

FILIPINO WOMEN TAKING ON THEIR ENDANGERED, ENGENDERED WORLD*

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to: 1) show the endangered, engendered world of the Filipino women and discuss the role of globalization in the continuation of this endangered, engendered world, and most importantly, 2) highlight the responses of Filipino women to this historically continuing world of burden. It cites statistics from the United Nations and the offices of the Philippine government to validate its position.

Introduction

The Human Development Report of 1995 had a simple but serious message for the world: “human development, if not engendered, is endangered.”

The message was really not new. That human development, the process of expanding capabilities to enlarge peoples' choices to lead lives they value, continues to be endangered, has long been known and experienced by many of this world's poor.

Even just the three essential capabilities of people, namely, 1) to lead long and healthy lives, 2) to be knowledgeable, and, 3) to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living, have remained elusive for millions of human beings in this present world. Other significant human capabilities such as to protect personal security, to enjoy political freedom, to be able to participate in community life, and to preserve this earth for future generations, continue to be just as compromised.

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While noting global progress, the 2002 *Human Development Report* also noted global fragmentations along various human development indices.

Specifically, in terms of economic justice, while the 2002 Report noted that the proportion of the world's people who lived in extreme poverty fell from 29% to 23% in 1999 (due to population growth), the richest of the world's people have incomes 114 times of the poorest 5%. (UN: HDR. 2002) The world's countries remain divided in terms of their differential GNP per capita as follows: 25 high income countries with \$9,266 or more in 2000, 79 middle income countries with \$756-9,265, and 59 low income countries with \$755 or less (*Ibid* : 17-19).

In concrete terms, the 2002 *Human Development Report* (*Ibid* : 11) noted that:

- a) In 1999, 2.8 billion people lived on less than \$2 a day, with 1.2 billion of them barely surviving at the margins of subsistence on less than \$1 a day;
- b) The world's richest 1% of people receive as much income as the poorest 57%; and
- c) The income of the richest 10% of the U.S. population is equal to that of the poorest 43% of the world or the income of the richest 25 million Americans is equal to that of almost 2 billion people.

For health, while 800 million people have gained access to improved water supplies since 1990, and 750 million to improved sanitation, child immunization rates in Sub-Saharan Africa have fallen below 50%. Additionally, while 57 countries, with half of the world's people, have halved hunger or are on track to do so by 2015, at the current rate, it would take more than 130 years to rid the world of hunger! (*Ibid.*)

Even as under-five mortality rate worldwide fell from 96 to 56 per 1000 live births between 1970 and 2000, every day, more

than 30,000 children around the world die of preventable diseases. While some developing countries have made progress in tackling HIV/AIDS, for example, Uganda, where HIV prevalence fell from 14% in the early 1990s to around 8% by the end of the 1990s, almost 22 million people had died from AIDS by the end of 2000 as 13 million children lost their mother or both parents to the disease and more than 40 million people were living with HIV, 90% in developing countries and 75% in Sub-Saharan Africa. (*Ibid.*)

For education, as worldwide, primary school enrolments rose from 80% in 1990 to 84% in 1998, 113 million school-age children were not in school with 97% of them in developing countries. (*Ibid.*)

For peace and personal security, although the 1990s saw a large decline in deaths from interstate conflicts, to 220,000 people over the decade — down from three times that in the 1980s, nearly 3.6 million people were killed in wars within states in the 1990s, with children constituting half of all civilian war casualties and genocide in Europe and Africa killing 200,000 in Bosnia in 1992 and 500,000 in Rwanda in 1994. New forms of international terrorism have emerged, with 3000 people from more than 80 countries killed in the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City. (*Ibid.*)

With continuing global inequality and fragmentation, the world continues to find human development greatly imperiled and endangered especially for the majority poor.

Not only is human development endangered, it is also engendered, with women as the poorest among the world's poor.

The same 2002 *Human Development Report* (*Ibid.*) noted that around the world, there are 100 million “missing women” who would be alive but for infanticide, neglect and sex-selective abortion. About 500,000 women die due to pregnancy and child-birth every year, not to mention those who die or are victims of domestic violence.

