

# Gender and Development: Push and Pull Migration, Transnational Experience and Well-being of Filipina Overseas Migrant Returnees

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**Abstract:** The global movement of people which coincided with the globalization of the market economy resulted into the feminization of overseas migrate, on given the higher demands for female migrant workers from the low-income developing countries such as the Philippines. This has changed the landscape of overseas migration in the country since the 1970s where the bulk of overseas migrant workers were males as triggered by the oil boom in the Middle East (Ducanes, 2015). This paper examines the social dimension of transnational migration as experienced by Filipina overseas migrant returnees by understanding the motivations for temporary overseas migration, the factors associated with return migration, their narratives of transnational migration and their self-assessment of the impact of migration on their well-being.

Qualitative interviews were conducted among seven (7) Filipina migrant returnees from Nueva Ecija. Results revealed the interplay of gender, migration and family in relation to push and pull migration. Likewise, the transnational experiences of these migrant returnees demonstrate the resiliency and agency of women in the context of development and transnational migration.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The global movement of people or what we call international migration is associated with development in two ways. First, a developmental orientation of international labor migration evaluates its socioeconomic consequences on national economies, communities and households (Goss 1995) through overseas migrants' remittances. The increase of South-North migration has been accompanied by increase in money remitted by migrants to developing countries (De Haas 2005). Remittance is a major factor in integrating societies together economically and socially (Orozco 2002). A functionalist approach to international migration predicts that remittances will stimulate economic growth (Goss 1995) and will eventually improve income inequality in the country of origin. Second, the increased participation of women in the labor force among developed societies resulted to the feminization of overseas migration engendered by the increased demands for female migrant workers from the low-income developing countries such as the Philippines to fulfill the carework duties vacated by women from the developed world as a requisite to their participation in the labor force. So, the demand for carework and domestic works resulted to

the gendering of international migration globally. In the Philippine experience this resulted to the exodus of women overseas to participate in overseas work. This has changed the landscape of overseas migration in the country since the 1970s where the bulk of overseas migrant workers were males given the heightened demand for construction workers in the Middle East triggered by the oil boom (Ducanes 2015; Orbeta & Abrigo 2009). In 2015, there are around 1.25 million female overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) reported by the Philippine Statistics Authority. With the globalization of the market economy, higher demand for female workers from developing nations to supply low-wage service labor in more developed nations followed (Parrenas 2000). With the feminization of overseas migration and the greater participation of women in the labor force especially married ones, adjustments and sacrifices in the family have been noted.

Overseas remittance has been an important source of Gross National Product in the Philippines. Various researches looking at its contribution to economic development have been conducted. Quantitatively, overseas migration is framed based on its contribution to economic development. Qualitatively, it is studied in relation to changes in family structures and roles, parent-child relationship and family relations. This paper examines the social dimension of transnational migration as experienced by Filipina overseas migrant returnees by understanding the motivations for temporary overseas migration, the factors associated with return migration, their narratives of transnational migration and their self-assessment of the impact of migration on their well-being.

## II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### *Push migration*

When it comes to the motivation for overseas migration, Mesnard (2000) demonstrated that in Tunisia credit constraint is among the reasons for overseas migration. Overcoming credit constraint as a result of increase wage has an ambiguous effect on migration duration which can prolong and may attract them to return earlier to the country of origin.

De Haas & Fokkema (2010) found out that the main driver of migration in southern Morocco is economic which is basically improving the standard of living and income insurance for the household. But they went further by exposing the underlying structure, i.e. the role of intra-household power inequalities, tensions, and conflicts of interest in migration decision making instead of interpreting overseas migration using the economic lens. Similarly, Ghanaian women's migration to Canada is driven by the following reasons: to obtain rewarding jobs, to work hard to support family members in Ghana, to accrue capital; and eventually to return to establish a business or to construct a house in Ghana (Wong 2006 p.366).

Curran et al (2006) analyzed the substantial ways on how gender organizes the social relations and social structures influencing not only the causes but also the consequences of migration. Hull (2010) focused on the struggle of female migrants and looked into the intimate network of social relations where they are embedded that have either discouraged or motivated them to migrate as well as the significant role they place in the configuration of their respective families due to migration.

#### *Impact of Migration on the Family*

Given the participation of household heads in the migration process, the impact of migration on the family has been explored in the literature.

Dreby (2006) studied international migration in the context of Mexican transnational families. She found out that the traditional Mexican gender ideology determines the expectation among migrant fathers and mothers. The stability of migrant fathers' relationship with their children in Mexico is contingent on their ability to provide financially for the family. In addition, their relationship with their wife affects their intimacy with their children, i.e. they are more likely to reach out and cultivate a harmonious relationship with their children that results to an improvement in their relationship. The case of migrant mothers is different. Vis-à-vis their migration they are expected to continue demonstrating their emotional intimacy and the fulfillment of role as a mother from a distance. Dreby (2007) further claimed that children are powerful players among transnational families because they capitalize on the desire of their parents to maintain harmonious relationship with them and demand for the access of resources which later on affects the trajectory of migration.

Şenyürekli & Detzner (2008) looked at how familial networks among Turkish migrants in the United States are maintained. Instead of looking at parent-child relationship, they studied migrant-parent relationship. They further added that being part of a transnational family, migrants were not able to sustain intergenerational relationship with their parents. For one, immigration in the United States decreased financial exchange between them and their parents. It was concluded that migration affected the structural, associational, and functional solidarity among transnational families.

