

Retracing Filipino International Migration: Interrogating Feminization, Human Agency and Transnational Spaces

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In her 9th State of the Nation Address to the Philippine Congress and Senate, the former President Gloria Arroyo implicitly said: “We’re trying to create good-paying jobs in the Philippines so that overseas work will just be a career choice, not the only option for a hard-working Filipino.” This drew various reactions from migrants’ groups that are based in all parts of the world. Center for Migrant Advocacy (CMA) executive director, Ellene Sana, for example commented that “what we heard was nothing new.” Migrante International, also said that OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers) are the government’s “economic sacrificial lambs.”¹

For most Filipinos, these comments are hardly surprising because since its institutionalization and becoming a cornerstone of the Philippine national economic policy in the 1970’s, sending contract workers abroad has never abated. In fact, 1,802,031 Filipino workers were deployed in 2012; this figure has been consistently increasing since 2005. Moreover, in addition to those who are already abroad, close to third or 30% of those who are at home intend to migrate if it were only possible. For most Filipinos then, the promise of the former Philippine President Arroyo of “to create more jobs and not to make migration a strategy of development” remains, to most Filipinos who seek greener pastures and better lives overseas as, empty promises.

An editorial of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, an influential and leading newspaper of the Philippines, asserts that the Arroyo administration has made false claims by saying that the Philippine economy has taken off in terms of social development, infrastructure, jobs, agriculture, energy, and digital infrastructure. But in truth, the editorial added, the so-called growth over the past decade has been service-oriented and consumption-led. Moreover, there is a glaring absence of investments and exports, the traditional engines of “economic takeoff.” What actually keeps the Philippine economy afloat at present is due to the upsurge of remittances from OFWs. Given these conditions, it is clear that international migration, for three out of every ten hardworking Filipinos, migration is still the only option for a better life.

It is within this context that this paper examines and analyzes the Philippine migration flow in general and the social and political issues and implications brought by this phenomenon in particular. More specifically, it discourses the feminization and gender perspective of Philippine international migration by looking at Japan as a host country, focusing on Filipino women migrants, their changing image and their participation in Japanese society. This brings forth a new perspective of the changing nature of Filipino

¹ Rina Jimenez-David, “Sacrificial Lambs,” *Inquirer.Net*, (May 24, 2011), <www.opinion.inquirer.net>.

women migrants, their agency and the processes of how they create their own transnational spaces.

Transnationalism is one the defining features of globalization and international migration. Traditionally, migration was perceived to be as a directed movement with a point of departure and arrival. Migrants were also viewed as people who leave and cut their ties from their countries of origin and then settle and assimilate in their host countries. But with the increased global transportation and telecommunication technologies, more and more migrants are now moving back and forth and have developed strong and simultaneous ties not only to their host countries but also to their countries of origin, and in the process blurring the congruence of social and geographic space. These simultaneous ties are results of the heightened interconnectivity between people and the loosening of boundaries between countries.

Transnational spaces, which are by products of transnationalism may refer to or can be metaphors of the sustained ties of geographically mobile persons, persons, networks, and organizations.² To analyze the dynamics of these spaces is also to understand how migrants, in the process of simultaneous engagement with their countries of origin and host countries, today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. These transnational spaces, in relation to social and political factors, need to be explored as a potential area as to how Filipino migration to Japan may be studied in the future.

The Profile of a Filipino Migrant

Based on the data collected from the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency and the United Nations Report on Migration, the number of Filipino migrants to all parts of the world has reached an approximately 10.5 million as of 2013. This is approximately 10% of the entire Philippine population. Migrants in this number would include asylum seekers, refugees, irregular, temporary, and permanent workers. North America has the largest share of Filipino migrants and Canada and the United States are the top two destinations of the Filipino overseas workers. The Middle East hosts about 2.2 million Filipinos, of which about 91% are under temporary status. Most of them are in the construction, IT, and hotel industries. Asia and Southeast Asia regions remain second to the Middle East as destination for OFWs with about 200,000.

The same report done by the UN shows that there are about 61 males for every 100 female workers. Half of the Filipino overseas workers were below 32 years old and nine out of every ten overseas workers was more than 15 years old. There were more women in the younger age groups, while men dominated the older age groups. More than half of the overseas workers were married and more than half of male overseas workers were heads of

² Thomas Faist, "The Transnational Social Spaces of Migration." Working Papers—Center on Migration, Citizenship and Development, No. 10 (2006), <www.uni-bielefeld.de/tidrc/ag_comcad/downloads/workingpaper_10.pdf>.

their households.

The Filipino Migration: Looking Back

Since the early 1900s, successive waves of Filipinos have migrated to other countries in search of employment opportunities. Migration, in this context, is defined as the process of leaving one country to take up permanent or semi-permanent residence in another. Filipino overseas migration can be traced way back to the 1920s under colonial rule, when the Filipinos worked in pineapple plantation in Hawaii. The movement of agricultural workers later expanded to California, and to Washington and Alaska to work in fish canneries.

From the beginning of the 20th century until the 1970s, the United States was the primary destination of Filipinos who ventured into international migration. Filipinos were then considered as US nationals (but not citizens), and this facilitated easier migration. Many Filipinos, mostly men, were recruited as plantation workers and between 1906 and 1934 some 150,000 Filipinos arrived in the United States, with the majority based in Hawaii. Moreover, US military servicemen based in the Philippines during World War II also brought their Filipina 'war-brides' to the United States. The turning point in Filipino immigration to the United States and the other settlement countries came after the immigration reforms around 1965. Many Filipinos availed of family reunification and job opportunities under the new revamped immigration policies.

Another wave of Filipino migrants followed in the 1960s, which were largely composed of professional workers. They were Filipino nurses, doctors, and medical technicians who filled in skill gaps in the United States, Canada, and other European countries. In the 1970s, the phenomenon of overseas contract workers (OCWs) emerged. The upsurge of Filipino migration, especially to the Middle East, was because of the institutionalization of the Philippine government. By institutionalizing international migration, the state took center stage in terms of policy making in the sending of labor export to other countries. It is during this time that international migration became a backbone of the Philippine economy. The Marcos administration thought that deploying Filipino workers to the Middle East to take advantage of the oil-boom would temporarily solve the growing unemployment rate in the country.

