 2001).These identities are situational, negotiated and multi-faceted (Benmayor and Skotnes 1994) demonstrating an interplay of factors and forces in their place of work and in their home country, hence, 'complex day-to-day

negotiations in defining self vis-à-vis "home" and "host" society' (Yeoh and Huang 2000:414).

Jorgen Carling (2005:9) observes that a number of studies on migrant Filipino women portray them as the 'sacrifice and suffering' women, the 'victim type' while others depict them as women with agency, able to cope and resist difficult situations. The women's narratives in my study reveal both situations but what is ultimately emphasised are their ways of coping and surviving, their agent selves.

Adjusting to new culture and tradition

Working in Saudi Arabia meant major adjustments as certain aspects of their culture and tradition were alien to Manang, especially the food and the household where she worked headed by a man with several wives. In her narrative, she clearly remembered the times when abusive words like dog and swine, were hurled at her simply because she was considered a lowly person, a mere maid, a foreigner, a domestic helper in the household. As expressed poignantly by Manang:

> I endured all the insults and hardships while working abroad. I was the only helper in this large household. I cleaned the entire house. I washed the kitchen utensils. Fortunately, I did not have to do the cooking. The wives did this.

Being away from family, especially on important occasions, was most painful to Manang but what sustained her were the constant letters and voice tapes from her children. Every three months, Manang sent most of her earnings home, keeping only a small amount for her cigarettes and some for savings. This made her feel good as she was able to provide for her children by herself as a single parent.

Meeting the heavy demands of domestic work

Long working hours and a wide range of tasks (from general house cleaning, to cooking, ironing, marketing, washing cars, feeding babies, tutoring the children,

walking the dogs and so on and on) characterise domestic work, and because in most of the receiving countries, this work is not covered in the Employment Act, it becomes unregulated, and workers are unprotected. Apart from the need for legal protection, domestic work places women in individualised work environments where there is greater isolation and less chance of establishing support networks (ILO 2008).

Edna's (LS) day in Malaysia, usually started at 4 a.m. Aside from doing all the household chores, she had to take care of two young children. On top of these, her employer expected her to devote some hours toward helping in her lingerie business like sorting and packing.

In Hong Kong, Nora (LS) recalled having an employer who made sure every cent paid to her was worth it. Nora remarked:

> She squeezed every ounce of me so that even on my days-off, I still had to prepare the day's meals very early in the morning before leaving the house.

> My housework was non-stop, said Marla (LS). Four hours of sleep were all I had every night. I felt exhausted and hungry often.

In her narrative, Marla pointed to how her desire to be a dutiful wife and mother, altruistic and self-sacrificing (Barber 2000; Carling 2005; Tacoli 1999; Yeoh and Huang 2000) enabled her to survive the initial year of her migration.

> At one point, I was on the verge of giving up but I had to quickly remind myself that there was the mortgaged house that needed to be redeemed, the sickly husband who needed medication and the young children who needed good education. I kept telling myself, you can endure, you can do it and this is how I survived the first year. I just worked and worked with barely enough time to eat so that at times I brought my lunch of noodles in a cup even while in the toilet.

Gemma (FGD, Baguio) related that while in Hong Kong, she only had warm water to drink for breakfast and an egg or noodles for lunch and dinner. She also felt miserable for not being appreciated at all:

> My employer was not satisfied with my work and would get mad at me all the time. It was then that I decided to quit and file a complaint with the employment agency.

Relationship with employers

Marla also had to contend with a lady employer who easily felt jealous when she smiled at the male employer. She had to abide by a dress code: no shorts, only close neck top, make-up can be worn only while out of the house and goodbyes during days-off are only addressed to the woman employer. For others, disciplining was manifested in the form of limiting the domestic helper's food consumption (FGD, Baguio City). In one particular household, the woman employer would count the eggs and the fruits in the kitchen before leaving for work in the morning and upon return in the evening would then keep track whether any amount was consumed or not. In this sense, the disciplining of the worker is also a mark of exclusion: 'She is not one of us'.

Discipline in the Foucaldian sense is a type of power, a modality for its exercise comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures ' …for assuring the ordering of human multiplicities (Foucault 1977, 1995:215, 218), and in order to extract from bodies the maximum time and force, the use of …time-tables, collective training, exercises, total and detailed surveillance'. The disciplining in the context of a woman's migration is to ensure that the migrant woman is able to fulfil her duties and obligations and her contract and possibly extend it even much longer. The migrant woman domestic helper in turn, moulds and disciplines her behaviour according to the signs, symbols and practices by which structures of authority and control are demarcated by her employer (Gamburd 2000).

 The disciplining and control of the Filipina domestic worker in Hong Kong stem from her being an Asian other, with an 'ambiguous class identity, highly visible and intimately linked with the changes occurring at the core of the Chinese households', argues Constable (2002:260). Amplifying and extending this argument, I state that disciplining comes about because here is now a stranger playing a role in a most private space, taking over the traditional tasks and responsibilities from another woman, (not from the man of the house, which explains why there is less tension between him and the domestic worker) of

higher rank and status. Thereupon, she is subject to various forms of control and surveillance.

5.4. Struggles and acts of resistance

James Scott (1985: xvi-xvii) puts forward the notion of the 'weapons of the weak' and the everyday covert and coded resistance by the dominated groups. In my study, the day-to-day struggles of the migrant women are their ways of coping and resisting which are also their ways of demonstrating their sense of agency. These vary and cover a wide range: from overt means to covert, from subtle and hidden to outright defiance and even violence equal to that of the perpetrator.

To some of the migrant women in our stories, ways of coping meant abiding by certain rules in the employers' household, being efficient and taking upon multiple tasks even beyond a 'normal' domestic helper's work. Marla taught English to her employer's son and for this, she was showered with gifts. To her, gifts compensated for the restrictions (the disciplining) imposed by her employer. In themselves, gifts from employers to domestic helpers provide an appropriate mode of symbolic and material compensation for services above and beyond the formal contract of obligations (Gamburd 2000). Nevertheless, this does not obscure the power imbalance inherent in the relationship between the domestic worker and her employer.

In a span of 18 years, Siony kept and maintained her employer's double-storey house clean and tidy. This was in addition to the daily rounds of washing (clothes and cars), ironing and maintaining all rooms of the house. She also took care of a large garden with a small pond as well as the six dogs of the household. For Siony, being hard-working and most efficient in her work was her way of coping with separation from her family, with homesickness and loneliness. As shared by the women during the FGDs, *'ang unang kalaban mo ay homesickness'* ('homesickness is one's foremost enemy'). Therefore, one has to make use of time to just work and work, leaving very little space to feel

homesick. For Siony, it was important to be always in the good graces of her employer as this ensured the constant renewal of her work permit, hence, a regular income that supported her needs and those of her family.

For other women, coping meant displaying acts of resistance. As shared by the women in the focus group discussion (FGD, Baguio City), such acts could range from a very mundane and covert form like spitting on the food served to employers in the hope that they would have a more positive and caring attitude, to calling them (only in the company of friends) by nicknames like 'Bruho' (male witch), 'Demonyo' (male devil) or 'Bruha' (female witch) or 'Demonya' (female devil), 'the hidden transcript' according to Scott (1985:5) 'that takes place beyond direct observation by power holders'.

In other instances, women migrants display overt forms of protest to harsh and difficult working conditions.

Edna (LS) claimed that she was treated harshly by her first employer. She worked long hours and her days usually started at 4 in the morning. Unable to endure her difficult situation, she protested by refusing to eat and locking herself up in her bedroom for two days. Eventually, the employers listened to her complaints and became more reasonable and considerate.

Apart from the capacity to negotiate her working conditions, Edna too hang on to her faith mainly to cope with her homesickness and difficulties faced by her family because of her absence. She kept at her bedside a small statue of Mary, the mother of God (in the Christian, Catholic religion) to whom she prayed daily for her family's safety and welfare.

Randolf David (2004), a Filipino sociologist, argues that it is the Filipino's strong sense of spirituality which explains the resiliency of migrant workers amidst hardships and difficulties. Moreover, as Gemma Tulud-Cruz (2006) contends, religion helps in dealing with ruptures and discontinuities and multiple oppression in migrants' lives; it gives them a courageous hope for a better future for themselves and their families. Religion for the Filipino migrants plays a crucial role in negotiating their identities.

At another level of resistance, in extreme cases, violence inflicted on migrant women is confronted with equal violence. Ana (LS) was faced with constant threats of sexual abuse and in one particular incident, a struggle ensued between her and the male employer, and as she claimed, in an act of self-defence, she grabbed a knife and stabbed him. Ana was arrested, punished by whipping and deported.

In my experience as a volunteer worker responding to migrants in crisis situations, I handled a case where a Filipino woman migrant snapped one day after feeling exhausted and oppressed by the demands of her work as a domestic helper, her desire to be as efficient as possible and to meet the financial needs of her family back home. She tried to set fire to the employers' bedroom; she hid some valuables in the household. As a result, she was jailed for a few months but later, charges were dropped by her employer and eventually, she was deported to the Philippines.

As expressed by Dorothy in the FGD, Baguio City, 'there comes a moment when (the weight of oppression becomes too heavy to bear) you really feel like getting back at your employer and in a split second, you black out (snap out). In such moment, you could end up killing'.

The above stories of Ana and Dorothy and my sharing of a particular incident, demonstrate the vulnerabilities of women migrants taking up jobs like those of domestic helpers, being away from families, confined within households of strangers and with hardly any support system in place. In the study of Nasra Shah and Indu Menon (1997) on violence against women migrant workers, they contend that domestic service and entertainment services are the two occupations where the risk of violence are greatest. Violence could be economic, social/psychological and sexual/physical and may occur both in the migrant women's home country and in the receiving country (country of work).

Such vulnerabilities of the women migrants to violence affect their return, meaning that their return to the home country could occur at any point and at any time in their migration journey. It could mean hardly earning anything,

making them poorer than before they left their country of origin. It could also mean returning with heavy emotional and psychological costs. The extreme situation would be not being able to return, or to return but after a long period of time, when, for example, the migrant woman is jailed for a crime, whether she is guilty or not. The point is that recourse to justice is often a long, costly and tedious process so that at times, there is reluctance on the part of the authorities (such as embassies) to pursue legal action against erring agents or employers. Consequently, the women are deprived of the full force of law and thus return to their home country without the satisfaction of the justice that is due them (Tharan 1989).

5.5.   Carving new identities

'Questions of identity are always posed in relation to space…' and that 'certain socio-political flows and barriers that constitute spatial configurations, also constitute and reflect the formations of identity' (Papastergiadis 2000:52). There is a need to view space and identity as dynamic concepts and spatial arrangements constructed through the social divisions of race, class and gender. However, migration research traditionally conceptualises the spaces through which migrants move mainly in economistic terms and does not sufficiently consider the struggles that migrants experience which in turn shape and give meaning to such spaces (Silvey 2004).

In my research, transforming meanings and identities in the places of work of migrant workers characterise the migration experience of the women like Ester (LS), Amy (LS), and Rita (LS). In turn, these new identities enabled them to confront the difficulties that their role and status as migrant workers entailed such as low status, being undervalued and socially excluded, and sustain their migration journey until their eventual return to the home country. In this sense, identities are ways of negotiating differences that cross and ground the migrant women's lives (Papastergiadis 2000).

By being a community worker, a union organiser and devoted worker and survivor, these three women demonstrated to themselves and to the larger society that they were more than just domestic workers; that they were capable of doing bigger tasks, and serving a wider community beyond the families and households they worked for.

Community worker

For Ester, her most valued experience in Hong Kong was her service in church. It must be noted that the Church plays a central role in the welfare of migrant workers by providing spiritual guidance, shelter to those who encounter serious problems with employers, counselling as well as advocacy for migrants' greater protection of their rights and well-being.

On Sundays, Ester taught catechism and volunteered her services helping co-Filipino women migrants who encountered various problems. This meant for her giving advice, linking women with other groups who could provide assistance, and visiting in the hospital those who fell ill. She remarked:

> We visited Filipino migrant detainees in prisons, we acted as focal points for communicating with their relatives and also gave them religious articles. We assisted undocumented workers, provided information and helped them find temporary homes, and solicited their food and airplane tickets to return home.

> With this experience, I came to know myself, my personhood. I had earlier thought that if one had enough money, then everything was fine. But I discovered that if you do not share love with others, then money does not mean much. Also, since I was educated (that is with a college degree), I was proud, but dealing with all kinds of problems faced by my fellow migrant workers humbled me.

Union organiser

Rita (LS) was a student activist back in the Philippines during her college days and when she went to work in Hong Kong as a domestic helper, she carried over her activism, became an organiser of migrant women workers from different parts of Asia and eventually led the establishment of the Asian domestic workers union. This was possible in Hong Kong because the

government provides ample political space for migrant workers to articulate and demand for better working conditions and greater protection of their rights, a situation not found in receiving/host countries like Malaysia and Singapore. She was able to negotiate with her employers to allow her to devote some time to her union work (in exchange for less salary) and at the same time displayed her ability to fulfil the demands of her role as a domestic helper.

Rita was a dedicated union worker who derived a sense of pride and achievement from what she did. As expressed by her:

> Friends I have worked with, have taken over the leadership of the union and for this, I am happy. This means that they have been empowered. This is a big accomplishment for me in my life time. I felt proud being able to organise women migrant workers of different nationalities.

Devoted worker and survivor

In Qatar, aside from being a housekeeper, Amy also cared and nursed a special child in the family, a service for which her employers were fully satisfied. She also served as tutor to the other children. Although she was greatly valued and well compensated by her employers, she could not renew her contract because she fell ill. Amy went back to the Philippines, rested for a few months and then left again for overseas work. While in Kuwait, Amy was doted upon and showered with gifts by her lady employer who was happy with her work as a personal assistant, especially the regular massage she gave, to which the employer attributes as helping her to conceive. However, an attempted rape on Amy by the male employer forced her to run away and file a police report. While her case was pending in court, she was placed in a detention centre where she met other Filipino women, some of whom claimed they were raped by their employers but were accused of adultery instead. Amy poignantly recalled how she tried to console these women every single day of their detention. She took pride in being a pillar of strength to them:

> Don't lose hope. I admonished them. I became a parent to them. We all need to be strong for the sake of our family. We have to help each other. One by one we will be released. Fight back your feelings of despair. Overcome your fear of not being able to return to the family. There were 12

of us in a group. The authorities placed us in an underground detention place. Food served was almost uncooked, we had broth with mere salt. We were treated like criminals. People back home do not realise how much suffering and sacrifice we have endured. Husbands just squander money at the beer house.

When finally we were allowed to return to the Philippines, we were brought to the airport in chains. We were pushed, we stumbled and immigration officials castigated us for bringing lots of problems.

5.6.   Meanings of return for the individual migrant

There are various motivations of return and factors affecting return according to the migration theories reviewed in Chapter 2. As the literature further shows, there are different types of return: return as failure, as success, as conservatism, as change and innovation (Cerase 1974 cited in Cassarino 2004; Ghosh 2000). Return may be voluntary or forced. Morrison (cited in Black et al. 2004), states that while there is no single definition of voluntary return, it constitutes three elements: a clear and open choice to return to country of origin or stay permanently in the host society; a choice between returning to the country of origin or staying and risking forcible return later; an absence of force. The UNHCR Handbook on Voluntary Repatriation defines voluntariness as the 'absence of any physical, psychological or material pressure', hence, the element of free will and absence of refusal to return (cited in von Lersner et al. 2008: 2).

I argue that the meanings of return are gendered in so far as they elucidate the social dimensions of return. The dynamics of social relationships, roles and responsibilities between women and men are brought to the centre. Upon return, either the migrant female spouse re-assumed her traditional tasks or a more egalitarian sharing of tasks and decision-making between wife and husband took place. Children of migrant mothers expressed psychological and emotional difficulties and even a sense of abandonment by the mothers' prolonged physical absence. Migrant mothers, in turn, felt guilt in being away from home although providing for the economic needs of their families. In a

sense, women's migration reinforces gender conventions about nurturing and mothering.

The changed role and enhanced status of the migrant women affected their decision when to return. At the same time, the migration of women also affected the ability of the men left behind to manage their families and households. Consequently, this situation influenced the return of the migrant women. Returns are gendered in so far as they amplify the power structures embedded in institutions such as families, the economy, the state and politics and law in both countries of origin and countries of work and how these impact on the migration outcomes similarly or differently for women and men. For example, while unskilled men and women migrants face similar problems and violations of rights, women migrants experience these in a qualitatively different manner as exemplified by those engaged in domestic work. Domestic work is usually outside the purview of national labour laws and standards and therefore remain unregulated and unprotected. Domestic workers are confined to households under the control of their employers and often, they are without support systems thus rendering them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

From the women's narratives and the sharings in the focus group discussions, one gleans the following insights. One could return home involuntarily as when a migrant encounters problems with conditions of employment, as in cases where promised jobs do not exist, or when documents are falsified, or when contracts are terminated prematurely, and similar other cases. For some of my interviewees, events beyond their control such as the Gulf war in 1990, the civil unrest in Iran, Israel and Palestine, and the 2006 conflict between Israel and Lebanon forced thousands of migrant workers to flee and return home.

Voluntary return could be precipitated by a host of factors, for example, when conditions of work are no longer deemed satisfactory or when one's goals for migrating have been achieved, or simply the desire to return home. At the same time, even if the element of free will is involved, there may still be an amount of

psychological pressure on the migrant to return home. The stories below elucidate and amplify these contentions.

After working for ten years in Saudi Arabia, Manang (LS) felt it was time to go home when she observed that her employer's business enterprise was facing difficulties and therefore, the household budget was being cut. This meant for her less food which compelled her to provide for her own meals. Manang thus decided to return home and accepted that she could return home because by then, she had saved some money which she thought could be invested in a small business and thus enable her to generate some income.

Manang's return could be categorised as voluntary as there was no ambivalent attitude or thought in her mind. She was not doubtful of her future life upon return to the Philippines. She believed she could manage with her savings. Besides, her children were grown-ups, educated to a certain extent and could support themselves.

Edna (LS) was about to complete her two-year contract with her third employer when she realised she could not go on because of the increasing difficulty of getting along with her and therefore, she decided to return home for good, so she hoped. Still, there was ambivalence in her mind knowing that she was the main breadwinner in the family. She wondered whether she would get a job upon return and whether her children would be able to complete their high school education. While Edna's return was her own decision, hence voluntary, there was a great degree of ambivalence in her mind.

Ambivalence in Edna's case portrays a conflict between protecting her own emotional and psychological needs, and responding to the material needs of her family back home.

When Amy's husband wrote to her and expressed that 12 years abroad was much too long to be away from home, she decided to return home after completing her contract in Lebanon, her fourth country of employment. Amy agreed that she had been away too long although there were brief returns in between her several contracts. Like Edna, there was ambivalence in her final

return or her return 'for good'. Her children were still in school and had not finished college. Also, although they had a house, they faced the threat of eviction because the house was built on a squatted piece of land. Not being able to provide for the material needs of her family although fulfilling the psychological needs of her husband caused ambivalence of return in Amy's case.

Marla worked for a total of 15 years in Hong Kong and with 4 employers. During one of her yearly visits back home in the Philippines, she got pregnant and as a result she had to end her contract with her employer in the later period of her pregnancy. Fulfilling reproductive needs had become paramount in Marla's situation. It is the case that for many migrant Filipino women, their child-bearing, reproductive roles have been de-prioritised. According to the statistics of the Commission of Filipinos Overseas (see Dungo 2008) among women migrants, the largest number of overseas workers is in the age group 25-29, hence in their child-bearing years.

Pregnancy while on work site is a difficult situation for migrant women workers. In countries like Malaysia and Singapore, they are deported once found pregnant, not only because of the unfounded fear that they would no longer be able to work diligently, but more so because the governments do not want to host children of foreign migrant workers who are deemed to exert pressure on existing social services for the local population. A bigger fear is having children of migrants who could eventually assume permanent resident status. Likewise in Taiwan, migrant women are deported if they become pregnant and/or give birth to a child for the purpose of excluding them from permanent settlement (Cheng 2003). There are larger implications for the 'invasiveness of state regulations over decisions concerning human sexuality…the regulation…reflects the gendered as well as racial nature of immigration policies. The control of women's bodies becomes a means through which the state realizes its particular racial/nationalist project' (Cheng 2003:174).

For 18 years, Siony was a devoted and hardworking housekeeper to a family in Malaysia. When she informed her employers that she wanted to go home for

good, some time within six months, their attitudes changed to the extent of fabricating accusations against her. Siony was clearly devastated and felt that her years of dedicated service were totally unrecognised and unvalued. She exclaimed: 'I felt demeaned and insulted, my dignity violated for being falsely accused of a crime I did not commit'. Siony, thereupon, left her employer's place, lodged a police report, ran to the Philippine Embassy and sought help and refuge. Assistance came readily and she was able to return home but with some trepidation. On one hand, she was eager to be reunited with her children whom she had not seen for eight years. On the other hand, she was hoping (before the accusation was lodged) to be able to still save some money from her expected salary of six months (had she not returned unplanned) so that she could complete the interiors of her newly constructed house, a house she was able to build from her earnings in Malaysia.

There was emotional and psychological pressure on Siony to return home because of her employer's accusations of theft so returning home was her immediate option. The act of returning home itself was voluntary, but saddled with some ambivalence arising mainly from her continuing desire to fulfil her material needs. In addition, from her narrative, I could read between the lines that she had also developed a lasting relationship with a man in the country where she worked and although she did not articulate this, it was possible that her ambivalence to return finally to the Philippines was also affected by this relationship. Based on my experience of interacting with migrant women, their narratives of ambivalent return tend to include only their desire for more material gains for their families rather than their own personal desires such as sustaining intimate relationships they have established in their country of work. In a great sense, this attitude makes the separation from families more tolerable and justifiable and is in keeping with the normative expectations of gender (Tacoli 1999).

Involuntary return: from illegal recruitment to armed conflict

In many instances, return was involuntary. Not having proper work contracts or visas as a result of illegal recruitment meant repatriation for some. Sexual abuse from employers compelled women to escape and run away and in the process are sent back home by the authorities. Often, the women are not justly compensated and the perpetrators not subject to full force of law. Or in worst cases, the women abused become defendants in court rather than complainants. Indiscriminate dismissal from work also forces one to return. Civil unrest or armed conflict forces mass evacuation and repatriation of migrant workers. Clearly, this means major disruption and destabilisation among the migrants and families both in host countries and country of origin. For the migrant worker, it could mean an erosion or loss of all her resources, her earnings which would then put back her family once again to a life of poverty. At worse, working in areas of armed conflict could result in loss of lives.

The narratives of return have shown that macro forces such as war or civil unrest make one's return forced or involuntary thus negating the benefits that international labour migration brings. Other causes of involuntary return are reflective of the abuses in the migration process and in the nature of domestic work itself as well as abuses stemming from attitudes toward a woman migrant worker doing so called unskilled work.

Five women in the focus group discussions (FGD: National Capital Region) shared their experience of involuntary return: immediate repatriation after the outbreak of the Gulf war; deportation after being victimised by illegal recruitment; non-payment of wages and an unfair dismissal. Similarly, in the focus group discussions (FGD: Davao City), one man returned home when the company he worked for closed down its operations. Two other men returned after being victimised of illegal recruitment.

Diane worked in Kuwait as a hospital attendant from 1985 to 1993. She experienced being in a country at war and being molested by Iraqi soldiers until her repatriation to the Philippines. Cathy worked only for a year in Taiwan

because the company where she was employed ceased its operations and no job replacement was provided. She was repatriated to the Philippines and in the process she could no longer recover the large amount of money (about $4,000) she paid to the recruitment agency.

Mercy felt she was dismissed unjustly when her male employer sent her back home after working for only six months in Hong Kong. She expressed:

> I was puzzled. I was a good worker and there were no complaints against me. My lady employer liked me. The reason given to the authorities for terminating my contract was plain family problem. To me this meant my witnessing my male employer's infidelity toward his wife. This was the only reason I could think of, for my being sent home.