Wong (2006) in her investigation of Ghanaian women in Toronto demonstrated how gender roles that are associated in matriliney are reproduced within transnational families. Among the Ghanians, child rearing, socialization and the cultural education of children is the collective responsibility of mothers, co-mothers, grandmothers, aunts and sisters. Given the role played by left-behind Ghanaian women, remittance is sent on the female line thereby empowering them that consequently results to intrahousehold conflict. Vlase (2013) likewise observed the empowerment of women among the Romanian migrant in Italy. Despite the fact that their return migration is contingent on the decision of their husband, it was observed that women begun challenging the rules that govern traditional relations between family members, i.e. women returnees may refuse to live with their parents-in-laws and are likely to draw boundaries to the diffuse solidarity that characterized their kinship network. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1992) has shown that patriarchal gender relations organize family stage migration, and migration reorganizes gender relations. With the migration of men, women assumed new tasks and responsibilities that made them more assertive and independent. Upon the reunification of families in the United States, the reorganization of gender relation is observed as women did not relinquish the decision making power and authority they have established when their husbands went to the United States. On the other hand, the situation is different when instead of the father, the mother will be the one to work abroad. Hoang & Yeoh (2012) studied breadwinning wives and left-behind husbands in the Vietnamese transnational families which altered the normative gender practices in Vietnam and putting men in a difficult situation of balancing their fathering responsibilities and a sense of masculinity attached to the breadwinner role. In order to remake their masculinity in this context, they continue to work in order to ensure that they will not be financially dependent on the remittances of their respective wives. Montes (2013) studied how masculinity is redefined and expressed not only by migrant fathers but by other male family members in the context of transnational community in Guatemala. It was claimed that by being emotional to the migration of a family member they were able to position themselves outside the hegemonic masculine expectation of society.

The gendering of migration did not only alter the power configuration that empowered women and redefined masculinities among men but also resulted to task sharing behavior. Sakka, et. Al (1999) when they studied Greek returnees found out that migrants indicated higher sharing than non-migrants when it comes to "shopping things for children" and "meal preparation when receiving visitors.

#### *Transnational families, childcare and the well-being of left behind children*

According to Asis, et al (2004) overseas migration created a crisis in reproduction and child care. The overseas migration of fathers and especially mothers reconfigured

family arrangements and resulted to the re-emergence of the extended family household structure. The importance of other relatives is recognized in addressing the gap in childcare in transnational families where the mother is the migrant worker. Mexican and Central American women stated preference for grandmothers as ideal caregivers (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila 1997; Bastia 2009). This maybe one the the reasons why migrants maintain their cultural link in their country of origin especially left-behind members of the transnational family.

Jiozeliūnienė & Budginaitė, (2016) when they reviewed how global migration affects family life among Lithuanians in the Baltic region, the role of the family of orientation, i.e. own parents'/ spouse's parents have been recognized to provide support and childcare assistance among global migrants. Schmalzbauer (2004) who studied the case of poor Honduran transnational families, emphasized the role of kin-work and other-mothers in transnational care in the context of shared sense of family responsibility among mothers and co-mothers.

Mazzucato & Schans (2011) while looking into the well-being of children among transnational families have identified four (4) classifications: (a) children are raised by caregivers, (b) raised by their biological fathers, (c) raised by kin/relatives, and (d) children needs to care for themselves (see also Jiozeliūnienė & Budginaitė 2016).

However, childcare can be a problematic situation among transnational families. Wong (2006) revealed how childcare became a source of intra-household conflict among the left-behind husband and female relatives of Ghanaian migrant women in Toronto because since the matrilineal lineage provided childcare among transnational families, remittances were sent to them and not on the left-behind husband who contested such arrangement. Sending remittances to caretakers, who most of the time are grandparents improves the social relation between migrant parents and caretakers because it is considered to be one of the foremost obligations of migrants (Moran-Taylor 2008).

Despite the availability of care providers among the children left behind, Cortes (2015) found out that the absence of a mother migrant has a detrimental effect on the school performance of a son compared when the migrant is a father. Recognizing this problem, OFW mothers were able to reinvent their mothering vis-à-vis overseas migration by making advantage of cellphones and text messaging to maintain and enhance their relationship with their children, thus maintaining their role as mother in the family (Uy-Tioco 2007). This could be the reason why in the Philippines left-behind children of migrant parents are less likely to have conduct disorders and no more likely to have emotional disorders than children in non-migrant families (Graham & Jordan 2011). It was further argued that since the country has a long history of overseas migration, transnational families are normalized (Graham & Jordan 2011).

On the other hand, the longer the parent-child separation, the more inclined children are to cultivate other feelings especially if transnational parenting, rather than being based on maintaining intimacy between migrant parents and left-behind children is predominantly based on sending money (Moran-Taylor 2008).

#### *Reasons for return migration*

Return migration can be explained by four factors. The first factor is political. From the perspective of destination countries, return migration is a mechanism for the definitive removal of unwanted migrants through forced or semi-voluntary return (Sinatti 2015, pp.285-286). In addition, return migration happens as a consequence of temporariness of overseas migration which is associated with the strict migration policy among destination countries that have no existing provision of family reunification of migrants and their families (Mazzucato & Shans 2011). Other political reasons include crisis situation, such as war and forcible deportation in the country of destination (Go 2012) and improvement of political situation in the country of origin (Chirium 2005; Makina 2012). Among the Zimbabwean international migrants, they intend to return upon the improvement of the political and economic situation in their country while more than 60 percent of the interviewed respondents explained that their principal reason for returning home is the liberation of Eritrea from Ethiopia.

