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## **GLOBAL MIGRATION PERSPECTIVES**

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### **Gender dimensions of international migration**

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## **Global Commission on International Migration**

In his report on the 'Strengthening of the United Nations - an agenda for further change', UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan identified migration as a priority issue for the international community.

Wishing to provide the framework for the formulation of a coherent, comprehensive and global response to migration issues, and acting on the encouragement of the UN Secretary-General, Sweden and Switzerland, together with the governments of Brazil, Morocco, and the Philippines, decided to establish a Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM). Many additional countries subsequently supported this initiative and an open-ended Core Group of Governments established itself to support and follow the work of the Commission.

The Global Commission on International Migration was launched by the United Nations Secretary-General and a number of governments on December 9, 2003 in Geneva. It is comprised of 19 Commissioners.

The mandate of the Commission is to place the issue of international migration on the global policy agenda, to analyze gaps in current approaches to migration, to examine the inter-linkages between migration and other global issues, and to present appropriate recommendations to the Secretary-General and other stakeholders.

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Potential contributors to this series of research papers are invited to contact the GCIM Secretariat. Guidelines for authors can be found on the GCIM website.

## **Introduction**

This paper addresses the question ‘how can or should we understand the gender dimensions of international migration? Different approaches are not necessarily ‘better’ or ‘worse’ than one another, but different in the way gender is conceptualized and analysed. I will concentrate on international migration originating in developing countries. After introducing some important theoretical and empirical elements related to gender and migration, I will discuss the different types of causal relationships between gender and migration and suggest a framework for analysis. This is followed by a case study of research on migration from the Philippines, where I present four very different research approaches. Finally, I present a set of principles to guide analyses of gender and migration.

This paper does not specifically address trafficking in persons. Trafficking is a specific form of migration that is often inextricably linked to exploitative gender relations, most obviously in the case of trafficking for prostitution. While trafficking is undeniably a key aspect of the gender dimensions of international migration, the purpose of this paper is to accentuate the gendered nature of international migration more generally.

## **The changing realities of gendered migration**

During the past couple of decades, the gender balance of international migration flows has developed in response to factors such as immigration legislation, gender-selective demand for foreign labour, and changing gender relations in countries of origin. Different factors have often worked together to increase the share of women in migration flows. As a result, the feminization of migration has been recognized as a tendency at the global level (Castles and Miller 2003:67). Women today make up nearly half of all international migrants. One reason is that family and refugee migration, in which women usually outnumber men, have grown in importance *vis-à-vis* labour migration. Another reason is that more women migrate independently for work purposes.

Alongside women’s increasing participation in conventional labour migration, specifically female forms of migration have emerged. These include the commercialized migration of domestic workers (sometimes labelled ‘the maid trade’), the migration and trafficking of women in the sex industry, and the organized migration of women for marriage (sometimes labelled ‘mail-order brides’).

The existence of gender-specific economic niches for immigrants and the tendency of migration to sustain itself in particular forms has produced overwhelmingly male or female migratory linkages between certain pairs of countries. In Italy, for instance, women constitute 85 per cent of the Cape Verdean immigrants and men constitute 96 per cent of the Senegalese (Andall 2000, King *et al.* 1997).

## **Gender, women and gender relations**

The term 'gender' was introduced to social science in order to underline the difference between socially and biologically determined sex. Gender relations simultaneously produce and are reproduced by social practice. The concept of gender relations encompasses men's and women's roles in society and the way in which these roles are linked to ideas about 'maleness' and 'femaleness'. Gender as a product of socio-political processes produces and institutionalizes asymmetries on the basis of sex (Bjerén 1997, Stølen 1991, Tienda and Booth 1991).

In the context of development theory and practice, gender rose on the agenda during the United Nations Decade for Women in the 1970s (Chant 2000). At first, this was conceptualized and promoted under the heading 'Women in Development' (WID). This mirrored a general tendency in gender research to be centred on women rather than on two genders defined in relation to one another (Bjerén 1997). Since the late 1980s, there has been a growing awareness of this bias, and a subsequent shift from 'Women in Development' to 'Gender and Development' (GAD), as the dominant approach. The discourse on GAD is replete with promises of a new focus beyond the narrow concern with women alone. However, this has largely been a move from 'women *per se*' to 'women in relation to men'. Only recently has there been a call to include 'men as men' and a balanced approach to masculinities and femininities in thinking about gender and development (Chant 2000, Cornwall 2000, Levy 2000).

If the most common weakness in gender research is the focus on women rather than on gender, a second caveat is the danger of essentialism. There is an underlying assumption in much gender research that women-in-general are everywhere oppressed by men-in-general (Cornwall 2000). This is misleading for at least three major reasons. First, women are not always the losers. Certain groups of men are particularly vulnerable to insecurity and marginalization, for instance those who are unable to fill the culturally prescribed role of 'breadwinner' in times of economic restructuring (Chant 2000).

Second, the widespread and narrow understanding of 'gender relations', excludes many kinds of relations between men and women, such as that between mothers and sons, brothers and sisters, and a female boss and a male employee. Rather, it is founded on a model relationship which is invariably oppressive and heterosexual (Cornwall 2000).

Third, gender relations are always mediated by other socially constructed categories such as class, age, 'race' and ethnicity (Chant 2000, Tyner 1996). Being a woman means different things to a young migrant domestic worker and to the wealthy woman who employs her. Related criticism of the universal female subject has been a central element in postmodern feminist thought (McDowell 1992, Peet 1998). This development away from monolithic notions of male and female has led to increasing use of the plural terms 'masculinities' and 'femininities' in gender research since the mid-1990s.

## **A brief history of gender in migration research**

Research on gender and migration has largely mirrored the historical evolution of research on gender and development, but perhaps with a time lag. Traditional migration theory is largely gender-blind or even overtly sexist. In his classic 'A theory of migration', Everett Lee (1966) wrote that 'children are carried along by their parents, willy-nilly, and wives accompany their husbands though it tears them away from environments they love'. In fact, women were nearly always conceptualized as accompanying dependants and therefore not given much attention in theoretical accounts of migration (Boyd 1989, Chant and Radcliffe 1992).