The often accepted traditional push-pull theory of migration can be used to explain this upsurge. Middle East countries needed cheap labor to meet the demands of construction, health care, and domestic work while for the Philippines, sending Filipinos to Middle East countries would somehow alleviate the unemployment problem. In 1978, the Labor Code was amended, declaring the participation of licensed, private, and fee charging agencies in the recruitment and placement of Filipino workers for local and overseas jobs. Thus, what the government deemed to be a temporary measure to solve unemployment during the 1970s became somewhat a permanent fixture in the Philippine's economic policy.

Corazon Aquino's administration saw a changing image of the Filipino migrants.

Called as overseas contract workers (OCWs)—which was later changed to Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) to designate temporary Filipino migrant workers registered with the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA), these migrants were hailed as “the new heroes” by virtue of the remittances that they sent to the Philippines. The Philippine government created agencies and institutions that would facilitate sending of remittances, ensuring the flow of information and communication and co-opting with overseas communities to facilitate the integration of these migrants to the Philippine development even if they are outside the country.

It is in Ramos presidency where laws on overseas migration were passed by the legislative branch of the government. Overseas migration gained a new perspective and became a controversial issue with the hanging of Flor Contemplacion, a domestic helper in Singapore who was accused by her employer of killing another Filipino maid and the son of her employer. Despite pleas from the Philippine government for review of trial and leniency, the Singaporean government hanged Flor Contemplacion. She then became a symbol of the oppressed Filipino migrants and militant groups demanded that the Philippine government should do more to ensure the rights and protect the working conditions of the OFWs in all parts of the world.

As a response, the Republic Act 8042 or what is known the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995 was promulgated by the Philippine government. The act stipulates that the government “does not promote overseas employment as a means to sustain economic growth and achieve national development” and that it should only be made an option to the Filipino people.³ Also, this law was adopted to institute policies on overseas employment and establish a high standard of protection and promotion of the welfare of migrant workers, their families, and overseas Filipinos in distress. The government claimed that the adoption and implementation of this law resulted into increased benefits and services to overseas Filipino workers and their families. Under the said law (RA 8042), the government enacted a framework to promote the welfare of migrant workers and instituted concrete programs to assist them in their difficulties abroad. The Government created agencies such as the POEA and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) to address the continuing needs of overseas Filipino workers.

The promulgation of these laws and the establishment of these agencies are testaments that the Philippine government has no intention of changing its policies when it comes to international migration. In the process, this makes the billions of remittances from Filipino migrants all over the world an essential factor in economic development and the institutionalization of international migration as a saving grace of a perpetually ailing economy.

³ *Republic Act No. 8042, Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995*, <<http://www.poea.gov.ph/rules/ra8042.html>>.

The Filipino Migration: Its Causes and Impacts

There are, however, social costs that the Philippines must bear in the process of looking at international migration from this perspective.⁴ This concern may stem from the fact that most Filipinos want to go abroad and even young students are now choosing careers that would facilitate and enable them to go abroad via a much easier route. Coronel argues that if this trend persists, then it would result to a country where its people envision their future elsewhere, thus eroding their sense of nationalism and reflecting a failure of governance.

There is also a lot of concern about the negative influences of migration to the Filipinos' sense of values. Parents, who are away, and who leave their children to their relatives try to compensate for their absence by sending money and gifts, thereby promoting the value of materialism among Filipino members. Reliance on remittances, not only by the households and families, but also by the entire country has sown anxieties about dependency on overseas employment, raising questions about self-reliance, sustainable development, and dependency on temporary employment. This may leave the Philippine economy in a very vulnerable situation, exposing it to external risks such as conflicts economic reversals or political changes in the countries of destination.⁵ These factors may result in hazardous conditions for OFWs such as they may be repatriated back to the country and once repatriated, they face uncertainty and unemployment because the Philippine economy cannot absorb the massive number of the repatriated workers.

The migration of Filipinos to all parts of the world in search for what they think is a better future for them has also impacted the Filipino family structure. In a study cited by Asis⁶ where it surveyed children of migrants or OFWs whose parents had been working abroad for at least a year during the time of the data gathering reveals that these children who are left behind by their parents are materially and economically better off. More OFWs children consider their family as not poor which confirmed what earlier studies had documented: that migration does make a difference in improving the economic conditions of the families.

Asis added that migration makes a difference in terms of the gender roles in the family and being a family. For example, in the case where it is the mother who is an OFW, children still look up to these mothers as providers but the left behind fathers are not involved in care giving and domestic tasks. Instead, these tasks are taken over mostly by other female family members. Fathers participate more in the areas of disciplining children, teaching them good manners, and teaching the children about right and wrong. This indicates changes and rearrangement of the gender roles of the fathers in a traditional Filipino family structure, especially when it is the mothers who leave.

Though migration has not diminished the importance of family, it has however,

⁴ Maruja M. Asis, Shirlena Huang, and Breand S. Yeoh, "When the Light of Home is Abroad: Unskilled Female Migration and the Filipino Family," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 25 (2), (2004): 198-215.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 200.

changed the nature of the family life.⁷ Children feel a certain sense of incompleteness as family because they are left to care by their parents to relatives and helpers. On the other hand, migrants and those left behind are able to maintain ties through communication, such as text messages, internet, and phone calls. These means have somehow eased the anxiety and loneliness caused by the separation. Migration seems to have also influenced the children's career and migration aspects. According to the study, about 47% of the respondents said that they would like to work abroad someday and this idea of working abroad is reinforced by the courses that these children take in college. The girls are likely to mention nursing, medicine, or teaching while boys are likely to mention engineering, medicine, or military courses which are marketable in the global labor market.