Mercy only managed to recover a portion of her agency fees. She returned to the Philippines much poorer than before she left to work in Hong Kong. According to the Hong Kong government's policy, a migrant worker is given just two weeks from the time a contract is terminated to find another employer, failing which the migrant worker is sent back to her home country. This policy is regarded by the women migrants themselves and migrant support groups as harsh and unjust since it gives very limited time for the domestic worker to find a new employer and redress the injustice committed against her (*Asian Migrant Forum* 1996).

Illness in the family as well as problems with husbands (who squandered remittances through gambling and drinking) and children (illness problems with school-going children; young adults caught in possession of drugs) left behind are compelling reasons for the women migrants to return home as expressed by several women in the life stories, workshops and focus group discussions.

Trining (LS) had to cut short her contract in Singapore when her youngest child and the only son who was then in high school started getting into trouble. She felt that as a mother, she needed to be beside him, guiding him. The father left behind could not be a proper and adequate substitute for the migrant mother in terms of fulfilling her traditional role.

For some, the return was premature as it occurred not too long after settling down in the host country:

> After eight months, I could no longer endure how we Filipinos were lowly regarded. The local people looked down on us, thinking that we Filipinos are very, very poor. Our employer did not provide us with enough food, we worked long hours and some of my friends even had to sleep on the floor. Moreover, our clients at the beauty salon were too difficult to please (Bernadette, FGD, Caloocan City).

In terms of the typologies of return (Cassarino 2004), this return is a return as failure, of being unable to fit or to integrate in the host country and of being unable to earn an expected level of income. I contend that this typology is too simplistic a way of explaining failure. It does not account for factors and conditions affecting failure. Another consideration is that the question of 'success' or 'failure' is often measured primarily in economic terms. As shared by Carla (FGD, La Union), a teacher- turned- domestic worker in Hong Kong who has since returned home:

> I did not come home with any savings so that my family considers me a failure. But while in Hong Kong, I learned a lot about hard work and persistence in life and these to me are important in life.

Still for others, coming home or returning home was for good when goals set had been realised. This is the return as success according to Cerase (1974 cited in Cassarino 2004). Nora's (LS) main goal in working overseas was to send her eldest child, who was the brightest in the family, to college. When this goal was achieved, she decided to return home. Nora quipped:

> After working for five years with my Canadian employer, I decided it was time to go home. Three months before my planned departure, I tried to save as much as I could so that I could change the roof of our house.

Nora's son completed two bachelor degrees, mathematics and electronics communication. He now has a well-paying job, is married with a child and takes care of the younger brother's college fees.

Similarly, Ester finally decided to return home after 23 years of working in Hong Kong. Her husband did not have a regular income from his small business. Ester was therefore the main breadwinner in the family. The final return took a

long time as her dreams and goals in life became more and larger through the years. Foremost was for the children to complete their college education followed by building a house and later purchasing vehicles which could be hired to give them some income in return. When the eldest child started to have her own family, Ester also provided financial help so that the son's children could go to private schools.

In the focus group discussion (FGD, Baguio City) Vangie, who worked as a staff nurse in a hospital in Saudi Arabia for nine years, shared that during her last vacation, she decided to stay home for good. Vangie contended that she had saved some money, children were in school and thought she would look for a job in the country instead. However, she faced difficulty in securing a job as she needed a patron to back up her application, a practice reflective of the persistent patronage system in the government. Vangie has therefore entertained thoughts of applying again to work overseas.

Psychological reasons for return

Some migrant workers decided to return home, not because they had met the goals they had set for themselves upon migration but because they felt it was time to go home. They had been away too long, so that further separation from the family was no longer bearable. I conceptualise this return as one motivated by a psychological need to return.

Rita, (LS) (who was widowed while at work overseas) for her part, agonised over her decision to return to the Philippines although she felt it was time to go home and be reunited with her son, her only child. Rita risked not being able to provide for the material needs of her child but felt that responding to her own emotional needs and that of her son were more important:

> It took me a long time to make the decision. There was the fear that it would not be easy for me to get a job once back home. I did not have money to bring back even after working for 13 years in Hong Kong because throughout, I had to spend for all sorts of eventualities in my family such as illnesses and deaths. It dawned on me that my only child, a son, has been separated from me for too long and therefore, I told myself, it is time to go home and there is no turning back.

Zeny (LS) worked for 15 years in the Middle East as a hospital assistant. Throughout her stay abroad, she did not go home to visit her two children who were left to the care of her sister. To her, it was enough that she sent money regularly. Finally, she decided it was time to go home after years of separation from her loved ones. As a single parent and the sole breadwinner in the family, it was essential for Zeny to keep her job although her prolonged absence from home caused a deep emotional toll on the children.

Return as narratives of struggle and narratives of empowerment

The narratives of return are stories documenting the struggles of the migrant women workers, the mechanisms they employed to cope with separation from home and families, the strategies they adopted to deal with the power of employers, their efforts to fashion a new self and identity, the social capital they developed to make them acceptable to the host society and give more meaning to their lives (Barber 2000; Huang et al. 2000; Yeoh and Huang 2000). Hence, in a large sense, these are narratives of empowerment, of women migrants' ability to cope with the difficult realities of their migration experience and to fashion a life that they aim for. I shall discuss and analyse in detail the migration experience and women's empowerment in the next chapter, Chapter 6 in the context of family relationships and re-settling in the home country.

Manang's narrative of her migration experience in Saudi Arabia is a continuation of the narrative of her life, which from birth, has been one of constant struggle to overcome hardships and poverty. Thus, her repeated reference to 'enduring all hardships in life' ('*tiniis kong lahat sa buhay*') during the course of her narration. More importantly, her life speaks of a woman's ability to survive, to rise above poverty and shape somehow a kind of life that is decent and dignified. This agency is a common thread that runs through most of the women's life stories. Even when faced with difficulties, the will and desire to continue to work remain strong. Amy first worked in Qatar and then moved to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and finally to Lebanon. In all these places of work, she faced difficulties and in Kuwait, she was sexually abused. But she persevered

through it all and survived. Ana was undeterred by her experience of constant threats of sexual abuse which ultimately led to the stabbing of her employer in Saudi Arabia. After a brief stay in the Philippines following her deportation, she went to Taiwan to try her luck again. Here, she was able to work and earn some money. But Nena, who endured six difficult years in Malaysia and Taiwan, opted to return home for good when she realised she was burying herself in heavy debts mainly due to the payment of exorbitant agency recruitment fees.

The agency of the migrant women workers is limited: it is bounded by gendered policies and practices. Migrant workers, particularly those who undertake domestic work, cannot choose their employers. Hence, they are at the mercy and kindness of their employers (Asis 2006). They can choose the countries where they desire to work but often they are also constrained by the rate of recruitment fees charged by agencies. Working relationships and conditions vary from employer to employer even with standard working contracts. The laws and policies of receiving countries differ too, some being more receptive and sensitive to migrant workers in general than the others. In Hong Kong for example, there is political space for the migrant workers to organise themselves and unionise. They can go to the streets, hold rallies, and protest against indiscriminate policies. This is not the case in Singapore or Malaysia or in Gulf countries (see various reports, Asian Migrant Centre 1996-2000). The overall reception given by the host society, whether they are migrant-tolerant or sensitive or xenophobic would also affect the kind of life and experience a migrant worker goes through.

Ambivalence and contradiction of return

The decision to return is as complex as the decision to leave. There is ambivalence (Constable 2004) and also contradiction, even if the decision to return is voluntary. This was expressed both by the narrators of life stories and the women in the focus group discussions. It is heavily gendered as shown by several women in the life stories and in the focus group discussions who returned home because children were facing problems, or husbands were

creating problems. Moreover, the women themselves were feeling a sense of guilt for being away too long and transferring their caring roles mainly to other female members of households. This guilt stems from society's expectation that a woman's place is still the home, that she needs to be at home and be the carer and nurturer. While Philippine society now accepts the movement of women to work overseas primarily to address their families' needs, there persists the deeply ingrained norm that a woman's place is still the home. Moreover, her being away from home does not free her of the responsibility to respond to the emotional needs of her family (see Parrenas 2006). As shared by one woman during the focus group discussion:

> *Tiniis kong iwanan ang apat kong anak. Gusto kong gumanda ang buhay nila. Nagawa ko ang gusto nila, napag-aral ko sila, sa ganito, napunuan ko ang pagkukulang ko. Iniwan ko silang mga bata pa.* (I endured leaving my four children behind. I wanted them to have a good (beautiful) life. I did what they wanted, I was able to provide education for them; this was my way of compensating for my inadequacy, for leaving them behind when they were still young).

At the same time, the status and economic power that stem from being a provider for the family are often too difficult to give up, thus, the desire for the migrant woman to remain as migrant worker. Hence, there is ambivalence around wanting to return.

For some women, it took several years to return home because the goals set and the needs, demands and expectations of families left behind kept multiplying. One period abroad could not meet these demands considering the salary of the women especially the domestic workers, so that the women extended their contracts not once but twice, thrice and even more. Ester worked for 23 years in Hong Kong. In several cases, families supported would include not only the immediate but the extended family as well and sometimes, even beyond the family. In the process, the definition of a family has broadened. The Philippine society places a great value on strong family ties and reciprocity, and sharing one's good fortunes with neighbours and community as a whole particularly in rural areas.

A study on the economics of remittances pointed out that for the most part, remittances are used for daily expenses such as food, clothing and health care. Funds are also spent on building or improving housing, education, buying land or cattle, and buying durable consumer goods such as household appliances *(Business World* Special Report 2004). Findings of this study are re-confirmed in my research both by the individual life story narration and the focus group discussions. In the latter for example, migrants' remittances were utilised for daily living expenses followed by housing construction, purchase of appliances, investing in small business and real estate property.

Delaying return occurs because of the apprehension or even fear of not being able to sustain one's standard of living due to lack of secure income earning opportunities in the home country. The home country is faced with the persistent problem of unemployment and underemployment. The National Statistics Office places the number of unemployed persons at 2.93 million as of April 2006, representing an unemployment rate of 8.2 per cent (INQ7.net, August 12, 2006).

It is also the case that through the long years of working and living overseas, the migrant worker becomes socially embedded in the host country, thus further delaying or postponing return. Ester, a college graduate, has found Hong Kong not only a place which has enabled her to provide financial security for her family but has also allowed her to shape an identity of a concerned migrant worker assisting other Filipino women in distress. The pleasure and comforts of living and working in Singapore (as contrasted to her harsh rural life), a modern city-state, made Trining yearn to go back to the country even after deciding to return home for good.

It appears that for women who had clear migration goals in the first instance, it was easier to decide when to return home as in the case of Nora whose main goal was to earn enough to enable her eldest child to complete his college education. But for Amy who did not set a goal from the onset of her migration, it was the husband who convinced her to come home as '12 years is too long to

be away'. She hesitated initially because by then she had set specific goals, like building a house, but changed her mind and acceded to her husband's wish.

Nora was clear and focused in what she wanted to achieve. Her migration goals were time-bound; there was no procrastination. Moreover, her fixed goals were jointly decided by her and her husband.

5.7. Conclusion

The narratives of return started with the narratives of departure so as to provide a holistic and integrated approach to the phenomenon of international labour migration. This includes unearthing migrants' motivations and goals in migrating specifically women migrants' goals; understanding the interplay of various factors in shaping the life and identity of the migrant woman worker, her sense of agency as well as the limits to such agency; the meanings of returning home and the various reasons why return remains distant, ambivalent and contradictory; and finally the return of the migrant woman worker.

Return allows us to comprehend the particular human consequences of the larger forces in everyday lives and actions: the war in Iraq, labour and immigration policies, illegal recruitment, downturn in economic status of employers, vulnerability to abuses by the very nature of job.

'Each return creates its own logic, contradictions and possibilities for the future. And in each return, the meaning of home is created anew' (Long and Oxfeld 2004:15).

In the next chapter, Chapter 6, I discuss and analyse the home that the migrant women returned to. I contend that meanings of home would vary depending on how one would remember it : the physical landscape, the social ties, the political or economic conditions, or the emotional security the home and its family members provide.

Chapter 6 also seeks to delve deeper into the consequences of return in terms of the life after migration for the migrant worker herself, her household and her

family. Chapter 7 will focus on the consequences of international labour migration for the society as a whole.

CHAPTER 6

CONSEQUENCES OF MIGRATION AND LIFE AFTER MIGRATION

> When I returned home after working overseas, our life became better. In the past, we ate corn, we ate leftover rice, the crust was rinsed, dried in the sun and boiled for our next meal. Because of long hours of hard work, I could only get a few hours of sleep. My body ached all over. I almost had an emotional breakdown because of hardships in life exacerbated by the fact that my husband deserted us. I was angry at God for some time.

To Manang who worked for ten years in Saudi Arabia as domestic helper, migration eased her own and her family's difficulties in life. She brought home $4,000 which was her savings and with this money, she set up a small business. She started selling soft drinks and ice blocks, she rented out rooms in her house which she renovated. Her children were able to finish high school and vocational courses.

In her narrative, Manang also expressed that her work experience abroad made her learn to mix with people from different backgrounds. She became self-reliant and most of all confident in herself. 'I no longer felt that I was just a small insignificant human being', she remarked.

6.1. Introduction

In chapter 5, I discussed and analysed the meanings of return for the migrant women workers, the reasons for their migration and the reasons for their decision to return. I examined the various types of return of the migrant women workers and to what extent the existing theories of migration and return and other conceptualisations are able to explain the women's return. This chapter is an extension of the analysis in Chapter 5. It investigates the consequences of return migration on the home and the family left behind by the migrant women workers. It analyses how migration has affected the women migrants' sense of agency and empowerment and what life after migration means for her and her family.

In the introductory chapter, I underscored the point that the migration process is deeply embedded in the context of family norms and thus, it is essential to look at the impact of women's migration on the family left behind. In my research, 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 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, the mother, the wife, the daughter, reconstitutes the family's structure and dynamics of relationships among various members (Zlotnik 1995). The women migrant's status undergoes change as a result of her income earning capacity to provide for the family. A change in her position in turn affects her sense of self as well as the power dynamics within the households.

In this chapter, my analysis begins by looking at how migration affected the home, the family left behind, in terms of family structures, gender roles and gender shifts, sense of security and insecurity; whether there were any differences between the male and female children in the way they were affected and how; and inter-generational relationships. Next, I investigate the extent to which migration has brought about changes in the lives of the migrants and their families' well-being. I explore and analyse whether the migration experience has contributed to the women's sense of empowerment and in what ways. Lastly, this chapter seeks to determine what happens to the women migrants when they finally return to their home country in terms of being able to resettle and fit back into their families and communities, socially, psychologically and economically. The factors that I consider enable me to answer these questions are the material and emotional/psychological well-being of families, migrants' status and self-esteem, egalitarian household relationships, and enhanced decision-making role. In examining the return of the migrant woman worker, I also take into account factors like social-cultural

integration and structural integration such as access to employment (von Lersner et al. 2008).

6.2.   What is the home that the migrant worker returns to?

Notions and meanings of home vary, from one denoting home as a private sphere of intimacy, personal emotion and relationship, and domestic and familial life to home as a site of domestic violence and abuse, and of women's subordination within the private patriarchy of the family. Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson (1998:10) contend that home connotes an 'individual search, involving either or both physical and cognitive movement'. For labour migrants, according to John Berger (1984), home is found in routine practices, habitual interactions, in memories and myths, and stories. Home is connected with origins, identity, attachment and settlement, and with its common use as a metaphor for nation (Webster 1998). I maintain that returning home can be a difficult and emotionally destabilising experience when migrants, for example, discover that their place of return bears little resemblance to the home they have left or they have remembered or imagined it to be during the years they were away. Thus, returnees come home 'disappointed and disillusioned, and sometimes alienated from the homeland' (Markowitz and Stefansson 2004:9). At the same time, 'home is the healing response to all other places and peoples, the starting point and endpoint that provide a reprieve to all phases of in-betweenness—travel and adventure, newness and strangeness, alienation and confusion, and unpredictability' (Markowitz and Stefansson 2004:24).

In the focus group discussion in Davao City, the women and men expressed that home is the Philippines, 'our real nation' signifying a sense of belonging and rootedness. Home is where you find your family, hence, you go home to a family where there is love and care, safety and security. A migrant worker goes home to see the fruits of her/his hard-earned money and to take a long-awaited and well-deserved rest. Coming home also means you have achieved your

purpose in working overseas, you have not encountered any problems and you have come home a success. These are idealised sentiments by a group of returning migrants. But certainly, the realities are much more complex than these as I explain and analyse below.

The home that has changed

The home that the migrant returns to has changed in both a literal and a figurative sense. For some of my life story narrators, 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. As one drives through towns, provinces and even small villages, one distinct mark of having been abroad, an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW), is a concrete house, 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.

To the other migrant women workers in my research, 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. For many of the returning mothers, 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 now cared for by aunts and grandparents or even friends or hired workers in other instances. In some instances, households are now 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 Gardner 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' (2002:226). When a woman leaves, her roles as wife and mother are drastically affected. In the Philippine society, much of the caring, nurturing and housekeeping roles rest with the mother so that 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 Parrenas (2006:121) 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'. In Ester's story, her daughter felt abandoned for all the years that she has been away. Hence, the sense of abandonment is also gendered.

Ester (LS) 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.

> 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 Philippine society, the father is perceived as the pillar of the home and the mother as the light of the home, a common metaphor designating the father as the breadwinner and the mother as the carer, the nurturer. Therefore, for a home to stand firm and strong, the father and the mother should be present.

When Zeny (LS) 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 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 the son married and the two could not get along. She could not even show affection for the 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 (FGD, La Union) 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 as I explain below.

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. Though his mother was away for 13 years, she visited him at least once a year and even took him to Hong Kong yearly during the summer school break. 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 cared 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 that a mother's care is irreplaceable (Anonuevo and Anonuevo 2002) Observations and studies on migrants' families point to a trend where increasingly, grandparents assume a big role in taking care of the children of their children left behind. This phenomenon surfaces 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 2008). Differences between the discipline and care of grandparents and the children's parents could also cause some strains in family relationships.

But 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.

Gina, (Amy's daughter) was only five years old when her mother left to work abroad. In the interview, Gina shared deep sentiments:

> Now, I am twenty years old, a young woman. We grew up in the care of my father and my aunt in the absence of my mother. We were happy because we got what we wanted as both my parents were earning. My mother has now returned but I cannot continue my college education. It's only my older brother who can continue schooling because we do not have adequate funds according to my parents. I did not insist on schooling. I joined some of my friends to learn to dance so that I can go abroad to Japan as an entertainer and in that way I can earn lots of money.

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.

Generational conflict and contradictions

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 for 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 2008; Episcopal Commission et al. 2004).

In my research, a group discussion was held with 18 high school students in a private school on the Visayas island, both of whose parents were still overseas working. The majority of the children were left behind by either mother or father at a young age (one was left behind by her father even before she was born, the rest from age 3 months -11 years) to the care of relatives, mostly female.

The children as a whole understood why their parents 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 parents as an opportunity for them to develop strong character, independence and self-reliance.

Another student remarked that it was good for her parents to be away because she felt freer and closer to them in their physical absence as she would argue and fight with them when they were around.

One student clearly missed her mother and shared the following:

> I asked my mother to come home and be with me and my brother because we needed her to be close to us (pause). But my mother said that she will come home only when we stop asking for all sorts of things and wants from her (student in tears).

Still another student in the above group discussion remained quiet all throughout the 1 ½ hour session, head bowed and at the end stated that she looked forward to another similar sharing session and specifically to discuss concerns such as family relationships, friendships, loneliness, managing studies and family conflicts, and coping with life's crisis. In this sharing session, the school's guidance counsellors were present and they assured the students of follow-up meetings.

In another focus group discussion with 15 children of migrant parents, of mostly high school age and college age (13), and with a few (2) of primary school age, in Tarlac province, Luzon island, the children shared similar difficulties of growing up without the presence and guidance of their parents. All of them spoke of loneliness and of being caught in difficult situations and relationships. But they also shared the benefits of having parents working abroad—nice clothes, good private schools, nice house, some luxuries, more food on the table as well as freedom and independence.

A 2003 Children and Family Study showed that most children of OFWs (Overseas Filipino workers) 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 FGDs with adolescents in this study revealed deep feelings of loneliness and alienation from parents. The study also points out that children of OFWs were in a better 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. The study supports my argument that migration has indeed brought about economic and material benefits but at emotional and psychological costs to children left behind and to the migrant women and mothers themselves. At the same time, a recent work (Edillon 2008) on the effects of parent's migration on the rights of children left behind concluded that such benefits may not be sustainable:

> Children of OFWs are vulnerable to economic and psycho-social shocks…the economic shocks may originate from political and economic crises in the rest of the world…The psycho-social shock may be the higher risk of splitting up of families…The study also reveals the lack of economic security of OFW families (due to absence of liquid assets and insurance coverage) and children, as well as the absence of systematic intervention from local government units, non-government organizations, the school system that offer psycho-social support.

In a similar investigation of children in Moldova left behind by migrating parents, Gavriliuc (2007) 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. I contend that 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 (2007) emphasised, the child's preparation for an independent life. This area deserves study in greater depth.

Just as there was ambivalence and contradiction in the migrants' decision to return, so there was also ambivalence in the children's reception of their mothers' return. Gina and Berto expressed that it could have been better for their mothers than not to have returned home because at the point they did, they were not through with their college education, some thing that meant so much to them and to their parents as well. But 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.

Mario, Gina's brother thinks life is the same:

> We are still poor, before and now. That's why I am working hard to finish my schooling and later be able to help my parents and my sister.

At the time the parents were working abroad, Berto felt secure emotionally and materially; Mario and Gina were 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 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, working long hours but no definite income, hence, on return insecurity sets in for various members of a household.

Studies on migrants' remittances have shown that these are utilised to meet mainly the day to day needs of households and for education. Results of the various focus group discussions reinforce these findings. But since tertiary education especially in private institutions is expensive, it is difficult to send more than one member of the family at the same time as in the family of Mario and Gina. In the Philippine society, there is the strong expectation that whoever

is educated first in the family would then help other members to go to school as well.

A recent survey on the cost of college education shows that with an income of US$3,500 a year (about 148,000 pesos), an average Filipino family will not have enough food and will be unable to pay rent even if just one child enrols in any of the country's top three universities in 2008 school year (Bolido 2008). Therefore, this acts as an impetus for migration. This explains why skilled professionals like teachers or doctors are willing to take up jobs overseas which are below their occupations because salaries in the home country would not enable them to send their children to good schools at the tertiary level.

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, hence, a situation where children suddenly take on adult roles. Pressure mounted in Conrado's family when the children themselves wanted the mother to separate from the father but to the former, it was important for the children to have both a father and a mother in structure, even under difficult situations, thus causing further strain on the children. Children are torn apart, living in separate households and loyalties are divided

Conrado, second child in the family and the brightest was forced to grow up fast when his mother left to work abroad. He had to learn to transact business in the bank with the help of his grandfather at the early age of 10 as his mother entrusted the remittances to him and not to the father who left home for some time. At that point in their life, the family broke apart; he was taken cared of by his maternal grandparents while his other siblings were taken by their father and cared by their paternal grandparents. During the interview, Conrado remarked:

> When I became older, I castigated my father for being irresponsible and unfaithful toward our mother. I and my siblings had asked our mother to

separate from him but she resisted because to her it was important for the family to be whole in form, no matter what happens.

The Family Code of the Philippines (Article 68) stipulates that the husband and wife are obliged to live together, observe mutual love, respect and fidelity and render mutual help and support. At the same time, sexual infidelity is one of the ten grounds where a petition for legal separation may be filed. Divorce is not allowed in the country (predominantly Christian and Catholic) under the law and the Catholic Church forbids it as well. Since there is a strong pressure from the society to preserve marriage as long as one can, Conrado's mother did not opt for legal separation.

By the time Conrado completed his college education and passed the engineers' board exams, his father had changed and had reformed and was back to the family, taking care of the children and the household. His father also took up a short course in mushroom culture after which he started his own garden and earned some income from it. Conrado also emphasised during the interview that harmony in relationships was restored among the siblings and that they cared for and helped one another.