When female independent migration for work was recognized as an empirical phenomenon, it was not given special attention because it was simply thought to mirror the independent economic migration of men (Kofman 1999). In other words, women were not considered because they were seen as either following men or behaving like men. While sex had long been recognized as an important variable in migrant selectivity, this was as an unproblematic basis for classification rather than as a key to the different migration experiences of men and women.

Greater interest in migrant women arose in the mid-1970s. During the following decade, the dominant concern was making migrant women visible (Morokvasic 1983, 1984). Researchers emphasized that not only did women constitute a significant proportion of many migration flows, but they were often primary migrants themselves. Furthermore, women had different experiences of migration than men. Since then, a multitude of case studies on migrant women in different parts of the world have been published. However, these studies have rarely treated gender as a central theoretical concern, and the insights from case studies on female migrants have had little impact on migration theory in general (Kofman 1999, Mahler 1999). While the documentation of female migration grew, this was often seen as a 'woman's issue' and a sub-theme in migration studies.

The publication of 'Gender and migration' in developing countries in 1992 was an important milestone in research on gender in migration (Chant 1992b). In their introduction, Sylvia Chant and Sarah Radcliffe (1992) noted that until then, researchers had rarely done more than noting numerical sex differences in migration. However, the book itself was primarily empirical and included little substantive theoretical analysis of gender. The need to move beyond discussion of the different migration patterns of men and women persisted (Drakakis-Smith 1993).

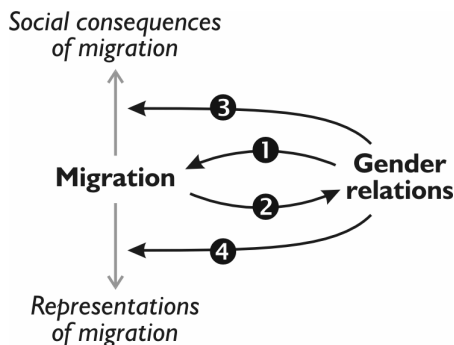
Awareness of the tendency to associate 'gender' with 'women' does not always translate itself into a balanced approach in actual migration research. For instance, a recent collection entitled 'Gender and migration in Southern Europe' contains nine case studies of groups of migrant women rather than analyses of gender relations (Anthias and Lazaridis 2000). Such case studies are important in their own right, but should not be wrongly labelled (Carling 2002b).

Much research on gender and migration has been conducted with reference to 'household strategies'. The household became popular as a unit of analysis in migration research during the 1980s because it was thought to unite micro (behavioural) and macro (structural) perspectives (Bach and Schraml 1982). Sylvia

Chant (1992a:202), for instance, argues that ‘there is little doubt that this is the most fruitful basis from which to elaborate future concepts and methodologies for gender-selective mobility’. It is necessary to focus on the gender division of labour in reproductive as well as productive activities, and therefore relate migration to the household. However, Feminist scholars have pointed out that there is often a tendency to treat the household as a monolithic, altruistic unit, thereby obscuring discrimination within the household (Matthei 1999). In addition, households in many parts of the world are so different from the Western stereotype that they are difficult to use as a theoretical constant in research on gender and migration. For instance, who belongs to a household can be problematic to determine in the first place, and bringing migration into the picture complicates matters further (Åkesson 2004).

Robin Cohen (1997:127) notes that migration scholars are ‘normally a rather conservative breed’. Indeed, migration theory has been slow to incorporate insights from gender research in other areas of the social sciences. In particular, there has not been any sustained dialogue with feminists (Kofman 1999). There have clearly been advances over the last few decades since women are no longer invisible in migration research. However, the frequent use of the word ‘gender’ is not always justified by an analytical approach to gender as a relational term. According to Kofman and her colleagues (2000), mainstream literature on migration continues to ignore the presence of women and express a form of ‘gender-neutrality’ which in reality reflects the experience of men.

Conceptualizations of gender have also reflected the hesitation of mainstream migration literature to accept the challenge of constructivism. While attention to gender as an organizing principle has increased, this has often been seen as a relatively unproblematic question of considering men and women separately. Until recently, few studies critically examined the social construction of gender in relation to migration (Thomas-Hope 1994, Tyner 1997).



**FIGURE 1** DIFFERENT FORMS OF CAUSAL ANALYSIS OF THE GENDER DIMENSIONS OF MIGRATION

**Causal analyses of gender and migration**

In this section, I will discuss four different types of causal analyses of gender and migration. The expression ‘causal analysis’ does not refer to specific methodologies,

but rather, analyses of how gender relations affect and is affected by migration and its consequences. The four approaches are illustrated in Figure 1.

### *Gender relations' effects on migration*

First, there is by now a vast body of literature addressing how gender relations affect the size, direction and composition of migration flows, as well as the experiences of individual migrants (arrow 1). Migration for employment and marriage, for instance, are inextricably connected to the gender division of labour within and outside the household. While early research simply assumed that men migrate for work purposes and women migrate as dependants, more recent research has challenged this and showed, for instance, that many men migrate in order to marry (Böcker 1994, Kofman 1999). The causal relationship addressed in this approach can be subdivided as follows:

Gender influences the degree of choice in deciding to migrate. In many cases, men make autonomous decisions while women migrate as part of family strategies where they are not fully in control (Boyd 1989, Hugo 1995).

Where there is a choice, gender influences the aspiration or desire to migrate. In some cases, the proportion wishing to emigrate might be similar among men and women while motivations are different. In other cases, the share of prospective migrants is different between the sexes. (Carling 2002a, Commission of the European Communities 2000, Mahler 1998, 1999, Wiltshire 1992).