Of the world's estimated 854 million illiterate adults, 544 million are women and of the 113 million children not in primary school, 60% are girls (*Ibid* : 22).

Generally, while women spend equal or more working time than males, they earn only about 75% as much as men.

The Human Development Index (HDI) first suggested in 1990 was supplemented later by two other gender-related indices: the GDI (or the gender-related development index) and the GEM (the gender empowerment measure).

The HDI and the GDI would be the same if human development promoted gender equality as well. The greater the gender disparity, the lower is a country's GDI compared with its HDI.

The GEM, on the other hand, differs from the GDI in that it exposes gender inequality in opportunities in selected areas of economic and political participation and decision-making. Specifically, it tracks the percentages of women in parliament, among legislators, senior officials and managers and among professional and technical workers, as well as the gender disparity in earned income, reflecting economic independence.

The 2002 *Human Development Report* showed the distribution of 173 countries in terms of their HDI, GDI, and GEM (HDR, 2003 : 222-229). It is clear from the UNDP data that for all countries, the GDI is lower than HDI, indicating global gender inequality. Worse, women are less empowered, "their voices have less impact than men's in the decisions that shape their lives. (*Ibid* : 23)

Filipino women, like their counterparts all throughout the world, also live in their endangered and engendered world. It is the intention of this paper, through literature review, from *UN Human Development Reports*, and from personal research and experience, 1) to show this endangered, engendered world of the Filipino women and to conclude this section with a brief discussion of the role of globalization in the continuation of

this endangered, engendered world, and most importantly, 2) to highlight the responses of Filipino women to this historically continuing world of burden.

So far, the Filipino women, like their global counterparts, continue to meet the challenges of an expanded, heavier world of poverty and inequality. How much longer they can sustain their individual efforts to carry the burden of an endangered, engendered world should not be the question to ask. Rather, the urgent issue to confront is how soon it will take to alleviate the heavy burden from the strong yet weakening shoulders of women throughout the world.

To answer this, it may be best to consider the following advice of James Gustave Speth, the administrator of the United Nations Development Programme:

Poverty is not to be suffered in silence by the poor. Nor can it be tolerated by those with power to change it. The challenge is now to mobilize action — state by state, organization by organization, individual by individual (HDR, 1997).

The most effective response to alleviate global inequality and fragmentation can only be a collective global effort on all levels, from individual human beings to organizations and government, within and across states. The problem persists: how to translate this advice globally, nationally, organizationally and individually into concrete, doable, urgent action and practice at the soonest possible time and manner.

Otherwise, everyone's world continues to be endangered, and for women, engendered.¹

The Endangered, Engendered World of Filipino Women

In 2000, the Human Development Index (HDI) of the Philippines ranked it 77 among 173 countries. The data showed

¹Engendered is used in this paper as "unequally gendered" in terms of certain aspects of life. —Ed.

that for 2000, the Filipinos' life expectancy was 69.3 years, a high 95.3 adult literacy rate, and a combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio of 82. Gross Domestic Product per capita registered the lowest index at 61% or a value of US\$3,971. (We are using 2000 figures for full comparison of data, and figures before and after as data allows.)

While the 2000 HDI was an improvement over the previous years (from 0.652 in 1975 to 0.684 in 1980, 0.716 in 1990 and 0.733 in 1995), the persistence of poverty and inequality among the Filipino people required more fundamental improvements in the country's development efforts. Like the majority of the people throughout the world, human development in the Philippines continues to be endangered.

In 2000, poverty incidence or the proportion of families with per capita incomes below the poverty threshold was placed at 28.1 per cent in 1997 which increased to 28.4 percent in 2000. This information meant that in 2000, 34% of the country's 76.5 million population lived below the poverty line or a total of 26.6 million Filipinos or about 4.3 million families.