The Philippine government does not see the need to change the current policy of sending Filipinos abroad as a cure and sustenance of an ailing economy. Instead, it is encouraging it. The 2002 Human Development Report supported this idea when the report concluded that: "No solid evidence on loss of skilled manpower, due to labor migration, has surfaced. The consensus is, going abroad increases the return on investments in education and skills. Overseas work . . . should be encouraged." Thus, despite these seemingly negative impacts and costs that the Philippines has experienced because of international migration, the trend does not seem to abate and will likely increase in the future.

The Feminization of Filipino Migration: Gendering Migration

The magnitude of labor export from the Philippines, both in volume and geographic scope, is without parallel.⁸ Spatially, they have found employment in over 160 countries and territories. Apart from the sheer size of the Philippines's overseas employment program, an additional noticeable feature is the predominance of female migrants.⁹ In 2012 for example, nearly 60% of all newly-hired contract workers from the Philippines were women. This wave of Filipino migration then saw the predominance of women leaving the country.

The Philippine migration flows have become increasingly feminized since the 1980s, as more women than men migrated for jobs as nannies, maids, housecleaners, cooks, entertainers, and in other helping professions and service occupations, in other words, reproductive labor.¹⁰ Martin et al¹¹ identified four main flows of female migrants from the Philippines—to the Gulf States as maids, to Southeast Asia as maids, to Japan as entertainers,

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ James A. Tyner, "Scales of Sexuality and the Migration of Filipina International Labor Migrants," (paper presented at the IUSSP Regional Population Conference on Southeast Asia's Population Conference on Southeast Asia's Population in a Changing Asia Context, 2002): 1-17.

⁹ Lin Lim and Nana Oishi, "International Labor Migration of Asian Women: Distinctive Characteristics and Policy Concerns," *Asia and Pacific Migration Journal* (5) 1 (1996): 85-116.

¹⁰ Kathy Nadeau, "A Maid in Servitude: Filipino Domestic Workers in the Middle East," *Migration Letters* (4) 1 (2007): 15-27.

¹¹ Philip Martin, et al., "Best Practices to Manage Migration: The Philippines," *Center for Migration Studies IMR* 38 (4) (2004): 1544-1559.

and to other industrial countries as nurses, teachers, and domestic helpers. The increasing deployment of female migrants to work abroad prompted the Philippine Senate to identify both female overseas performing artists and domestic helpers as two of the most vulnerable of all occupations.¹² The feminization of Filipino migration is consonant with other identified systems of international migration and this is related to several developments, including immigration policies that favor family reunification, migration policies that specifically target women workers, and the changes in the social and economic statuses and roles of women.

The Gender Dimension of the Feminization of Filipino Migration: Defining the Reproductive Work

Gender as a fundamental principle in social organization and behavior is demonstrated in many ways in most culture, including gender socialization and gender stratification and inequality.¹³ Sociology and other social sciences recognize that women live and work in a distinct though interrelated world from men. More importantly, the world that women experience is often defined and controlled by men. Analyses of women's behavior, including migration and work, cannot therefore ignore fundamental social divisions based on gender. Research on gender and migration tend to view the roles of women either in functionalist or structuralist perspective. In the functionalist view, gender is not essentially significant. If women are considered at all, they are seen as either less likely to participate in migration because of their lack of qualifications for the labor market, or as passive wives and dependents of male migrants. Women are typically relegated to traditional functions of family care. In contrast, the structuralist paradigm recognizes that gender is a central organizational theme in migration. Women can be, and are often recruited as migrant workers. Once incorporated in migration systems, the labor market experiences of women significantly differ from that of men. Gender is often the basis of the segmentation of a labor market, and women migrants' labor market experiences are primarily shaped by gender as social fact.¹⁴

Research on women's migrants experiences generally support the critical role of gender in defining work.¹⁵ Women migrants, for example, are concentrated in few occupations and industries. These are often menial and low-paid occupations, with particularly difficult working conditions, and little or no prospects for upward social mobility. Thus, women migrants dominate the garment industry, work in sweat shops or at home under the outworking system, work as entertainers and domestic workers and earn lower wages than men.¹⁶

¹² Tyner, "Scales of Sexuality and the Migration of Filipina International Labor Migrants," 1.

¹³ Joan Acker, "Gendered Institutions: From Sex Roles to Gendered Institutions," *Contemporary Sociology* 21, No. 5 (1992): 565-569.

¹⁴ Sharon Lee, "Issues in Research on Women, International Migration and Labor," *Asia and Pacific Migration Journal* (5) 1 (1996), 113.

¹⁵ Nicola Piper and Mina Roces, eds., *Wife or Worker?: Asian Women and Migration*, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

¹⁶ Lee, 89 and Lim and Oishi, 85-116.

Given the prominence of women in contemporary international migration and labor, the role of gender as fundamental basis for defining migration and labor experiences, can no longer be neglected. Moreover, the social, political, and cultural ramifications of gender need to be incorporated in the studies of women migration and labor experiences for the reason that these remain understudied.

The trends in female international migration point to an emerging international division of labor in reproduction. This division of labor intersects class, ethnicity, and age and hence produces a diversity of forms of labor relations. Yet, at the same time, it is governed by an overwhelmingly homogenous cross-cultural apparatus, which defines social reproduction as a female, domain, a trivial domain to economic activities.¹⁷

In general, work is generally of two types: that which is productive, or work for exchange, and that which is reproductive, or work for use and the satisfaction of needs. Productive and reproductive work are both part of processes of survival and renewal: productive work satisfies such basic human needs as food, shelter, and clothing; reproductive work is the production of people, not only the bearing of children but also the caring—the physical and ideological maintenance of human beings—which enables individuals to fit into the social structure of the society.¹⁸

Reproduction as a concept embodies three different meanings that are interrelated: 1) human reproduction, 2) maintaining and sustaining human beings which are sometimes referred to as “reproductive economy,” “sex-affective services,” “care-taking economy” and reproduction of human resources. The third concept is the systemic reproduction, which is the maintenance of the particular structures that enable a given social system to be re-created and sustained.¹⁹ Ideologically, reproductive work has been and still is defined as women’s responsibility and it is often unrecognized, devalued, or underpaid and at times unpaid. When reproductive work is linked to the sexual division of labor and the wider labor processes in society, however, its value becomes problematic and questionable.

