

Struggle between Tradition and Change: The Effects of Feminization of Labor Migration on Division of Labor, Sexual and Gendered Roles of OFWs and Left-Behind Husband/Father and Wife/Mother

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The world, with its shifting histories and spatial fields, deals with ethnoscapes, the landscapes of moving persons. Appadurai states that, “the landscapes of group identity - the ethnoscapes - around the world are no longer familiar anthropological objects, in so far as groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogenous” (p.48). These moving groups: tourists, immigrants, guest workers, refugees, our OFWs and others who constitute the landscape of persons in our shifting world presents an essential feature in our world where changing social, territorial and cultural reproduction of cultural identity occurs. Appadurai (1997) extends Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* and call these landscapes ‘building blocks’ of ‘imagined worlds, that is, the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the world’ (p33). Migration impels the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds. More

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and more people and groups around the world deal with realities of having to move or the fantasies of wanting to move. The feminization of labor migration, representing an ethnoscape, ushers in what Appadurai calls a ‘modern moment,’ a dramatic and unprecedented break between the past and present, or an ‘idea of situated difference’ in relation to something local, embodied and significant. Appadurai stresses the dimensionality of culture rather than its substantiality where culture is less as a property of individuals and groups but more as a heuristic device that can be used in the interrogation of difference. He states that “culture is not usefully regarded as a substance but is better regarded as a dimension of phenomena, a dimension that attends to situated and embodied difference.” (p13). Moore (2006) speaks of ‘the Global,’ a concept-metaphor, a space of theoretical abstraction and processes, experiences and connections to the world. The OFW phenomenon represents ‘the Global’ but at the same time demonstrates the value of ‘the local.’ After all, Moore claims that *lives are still locally lived*. The interconnectedness of ‘the Global’ and ‘the local’ where within such domains new facts, connections and relationships can be imagined, is germane to the analysis of the feminization of labor migration and its impact on the division of labor, sexuality and gendered roles OFWs and Left-Behind Husband/Father and Wife/Mother. The *work of the imagination* is a ‘space of contestation where individuals and groups seek to annex the global in to their own practices of the modern’ (Appadurai, 1997 p4).

CONTEXTUALIZING THE TOURIST GAZE

Urry’s (1994 & 2011) concept of “tourist gaze” relates to Appadurai’s idea of ethnoscape where within it are the concept of imagined selves and imagined worlds. The “tourist gaze” that involves a “binary division between the ordinary/ everyday and the extraordinary” (Mackie, 2000) implicates the search for difference, in the issues of division of labor, sexuality and gendered roles in the context of, and as a consequence of

the phenomenon of feminization of labor migration. The concept of the “tourist gaze” leads to a perspective that every adventure, every relationship between OFW wives/mothers or between left-behind husband/fathers and the “other,” and the perceived sexuality and gendered role of OFWs represents an “embodiment of difference” (Urry&Rojek cited in Mackie, 2000). The OFW experience is “to gaze upon or view a set of different scenes, of landscapes or townscapes that are out of the ordinary” (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p2). It represents a ‘notion of departure,’ from those typically encountered in everyday life, and consequently leads to a distinct ethnoscape reality. Urry (2011) further explains the concept of “tourist gaze:”

Gazing refers to the ‘discursive determinations’, of socially constructed seeing or ‘scopic regimes.’ ...One’s eyes are socio-culturally framed and there are ‘various ways’ of seeing. We never look just at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves. Gazing at particular sights is conditioned by personal experiences and memories and framed by rules and styles, as well as by circulating images and texts of this and other places (p 3)

Such gazes are constructed through difference. The gaze in any historical period is constructed in relationship to its opposite (p 4)

The tourist gaze changes and develops in different societies, within different social groups in diverse historical periods. (p14).

Appadurai’s (1996) concept of ethnoscapas and Urry’s (2011) concept of tourist gaze provide a framework to understand the OFW phenomenon, the impact of feminization of labor migration on division of labor, sexual and gendered roles of OFWs and their left behind spouses.