Gender influences the ability to realize migration intentions (Böcker 1994, Kofman 1999). The changing gender balance in favour of women among Cape Verdean emigrants is a case in point. While the proportion wishing to emigrate is roughly the same among men and women, women have more possibilities of legal employment in Europe as domestic workers. In addition, they can more easily live and work as undocumented migrants (Carling 2001).

Gender influences the experience of migration once it has occurred (Chell 1997, Lazaridis 2000). Migration is not only a spatial relocation, but a far-reaching personal experience. Discrimination and racism often takes a different form for men and women. In particular, female migrants often experience sexual harassment which is linked to their ethnic minority status (Estrada-Claudio 1992, Lazaridis 2000).

### *Migration's effects on gender relations*

The second relation presented in Figure 1 is the effects of migration on gender relations (arrow 2). Several studies have examined whether or not female migrants gain improved status as a result of their migration (Brochmann 1990, Tienda and Booth 1991). While empirical studies point in different directions, it is possible to extract the following implications for research:

It is relevant to study changes in gender relation when men migrate as well as when women migrate. Women might, for instance, experience increased autonomy both as

independent migrants and as *de facto* heads of household while their husbands are working abroad (Vasquez 1992).

The effects of migration on gender relations are often contradictory. Rather than a straight-forward improvement or erosion of women's position, the results of migration often take the form of 'restructured asymmetries' (Tienda and Booth 1991). Effects on gender relations may also be different in the short term and in the long term (Brochmann 1990).

It is difficult to single out the effect of migration when gender relations are constantly reconstructed in response to social and economic changes. Comparing changes in gender relations in migrant and non-migrant households does not necessarily solve the problem, since migration often has many-sided community-wide effects.

Features of gender relations that appear to be due to migration may have other explanations. For instance, where widespread male out-migration coincides with a high share of female-headed households, one would expect one to be the cause of the other. However, empirical research has shown that female-headedness can often have other causes (Finan and Henderson 1988).

The effect of migration on women's position must be analysed with reference to the temporal and spatial context as well as to the life circumstances of individual women. Even within the same community, the consequences of migration can be very different for married and single female migrants (Tienda and Booth 1991).

#### *Gender relations' effects on the social consequences of migration*

Third, the social consequences of migration are affected by gender relations (Figure 1, arrow 3). The changes in gender relation as a result of migration is itself a social consequence, but I also want to make the point that gender influences the outcome of migration in other areas. For instance, intra-family gender relations affect the different propensity of male and female migrants to remit their earnings. When many studies find that women send a larger share of their earnings to their families, this must be seen as a consequence of socially constructed gender roles (Boyd 1989, Byron 1999). In addition, gender relations affect the use of remittances in migrants' home communities (Georges 1992).

Another example is related to the sexist bias of many immigration laws which are predicated on a breadwinner ethos. Especially during the guestworker era of the 1960s and 1970s, women were largely admitted as dependants and often did not have the right to work (Kofman 1999, Phizacklea 1998). Without work outside the home, they had a disadvantage in learning the language and integrating into the community. This in turn had consequences for their children.

The point here is that even when the effect on gender relations itself is not a central concern, gender should be considered in the analysis because it is likely to modify the consequences of migration in a wider sense.



### *Gender relations' effects on representations of migration*

Finally, gender relations influence the ways in which migration is represented by scholars, policy-makers, the media, and migrants themselves (Figure 1, arrow 4). I will use three examples to illustrate this:

The typical periodization of European immigration history has a distorting, sexist bias (Kofman 1999). Labour migration was assumed to be overwhelmingly male until the cessation of mass migration, followed by a period of overwhelmingly female family reunification. This representation reflects an expectation of men producing and women reproducing. In fact, many women entered as independent migrants in the pre-stoppage years. When family reunification became the dominant form of migration, many young men entered as dependants. Sexist expectations result in downplaying the roles of immigrants who do not fit the stereotypical pattern.

Another example from migration literature concerns the more general representation of female migrants as dependants. When Zlotnik (1995:230) argues that 'the majority of women who migrate internationally do not do so for work purposes' this is simply based on the fact that many female migrants migrate under the headings of asylum and family reunification which says nothing about their subsequent employment status (Phizacklea 1998). Laws which themselves have a sexist bias might channel women into certain forms of migration, but this does not mean that migrant women are inherently non-productive.

The final example concerns representations of the migration experience by migrants themselves. In her study of Barbadian migrant families, Chamberlain (1997) has shown how gender modifies narratives of migration. Although the circumstances of migration were quite similar for men and women, they represented their experiences differently. Men described their migration as spontaneous, casual, and independent. Women's narratives lacked these features, while they placed greater emphasis on the family context of migration. In her analysis, Chamberlain relates these differences to gender relations.

These examples have shown that gender relations influence not only migration itself, but people's ways of thinking about migration. With migrants' narratives, as in the last example, this should not be thought of as a problem, but as a further dimension to explore in the data. With policy-makers and academics, however, stereotypical views on male and female migrants can lead to discriminatory policies and misleading accounts of migration.

### **Approaches to gender in migration from the Philippines**

I will now turn to a particular case of gendered migration which has received a lot of scholarly attention. By presenting and discussing four different approaches to the study of Philippine<sup>1</sup> migration, I wish to emphasize the breadth of approaches and their respective strengths and weaknesses. The approaches are partly overlapping and should not be seen as incompatible 'schools of thought'. Rather, they exemplify

<sup>1</sup> The adjective 'Philippine' relates to the country, while 'Filipino' and 'Filipina' relate to the men and women of the people.

different possibilities for studying the interrelations between migration and gender in the same empirical context. The studies I discuss can all be related to the framework outlined above (Figure 1). However, some of them concern highly complex interrelations between gender relations, migration, consequences of migration and representations of migration.