Another factor is economic which denotes either an improvement in the economic situation in one's country (Saenz & Davila 1992; Raegan & Olsen 2000; Konzett-Smoliner 2016; Klinthall 2003), high cost of living overseas (Lockwood 1990), improvement in the economic situation of the migrant (Paturis 2014; Hunter 2015; (Klinthall 2003) or the opposite (Makina 2012).

According to Bujan (2015) male migrants return is linked to economic expectations and their role as providers in their homes of origin, i.e. if they feel that they have already fulfilled the economic expectations of their family they are more likely to return. Paturis (2014) in her study of the east European migrants claimed that return migration is not only related to the economic circumstances of the migrants but the economic situation of the country of origin vis-à-vis the country of destination. Among the Chicano return migrants, if the employment growth and wages are better and more favorable now than the condition prior to their migration, they tended to be more likely to engage in return migration compared to their peers who had more favorable wages and employment growth outside their country (Saenz & Davila 1992, p. 1258). This is also true among migrants from Sweden who evaluate the circumstances in the home country relative to Sweden for their return migration (Klinthall 2003). Likewise, among Austrian return migrant groups, the main remigration goals were related to their home country's high quality of life, security and social welfare system (Konzett-Smoliner 2016, p. 1110). The greater the purchasing power of

the French pension, the more likely that French migrants to return in their place of origin (Hunter 2015).

Not only that the economic condition in the country of origin influence the decision to return home but the quality and the standard of living in the country of destination affect the decision to return. Return migration in rural French Polynesia was influenced by the high cost of urban living and other economic employment problems overseas (Lockwood 1990).

Lastly, return migration, according to the neoclassical theory is a manifestation of a failed migration experience of having been unable to get a high paying job abroad (Makina 2012), which can be due to work termination and lack of paper (Feindt & Browning 1972). According to Sri Tharan (2010), involuntary return is influence by structural limitations arising from the nature of employment stipulated by contracts among unskilled migrants.

The third reason is family-related. Strong family relations (Varshney 2013), attachment to one's roots (Toren 1978; Piotrowski & Tong 2010), and family allegiance (Lockwood 1990). It has always been an expectation among family members to care for their aging parents. This is likewise true with return migration to comply to the responsibility of providing care for an aging parent (Aranda 2003; Maron & Connell 2008). One's responsibility to one's family is so significant that Makina (2012) observed that migrants with one or more dependents left at home are more likely to return. On the other hand, familial and household decisions may likewise be a factor for the non-return for the married, young and less educated migrants (Saenz & Davila 1992, pp. 1262-1263).

And so, after their working life ended, there was no reason for those who did not reunify their family to stay in Europe. They had longed to return to Morocco and expressed happiness at being home to enjoy their retirement and be reunited with their family (de Haas & Fokkema 2010 p. 551). On the other hand, when problems with home arrangement where children were neglected or when no alternative child care arrangements are available, return migration is high among migrant mothers (Rajman et al 2003). For Eimermann (2017), migrants return reasoning is related to the composition in the family, transition in life course (see also Bujan 2015) and transnational ties and family issues (Go 2012).

Lastly, personal reason is another factor influencing the return of migrants' home. Voluntary return due to completion of work or contract and the fulfillment of one's goals can be considered as positive factors associated with return migration while intolerable working conditions are negative factors affecting return (Go 2012). On an individual level, return migration can be a result of social (comparing one's socio-economic situation before overseas migration and the current situation) and intra-subjective comparison (comparing different parts of their identity and determine

which among these is the most valuable (Saar 2017). Parrenas (2000) argued that conflicting class mobility increase the economic status of Filipina domestic workers in the US and Europe but at the same time engendered decline in their occupational status. The only way to cope with their marginal status in the receiving country is basing their identities on the increase in their class status in the home country.

Migrants' experience can also influence their decision to return. Homesickness, racism and problems of integration (see also Paturis 2014) are identified by Varshney (2013) as reasons. Other reasons include patriotic values and weighing career in the country of destination and origin (Paturis 2014).

#### *Effects of Return Migration in the Family*

de Haas & Fokkema (2010) in their study of return migration in Morocco discovered the difficulties experienced by returnees in regaining their position in the family. Reunification with one's family as lower cost of living are among the reasons for return migration. Another type of migration that was discovered is pendulum migration which accordingly is a response to the refusal of children and spouses brought to Europe to return to Morocco and the desire of the migrant to maintain social and economic ties with Morocco. Similarly, in rural French Polynesia, high cost of living, family responsibilities and allegiance, to choose tranquility in one's home country compared to the the noisy life in the city and the desire to become one's own boss were identified to be the factors for return migration (Lockwood 1990).

Overseas migration has been driven by economic motivation. It could either be for the purpose of paying for one family's credit, improving the standard of living and income of the family, to accrue savings and capital, to obtain higher paying jobs. However, despite the economic motivations for overseas migration, gender organizes the decision whether to migrate or not.

Studies on the impact of migration on family focused on how the it affects traditional gender ideologies on the expected roles of men and women, relationships in the family and how ties are maintained between the migrant and the left behind families. The gendering of migration has been the emerging focus of researches on migration studies especially that the feminization of migration is prevalent. Along with this, power relation is said to be affected by the feminization of migration as women were empowered in the process.

The impact of migration on families has been studied in relation to the well-being of left behind children. Since the literature argues that the feminization of migration created a crisis in child care, studies on how the family is restructured to fill in the gap left behind by migrant women has been explored in the literature. Since overseas migration has been influenced by one's desire for the economic well-being of the family, return migration occurs especially that reunification in

the host country is not permitted and supported. Four factors were identified to influence return migration: political, economic, family-related and personal reason.