In this paper, I will attempt to illustrate Appadurai’s concept of ethnoscapas in the context of the feminization of labor migration in the Philippines, considering the

dimensionality of culture where issues of division of labor, sexuality and gendered roles are rendered significant through perception, practice and performance. I will interrogate the division of labor between the OFW and the left behind husband/ wife and the performance of sexuality and gendered roles in the context of the OFW phenomenon, and how, as manifested in the various spaces, feminization of labor migration, challenges the traditional gender ideology and destabilizes Filipino families.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE OFW PHENOMENON

The Philippines is renowned as a major source country of global workers. This phenomenon started as far back as the 16th century but where labor migration was mostly about Filipinos responding to opportunities abroad and made their own arrangements. *'In the 1970s, it was the Philippine government who initiated an "Overseas Employment Program" to place Filipino workers in overseas jobs. The country faced rising unemployment, serious foreign-debt problems and the need to bring in scarce foreign exchange (Yang, 2004).* The Marcos administration embarked an aggressive labor export program as a temporary measure to reduce unemployment and help the declining economy. What was intended to be temporary became a permanent one as successive governments after Marcos pursued the same labor export policy. The migration of Filipinos to work in other countries has been a source of both blessing and concern. On one hand, ordinary Filipinos enjoy economic benefits. On the other hand, the social costs are a cause of great concern. The OFW phenomenon produces shifting historical contexts and spatial fields out of which new practices and challenges on gender and sexuality have emerged.

REASON FOR MIGRATION

Education for the children is the most frequently cited reason for parents to work abroad. Several studies (Ofreneo & Samonte 2005; Yang, 2004) indicated that among the major

spending priorities of migrant remittances by families is the children's education. It was even more than what was set apart as capital for business, purchase of a house and lot and cash savings all combined (Sampa, 2010). Many are attracted by jobs with salaries that exceed those in the country. OFWs are pushed to make the sacrifice to leave their family behind to meet their family's financial needs not only on their children's education, but health and everyday needs as well. Others leave because there are no more jobs available in the country. There are studies among middle class families, however, that show that reasons for migration are more for mobility rather than survival. The decision to leave is to provide for the family and build a better future for the children, ironically however, the source of blessing is also the source of countless problems and anxieties about the consequences of separation of families. Remittances have built homes, supported children's education and established businesses. It means revenues for the country and a major source of foreign exchange. On the other hand, the social costs are a cause of great concern. There are concerns about the safety and protection of Filipinos abroad. There are anxieties about the consequences of separation for families. There are concerns about what kind of adults will result from children who grow up without mothers, fathers or both. The economic benefits cannot be denied but the social costs and consequences may be irreversible if government and Philippine society fail to fully consider the future where citizens have grown to be adults without the guidance and presence of parents in their growing up years.

Children are biyayang Diyos and sources of kaligayahan. Socialization practices are characterized by pag-aaruga, pananagutan and pagkamatapat. The traditional gender division of labor in the family relegates men as the haligi ng tahanan (pillar of the home) while women as the ilaw ng tahanan (light of the home).

THE CRACKS: CHANGING STRUCTURES OF THE FILIPINO FAMILY

The OFW phenomenon has brought many changes in the traditional Filipino family. Jocano (1998) describes the family, ideally composed of father, mother and children, as the center of the universe of every Filipino. The family is the source of everything in life -economic resources, social and religious

guidance, psychological assistance, care for the elderly, and help in times of crisis. Filipino cultural values characterize the family having strong family ties and connectedness. The family, as the building bloc of Philippine society, remains as the fundamental structure to understand the traits of the Filipino culture. Linguistic expressions reveal the rich concept of *magkakamag-anak* (Tagalog) or *kaparientihan* (Ilonggo) or *kabagian* (Ilocano) as buttresses of family solidarity. To the Filipino, family is a source of stable reservoir of emotional support and security. Children are *biyaya ng Diyos* and sources of *kaligayahan*. Socialization practices are characterized by *pag-aaruga* (care), *pananagutan* (responsibility) and *pagkamatapat* (loyalty) to the family (Jocano, 1998; Kintanar, 1998). The OFW phenomenon, however, presents various emerging snapshots of the Filipino family that challenge family traditional ideology. Asis (2004) states that the welfare of the family impels the Filipino to work abroad *risking life and limb* but do remittances fulfill the true kind of *pangangalaga*, *pag-aaruga*, *pananagutan* and *pagkamatapat* that Filipinos seek for their families? Sobritchea (2014) asks ‘what is love of country—sending remittances or raising responsible children?’

