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When Men and Women Migrate:
Comparing gendered migration in Asia

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WHEN MEN AND WOMEN MIGRATE:
COMPARING GENDERED MIGRATION IN ASIA

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An Overview of Labor Migration in Asia

Asia has been a region in motion since the 1970s, the time when migrations became truly global (Massey et al., 1998). The oil crisis of 1973 was a defining moment as far as migration trends go, reconfiguring the flows and directions of international migrations the world over. Where before Asia was largely a region of out-migration, since the 1970s, Asia has been the site of international migrations, much of which is intraregional. Today, out of the 179 million people who are outside of their countries of birth, an estimated 50 million are in Asia.[1] Of the many forms of international migration in the region, the movement of labor across borders has been most significant. Contrary to the intent of governments to keep migration temporary, it has been sustained in the past 30 years. Asia, thus, like other regions before it (North America, Northwestern Europe, the oil-rich Gulf countries), did not escape the need to import labor to sustain development processes.

A timeline of the major trends and patterns of migration in Asia can be summarized as follows:

• In the 1970s, the beginning of organized migration, labor migration originated from South Asia (India, Bangladesh, Pakistan), East Asia (Korea) and Southeast Asia (Philippines, Thailand) to the oil-rich Gulf countries. This was dominated by male migrants, who were in demand for the many infrastructure projects launched by the Gulf countries. During this period, female migration was only 15 percent of some 146,400 Asian workers who took up overseas employment; their share increased to 27 percent in the next decade (Abella, 1995:241).

• In the 1980s, the high performing economies of Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and later on in the decade, Malaysia and Thailand, had to import migrant workers. The construction sector, plantations, fishing and rice mill industries and factories in these countries experienced labor shortage, as locals moved on to better job prospects. The demand for female migrant workers increased, but the demand was limited to domestic work (Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia) and entertainers (Japan). On the other hand, the Middle East continued to draw migrants, although not in the same scale as in the previous decade. A remarkable development was the opening of the labor market to women migrants to fill jobs in the service (mostly domestic workers), sales and professional (e.g., medical personnel) sectors. The Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka became the major source countries of domestic workers. Female migration from the latter two countries, in particular, is heavily directed to the Middle East countries. While domestic workers also dominate female migration from the Philippines to the Middle East, a sizable number are professionals (mostly nurses and other medical personnel. The concentration of women migrants in domestic work and entertainment (also in caring professions such as nurses) highlights the gendering of the labor market. In Asia, male labor migration has specialized in addressing the labor needs in the formal/productive sectors, while female labor migration is responding to the

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[1] www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2002/pop844.doc.htm; accessed on 20/6/2003

labor shortage in the informal/reproductive sector. The "caregiving crisis" in households reflects how families and households are acted upon and act upon the changes wrought by globalization. In developed countries, households turn to women migrants as a strategy to meet the shortage of "domestic service" as women join the labor market, while in developing countries, households turn to the migration of female members as means to shore up income. In the two-tiered transfer of reproductive labor – women in developed countries pass the work on to women migrants from developing countries, who in turn, pass it on to other women in their countries of origin – women migrants form the crucial link (Parreñas, 2001).[2]

The growing participation of women migrants in the 1980s expanded the discussion of migration to include protection and rights-related issues. These issues already surfaced in the Middle East-bound migration, but they assumed greater urgency with regards to female migration because of the concentration of migrant women in domestic work and entertainment. On the one hand, there are concerns derived from the invisibility of these sectors which render women vulnerable to potential abuses and exploitation, including gender-based violence.[3] On the other hand, the migration of women, traditionally the caregivers in the family, was seen as undermining the welfare of the family. Although family concerns also came up in the large-scale male migration, the departure of men to provide for their families was still part of the repertoire of gender roles – it was not ideal, but it was expected of men to go the distance to provide for the family while the women kept house.