In 1997, there were 4.0 million families or 24 million Filipinos below the poverty line. The poor in the rural areas were most affected, with the poverty incidence increasing from 39.9 per cent in 1997 to 41.4 percent in 2000. (nscb website)

Preliminary results of the July 2002 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey showed unmet minimum basic needs as follows: (See Table 1)

- a) On survival: for 2002, 20% of total families still had no access to safe drinking water, 14% without sanitary toilet, and 21% without electricity; and
- b) On security: for 2002, 28% had houses without roofs of strong materials, 38% without outer walls made of strong materials and about 33.5% did not own their

Table 1

Filipino Minimum Basic Needs (MBN) Indicators	2002	1999	1998
Total Families ('000)	15,925	14,746	14,371
<i>On Survival</i>			
% with access to safe drinking water	80.0	81.4	78.1
% with sanitary toilet	86.1	85.8	80.4
% with electricity	79.0	73.3	72.3
<i>On Security</i>			
% with roof made of strong materials	72.2	70.5	62.2
% with outer walls made of strong materials	62.1	68.1	55.9
% with owned house and lot	66.5	71.5	68.3
% who owned house & lot availed through gov't program ^a	5.1	5.9	6.3
% with lands other than residence	21.5	21.4	18.3
% who acquired lands other than residence through CARP ^b	11.0	9.1	8.8
% with family head who is gainfully employed	81.2	66.2	86.1
% with member 18 yrs. & over who is gainfully employed	93.5	95.0	95.1
<i>On Enabling</i>			
% with children 6-12 yrs. old	51.9	52.7	52.1
% with children 6-12 yrs. old in elementary ^c	91.2	91.6	91.1
% with children 13-16 yrs. old	36.1	35.8	35.1
% with children 13-16 yrs. old in high school ^d	77.0	71.5	69.9
% with member involved in at least 1 legitimate People's Org	26.9	19.1	15.9
% with children 5-17 yrs. old	68.4	69.5	68.9
% with working children 5-17 yrs. old ^e	12.8	14.7	15.2

^a - % to families with owned house and lot. ^d - % to families with children 13-16 yrs. old.

^b - % to families with lands other than residence. ^e - % to families with children 5-17 yrs. old.

^c - % to families with children 6-12 yrs. old.

Source: <http://www.census.gov.ph/data/pressrelease/2003/ap0207ptx.html>.

house and lot. While there was a significant increase in the percentage of gainfully employed family head, from 66.2% in 1999 to 81.2% in 2002, a slight decrease in the number of gainfully employed household members 18 years old and over was noted in 2002 (93.5%) compared to 1997 (95%).

As the number of families with children 5-17 years of age slightly declined, it was significant to note that about 12.8% of families in 2002 had working children, with the proportion of working children in the lowest 40 per cent income group (19%) more than double that of the highest 60 percent income group (8.8%) (Ericta, in *Ibid.*)

Unemployment rate was noted at 12.7% while under-employment rate was 20.8% for January, 2003, GDP growth was 4.6% and GNP growth was 5.2 for 2002. Population growth rate was 2.36% in 2000.

In 1997, the country's GINI coefficient was reported as 0.4881 by the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB). In 2000, this increased to 0.4814. While showing slight decline, this Gini coefficient confirms the reality that income inequality continues to the Philippines. UNDP data show that the richest 10% in the Philippines had incomes about 16% times more than the poorest 10%, with the Philippines' richest 10% controlling 36.6% of total income and the poorest 10% with only 2.3% (HDR, 2002 : 195).

Not only is human development endangered in the Philippines. Like the rest of the world, development continues to be engendered in the Philippines.

The country's Gender-related development index (GDI) ranked 63 among 173 countries and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) ranked at 35. This may lead to the observation that the Philippines is fairing better along the

gender equality dimensions compared to other countries. (*Ibid* : 223, 227)

More specifically, Filipino females have longer life expectancy at birth (71.3 compared to males' 67.3) and have almost equal adult literacy rate (95.1 compared to males 95.5) and even slightly higher combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio compared to Filipino males (84% compared to males' 80%).

However, Filipino women continue to be disadvantaged economically.