Alma, a 12-year-old, whose mother started working in Hong Kong when she was only a 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 sleep 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, the 'global care chain' (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002) depicting 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 have been passed on to her by her mother and not to her brother.

Equal if not greater burden on sons

The existing literature points that children left behind are mostly cared for by female members of families, households and kin network. However, based on my research, I argue 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. Thus, for Vivian, whose parents were working overseas, it was her older brother who would attend parent-teacher meetings and would also coach her with her studies.

Nora, one of our life story narrators, had three children, all males. She remarked that her second son suffered because of her absence from home. He felt he did not have anyone to turn to for comfort and advice, even though his father was around. His father was a soldier who worked in a nearby military camp but his free hours were spent with his peers drinking, gambling and eating into the small hours of the night. The second son had to take care of the youngest child in the family. The eldest was spared of the burden since he was away in college. Thus, the second son ran all sorts of errands for the father. He got into trouble. At age 15, he made an 18-year-old girl with whom he had a dating relationship, pregnant.

In Edna's (LS) 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 do the marketing. Unable to cope with household responsibilities, he dropped out from high school. Later, the family engaged the help of a woman to do the household chores. But Edna's husband got involved with her sexually. This caused the second child, a son, to run away from home and seek refuge in his grandmother who lived in the province, hundreds of miles away. The above stories of Alma, and children of Nora and Edna 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. These are the social consequences of migration which though they are currently discussed by various sectors of Philippine society, seem to be accepted as given and therefore, whatever measures are being made to address these concerns, they are meant merely to minimise the problems (Center for Migrant Advocacy 2006).

Growing up strong and independent

On the positive side, children of migrant workers learned to be self-reliant and independent, but 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 consequences of being left behind. For the young children and adolescents, this meant the absence of parents, particularly mothers, at important points in their lives, their birthdays, their first day in school, their school graduation, their first holy communion and during important holidays, especially Christmas. Life after migration has meant to many rebuilding relationships as expressed in the women's and children's narratives.

In a forum on Philippine migration, a 25-year-old young woman shared her life as a daughter of a former overseas worker, a finance officer who worked in Saudi Arabia for 25 years. Carol recounted that in all her 25 years, her father visited her and a younger sister for a total of 25 months. As her father earned substantial income, they were able to lead a comfortable life and went to good schools and finished college education. She and her sister are now working, with good jobs. Carol further remarked:

> Being left on our own, (parents were separated) we grew up to be strong, self-reliant and independent persons. We learned to do all kinds of tasks even including so-called men's work like fixing electric wiring, house painting and the like. We managed our financial resources well and we did not indulge in luxuries. We became mature and confident persons. However, looking back, there is no way to compensate for the years of separation from our father, he, not seeing us grow and us, missing all those occasions and times a family should be together. One of the first things my father said when he finally returned home to retire was that we should never do what he did, to leave home and work overseas for 25 years.

Carol's reflections support my earlier contention that migration creates ambivalent and contradictory outcomes whether for the migrant woman worker herself or for families, particularly children, left behind. On one hand, migration translates into material well-being for families left behind. On the other hand, it brings emotional and psychological costs and consequences. For the migrant woman, it brings enhanced status, newfound pleasures and freedom. But it also brings guilt, loneliness and insecurities upon return.

6.3. 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, firm and strong fathers. Her findings showed among others, that the

men, 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 my study, I found that the latter group of men predominated.

For Ana (LS), coming home meant a separation from her husband who had been unfaithful and who had misused money sent to him while she worked in Taiwan. She is back to being a farmer with no land of her own. She is also in a live-in relationship with a man who is estranged from his wife who works in Hong Kong as a domestic help. Ana has left the land and the small house she had earlier built in another province because she no longer wished to see her husband. Her children are now with their grandparents and estranged from her.

Mila (LS) 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 (LS) 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 loaned most of the money to his siblings to finance their overseas employment fees and other expenses and the money was never repaid. Amy was furious. She 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 (LS) learned that her husband had gotten involved with the woman she had engaged to take care of the children and

wash their clothes while she was away. 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. 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 narrated above? The male spouses left behind were unable to cope with the wives' absence from home and thus 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. One could not separate because of parental pressure and as I explained in Chapter 5, there is still a social stigma attached to separated women or women who leave their husbands. 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, I maintain that the women migrants were not passive women, 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

Graeme Hugo (1995; 2002), in his study of Indonesian women's migration underscored that the question of the extent to which migration has led to social change in terms of women's enhanced status and empowerment, still needs to be answered, although some evidence suggests that it has not improved substantially. The fact that most Indonesian women leave one patriarchal setting (their village) for another (Saudi Arabia) provides some answer. One study though did point to husbands' increased respect for the migrant wives and

their taking upon themselves more child care roles in the absence of the wives and the breaking down of traditional gendered roles (Hugo 1995).

Katherine Donato et al. (2006) argue that the connection between migration, employment and female independence is not necessarily direct and unidirectional, varying and developing in different ways. The experience of Mexican women immigrants showed that migration did little to change gender inequality. Hence, what is needed is a more nuanced and contextually situated understanding of how migration affects gender dynamics.

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 'the relative position of women remains unequal vis-à-vis men, but the concrete circumstances of their position are drastically changed (such as in the case of a shift from a subsistence to a cash-based economy)' (Tienda and Booth 1991:56). Specific areas of change include access and control of resources, ownership of means of production and consciousness of inequities in power and authority in public and private domains (Tienda and Booth 1991).

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.

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 market and he 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, I 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.

Two women were no longer interested in repairing their broken marriages, hence they decided to lead a more autonomous life while one maintained a strained relationship merely to give a semblance of a whole family.

6.4. Migration and its rewards

According to Paul Thompson, migration brings sorrow but is also a cause for celebration (Thompson in Benmayor and Skotnes 1993). While migration has clearly spawned psychological and emotional consequences for migrant women and their families, migration, too, has its rewards both in material and non-material senses: broader outlook in life, newfound pleasures, and freedoms.

In the nine years that Edna worked overseas, she saved some money to build a small modest house with concrete walls although on a squatted piece of land. She was also able to purchase a second pedicab which her son drives daily to transport people. She occasionally gives talks at recruitment agencies to share her experience abroad as a domestic helper. When asked what she learned most from working abroad, Edna remarked:

> I learned to deal with all sorts of people, to discern what is good or not for myself and my family. With regards to my being a domestic worker, I learned to be efficient, good organiser, good in managing my time and still took care of myself well.

Looking back to her experience of working as a domestic helper for 15 years in Hong Kong, Marla remarked that it brought several benefits. With her earnings, she was able to build a house and purchase a piece of land where they grew coconuts and tended rice fields. More importantly, the children went to good schools and had good education.

However, Marla expressed regret at not being able to pursue a career in the government, a career which she had started to build prior to her leaving for abroad.

Reflecting and assessing her experience, Nena maintains that there were no benefits at all. She just got herself buried in heavy debts due to the high agency recruitment fees she paid to land a job in Malaysia and in Taiwan.

In two focus group discussions (in two different sites) attended by 11 officers of a migrants' federation, and 30 migrant returnees, the majority shared that their remittances were utilised mainly for their children's education, payments for

loans incurred in seeking job abroad, purchase of land, house improvements and putting up small businesses. The women also remarked that their experience working abroad instilled in them the values of discipline, efficiency, patience with children and spending more time with them. Moreover, the difficulties that their work entailed made them strong and courageous, able to carry problems in life, whatever they may be. Nora (LS) in particular shared the following benefits from her migration experience:

> With my long service pay, I extended our house, opened a small business and catered food. My husband helps in the business. I was also able to save for my youngest son's college education plan but now I am not sure if he can make it to college as he does not seem to be up to it. Overall, my experience abroad was good. My husband appreciated what I have done. I also have another opportunity to go abroad again, to Canada as a caregiver. But I tell myself, it is enough! It is so difficult to be separated from your family. Now I am contented with what we have. I have trained my children, all boys, in all types of housework and made them good housekeepers. I feel that my husband is more caring towards me now than before. I feel more valued for my hard work and contribution to the family's well-being.

Mila (LS) has become active in community activities by being a village official and by taking on a leadership role in a federation of migrants' groups in her home province. She expressed that her rich experience as an OFW (overseas Filipino worker) has enabled her to deeply empathise with the needs and concerns of migrant workers and their families and therefore this has helped her to carry out her leadership role quite effectively. Mila remarked:

> My work overseas helped me broaden my outlook in life, having been exposed to all sorts of people and all kinds of problems and challenges. I have more courage and confidence now to face life's trials.

These stories point to the rewards that migration brings, non-material and material— the security of a monthly income, earning enough to send children to good schools, to provide for their daily needs and some occasional luxuries and even to build houses. There are other rewards from the migration experience as recounted in the life story narration and focus group discussions. The opportunity to see the world is a major reward for the migrant woman worker, an experience which even the educated with good jobs in the home country can

ill afford. There is freedom from being away from home as one is not physically present to face the hardships and burden of managing households and the caring and nurturing roles. There is freedom in not being bound by societal norms and expectations on how a woman should behave or develop relationships. There is freedom in being able to make one's own decisions both in small and big matters.

Yet the financial and psychological costs of migrating are high. The pressures that come with being the provider for the family exert a strong need and desire on the migrant woman to succeed and thus maintain the identity of being a dutiful wife, mother, daughter, altruistic and ever-sacrificing (Tacoli1999). Viewed from this perspective, the notion of agency comes to fore—the ability to navigate through various types of difficulties, psychological, emotional, cultural and economic and test one's will, endurance and determination.

Two narrators claimed no benefit at all from their overseas employment. One woman utilised all her earnings to pay off her debts incurred in paying her recruitment fees while the other spent all her savings to meet her daughter's needs and demands.

6.5. Migration experience and empowerment

Empowerment is rooted in the notion of power and Steven Lukes' theorising of power helps us to understand this complex and multi-faceted concept. According to him, 'power is a dispositional concept, identifying an ability or capacity, which may or may not be exercised' (Lukes 2005:109). In relation to social life, power refers to the capacities of social agents to bring about significant effects and changes (Lukes 2005:71). Furthermore, there is the dimension of 'power over' which does not necessarily translate into domination, rather, 'power over' others can be 'transformative, productive…' (Lukes 2005:109). Feminists' analysis of empowerment derives partly from Lukes' analysis of power.

Empowerment is a dynamic and on-going process located in a continuum. The process entails various stages — from individual to collective consciousness-raising to mobilisation for structural changes to end women's oppression (Afshar 1998). At the individual level it means self-assertion, belief in one's capacity to change conditions in life. Thus, the empowerment process 'begins in the mind, from woman's consciousness… from believing in her innate right to dignity and justice, and realizing that it is she, along with her sisters, who must assert that right'. It is spiral, 'changing consciousness, identifying areas…for change, planning strategies, acting for change…and affects everyone –the 'individual, the activist agent, the collective and the community' (Batliwala 1994:132). Empowerment constitutes a sense of agency, ability to negotiate, communicate, organise and hold opinions (Rowlands 1998). The 'power within' as maintained by Kabeer (1995) is expressed in terms of women's ability to control resources, determine agendas and make decisions affecting their lives.

An Asian regional research on domestic worker migration (Licuanan 1994) showed that to the women, the experience of working abroad was a gain in itself. They became more independent, self-confident and developed a more decisive personality. Similarly, in the study of Filipino women migrants by Maruja Asis (2002), the women maintained that the experience of migration instilled in them a more positive sense of self and a stronger sense of spirituality 'not because of the absence of trials but because they had surpassed various trials' (Asis 2002:91).

In studying women local migrants in China, Delia Davin (2005:29-38) observed that when they returned to their rural communities from their urban work experience, the 'women brought with them different expectations of women's roles, higher demands of living standards, greater aspirations for children and increased sense of autonomy'. According to C. Cindy Fan (2004), migrant work for rural women in China was not just an opportunity to earn their own wages but it also exposed them to new ideas, outlooks and lifestyles thus creating the potential for the women to become agents of economic and social changes in their communities. Women migrants have become 'better equipped to plan their

future, to critically evaluate rural life and traditions, and to engage in alternative gender divisions of labor' (Fan 2004:199).

In my study, I sought to examine how women's migration experience affected their sense of empowerment— the power within themselves to create change, to alter power imbalances within the family and to participate in advocating for change of the larger structures affecting their situations and conditions as returning migrant workers.

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. At the same time, however, they also became trapped in the cycle of meeting incessant demands from their families and carried over upon return to the home country and beyond life after migration.

My research shows that the migration experience has made the women more confident, more assertive, and more sensitive to communities' needs than before migration. The women have also developed a broad outlook in life by their travels, by their exposures to other countries, to other cultures. They have acquired organising skills, time management skills, language skills, and also leadership skills so that many of them are now active in their community affairs.

In the life stories, one woman continued her involvement in migration concerns (a carry over from her union organising work in Hong Kong) and two women have become leaders in organising returning migrant workers and their families. They assist them to resettle in their communities, to engage in livelihood and small business enterprise, and to access legal aid for victims of illegal recruitment. The women leaders are also at the forefront of advocacy for the creation of jobs and opportunities in the country to stem the tide of migration and for necessary support to enable them re-integrate into their communities.

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. To her, it was to give him a lesson for the time that he was unfaithful and irresponsible. 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, hence, 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 cathexis (emotional and sexual attachments) according to Connell's (1987) conceptualisation.

One could argue that at the individual level, the women have become empowered, but such empowerment will need to be translated into actions to change the circumstances of their lives such as equal sharing of caring roles and household responsibilities in the family, and equal involvement in community affairs.

At another level, collective action (Batliwala 1994) needs to be forged among the women to press for changes in government policies and programmes to address the root cause of migration and in particular the feminisation of migration. Jane Parpart et al. (2002) remind us that empowerment is a process that takes place in institutional, material and discursive practices so that we need to be aware of larger and macro structural changes that frame women's empowerment at the individual level. I contend, therefore, that for the women migrants, empowerment remains an on-going process. Pauline Barber (2002:42) maintains that '… empowerment occurs within a process of on-going micro-political negotiation – it is not a state or condition that once arrived at is achieved and moved on from'. Like the bounded agency that I have contended, empowerment is also bounded by class divisions and larger social structures of power.

Empowerment, therefore, necessitates transformative social and political action in societal institutions. It also means collective power in setting discussions and agendas (Kabeer 1995; Parpart 2002) and for migrant women, their substantial and genuine participation in migration policy agenda at all phases of the migration process, specifically after their return.

6.6.   Resettling, fitting back in after return

When the migrant women have finally returned to their families and communities, an important question to raise is whether they are able to fit back and resettle and if so, what are the enabling factors for such resettlement? According to Bimal Ghosh (2000), successful reintegration constitutes two inter-related dimensions: one, personal success which translates into social, economic security and welfare of the returning migrant and two, the migrant's contribution to the economic and social development of the home country and the local community.

To what extent are these assertions applicable to the lives of the returning migrant women workers in my study? For the migrant women workers with professional skills, returning to their line of profession proved difficult because of age, the deskilling that has taken place and the lack of job opportunities and the patronage system in the Philippine political life distorting the merit system in the civil service.

A reading of our life stories in this study, reveals in part stories of lost opportunities for the migrants themselves, their families and communities.

Ester and Marla were accounting graduates but settled as domestic helpers in Hong Kong. Ester toiled hard so she could send her children including a daughter to college and enable them land a good job in the Philippines. The daughter did finish college but because she could not find a decent job, she eventually moved to Hong Kong where she also worked as a domestic helper. When Ester returned she was already in her 60s so it was not possible to rejoin the formal labour force. Instead, she and her family set up a small business like

poultry and hog-raising to generate some income but this was not adequate to sustain the standard of living they had acquired when Ester was working in Hong Kong.

While Marla was able to send her older children to good schools and to set aside money for a house and small business, she regretted not being able to pursue her career in accountancy. Like Ester, she could no longer rejoin the formal labour force upon return because of age. Marla continued to engage in livelihood projects to augment the family's income and save for the youngest child's future educational needs.

Upon returning home to the Philippines, Susan (LS) had hoped to secure a teaching job, something that she had aimed at after completing her bachelor's degree but was not fulfilled as she left the country to work abroad. She first enrolled in a one-year course so that she could qualify to teach high school and so she did and with excellent grades. She was the most promising candidate when she applied for a teaching post but because she did not have a patron, she did not succeed. Out of sheer frustration, she engaged in mission work with young people in Cebu province for about six months after which she returned to her hometown and finally decided to learn baking and set up her own bake shop. She earns just enough to maintain her simple life style.

Onofre Corpuz (2006) traces back the roots of the patronage system to the influence of political parties which destroyed the neutrality of the civil service.

> By the 1950s, political influence through letters of recommendation and similar pressures from party leaders had become common and then decisive in appointments to key career positions. Technical and professional qualifications became secondary… From then onwards, the competitive examinations system was destroyed and the neutrality of the civil service and efficiency were rapidly eroded. Even if the majority of civil servants did their jobs when treated as professionals, the politicalization of most positions was demoralizing (Corpuz 2006: 672-673).

Clearly then, conditions in the home country do not motivate or encourage overseas workers to return home permanently. The lack of a merit system especially in the government service clearly is a deterrent. For those desiring to

be self-employed and set up a small business, it is the lack of skills and access to adequate credit or infrastructure support for small business that demotivates.

Breadwinning continues and expands

While most of the migrant women were clearly empowered by achieving greater confidence and sense of self and assertiveness and greater decision-making roles, and enhanced status, my research also shows that the women's breadwinning roles have remained and have even expanded in some cases.

It has been more than a year since Edna (LS) returned for good. For a while, she engaged in money lending. Now, she has a regular housekeeping job. Her husband earns on a daily basis from his tricycle transport. However, most of the time, he is ill. The eldest in the family did not finish school and he now earns some money driving a tricycle but he has since gotten married to a young woman who did not finish school like him. Both now live with Edna and family. A nephew from the province had also come to stay with the family while he looks for a job. Edna's husband encourages her to once again leave the country and work overseas mainly because the children are still in school and have more years to go before finishing high school and hopefully, college.

Ambivalence sets into Edna's mind. She would rather stay, be close to her family and earn some decent income perhaps from some good form of business. She is not sure at all if this can be done. She misses her job abroad, she misses the security of getting a monthly pay. Meanwhile, Edna feels the great burden of not only providing for her family but for relatives as well.

Amy spent some time mending her relationship with her husband and children. Later, she had their house repaired and in turn, her husband took care of purchasing new set of furniture and household appliances. Amy now works as a real estate agent and from her earnings, she sets aside some amount to pay for her daughter's expenses for preparing to go to Japan to work as an overseas performing artist, a euphemism for entertainer.

Ester (LS) was away for 23 years but her work abroad has brought about tangible benefits for her family— a house, children's education, two out of four children completed college, a second-hand car, two pedicabs, a pool table for hire, small poultry and piggery business. Life, it seemed, was stable and secure when she returned home. However, during a group sharing, she remarked:

> I now think that I may have made a mistake for coming home. When I was still abroad, my children promised that when I return, they would take care of me now that I am a retiree in my sixties. But now that I am back, I still have to buy my own medicine and most of my children are still financially dependent on me.

To help her cope with her situation, Ester devotes much time to being an active volunteer worker, an auditor in an organisation of migrants and families. As an auditor, she is able to make partial use of her college training in accountancy. Life for Ester and her family improved later when her college educated son left for abroad to work. He now earns a good income and remits part of it for Ester's family's needs including the grandchildren's.

Zeny (LS) returned home after 15 years and thereupon tried a small jewellery business but failed. She spent her savings on the needs of a daughter—paid her hospital bills, supported her since she stopped working, supported her unemployed husband by giving him a tricycle which he could ply to earn some income. Zeny has exhausted her savings. She does not have any regular source of income. She is a real estate agent and only earns if she is able to sell a lot or a house which is quite seldom. She feels alone and rejected by her daughter. In her narrative, Zeny poignantly shared that life is hard and she can barely meet her daily needs, not even her daily meals. Water and electricity supply has been cut in her household because she could no longer afford to pay the bills. In a calm manner, Zeny remarked, 'Life could be a bit easier if I could get a loan and set up a small business of my own. I can cook and put up a food stall. I am getting old. In life, it is difficult to be by yourself'.

Several organisations in the Philippines are now involved in micro- credit enterprise and micro-finance institutions have spread considerably in the country although there is still the problem of access for poor families in poorer

regions (Asian Development Bank 2008). For Zeny who lives in an urban area, it is a matter of linking up with these groups to avail herself of loans for starting up her small business like Nena and access their funds like Nena and Marla.

Nena decided to join an organisation, Zone One Tondo Organization (ZOTO), an urban poor people's organisation and availed herself of their micro-credit programme. A loan of 30,000 pesos enabled her to engage in small business—selling soft drinks as well as breakfast food. Nena also rents out two rooms in her house. She calculates that she earns (gross) about 1,500 pesos (US$32) a day and of this amount, she pays back ZOTO 470 pesos (US$12). The family is able to survive decently on her daily income. Meanwhile, the husband helps Nena in running the small business in all its aspects.

By being members of ZOTO micro-credit programme, Marla and Nena have been able to participate in some training programmes such as those on leadership formation, product development, food production and business skills and values.

Although there are clearly benefits in the micro-credit programme, there are still gaps that need to be filled such as the health needs of the members. When a member falls ill, she is not able to make the daily repayment, or instead of seeking medical help, she would use the money to pay her loan.

Proponents of micro-credit programmes point to borrowers achieving gains in income, security and social status. For the poorest of the poor, access to credit often means access to food, clothing and roof on the house. It means the poor are able to gain dignity for themselves.

On the other hand, moving a family out of poverty is a process that takes long years and for women borrowers, may pose obstacles such as tendency for male relatives to appropriate loans or decide where loans are put to use. At times the women have little control of income derived from micro enterprise set up from loans (Todd 1996). Other critics of microcredit point to the rigidity and even coerciveness of the loan recovery system of NGOs managing the programme rendering women as 'docile subjects who can be manipulated' for

the advancement of the economic goals of NGOs (Karim 2008:15). Moreover, women need more than micro credit. They need social insurance. They must also have access to technical and marketing assistance to sustain their initiatives and help them go beyond income generation and thus rise above the poverty line (Ofreneo 2005).

Rita (LS), a widow, tried all sorts of work to earn an income. She operated an office canteen which generated a decent income but it was too tedious and demanding and therefore gave it up after six months. Having been a union leader in Hong Kong, her experience was put to good use by giving lectures to departing overseas workers but this did not provide her a regular income. Rita started to set up a convenience store/variety store but neighbours purchased goods on credit and before long, the business closed down. Two rooms were added to her modest home and for a while, she had tenants. Rita also went into a soap business in addition to having a stall selling second hand clothes. For Rita, life has been a constant struggle and, at one point, she contemplated on just giving it up.

The narratives above demonstrate the precarious condition of the migrant women when they return home and are not able to find a secure job either in the formal labour market or in the informal sector. Although the women had some savings upon return, these were easily dissipated. The conditions of Rita and Zeny specifically underscores the need for those in a similar situation to be provided with support, both financial and technical so that they can undertake some livelihood projects on their own. At the same time, the narratives of Rita and Zeny indicate the inadequacy of social safety nets for returning migrant women and for the poor in general, in Philippine society.

The overall picture that emerges from the lives of our women narrators after migration is the following:

Of the four single parents, one felt that clearly migration lifted her family out of poverty. For two, life became more difficult because there were no savings or their savings were easily exhausted. For the other, while assets were

accumulated, life style and living standards during migration were no longer sustainable after migration.