The question of the exchange value of reproductive work may be grounded on the complex relations between the working conditions of women and the sex-gender system, which are grounded also on the public-private division. This binary division is reflected in the economy and in the value given to different types of work, as well as in the consideration of certain tasks as women’s work or female jobs and others as men’s work or male jobs. Thus, the value of reproductive work may be defined according to who performs it (or who is expected to perform it), its economic value (paid or unpaid), and in what domain is it performed (public-private domain).²⁰

¹⁷ Thanh-Dam Truong, “Gender, International Migration and Social Reproduction: Implications for Theory, Policy Research and Networking,” *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* (5) 1 (1996): 27-52.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Eviota, *The Political Economy of Gender*, (New York: John Hopkins University Press, 1993).

¹⁹ Truong, 32.

²⁰ Lilian Celiberti and Serrana Mesa, *Gender Relations in Productive and Reproductive Work*, (Uruguay: IPS Communications, 2009).

A good example of this is household work, which is often ideologically relegated to women. Not only it is unpaid, but its essential contribution to social reproduction has been rendered invisible. Traditionally, the home is merely a unit of consumption. It is not considered as a producer of inputs and resources necessary for the functioning of the economic system.²¹ The production of goods and services that takes place in the domestic sphere or that is channeled through unpaid work (for example, voluntary work) has been made invisible, and ultimately, has been considered as non-work, by confusing production with production for the market and work with employment.²²

Women see and perceive themselves as secondary and productive workers because of their primary responsibility in the home. Women's ties to the home define their role in the labor force while men's reproductive work is not constrained by a similar ideology of domesticity. One of the major implications of this role is women's position in the labor market; while at specific levels women may be a preferred labor force or retained because of the nature of their tasks, at the general level, women are less likely to be absorbed into waged work and as a group, they are more likely to be released during economic recession. Women's secondary position also means that especially in situations of a large labor surplus, women must seek their own survival outside the formal wage economy.

In terms of labor migration and definition of reproductive work, researchers have examined the globalization of reproductive work by focusing on the transfer of social reproduction within the international division of labor. Researchers assert that the globalization of domestic service reproduces gendered and racialized divisions of labor in global capitalism and that it constitutes a transfer of labor between developed and less developed regions and nations. For example, Cheng²³ examines the feminized process of migration in Asia and argues that the migration of women domestics constitutes a transfer of gendered labor. Truong²⁴ maintained that this migration process, along with other dimensions of globalizing processes, such as sex tourism, indicates a transfer of reproductive labor. This concept on the transfer of genderized labor allows us to understand how global capitalism operates and how labor, articulating with existing gender and racial systems, is deployed in the process. This concept also stresses the inequitable distribution of reproductive labor between countries of unequal development.

A research area that interests specialists in migration and women migrants is the participation of state apparatuses in the transfer of genderized labor across nation states.²⁵ It appears that the diversification of forms of female migration in the context of reproductive labor is a manifestation of a deeper process through which relations of reproduction are being

²¹ Ibid.

²² Truong, 33.

²³ Shu-Ju Ada Cheng, "Rethinking the Globalization of Domestic Service: Foreign Domestic, State Control, and the Politics of Identity in Taiwan," (February 15, 2011), <<http://gas.sagepub.com/content/17/2/166.short>>.

²⁴ Truong, 39.

²⁵ Piper and Roces, *Wife or Worker?: Asian Women and Migration*, 138.

organized. For example, previous researches analyzed the motivating factors that drove women migrants to move to another country in terms of the need and market availability of receiving countries. In other words, it focuses on push/pull factors from a gender perspective. As more and more women in developed countries reject the ideology of domesticity, women from underdeveloped countries fill the gap that these working women leave in the sphere of domesticity.²⁶ The transfer of sexual labor across nation states, for the hospitality and entertainment industry, is also attributed to new forms of capital accumulation and new ideological ideas on desire and social intimacy.²⁷ For example, the industrial production of sexual services is such that it involves intense utilization of sexual labor, which is viewed as impermanent and “disposable,” and therefore, a continuous supply must be ensured. This demand is further intensified by the directing patterns of male desire towards younger or even virgin women.

Previous studies also try to link international migratory processes and the relations that organize reproductive labor at the various levels. These studies provide the space for the understanding of female workers as reproductive workers in cross-national transfer of labor. They show that state passivity and state participation in the transfer of this reproductive labor reveal deep gendered biases in matters relating to sexuality and reproduction. Also, state power, or its ability to impose a definition on migration regimes and migrant status to formulate ideals and define morality in gender relations, appear to be enacted in concert with the interest of dominant groups in society.²⁸

All in all, these avenues of research on the gendered nature of migration exploring women migrant workers motivating experiences (especially about Filipino domestic workers) have analyzed four themes: exploitation, victimization, and the problems of human rights²⁹ epitomized by the hanging of Flor Contemplacion, a Filipina domestic worker who was accused of killing her ward and another Filipina domestic worker in Singapore.

This analysis of the transnational transfer of genderized labor broadens our perspective of how we examine the feminization of international migration. The feminization of migration must be studied not only from the perspective on the increasing number of female migrants and describing only the situation of women but must be situated within how gender provides insight into the dynamics of the relationship between men and women and the inequalities arising from such relationships. Work, in particular, labor markets, is a key issue in a globalized world and therefore attention must be paid. The gender perspective would allow us to understand that work is not gender-neutral, and discussing workers in general is not the same as discussing male workers and female workers. Neutrality disguises inequalities and therefore, reinforces them. This is the significance of looking the transfer of

²⁶ Nicole Constable, ed., *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

²⁷ Truong, 50.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁹ Piper and Roces, *Wife or Worker?: Asian Women and Migration*, 148.

labor, especially reproductive work, across nation states from the gender perspective.