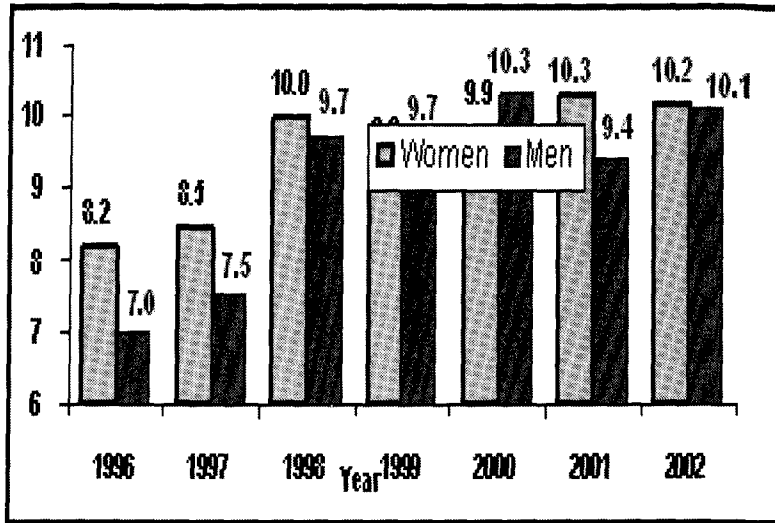
Data for 1975-77 from the 2002 Human Development Report showed that Filipino women worked a total of 546 minutes per day compared to male shorter working time of 452 minutes per day. Females allotted more time to non-market activities (71%) compared to the males (16%). In contrast, they allotted less time (29%) than the male (84%) for market activities.

In October, 2001, there were 54% of women in unpaid work. Women also constituted 80% of workers in public and private ecozones. The women dominated international migration especially for vulnerable, sex-related types of work. (NCRFW : 2002)

Their estimated earned income for 2000 (US\$2,933) was only about 59% that of male earned income (US\$4,994). For the same year, Filipino female economic activity rate was 49.5%, estimated as 61% of male rate. Filipino women dominated services with 61% employed in that sector. However, they lagged behind men in terms of employment in agriculture and industry.

Unemployment rates among Filipino women were higher than males for the period of 1996-2002, except in 1999 and 2000. (See Table 2.)

Table 2. Unemployment Rate for Women Higher Than Men



Source: Labor Force Survey, October, 1996-2002
National Statistics Office

For 2002, more Filipino women worked as laborers and unskilled workers (35.7%), as officials of government and/or as executives and managers (16.7%), as service workers (11.8%), and, as professionals (8.0%), clerks (7.4%), and as technicians and associate professors (3.5%). They, however, were outnumbered by males in farming, forestry, fishery, in trades and related work, and, plant and machine operation and assembly. (See Table 3.)

Table 4 shows Filipino women mostly engaged in domestic/private household activities (as laundresses, maids, cooks, babysitters, etc.), education as well as health and social work industries in 2002. In contrast, men dominated the construction,