Temporary overseas employment has been a vital part of the Philippine economy and the lives of Filipino families since the mid-1970s. The number of overseas contract workers deployed grew from less than 50,000 in 1975 to nearly 800,000 in 1994. During this period, the gender balance of emigrants has shifted markedly, from 30 % female in 1975 to 60 % female in 1994 (Gonzalez 1998, Lim and Oishi 1996). Filipino migration takes place within a clear sexual-spatial division of labour which results partly from the gendered socialization of Filipinos and partly from the labour demands of foreign employers which are predicated on sexist and racist assumptions of men's work and women's work (Tyner 1997). Most men are employed in construction and production in the Middle East. Women are primarily employed in services, 'entertainment' and clerical positions in East Asia. Filipina domestic workers are also found in large numbers in the Middle East, Southern Europe and North America. In addition to the female overseas contract workers, many Filipinas emigrate as 'mail-order-brides'.

#### *Sacrifice and suffering of female migrants*

Much of the research on emigration from the Philippines has highlighted the sacrifice and suffering of migrant women (Battistella and Paganoni 1992, Gonzalez 1998). In addition, Filipina migrants figure prominently in similar types of research on female Asian migrants in general (Battistella and Paganoni 1996b, Heyzer 1994). The common feature of this literature, which I will refer to as the 'sacrifice and suffering' approach, is a consistent association of female migration with exploitation, and a representation of female migrants as victims. There is a strong policy orientation in much of this work, and recommendations usually focus on various forms of protection of migrant workers.

The image of Filipina migrants which emerges from much of this literature is one of a woman who silently endures harsh or even abusive conditions of employment for the sake of her family. In a study of Philippine labour migration and public policy, Gonzalez (1998) includes a box labelled 'Filipina domestic helper in Singapore' in the section about the feminization of migration. An extract from the box illustrates the image of Filipina migrants:

'Norma's duties were vast especially since she had to cater to the whims and demands of several households but she never complained. She said that most of the time she felt both mentally and physically exhausted and just wanted to give up. However, Norma's promise to her family to work hard and achieve her goals kept her from "going over". Norma coped with her day-to-day trials by praying and meeting friends during her breaks.'  
(Gonzalez 1998:96)

Both the inclusion of such a 'typical' story and the particular wording in the story add to the image of female migrants as invariably subservient and victimized women. While the expression 'whims and demands' stresses the unpredictable and inconsiderate way in which her masters commands her, the word 'duties' underlines the moral determination with which Norma conscientiously performs her work. Instead of protesting when she is asked to take on additional work for another family in breach of her contract and in violation of Singaporean law, she silently complies. Her coping mechanisms are introvert and refrain from challenging the circumstances of her situation. The best an abusive employer can hope for, is a maid like Norma who copes with the exploitative relationship through praying and socializing in the duly assigned periods of time.

Gonzalez' (1998) account of female migrants' sacrifice for the good of their family gives an impression of admiration, and he does not question intra-household power structures. Along with several other scholars, he is particularly concerned with the potentially damaging effects of female migration on the Filipino family. Licuanan (1994) paints a similar picture of family life being torn apart by the necessity of migration:

'The need to provide for the economic well-being of her family pushes the worker to a foreign land; in the process, she deprives her family of the social and emotional support that a mother alone can provide. [...] Husbands have not been spared from the unfamiliar pressures imposed by their additional role of mothering even though other family members may be around to help.'  
(Licuanan 1994:107-108)

The point migration will entail difficulties both for the migrant and for the family members who stay behind is easy to accept. What is interesting, however, is the way in which Licuanan presents the husbands' anguish as a result of crossing the sexual division of labour. Migration is presented as a problem because it forces change upon well-established gender roles.

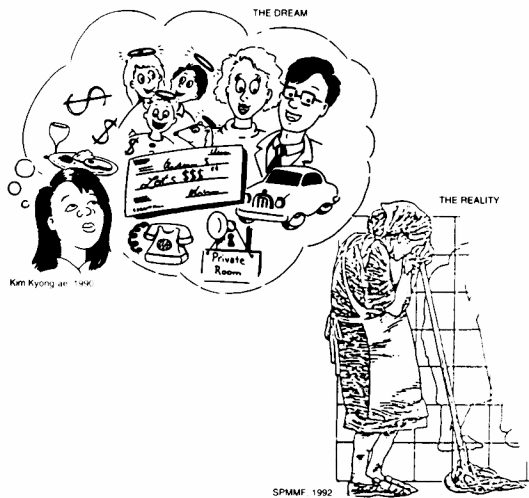
In other cases, families are described as oppressive and inconsiderate *vis-à-vis* the migrant women. The image of sacrifice and suffering is given an additional dimension and the women appear to be isolated victims:

Asian female migrants opt to work abroad under trying conditions for the good of the family, aware that personally they may gain little from the experience. [...] It is not uncommon that after remitting their earnings faithfully, they may return home empty-handed to find that the money they have remitted to their families has disappeared in family consumption. (Lim & Oishi 1996:31)

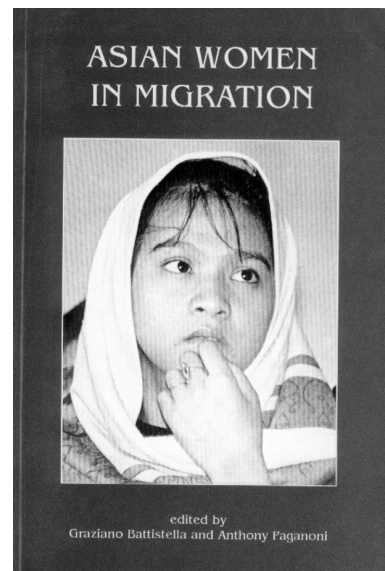
'... the women themselves may not be the ones to profit the most from their overseas employment. Instead, they may end up working to support a network of dependents who, in several cases, have been known to squander these hard-earned resources.'  
(Heyzer and Wee 1994:67)

While there is no doubt that many women suffer in the course of migration, it is not obvious whether female migration itself or the gender structures within which it takes place should be seen as the problem. Battistella and Paganoni (1996b:iv) are typical of the ‘sacrifice and suffering’ approach in arguing that ‘the participation of women in labour migration is not without problems’. Rather than criticizing the gender structures which often make migration a trying experience for women, the ‘participation of women in migration’ is what calls for concern. Gonzalez (1998:92) also represents this view, stating that ‘issues resulting from the increasing feminization of Philippine labour migration are probably the most appalling social costs of the diaspora’. In short, the argument is that migration creates problems because women take part in it.