Feminization of Migration

The traditional gender division of labor in the family relegates men or fathers to be the *haligi ng tahanan* (pillar of the home) while women or mothers to be the *ilaw ng tahanan* (light of the home) (Parrenas, 2010). Parrenas discusses that the metaphorical reference to men as *haligi* establishes them as breadwinners whose primary responsibility is to provide for and sustain the household. On the other hand, women as *ilaw ng tahanan* “do not face the cultural and social pressure to acquire material goods for the family” rather they bring radiance to the home by nurturing the family.” This cultural value is challenged when labor is feminized and OFW -wife becomes the main provider. Philippine migration has been described as one that wears a woman’s face. Majority of Filipino migrant workers have been women with more than 70%

The body of literature shows not only how “feminized” migration has affected Filipino household and relationships, but also the gender stereotyping of Filipinas abroad as ‘domestic helpers’ in Hongkong, Singapore and Italy or ‘japayukis’ in Japan, albeit this changes as more Filipino female professionals work abroad.

accounted for from 2000 to 2006 (Parrenas, 2010). It is probably even higher today. Sobritchea (2007) reports that more wives and mothers now leave their families behind and, in many cases, become the breadwinners of the family. Pingol (2001) reports that even as OFW wives assume the role of breadwinners to maintain their families and households, they have also taken decisive roles in managing family income and expenditures and help improve the family economic situation and education of their children. Husbands left behind remake their masculinity by taking care of the children while migrant wives remake their femininities by providing for the household.

Women's migration sets a cultural dissonance that leads to cultural transformations. Anthropologist Gamburd (cited in Parrenas, 2010) reports, it "initiates the reconstitution of gender relations and forces the rearrangement of household labor in transnational families." When men migrate to work, they are seen as fulfilling their roles as breadwinners. But women who leave their families behind to work abroad defy the traditional cultural prescription of mothers as "keepers of hearth and home" (Asis, 2004). Literature shows that fathers are not able to adjust to changing gender roles and assume the traditional tasks performed by mothers. Although the responsibility to fill in the void falls under the shoulders of the female kin, it is said that these are poor substitutes for mothers. Literature shows how fathers do not do more childcare as a result of women's migration, how female kin are overworked to take care of the household and how children feel abandoned when mothers leave their children behind to work abroad. The migration of women to better-paying jobs overseas has not changed the perspective of men or husbands left behind on their place in the family, and the entire family suffers (Parreñas, 2005). On the other hand, feminization of labor migration has created a backlash against mothers who have chosen to migrate leaving their children behind. Parrenas (2010) argues that children feel abandoned not because they received inadequate care when their mothers migrate but instead because they have been denied the provision of care that follows gender order of the families where culture renders mothers as the nurturers of children and fathers as breadwinners. Overall, transnational

families, especially those with absent mothers, are found as needing to negotiate more issues than other families (Asis, et.al,2004).

DIVISION OF LABOR, GENDERED & SEXUAL ROLES AND LABOR MIGRATION

Migration also ruptures the gender division of labor in parenting. Fathers are expected to be disciplinarians while mothers the pacifier. When either parent is absent, children become confused about their left-behind mothers becoming strict, while left-behind fathers find it difficult to be pacifiers 'maybe because of their 'macho' image (Parrenas, 2010). Studies convey an inequality of division of labor where mothers can "mother and father" but fathers can only be breadwinners and cannot take mothering roles such as nurturing and caring for children. While remittances contribute to the economy, studies show that the OFW phenomenon ushers in legitimate fears not only of *brain drain* but *care drain* as well. ² In the absence of mothers, fathers cannot always avoid female-gendered work but the rejection of traditional women's work by fathers left-behind indicates that fathers may stagnate gender boundaries (Parrenas, 2010).