Table 3. Women Work More as Laborers and Unskilled Workers in 2002

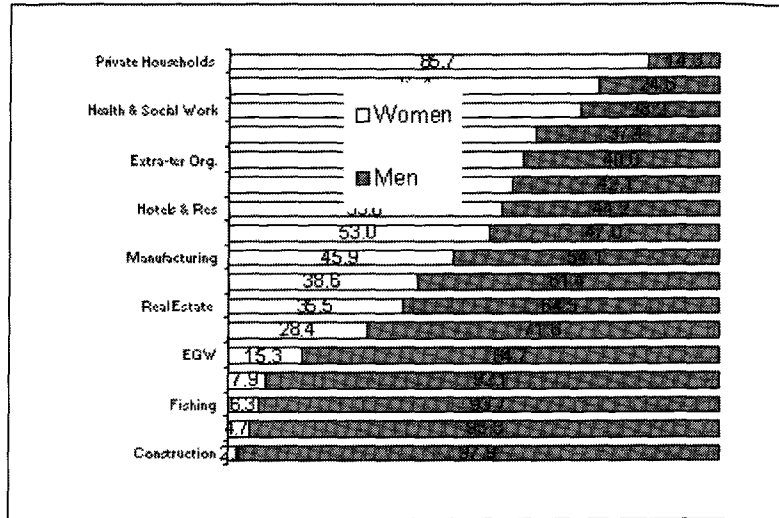
Occupation Group	Women		Men	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Laborers and Unskilled Workers	4215	35.7	4997	27.1
Officials of Govt. and Special	1968	16.7	1404	7.6
Interest-Orgs., Corp. Execs., Managers, Managing Proprietors Supervisors				
Service Workers and Shop and Market Sales Workers	1394	11.8	1227	6.7
Farmers, Forestry Workers and Fishermen	1020	8.6	5264	28.5
Professionals	949	8.0	443	2.4
Clerks	874	7.4	432	2.3
Trades and Related Workers	804	6.8	2159	11.7
Technicians and Assoc. Prof.	412	3.5	390	2.1
Plant and Machine Operators & Assemblers	165	1.4	2016	10.9
Special Occupations	10	0.1	108	0.6
Total	11811	100.0	18440	100.0

Source: Labor Force Survey, October 2002
National Statistics Office

transport, fishing, mining and the electricity and water industry sectors. (See Table 4.)

Politically, Filipino women have a long way to go on the road to power. In 2000, there were only 17% seats in Congress held by Filipino women and only 35% of female legislators, senior officials and managers.

Table 4. More Women Engaged in Activities of Private Households, Education, Health and Social Work Industries in 2002



Source: Labor Force Survey, October 2002

Although they received their right to vote and to run for election early, in 1937, for 2001, there were only 7.7% women in the Senate, 16.7% in Congress, 19.5% as governors, 13% as Vice-governors, 16.5% as board members, 15.6% as mayors, 12.4% as vice-mayors, and 17.4% as councilors. In 2001, there were 21.4% Filipino women incumbent judges in Philippine courts. (*Ibid.*)

Finally, in terms of health, maternal mortality rate was 172 per 100,000 births in 1998. For the same period, the percent of obese among women (4.4) was higher than the males (2.1) and the per cent of underweight among women (40.9) higher than males (35.3) (NSCB website). Economist Ermi Amor Figueroa Yap estimated that 3.6 million Filipino women and girl children

experience physical harm at home while about 1.125 million have been raped. (In Mission, 1999)

Globalization and the Feminization of Poverty

There is wide consensus that the continuing process of endangered and engendered development is caused by globalization, the term used to “refer to the rapidly accelerating integration of many local and national economies into a single global market, regulated by the World Trade Organization, as well as to the political and cultural corollaries of this process.” (Jaggar, n.d.)

Starting from policies of colonization and neo-colonization which affected nations, classes and races, today's neo-liberal policies of liberalization, deregulation, and privatization have intensified the poverty of the world's majority, (Alquitas, n.d.) affecting women in particular.

According to Rosalinda Pineda-Ofreneo, the Philippine Government's compliance with stabilization and structural adjustment measures imposed by World Bank and the International Monetary Fund explain why Filipino women remain poor. (PBSB Bulletin, second issue)

As a result, Filipino women continue to experience the following serious problems (Repro watch, 1998):

- 1) increasing unemployment and poor working conditions,
- 2) continuing displacement in agriculture and increasing decline in incomes of rural women,
- 3) increasing feminization of migration and deployment of Filipino women migrants,
- 4) unabated prostitution and trafficking in women (related to rural poverty and unemployment, as well as migration of vulnerable and unprotected women workers),

- 5) substantial curtailment of investments in health, education, and other social needs and services,
- 6) limited participation of women in politics and public policy,
- 7) poor access and utilization of environmental resources, and,
- 8) worsening of the conditions of the girl-child.