Since the literature focuses more on the impact of overseas migration, only little was written on the effects of returning home in the family.

#### *Significance of the Study*

This study is significant in enriching the narratives of Filipina migrant domestic workers by describing their positive and negative experiences abroad as well as the consequences of overseas migration in their respective families. Though there are already existing literature on the topic, this study will contribute to the nuanced understanding of the motivation to work overseas as well as the reasons for their return migration as well as their life after returning home.

#### *Scope and Delimitation*

This study only focused on female overseas Filipino workers returnees from Nueva Ecija. It is one of the provinces of the Central Luzon region in the Philippines. The province has a total population of 2.3 million representing 18.60 percent of the total population of the Central Luzon Region (Philippine Atlas). In 2021, the poverty incidence among families is 17 percent, the third highest in Central Luzon. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority there are more than 62,000 overseas Filipino workers in the second quarter of 2016 where 44.6 percent are head of households (Ducanes, 2012).

Seven (7) narratives are included in the study. All of the respondents came from the same town as the author. They were introduced by a key informant through referral technique. As such, their narratives may not cover all the stories of female migrant workers in the country. Likewise, their well being were all based on their narratives. Not unlike how the United Nations' Development Program (UNDP) conceptualized well-being quantitatively, this paper described their well being based on their positive and negative experiences. The well-being of their family is likewise based on their perception of the consequences of their temporary labor migration in their economic situation.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative descriptive study based on the narratives of female OFW migrant returnees who were identified through purposive sampling. Participant were chosen on the following criteria: women, married, and must have stayed in the country for more than 2 years already after the return migration. Gender was controlled in order to determine the well being of left behind families in the context where the mother is the overseas migrant. Seven (7) participants have been interviewed. A guide question was used to elicit common themes on motivations to migrate, factors associated with the return migration, their well being and family's well being while working abroad and after their

return migration. A verbal consent was secured prior to the gathering of data. Pseudonyms were used to protect their identities.

#### *Theoretical Framework*

Family resiliency theory is used to frame how demand (stressors, stress and daily hassle) interact with the (capabilities)resources and coping behavior of the family and meaning to produce family adjustment. In the context of international migration, working abroad is perceived to be the family's adaptation to a family crisis. In the process of deciding whether to work abroad or not, the family weighs in the demands, i.e. problems confronting the family and the capabilities, i.e. resources of the female migrant that would serve as the coping mechanism of the family towards the solution to the crisis that is confronting the family (see Patterson, 1988).

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this part the socio-demographic profile of the respondents, the motivations for migration, consequences of migration in their family, their well-being abroad and reasons for returning home are presented.

Table 1 (see appendix) shows female OFW returnees were in their productive years when they worked abroad with the age range of 26 to 40 years old. They have a low level of education as five (5) of them are high school graduates and two (2) finished vocational courses. Six (6) are married while one (1) is separated. Their length of stay abroad ranged from 3 months to 24 years. Everyone was employed as domestic helper/ caregiver. Country of destination includes Middle East, Hong Kong, Africa and Singapore. In terms of salary, the maximum was \$550 while one did not receive anything from work.

#### *Push Migration*

International migration among the respondents is both a family and individual survival strategy that address the problems of financial difficulty and domestic abuse. Using the family resilience theory, these serve as stressors. Women assess their resources, in their cases, their social networks (sister-in-law, aunt, sister) who assisted them in the process of seeking overseas employment. And so, their decision to work abroad has been justified in this context.

#### *Migration as a response to the economic pressure of the family relaxed the gender expectation among female members of the family*

Overseas labor migration is the common rational strategy of Filipino families to respond to socioeconomic problems. All the respondents except one associate their decision to work overseas to improve their family's economic situation.

### 1. *The case of Marina*

Even before Marina went abroad to work, she has been financially supporting her family. Being the eldest and the breadwinner in the family she needed to support her jobless parents and nieces. Doing so is consistent with the cultural expectation in the Philippine society that it is the responsibility of the eldest child to support parents who are old or who are unemployed. Before Marina departed for overseas work, she was a staff in a pharmacy in her hometown in the province of Nueva Ecija. She worked there for more than 10 years but have decided to resign because her wage amounting to \$64 was not sufficient for her family's needs. She was 31 years old when she went to Singapore to work as a domestic helper in 2003. It was the aunt of her sister-in-law who informed her to apply as a domestic helper in Singapore. The job was enticing because instead of paying the placement fee it was deducted on her salary for six (6) months. For half a year, she was not able to send remittance to her family back in the Philippines because \$215 was deducted from her salary of \$230. She used the remaining \$15 for her toiletries. Only after 6 months that she started sending \$146 monthly remittance for the next 10 years to her family.

### 2. *The case of Ella*

Ella's decision to leave her 9-year-old and 7-year old children in the custody of her husband is influenced by her desire to provide for her family where she wanted to ensure that she can give them a better life. She finished secondary school while her husband only reached the primary level. With the low educational attainment, she and her husband obtained, finding a high paying job seemed impossible. Prior to her overseas work, she managed a vegetable stall in the market while her husband worked as a farmer. However, the meager and unstable income they generate was insufficient for their family's needs. Her overseas migration was a joint decision between her and her husband. She said that since she has higher educational attainment compared to her husband, she was more confident and it was easier for women than men to find overseas employment during those times, that is why she insisted to be the one to work abroad.