The Feminization of Migration and the Rise of International Marriages

The relationship of marriage in general generates different categories and raises a number of issues. Previous studies concerned with women's migratory patterns discuss women as either migrants for marriage (those who migrate for marriage and include mail-order brides) or overseas contract workers. According to Piper and Roces,³⁰ however, the image of women in these cases as migrant workers obscures her other roles as mother or wife (since husbands and/or children often remain in their country of origin). Since the women in these case studies are contract workers, they are temporary residents rather than citizens. There is also the question of "temporary residents" who marry "local" men or reunites with her husband in the country of her employment. There is also the migrant for marriage who becomes employed. Therefore, Piper and Roces challenge the analytical framework that views migrant women as either migrants for marriage or overseas contract workers. Thus, factors such as the diverse experiences of women migrants across class, educational backgrounds, location within their life-courses, ethnicity, and types of marriage (international or transnational) can also be highlighted in the study of marriage and international migration.

An offshoot of the feminization of international migration and of its gendered nature is the rise of international marriages³¹ or cross border marriages.³² This is because when women migrate, they come in contact with other nationalities, which may result in marriage. Marriages that cross borders of nations have become increasingly common. It can be argued that these marriages need to be studied because they are shaped and limited by existing and emerging cultural, social, historical, and political-economic factors and also by "gendered geographies of power" that characterize all transnational migrations.³³ These gendered geographies of power suggest that we consider not only who moves but also how people are differently located in relation to access and power over the flows and connections between places. There are groups for example who move that are in-charge of their movements and whose power increases with the movements. There are groups, however, who are always moving physically, but are not in charge of the process of movement. This concept explains why it is always women who move by virtue of marriage.

Most of these brides move from poorer countries to wealthier ones, from the less developed global "south" to the more industrialized "north." These women come from parts of Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe and go to North America, Australia and wealthier regions of East Asia. These are consonant to the common patterns of women's labor. Thus,

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 150.

³² Constable, 3.

³³ Ellen Oxfeld, "Cross Border Hypergamy? Marriage Exchanges in Transnational Hakka Community," in *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in transnational Asia*, edited by Nicole Constable, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 20.

the earlier studies focused on women who migrate as brides to “local” men and their experiences of sufferings and hardships. Previous research also regarded these international brides as victims of circumstance and the mechanism of international marriage as traffic in commodified women.

Past scholarly works also focused on the so-called mail-order bride discourse and to the reasons why such marriages occur or the quality of the marriages (whether the marriage is successful or not). The result of the discourse is that these mail-order brides are forever labeled or categorized as “brides” and almost never become “women.” Stereotypes of women migrants as foreign brides or mail-order brides elucidates the common assumptions about the connection between poverty, opportunism, and the assumed “lack of free will” or agency within a constrained set of circumstances of foreign women who marry local men. These reveal global patterns of inequality that are thought to pressure women to migrate to richer countries.

This type of discourse have already changed and the currently, the discourse have moved to critical examination of the various aspects of the experiences of family relationships, communities, and societies. Influenced by the postcolonial feminist perspective, which highlights the influence of gender in colonizing processes, a great deal of the ethnographic and qualitative research on international marriage migration focuses on women’s agency, the patriarchal underpinnings of marriage, and the uneven gender relations.³⁴ This perspective offers the idea that personal life experiences and interests of women must be included in the analysis of the patterns of global migration because it challenges the universalist notions that women have the same and uniform experiences. It also questions the dominant discourses that represent women globally.

Constable also analyzed the movement of women, particularly brides, by elaborating on the concept of hypergamy.³⁵ As an argument to the common notion that brides, especially from less developed countries who marry men from developed countries, view marriage as a strategy to gain citizenship and upward social mobility, the concept of hypergamy begs the question of how, for whom and in what sense such marriages represent upward mobility. As Constable argues, patterns of marital mobility entail analysis on nationality/ethnicity, gender, and economic class. To assume that when brides from poorer countries move and marry to men from richer countries is simply upward is to overlook the contradictory social and economic patterns that are not necessarily linked to geographic mobility and underlying questions about gender. The idea of hypergamy therefore contradicts the popular assumptions that most brides are poor and they categorically marry men who are above them in socioeconomic ladder. As Oxfeld argues, even though women may appear to be moving up from a less developed country to a richer or more developed country, they do not necessarily move higher on the chain of economic resources.

³⁴ Constable, 13.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

Some women do not simply marry up for material gains, as previous studies have shown. There are also other desires that come into play. Some women count love among the factors that motivate them to marry. Others opt to find husbands abroad not because they prefer to live abroad but because of local constraints on their marriage opportunities. These show that pragmatic or practical considerations do not necessarily preclude love and non material forms of desire.

The rise of international marriages, therefore, as a result of the feminization of migration reveals changes in the approaches of the study of women migrants. Whereas women migrants were considered and portrayed as victims of abuses and human rights violation in the past decades, the discourse and landscape on the research on women migrants and international migration at present construct them as women who have free choices and agency. In view also of the feminization of migration, the approach that women migrants should not be treated separately as workers or mail-order brides but rather as migrants whose experiences as both mother, bride, and worker intersect the political, economic, and social spectrum of migration is forwarded, thus the need to use gender in the study of this migration pattern.

The Filipino Migration to Japan: The Feminization Issue

Gendered patterns of migration are especially striking in Japan. From 1994 to 2009, of the total number of Filipinos going to Japan, women accounted for more than 60%.³⁶ Japan is also a popular destination for marriage migrants. Between 1965 and 1970, the small number of Japanese international marriages was between Japanese women and foreign men but especially after the late 1980s, the number of marriages between Japanese men and foreign women increased dramatically.³⁷ According to the Japanese Welfare Ministry, there were 5,000 marriages to foreigners in Japan in 1970, 10,000 in 1983, and 20,000 in 1989 and almost 27,000 in 1993. Out of over 50,000 Filipino-Japanese couples overall in the late 1990s, all but 1% are said to involve Filipino women and Japanese men.³⁸ These numbers then reveal a gendered pattern of the Filipino migration to Japan.