Filipino Women's Responses To Their Enlarged World of Burden

Historically, women were first confined to their homes, rendering unpaid, unremunerated reproductive labor. Their empowerment as human beings required the expansion of their capabilities beyond the home. As women ventured out, however, to render productive labor and to participate in their community, organizations, or societies, they still continued to render unpaid reproductive labor. Even their productive labor and political participation, however, were not valued as much as their male counterparts. This process of the feminization of poverty, inequality and exclusion continue until today.

Pre-colonial Filipino women were active, not only at home but in their communities as well. Their economic and political status was equal, and in some cases, even higher than men.

Colonization confined them to reproductive labor and to their limited domestic world. During the Spanish colonization period, Filipino women were excluded from politics and even education at the start. When they were allowed to study, their subjects were mainly home-related.

Public education and suffrage were granted to Filipino women and men during the American colonization. However, economic and gender inequality became more pronounced. Human development also started to become endangered with colonization.

Beyond colonization, up to the present, as was shown earlier, poverty and inequality continue to make survival difficult for Filipinos, especially the women.

Historically, Filipino women, like their global counterparts, have responded to their endangered world along certain dimensions. (PBSP Bulletin, *op.cit.*)

- A. On Personal Level, for the sake of their household,
- i. They have to assume burden upon burden upon burden, of unremunerated reproductive labor at home, of lowly paid productive labor, and of still male-dominated political participation (the so-called multiple burden of women);
 - ii. They have to work more (those with regular jobs do side jobs like teachers selling items within the school or laundry women doing more laundry in more homes),
 - iii. They have to extend their productive labor time to earn more, and,
 - iv. They have to expand their space of productive work through migration or extend their reproductive labor beyond their family of origin through international migration.

As Filipino women assume the responsibility of survival not only for herself but more for her household, her social self expands at the expense of her constricting private person. Physically, women and girls find themselves eating less, and more underweight than men as earlier noted. Graphically, women find their private spaces become more limited, their physical bodies more emaciated, their private time limited as their responsibilities and labour for others (their households, their employers, their communities and societies). (See Figures 1-3). *Expanding World of Filipino Women 1 and 2*).