Figure 2 exemplifies visual representations of the ‘sacrifice and suffering’ approach to gender and migration. Image A is taken from the book ‘The trade in domestic workers’ (Heyzer 1994) and contrasts the prospective female migrant’s dream of wealth and happiness with the reality of despair and drudgery experienced in migration. The illustration gives an impression of a regular pattern in which migration inevitably leads to suffering. Nevertheless, women are continually tricked into thinking that migration is the way to prosperity. In this image, the female migrant is constructed as a naïve woman, migrating out of her own free will, but being duped into a hopeless situation.



A



B

**FIGURE 2** VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE ‘SACRIFICE AND SUFFERING’ APPROACH TO GENDERED MIGRATION.

*Sources:* Heyzer 1994, Battistella & Paganoni 1996.

Image B is the cover of a book devoted to the study of female migration in Asia (Battistella and Paganoni 1996a). While the cover photograph contains no reference to migration, it shows a young woman with a sad expression of uncertainty on her

face. The picture would hardly have been chosen for the cover of a book about Asian women in general, but the context of migration apparently legitimizes the image of vulnerability. Again, the migrant woman is constructed as weak and passive, consistent with the focus on sacrifice and suffering.

*Strategies and resistance within sexist confines*

Several recent studies of Filipina migrant domestic workers have challenged the 'sacrifice and suffering approach' and demonstrated how these women act strategically when they migrate and resist oppression in the country of employment (Chell-Robinson 2000, Constable 1997, Tacoli 1999, Yeoh and Huang 1998).

Through research among Filipina domestic workers in Italy, Tacoli (1999) analyses how international migration provides women with a possibility to balance self-interest and self-sacrifice *vis-à-vis* their families. Migration is an opportunity to see the world, separate physically from the crystallized gender roles of the household, and possibly escape an unhappy marriage. As divorce is illegal and marital disruption is highly stigmatized, the only socially acceptable form of separation might be migration. Working abroad offers an opportunity of emulating migrant friends and relatives who have seen the world and appear 'glamorously modern and Westernized' (Tacoli 1999:668). By migrating, the women are able to pursue such personal goals while at the same time meeting their obligations towards the family. As higher earnings abroad allow them to remit money and raise the family's standard of living, migration is consistent with expectations of self-sacrifice as daughters, wives or mothers.

Constable (1997) arrive at similar conclusions in a study of Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong. In addition to the hardship of domestic work, there is often a liberating element of pleasure, freedom and independence which helps explain why thousands of female migrants continue to leave the Philippines. Simply portraying these women as 'driven by poverty' deprives them of initiative and creates an image of women's passivity which itself is sexist. At the place of employment, Filipinas have developed strategies of resistance within the confines of domestic employment under appalling conditions. Constable shows how public demonstrations, as well as subtle use of language and humour constitute attempts to reverse the pattern of dominance and subservience. Similarly, Yeoh and Huang (1998) analyze how Filipinas in Singapore use their limited opportunities to counter everyday oppression. For those who have regular off-days (28 per cent of the maids have *no* days off) certain off-day spaces have emerged. In particular, they analyze how Filipinas colonize the shopping centre *Lucky Plaza* on Sundays:

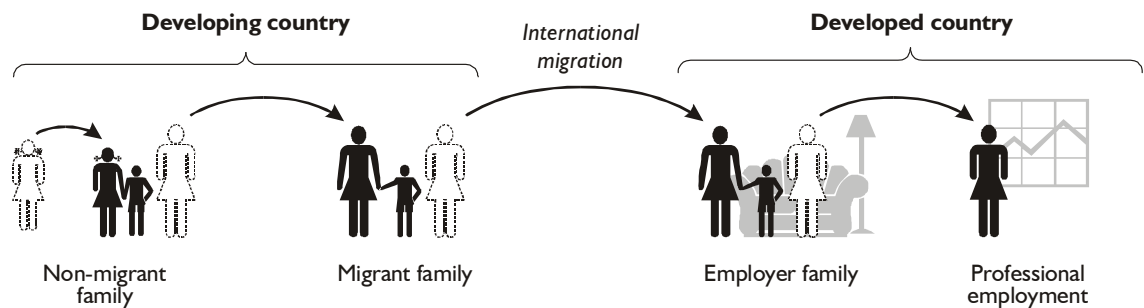
'On a typical Sunday, about 2000 Filipina maids stream into the shopping complex after 10 a.m., mostly after church service. By noon, they have packed the six-storey complex, colonising every nook and cranny. [...] Through the unbridled tone and unbounded topic of their conversation, their boisterous but non-violent outward behaviour and casual disregard for the gaze of others, they reflect a style of resistance in contradistinction to the more

compliant and subservient attitude integral to their daily working routines.’(Yeoh and Huang 1998:598).

Yeoh and Huang do not downplay the oppressive working conditions of the Filipina maids. On the contrary, they provide a detailed account of exploitation, surveillance and control. What differentiates this literature from the ‘sacrifice and suffering’ approach, is the accreditation of the maids’ initiative and dignity as they manage their lives within the confines of family obligations on the one hand and oppressive employers on the other.

### *Female migrants and the global care chain*

Hochschild (2000) takes a different approach which places Filipina migration in an international gender perspective.<sup>2</sup> Her argument is that migration of domestic workers is part of a *global care chain*, a series of personal links between people based on the paid or unpaid work of caring (Figure 3).<sup>3</sup> A typical chain ends with a woman in a rich country pursuing professional employment and finding herself unable to fulfil her obligations within the family. The context of professional employment in industrialized employment still requires ‘finding someone else to deal with domestic chores’. In the past, the professional was a man, and the ‘someone else’ was his wife. Although men take on a greater share of domestic work today, dual-career households feel forced to look for the ‘someone else’ further down the global chain (Hochschild 2000). In this sense, migration of domestic workers is a form of demand-based migration founded on the gender division of labour in receiving countries (Lazaridis 2000).