It was in 1989, when she decided to work in Dubai. Her older sister who was also working overseas as a domestic helper persuaded her to apply as her sister's employer is looking for another house helper. Her employers were both Saudi Arabian nationals. She worked in Dubai for four (4) years with the salary of \$92 dollars. After her contract ended, she then moved to Hongkong where she worked for 20 years. While in Hong Kong, she had four Chinese employers. For the first six (6) years she received \$219 monthly salary. At the end of her contract, she was receiving \$364.

### 3. *The case of Annie*

Annie and her husband were both high school graduates. They have two children which they were able to support through her income as a meat vendor and the salary of her

husband who is employed as a municipal driver. She decided to leave the country to pay the debt incurred by her husband who was hooked in gambling. Her sisters-in law who were then based in Saudi Arabia as nurses helped her in the process. They looked for a sponsor who served as a dummy employer since it was easier to go there if the employer is a Saudi national. Her sisters-in-law shelled out money which she eventually paid. When she arrived in Saudi in 2002, she worked as a babysitter to a Filipino family. Her employers were both nurses. She recalled how kind her employers were. She was allowed to work part-time every weekend to augment her salary. She ironed the clothes of neighbors and received \$18 per month per household whom she worked part-time. She sent \$145 remittance every other month. She sometimes divided her remittance between her parents and her husband. Despite the good working condition, she experienced in Saudi, she was not able to save money because everything was sent to her family in the Philippines.

### 4. *The case of Julia*

Julia was 27 years old when she left the Philippines to work in Dubai in 1999. She was already married then and her children were young, one was on the sixth grade and the other one was on the third grade. In terms of her educational attainment, she finished a two-year course in Computer Programming while her husband is a high school graduate. Previously, her husband worked with the National Irrigation Administration but when the contract ended, he just helped her in managing their business. But the income generated from their business is so small that they resorted to borrowing money from lending agencies. Their loans piled up and the only option is the temporary labor migration of one of them to settle their loan obligations and to improve their lot.

### 5. *The case of Leni*

She finished vocational course while her husband is a high school graduate. Her husband worked part-time in Manila for construction jobs while she was a market vendor in Nueva Ecija. They have two children: one is ten (10) years old and the other one is seven (7) years old. They were then living in the neighboring province of Nueva Vizcaya when she and her sister-in-law were recruited to work in Dubai for a salary of \$291. She said life was difficult in Nueva Vizcaya. They live on subsistence from the vegetable products they sell. She was full of hopes that overseas migration will enable her to build a concrete house for her family. Together with her sister and a group of female recruits they went to Dubai in 2013. No placement fee was asked but her salary was halved. Out of her dismay she did not finish her contract. She only worked for only 1 and a half years

### 6. *The case of Jing*

Both Jing and her husband are high school graduates. Her husband is currently a tricycle driver in Nueva Ecija. They live in an extended family with their single parent child and two grandchildren. Before she went to work in Hong

Kong in 1999, they lived in a compound with her in-laws. Although they were given a portion of land where they built their own house, she dreamt of renovating it. She said that it was her motivation to work abroad. Also, she wanted to experience working overseas. Because she was hired directly, no placement fee was paid. She earned \$400 for four (years) as a domestic helper in Hong Kong.

The cases of the six (6) married female overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) returnees illustrate how women in the context of migration step up when one's husband failed to economically provide sufficiently for the family. This has reversed the gender role expectation in Filipino family where the wife is supposed to stay at home and fulfill domestic roles. Women through their pursuit of overseas migration for the economic improvement of their family challenged and altered the traditional gender ideology in the country where women are the carers and men are the providers. Now, there is a relaxing of the motherhood ideology as carer and nurturer to accommodate their new role as provider in the family.

#### *Migration for personal development*

Lucia is an elementary graduate with 5 children. She was quite old when she left for the country to work. She was then 40 years old when she worked in Singapore. She must leave the country to get away with her husband who was a womanizer and was physically abusing her. She was invited by her cousin and worked there for 18 months where she had not received anything from the agency as the expenses for her migration was deducted from her salary. Given that, she did not send any remittance to her family in the Philippines. In 2005 she had to leave again due to her worsening marital relation and because of the unemployment of her husband.

In the context of domestic abuse, overseas migration is a way out (Piper 2008). Lucinda's reason to go abroad was to protect herself against her abusive and womanizing husband. Overseas migration is the only way to empower herself. This was a sacrifice on her part because as she escaped from her husband, she was able to provide for her children but was not able to look after their well-being while being away from them. So, the conflicting role of being a provider but neglecting to provide care for her children became her crisis. Despite the growing participation of women in the labor force, the expectation of women as caregivers has not changed, thus, in the context of international migration for the survival of the left-behind family, women in these transnational family structures are still constrained by caregiving expectations (Aranda 2003, p.611).

#### *Transnational Experiences: Vulnerabilities and Resiliency*

Migration is a multi-faceted experience that encompasses opportunities for personal, social and economic development but also includes risk of violence, abuse and exploitation for men and women alike (Gender and Labour Migration in Asia 2009). The social construction of gender influences migration and women migrants' experience of

abuse and exploitation (Tyner 1994). The vulnerability of women migrants in the overseas domestic work was evident from the experiences of the respondents. As gender is socially constructed, a global division of labor among migrant workers is observed. As early socialization process prepares women to perform domestic chores, many women may be limited to domestic service-oriented occupations (Tyner 1994, p.595). These job poses risks and make overseas migrant women more vulnerable to exploitations and abuses. Among the negative experiences of women migrants are violation of contract, inhumane treatment, illegal detention, and attempted rape.