• In the 1990s, two new labor markets emerged: Taiwan and South Korea. Their transition from labor-sending to labor-importing countries occurred in a short span of time. South Korea, for example, was exporting workers to the Middle East in the 1970s, but became a labor-importing country in the 1990s. Likewise, Taiwan saw its people leave for greener pastures in an earlier time. Economic growth in the 1980s not only drew return migrants, but also led to labor shortage in some sectors, which, in the mid- to late-1980s, was addressed by the use of unauthorized migrants in the absence of formal labor migration policies. Recognizing the need for migrant workers but cautious also about their repercussions on Taiwanese society, Taiwan formalized a labor migration policy in 1992. Among its features are the following: limiting the source of migrant workers to ASEAN countries (initially, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand; and Vietnam from 1998) and a one-entry six-year maximum of work and stay in Taiwan (i.e., migrants cannot re-enter Taiwan beyond six years (up from two years and three years before then). Migrants started arriving in South Korea in the early 1990s, filling in the labor shortage in low-end jobs in manufacturing and construction. South Korea had a policy of not admitting less-skilled workers. Instead it instituted a trainee program (which was actually labor migration), which, according to critics, created the huge problem of unauthorized migration. Some 70 percent of migrant workers in South Korea are unauthorized. After many years of lobbying, on 31 July 2003, South Korea passed a law instituting the work permit system. From 1 August 2004, employers would be allowed to hire foreign workers, who would be entitled to

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[2]   In high performing economies in East and Southeast Asia, foreign domestic workers become the "substitute wife/mother" as local women join the labor market. Japan and South Korea do not have a comparable demand for foreign domestic workers (*see* Yamanaka, 1995; Lee, 2003). Both countries, though, import entertainers. In the Middle East, the demand for foreign domestic workers is associated with rising affluence.

[3] Some scholars caution that the attention to protection issues and the presumption of vulnerability of all women (especially vis-à-vis men) at all times may have unintended consequences for women and also presumes women's lack of agency (Piper, 2003; *see* also, UN, 1995)). These are important points to consider, but at the same time, the persistence of problems in labor migration points to the need to continue addressing protection issues and the inclusion of a human rights perspective in framing labor migration.

three basic rights granted to local workers: the right to join unions, the right to collective bargaining, and the right to strike (*Asian Migration News*, 31 July 2003).

Rising female migration from and in Asia in the 1990s indicated that the trend has become irreversible. In the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, female migrants outnumber male migrants among the new workers legally deployed every year. Unlike male migration, the demand for female migration is more constant and resilient to economic swings. The 1997 crisis in Asia was instructive in this regard. While the demand for migrant workers in the construction and manufacturing sectors declined, no such change was observed for domestic workers. However, there were some indications though that their working and living conditions may have worsened (e.g., a slash in wages, longer working hours, employment agencies offering free placement fees to employers and passing on the costs to migrant workers, etc.). Based on the trends thus far and future demographic trends, the demand for female migrant workers is likely to continue.[4]

Two other trends were evident in the 1990s: the rise (or increasing awareness of) in trafficking in persons, especially women and children,[5] and the growing demand for professionals and skilled workers. All receiving countries welcome professionals and skilled workers, granting them family reunification and permanent residence.

Thus, against the odds of a highly regulated and restrictive regime, labor migration has evolved into a massive and relatively permanent phenomenon. Migrants make up some 29 percent of the work force in Singapore; Malaysia has about 16 percent (Battistella, 2002). In the GCC countries, migrant workers outnumber national workers (72 percent vs. 28 percent as of 1990 – Evans and Papps, 1999:302), prompting these countries to design policies and programs to nationalize their work force.[6] Figure 1 locates the receiving countries in terms of having an official policy acknowledging the need to bring in less-skilled migrant workers.[7] At one end is Japan, which has maintained a policy of not admitting less-skilled migrant workers. It has responded to the shortage of less-skilled workers by admitting *Nikkeijin* (descendants of Japanese migrants in South America) and by introducing the trainee program.[8] Unauthorized migrant workers make up the rest of the shortfall.[9] At the "open" end are countries which have codified their system of

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[4] There is a resurgence of demand for nurses in developed countries. Aside from nurses, the demand for caregivers is also increasing.