**FIGURE 3** A GLOBAL CARE CHAIN (SEE TEXT FOR EXPLANATION).

In the global care chain, the demand for domestic work in the wealthy household is met by a female migrant from a developing country such as the Philippines. In the

<sup>2</sup> Hochschild builds her argument on her colleague Rhacel Parrenas’ unpublished dissertation *The global servants: (Im)Migrant Filipina Domestic workers in Rome and Los Angeles*, Department of Ethnic Studies, University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>3</sup> I have chosen to use Hochschild’s original term ‘global care chain’ in this essay. However, a better term would be ‘transnational care chain’ since there is not anything inherently global about this chain. The word, ‘transnational’, on the other hand, relates to a tradition of migration research which focuses on the ‘multi-stranded social relations that link together [...] societies of origin and settlement’ (Basch 1994:7). The care chain of domestic work may well be conceptualized in this way.

early 1990s, there were at least 275,000 Filipina domestic workers in other countries (Heyzer & Wee 1994). Many of these women have children of their own in the Philippines. Given the gendered division of labour in Philippine households, they cannot expect their husband to take on their domestic workload in their absence. Furthermore, the husbands might themselves be migrant workers in other countries. For the migrant women, the solution to this problem is to employ a live-in domestic worker to care for her family while she is gone. Hochschild (2000) quotes an example of a Filipina in Los Angeles who is paid \$400 a week by the wealthy Beverly Hills family she works for. At the same time, she employs a live-in domestic worker for her own family in the Philippines for \$40 a week. This woman comes from a poorer, non-migrant family (Figure 3).

In the non-migrant family, the absence of the mother creates a demand for care for her own children. Since they cannot afford to pay a domestic worker, this work is taken on by an elder daughter while the mother is away. At the end of the global care chain, this daughter enters the role of mothering for her younger siblings, giving her less time to play, study or work outside the home. Alternatively, the migrant's mother cares for her children. Such grandparent fostering is a common constellation in societies of emigration. It takes pressure of the eldest children, but means that grandmothers can experience forty or fifty years of continuous child rearing responsibility.

While every woman in the chain feels she is doing the right thing for her family, hidden costs are passed along and eventually end up with the older daughter in the non-migrant household. As child care work is passed down the chain, it diminishes in value and becomes unpaid at the end (Hochschild 2000).

When a Filipina worker says that 'in my absence from my children, the only thing I could do with my situation is give all my love to [the American] child', is the employer's child getting 'surplus love' the way immigrant farm workers provide surplus labor? (Hochschild 2000:1). The migration of domestic workers is extraordinary because domestic work is traded on a global market at the same time as the 'soft' and personal qualities of affectionate care are sought after by employers and marketed by employment agencies. The combination of the commercial and the affectionate is evident in advertisements for foreign domestic workers in Singapore's leading newspaper *Straits Times* and other papers in the region. In the advertisements, images of smiling nannies and children are coupled with commercial catch-phrases such as 'money back guarantee', 'special package', 'free replacement' and 'excellent after-sales service'. This calls for a combined psychological and economic analysis of the kind Hochschild provides.

Focusing on care chains highlights the way in which gender relations at origin and destination are linked in the migration process. The problems created by the gender division of labour in industrialized countries are not solved, but passed on to other women:

The hiring of a full-time domestic worker means that patriarchal household and work structures can go unquestioned, women pursuing a career and a family need not 'rock the boat' and any guilt over exploitation is assuaged by the knowledge that a less

fortunate women is being provided with work. (Phizacklea 1998:34, emphasis in original)

Rather than questioning the participation of women in migration, Hochschild, Phizacklea and others focus on the gender division of labour as the problem: 'If fathers worldwide shared child care more equitably, care would be spread laterally instead of being passed down a global social-class ladder' (Hochschild 2000:6).

### *Deconstructing representations of gendered migration*

Migration is just one sphere of society in which images are intentionally or unintentionally constructed to make racism, sexism and poverty appear to be natural, normal or inevitable. A fourth approach to gender and migration in the Philippines focuses on the ways in which images of migrants are constructed (Pratt 1997, Rafael 1997, Tyner 1996, 1997). Policy-makers, non-governmental welfare organizations and recruitment agencies all conduct their activities based on certain representations of migrants.

An explicit form of image construction is the labelling of overseas contract workers as 'heroes' and 'heroines' by Philippine governments. This has received considerable academic attention, both from a constructivist perspective and in more traditional accounts of emigration from the Philippines (Asis 1992, Basch *et al.* 1994, Gonzalez 1998, Rafael 1997, Tyner 1996). It was former President Cory Aquino who first used this expression in a speech to a group of domestic helpers in Hong Kong in 1998, telling them that 'you are the new heroes'. By creating this image, President Aquino and her successor, Fidel Ramos, have sought to control the frustrations of migrants and their families resulting from the emotional distress of separation and exploitation (Rafael 1997).

Remittances from migrant workers are hugely important to the Philippine economy, and authorities have frequently been accused of overlooking the human consequences of migration in their quest for foreign exchange (Estrada-Claudio 1992). The construction of a heroic image of migrants can be seen as a strategic response to this criticism.