#### *Violation of Contract*

Ella's last employer violated the provision that domestic helpers in Hong Kong should only work within the area. Her employer violated the contract by bringing her to a province in China where she was assigned as the school principal. Ella complained the 16-hour travel from Hong Kong to China every month for the renewal of her Chinese visa. With that tedious routine she intentionally did not finish her contract. She felt exasperated and violated when she was brought outside Hongkong. Her employer threatened to sue her for violation of contract, but she was not shaken and warned her of charging the same by bringing her to China. She was then released from work.

Leni, on the other hand felt cheated because before she left the country, she was assured of a monthly salary of \$300 but only received \$150. Leni's experience is consistent with the observation of Rodriguez (2011) especially in the Middle East where Filipino migrant workers suffered the consequences of contract substitution when they arrive in the destination country, where they are paid lower salaries that what is stipulated in their contract in the Philippines.

#### *Inhumane treatment*

Several stories of exploitation and abuse were recounted by respondents. Their stories are narrated below:

##### *1. The case of Lucinda*

In 2010, she applied and worked as a house helper in South Africa. She was deprived of decent food as she was only fed once a day by her employers with their leftovers. There was also an attempt from her employers to get her phone which she insisted they cannot do because she was the one who purchased it. She was also bold and assertive enough to complain and demand her employers to bring her back to the agency. With the help of a friend the agency moved her out from her employers. She was reassigned to another household, but her situation was worse. Her employer attempted to rape her. She said that she was asked to bring shirt and found out that the employer was caressing his genital. She became dubious when she was asked to bring his shirt, so she brought with her the broom she was holding. When she saw what the man was doing, she said "filthy!" and used the broom to protect herself. She made her voice loud

enough to get the attention of people. When her female employer woke up, she learned about the commotion but was unaware of the actual incident. She asked her female employer to bring her to the agency because of what her husband did. On their way to the agency, the husband kept on saying sorry to her. To no avail, she narrated her story and filed a complaint when they arrived at the agency. Her experience is like the experiences of Filipina migrant workers who are victims of sexual abuse abroad. Her experience is reflective of the sexual abuse and deprivation experienced by women migrants in the domestic work.

## 2. *The case of Julia*

She worked in Dubai for only 3 months because the working visa of her employers had already expired. Her male employer was a French pilot while the female one was of Spanish descent. Because of the huge amount of money her employers paid to get her to Dubai, she was forced to illegally go with them in France. When they were in Dubai, the nature of her work was easy for she was allowed to use appliances. But when they arrived in France, things have changed. She was not allowed to use the washing machine, so she had to manually wash their clothes. In fact, she shared that when she returned in the Philippines, her hands were swollen because she was made to wash manually their thick curtains. She even said that her arm was ironed by her female employer.

The abuse of her female employer started when she was asked by her male employer to spy on her wife whom before was a drug dependent. Upon learning about her task, as a retaliation, her female employer locked her up in her room and starved her for one (1) and a half month. She was only able to get out of her dire situation after she broke the window in the attic and escaped from her room. She informed the Philippine embassy about her situation. She was advised by the Philippine embassy to file a case against her employer, but did not pursue it. Instead, when she arrived in the Philippines, she reported to the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) her employers so that they will be blacklisted and no more Filipino domestic helper will experience the same fate she had with them.

## 3. *The case of Leni*

Notwithstanding the fact that Leni's female employer is a dentist, she was very stingy that even Leni's toiletries were not free. There were also occasions where Leni had to buy her own food because if her employers decide to skip meal, house helpers have nothing to eat. Together with her fellow house helpers, they have no choice but to order and pay for their food which costs \$6 per delivery. Because she can no longer endure her working condition compounded by her frustration on the salary she was receiving, she decided to come up with a story that her husband died and she needed to go home to take care of their children. Knowing her condition there, her husband supported her decision to go home. She even cried to convince her employers and even co-

opted with her family to send a text message from the Philippines informing her of the death of her husband.

These exploitations were experienced in a context where the *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families* is already in place. Human rights violations against migrant workers display gendered differences, such as in the violations of: freedom of movement, freedom of association, right to just and favorable conditions of work, including a healthy and safe workplace and fair remuneration, right to privacy, right to health, right to be protected against discrimination, including sexual harassment, right not to be held in servitude, and right not to be subjected to forced labour (Lansink 2009).

These stories are stories of survival in different situations. Despite the vulnerabilities experienced in the domestic work, Filipina migrant workers are strong enough to handle and face the risks they encountered. Some have taken advantage of their vulnerabilities to demand for a change of employer while others just live with their condition and survived along the way.

## *Pull Migration*

Return migration can be explained by four factors. The first factor is political. From the perspective of destination countries, return migration is a mechanism for the definitive removal of unwanted migrants through forced or semi-voluntary return (Sinatti 2015, pp.285-286). In addition, return migration happens because of temporariness of overseas migration which is associated with the strict migration policy among destination countries that have no existing provision of family reunification of migrants and their families (Mazzucato & Shans 2011). Since there is no provision of family reunification among international domestic helpers, then their primary reason for return is the termination of their contract. Other reasons include personal, health, family-related and work-related.

## *Lucia's need to save her children from abuse*

Lucia personally wanted to go home after several years of working abroad from different countries. However, connected with her personal reason is her concern for her children's well-being. She left her children under the care of her abusive husband. She was able to escape from him, but her children suffered from his abuses. Mentally and physically her children were abused whenever her husband was drunk. There was an instance where her eldest child was battered in the neck with a pipe and all her children were threatened to be chopped and cooked by her husband.