Fig. 1: The Initial Expanded World of Filipino Women

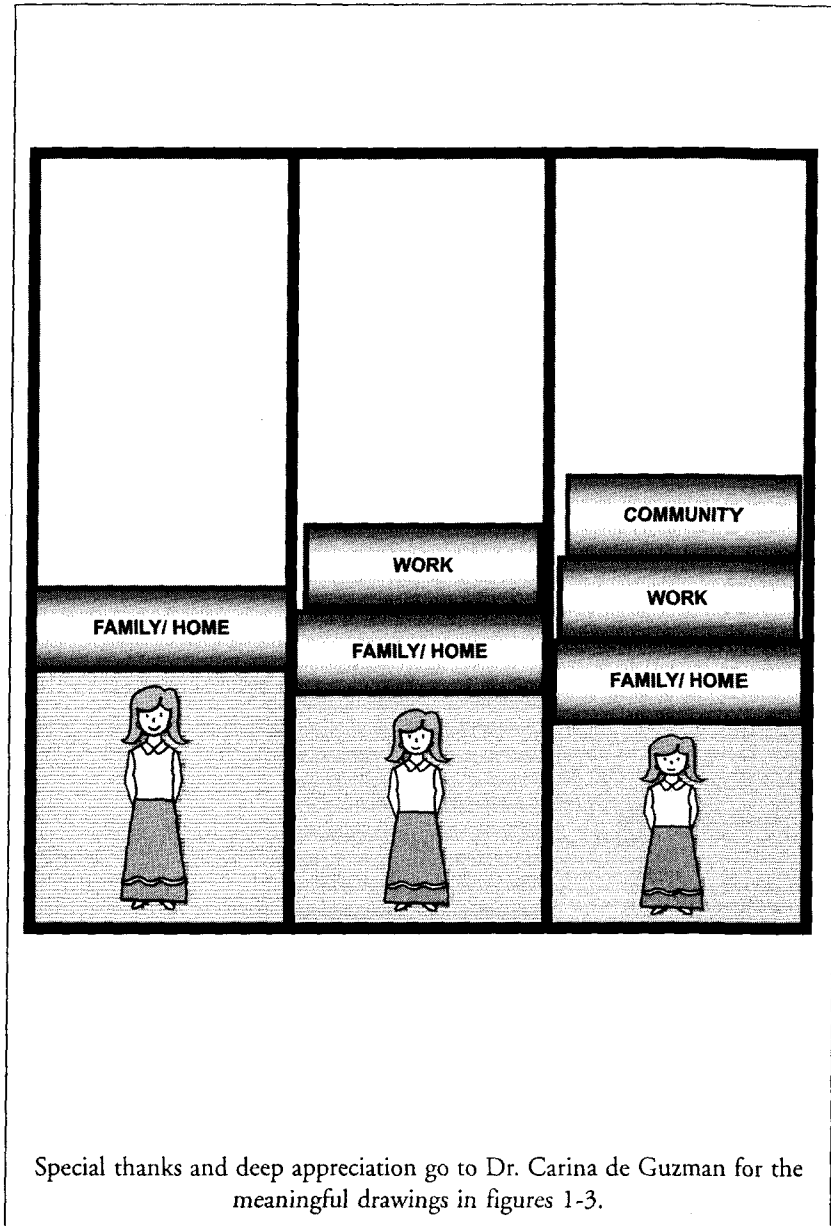


Fig. 2: The Continuing Expanding World of Filipino Women

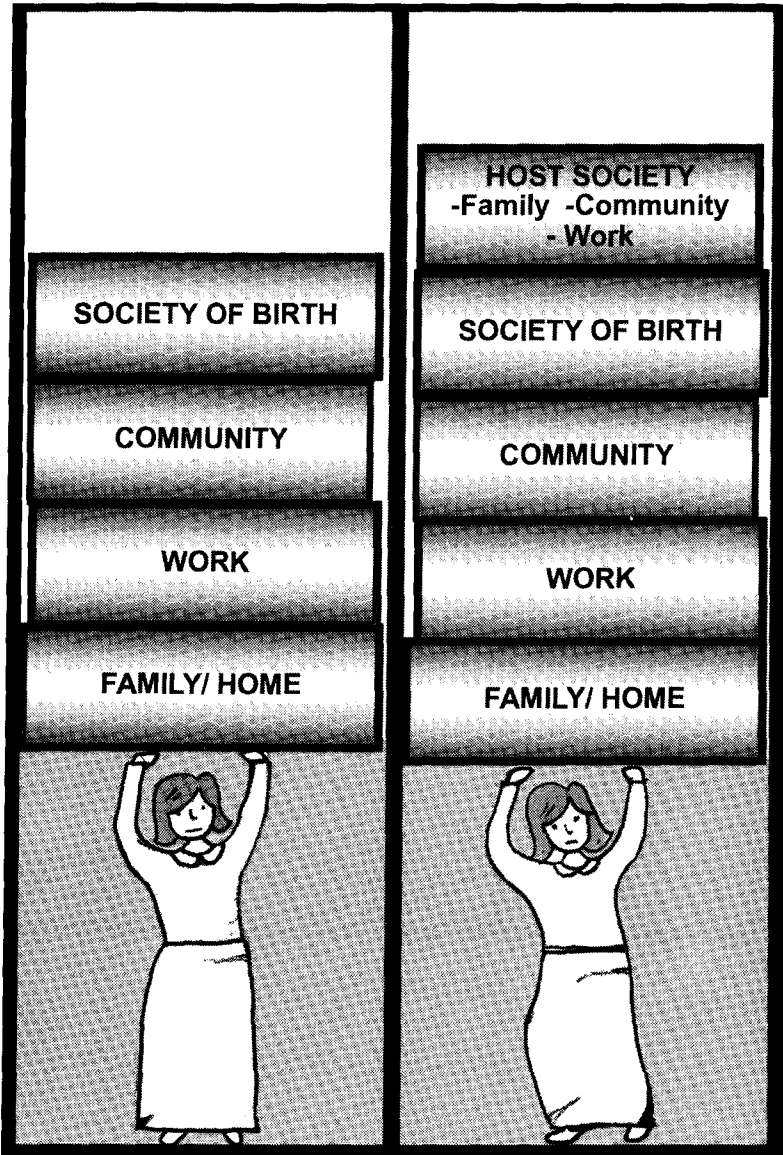
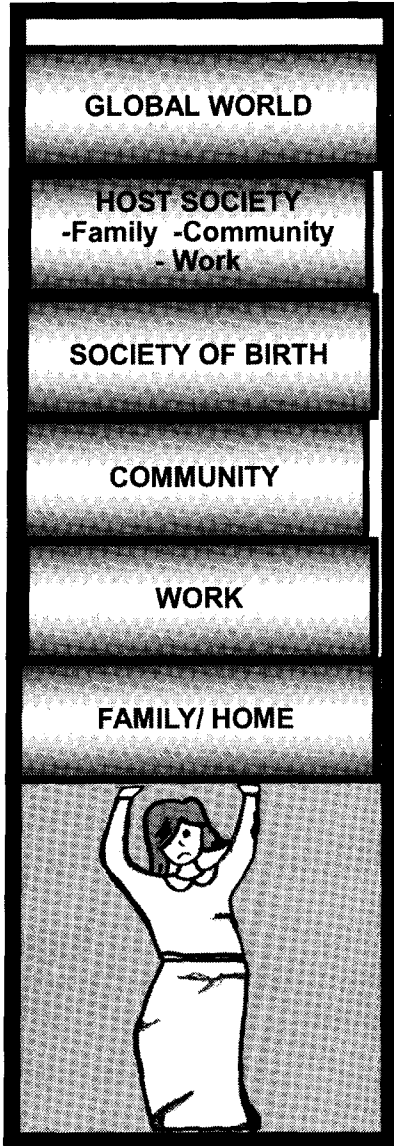