[5] Unauthorized migration is significant in Asia – at least a third of labor migration in Asia is unauthorized. In some countries – Malaysia, Thailand and South Korea – the proportion of unauthorized migrants is larger than authorized migrants (*see* Battistella and Asis, 2003).

[6] As of 1990, the share of migrant workers in the work force in the individual countries was as follows: Bahrain – 53 percent; Kuwait – 86 percent; Oman – 67 percent; Qatar – 77 percent; Saudi Arabia – 68 percent; and UAE – 89 percent (Evans and Papps, 1999:207).

[7] The sending countries in Asia generally acknowledge the necessity of labor migration. In Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Philippines, the state is actively involved in labor migration. The government of Vietnam has also started to promote labor migration. Thailand became more of a labor-importing country in the 1990s up until the 1997 crisis; it resumed a program of labor migration since. Some countries of origin, e.g., the Philippines, frame their labor migration policy as a temporary measure to counter unemployment. This has turned out to be wishful thinking as unemployment problems continue to plague countries of origin.

[8] Entertainers are classified as professionals by the Japanese and Philippine governments. In the Philippines, they are officially referred to as "Overseas Performing Artists." Japan has entertainers from other countries, but they are unauthorized migrants, including victims of trafficking.

[9] The presence of unauthorized migrant workers marked Japan's discovery of migrant workers in the 1980s. The numbers peaked in 1993 and declined thereafter, in part because of the sluggish Japanese economy, and in part because of more controls.

admitting migrants and regulating their stay.[10] The fact that they have a formal system of importing migrant workers does not imply an open and welcoming reception of migrants. In general, the policies are intended to control and regulate migrants through limited work contracts (usually two years).[11] The work permit governs the entry, stay and work activities of migrants. Migrant workers cannot change employers or employment sector; if they do, their work permits are revoked and they are rendered unauthorized workers. The joint provision of entry, stay and work activities of migrants does not give migrants the freedom to seek better working conditions. In between these two ends are Thailand and Malaysia whose policies tend to be ad-hoc. Malaysia approved the establishment of recruitment agencies for foreign contract workers in 1981. Before then, Indonesians were recruited informally to work in the plantations; by the1980s, Indonesian workers had found their way into the domestic and construction sectors (Wong and Teuku Afrizal, 2003:175-177). Malaysia developed the first comprehensive policy for the management of migrant workers in 1991, but in practice, it has changed or modified its policies several times. Some read these revisions as flexibility (e.g., Kanapathy, 2001); others see it as ambivalence. In 2002 Malaysia introduced amendments to the Immigration Act to solve the problem of unauthorized migration by introducing more punitive measures to unauthorized migrants –six months to five years in jail, MR10, 000 in fines, and six strokes of the cane. In the case of Thailand, migrants arrived spontaneously from neighboring Burma (also Cambodia and Laos) even without a recruitment system in place. The government has been coping with the "problem" of unauthorized migration through a registration system. From September 2004, however, Thailand will shift to a work permit system to recruit migrant workers.

To summarize, the template of migration policies in the region – keeping migration temporary based on the control and surveillance of migrant workers – has gone unchanged in the last 30 years. Countries of origin have introduced mechanisms to promote the protection of migrant workers, especially women workers – legislation (e.g., the Philippines), pre-departure orientation and training programs, on-site programs and services, deployment of labor officers and welfare officers – but these are not sufficient. Receiving countries in general have not been as cooperative. Although some moves to enhance the protection of migrant workers have been introduced (e.g., Singapore has introduced several good practices in recent years such as providing for tough punishments for offences against foreign domestic workers[12]; accreditation of employment agencies; and production of educational materials promoting good employment practices), the fundamental premise of migration policies has remained the same. This policy regime has resulted in the following outcomes: keeping migration temporary (but extended through contract renewals), limiting migrants' participation in the receiving countries in the economy (and in a specific sector and employer), and preventing settlement by not allowing family reunification.[13] These conditions have real consequences for migrants: they cannot count on job tenure, they are not free to choose better wages and working conditions, and they are not allowed to have a family life.