## *Annie's children demanded her not to work overseas again*

Annie had to go home because her daughter met a minor tricycle accident. Although not a serious one, she felt responsible for the event because she was not around. In addition, her children pleaded her not to work back overseas. Thinking that she went abroad for their education, her



children told her, “*kung babalik ka pa mama hindi na kami mag-aaral*” (if you decide to leave us again and work abroad we will no longer go to school) which denotes their eagerness to be with her than to pursue their studies.

#### *Marina and her desire to have a child*

Before Marina left for her final out-migration she married her boyfriend. Her decision to finally return home is influenced by her decision to have a child. She was lucky enough that despite her age she was able to conceive one. Despite the financial hardship she experienced with her married life, she has no desire to reapply and work overseas. She said, she was too tired for overseas migration again.

The primary reason is related to their children. Lucia and Annie looked after the well-being of their children while Marina wanted to have her own child. Working overseas will deter them to attain their family goals. This demonstrates that the migrant women’s role of looking after the well-being of her family remains even though she has become the new provider for the family. Some women migrant workers engage into *transnational mothering* (Dreby 2006; Hoang & Yeoh 2013; Uy-Tioco 2007; Peng & Wong 2013) to fulfill their roles as caretakers of the family using social media technology like Facebook. The second reason for pull migration among respondents is health-related which is illustrated by their admission of losing the physical strength and fit to work overseas.

#### *Ella lost the physical strength to continue working overseas*

Ella, who was 55 years old already when she returned home felt that her body weakened after 24 years of working abroad. She said, “*pagod na din akong magtrabaho saka matanda na ako*”. (Given my old age, I am tired of working abroad). Working for 24 years as a domestic helper enfeebled her body. Likewise, she was able to fulfill her main goal of providing a good life for her family.

#### *Jing is no longer physically fit to work*

Jing became ill when she was in Hong Kong and it was a factor for her to return home. A small lump grew on her neck. She informed her employer about it and was brought to the hospital. At first, she was given a medicine that would possibly remove the small lump. But the medicine did not remove her lump, so her employer had her neck biopsied. Though it was found out that it was not cancerous, her employer funded her operation. She was even subjected to chemotherapy. She requested her employer to allow her to go home but instead asked her if she already had enough savings given her plan of not returning back to Hong Kong to work again. She was only released from work upon her total recovery. Her employer paid her ticket and even gave her pocket money.

Lastly, work-related reason served as the deciding factor why Julia and Leni returned home.

#### *Julia was physically abused*

Julia was maltreated and locked in the attic for one (1) and a half month by her female employer and was deprived of any food and water. The torture she experienced has given her the phobia of working overseas. Her story is no different to the stories of exploited Filipina migrant workers abroad.

#### *Leni was disappointed with the lower salary she received*

Leni’s experience of receiving a salary lower than what is agreed upon is likewise commonly experienced by Filipina domestic workers in the Middle East who are forced to sign a new contract upon their arrival and the old contract signed in the Philippines was destroyed.

#### *Overseas Migration’s Positive Consequences on the Well-being of the Migrant Returnees’ Family*

Temporary overseas labor migration’s economic provision was experienced by Marina, Ella and Jing. The positive consequences of working abroad include the following: sustainability of financial resources for the subsistence of their family, improvement in the finances of the family and accumulating wealth to build a house and purchase a tricycle for the family.

##### *1. Marina contributed to the subsistence of her family*

In general, Marina contributed to the subsistence of her family. For ten (10) years she supported her family financially with the \$145 she had been sending but the remittances she sent back to her family are not enough to enable her family to accumulate wealth. However, the economic well-being of her family especially her parents were ensured during the time she was working in Singapore. For that matter, she recognizes the positive contribution of temporary labor migration in the well-being of her family.

##### *2. Ella’s overseas work improved the economic well-being of their family*

Ella’s overseas migration was a joint decision between her and her husband. Since she has the comparative advantage given her higher educational attainment and greater chance of finding overseas employment, so they arrived at the decision that she will be the one to work abroad. Overall, she is satisfied with her overseas migration because her family became financially able. Her relationship with her family remained the same. The positive about it is that she became empowered that her husband informed and consulted her on the family’s expenditure. The well-being of her children was ensured as her brothers assisted her husband in caring for their children.

##### *3. Jing built her dream house*

In the Philippines, the house symbolizes the socio-economic situation of the family. The success of overseas employment is illustrated by the purchase, transformation and building of one’s dream house. Just like other overseas migrant workers, Jing went abroad to materialize her desire to

construct a house for her family. She successfully attained her goal for she was able to build a bungalow house for her family and even bought a tricycle for her husband.

#### *Overseas Migration's Negative Consequences on the Well-being of the Migrant Returnees' Family*

Temporary overseas migration does not always bring positive consequences to the migrant's family. From the narratives of the respondents, it was stated that overseas labor migration did not bring any improvement in the economic situation of their family. In Philippine society, this is a manifestation of failed migration. More than that, when the well-being of children are affected or are sacrificed when the mother is working overseas signals that working overseas should be discontinued.

##### *1. Lucia's children suffered physically from their father*

Lucia's children suffered from her abusive husband when she was not around. Even though \$182 was sent to the Philippines, she was informed by her children that nothing was spent by their father on them. She felt sorry and was teary eyed that her children transferred from one household to another to survive. They even stayed with their friends' house because their father was physically abusing them especially when he was drunk. She had to make arrangements with her neighbor who has a daughter in Hong Kong to be able to send money directly to her children without the knowledge of her husband. Her long years of working abroad brought no financial improvement on the economic situation of their family. The remittances she secretly sent on her children are just enough for their everyday survival.