Of the nine married women migrants, five felt that life became harder after migration because of continued financial dependence of even grown-up children, because of greater demands of school age children and because life after was the same as life before in terms of the source of livelihood, meaning no assets were accumulated and no savings were generated. Four other women engaged in small businesses and earned enough income to meet day-to- day needs of families. Some women ventured into different kinds of income-generating activities and enterprises but in general, earnings were inadequate to meet the needs of families. For others, the burden of caring for the material and non-material needs of the family remained on the women because by then, a culture of dependence had set in. Moreover, the women too had become used to being the main breadwinner, a role they carried over upon their return. As Edna put it: 'the status is already there; you have earned it during those years you were working overseas and therefore you want to maintain it'. Clearly, though, this burden exacted a toll on Edna, physically and mentally.

For those with college degrees and wanting to secure government jobs, it proved difficult because of the endemic patronage system in the government. For others, they were no longer qualified or confident to seek jobs for which they were formally trained for because deskilling had occurred. In the life stories, Ester and Marla were college graduates in commerce but worked as domestic helpers for several years abroad. While back in the Philippines, they could no longer find jobs appropriate to their qualifications.

Also, it was almost impossible for those with less than college education to land formal employment not only because there are not enough jobs but also because they are already considered too old to be employed.

Finally, for many if not all the migrant women, life after migration meant heavy socio-psychological adjustments. Siony could no longer relate to her son, now aged 30, married with children of his own. She left home when the son was just

8 years old. Siony also had to contend with neighbours who have come to depend on her for all sorts of needs thinking that as a former overseas worker, she is in a position to help them. Siony feels miserable not having enough cash at the end of each month unlike those 22 years of working overseas as a domestic help, where she had a regular income. She refuses to venture into small business, she does not feel confident and she finds it demeaning, below her status. She harbours the thought of returning overseas again though the possibility is almost nil due to age. Her new house still needs a ceiling and kitchen cupboards and paint. She needs cash to purchase fertilisers for their vegetable and rice farms. She does not wish to stay home and take care of her grandchildren the way her late parents took care of her own children when she was away for 22 years.

Contradictory outcomes of migration

What do these stories tell us about life after migration? Contradictions abound. Years abroad were spent caring for other children and families and helping maintain households, but the women could not be physically present to care for their own children and families. Hence, the global transfer of care from poor countries to rich countries; a dependency of another kind, that of less privileged women supporting the needs of the richer, more privileged women (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002). In the next chapter, I will analyse a similar dependency of rich countries on poor countries to address the health requirements of the latter.

In their desire to ensure the welfare of their families, women assumed traditional roles of spouses and thus 'crossed gender boundaries' (Parrenas 2006:59). They crossed gender norms by their physical absence from their families and homes to work in foreign lands. Filipino women are regarded as the 'light of homes' and so when they leave, that light is extinguished (Dizon 2007). Men are regarded as '*haligi ng tahanan'*, pillars of the home, meaning fathers as breadwinners whose primary duty is to build a house for the family. While society now recognises the valuable contributions of women overseas

workers to their families' well-being, in the main, the society still holds the view that women's rightful place is still the home, to be at home and continue to be the light of the home.

To many women migrants, the migration experience provided a strong sense of freedom and liberation whether from the confines of their village homes, or from unhappy relationships, or from the drudgery of day-to-day reproductive tasks and responsibilities. Yet, the return of the women migrants showed that their role of providing for their families continued and even expanded upon their return. Although the husbands had come to share household and other responsibilities, it was still the women who bear the greater burden. My finding concurs with the observation of a Filipino sociologist, Medina (2001) who, in her study of gender roles in the Filipino families states that though Filipino women are now co-breadwinners (or main breadwinners and at times, sole breadwinners), their responsibilities at home remain. She further asserts that although men's role is changing, that is from the traditional role of a hardworking breadwinner to a father who is personally and emotionally involved in day-to-day child rearing, it is still the wife and mother who is mainly and ultimately responsible for domestic tasks and child care.

Psychological adjustments/rigidity of gender roles and norms

The reproductive roles of Filipino women are deeply internalised by the women themselves, the families and the Philippine society as a whole. While the migrant women took upon themselves the productive role of engaging in a paid work and supporting the needs of their families, nevertheless the women themselves felt their role as carers and nurturers could not be taken over by their partners or relatives whether women or men. This is clearly a manifestation of the rigidity of a gender structure which upholds the value of a nuclear family and the traditional roles of men and women. All the women in the focus group discussions agreed that parents, especially the mother, are terribly missed by the children when parents work abroad. They expressed that the care of the father or relatives with whom the children are left is not the same as

the care given by the mother. Moreover, while the women acknowledged their economic contributions to their families, they felt that their physical presence was certainly needed by their growing children, but they had to provide a good life for the children and in so doing they had to endure the hardships.

6.7.   Conclusion

The women and their families have become better off economically than before migration, but not on a sustainable basis. Savings were easily eroded. Regular remittances helped maintain a decent standard of living for households and families, but also created a culture of dependence among various members of the family, thus creating conflicts and greater pressures and burdens on the migrant worker upon return and beyond.

Life after migration has meant dislocations in not being able to secure a decent paying job or an income-generating activity to adequately meet their needs and those of the family. For those looking forward to retirement, it has become elusive due to persistent expectations to provide for other members of families including grand children. The overall political, social and economic environment in the home country is unsupportive and insensitive to the needs of former migrant workers as voiced by the women in the focus group discussions I conducted in various sites. No adequate credit facilities exist to support those who desire to set up small businesses. Marketing and product development support are also lacking. For many returning migrants, there seems to be no opportunity in the home country to provide them the same financial security that an overseas job has afforded them.

Life after migration has meant a time for facing the realities of coming home as strangers and returning home to strangers, in the psychological sense mainly due to the prolonged absence of women; of mending broken relationships with children left behind who felt abandoned even if mothers were out there fulfilling their non-traditional roles; with spouses unable to take over changed gender roles.

The government's inability to provide adequate alternatives to overseas employment has made the return difficult and ambivalent so that the desire to leave again and work overseas remains even if the decision has been made to return home for good.

Readjustment and resettling concerns are also influenced by life-cycle factors in the families that is, whether the children left behind are still of school-going age or not, or whether they have grown up with their own families and are financially independent.

The age of the returning migrant is also a factor to consider. Only two women (out of 14) who returned were in their thirties and of the two, the college graduate had tried to join the formal labour force but did not succeed because of a lack of patron to support her employment as a teacher. The other woman returned to her former occupation as a farmer. The four women in their forties engaged in small business such as food vending, convenience store, dressmaking, tutoring; others worked as sales agents and one worked as a family cook. One woman in her fifties relied on the agricultural produce of her farmland tilled by farm workers for her daily subsistence. Another woman, already in her sixties, went back to her life as a farmer together with her husband tilling their own land. But now they only have to provide for themselves. Lastly, for some of those who returned, investing in the education of their children and relatives somehow ensured the opportunity for the upward mobility of the future generation. But the irony is that while the women struggled to be able to send their children to college, the educated children repeat the cycle of migration because of the lack of job opportunities in the country and the now deeply ingrained notion among the young people that one has to go abroad to be able to better one's lot in life.

Returning to the contention of Ghosh (2000), that successful reintegration of migrants means their ability to contribute to the social and economic development of their communities, I argue that the women have done this, albeit to a very limited extent, through their engagement in small income-generating projects. Being small and micro in nature, these projects cannot

adequately stimulate the communities' economy and provide employment and income. But these individual projects can be expanded and scaled up to bigger and collective medium enterprises to create greater economic impact. What this means is adequate and sustained material, technical and financial support from national and local governments as well as from the private sector. I argue that a strong political will to create conditions for migrants to make their return secure economically and psychologically, is imperative. I maintain also, that the social skills gained by the women migrants, their broader outlook in life, their enhanced social standing in the community and their more egalitarian gender relationships in their families, can be harnessed and thus make the women potential change agents in the society. The women can be mobilised to engage in information and education activities. More importantly, basing on the depth and richness of their migration experiences, they can be effective voices to instill awareness and consciousness among various segments of society of the consequences of the prolonged migration of women.

In the next chapter, I analyse the impact of prolonged women's migration on Philippine society as a whole and argue that a culture of migration has now seeped into the fabric of Philippine society, affecting vital institutions in the country.

CHAPTER 7
CULTURE OF MIGRATION: IMPACT ON PHILIPPINE SOCIETY

When Manang (LS) was asked how she felt about more and more women leaving the country to work abroad, she replied: 'It is not good especially if you have to leave young children behind. No one can give them quality care particularly when they fall ill.'

Manang's only daughter, married with young children, left for Korea to work in a factory. Her employment was brief due to problems with working visa. Manang's son who completed high school and a vocational course was also planning to leave for Korea to work in a factory as soon as the family is able to raise 160,000 pesos (approximately US$4,000) for agency fees and other expenses.

When Amy (LS) returned to the Philippines after being away for a total of 12 years working in the Middle East, she remarked that she still had to work hard to raise enough money to be able to send her only daughter to work in Japan as an entertainer.

All the four daughters of Trining (LS) experienced going abroad to work. Matilde, the eldest, worked for a total of 9 years, 5 years in Singapore and 4 years in Hong Kong as a domestic help. She left when her children were still very young and decided to return home because the husband was turning to more and more vices. Part of her earnings were utilised for the construction of their house, the rest were ill spent by the husband. Now that the children are of school age, Matilde desires to leave again. She is now applying to go to Bahrain where she does not have to pay any fees beforehand. Fees and other expenses will be deducted from her salary. Trining worries that she and her husband would be left behind to take care of the daughter's children.

Trining's second daughter completed a college degree in forestry but instead of looking for a job to suit her qualifications, she opted to work in Singapore, also as a domestic help. The third daughter followed her. The youngest went to work

in a factory in Taiwan, although briefly, because her work permit was not in order. The family had paid a substantial amount of money to the recruitment agent and they only managed to recover a part of it when she was forced to return to the Philippines.

Ester (LS), who worked for a total of 23 years in Hong Kong, had hoped that her daughter would get a college degree and secure a good job in the Philippines. The daughter completed college but ended up working like her, a domestic help in Hong Kong.

7.1. Introduction

What do the above stories tell us? Despite the perceived disadvantage of leaving young children behind, the high cost of landing a job, and the uncertainties in securing a job, overseas migration persists: one works toward a college degree as a 'passport' for securing an overseas job even though not commensurate with qualifications obtained; and that the cycle of overseas migration prevails within Filipino families.

This chapter will analyse the culture of migration, its dimensions and ramifications, how this culture developed over the years and what its effects are on the fabric and institutions of Philippine society. Whereas Chapters 5 and 6 analysed the impact of migration on the individual migrant women themselves and their families, this chapter will look at the gendered impact of the culture of migration at the individual and family levels and what it means when families become dependent on migration as a way of achieving a good life; at the societal level and what it means to the country's sense of pride and esteem; and what are the various implications of a government's active role in promoting migration itself. This level of analysis is able to bridge the micro, meso and macro forces which explain the phenomenon of international migration from the Philippines.

The stories above, which are part of the life stories documented in my thesis, show how overseas migration has become deeply ingrained in the Filipino

people's behaviour and ways of thinking and living. I will argue that such culture of migration has eroded the nation's sense of pride and dignity and the value of working and serving in one's own country. It has resulted in the deskilling of qualified individuals and also exacerbated the drain in the country's human resources affecting critically basic social services like health and education. Distortions in the educational system have taken place as well. Ambivalence in policy-making has also occurred. The culture of migration has resulted in a dependency of the government on international labour migration and increasingly of women's labour, as a way of addressing the country's unemployment and underemployment problems as well as a dependency of families on migration as a means to better their lives. The government's dependency privileged the global competitiveness of Filipino overseas workers over its responsibility to put in place structural reforms in the economy. Heavy reliance on migrants' remittances to spur the economy is an unsustainable strategy; in turn, the dependency of families on labour migration has spawned gendered social consequences, lost opportunities and an unsustainable life style and standard of living.

7.2. Meanings of culture: culture of migration

Culture is 'ubiquitous, with profound effects on humans' (Neuliep 2000:14). It is invisible and at the same time pervasive. Most of our thoughts, emotions and behaviours are culturally driven, further argues James Neuliep. Roger Keesing (1981:68) posits that culture refers to 'systems of shared ideas, systems of concepts and rules and meanings that underlie and are expressed in the ways that humans live… what humans learn.' Studying culture means studying the sharing of a world of common meanings and values.

The literature on the culture of migration remains scant and without clear definitions or elements (Ali 2007). In the main, however, it refers to a culture that ascribes migration the value of being integral to socio-economic mobility (Tsuda 2003) and therefore, an effective strategy for overcoming economic hardships. Wayne Cornelius (1999:112) defines culture of migration as a 'set

of interrelated perceptions, attitudinal orientations, socialisation processes and social structures including transnational networks, growing out of international migratory experience, which constantly encourage, validate and facilitate participation in this movement'.

Basically, there are two theories that explain how migration flows continue and are sustained: the social capital theory, and the theory of cumulative causation as developed by Massey et al. (1998). The former mainly refers to the role of social networks between migrants and relatives and kin in both sending and receiving countries while the latter explains why over time, international migration sustains itself. Causation is cumulative because each act of migration alters the social context within which migration decisions are made. A culture of migration develops as a result of the growth and multiplication of networks. Sara Curran and Abigail Saguy (2001:63) contend that networks which expose people to different social groups transmit vital information and 'serve as conduit for new cultural values, identity and desires', including desire for market goods that are perceived as important for affirming a new identity. Hence, over time, migration and the values and beliefs associated with it become integrated into the structure and values and expectations of families and communities (Heering et al. 2004). Massey et al. argue that '…migration becomes a rite of passage, and those who do not attempt to elevate their status through international movement are considered lazy, unenterprising and undesirable' (Massey et al. 1998).

The above theories are useful in trying to explain how the culture of migration has developed in the Philippine society at the level of families and communities mainly through the role of social networks. However, I contend that in addition to the social networks, the state, the government of the Philippines itself, plays a major role in propagating and perpetuating this culture and that the state institutions themselves are now infused with this culture of migration. I will explain this point at a later part of the chapter.

Factors promoting culture of migration

The cultural and ideological forces of international migration in the sending countries are often deeply rooted in the past. The Philippines has a long history of its peoples moving from one part of the country to the other (from Luzon island to Mindanao island where fertile land and rich natural resources abound) and from the country to different countries in various parts of the world. Colonialism played a key role in the movement of Filipinos in the early twentieth century mainly to the United States to serve the needs of the colonisers in the agricultural sector as well as in its naval fleet. Post-World War II reconstruction in Europe and United States also attracted professionals such as scientists, engineers, nurses and doctors (Barber 2002; de Guzman 1999).

Today, the forces of globalisation have contributed to the rapid growth in international migration, and the culture of migration now embedded in Philippine society is very much part and parcel of such forces. Significant economic transformations in the country in the 1970s signalled its incorporation into the global economy (Tyner 2000). Economic policies that promoted export of agricultural crops as well as an export-led industrialisation which capitalised on cheap and docile work force, particularly women's force, destabilised Philippine society (Bello 2005; Eviota 1992; Tyner 2000) and consequently radically altered domestic labour market conditions and relations. Serious unemployment and a balance of payments crisis caused by heavy government borrowing and failed development projects gripped the country (Alcid 1996). The promotion of overseas employment in the early 1970s was therefore crafted as a temporary solution. The economic and social situation in the 1980s further deteriorated in view of debt payments and structural adjustment programmes and conditionalities imposed by The World Bank and other international lending institutions. Amidst this situation, the export of labour was pursued more vigorously by the government in partnership with private sector recruitment agencies. Today, Filipino migrant workers, both unskilled and skilled, may be found in about 190 countries all over the world.

The society is now faced with generations of overseas migrants. Every day, an estimated 3,000 Filipinos leave the country to work. Every day, one finds a long queue of individuals at the Department of Foreign Affairs applying for a passport to leave the country mainly to seek overseas jobs. Filipinos brave the risks of working even in war-torn countries such as Iraq (*Business World*, December 2, 2004).

A culture of migration has taken place in the Philippine society manifested in the belief and value that socio-economic mobility is possible mainly or only by migrating and working overseas. Hence, families like that of Trining's (LS) have created a dependency on migration as a means for securing a decent job and an adequate income. Education and training in the Philippines places a premium on working overseas, lessening or obscuring the need to contribute directly to the country's own development and serve the needs of its people. Moreover, in my interactions with the migrant support network to which I belong, a network that has pioneered migrants' savings and alternative investment programme, the members of the network contend that the culture of migration has placed a greater value on waged employment rather than on entrepreneurship, which often requires hard work, creativity and ability to face risks. Hence, many young women and young men now turn to overseas work.

In a 2005 forum on the Filipino Diaspora, Maruja Asis, a migration scholar, remarked that migration has become an ordinary part of the lives of Filipinos. Migration has become such a common occurrence in the society and that returning to the home country seems rather the exception now.

Several factors collectively explain why Philippine society has reached a point where overseas migration has become so pervasive. Migration itself is state-led, promoted by the Philippine government and has thus been institutionalised. It has become a huge industry as evidenced by the existence of about 1,200 licensed agencies regulated by the government. Networks of migrants have grown and developed in several countries of the world facilitating the outflow of Filipinos to work overseas. The ease of travel and global communications has also contributed to the phenomenon of international migration. At the societal

level, unemployment and underemployment persist in the country because of the worsening state of the country's domestic productive sectors. Moreover, job quality is declining: most new jobs are low-earning or unpaid family work and non-permanent (IBON 2007; Habito 2008). 'The problems in terms of quantity and quality of work in manufacturing and agriculture are significant because these are sectors crucial not only for generating jobs but as foundations for a robust economy' (IBON 2007:5).

7.3. Government as an active promoter of overseas employment

In the 1970s, when the Philippine government started to pursue an overseas employment programme, it adopted a policy that overseas employment was meant to be a temporary, stop-gap measure to ease domestic unemployment and liquidity problems. Thirty-nine years hence, we find the government still pursuing the same programme with greater vigour and earnestness (Sto. Tomas 2003). Thus, it continues to direct its efforts toward:

- exploring and developing better markets for overseas employment;

- developing technical education and training programmes to ensure that Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) are qualitatively at par with, if not superior, to their foreign counterparts;

- recognising the importance of OFWs as partners in nation building, the government ensures that OFWs are protected from the perils of overseas employment.

In 1995, the government enacted Republic Act 8042 or the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act which essentially seeks to provide greater protection and welfare to migrant workers. A reading of the policy however, highlights ambivalence of the government toward overseas employment.

> While recognizing the contribution of Filipino migrant workers to the national economy through their foreign exchange remittance, the State does not promote overseas employment as a means to sustain economic growth and achieve national development (Republic Act 8042 1995).

On the one hand, the government states that overseas employment is not promoted as a means to sustain economic growth and national development; on the other hand, the state not only encourages the deployment of overseas Filipino workers but plays an active role in promoting it. In public forums, the Cabinet Secretary of Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) stresses that overseas employment is 'market driven', and that government only performs a 'facilitative role' (Sto. Tomas 2005). Besides, the Labour Department secretary has argued that overseas labour migration has afforded Filipinos an alternative route for the betterment of their lives. In addition, 'people are better

aware that there is a bigger world than their barangay' (the smallest political unit in the local government system) (Sto. Tomas 2005).

The reality, however, is that two key government agencies, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) 'pursue an aggressive marketing of Philippine labour' (Opiniano 2004:9-11). Even at the local government level, based on my observations in the course of my field work, at the lobby of provincial government buildings, one finds numerous announcements of job openings overseas. Some local governments explicitly encourage and support prospective migrants by offering loans to defray the initial costs of applying and for securing jobs.

The state has a 'highly developed transnational migration apparatus' argues Robyn Rodriguez (2008:796). This apparatus constitutes agencies in the Philippines as well as in embassies and consular offices in various countries (for example, the International Labor Affairs Office) which are tasked with determining global demands for Philippine labour at specific industries and also identifying which countries would offer visa categories to allow Philippine migrants to enter for employment. The POEA itself has a marketing unit with skills desks attending to particular jobs like domestic helpers, workers in shipping, construction, entertainers, and medical workers. Furthermore, the Philippine government has its own recruitment facility, the Government Placement Branch that foreign states deal with to secure migrant labour for government-to-government hiring, for example, the hiring of medical professionals in government hospitals, physical therapists to the United States, and information technology workers to Singapore (Rodriguez 2008). In a sense, 'states, like business corporations, are increasingly outsourcing labour, eliminating employment for their own citizens and nationals while securing workers from other countries' (Rodriguez, 2008:798).

The labour brokering or labour diplomacy (state- to- state relations in developing markets for Philippine labour) engaged in by the Philippine government is also a gendered process as it relies partly on the construction of

Filipino workers, particularly women workers, as caring, docile, meticulous, warm and conforming to acceptable norms of sexuality (Rodriguez 2008; Tyner 2000).

Marketing of labour

To illustrate the vigour with which overseas employment is being pursued, in the year 2005 the government had aimed to deploy one million overseas workers as traditional, as well as new and emerging markets in many parts of the world continued to open their doors to OFWs (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, February 19, 2005). Listed in their marketing plan for new OFW destinations were: Israel for caregivers, tourism and construction workers; Singapore and China for teachers; Australia, Norway, Trinidad and Tobago, and South Africa for health care workers; Cayman Islands for restaurant workers; Bahamas for medical and skilled workers; the United Kingdom for social workers and physical and occupational therapists; Kazakhstan for technical and professional workers in the oil, energy and construction sectors, and Iran for skilled workers.

As a way of ensuring that this target is achieved, DOLE and POEA, in coordination with legitimate private recruitment industry, conduct year-round high-level marketing missions to tap and strengthen OFW markets. Furthermore, emphasis is placed on boosting strengths in the traditional markets, tapping new and emerging markets, and at the same time ensuring the welfare and reintegration programmes for the migrant workers and their families and enhancing efforts to address the problem of illegal recruitment (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, February 19, 2005). I maintain that there are competing demands with potential conflict in pursuing these two trajectories: promoting overseas employment on one hand, and upholding migrants' welfare, on the other. For example, a country may be agreeable to the entry of Filipino workers in a specific industry, but may not be amenable to forging a bilateral agreement that binds the host country to certain terms and conditions of treating the migrant workers.

Labour migration as a persistent state strategy to address unemployment and under-employment

A study undertaken by IBON Foundation, an independent research institution revealed that the government has deployed more overseas Filipino workers than it has created promised jobs and livelihood opportunities. From year 2001 onwards, an average of 787,000 jobs was created annually which were not enough to meet the 978,000 new jobseekers who enter the labour market each year. In contrast, the government has deployed an annual average of 900,000 overseas workers. Government has thus become dependent on the overseas job market to provide employment, arrest under-employment and consequently, generate remittances to bring in much-needed dollars and reinvigorate the faltering economy. Share of remittances in the gross national product has grown from nearly 8 per cent in 2001 to 10 per cent in 2007. OFW remittances reached $16.4 billion by the end of 2008 (Lema 2009).

According to the Labor Education and Research Network (LEARN), if the number of those under-employed was added to the 2.8 million jobless, there would be more than 10 million Filipinos, out of a 36 million strong work force, who are looking for work. The numbers include men and women who leave the labour force in the absence of clear job prospects. 'Clearly, the government faces a jobs deficit of crisis proportions' (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 29, 2006:1). Employment in the formal sector is shrinking and employment in the informal sector of the labour market is growing. '…jobs in those areas of the economy that contribute to economic growth are deteriorating while more and more people are being employed on a part-time basis doing menial jobs in agriculture and household work' (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 29, 2006). Out of every 100 Filipinos employed, 53 are earning wages and salaries, 35 are self-employed and 12 are unpaid family workers, mostly women; 63 are working full-time and 37, mostly women, work only part-time.

Maintaining global competitiveness and its gendered implications

In Chapter 2, I referred to competitiveness as the search for cheaper and better processes, products and services and that in the context of the globalised neo-liberal economy, to compete is seen as the way to survive (Munck 2002). During the 10th National Convention of Government Employees, the Philippine President remarked that the source of excellence in the nation's economy (using the indicator of international reserves hitting a record-high of $18 billion) is its work force which is found in 190 countries all over the world. Along this line, the President had asked local colleges to train overseas workers with the goal of making the Filipino the best worker in the world and globally competitive. This would translate into enhancing the curriculum to include more courses in English, computer literacy, cultural awareness, supervisory and technical skills (Bengco 2004). Moreover, the President's remark itself is an indication that education is now geared to serve the needs of other countries.