Fig. 3: Present Engendered and Endangered World of Filipino Women.



With globalization, Filipino women migrants find themselves with the additional burden of the global world (and its corresponding multiple burdens) superimposed on their previous multiple burdens in their country of origin. (See Figure 3). Those who become foreign brides now assume responsibility for at least two households, one in their present foreign host country and the other, in their country of origin. As foreign migrants, race is an additional factor adding weight to their burden of class and gender inequality. They have become, as Rhacel Parrenas described, “servants of globalization.” (Parrenas, 2001)

B. Household Level, among others,

- i. mobilization of more members for productive work,
- ii. more working children,
- iii. interrupted education for children,
- iv. sharing of meager resources, and,
- v. chain migration (within national and international boundaries).

In order to survive, no one in the impoverished household can escape the responsibility of whatever type of labor one can share, either within or outside of the Philippines. Age and gender are not exempt from the struggle for survival. Whatever limited resources are available, these have to be shared within the household. However, as discussed earlier, females are most likely the ones to carry the burden of poverty and survival within households.

C. Organizationally and Structurally, in unity, there is strength locally and globally

- i. Women have formed or joined unions, neighborhood associations and organizations,

- ii. They have forged partnerships with NGO/GOs, academe, media, and other sectors,
- iii. They have demanded local and international legislation and policies addressing women's rights and redress of their present plight, and,
- iv. They have opted out of mainstream society and have joined underground movements aimed at toppling and taking over present oppressive regimes.

While efforts on this higher level are observed, there is still a need to challenge more women to go to this level of collective response, both locally and globally. This is not an easy task, however, as most women are busily engaged and preoccupied with daily survival of their households.

What is evident is that Filipino women, like all other women elsewhere, remain undaunted despite their heavier, expanded burdens. They refuse to give up. They seem to thrive on crises, outliving men by several years. However, they are getting wearier and their private space and time, getting more and more limited. How much longer will they need to carry the burden of the whole world on their tired shoulders and bodies?

Not much longer, women cry out, not much longer.

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