Migration of mothers can cause neglect of children who are the future of the nation. Asis (2004) states that "if overseas employment is truly necessary, other family members should take on this task but the mother should stay home to rear the children."³ Former Philippine President Fidel Ramos called for initiatives to keep migrant mothers at home. Ramos stated that 'we are not against overseas employment of Filipino women. We are against overseas employment at the cost of the family solidarity' (Parrenas, 2010). Male contract workers in Saudi Arabia maintain a patriarchal attitude toward women. They believe that married women should stay at home and take care of the household and raise children and that it is inappropriate for them to work abroad and leave family behind (De Guzman, 1993). In a more recent study, Asis (2012) claims the if remittances are the most recognized "development"

impact of labor migration, the host of family problems attributed to migration tends to outweigh the positive consequences. Sobritchea (2007) reports that social scientists, healthcare providers and development workers have raised serious questions about immediate and long-term effects of mothers leaving their children and families behind. Osteria's (1994) study revealed that migrant women especially domestic helpers, expressed fear about their marriages and children they left behind.

Tourist Gaze, Gender and Sexuality

In other families, left-behind fathers reconstruct their identities and eventually accept their roles as 'househusbands' (Pingol, 2001). However, even as women empowerment is recognized through the accomplishment of "reproductive labour" by the remittances they send (Fresnoza-Flot, 2009), the wives' sexual submission to their husbands upon their return affirms the husband's maintained superiority. When husbands become lesser earners, wives feel they need to boost their husband's ego by allowing them the positions of "masters" in bed (Pingol, 2001). In the politics of the marital bed, OFW-wives consider it as a serious obligation to keep their left-behind husbands dominant sexual partners.

The Filipino masculine identity, in the traditional sense, is deeply ingrained on economic and sexual dominance (Pingol, 2001). This is challenged when labor is feminized and OFW - wife becomes the main provider. The displacement of body and space require men to view themselves in a different light. The reconstruction of their identity and eventual acceptance of their roles as "househusbands" is a product of their own interpretation and reconstruction of their histories (Pingol, 2001). Husbands may acknowledge their wives' need for space, even understand infidelities, by "letting her go" that is allowing her to make her own decisions.

In Parrenas' (2010) study, left-behind fathers maintain the position as the primary decision maker in the family. The

OFW-wife keeps within the boundaries of “appropriate gendered, place-based behavior,” a representation of cultural entanglement. While Fresnoza-Flot (2009) notes that migration has not completely emancipated the OFW wife/mother from traditional gender ideology and expectations, Medina (2001) observes that rapid social change the OFW phenomenon brings creates conflicts between traditional norms and new modes of conduct that engenders cultural and social pressures. The UNICEF report (2008)⁴ shows that fathers who are not traditionally geared to be house-bound must suddenly take over the mother-role. While it is true that female extended family may provide sufficient physical, emotional and moral substantial support, the new arrangement certainly disrupts the family, children facing emotional challenges and the risks that their fathers may not be able to look after them the way their mother does. Presence of extended kin may also mean additional separation from the father. The body of literature shows not only how “feminized” migration has affected Filipino household and relationships, but also the gender stereotyping of Filipinas abroad as ‘domestic helpers’ in Hongkong, Singapore and Italy or ‘japayukis’ in Japan, albeit this changes as more Filipino female professionals work abroad.

Urry’s (2011) concept of the “tourist gaze” implicates the search for difference that somehow justifies the OFWs’ choices. In the context of feminization of migration and the OFW phenomenon, the differentiated space and displaced female body deal with seemingly conflicting notions and demands of the sexual self: the “need for intimacy and romantic relationship, on one hand, and the ideal of the celibate and faithful wife and mother, on the other” (Sobritchea, 2007). In his article, *Crossing Border PinoyKasi*, Michael Tan (2007) mentions the need to consider the broader context of OFW sexuality, that in a study by Dr. Sol Dalisay of “cross border sexuality”,

“the overseas escapades of Filipinos aren’t a simple matter of libido. The Filipino is so used to having large group of friends here at home. When they leave to work overseas, they suddenly

find themselves isolated. Incurable romantics, the Filipino will fall in love easily, with Fellow Filipinos, with people from their host country, or other expatriates. Sex will often come in to the picture. Many will deal comfortably with the cross-cultural divide when it comes to sex, but others may have to pay for their attraction—not fatally, we all hope.