I also contend that because excellence in overseas workers is now what the Philippine government aspires to, it relegates the more difficult task of addressing the root causes of migration or creating jobs within the country that provide decent pay and social benefits. Below, I give illustrative cases to support my argument.

The immediate response of the government to the crisis in Lebanon at the outbreak of civil unrest in 2006 was to help the displaced Filipino women (domestic workers and caregivers) find work in other countries in the Middle East, as well as to upgrade their skills to become super maids. By becoming super maids, they would be equipped with skills in first aid and evacuation from high-rise dwellings in case of fire and other calamities and thus be able to manage efficiently and effectively emergency situations (TESDA 2007).

The recurring incidence of violence in the lives of women migrant workers has prompted a government proposal requiring prospective migrants for domestic work to undergo psychiatric tests to determine their suitability to assume the job. Critics (Aming 2008) argue that this does not guarantee the safety and well-

being of the women once at the job site because of the inherent difficulties and vulnerabilities associated with domestic work. In 2005, the Philippine government contemplated banning the deployment of housemaids to Bahrain and other Gulf countries mainly because of the rapid increase in complaints filed by Filipino women domestic helpers ranging from contract violation, unpaid wages, overwork, maltreatment, physical abuse, sexual harassment and in extreme cases rape and prostitution (del Rosario 2005).

In a similar move pursuing the goal of ensuring and upgrading the quality of domestic service workers, a government agency, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), has set up 150 training centres in various parts of the country to upgrade and professionalise household workers so that completion of a training course would serve as a requirement for deployment. The training programme itself identifies 'priority markets' for caregivers and domestic helpers: for the latter, Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong, Kuwait, and Taiwan and for the former, Canada and Israel. The training, therefore, is country-and occupation-specific. Similarly, the government, particularly the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), seeks to enhance the quality and effectiveness of its pre-departure orientation seminar for household workers and caregivers by partnering with leading non-government organisations (NGOs) and giving emphasis to topics such as gender sensitivity, human rights, assertiveness training, and values education (TESDA, 2007). Again, I maintain that while the assumption here is that by providing such training, the migrant women workers would be better equipped to assert their rights and remain honourable and law-abiding foreign workers, one has to recognise the social positioning of the women workers in countries where although their labour is much needed for reproductive and productive functions, they are at the same time, marginalised as the 'other', the outsider (Jones 2008), subject to disciplining, control and surveillance.

When the Japanese government, in an effort to curb human trafficking cases, introduced in 2005 new visa rules for entertainers requiring two-year work experience or two-year formal education in the performing arts to qualify for

work, the Philippine government requested reconsideration of such rules. The latter feared the repercussions of the new rule on the 80,000 Filipino entertainers in Japan who could lose their jobs. In a move to mitigate the impact of a potential loss in jobs and to make the Filipino women entertainers more 'qualified', the country's Department of Labor and Employment had therefore planned to encourage educational institutions to formulate a curriculum that would suit those applying to be entertainers in Japan.

In contrast to the above government response, several migrant and women's groups in the Philippines expressed support for new policy changes to strengthen the professionalisation of the entertainment industry and eliminate the exploitative aspects of the business (DAWN et al. 2005). These groups also maintained the position that the decades-old phenomenon of Filipino women working in Japan as entertainers has given rise to a kind of migration that brings 'denigration of the integrity of genuine Filipino artists, the sexual exploitation and abuse of our women, a culture of dependency, and generations of abandoned Japanese Filipino children' (DAWN et al. 2005). Finally, they called upon the Philippine government to retrain and provide decent and gainful local employment for women who may be dislocated through the new immigration policy.

The continuing advocacy of several migrant support groups, human rights groups and women's groups is that the state should not only protect the rights and welfare of overseas workers but must have the political will to address the root cause of migration. Prominent among the women's groups is the Network Opposed to Violence Against Migrant Workers (NOVA) which has been at the forefront of exposing exploitation and abuses against women migrant workers and advocating for policy changes and reforms.

I contend further that training and upgrading skills of domestic workers or entertainers are short-term and short-sighted approaches as I have earlier articulated, so that changes in policies, such as treating domestic work as work and therefore covered under employment laws, would provide greater protection instead. Along this line, the ILO proposes to develop a Convention to

provide much-needed (and long-awaited) protection for domestic workers. The institution recognises that many of the problems faced by domestic workers arise from the specificity and nature of their occupation and the lack of attention to their situation in national legislation and international law (ILO 2008).

Migration: cause for lamentation or rejoicing?

Debate in the Philippine society continues as to whether overseas migration at its scale is a cause for lamentation or rejoicing, pride or shame, hope or despair. Does one lament or does one rejoice that the country now has about eight million overseas workers occupying skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled jobs across five continents? Philippine society is polarised on this position. A prominent leader in the corporate sector remarked that the country should rejoice because 'we have found a truly unique niche that many other countries envy, (we should) celebrate the significant contribution that it brings to our struggling economy, and give the industry our full and unequivocal support' (Ayala 2003: 1-2).

Reflective of the religiosity of the Filipino people, others rejoice at the OFW phenomenon, regarding it as a blessing, that is, nannies, domestic helpers , nurses and caregivers, are 'like ambassadors and messengers of God…bringing happiness to other people, bringing beauty…breathing life to churches of the world.' (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, April 8, 2007: A10). This viewpoint complements that of the government's accord to OFWs as heroes of the country mainly because of their contributions to the economy.

While labour migration has been a source of pride to some sectors of society, it has also been regarded as a mark of shame for the economy's failure to provide enough jobs with decent wages and for the citizens' frustration at the country's leadership and governance. Work abroad seems to be the only path leading to a better life. Filemon Aguilar, Jr. (cited in Silvey 2004: 499) argues that if what this implies is a nation that cannot provide for the needs of its citizens and allows the permanent loss of substantial groups of citizens, this is a ' [trans]national shame'. The country should lament because of the loss of

trained and experienced human resources as well as the deskilling that comes with accepting a job beneath one's capabilities. However, the Socio-Economic Planning Minister disagrees that the departure of thousands of Filipinos to work abroad is a sign that they have lost confidence in the country, even though periodic surveys attest to this. To him, it is economics, not desperation (*Business World,* March 30, 2004). In other words, there is a huge demand for labour and the country has a large pool of surplus labour which can be exported to fill this demand.

7.4. Culture of migration and its social impact

Deskilling and lost opportunities

A reading of the life stories in this study reveals in part stories of lost opportunities—for the migrants themselves, their families and the communities they leave behind.

Ester and Marla (LS) were accounting graduates but settled as domestic workers in Hong Kong. Ester toiled hard so she could send a daughter to college but because she could not find a decent job, she eventually moved to Hong Kong and worked as a domestic helper too. While Marla was able to send her children to good schools and to set aside money for a house and a small business, she regretted not being able to pursue her own career. Prima (a friend I have known in my years of study in the United Kingdom) dreamed of opening a pre-school in her hometown after completing a degree in education. But she was lured by friends to join them in Hong Kong to work as a domestic help. She did work there for 12 years, after which she moved to England with her employers where she continues to be a domestic helper. When asked about her dream, she remarked: 'It has been trampled upon by other demands and needs of my family primarily that of meeting the high medical expenses of an ailing mother. Since I cannot be a teacher (and a good one) now, I can at least be a dutiful daughter, sister, and aunt'. At the same time, Prima has also become comfortable being in a different part of the world to which many aspire

to come to work and earn good money, so she chooses to remain in England for as long as she can.

The culture of migration has bred deskilled professionals (such as teachers who have become domestic workers) and corollary to this are what one may call secondary dreamers, that is, dreamers who try to compensate for lost dreams or relegate this dream by tutoring or giving talks or training to fellow domestic workers. For example, in Hong Kong, there is even an association of teachers from the Philippines composed of trained teachers now employed as domestic workers. Their aim is to help prepare Filipino domestic workers with college degree in education to review and try to pass the board of examination for teachers in the Philippines when they decide to return to the country and work as teachers (Interview with a migrants' rights and welfare advocate, June 17, 2007). There seems to be a paradox in this since experience shows that rarely, if ever, does the return to the country to teach and practice one's vocation or formal training occur.

Impact of remittances on individuals, families and communities

Ninna Nyberg Sorensen (2005) contends that a gendered analysis of remittance practices would entail questions such as: who moves and who stays, under which conditions, for what purposes are remittances utilised and what sustains gendered migratory practices. Similarly, Pessar and Mahler (2003) argue that studies need to go beyond those which focus on the magnitude of remittances flows and how they are invested and thus take into account the social relations between the remitters and recipients which tend to be gendered thus affecting gendered division of labour among others. The gender –power and generational dynamics between home and abroad are also brought to the surface in the course of analysing how remittances are sent and spent (King et al 2006).

Remittances are so vital to the Philippine economy and as my study shows, to the survival and maintenance of a decent standard of living for families and households so that the cycle of migration is perpetuated thus leading to a

culture of migration. At the same time, a culture of dependence on migration and increasingly, women's migration has ensued, creating conflicts and greater pressure and burdens on the migrant worker while at work overseas (Zontini 2004) upon return and even beyond as my research demonstrates. As Sorensen (2005) points out, the pressure to remit may pose a number of difficulties for the migrant worker, one of which is the inability to accumulate resources for return and for potential investments.

A 2003 report of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) on the Philippine situation had warned that 'while the high level of out migration has generated substantial remittance income, it comes at a high cost to the country in terms of loss of skills and knowledge and can have high social costs'. The money that workers and emigrants send home is utilised for sending sons, daughters, nieces and nephews through school, while the rest is spent on food and village fiestas as well as ill-advised small business ventures that usually fail. The ADB study cited 'extensive anecdotal evidence suggesting considerable spending for non-essentials and luxuries… many workers experience severe economic reintegration problems and any savings they may have brought home are easily exhausted' (cited in Morella 2004: 2).

Going back to the life stories in Chapters 5 and 6, my findings showed that returning home was fraught with difficulties and life was not any better for many of the women migrants in my study. Savings were easily exhausted, some came home without any savings, some invested in small business, but income generated was insufficient to meet the family's needs.

The money that OFWs send and spend back home in the Philippines fuels consumption that in turn drives more than 70 per cent of gross domestic product. For example, the disposable income of most OFWs is one reason why malls proliferate despite tepid economic growth that averaged about 4.6 per cent in 2000-2005. Mall developers and operators depend heavily on migrants' remittances so that the thrust of their business expansion is finding locations with huge concentrations of families of overseas workers (*Malaya*, May 25, 2006). Overseas Filipino workers, particularly those in Europe and North

America, now comprise a valuable segment of the real estate market in the Philippines. A significant portion of the remittance is utilised to purchase a housing unit to fulfil a dream that motivates many to work overseas, that is, to have a home of their own.

In the life stories, Siony's (LS) greatest pride is a one-storey, three-bedroom concrete house, a testament to her 22 years of hard work as a domestic helper in Malaysia. As she has returned home for good, the community looks up to her for having made it, for having fulfilled the dream of many, to have a house of their own and some other assets. But perhaps unknown to many is the sense of insecurity that she now faces as she no longer enjoys a regular monthly income. Also, because she has invested a large part of her earnings and savings into building her house, she no longer has any left to invest in more productive ventures.

Divergent views persist on the effects of remittances. On the negative effects, it is argued that remittances are used for excessive consumption, thus decreasing potential multiplier effect. Moreover, a culture of dependence is perpetuated at two levels: one, on the recipients thus limiting their ability to participate in productive endeavours and two, on the government such that it postpones needed structural reforms in the economy (Calucag 2004).

A more recent study of the Asian Development Bank (cited in Dumlao 2008) points to scepticism about the government's over reliance on overseas remittances, noting that the remittances go to the relatively better off in the society and that for the rural poor, remittances are from the capital region implying that overseas remittances increase income as well as expenditure inequality (see Opiniano 2002). The report, therefore, argues for the need to create opportunities in the home country and to enhance the capability of the population to benefit from these opportunities.

On the positive side, remittances have been shown to help lift households out of poverty. They have also spurred regional development through increased spending on consumption as well as investments in human capital and housing

and consequent multiplier effects (Pernia 2006). The multiplier effect of consumptive behaviour increases demand for goods and services especially when used for education, health and shelter.

However, as Pernia argues, the 'remittance bonanza has not been totally an unmixed blessing, not only for the households but also the macro economy. It has allowed the government to skirt the difficult task of policy reform that would have improved the performance of the domestic economy and reduced the need for overseas employment' (Pernia 2006:17).

At the same time, civil society groups devoted to the protection of the rights and welfare of migrant workers maintain that remittances should not be made the substitute for government's responsibility for generating funds for national development. Moreover, migrants should not be made to finance development plans. Finally, the advocacy groups argue that the agenda of maximising remittances can result in a mass export of labour, the primacy of profit-seeking motives of money-transfer companies, and the inability of governments to address national economic and financial problems (Migrant Forum in Asia 2004).

Sustaining new life style and new aspirations in life

The culture of migration is deeply ingrained in the people's attitudes and values so that even if there are alternatives to overseas migration, these are viewed as temporary substitutes or not adequate to fulfil one's needs and aspirations in life. For example, in one urban poor community in the Philippines, a non-government organisation (NGO) started offering low-interest loans to the enterprising poor including former OFWs, the goal being that women would stay in the country and in the community, set up livelihood projects and be with their family especially with their young children. While a number of these women now have prosperous small businesses, ultimately many of them still desire to go abroad again. Hence, the remarks: 'I'm going back to Hong Kong, work there for two more years, then migrate to Canada with my family. The loans (from the

micro-finance NGO) were fine but my luck waits for me in Hong Kong' (De La Cruz-Azarcon 2006).

In time, the level of migration aspiration grows higher and higher. Countries of destination are ranked and stratified according to level of wages, opportunities for advancement, migrant- sensitive political environment, and opportunities for family reunification. Thus, in Asia, Hong Kong is a favoured destination because of its relatively high wages. In Europe, it is Italy or Spain which provides some chance for family reunification. For those working in Hong Kong, the dream of many is to go to England with their British employers preferably or to Canada. For the Filipino domestic helpers in Malaysia or Singapore, their desire is to move to Hong Kong. Thus, the cycle of migration is repeated and the culture of migration nurtured.

Migrations create a migration culture— a culture that is generated in the community by sharing information and experiences about opportunities, excitements, modern and high living standards in countries of destination. Migrating takes its place as a community value and even as a normal rite of passage among young people. Additionally, there is a growing number of people in the main migration age groups who are better educated and more knowledgeable about opportunities offered in various parts of the world (Castles 2000). Even among children in the Philippines, they now aspire to go overseas. In the Focus Group Discussions with children of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), there was a general desire expressed to go abroad like their parents because of job opportunities and the attractiveness of the purchasing power of the dollar or the pound and the euro. In a survey involving 1,443 children of migrant and non-migrant workers, 47.3 per cent said they wish to go abroad preferably to the United States and work as doctors, nurses and engineers. Economic need was cited as the overwhelming reason for the desire to go abroad (Episcopal Commission et al. 2004).

I contend that often the narratives of migration are those of rosy pictures of life abroad, of new comforts, new tastes and experiences which thus provide a great attraction for people in the communities to try it out there despite the risks,

uncertainties, and high costs entailed. Except that which is reported in the media, very few migrants would narrate the hardships and difficulties associated with migration such as the long working hours, the lack of security or protection, the feeling of loneliness and alienation, the harsh immigration rules and regulations, the racism, and the xenophobia. Jane A. Margold refers to this editing process of Filipino women migrant workers, 'this highly selective visual account…of journey abroad' as a way of striking out the humiliating circumstances of their domestic work, a narrative that 'sustains a reassuring vision of herself as appreciated and welcomed by her kin and her homeland' (Margold 2004:62). This reassuring narrative therefore helps perpetuate the cycle of migration.

Overseas migration creates new consumption patterns for families which receive remittances, greater purchasing power, and a life style that others may aspire to for themselves— branded clothes, hi-tech appliances, private education, large and concrete houses at times with an architectural design, patterned from the houses of countries where the migrants worked. At the same time, consumption offers new sources of social distinction and status (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2003). Overseas Filipino workers who are able to raise the standard of living of their families by such new consumption patterns are regarded highly in the community. They are looked upon as having succeeded in overcoming the challenges and hardships of working overseas and hence, duly rewarded. For women migrants, this could also mean a vindication for having left and even 'abandoned' (the words of the women migrants themselves expressed in the focus group discussions) the family back home. New consumption patterns thus have the 'capacity to counteract social norms predicated on … patriarchal ideologies' and even 'supply the semiotic elements for a counter hegemonic vocabulary (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2003:199).

However, this raised standard of living manifested by new consumption goods is not sustainable. In my visits to the homes of the migrant workers who have returned, I saw electrical goods lying idle, no longer utilised such as washing

machines or microwave ovens, because electric bills could no longer be paid. Children who used to study in private schools now needed to move to public schools as was the case with Ester's grand children. Savings of Marla's (LS) husband who used to work in the Middle East were exhausted when he fell ill and was hospitalised. Similarly, Ester's (LS) savings were also depleted when the family incurred huge medical bills.

Sustaining the family's level of living equal to or slightly lower than that obtained while the women migrants worked overseas, has become fraught with difficulties for a number of reasons: lack of savings or savings eroded because of high costs of social services especially health and education, no productive investments, no opportunity for employment upon return.

When we go back to the life stories, we find that life after migration for the women migrants meant even harder work and burden to sustain and maintain their families. Almost all the members of *Bannuar*, a federation of returning migrant women workers, expressed in the focus group discussions (FGDs) that livelihood was their main concern upon return to the country. This explains their engagement in various forms of small business or income- generating activities like food vending, vegetable selling, marketing small consumer goods, soap making and selling, variety store and other small business. They maintained a greater role in providing for their families than that of the male family members.

Finally, amidst the global financial crisis, Filipino migrant workers face the grim prospect of losing their jobs abroad and returning home unemployed and often in debt. The Department of Labor and Employment reported in 2008 of workers being laid off by semi-conductor manufacturing firms in Taiwan, construction projects in Macau, and shipping firms whose vessels are indefinitely docked due to over-capacity and slowing demand. Meanwhile, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) continues to advertise hundreds of overseas jobs covering a wide range, from engineers, forklift operators, firefighters, electricians, to butchers, carpenters, nurses, domestic helpers, cooks, cashiers, designers, and scaffolding charge hands (Tan 2009). What this implies is that within the government bureaucracy itself, the culture of migration

exists and persists. Consequently, the drain on the country's human resources continues.

Drain on critical human resources: nurses, doctors, teachers

One of the major consequences of the outflow of labour particularly of skilled workers is the brain drain phenomenon. A study on brain drain noted the long history of the migration of skilled Philippine workers, which dates back to the 1960s. One survey conducted in 1971 placed the number of Filipino doctors working in the United States at half those registered in the country. The study further emphasised that the exodus of skilled Filipino workers comes mostly from the employed professionals with long years of experience and responsibility. Consequently, this has left a vacuum in the industries where these skilled workers came from, and which cannot be readily filled by new graduates (Alburo 2005).

Records of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas show that during the period 1998 to 2004, a total of 12, 734 teachers, predominantly women, left to settle in the United States, Canada and Australia.This excludes the number of teachers who have left the country to work in non-teaching positions. Filipinos are chosen over other nationalities because of their high qualifications including 10, 15 or 20 years of teaching experience. The main fields of teaching filled up by Filipino teachers are special education, elementary and secondary science and mathematics education, subjects in which certified teachers are difficult to find (Lontoc 2005; Salamat 2006). The country is now starting to lose some of its best and most experienced teachers, mostly women, in subjects where in a global assessment of performance by high school students in mathematics and science, the Philippines ranked 42nd out of 45 countries (Senate Economic Planning Office 2008).

Some of the key factors which explain the brain drain phenomenon are: decline in the absorption of college graduates into the labour force, imbalances in the supply of skills; high unemployment rate; and the existence of more job opportunities abroad. For teachers in particular, what drives them to seek

teaching jobs overseas are factors such as low salaries, heavy teaching and non-teaching workload, and lack of opportunities for career and personal advancement (De Quiros 2006; Lontoc 2005).

Within the last few years, the country has been faced with a new and disturbing phenomenon, that is, Filipino physicians migrating to the United States, not as medical doctors, but as nurses. In a survey conducted by the National Institute of Health-Philippines (Galvez-Tan 2005), more than 3,500 Filipino medical doctors have left as nurses since the year 2000 while an estimated 4,000 doctors are enrolled in nursing schools in various parts of the country. About 40 nursing schools offer an abbreviated nursing course to suit the needs of medical doctors. The survey further noted that the medical doctors becoming nurses come from all kinds of specialisations. Their ages range from 25 to 60 years and their years of practice from zero to 35. Overall, the survey elicited five main reasons for this shift, namely: political instability; poor working conditions; threat of malpractice law; low salary; and compensation; and peace and order problem in the country. Equally disturbing is the decrease in the number of applicants entering medical schools. A random sampling of ten large training hospitals has shown a decrease in applications for residency training positions (Galvez-Tan 2005).

At the same time, the country faces a massive migration of Filipino nurses. It is estimated that 85,000 nurses left from 1994 to 2003, mainly to the United States, United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, Ireland and Singapore. The high demand for nurses overseas has led to a rapid increase in nursing schools. However, from 2001 to 2005, only 111 of 263 nursing schools in the Philippines managed to have 50 per cent of their nursing graduates pass the licensure examinations. In the desire to capitalise on the huge demand for nursing course, nursing schools have proliferated. But what this has meant is a dearth of quality educators, an increase in ratio of nursing student to patient (from 1:2 to 1:15); increase in nursing board exam non-passers; and deterioration in the quality of nursing graduates (Divinagracia 2005).

Distortions in the educational system

Corollary to the above, nursing curricula are also being modified to cater to the medical needs of developed countries. For example, the number of hours devoted to clinical practice in the operating room or in the intensive care units has increased. I contend that an intensively medicalised concept of health and an approach to curative health is thus being promoted rather than a community approach to health emphasising preventive health which suits the needs of developing countries like the Philippines. Another distortion is within the universities where the nursing college is but one of the many colleges. Because of the high turnover of trained and experienced clinical instructors who have opted to work abroad, higher salaries now need to be offered to them to stem their departure. By doing so, a distortion of the university pay scale system has taken place (Interview with a high ranking university official who preferred anonymity, March 15, 2005).

It is clear from the figures of projected enrolment for the school year 2008-2009 released by the Commission on Higher Education that it is the overseas labour market that future graduates aspire to. These courses, apart from nursing, are: hotel and restaurant management, computer science, criminology, information technology, accountancy, business management, elementary education, English education, and electronics and communications engineering (Tan 2008).

However, the country is now faced with an oversupply of nurses and therefore, many of them are unemployed or underemployed. Of the 100,000 new nurses every year, only 12,000 are able to secure gainful employment. A change in the policy of destination countries and the concern over the quality of nursing graduates had affected the recruitment of Filipino nurses (Esplanada 2008).

Distortions in policy-making

Corollary to the above, distortions are now taking place in the Philippine government's policy-making process. For example, the government has recently launched a programme to assign nurses to the rural areas (Aming

2009) to address the problem of unemployment and to serve neglected sectors of the rural population where maternal mortality and infant mortality rates remain high. However, the programme is at the same time viewed as an opportunity for the nurses to gain work experience that could hasten their deployment overseas. Clearly, the structural problem of underserved communities is not being addressed in terms of policies that would attract and motivate Filipino nurses to work in the country and in areas where they are most needed.

In the Philippine Congress, there are bills pending (such as House Bill 4580: Mandatory Two-Year Domestic Service For All Registered Filipino Professionals) which seek to stem the brain drain of nurses and doctors and other professionals by requiring mandatory service in the country (Asis 2006). At the same time, the Philippine government successfully lobbied for the certification examination of nurses for the United States to be administered in the Philippines to facilitate the recruitment of Filipino nurses (Aming 2007). These contradictory measures arise from the competing discourses of the right to move (thus, one cannot stop the movement of nurses and doctors) on one hand, and the right to health care, on the other hand. But the State has the obligation to uphold and promote the basic human right to health, the right to quality, available and accessible health care.