To a large extent, the heroic image is consistent with the representation of female migrants as passive victims discussed earlier. Non-governmental welfare organizations have attacked the government for failing to protect female migrant workers, but simultaneously promote their own version of a heroic image. When the female migrant is represented in the light of sacrifice and suffering, the heroic element relates to her stoical response to the hardship she endures. This image is exemplified by the winning essay in an essay-writing contest about the role of Filipino overseas contract workers in national development:

[Overseas contract workers] are our unsung heroes who defy homesickness and solitary confinement away from home. These workers ignore the grim realities of their distant employment [...]. (Quoted in Tyner 1996:88)



James Tyner (1996) and Vicente Rafael (1997) have both investigated the gendered nature of the heroic image of overseas contract workers. Rafael's analysis concentrates on what he calls the economy of pity in the Philippine political culture. After the 1986 revolution, the regime of Cory Aquino thrived on the notion of pity to legitimize its claims to power. In short, it was 'predicated on the logics of sacrifice and suffering' (Rafael 1997:276). Cory Aquino herself came across as a stoic widow given to prayer, seeking support from her dead husband and the Lord. 'Her obedience was the basis of her power' (Rafael 1997:276). It was in this context that Aquino encoded overseas contract workers as heroes. Importantly, this happened at a time when they were increasingly made up by female domestic workers and 'entertainers'.

The feminine form of heroism was transformed into martyrdom with the death of Flor Contemplacion in 1995. While working as a domestic servant in Singapore in 1991, she was charged with murder and sentenced to death. Although the case was clouded in controversy and numerous requests for clemency were made, Contemplacion was hanged after four years in prison. The execution triggered a wave of protests in the Philippines, including the bombing of the Singapore Airlines office in Manila (Gonzalez 1998, Mules 1999). Bilateral relations between the Philippines and Singapore deteriorated dramatically, and the Philippine government came close to severing diplomatic ties with Singapore. Contemplacion's coffin was met by First Lady Amelita Ramos at the airport the day after the execution, and more than 25,000 people joined the funeral.

Rafael argues that Contemplacion came to be seen as a symbol of the historical suffering of the Filipino people. The link between her and the nation was founded on her presumed innocence and her suffering in the name of her family. In this process, Rafael, argues, Contemplacion was converted into an object of pity.

That Flor Contemplacion was a woman, and that overseas contract workers by virtue of their subordinate position to foreign employers come across as 'feminized' within the gendered contexts of nation-state formations further reinforced the sense of public pity and outrage. For [...] the question of heroism, at least since Cory Aquino, had less to do with asserting sovereignty than with affirming ties of indebtedness to a network of relations and declaring subordination [...]. In this sense, it had already taken what we might think of as a 'feminized' aspect. (Rafael 1997:277)

In his analysis, Rafael explores complex relationships between gender relations, migration and political culture which are difficult to place within a framework of causes and effects. His work shows clearly that gender should be analysed in terms of socially constructed notions of femininity and masculinity which relate to political and other discourses.

Since Rafael's analysis of the Flor Contemplacion affair, the Philippines has been shaken by the fate of another migrant worker — this time a male. Filipino truck driver Angelo De la Cruz was taken hostage in Iraq in the summer of 2004, and the Filipino government eventually withdrew personnel from Iraq earlier than planned in order to save his life. There were clear parallels with the Flor Contemplacion affair in terms of the government's placement of migrant welfare above other foreign policy considerations, the Filipino public's emotional involvement, and the epitomization of the vulnerability of overseas Filipino workers in the plight of an individual migrant.

Given these parallels and the fact that Contemplacion was a woman and De la Cruz was a man, it would be an interesting undertaking to revisit Rafael's gender analysis.

Tyner (1996, 1997) has analyzed the construction of images of the second largest group of Filipina migrants, namely 'entertainers', or 'performance artists'. These are synonymous terms figuring in official policy. Most of the women who emigrate under these headings, primarily to Japan, end up in a variety of service jobs catering to male clients, including nude dancing and prostitution. Tyner (1996) shows that this migration must be understood as the result of a historical process starting with the promotion of tourism under the Marcos regime. During the 1970s, international tourism was used politically to confer legitimacy to the authoritarian regime.

An important part of tourism marketing, was the emphasis on a cheerful, hospitable people. The Philippines soon became known as a country of beautiful and friendly women. The construction of Filipina female sexuality in tourist guides often contained references to the exotic and primitive. Tyner (1996:83) cites a guidebook which states that 'just a couple of hundred miles from the scantily clad gogo dancers of Manila bars, bare-breasted women of the mountain tribes still live a life of eons-old patterns'. In this way, satisfying the sexual demands of foreign men came to be seen as something natural, as a way of life. The tourist could see himself as 'merely engaged in a cross-cultural exchange to enjoy "Philippine hospitality"' (Estrada-Claudio 1992:405).

Once this image of Filipinas was firmly established abroad, the country became a destination for organized sex tours. In the early 1980s, a number of non-governmental organizations initiated campaigns against the sex tours and were partly successful in combating the business. However, this resulted in a change of venue rather than an end to sexual exploitation of Filipinas (Tyner 1996, 1997). While tourist arrivals from Japan declined markedly during the 1980s, labour migration from the Philippines to Japan tripled from 1981 to 1987. More than ninety percent of these migrants were female entertainers (Tyner 1996).

Tyner's analysis shows how the growth of female migration to Japan was founded on the construction of a particular image of Filipina sexuality. He goes on to examine how subsequent representations of these women in the Philippines have informed policy making. Several cases of abuse and the suspicious death of a female entertainer in Japan called for protective measures. According to Tyner (1996), policy was based on the assumption that there are two types of women: morally deficient unqualified women who are prone to abuse, and qualified performing artists of good character that should be allowed to work abroad. Government efforts to combat abuse, therefore, were concentrated on identifying women who were 'suitable' for overseas employment as entertainers.

In reality, most women who emigrate as performing artists get trapped in a system of debt bondage that makes them particularly vulnerable to exploitation. New regulations have increased requirements for pre-departure training and screening of migrants and passed the costs on to the women themselves. This might actually increase the amount of debt incurred by migrants, and hence their vulnerability to abuse. In his analysis, Tyner (1996, 1997) documents how images of Filipinas'

sexuality have laid the basis for migration to Japan as well as reactive policies on the part of Philippine authorities.

My own analysis of the 'sacrifice and suffering' approach to female migration earlier in this section constitutes a third example of deconstructing representations of gendered migration. The use of imagery (Figure 2) and verbal pictures such as that of Norma (above) are part of the construction of specific images of migrants which again are parts of wider political and/or academic agendas.