Sobritchea (2007) reports that some women choose to work abroad to either escape from an unhappy marriage or a troubled family. The “spatial displacement” brought about by the OFW phenomenon provides the “safe distance from everyday life” that some of these Filipino women seek. Moore & Todd’s (2006) concept-metaphor of space provides the sought respite from everyday life, while meeting the material and financial requirements of the OFW families. These spaces, for good or bad, also invite the tourist-OFW “to enact the desire to cross a threshold, to open a door, or to look beyond the veil” (Mackie, 2000). The experience of the female OFW gives her the adventure she seeks as some married women even declare themselves single to facilitate emigration (Lan, 2006 cited in Fresnoza-Flot, 2009). In essence, the very displacement that engenders problems is also the engine of the OFW dreams of prosperity, respectability and autonomy.

Johnson (1998) argues that gender and sexuality are “neither static nor singular. Rather they are processes that unfold in -even as they create and reproduce-multidimensional sexual, cultural and social geographies.” The performance of gendered roles and sexuality in the context of the OFW phenomenon may be considered as a ‘process of becoming’ where meanings attached to these OFW encounters are importantly shaped by the “tourist gaze” - by the real and imagined worlds with which they are associated and within which they are set.

F. Landa Jocano (Jocano Jr., 2014) leaves a challenge to continue “romancing our culture,” to find new ways to understand and define it, to bridge interspaces that we may

understand our histories and cultural reproductions. These processes of reification are clearly projects of “romancing our culture,” not just forming scientific frames of mind to understand the ethnoscaples we have carved for ourselves but as Jcano put it, a passionate, romantic engagement with our own society and culture. As we function in a world that is fundamentally characterized by objects in motion...ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages, technologies and techniques, we realize the essence of Anthropology, an archive of lived actualities (Appadurai, 1997).

There is a need to emphasize the social cost of feminization in migration for OFWs and their families. Analysts have established poverty to be the main reason for overseas migration. But the UNICEF report (Reyes, 2008) buttresses the fact that deficiencies in governance and resource management in the country are the bottom line causal factors. Policymakers must be reminded that migration exports human beings and not commodities. Outmigration brings serious repercussions not only to government and economy but also to families left-behind and the OFWs themselves. Dr. Diane Alampay, a developmental psychologist points out that “in the Filipino context, when you take the mother away from the family, it is bizarre” (Carandang, et.al., 2007, p4). The OFW phenomenon changes people, values, attitudes and behavior. Government must create programs for families left-behind to lessen the impact of the mother’s departure and absence in the family, programs to help children cope with the situation, build their confidence and self-esteem, create support groups for left-behind husband/wife and children. Eventually, however, government must seriously revisit its migration policy and be reminded that, historically, overseas labor migration was purposed to be a temporary measure to reduce unemployment and help the declining economy. Government must not be remiss in its duty and responsibility to protect family, the source of its human capital, and take care of its citizens.

ENDNOTES

¹Country Migration Report: The Philippines 2013 implemented by the Scalibrini Migration Center with IOM and in partnership with the Government of the Philippines

² Data from Country Gender Assessment, 2008, ADB and ODA GAD Network, as cited in *The Effects of Parent's Migration on the Rights of Children Left Behind*, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Global Policy, New York, 2008.

³ Taken from *Asis, Maruja M.B. Family Ties in a World Without Borders. Philippine Sociological Review Volume 42, Numbers 1-4, 2004:20.*

⁴ Data from Country Gender Assessment, 2008, ADB and ODA GAD Network, as cited in *The Effects of Parent's Migration on the Rights of Children Left Behind*, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Global Policy, New York, 2008.

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