Impact on health system

In 2005, a former secretary of health lamented that the country would be faced with a severe health crisis if the trend in the massive departure of doctors and nurses continued (Galvez-Tan 2005). He argued that the departure of doctors will further decimate a health system which has for long been suffering from severe maldistribution of doctors, that is, practising in large urban areas so that rural areas and towns are left unattended by medical services.

In the past, the medical profession attracted many of the nation's brightest minds imbued with ideals of service and sacrifice for the country. I argue that what is now taking place is that personal ambition has taken over national

service. The country is unable to keep the medical professionals for various reasons: huge gap in wages and lack of career opportunities, among others. For example, a nurse working in the USA would earn a salary of US$4,000 a month compared with a monthly salary in the Philippines of about $220 (Galvez-Tan 2005).

Culture of Migration and Filipino Identity

The culture of migration has influenced the shaping of the Filipinos' sense of identity. The process of constructing national identity has not been without difficulty; it is contested and incomplete, an ongoing process (Hall and du Gay 1996) and under threat from various post-modern developments such as the forces of economic globalisation. Anthony Smith (1991:17) contends that national identity, a collective cultural phenomenon, connotes a process of 'self-definition and location'. It 'provides a powerful means of defining and locating individual selves in the world, through the prism of collective personality and its distinctive culture'. Migrants' feelings of identity and belonging can be profoundly affected and shaped by experiences of working in foreign lands particularly that of being discriminated against because of race, gender and the types of job occupied. Hence, the Filipino nation is now confronted with a gendered and racialised identity arising from the presence of Filipino women engaged as domestic workers in various parts of the world. Nira Yuval-Davis contends that 'women especially are often required to carry this "burden of representation", as they are constructed as the symbolic bearers of the collectivity's identity and honour, both personally and collectively' (Davis 1997:45).

Conrado De Quiros, a leading Filipino journalist, has used the hyperbole, 'toilet cleaners of the world', to refer to the huge outflow of Filipino women working as domestic helpers in about 190 countries of the world. To him, the sending of such educated Filipino women is a manifestation of the 'steep depreciation of this country's ambition, aspiration, or desire for achievement… a legacy of smallness that made us settle for mediocrity when we were capable of

greatness, that made us accept being pygmies when we could become giants' (De Quiros 2004:2). Randolf David (2004), a noted Filipino sociologist, argues that the identity, Filipino, is now equated with a maid in European and Singaporean homes, a prostitute or dancer in Japan, and an underpaid seaman in a foreign cargo-boat. Abroad, Filipinos are seen as refugees aiming to escape from economic miseries confronting the country. The discourse on the sexuality of Filipino women domestic workers in Hong Kong has stereotyped them as prostitutes, as providers not only of domestic service but of sexual services as well (Chang and Groves 2000). *Bun mui* is the local Cantonese term for 'Filipina girl' with derogatory connotation of a servant-master bond. Such a discourse is reflective of the interplay of relations of power between the migrant women and Hong Kong society, broader international development and migration policies and the nature of domestic work itself. According to Kimberly Chang and John Groves (2000:77) '…it is the Filipina as domestic worker whose sexuality is subject to social commentary and control…defining and judging them not according to the work they perform, but in terms of their sexuality'. Moreover, they argue that:

> Indeed, the debates rage on over the women's occupation of public space and engagement in illegal work and other supposed illicit activities. The paradox remains that these women whose responsibility it is to care for families of Hong Kong continue to be treated as a moral threat to the community (Chang and Groves 2000: 84-85).

Identity is inextricably linked with socio-economic and historical contexts. I argue that Philippine society is now confronted with a crisis of identity, a crisis spawned by a number of factors: its promotion of an increasingly feminised international migration; the persistence of deep ethnic, class and economic divisions; and the government's inability to provide a decent and secure life for its peoples. To many Filipinos, the existence of a Filipino nation is not only remote and abstract, it is also being questioned (Dionisio in David 2004). One step towards reclaiming and refashioning one's identity is to go back to the nation's rich historical past. The Filipinos were the first peoples in Asia to wage a nationalist revolution against western colonialism and to establish the first Asian republic with a democratic constitution (Corpuz 2006). The 1896

revolution was not the only 'finest hour' as a nation, contends Bello (2005). The country demonstrated a prodigious collective sacrifice against the Japanese invaders in the 1940s; later, it struggled for 16 years against the Marcos dictatorship culminating in what is now called the EDSA Revolution which became an 'inspiring model of a largely nonviolent struggle based on people power for many other people in the world suffering under the yoke of dictatorships' (Bello 2005:3). The Philippines also prides itself on having the longest experience in Asia with institutions of liberal democracy, a vibrant civil society and free press in the region, and a well-developed legal system.

Yet the country is also faced with numerous difficulties such as the need to forge a more inclusive sense of national identity. Several ethnic, religious and community groups such as the Chinese, Lumads, Cordillera peoples and specifically, the Muslims feel excluded (Bankoff and Weekley 2004). Poverty persists amidst deep and serious income inequality. The country's 10 richest individuals had a combined income of US$12.4 billion in 2006, equivalent to the combined annual income of the country's poorest 9.8 million households composed of some 49 million Filipinos (IBON 2007).

A shared set of ideal national values and shared ancestry, often in part constitute that collective identity. A shared history is, arguably, the most important element in the process of imagining a new national community (Anderson 1991), both during the struggle for liberation and after independence, when a functioning state must be created as well. However, maintaining symbolic unity after struggles for national independence or self-determination is made more difficult because of peoples' changing expectations, existing social and cultural differences, and the state's failure to provide a decent and secure life for its peoples. Hence, class and extreme economic disparities must cease if the nationalist project is to succeed (Bankoff and Weekley 2004) and this has to be addressed at the symbolic, ideological, and material levels (Smith 1991).

During the term of President Ramos (1996-1999), his nation-building project was to restore 'the sick man of Asia' (in a region of Asian 'tigers') to its reputation as a democratic and thriving nation (Bankoff and Weekley 2004:18,

21). The present Arroyo administration aims at building a strong republic and one key component is the capacity to deliver basic social services to all. Assessments show that, clearly, the government falls short of this capacity. Halfway through the 2015 target to achieve the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs), the country needs to work on MDG targets for providing universal access to education, reducing maternal mortality and providing access to reproductive health services (Philippines 2007 Mid-term Progress on MDGs). According to Social Watch (September 23, 2008) the Philippines is ranked as one of the countries with a very low Basic Capabilities Index (a simple average of three indicators: percentage of children who reach 5th year of primary education; mortality of children under five; and percentage of child deliveries attended by skilled health personnel).

When we examine where the migrants' remittances are utilised, we observe that most of these go to day-to-day living expenses of the families, education, and health needs. Clearly, migration is being pursued so that basic social needs are met by individual families themselves where the state is failing to act as the provider of social services.

7.5.   Conclusion

Some of the key questions I had set out to address in my study are: What happens to a country that mainly depends on the export of labour and mainly women's labour, to keep its economy afloat and to respond to the persistent problems of domestic unemployment and underemployment? What is the sense of security or insecurity that migration provides for the families and for the Philippine society? What does a culture of migration mean, what are its ramifications on the society and its institutions?

Overall, a culture of migration is a way of life now deeply ingrained in Philippine society where a great value is placed on international migration and where migrants are accorded a high status. It is a culture which has given new meanings to families and to gender roles, to personal goals and national

aspirations and to the values of education and state governance. In this chapter I have argued that a culture of migration has seeped into the fabric of Philippine society creating distortions in policy-making and the educational system. It has also led to a drain in the country's human resources affecting two vital social services such as health and education.

The pervasiveness of this phenomenon has raised numerous concerns such as the impact of migration on families left behind, the adverse consequence of greatly increasing number of women, of mothers leaving to work abroad for long period of time, and tensions between individual aspiration and national aspiration, the larger project of nation-building. Hence, the country is now faced with a situation of being suppliers of world labour, and mainly women's labour in traditionally defined reproductive spheres, as domestic workers, caregivers, or entertainers, often undervalued and unprotected, in exchange for remittances that the national economy so badly needs. The high number of Filipino women working as domestic helpers in various parts of the world has brought about a gendered and racialised identity of the Philippine nation. A 'national shame' is brought to bear on a country that cannot provide for the needs of its citizens and allows the loss of substantial groups of citizens, many of whom are educated, skilled and well-experienced.

The home country is no longer perceived as a place that provides security for its own people. What this implies is that people lack faith in good government, in the state's ability and capacity to meet the needs and aspirations of its own people (Molyneux and Razavi 2005).

Deskilling has taken place for doctors who now work as nurses, for teachers and other professionals who are employed as domestic helpers. The better trained and more experienced professionals are leaving the country for developed countries, causing loss of investments in human resources and 'leaving a void in the industries where these skilled workers came from which cannot be easily substituted by new graduates' (Alburo 2005:38).

I have discussed and argued in chapters 5 and 6 the social consequences of migration, particularly of the long years of separation of families as well as the outcomes of migration itself on the individuals and families. While one cannot deny the economic benefits derived from it, the long-term outcome is that of an unsustainable standard of living.

We now have a society where children are left behind at a very early age by one or both parents and cared for by the extended family, usually the female members. Children too carry a heavy emotional and psychological burden with the absence of their parents.

Personal goals have taken over the larger project of national service and contributing one's knowledge, expertise and skills towards the political, social and economic development of the country.

The state apparatus is being developed for it to become more effective in promoting overseas employment and to be a role model among sending countries, rather than creating alternatives for its citizens to remain in the country to live and work and find security. In a forum, 'Promoting and Fulfilling the Human Rights of Migrants' (Center for Migrants' Advocacy 2007) bringing together various government agencies dealing with migration, one official remarked how the Philippines is now looked upon as a model sending country and therefore, I argue that sustaining this prestige is of importance to the Philippine government. In the process of so doing, I contend that a culture of migration has also now permeated the bureaucracy which explains why labour migration, though initially crafted as a temporary stop-gap measure to alleviate unemployment, has become a permanent strategy. Structures of regulating the migration industry, promoting and marketing Filipino labour are in place. At the same time, resources for migrant workers' welfare programmes and services have been low despite the huge income generated from membership dues of migrant workers. For instance, in the year 2006, while the Overseas Workers and Welfare Administration (OWWA) had an income of 2,062,606, 736 pesos, only 395, 795, 964 pesos were spent for services and personnel expenses amounted to 332,903, 162 (Agunias and Ruiz 2007).

A feminised international labour migration has eroded the country's sense of national identity because migration is equated with Filipino women domestic workers or entertainers. Nana Oishi argues: 'women are more than labour force…women represent values of the state and also embody national pride and dignity' (Oishi 2005:102). The nation itself is gendered and the 'processes of nation-building rely on gendered discourses and symbolic representations…' (Einhorna 2006:196,198). 'Women lose their "own identity" when used as markers for the nation. They become a "metaphor" for what they represent rather than what they are' (Eisenstein 2000:43). Thus, Filipino women are cast mainly as domestic workers or nannies or entertainers, not IT professionals or science and mathematics teachers or experts in various United Nations agencies.

Finally, I contend that the culture of migration is in part a manifestation of a deep crisis (including a crisis of spirit) (Bello 2005) that has long plagued the country, a failure of institutions and policies unable to deliver genuine development or to quote Denis Goulet (1995:141), 'integral human development', 'one that rests on a secure sense of identity and cultural integrity, on a system of meanings to which one can give enthusiastic allegiance'. The crisis necessitates 'the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities…' (Sen 1999:3).

CHAPTER 8
IMPACT OF FEMINISED MIGRATION ON THE INDIVIDUAL, THE FAMILY AND SOCIETY IN THE PHILIPPINES

8.1. Introduction

My study seeks to bring to the centre the debate on the social consequences of the prolonged migration of women in particular, and dependence on migration in general, for employment and well-being at the individual, the familial, and the wider societal level.

The key argument underlying my study is that the continued and prolonged dependence on migration by the Philippine government to address unemployment on the one hand, and by Filipino families, on the other hand, as seemingly the only source to secure employment and a better life, has been leading to social change, in terms of promoting women's agency and empowerment, the restructuring of households and redefinition of families and gender relations, as well as the rise of a culture of migration. Such a culture is characterised among other things by an increasing dependence on women's migration to work mainly in gender-segregated occupations with low status and low value, subjecting women migrants to vulnerabilities, to abuse and exploitation and at times deskilling for the educated and skilled women taking on such jobs. The culture of migration has bred feminised migration denigrating women's labour but this same labour has sustained the productive and reproductive tasks and roles of families both in the migrants' countries of work and in their own countries.

In order to understand the social changes occurring in the Philippines arising from women's migration, I have taken the approach to study the return phase of migration. Studying return allows us to reflect on the extent migration goals have been achieved or not, the conditions under which return takes place for a migrant woman worker and the macro forces which help explain the circumstances of return and life after return.

Specifically, I raised the following questions in my research:

- What does the return of women migrants demonstrate with regard to migration motivations, goals, and outcomes?

- What are the gendered meanings of the return of women migrants in terms of the effects of migration experience on their positions and roles, and their identity, sense of agency and empowerment?

- What is the impact of the women's migration experience on their families and households?

- What are the gendered outcomes of long-term migration and return of women migrants on Philippine society as a whole?

A multi-level approach to the study of migration: the micro (migrant woman worker), the meso (the families) and the macro (the society or the country of the migrant woman worker) is essential in understanding the changes and consequences brought about by migration and how one level affects the other.

8.2. Contextualising return within the entire migration process

Analysis of the return phase of migration was contextualised within the entire process of migration starting with the decision to migrate, the conditions of work and the place of work and the migrants' ways of coping, keeping in mind the eventual return to the home country.

As rightly pointed out by the integrative theories of migration, the motivations for migration are often those that respond to the needs of families and households which at the same time also takes account of the individuals' desires and aspirations. In my study, migration was mainly pursued both as an individual and family strategy to overcome poverty, to acquire a regular source of income, not necessarily to earn higher wages as argued by economic theories of migration; to ensure children's education and to build one's own home. Women's migration journeys were also motivated by non-economic factors such as escaping from unhappy marriages or abusive husbands, seeking change from a dreary and harsh rural life, or simply trying out some adventure and excitement in life.

The neo-classical economic theories of migration emphasising push and pull factors, and economic rationality do not capture specific motivations, circumstances and situations of people who move. For one thing, for the majority of the women, the decision to leave their country and work overseas was hardly a voluntary act. To a great extent, their movement was forced by the circumstances of their lives: single parents who had to bear the responsibility for raising and caring for their children and married women with spouses without regular jobs; households with hardly any assets, except for a few with small piece of land mainly for subsistence.

The meanings and transformations in the women's lives associated the migration experience with a range of positive experiences: a way out of a difficult life for women working in the informal sector or being unpaid agricultural workers or small landowners; a means of providing some sense of security for women formally employed in the home country but with low wages and without tenure; a change in status from that of unpaid housewife to being a breadwinner coupled with the ability to support not only immediate family but extended family or kin; and an escape from unfaithful and abusive husbands.

Eleonore Kofman (1999:289) has argued that 'it is time migration theories are able to capture the multiple dimensions of women's lives'. Much of the literature on women migrants describes their victim status and their identities as dutiful and self-sacrificing daughters and mothers (Carling 2005) and not much emphasis is given to their ways of surviving and the psycho-social dimensions entailed. In my study, ways of coping and forging multiple identities to sustain the women in their migration journey and eventual return home were demonstrated by the women migrants themselves: adjusting to new culture and tradition, meeting the heavy demands of their work, specifically domestic work, and coping with the prolonged absence from home and the control and discipline imposed on them by their employers and the society as a whole. The women too displayed acts of resistance in their day-to-day struggles in Scott's (1985) formulation, ranging from covert and at times mundane forms, to overt

forms of protest and in extreme case of violence inflicted on them such as rape and sexual abuse, this was confronted with equal violence.

Transforming meanings and identities in their places of work characterise the migration experience of the women migrants. In turn, these new identities such as social service worker, union organiser, and devoted and efficient worker, sustained the women in their migration journey.

8.3.   Gendered meanings of return

Return is gendered as much as the entire migration process itself is gendered. Motivations for working abroad mainly for economic reasons reflect the family pressure exerted on women particularly single parents. Overseas work provided security of income for most households where husbands had irregular jobs. Women had better job opportunities than their husbands because of the labour market demand for certain types of work like those in service occupations such as domestic work, nurses or caregivers in which women are cast as more suitable than men. For some women, the experience of violence in their families was a determining factor in leaving and working outside the country. While in the country of employment, economic goals were paramount for the migrant women but in time, migration goals began to encompass non-economic goals such as the need to sustain autonomy and enhanced status in the migrants' families and communities,thereby, influencing the decision to return home. Returning home was compelled by both the pressure and desire to assume the traditional gendered roles of caring and nurturing the family. Returning home was also forced by circumstances and social and political forces clearly beyond the control of the migrant women such as restrictive labour policies and civil unrest and conflict.

Return migration is influenced by the interplay of structural, cultural, economic and social factors. According to Bimal Ghosh (2000), at the policy level specifically, insufficient attention has been given to the personal circumstances of returnees, their duration of stay in the receiving country and the varying motivations of their return. Some literature on return maintain that at the

individual level, most return takes place for personal and social reasons rather than economic or political ones (King 2000). In examining the meanings and implications of feminised migration on women's labour, status and conditions of employment, the structural elements and factors emerge: the structural limitations to a contractual and temporary type of migration; the vulnerabilities to abuse and exploitation inherent in unskilled and gendered occupations such as those of domestic work or factory work; the gendered policies of receiving countries rendering women migrant workers from foreign countries with virtually no rights particularly reproductive rights, right to marry and found a family and right to family reunion; stringent immigration rules and conditions of employment; and fluctuations in labour markets and government policies.

From the influence of the above structural limitations, one concludes that the return of the women migrants was largely involuntary when they encountered problems with employment as in non-existent jobs or illegal recruitment, falsified documents, premature termination of contracts, non-payment of wages, and running away from abusive employers. Outbreak of war or civil unrest has made some women's return forced or involuntary negating in the process the benefits that international labour migration brings. The above findings came into view in my focus group discussions and in the life stories of the migrant women workers.

Studying return allows us, therefore, to comprehend the particular human consequences of the larger forces impacting on everyday lives and actions of the migrant workers.

In the main literature, return is categorised as either voluntary or forced (Cassarino 2004, Black et al. 2004) but as I have argued in Chapter 5, the distinction between the two is blurred, particularly as it applies to migrant women on temporary migration and occupying work categorised as unskilled.

Voluntary return of some women migrants in my study was precipitated by such factors as when conditions of work were no longer deemed satisfactory, when

their goals for migrating had been achieved, or the psychological need to return after prolonged absence from home.

For some women, illness in the family, problems with husbands and children, sense of guilt for being away for a long period of time and in the process transferring their care-giving role to other members of the family, were compelling reasons for them to return home. The deeply ingrained notion of a devoted and self-sacrificing mother and wife as well as society's expectations that the woman should be at home caring and nurturing, clearly explain the circumstances of this return. Women's reasons for return also reflect men's inability to cope with reversed roles as they are left behind with their families. While the migration of women migrants mainly to provide for their families is clearly a crossing of boundary, of transgressing the traditional norm of femininity and feminine roles, men left behind in my study, were generally not able to cross the boundary of traditional male roles. Hence, the persistence of gender regime and gender order (Connell 1987).

8.4. Ambivalent outcomes of return

Ambivalence figured prominently in the decision of the women migrants to return for good, meaning, permanently. Existing studies point to ambivalence as caused by the desire to continue to pursue economic goals in keeping with the identity of filial piety, a devoted and self-sacrificing mother, wife or daughter; in contrast to the desire to maintain the sense of independence and personal freedom, and new personhood as well as the pleasures associated with the country of work (Constable 2004; Yeoh and Huang 2000).

While my research supports these findings, my study has brought to the fore a more nuanced understanding of ambivalence in terms of identifying other factors contributing to the ambivalence of return. The status and economic power that stem from being a provider for the family were difficult to give up. The freedom and autonomy associated with the capacity to earn also made return distant. The goals set by the women themselves and the needs,

demands and expectations of families left behind kept multiplying, making the return more distant, more ambivalent. For one to be able to meet increasing and widening material needs, and considering the level of wages of a domestic worker (which varies from country to country), the migrant woman worker had to work and complete not one or two contracts but several and in the process, became separated from her family for 10, 15 or 20 years. For women whose relationships with spouses had broken down, returning home was fraught with deep anxieties. But for most of the women, ambivalence was brought about by the apprehension of not being able to sustain their standard of living due to lack of secure income earning opportunities in the home country, lack of adequate savings or lack of productive investments. Remittances from the women migrants who mostly took up domestic work or factory work were mainly utilised for day-to-day expenses of families, for education and for some consumer goods. For women who had spent several years working abroad, savings were invested in constructing new homes, an important symbol of success in their migration journey.

Summing up, the period of return and the ambivalence about return are influenced by economic and psycho-social factors. While economic goals are the predominant goals maintained at the beginning of the migration process, in time the goals are transformed to encompass other motivations and dimensions— the desire to maintain the high status accorded by families and the Philippine society to a migrant breadwinner, an economic provider; the need to sustain the psychological and financial security that a regular monthly income brings; and the satisfaction of carving other meaningful identities outside that of a domestic worker in a foreign land.

The economic environment in the home country also affects the timing of return. To many women migrants in my study, return has been delayed because of the lack of viable alternatives to overseas migration. Unemployment persists in the home country. Quality basic social services are difficult to access. Education and health care remain expensive in view of their continuing privatisation and commercialisation.

8.5. Consequences of return

The recovery and interpretation of women's lives is pivotal to feminist scholarship, to the feminist reconstruction of our understanding of the world. Feminist theory is grounded in women's lives and aims to analyse the role and meaning in those lives in society (The Personal Narratives Group 1989). Migration theories are in the main economic in formulation and concerned with why people move and where people move and are, therefore, unable to seize the depth and richness of the lives of women migrants. They do not deal with questions like, what happens to families and to societies when people move and more so when women move. Chapter 6 of my study examined the consequences of return migration on the home and family left behind by the migrant women workers. It also analysed how migration has affected the women migrants' sense of agency and empowerment and what life after migration meant for the women and their families.

Adjustments and challenges to life after migration

Life after migration varied among the returned migrant women workers: from being lifted out of poverty level to having a slightly better life compared to life before migration. Most of the women had to undertake different types of income- generating activities to sustain their families. A culture of dependence on women working has set in after years of the families' reliance on monthly remittances which in turn has bred complacency and lack of resourcefulness on families. Moreover, the women too had become used to being a breadwinner, if not the primary breadwinner, a carry over of their role as overseas migrants. For women with college degrees and wanting to secure government jobs, it proved difficult because of the endemic patronage system in the government. Other qualified women no longer felt confident to seek jobs for which they were trained because deskilling had occurred and age had also caught up with them. For other women, life became harder after migration because of the continued financial dependence of their children and grandchildren. To still others, life was the same as before migration in terms of the source of livelihood. No assets

were accumulated. No savings were generated. For those women who were able to accumulate some assets, their life style and living standard during migration was no longer sustainable. Fitting back into homes and communities meant for many coping with the psychological insecurity of not having a regular income.

Empowered women migrants

The question that persistently confronts social science scholars is whether women's participation in the labour force and their income earning ability eventually bring independence and social equality with men. Hence, in migration studies, does women's mobility to work, earn income and provide for their family enhance women's status and empower them? Studies (Ghosh, 2009; Koggel 2003; Parrado and Flippen 2005; Tienda and Booth 1991) refer to mixed outcomes based on the influence of various factors which range from marital and family status, class status, legal status, to gender hierarchies in the labour market and access to adequate income. My own research points to the material gains from migration as well as non-material rewards for the migrant women. Women became empowered although they worked under difficult circumstances such as prolonged absence from families, demands and pressures of domestic work, and low status accorded to them by the society in countries where they worked. Women attained a high status in their communities and greater respect from spouses and other members of the families and households by being economic providers.