The Filipino entertainers or performing artists or the more official sounding Filipino Overseas Performing Artists (OPAs) are said to be the largest group of Filipino migrants and most of the women who migrate under these headings, primarily go to Japan. They end up in a variety of service jobs catering to male clients, including nude dancing and prostitution. James Tyner³⁹ claims that the growth of female migration to Japan was founded on the construction of a particular image of Filipina sexuality by the media and social institutions. For example, the migration of Filipino women to work as entertainers in Japan has strong

³⁶ Philippine Overseas Employment Agency, 2009.

³⁷ Nicola Piper, "International Marriage in Japan," *Gender and Place Culture* (4) 3, (1997), 321.

³⁸ Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare 2005.

³⁹ Tyner, "Scales of Sexuality and the Migration of Filipina International Labor Migrants," 1-17.

historical links to an elite and glamorous Filipino tradition of cultural dance performance that dates to early 20th century.⁴⁰ This only changed during the mid-1970s which was the height of Japanese sex tourism to the Philippines and when bars in Manila initially established to serve U.S. military personnel and tourists began to attract Japanese men. Around that time, Japanese promoters began to recruit Filipina women to work not only in hotels in Japan but also in hostess bars. This changed the image of Filipino women from cultural performers to hostesses and even prostitutes.⁴¹

At the same time, these representations of women have also influenced policy making, emphasizing the roles of the Philippine government in sending Filipino entertainers to Japan. Several cases of abuse and reported deaths of some Filipino entertainers in Japan drove some cause oriented groups to clamor for stronger protective measures for the safety of these women. Also, government policy was based on the assumption that there are two types of women: the deficient and morally weak women who are prone to abuse and qualified performers of good character that should be allowed to work. Government efforts, to combat abuse, therefore, were concentrated on identifying women who are suitable to go abroad as entertainers.⁴² This construction of the images and sexuality of Filipino women entertainers to Japan highlights the causes of the previous increase in the deployment of women that merited attention for research and analysis.

The Filipino Brides: Background of Filipino-Japanese Marriage

Aside from the OPAs, Filipino-Japanese intermarriage is a major aspect of Filipino migration to Japan. Records of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) from 1989 to 2006 show that there are 94,792 Filipinos married to Japanese nationals making the Filipino-Japanese married couple population the second biggest sector of Filipino-foreigner marriages, next only to Filipino-American couples. As of 2012, Filipino-Japanese marriages account for 27% of Filipino intercultural marriages or partnerships registered by the CFO. Over the years, the number of Filipinos married to Japanese continues to increase. The CFO records show a significant increase of 14.11% from 5,430 in 2004 to 6,322 in 2005. In 2006, from 8,601, the increase went up to 26.5%. The CFO records also show the great disparity in the number of Filipino women married to Japanese nationals which accounts for 93,934 or 99.09% against the Filipino men which only accounts for 858 or .91%.⁴³ These figures slightly decreased,

⁴⁰ Lieba Faier, "Filipina Migrants in Rural Japan and Their Professions of Love," *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (February 2007): 148-162, <https://is.muni.cz/el/1423/jaro2010/SAN777/um/Lieba_Faier_Filipina_Migrants_and_their_professions_of_love.pdf>, (accessed November 10, 2010).

⁴¹ Aurora Javate De Dios, "Japayuki-San: Filipinos at Risk," in *Filipino Women Overseas Contract Workers: At What Cost?* edited by Mary Ruby Palma-Beltran and Aurora Javate De Dios, (Manila: Goodwill Training, 1992), 49.

⁴² James A. Tyner, "The Social Construction of Gendered Migration from the Philippines," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 3 (4), (1996): 589-618.

⁴³ Data are culled from the following websites: <<http://www.immi-moj.go.jp/toukei/index.html>> and <<http://www.cfo-antitrafficking.org.ph/downloads/JapanConceptPaper.pdf>>.

owing perhaps to the decreasing number of Filipino women migrants that entered Japan in the past four years.

Women who are married to Japanese tend to have lower educational background than their Japanese partner. This is due to the fact that many of these women had worked in the entertainment industry, and a higher education was immaterial and not essential. Most Japanese men who marry Filipino women, on the other hand, live in rural or isolated areas, and so were said to be unattractive and uninteresting for Japanese women who perhaps want to migrate to urban areas. These Japanese men also expect their Filipino wives to be docile, loyal, and faithful or take care of their elderly parents and help in the farm work.

Filipino women have various reasons for entering into marriage with Japanese men. The image of Filipino women in Japan, that of as entertainers and as *Ajia no hanayome* (Asian brides) reinforces the notion that Filipino women marry Japanese men for purely economic reasons. This notion tends to view marriage between Japanese men and Filipino women in a very negative perspective. Ballestas⁴⁴ for example asserts that aside from the assurance and security of being able to stay permanently in Japan through a spouse visa, Filipino women, mostly entertainers, believe that they can be permanently secure once they marry a Japanese man because often, before marriage, the men would promise regular financial support for their families in the Philippines.

In her study conducted in 1999 focusing on the roles of the mail-order brides in cross cultural marriages, del Rosario, as cited by Ogsimer and Gatpatan,⁴⁵ found in her study that all research participants used to be employed in the Philippines before marriage to a foreign national. However, half of them became full-time housewives after their marriage and migration to their husbands' home countries. These women welcomed the change and were satisfied with their full-time homemaker status. The study attributed this to the belief of a Filipino woman, that regardless of socio-economic class, educational background and ethnic origin, a woman's destiny is to get married and raise a family. As wives, they believe that their roles are to take care of their husband, guide their children, and manage the house while the husband's role is to be the economic provider of the family.

From the 1980s until the late 1990s, Filipino women in these international marriages were portrayed as powerless, isolated, culturally disoriented, and incapable of decision making. Furthermore, marriage for these women was a heavy endeavor because they felt that they were housemaids rather than housewives. Others had become victims of domestic violence but still opted to stay in Japan because of their children. The prevailing literature for the past decade on these Filipino brides reveals that despite their presence in Japan for almost thirty years, academic and advocates discourses tend to situate these Filipinas within a

⁴⁴ Maria Rosario P. Ballestas, *Philippine Migration to Japan, 1970s to 1990s: Philippine-Japan Relations*, (Manila: Ateneo de Manila Press, 2003).