Finally, it is important to note that not only women are subject to construction of sexist or racist images. Lin (1998) discusses how Chinese men in the United States have been represented stereotypically as a sexual threat. This image probably stems from the emergence of 'bachelor societies' during the period of overwhelmingly male immigration, and it has been popularized through cinema. Similarly, foreign construction workers in Singapore are often represented as sexually threatening in a stereotype which combines ethnicity, gender and sexuality.

### *Discussion*

The four approaches to migration from the Philippines outlined above represent very different understandings of gender. The 'suffering and sacrifice' approach can hardly be said to address gender as such, but the fate of female migrants and their families. In this respect, it is parallel to 'Women in development' as opposed to 'Gender in development'. Furthermore, the gender relations in which migration takes place are taken for granted, while the negative consequences are ascribed to women's participation in migration.

There is clearly a risk of exaggerating the criticism of this approach. Much of the literature makes it clear that the focus is on women rather than on gender, and surely, this is a legitimate agenda. Moreover, this approach blends into admirable advocacy for the rights of migrant women. Perhaps it is sufficient to note that good advocacy is not always the same as good research.

The second approach, focusing on strategies and resistance, should be valued for the way in which female migrants are treated with respect and without pity. The concern for the well-being of migrants does not, as in the 'sacrifice and suffering' approach, translate into an image of domestic workers as passive victims. Furthermore, this approach offers a much more analytical line of attack towards the mechanisms at work: What goes on within the migrant's family and between her and the employer? Instead of simply labelling these relationships as oppressive it is possible to examine how individuals act within unequal power relations.

The 'global care chain' approach is interesting in its focus on interconnections at an international level as well as for its analytical treatment of the emotional aspects of migration. This perspective puts gender relations at the centre and provides a coherent framework for analyzing both the ways in which gender relations shape migration flows and how gender relations affect the consequences of migration. The consequences of female migration for the family have been addressed before. What is

new in this approach, is the linking together of intra-family power structures at origin and destination.

The constructivist approach has become increasingly prominent in migration research since the mid-1990s. It has been valuable in showing how the construction of images, whether explicit or unnoticeable, can have wide-ranging consequences. Perhaps a danger with this approach lies in the common detachment from the real-life experiences of the people involved. Tyner (1997) and Pratt (1999) are both exceptions in this respect, as they thoroughly discuss the material consequences of image construction for the lives of individual migrants.

### **Steps towards gender awareness in migration research**

I have shown that gender matters in migration research. Not only are migration and gender connected in several ways, but there is a range of different approaches to analysing and understanding these connections. Since these approaches complement each other, I see no purpose in advocating a specific approach or framework. Instead, there is a need to promote gender-awareness in itself. This is not simply a matter of 'bringing in gender' (Boyd 1989) or 'making women visible' but requires awareness of how gender is conceptualized and incorporated in migration research. Based on the preceding discussion of research, I will conclude with seven points of awareness which I think can serve as a means to this end.

#### *Gender rather than women*

Research on female migrants is important in its own right, but it is different from research on gender and migration. A research agenda for gender and migration has to revolve around gender as a relational term. The problem is not that a lot of research documents the particular experiences and vulnerabilities of migrant women, but rather that it is labelled as research on gender when this is not the case. Researching gender also means that men should be given attention, in a comprehensive approach to femininities and masculinities.

#### *Dynamism in oppressive structures*

Gender relations are often oppressive structures, usually with women in a subjugated position. Migration is mediated through such structures, and especially for female migrants, migration can therefore be an experience of oppression. However, documentation of oppression should not be the end of the story in migration research. Women might have little influence over the structures, but researchers should consider how women act within these structures in dynamic relationships with other people.

#### *Gender as socially constructed*

Gender should not simply be a label for sex. The sex balance of migration flows and the different migration patterns of men and women have long been noted. This is a necessary first step towards gender analysis, but there is a need to go further. Migration and its consequences are, as we have seen, influenced by socially constructed notions of male and female. What is understood as 'male' and 'female' is spatially and temporally contingent, and not a universal biological constant.

#### *Gender sensitivity at different levels*

Migration research should be gender sensitive at various levels. There is a need to question not only how migration itself is gendered, but also how gender affects representations of migration. Expectations about men's and women's roles in society have often led to distorted accounts of migration history, in which women are seen as passive and dependant. Also, when doing research on gender, one should bear in mind that differences in men's and women's narratives reflect not only divergent migration experiences, but also differences in how experiences are presented.

#### *Gender as a universal feature*

Gender and migration should not be treated as a sub-theme of migration studies. Rather, all migration research should be gender sensitive. One is bound to miss out on important aspects of migration if migrants are treated as gender-neutral. Since gender relations affect both the causes and consequences of migration, introducing considerations of gender in all aspects of migration can improve explanations.

#### *Gender as part of the picture*

Gender alone is not always a meaningful category. However, it is an essential part of multi-faceted socially constructed categories such as 'female migrant domestic worker', 'immigrant prostitute' or 'male foreign construction worker'. Such categories are constructed not only with reference to gender, but also to age, class, 'race', ethnicity and sexuality. An anti-essentialist notion of gender has to recognize that gender mediates and is mediated by other socially constructed characteristics.

#### *Diversity of migration experiences*

Just as women in general were invisible in much migration research until the 1980s, there is a danger of obscuring the diversity of migration experiences among women. To some extent, female migrants have been made visible in a stereotypical way. For instance, poorly integrated Islamic immigrant women have often been used as surrogates for all immigrant women in Western Europe (Kofman 1999). In short, gender stereotyping is not much better than gender-blindness.

While migration research has not been at the forefront of gender analysis, I believe that there is potential for cross-fertilization in both directions. Migration is a social phenomenon which can highlight many different aspects of gender relations.

Conversely, incorporating gender in analyses can increase our understanding of migration.

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