I contend that several factors had come into play in the process of attaining empowerment by the women migrants. The migration journey itself was difficult physically, socially and psychologically. The women migrants in the life stories were away for long years, from 6 to 23 years and to have been able to overcome the difficulties of their journeys definitely instilled in them a strong sense of confidence, autonomy and self-esteem. Though regarded lowly in the countries where they worked mainly as domestic helpers, the women acquired skills of being efficient, good organisers, able to assert themselves, put forward

their views and make decisions on small and large matters. They developed strong character borne out in their ability and courage to face life's challenges and vicissitudes. In other words, the power within (Kabeer 1995; Rowlands 1998) which is a vital element in empowerment emerged from the women. The women challenged gender norms and tilted the balance of power on their side by sending remittances to their children rather than to unfaithful and irresponsible husbands and by ensuring that properties acquired during their migration were in the children's name rather the husband's. Upon return, they demanded equal sharing in household work though still maintaining the burden of earning income for the family. Marital separation was sought from unfaithful husbands (power with others) (Rowlands 1998) but for other women in a similar situation, it proved difficult mainly because of societal constraints and gendered norms and expectations of women's role to keep a family intact at least in structure.

A key question raised with regards to empowerment is whether this is sustained. Power relationships within the households have been reconfigured. Women played a key role in decision-making. My study shows that it has been sustained based on my interactions and observations (over a period of about 18 months and several years with two migrant women) of the women's confidence, self-esteem and the prodigious effort to create changes in their own lives and in their communities. At the collective level of empowerment, some women have organised themselves into a formal federation of returning migrant workers and families and in the process provide assistance and support for resettling and reintegration, continuing education and leadership development and advocacy for greater protection and welfare of migrants and for the government's creation of viable alternatives to migration.

Despite the above indicators of empowerment, I maintain however, that empowerment is still limited and bounded and remains an on-going process for women and for women migrants in particular. Empowerment necessitates transformative social and political action in societal institutions. It also means power in setting discussion, discourse and agenda (Kabeer 1995; Parpart

2002). Housework, household responsibilities of caring and nurturing need to be recognised by Philippine society as men's work and responsibility as well. I contend that the contribution of women migrant workers should be duly valued and recognised by both sending and receiving countries in the entire migration process by bringing domestic work within the ambit of local employment acts, providing regulation of work, protection of workers and social security and providing opportunities for social mobility. Valuing and recognising the contribution of women migrant workers to their families and to the Philippine state, in general, would mean the government putting in place structures and resources to assist in the return of migrant women workers and their re-settling in the home country with community support structures in place; creating job opportunities for those who are still able to work and for those who have returned as senior citizens; providing social security benefits. Women migrants would need to make these claims to the Philippine government not only as a matter of rights but as entitlements. Barbara Einhorn (2006b:182) argues that the concept of entitlements links 'individual or group claims to redress inequalities with the institutions capable of response', be it state or market. Furthermore, she maintains that to speak of entitlements is to 'reinstate the notion of social responsibility for the collective good as well as a commitment to social justice'. Finally, collective empowerment of women migrant workers will come about when the structural roots and causes of their migration are addressed adequately and when migration becomes a genuine choice.

Consequences of return on the home and family

The home that the migrant woman worker returned to has changed in literal and figurative senses. A distinct mark of having a successful migration experience is a concrete house. In the life stories, four women constructed new homes, one purchased a new house, another three made improvements to their existing home while the rest either went back to their original homes or left for another place of abode in the case of those whose marital relationships had deteriorated. The women migrants returned to homes where children had grown into adults and were leading their own lives. Women returned with the

realisation that significant phases in the growing up of their children were missed because of their prolonged migration. Women returned to homes where emotional bonding needed to be re-established and psychological distance bridged.

The consequences of women's migration on children are captured in Chapter 6. Children were affected physically, mentally and emotionally and materially. As shown in similar studies on children left behind, parents' migration, particularly that of women, affected the emotional development, social relations and school performance of the children (Gavriliuc 2007). Migration of women in the families compelled some children to assume adult roles and responsibilities, mainly because of the inadequacy of fathers left behind to take over the mothers' role. It was not necessarily the female child who bore the burden of these roles as normally assumed. Factors such as the children's perceived level of intellect and sense of responsibility and age structure also influenced the burden carrier.

Children and relatives benefited from the earnings of the migrant women. They went to private schools, participated in extra-curricular activities in school, wore good clothes, and lived in homes equipped with modern amenities and appliances. They learned to be self-reliant and independent. They valued the hard work of their mother although at the same time they felt emotionally deprived of their mothers' physical presence and comfort.

Just as there was ambivalence in the migrant woman's decision to return, there too was ambivalence in the children's reception of their mother's return because to the children, it meant financial insecurity, no longer having enough resources to support their schooling through tertiary level or to maintain the same standard of living they had when the mother was abroad working.

Gendered consequences of the culture of migration

Chapter 7 has analysed how the culture of migration has been ingrained in the Filipino family and in the government itself and the Philippine society as a whole. Such a culture has created a dependency by both the families and the

government on migration as a vehicle to provide opportunities for employment that generates decent income vital to families' welfare and well-being. The value placed on overseas work by Philippine society is now deeply entrenched. The government promotes and facilitates migration.

The culture of migration has thrived on feminised labour, a labour that is persistently gender-segregated relegating women to work in areas considered extensions of their reproductive roles, and which is under valued, under paid and inadequately protected.

The culture of migration has meant years of absence of Filipino women from their families. The prolonged absence has led to heavy emotional and psychological costs especially on the children left behind. Husbands left behind have been unable to adequately assume the nurturing and caring roles of migrant wives thus causing tensions, fragmentation and destabilisation in the families.

The culture of migration has permeated the educational institutions in the country. Nursing curricula are tailored to meet the requirements of developed countries thus creating distortions and contradictions. Doctors in turn are taking up nursing so that they could be readily employed abroad (mainly in the United States) at wages 10 or 12 times more than what they could possibly earn in the home country. College-educated students are now taking up nursing as a second programme of study so they could leave the country at the earliest chance. Nursing schools have proliferated and in the process, the quality of nursing education has deteriorated. The country is now faced with unemployed nurses prompting the government to initiate a programme to assign nurses to work in the rural areas where they are critically needed.

Distortions and ambivalences in policy-making have taken place: the government's policy emphasis on maintaining global competitiveness of migrant workers over provision of adequate resources for migrants' protection, welfare and well-being; the recognition of the ill effects of brain drain of medical

professionals but without adequate response to the structural roots of the problem and even promotion of brain drain itself.

The culture of migration has impacted on the gendered national identity of the Philippines, where women migrants are regarded as economic heroes and at the same time as a mark of shame for being mere domestic workers or factory workers or entertainer-prostitutes, the *bun mui* in Hong Kong or the *wailao* in Taiwan, both derogatory terms implying undesirable 'others' (Chang and Groves 2000; Cheng 2003), considered racially and culturally different, assuming jobs considered low and demeaning and yet paradoxically, vital to sustaining productive and reproductive roles (Truong 1996) which in turn are important for any country's economic growth and social development.

Finally, the culture of migration is a manifestation of the Philippine government's unwillingness to address basic and deeply rooted structural problems and, therefore, its inability to provide security for its peoples, and to provide sustainable livelihood. In a large sense, this represents a failure of good government. Remittances, apart from rescuing the country from its economic woes, are the lifeblood of families. They are used to provide a decent life for families, for the children's education and for housing and health needs. But these are basic human needs for which the State should assume responsibility, in the first place. Therefore, in the Philippine experience of international migration, the burden of providing social needs and services has shifted to the migrant workers and increasingly women migrants. But reliance on overseas remittances for addressing economic problems is an unsustainable strategy and with major social and economic consequences (Asian Development Bank Report 2008).

The discourse on remittances and how these can propel development has assumed prominence over the past years. This has come about in view of the shift in the discourse on migration and development, from an approach to viewing international migration as a 'failure of development' to one where migration flows can be harnessed for development (Black and King 2004). In more practical terms, this has meant an attitude of finding ways and means to

minimise the risks and costs of migration and maximise its benefits (Black and King 2004).

I maintain that the Philippine experience in international migration of more than three decades, one that is propelled mainly by women's labour in jobs categorised as unskilled, is a manifestation of a failure in development, in the economic model of neo-liberal capitalism and a failure of good governance. To reiterate what I have underscored in Chapter 7, international migration has distracted the Philippine government's attention to addressing the root causes of migration and to putting in place structural reforms in the Philippine economy. Since in many ways, the educational system is now geared towards serving the needs of foreign labour market, I argue that distortions have taken place. The culture of migration has distorted society's institutions in its vital role of building a nation harnessing the human capacity and capability of its peoples.

International migration has become a substitute for creating opportunities in the Philippines for people to acquire decent and sustainable work and secure life.

My research 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. But my study has also shown that the social consequences on families and children left behind are deep and wide-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.

The life stories of the women migrant workers, their migration experience and most importantly, the gendered social consequences of their departure and return which I have retrieved and made central in my thesis will need to be brought to the arena of policy-making and programme development and mainstreamed, no longer marginalised.

8.6. Future research areas

My study investigated the lives of women migrants who occupied so-called unskilled work. It focused on the migrants' social conditions upon leaving, their motivations and reasons for leaving. The difficulties faced by the migrant women in temporary and contractual type of labour migration and in jobs categorised as unskilled were analysed. These included the absence of policy for family reunification, barriers in accessing social services, vulnerabilities to abuse and exploitation as well as gendered immigration and labour policies rendering migrant women with limited rights

There is now a growing number of skilled Filipino women migrants (apart from nurses who traditionally have been leaving the country) like those in the information and communications technology sector, visual media experts, and teachers. The situation and condition of these women deserve to be studied on their own and for comparative purposes, with the women occupying unskilled work.

There is a need to investigate the situation of professional migrant women occupying skilled work – factors which motivate their migration, barriers they face in accessing work and advancing their career in various types of employment such as health and social sector, information, communications and technology, science (De Dios 2009; Kofman 2000). One also has to study the situation of qualified and educated women who take up jobs that render them deskilled particularly for migrating spouses, majority of whom are women. The pre- and post-migration comparisons are essential in looking at migrants' occupational mobility and equal opportunity in the work force (Ho and Alcorso 2004).

The study brought to the fore a number of concerns and lessons 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. The Philippine 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.

There are several issues and concerns facing the children left behind. What are the long-term socio-psychological impacts of migration, of both men and women? When the children grow up, do they also leave to go abroad? When male spouses are left behind, are they able to cope, to manage gender roles and shifts in gender relations? What are the implications for a society where caregivers are grandparents of children left behind by migrant parents?

My analysis of the macro forces affecting migration pointed to the complexities of policy-making, particularly the interplay of human rights discourse (for example, the right to move as well as the right to quality health care), economic survival, social costs and consequences and the dynamics of competing government roles (one promoting migrants' welfare, the other sharpening marketing strategies) and private sector interests (regulation or deregulation). These issues present to us another serious field of inquiry.

If the educational system continues to produce skilled individuals to support the needs of other countries, in the long-term, what happens to the home country's human resource development agenda? Who will be left behind to serve the needs and requirements of the country? What kind of skilled individuals will remain?

It would be interesting to study policy-making on the part of countries and governments which depend on poor and developing countries like the Philippines to support their health infrastructure, for example. Can development aid, for instance, be linked up with the goal of compensating developing countries for the brain drain? For example, aid from the United Kingdom (where several thousand Filipinos work as nurses and caregivers) can be channelled to

upgrade the health structures and facilities of the Philippines and to train and enhance skills and competencies of nurses left behind.

8.7.   Original contributions to research on return migration

Russell King's (2000) article on generalisations from the history of return migration contends that the literature on return migration is empirical or descriptive in nature and that theorising has been made difficult partly due to the different types of return and hence of migration itself. He ends his article with a plea that 'studies of return not be isolated around the return decision or event, but be built around a more holistic and theoretically informed appreciation of the nature of migration and mobility in this globalized era' (King 2000:45). My research focused on gender, migration and social change and my analysis of the return phase of migration was situated within the overall process of migration rendering an integrated and holistic view of the phenomenon. I have examined to what extent dominant theories of migration within which return theories are subsumed are applicable to the migration and return experiences of migrant women workers from the Philippines, using mainly a gendered and feminist approach.

My research dwelt on the return phase of temporary labour migration, a type of migration where return is inevitable ('forced' in some sense) because one works on contract, for a stipulated period after which one has to return to her country of origin, the sending country. My study has shown that the term, temporary migration is misleading (women migrants in my study worked abroad for as long as 15, 20, 23 years). It is a category misused to box and bracket certain groups of migrant workers, groups which perform vital social roles (by being domestic workers and caregivers) and yet are not afforded the conditions of employment that go with living a socially just and humane life mainly due to inherent structural limitations of a temporary type of migration in jobs classified as unskilled.

The empirical findings of my study have contributed in some ways towards a nuanced understanding of the return phase of migration, an under- researched and under- theorised phenomenon— the reasons for return particularly for a temporary migrant woman worker and the forces affecting this return. By adopting a gender framework in my study, I was able to uncover the psycho-social dimensions of return, dimensions which do not emerge in the classical and neo-classical migration theories.

The study on return was situated within the larger context of the entire migration process— the decision to migrate, the experience during migration, the decision to return and the situation after the return. Stephen Castles (2000) has called for an interdisciplinary approach to view the dynamic whole of the migration process and this I have sought to achieve in my study. As a research methodology, the life stories powerfully elicited the migrant women's web of feelings, attitudes and values that gave meaning to their migration experience. It allowed the women to reflect on these meanings and to assess for themselves how the migration experience affected their sense of self and well-being and that of their families. The complexity of women's migration and the attendant interplay of political, economic, socio-cultural and psychological factors can only be captured by engaging in a holistic and a multi-level approach of study. This is, therefore, the approach that I have adopted in my research.

Rhacel Parrenas, who has done scholarly research on international migration from the Philippines, noted in her recent work, *Children of Global Migration* (2006), that an area worthy of future studies includes the return migration of women (and men) and whether they achieved a more egalitarian division of labour, whether close familial relationships developed between parents and children after prolonged periods of separation and to see the end result of the sacrifices of migrant families. My study has addressed these questions and concerns and found that relationships were greatly affected: children felt deprived of the physical and emotional closeness of their mothers; some felt abandoned; and others faced the burden of assuming adult roles. Some

children grew up strong and independent but they greatly missed their parents on important events in their lives. Migrant mothers felt a strong sense of achievement for being good providers but they also expressed guilt at being away for a long period of time from their families. Greater sharing of household tasks between men and women has taken place.

Recent studies of return, for example, of skilled individuals or professionals, illustrate the ways by which they have been agents of change and innovation in their home countries and in their work places (Ammassari 2004). My study focused on women migrants with skills, but were considered unskilled because their jobs in the receiving country were categorised as unskilled, in the main, domestic work, yet domestic work itself constitutes tasks that require certain skills, physical, emotional, organisational, and others. Definitely, the women migrants in my study returned home with skills, social skills mainly, new ideas, new ways of doing things, of perceiving relationships, and others. They returned home with developed confidence, self-esteem and assertiveness borne from the challenges of working overseas. They returned home imbued with the consciousness that the prolonged absence of women and men from their families spawns deep and wide-ranging social consequences.

The literature on return describes returns of success, of failure, of innovation and categorised as voluntary and forced. My research has shown that such distinctions cannot be neatly applied to the experiences of the women migrant workers. The circumstances and conditions of their movement and return are much too complex because of the confluence of factors such as changes in their personhood, sense of autonomy, aspirations in life, gender ideologies and regimes, gendered roles and relationships, gendered state policies and macro forces beyond the control of the migrant women.

Finally, my third level of analysis, the impact of gendered migration and return on the societal level, has enabled me to broaden and deepen the conceptualisation of the phenomenon of culture of migration, bringing other elements in the analysis and examining the gendered consequences of the phenomenon. The existing literature describes the phenomenon as placing a

material and symbolic value on migration itself, how it has become a norm for society's aspiration for upward mobility and perceiving migration as a rite of passage itself. In the process, the family plays a central role as the generator and reflector of such culture (Chamberlain 1994). Social networks also play an important role in perpetuating migration. My study has shown that the state itself, the government from the migrants' country of origin, plays a major role in developing the culture of migration. In doing so, distortions and ambivalence in policy-making have taken place mainly due to the competing and at times contradictory demands of promoting overseas migration on the one hand, for its economic benefits, and placing emphasis on migrants' welfare and protection to reduce social consequences, on the other hand. In my further analysis of the gendered consequences of the culture of migration, I have identified brain drain, deskilling and negative impact on the country's sense of pride and identity, and unsustainable livelihood as equally powerful outcomes.

8.8. The activist, the researcher

My activist self proved most useful in my being a researcher. It enabled me to identify with the subject of study passionately. It helped me develop rapport and trust with the women narrators of their life stories and minimise the power imbalance between the researcher and the 'researched'.

The research provided me with a nuanced understanding of a gendered migration process but not in terms of polarities and dichotomies which the activist tends to fall into. I have learned what Oakley(2000) has emphasised— that in research, questions have to be carefully examined, whether they make sense to people asked to take part, whether it contributes to generation of theory and whether the research findings can be widely applied.

Feminist research is an integral part of the process of discovery and understanding and encompasses the responsibility for creating change. It is research by women and for women geared towards political change (Stanley and Wise 1993; Kelly, Burton and Regan 1994; Wolf 1996). The findings of my

research will have to be shared among a community of migrants, migrants' support groups to which I belong, concerned policy-makers and migration scholars and in the process push the debate on the gendered social consequences of the migration of women workers forward, identify policy and programme implications, and formulate action directed at political and social change.

At one level, there is an urgent need for policies and programmes to address the concerns of returning migrant workers and their families. Since the return entails various dimensions, economic and socio-psychological support will need to be in place.

At another level, a serious rethinking of the Philippine migration policy will have to take place periodically to assess its impact on the Philippine society as a whole especially the social consequences of the migration of women workers in both unskilled and skilled sectors.

At a higher level, a global forum tying up migration with macro concerns and issues such trade, aid, debt and development goals on one hand, and the social consequences of the feminisation of international labour migration, on the other, will be most useful.

In all of the above action and intervention, the combined effort, knowledge and experience of the activist and the feminist researcher are important. To reiterate, feminist research is an integral part of the process of discovery and understanding and encompasses the responsibility for creating change and I add, change for the betterment of human lives.

9
APPENDICES

Appendix I: List of focus group discussions

One-day Workshop and Focus Group Discussions with returning overseas women migrants, July 24, 2004, San Miguel, Tarlac Province, Central Luzon, 30 participants.

Half-day Focus Group Discussions with returning overseas migrant workers, September 22, 2004, Davao City, Mindanao, 15 participants.

Half-day Focus Group Discussions with returning overseas women migrants, October 4, 2004, Bagong Silang, Caloocan, Metro Manila, 10 participants.

Half-day Focus Group Discussions with returning overseas women migrants, October 27, 2004, Project 6, Quezon City, Metro Manila, 7 participants.

Half-day Focus Group Discussions with children of overseas migrant workers, November 13, 2004, Tarlac Province, Central Luzon, 17 participants.

Half-day Focus Group Discussions with guardians of children of overseas migrant workers, November 13, 2004, Tarlac Province, Central Luzon, 7 participants.

One-day Focus Group Discussions with returning overseas women migrants, November 16, 2004, Baguio City, Northern Luzon, 12 participants.

Focus Group Discussions with children (high school students) of overseas migrant workers, November 25, 2004, Holy Spirit School, Tagbilaran City, Bohol Province, Central Visayas, 19 participants.

Focus Group Discussions in the towns of Bauang, Burgos, Naguilian, San Gabriel, and Sudipen, La Union Province, Northern Luzon, August 21-22, 2005, November 6-7, 2005, April 2006.

Appendix II : Profile of life story narrators

Narrators	Age	Current Status	Countries worked in	Years abroad	Particulars	Number of years since return of migrant	Current occupation
Manang	61	Single parent 4 children	Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong Domestic worker	10	Primary education, poor economic background. Migration lifted her from poverty. Set up small business, improved house, supported children's education.	15	Small income-generating activity (convenience store)
Nora	50	Married 3 children	Singapore, Hong Kong Domestic worker	8	College education, office assistant prior to migration. Migration supported eldest child to complete college.	14	Food vending; home tutoring
Amy	42	Married 2 children	Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait,	12	Housewife prior to migration. High school education. Migration contributed to household	4	Small real estate agent

			Lebanon Domestic worker; caregiver		upkeep.		
Zeny	49	Single parent 2 children	Saudi Arabia, Kuwait Hospital assistant	15	High school education, operated beauty salon prior to migration. Migration provided for children's upkeep and education.	13	Small real estate agent
Marla	52	Married 3 children	Hong Kong Domestic worker	10	College graduate, worked as accounts clerk prior to migration. Migration supported children's college education and house improvement.	16	Small income-generating activity(until her demise in 2006)
Nena	41	Married 1 child	Malaysia, Taiwan Domestic worker	6	Primary education. Had small business prior to migration, no clear material benefits from migration.	2	Small income-generating activity (convenience store)

Edna	42	Married 4 children	Malaysia Domestic worker	9	High school education, worked as community health educator prior to migration. Migration contributed to household upkeep and children's education.	1	Part-time domestic worker
Susan	35	Single	Saipan Macau Tutor, domestic worker	8	College graduate, no work experience prior to migration. Migration contributed to setting up small business.	4	Runs a small bake shop
Siony	52	Widowed 3 children	Malaysia Domestic worker	22	High school education, worked in own farm prior to migration. Migration supported construction of house and purchase of farm implements.	1	Farming
Mila	55	Married 1 child	Dubai, Cyprus, Saipan, Taiwan Domestic	9	College education, engaged in vegetable trading prior to migration. Migration contributed to household upkeep and education of	2	Small income-generating activity(hog raising)

			worker, factory worker		relatives		
Trining	62	Married 5 children	Singapore Caregiver	6	Primary education, farmed own land prior to migration. Migration contributed to house construction and children's education.	14	Farming
Ester	62	Married 4 children	Hong Kong Domestic worker	23	College graduate, worked as accounts clerk prior to migration. Migration supported education of children, household upkeep, house construction, purchase of vehicles.	2	Small income-generating activity (convenience store, poultry raising) tricycle transport for hire
Ana	35	Married 3 children	Kuwait, Taiwan Domestic worker, factory worker	6	High school education. Farmed owned land prior to migration. Migration contributed to house construction and house-hold upkeep.	4	Farming

Rita	49	Widowed 1 child	Hong Kong Domestic worker	13	College education, operated own business prior to migration. Migration supported house construction and child's education.	4	Small income-generating activity (soap-making)

Appendix III : Guide questions for the life stories

1. Socio-economic background

2. Life before migration

3. Reasons/motives for working abroad

4. Decision-making for working abroad

5. During migration: work experiences, relationships with employers, co-Filipinos and host country/society, adjustments made, coping mechanisms, significant experiences

6. Return migration: Why and when did you decide to return to the home country? (question also used in the focus group discussions)

7. What does the expression, 'coming home for good' mean to you?

8. What is the home that you returned to?

9. Was this the same home you had earlier left behind?

10. Did you prepare for your return? In what way?

11. Looking back to your experience overseas, what do you remember most? What do you value most?

12. What lessons have you learned from your experience working abroad?

13. Did you gain any new knowledge or skills? Any changes in yourself? In your outlook in life? In your relationships?

14. How were your earnings utilised?

15. What changes have you observed in your family, community and society upon return?

16. Discuss life after migration (questions also used in focus group discussions)

17. What adjustments did you have to make after return?

18. What were your most pressing needs after return? How did you cope or manage?

19. What did you expect from the government in terms of support or assistance for resettling after migration?

20. Describe your relationships with spouse and children or with other members of family and with your community.

21. Describe your overall standard of living after migration.

Appendix IV : Deployment of newly hired OFW's by skills category (new hires), 1998-2002