⁴⁵ Restituto Ogsimer and Agnes V. Gatpatan, "Filipino Women in Cross-Cultural Marriage: Their Emerging Roles in the Catholic Church in Japan," *The Journal of Sophia Asian Studies* (26), (2008): 42-55.

particular gender and sexual roles and geographical locations.⁴⁶ Particularly, the discourse on these women since the late 1980s has sustained earlier representations, stressing the structural and institutional oppression of women while taking little notice of their agency.⁴⁷ This continued even in the 1990s and during this time, discussions of domestic violence against foreign women in Japan have been similarly based on a narrow view of Filipino women as indirectly victimized by Japanese men. Although there are Filipino women who are victims, and these researches are data based and motivated by sincere concerns, these analyses in which attention is paid to the battered women only around the time of the assaults and within the context of male domination neglect other important social forces to which migrant women and Japanese men are differentially subjected.⁴⁸

Changing the Approach to Filipino Migration to Japan: From Victims to “The Place of Human Agency”

As mentioned in the previous sections, the representations of Filipino women as victims and wives who are only after material gains and security as well as the reactive policies of both the Philippine and Japanese governments to combat the abuse and improve the hiring system of entertainers paved for some scholarly analysis on ‘sacrifice and suffering’ approach to female migration. This approach focuses mainly on the work experiences of the OPAs in Japan and emphasizes their sacrifices for the sake of their families in the Philippines. Much of this literature typically implies that a large proportion of the OPAs are forced into prostitution, and that even with such sacrifices, their economic gains are quite small.⁴⁹ De Dios asserts, for example, that in “many cases, Filipina entertainers are immediately forced into prostitution as soon as they arrive,” and “it is very difficult for the entertainer to be able to pay her debts or send money back home on the basis of her salary simply because she can only stay legally for six months. It is this situation of economic need that predisposes many to engage in prostitution.”⁵⁰ Balleascas similarly argues that “many contract workers [referring to OPAs] agree to slowly move towards more direct sexual activities” and “feel comfortable with such a set-up with the rationalization that every touch, kiss or even intercourse was just part of work done for the sake of the family left behind.”⁵¹ Together, these authors tend to portray an image of Filipina OPAs as passive and naïve victims. Similar lines of assertions have been

⁴⁶ Nobue Suzuki, “Transgressing ‘Victims’: Reading Narratives of ‘Filipina Brides’ in Japan,” *Critical Asian Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (2003): 399-420.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 415.

⁴⁸ Nobue Suzuki, “Tripartite Desires: Filipina-Japanese Marriages and Fantasies of Transnational Transversal,” in *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia*, edited by Nicole Constable, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 56.

⁴⁹ Nobuhiko Fuwa and James N. Anderson, “Filipina Encounters with Japan: Stories Beyond the Stereotype from a Pangasinan Barangay,” *Philippine Studies*, Vol. 54, No.1 (2006): 111-141, or <http://www.h.chiba-u.ac.jp/mkt/Fuwa%20and%20Anderson_0.pdf>.

⁵⁰ De Dios, “Japayuki-San: Filipinas at Risk.”

⁵¹ Balleascas, 7.

repeated by Gonzales,⁵² the Philippine Migrants' Rights Watch, and the International Organization for Migration. The latter report even equates the flow of OPAs to Japan with human "trafficking." The US State Department similarly equated the OPAs with human trafficking and included Japan in its human trafficking watch list.

Data however showed that Filipino women who came to Japan were aware of their actions and what was the nature of their work once they arrived in Japan. For example, Osteria, who interviewed a sample of 155 OPAs in Tokyo, reported that "the women felt that the benefits were great," that "most of the respondents indicated their desire to return to or remain in Japan," and that "the women felt confident in the new economic role that they had assumed in the family."⁵³ Here, the notion of equating OPAs with prostitution is absent. Furthermore, while most Filipina OPAs serve as hostesses, in addition to their singing and dancing at clubs or bars, the goal of those clubs and bars in Japan is typically to sell drinks to clients and not sex, as documented. Theirs was conversation or social intercourse, not sexual intercourse.

Some recent writings cast further doubts about the simplified images of the OPAs as passive victims found in the earlier literature. Fuwa and Anderson, for example, articulate "the place of human agency" in their discussion of the wider contexts of international labor migration, including Filipino OPAs.⁵⁴ Suzuki describes how contradictory (but equally simplistic) images of Filipino OPAs as "slave-dolls" who are abused and "s/exploited," on the one hand, and as "cunning scavengers" who "will do anything for greater material rewards," on the other, have been popularized by the prevailing media in Japan.⁵⁵ Suzuki also claims that most of the existing researches on OPAs have been based on structured surveys, questionnaires, or brief interviews. Many "academic" observations are methodologically problematic, showing a tendency to rely uncritically on politically and morally charged activists' accounts of Filipinas who sought help and were inclined to talk; on secondary materials; on many recycled journalists' publications; and on speculative estimates of the number of apprehended workers and other variables.⁵⁶

Previous studies on international marriages between Filipino women and Japanese also counteract this discourse on "victimhood" "and martyrdom." Nakamatsu, for example, made a study on 45 Asian women who came to Japan during the period of 1985 to 1995 as Asian brides and argued that not all women who entered Japan through this route can be

⁵² Jose L. Gonzales, *Philippine Labor Migration: Critical Dimensions of Public Policy*, (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1998).

⁵³ Trinidad Osteria, *Filipino Female Labor Migration to Japan: Economic Causes and Consequences*, (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1994), 42 and 49.

⁵⁴ Fuwa and Anderson, "Filipina Encounters with Japan: Stories Beyond the Stereotype from a Pangasinan Barangay," <http://www.h.chiba-u.ac.jp/mkt/Fuwa%20and%20Anderson_0.pdf>, 3.