Not only that her children are deprived by her husband of the allowance she sent on them, but the health of her son was badly affected. His eldest son developed epilepsy when he was assaulted by her husband. She said, "*yung panganay ko nga naging epileptic at noong sinita niya ang tatay nyang nagsabi sa mga kapatid nyang kung gusto nila sila nalang ang gawing dinakdakan ay pinalo sya ng tubo sa leeg kaya hanggang ngayon ay pinagdudusahan nya ito.*" (My eldest son had epilepsy while I was away. When he reacted to his father who told them "what if I kill you all and make a dish out of it?," he was assaulted with a pipe in his head which until now has an effect on him.)

##### *2. No improvement in the economic situation of Annie's family*

Annie was not able to save money because everything was sent to her family in the Philippines. She equally divided \$150 between her mother and her husband. She was also able to buy expensive toys for her children. With the meager amount of remittance her family received, there was no improvement in their economic well-being. Only if her husband was not addicted to gambling and instead worked hard to help her financially, their situation might have improved.

When she went abroad, her children lived with her mother because she learned that her husband, with its addiction on gambling left their children alone in their house. However, even if her children stayed with her mother, they were never fully cared. In fact, she cried upon recalling that her daughter met an accident because she was asked to go to the market. It was fortunate that the accident was not fatal. This incident became the breaking point for her not to return back to Saudi even if she has already processed her visa before returning home. Her children also requested her not to return and even threatened not to go to school anymore if she will go back to Saudi. Adhering to the request of her children, she still entertains the idea that going abroad can be a solution to the financial difficulty her family is experiencing.

##### *3. The short period Julia worked abroad brought no positive consequences to her family*

In addition, instead of enjoying one's time abroad while working, Julia was traumatized and was discouraged to work abroad again. With the short period of time, she worked overseas, her family did not enjoy the fruits of her temporary overseas migration. If she was not exploited she might still be working abroad and might have brought her family with her in France.

##### *4. Leni's overseas migration was a failure*

Leni considers her overseas migration as a failure. It is associated with the violation of her contract that eventually decreased by 50 percent her expected salary. As expected, there were no improvements in the well-being of her family. That situation had been exacerbated by the fact that she had to buy her own meals when her employers are not in the mood of eating. Overall, she was not satisfied with her migration because no benefits were felt by her family. She still has plans to go abroad but not as a domestic helper again. She said,

*"ang baba ng sweldo ko sa inaasahan ko. Sa susunod kung sakali na mag-abroad ako eh hindi na D.H. ang papasukan kong trabaho."* (The salary I received is lower than expected. Next time when I plan to work abroad, I no longer want to work as a domestic helper again).

## V. CONCLUSION

The motivation for overseas migration has always been one's family. Overseas migration served as the family's adaptation to address the financial crisis of the family. This financial crisis demands female overseas migrants to think beyond their situation to be able to help ease the economic constraint of the family. The desire to provide financially to augment the income of the family and to build a decent house for the family demands that female migrant workers use their resources and the family's resources to address the financial crisis they are confronting. One's social network, e.g. the Annie's sister-in-law, Jing's sister, the friends of Lucia and Julia were all instrumental in motivating these women to take

chances and work abroad to change the economic situation of their family.

On the other hand, Lucia's case is different from the rest. The crisis she faced was her abusive husband who pushed her to use overseas migration to escape him. The situation demanded that she go far away from her husband or else she will die. The decision to work abroad has two uses for Lucia. Other than to escape, it has empowered her and her children financially from economic dependency on her abusive husband. Working abroad is the coping mechanism for her and all her children. However, in her case, her children were caught in between as they never fully go away with their abusive father. What changed their circumstances is not the empowerment of their mother but the separation of their parents which made their situation better.

What this study has revealed is the connection between agency, international migration, resiliency and agency of women migrant workers. The decision to work abroad is personal yet for the economic survival of the family. Women's agency operates outside the motherhood ideology of providing care and domestic service for their respective families. It positions women migrant workers in vulnerable and risky situations overseas with their goal of improving the economic well being of their family. Despite the exploitation experienced by these women, they were able to demonstrate how resilient they are in confronting their situation to be able to balance the well being of their family and their personal well being.

Temporary overseas labor migration is appraised in the Philippines in terms of how it transformed the finances of migrant sending families. When no improvement was observed and the well-being of children are sacrificed, migration is considered to be a failure and return migration occurs. Successful migration is achieved by women who are engaged in domestic work for more than 20 years as shown by the case of Jing.

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## APPENDIX

Table 1. Socio-demographic profile of respondents

Respondent	Age	Age when working abroad	Educational Attainment	Civil Status	Length of stay abroad (in years)	Work abroad	Country of destination	Salary in pesos
Marina	43	31	High school graduate	married	10	Domestic helper	Singapore	10,000
Ella	59	31	High school graduate	married	24	Domestic helper	Dubai Hong Kong	5,000 12,000- 20,000
Lucia	56	40	High school graduate	separated	9	Domestic helper Caregiver janitress	Singapore Saudi Arabia Africa	No salary 7,000 11-000 to 30,000
Annie	40	26	High school graduate	married	2	Baby sitter	Saudi Arabia	8,000
Julia	59	27	Vocational course	married	3 months	Domestic helper	Dubai France	No salary
Leni	35	32	Vocational course	married	1.5	Domestic helper	Dubai	8,000
Jing	51	34	High school graduate	married	4	Domestic helper	Hong Kong	22,000