SKILL CATEGORY	1998			1999			2000			2001			2002		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Professional, Medical and Technical Workers	41,640	13,816	55,456	50,677	11,823	62,500	67,454	11,231	78,685	83,056	14,392	97,448	84,839	14,849	99,688
Administrative and Managerial Workers	80	305	385	59	274	333	76	208	284	105	280	385	128	246	374
Clerical Workers	1,314	1,583	2,897	1,262	1,290	2,552	1,000	1,367	2,367	1,995	1,361	3,356	2,511	1,501	4,012
Sales Workers	1,121	1,393	2,514	785	1,459	2,244	949	1,134	2,083	1,814	1,374	3,188	1,452	1,591	3,043
Service Workers	73,048	7,627	80,675	76,792	7,346	84,138	83,794	7,412	91,206	83,951	8,400	92,351	88,082	9,292	97,374
Agricultural Workers	13	375	388	8	444	452	6	520	526	36	514	550	16	596	612
Production Workers	15,879	59,199	75,078	20,793	58,869	79,662	16,428	41,379	57,807	13,755	42,985	56,740	20,323	49,190	69,513
For reclassification	363	1,459	1,822	1,464	3,915	5,379	8,616	11,456	20,072	1,306	2,880	4,186	10,927	585	11,512
Total	**133,458**	**85,757**	**219,215**	**151,840**	**85,420**	**237,260**	**178,323**	**74,707**	**253,030**	**186,018**	**72,186**	**258,204**	**208,278**	**77,850**	**286,128**

Appendix V :   Deployment of newly hired OFW's by skills category (new hires), 2003 -2008

SKILL CATEGORY	2003			2004			2005			2006			2007			2008		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Professional, Medical and Technical Workers	67,336	11,620	78,956	80,470	13,677	94,147	51,988	11,953	63,941	24,046	17,212	41,258	21,761	21,464	43,225	21,717	27,929	49,649
Administrative and Managerial Workers	103	284	387	167	398	565	109	381	490	289	528	817	424	715	1,139	475	1,041	1,516
Clerical Workers	2,204	1,761	3,965	3,094	2,229	5,323	3,553	1,985	5,538	4,641	3,272	7,912	8,880	4,782	13,662	11,646	6,455	18,101
Sales Workers	1,394	1,096	2,490	2,761	1,189	3,950	2,973	1,288	4,261	3,112	2,405	5,517	5,389	2,553	7,942	7,277	4,247	11,525
Service Workers	76,296	7,725	84,021	102,080	11,343	113,423	123,241	10,666	133,907	128,186	16,135	144,321	86,241	20,894	107,135	100,570	22,759	123,332
Agricultural Workers	29	384	413	21	661	682	39	311	350	91	716	807	79	873	952	272	1,082	1,354
Production Workers	18,766	42,586	61,352	20,864	42,855	63,719	23,108	51,694	74,802	23,344	80,240	103,584	20,016	101,699	121,715	21,266	111,024	132,295
For re-classification	8,975	952	9,927	1	2	3	195	801	996	745	3,161	3,906	3,547	7,066	10,613			
Total	175,103	66,408	241,511	209,458	72,354	281,812	205,206	79,079	284,285	184,454	123,668	308,122	146,337	160,046	306,383	163,324	174,930	338,266

Source: Planning Branch, POEA 2008

Appendix VI : Selected detailed life stories[2]

MANANG

Manang was born to a poor family. Her father was a carpenter and her mother was a washer woman. She was the eldest in a family of five- 3 girls and 2 boys. Being the eldest, she had to give way to younger siblings' schooling. The boys were given priority in schooling. Manang only completed primary education after which she started working to help the family. She took charge of delivering the day's laundry done by her mother. At age 12, she started working as a domestic helper. At the age of 18, she got married to a soldier. After 13 years of marriage and four children, her husband left her for another woman. This was at Christmas in 1974.

In order to support the family's needs, Manang tried all kinds of small business such as: selling clothing material, food vending, supplying bath soap, toothpaste, and socks for the soldiers at the military camp located near her house. Her daily routine was getting up at 4 in the morning and working till late at night, rain or shine. For the family not to go hungry, this meant eating the cheapest variety of fish, eating rice mixed with corn (corn is usually used to feed chickens) and drinking roasted rice coffee.

In 1979, there was an opportunity to work abroad in Hong Kong, encouraged by a frequent client of the store Manang tended. The agency fee at that time was only one thousand pesos and this amount was paid on an installment basis.

But Manang worked in Hong Kong only for six months because she could not get along with a fellow worker who despised her manner of cooking. She then returned to the Philippines and the only benefit she got from her stint in Hong Kong was stocking up her store with goods but even these vanished after a thief broke into their store one night and carted away all the goods.

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[2] Based on transcribed interviews translated from the national and local languages into English.

She applied to work abroad again and this time it was to Saudi Arabia as a domestic worker. Working in this country meant a lot of adjustments—the food, abusive employers who called her names—dog, pig and most of all, working in a household with a man who had several wives. She was the only helper, she cleaned the entire house, she washed kitchen utensils but she did not have to cook; 'fortunately', she quipped.

Manang worked for ten years in Saudi Arabia. During this entire period, every three months, she sent all her earnings home, keeping only a small amount for her cigarettes. She was able to save $4,000 which she brought home. When she was 46 years old, she decided to go back for good as her employer's business was facing difficulties, food was getting scarcer in the household and this meant she had to buy her own.

Manang very much wanted to have a son who could be an engineer but none of her three sons did well in the college entrance examinations and so they ended up taking vocational courses.

In 1991, Manang returned to the Philippines. With her savings, she started selling soft drinks and ice blocks, she rented out rooms in her house which she had renovated.

Her unforgettable migration experience—a child under her care drank poison accidentally and had he died, she would have been killed by the employer.

Manang emphasised that she endured all the hardships abroad—it hurt her so much to be away from her family especially on important occasions; her only consolation were the constant letters from her daughter and voice tapes from the other children.

She also endured a lot of misfortunes in life. She was almost raped at age 13 when she was out early morning at 4 a.m. selling carabao's milk.

Manang's working abroad has benefited the family. 'The burden became lighter; our life became slightly better *("Gumaan ang buhay namin pagka-abroad ko.")* In the past, we ate corn, we ate leftover rice, the crust was rinsed, dried in the

sun and boiled (*sinangag*). The other portion of the crust was used as food for the swine. I only had few hours of sleep because of long hard work. *"Patang-pata ang katawan ko"* (My body ached all over). I also sold blankets from Batangas province and at times, I encountered scoundrels who refused to pay for the blankets they had taken after promising to pay on an instalment basis'.

'I almost had an emotional breakdown because of hardships in life and also because my husband deserted me. I had to resort to taking Valium drug to calm my nerves and to put me to sleep'.

'Without my mother, I would not have survived life. There was a time when I felt like losing my sanity. I hid under the bed and behind plants. I was in the brink of despair'. 'I endured all the hardships in life. Even in the midst of flooding in our area, I continued to sell food along the main road. When there was a downpour, I would hold an umbrella with one hand and continued to tend to my stall. At times at night, I would have a candle lit by the wayside'.

'*Nagtampo ako sa Panginoon'* (I was angry, had hard feelings toward God for a long time.) Later on however, I resorted to endless prayers'.

When Manang was asked how she felt about more and more women leaving the country to work abroad, she replied: 'It is not good especially if you have to leave young children behind. No one can give them quality care especially when they fall ill'.

But Manang has a son who is now planning to leave for Korea and also be an overseas worker. Meanwhile, they have to raise one hundred sixty-thousand pesos for agency fees (about $4,000) and other expenses. Her daughter also applied to work in Taiwan in a factory and did so but only for less than a year as she ran into work permit problems. Back home, she is now engaged in money lending.

Manang is now well settled and contented in life. She lives with her children who look after her needs.

NORA

Nora was born in Infanta, Quezon and her father was a soldier who relocated to Tarlac province. Nora was a top student in high school and a scholar. Unfortunately, she could not go to college because two of her siblings were already in college and her parents could not afford to support another one. Eventually, she got married early and her husband agreed to support her through college but her schooling was interrupted by the birth of the first child. There wasn't much encouragement from any one in the family or the household.

Meanwhile, relatives working abroad encouraged her to follow them and she thought it was a nice life for them to be out there judging from the photos sent to her and so she followed her sister-in-law in Singapore and worked there for two years. She had a day-off every Sunday. She learned how to cook. During the interview she remarked, 'I felt rich by being with a rich family. You feel the good life when you are treated like a member of the family'.

But pay was low in Singapore, only 300 Singapore dollars which was about 1,500 Philippine pesos. She worked part-time and earned an extra $100. After two years, she returned to the Philippines. With her savings, she was able to make some house repairs.

A sister-in-law encouraged her to work in Hong Kong where pay was much better than Singapore. Nora left her youngest child who was only two years old then to go to Hong Kong and work as a domestic helper. She had an employer who squeezed every ounce of her, who made sure that every cent paid to her was worth it and even on days she was off, she had to do all the housework prior to leaving the house.

Nora eventually changed employer and this time, it was a Canadian expatriate. She claimed she learned a lot —English language, grammar, correct usage of words, and others.

'In Hong Kong, I had hoped to earn lots of money. '*Pera nang pera ang nasa isip ko*' (In my mind, it was just money, money). I even resorted to borrowing money when it was time for me to go back and visit my family so that I had lots of money with me'.

'My goal was to send my eldest son to college. He eventually earned two degrees: B.S. Mathematics and B.S. Electrical Engineering. My husband retired early from military service. He did not know how to manage the small business that he set up. With his gratuity, he bought all the household appliances which we needed'.

'In the beginning, I used to send all my money to my husband as a sign of respect for him but he did not manage the funds well so I instead sent money to my eldest son. Though I had problems with my second son (no daughters), I did not think of coming home. I just wanted to save and save'.

'After working for five years with my Canadian employer, I decided it was time to go home. Three months before, I tried to save as much as I could so I could change the roof of our house'.

'Although you are happy when you get your pay, it is very painful to be away from your loved ones. It took a week before my youngest child warmed up to me when I finally returned 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 just a little bit). I made sure my second son (who got into trouble) completed high school and that he was not forced into marrying the woman whom he made pregnant.

'My husband's pension was not enough for college education, only for meeting daily expenses and therefore my job in Hong Kong helped a lot in sending our children to school'.

'My second son suffered because of my absence from home. He did not have any one to turn to when he had problems. He had to take care of the youngest,

Daniel, and he ran errands for his father. He got into trouble. At age 15, he got an 18- year- old pregnant.

'Other people in the community think it is good to go abroad. 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 finally coming home?"

'I travelled to several places with my Canadian employers—Australia, Canada, Thailand, Vietnam - this was one of the highlights of my working abroad. I had a long service pay, gifts, food allowance and others. I found out that in my household, there were lots of food stacked up every time I sent money but my husband's friends came over and ate and ate. They went into drinking bouts up to late hours in the night. My second son resented this'.

'With my long service pay, I extended our house, opened a small business and catered food. My husband helps in the business. I was also able to save for my youngest son's college education plan but now I am not sure if he can make it to college as he does not seem to have the aptitude'.

'My oldest child whom I sent to college now helps his younger siblings. He has a good job and a good pay (Assistant manager, EPSON) and he does not want to work abroad as he had experienced the difficulty of being separated from one's family'.

'Overall, my experience abroad was good. My husband appreciated what I have done. I also have another opportunity to go abroad again, to Canada as a caregiver. But I tell myself, it is enough! It is so difficult to be separated from your family'.

On the issue of more and more women leaving the country to work—she thinks moral values are being eroded, closeness to each other is gone, children develop anger and hatred toward their parents, they feel they have been abandoned; 'it is better if fathers are the ones who work abroad because they do not feel too close to the children; besides, a mother's care is different'.

During her absence, the children's aunts were turned to for advice, sometimes they would seek the neighbours' help.

'My husband did not spend the remittances well. He was fond of drinking and gambling. When there was problem back home in the Philippines, I found it hard to concentrate in my work. But my employer would jolt me whenever I cried. And she would ask: "Do you want to work or do you want to go home?" I would reply that "I want to work because my eldest is still in college…The most difficult part of being away is when there are problems back home. If I were to choose…If my life were good and am able to meet our needs, I would not go abroad'.

'Now, I am contended with what we have. I have trained my children (all boys) in all types of housework and made them good housekeepers'.

Now settled back home, Nora engages in food vending, tutoring school children and occasional sewing. The husband is now a retired soldier who helps in some household work and in their food vending business.

AMY

Amy came from a poor family in Samar. Her father, a *mestizo* (of Spanish descent), died when she was barely 7 months old. Shortly after, her mother migrated to Manila to work in a shoe shop in Divisoria market and from her small earnings, she would send money. Later, she remarried so that Amy and her sister were subsequently adopted by two relatives but this meant separation from each other. Her older sister was adopted by a relative in Baguio City who, according to Amy, treated her sister very well. In her case, a 'super strict' aunt adopted her. She was treated more like a slave rather than a niece, to be cared for. Amy recalls having to wake up as early as 4:30 in the morning to go to the market nearby, gather wilted cabbage leaves, cook these and feed it to the pigs her aunt raised in their compound. She also had to clean the house before going to school. At school, they were given free buns and powdered milk and she liked it. At that time, she recalls that she was only about 7 years old. For the

little mistakes that she committed, her aunt used to punish her by kneeling on salt. Because life was too difficult and her aunt was too harsh on her, Amy ran away at the age of 11. 'There was no love for me, so I ran away,' expressed Amy. She went to another relative in another place, in Mariveles, Bataan, a province in Central Luzon and there she continued her schooling until high school. There were factories around mainly in the Export Processing Zone and there were soldiers as well at a nearby military detachment. In 1977 at age 15, she met a man who would later become her husband, 15 years her senior.

When her husband was assigned to the Bicol region, one of the hot beds of Communist insurgency, Amy followed him. She recalled one encounter between the military forces and the insurgents, where almost all the soldiers were wiped out and there she was, a witness to it all. She escaped death only because she jumped into a fox hole just in time. But Amy fell into a state of shock and had to be hospitalised. It took a month before she could regain her speech. Amy's husband was transferred to another military camp, this time in Camp Aquino, Tarlac province. Meanwhile, their first child was born.

A niece who was then working in Qatar, encouraged Amy to also try her luck abroad. She thought it was a nice idea and her husband agreed to her traveling. She was only 24 years old then. The agency working on her papers had to adjust her age to 30 as this was the minimum age requirement then for those seeking jobs in the Middle East. According to Amy, she did not have any concrete or definite plans for her stay/work abroad. When she left on October 22, 1987, her eldest child was about 5 years old and the second, just about 2 years. Her husband's aunt was called to take care of the children.

In Qatar, Amy worked for a Palestinian family with five children. Her air ticket and visa fees were paid for by the employer. The family treated her very well. She started with a monthly salary of $150 and this was raised to $200. Every month, she would remit about $100-$150 dollars to her husband back in the Philippines. One child in the family where she worked for, was a disabled and so apart from being a house keeper, she was also a nurse to the child. Amy also served as a tutor to the other children. The employers were very satisfied

with her work and she was well liked. 'They liked me because I was honest and I took very good care of the disabled child'. But Amy developed back pain because of constant carrying of the child. She could not eat well and became weak. After completing her two-year contract, she bid them good-bye. 'They cried when I left', said Amy. They gave her gifts including jewelry. They purchased a first class air ticket for her. But because of back breaking work, Amy did not return to work for this family.

Her second trip abroad was to Saudi Arabia where she was hired directly by a couple, a teacher and an engineer with two sons. She only worked for 7 months since she was unhappy and was not treated well. She was locked in and the employers did not even care to mail her letters home. Amy also experienced some kind of sexual harassment from the male employer. She returned to the Philippines with only one bag to carry. She rested for three months and wanted to go abroad again. 'There were debts to pay', she expressed.

Kuwait was her third country of sojourn. She worked for a pilot-stewardess (Kuwaiti-Egyptian) couple in a household where there were several housekeepers, drivers and attendants. She was the personal assistant to the stewardess. She showered her with gifts and even took her for a cruise to the Nile River in Egypt.

The otherwise happy state of employment was shattered when one night, when every one was away (domestic staff on holiday and pilot's wife was abroad) except Amy, the male employer returned home unexpectedly, burst into Amy's room, and attempted to rape her. Amy escaped by climbing out of the window and ran to the nearby Philippine Embassy and was given shelter for a couple of nights. She had to run away too from the Embassy because the Filipino woman who she thought was trying to help, started procuring local men for Amy to service. Amy castigated her and others in the Embassy. 'What kind of co-Filipinos are you? I thought you are here to help. If I do not overcome my difficulty, God up there will take care of you (or will do justice for how you have treated me)'.

Because Amy ran away from her employer, she was brought to a police precinct and then to a detention centre. Food provided was good (at least initially) and the centre had adequate shower facilities, and others.

She was also allowed to retrieve her belongings from the employer's house. The police interviewed her for an hour and a hearing ensued shortly after. Amy stressed that the employer lied during the hearing. 'He claimed he was seduced by me. But I had bruises all over my body when I jumped out of the window. During the court hearing, I realised and I told myself, you cannot win if you are a foreigner, a woman and a domestic helper'.

It took 6 months for Amy's release papers to be issued . Within this period, she became close to other Filipino women in the detention centre. According to Amy, they bonded together into one support group and they looked up to her as an older sister, a leader of the group. Every day, after the 6 pm dinner, they prayed together, they comforted each other and shared stories of their lives. One girl was raped and when she made a report, she was accused of adultery instead.

Amy consoled them. 'Don't lose hope, I admonished them. I became a parent to them. We all need to be strong for the sake of our family. We have to help each other. One by one, we will be released. Fight back your feelings of despair. Overcome your fear of not being able to return to our country'.

'There were 12 of us in a group. The authorities placed us in an underground detention place. Food served was almost uncooked, we had broth with mere salt. We were treated like criminals. People back home do not realise how much suffering and sacrifice we have endured. Husbands just squander money at the beer house'.

'When finally, we were allowed to return to the Philippines, we were brought to the airport in chains; we were pushed, we stumbled and immigration officials castigated us for "bringing lots of problems." Some Filipino contract workers witnessed our brutal departure. They were angry and swore to get back at them (the immigration officials) brutally as well'.

Amy once more returned to the Philippines. The episode in Kuwait was not related to the family. She remained in the country for two months only and she planned to leave again for work abroad. This time she had a goal set—to build a house and since her children were already in school, she also wanted to earn and save for their continued education.

Lebanon was her fourth and last destination. Altogether, she worked for six years and had two employers: the first did not treat her well and the second, for whom she worked for five years, treated her very well and even wanted to marry her. She worked at the employer's hotel in Lebanon. She travelled with him to Canada, France and Japan where he had other hotel establishments. Amy was the favourite of the 'boss'; she learned to be a good worker and even learned new languages. She had a starting salary of $200 with free board and lodging.

As the family felt Amy had been away from home too long, Amy finally returned after 6 years in Lebanon only to find out that the husband did not manage the funds she remitted regularly. He loaned it all to his siblings to finance their overseas employment and was never repaid. Amy was furious and she rebelled and left home for two months.

'Husband, what did you do with the money I sent you? Do you think it was good to work abroad? I could not even swallow good food because I was thinking of you and the children. What did you do to my life? You did not value my hard work, my sacrifice. I thought our future could be brighter!'

Amy now works as a real estate agent with no fixed or regular salary. She and her husband try hard to raise money to enable their daughter to apply to Japan as an entertainer but policies have changed and it is now almost impossible for her to leave and work in this country.

EDNA

Edna was born in Vinzons, Camarines Norte, the third child in a brood of nine. Her father was a farmer who owned 7 hectares of land planted with coconut

trees, sweet potatoes and rice. The family also raised vegetables and engaged in basket making. Edna remarked that they had enough food to eat and were able to go to school. After completing Grade 6, her father made her stop schooling because he thought that a woman's place is the home and would therefore not need much education. Edna was devastated because she was keen to continue schooling and even dreamed of becoming an engineer one day. She travelled to Manila to join her aunt and started working in the factory and remained there for a few years. She returned to her home town to resume schooling but finished only up to second year high school because of lack of support from her parents. Eventually, she rebelled, ran away and eloped with a man she did not love and got herself pregnant. In order to survive, she and the husband tried their luck in gold panning but failed. They then decided to go to Manila and try to find jobs there. The husband worked as a driver but could not work continuously because of ill health. Edna got herself involved in being a community health educator where she received an allowance of about 70 pesos a day. Whenever she gave training, she tagged the children along mainly to enable them have some food. Life was extremely difficult with three children to feed. The family decided to go back to the province and started to engage in farming but family squabbles resulted in their being driven away by relatives. Once again, they moved to Manila. Her husband was in construction work and she resumed her involvement in health education and family planning counseling. Seeing her difficulties, a friend who was working in Malaysia as a domestic helper offered to help her secure a job and loaned some money to pay her agency fee. Edna maintained that it was a difficult decision to make, to leave her young children behind to work abroad but this seemed to be the only option available to her and so she left for Malaysia. Her husband assured her that he would take good care of the children.

Altogether she had three employers. Edna claims that she was treated harshly by the first employer. She worked long hours and her days usually started as early as 4 in the morning. Aside from doing all the household chores, she had to take care of two small children. Unable to endure her difficult situation, Edna

protested by refusing to eat and locking herself up in her bedroom for two days. Eventually, the employers listened to her complaints and became more reasonable and considerate. After two years, when her first contract ended, Edna returned to the Philippines. She remarked that she did not in fact earn much. What she sent monthly was barely sufficient for her family's needs. She was therefore not keen to return and go for a second contract. She tried to engage in a small business but still, life was hard and the children could not go to school for a year.

Edna entertained the thought of returning to Malaysia to work again and a foreign employer learned about her good work from an agency. She then returned to Malaysia. All expenses were paid by the employer. Her one year salary was advanced to enable her husband engage in business and so with the money, he purchased a tricycle which he plied daily. She worked for six years with this employer until it was time for her and her family to return to Canada. During this six-year period, Edna went home every year and spent one-month holiday with the family. Her family coped well except the eldest child who experienced a heavy burden of having to run the household because his father was always ill.

Edna continued to work in Malaysia and her employment with the third employer lasted for almost two years. She left because of the difficulty of getting along with her.

Edna decided to return to the Philippines for good in 2004. In the nine years that she worked overseas, she was able to save some money to build a small modest house with concrete walls and to purchase a second tricycle.

When asked what she learned most from working abroad, Edna remarked:

'I learned to deal with all sorts of people, to discern what is good or not for myself and my family'.

'With regards to my being a domestic worker, I learned to be efficient, good organiser, good in managing my time and still took care of myself well'.

'The most difficult part of my experience abroad was missing my family, not being able to sleep with my children at night especially'.

What changes in the family were brought about by her absence for nine years?

The children learned to cope and manage by themselves although the greatest burden fell on the eldest child. Meanwhile, the husband tried to care for the children but was most of the time contented with just waiting for the monthly remittance from his wife. Moreover, he got himself involved with another woman and this has, since then caused a lot of miseries to the household. The second son ran away and sought refuge in his grandmother's place in the province. Edna was devastated and at one point, dared to break up her marriage.

It has been more than a year since Edna returned for good. She does not have a regular job. She has engaged herself in money lending. Her husband earns on a daily basis from his tricycle transport. The eldest in the family did not finish school and he now earns some money driving a tricycle but he has since gotten married to a young woman who did not finish school like him. Both now live with Edna and family. Edna's husband encourages her to once again leave the country and work overseas mainly because the children are still in school and have more years to go before finishing high school and hopefully, college.

Ambivalence sets into Edna's mind. She would rather stay back, be close to her family and earn some decent income, perhaps, from some good form of business. She is not sure at all if this can be done. She missed her job abroad, she misses the security of getting a monthly pay.

10
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