⁵⁵ Nobue Suzuki, "Between Two Shores: Transnational Projects and Filipina Wives in/from Japan," *Women Studies International Forum*, 23 (4) (2000): 431-444.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 431.

viewed as “victims of the system.”⁵⁷ In fact, the actions of these women, entering into marriage with Japanese men, can be interpreted as a part of complex and sometimes ambivalent process of negotiating strategies to fulfill their roles as wives, workers and later as new Japanese citizens. Nakamatsu added that while the notion of marriage through marriage agencies does raise questions of “commodification” and “objectification” of women who are chosen as wives by men whom they had never met before, the system offered women opportunities to marry foreign men and live overseas.⁵⁸

Some Filipino women entertainers, after marrying Japanese men, were also able to develop acculturation strategies.⁵⁹ One of these strategies was assimilation wherein Filipino wives refused to maintain their cultural identity and try as much as possible to interact with other cultures. Filipino wives, after experiencing culture shock would be able to “make their own world” and integrate both cultures, live up to the expectations of their husband and husbands’ families and teach the Japanese community about the Philippines. This assimilation enables the Filipino wives to feel that they are part of the Japanese society.

This assimilation strategy, however, according to more recent studies, ignores the capacity of a people to develop their own meaningful identity and denies the possibility of having multiple identities.⁶⁰ It also obscures the diversity of a people and tends to overlook the power within the politics of the host country.⁶¹ More recent studies therefore, argue that identity, among migrants is also socially constructed and because identity can be formed along cultural contexts, then it can be negotiated.

An example of a previous study on the shifting and negotiation of identity by Filipino women migrants is done by Suzuki who looked at the “transgressions” of Filipino brides who married local Japanese men in a rural area in Japan. She defines transgressions as “acts that challenge gender-based norms and ‘normal’ behavior of hanayome ‘victims’ within the rural family and community, and beyond.”⁶² Suzuki focused on the sexuality and economic autonomy, two dimensions of the women’s lives in which they struggle to recapture their own ways of imputing meanings to their lives in relation to social forces. By negotiating their identities as sexual economic objects with their own desires and aspirations, Filipino women show signs of subverting their institutionally positioned lives. By performing the institutionally assigned female duties of biological and social reproduction, these Filipino

⁵⁷ Tomoko Nakamatsu, “International Marriage through Introduction Agencies: Social and Legal Realities of ‘Asian’ Wives of Japanese Men,” in *Wife or Worker?: Asian Women and Migration*, edited by Nicola Piper and Mina Roces, (London: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 125.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 23-25.

⁵⁹ Elena Samonte, “Filipinas in Cross Cultural Marriage to Japanese: Moving Towards a Synthesis of Cultures,” in *Filipino Diaspora: Demography, Social Networks, Empowerment, and Culture*, edited by M. Tsuda, (Manila: Philippine Migration Research Network, 2003).

⁶⁰ Jiemin Bao, *Marital Acts: Gender, Sexuality and Identity among the Chinese Thai Diaspora*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 19.

⁶¹ Aihwa Ong, *Flexibility Citizenship: The Cultural Logic of Transnationality*, (London: Duke University Press, 1999), 2.

⁶² Suzuki, “Transgressing ‘Victims’: Reading Narratives of ‘Filipina Brides’ in Japan,” 400.

women were able to incorporate their bodies into the depopulated Japanese village. Contrary then to the prevailing discourse, Filipino women also wish to enjoy affective and affluent lifestyles as much as contemporary Japanese women do and strive to move out from their confined spaces.

Professions of love and affection for their Japanese husbands also motivate some Filipino women to craft new gendered and sexualized subjectivities. In this sense, intimacy and cultural meanings of love can be produced through transnational practices, thereby exploring the ways in which love figures in the life of these Filipino women migrants. Love is also shown and defined by the transnational ties that these women maintain. For example, Filipino women appreciate their husbands more when these husbands allow or give them money to be sent to their families in the Philippines. Love allows these Filipino to accumulate strategies and move out of their spaces as entertainers and hostesses in bars by marrying their customers whom they profess to love. Therefore, as these women change their identities and acquire new subjectivities, love becomes “a powerful condition of these women’s transnational lives, a term of global self-making that is made meaningful through and that enables their transnational everyday practices.”⁶³

Transnational Spaces: Alternative Approach, Negotiated Identities

This changing image of the Filipino women migrants, their ability to exercise their agencies and their participation in transnational practices enable these women migrants to create transnational spaces. Structured by political action in both countries, these spaces connect the home country and the country of residence which fosters the participation of the Filipino migrants in the life of the two national spaces. Transnationalism makes the home country an identity pole, the country of residence a source of rights, and the new transnational space an area of political action associating both countries, and sometimes others as well.

These spaces allow migrants to negotiate their own identities and contest essentially constructed meanings which are in the process reconfigured in larger, dominant regulations and other practices in the host country. In the process, tensions and conflicts which are brought by various social and cultural forces in the interplay of subordination and domination inevitably occur. The above discussion on human agency shows how Filipino women migrants play with dominant ideologies and negotiate cultural rules in a variety of contexts. Clearly, despite the creative agency implied in the notion of flexible identity, flexibility and negotiation should perhaps be understood not as an individual autonomy, but rather as a negotiation with the multiple regulations of nation-states and hybrid cultural practices.

Within this context, these spaces may interrogate the essentially held notions of identity and culture and transform and reconstruct other modes of identification in the course of identity negotiation. New hybrid identities and new subject positions should be given

⁶³ Faier, 157-158.

attention to because it is in these identities and subject positions, complex social, cultural and even the political nature of identity construction are revealed and put the Filipino migration to Japan in a new perspective. Thus, the essentialized and traditionally held approach to the study of migration in general and Filipino migration in particular can be challenged and debunked. Transnationalism, along with other social forces and spaces can be an alternative approach to fully understand the narratives and lived experiences of the migrants that are relational and personal. In the process, nation-states, in their attempts to face the challenges of globalization and borderless world must capture the nuances and ambivalence of this phenomenon, thereby creating a global society which has the capacity to understand and accommodate cultural differences.