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[10] Singapore recognized its need for migrant workers way back in the late 1960s. It has the advantage of putting in place a migration policy before the arrival of migrants. Malaysia, Thailand and South Korea found themselves having to deal with a large number of migrants in their midst and drafting policies later.

[11] Entertainers in Japan have shorter contracts, usually six months; seafarers usually have a 10-month contract. Taiwan's single entry and six-year maximum stay is another exception to the two-year contracts.

[12] Malaysia has introduced a similar amendment in its penal code.

[13] There is some settlement taking place in receiving countries brought on by the marriage or relationship between migrant workers and locals (e.g., Asis, 2002). This is true in Japan, Taiwan and Korea, where some data on international marriages are available. *See* Piper and Roces (2003) on how labor migration and marriage migration intersect. Some problems have been noted for children where the marriage or relationship has broken up, leaving women sole responsibility for the children (e.g., Asis, 2003, 2001).

What Drives Male and Female Migration in Asia
There has been considerable research on migration in Asia in keeping with the relentless trend of labor migration. Extant literature on migration in Asia tends to be descriptive, providing useful documentation of trends and patterns of migration, characteristics of migrants, sources and destinations of migration, working and living conditions of migrant workers in the countries of destination, and so forth. A review of research outputs in the region found them atheoretical, of which lack of data was a factor (Hugo, 1998).

Given theoretical developments in migration studies and three decades of migration history, theorizing about the determinants of migration in Asia would have to consider the interaction of triggering and sustaining factors operating at various levels. To start with, economic-demographic differences are stark in Asia, and they define the basic contours of migration flows, i.e., the movement of labor from low-income and young, high population growth countries to high-income and aging, low population growth countries. The interventions of the state, the migration industry and social networks are crucial in determining and facilitating actual migration flows as well as access to legal or unauthorized channels (Figure 2).[14] The migrant industry, in particular, has played an important part in linking employers and workers, for a fee. [15]In the Philippines, recruitment agencies and manning agencies (specifically for seafarers) number over 1,000; in Singapore, there are about 400 employment agencies engaged in providing domestic workers. With migration becoming widespread and commonplace, it is not surprising that individuals – men and women alike – are taking the initiative to migrate. The perception of migration as a means to improve the family's situation runs strong in migrants' motivations, but other reasons also figure.[16]

Oishi's (2000) work sheds further light on the feminization of migration in Asia. Although a substantial number of women participate in legal international labor migration, the great majority of female migrants come from just three countries – the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka.[17]

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[14] We used this framework in our study of unauthorized migration in Southeast Asia (*see* Battistella and Asis, 2003:). We viewed legal and unauthorized migration as part of an integrated migration system. The same determinants and facilitators are at work and legal and unauthorized migrants are not distinct – where they differ is in their access to legal or unauthorized channels. We subscribed to a definition of unauthorized migration as a violation or departure from the migration norms of a country of origin, transit or destination. We maintained that unauthorized or irregular migration is distinct from trafficking in persons in the sense that the latter is a specific and more violent form of unauthorized migration.

[15] The involvement of the migration industry has increased the costs of migration, as these are passed on to migrants.

[16] For example, performing the *haj* is an important reason for the migration of Indonesian women to Saudi Arabia (e.g., Sukamdi et al., 2001 in Wille and Passl, 2001).

[17] The extent of women's involvement in unauthorized migration is difficult to quantify. In our study of unauthorized migration in Southeast Asia, there were as many women as men in the survey of Filipino migrants who had ever been in an unauthorized situation while among Indonesian migrants to Malaysia and among Burmese migrants to Thailand, there were more men than women (*see* the country reports for the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand in Battistella and Asis, 2003). In the case of Indonesian migration, the finding supported observations in earlier studies that women predominate in legal migration while men predominate in unauthorized migration. In contrast, among Thai migrants, female migrants are a minority in legal migration (13 percent in 1998, in Angsuthanasombat, 2001:171); reports suggest the large numbers of Thai women in unauthorized migration, specifically in trafficking in persons (*see* Caouette and Saito, 1999). As a receiving country, Thailand does not officially import female migrants; instead female migrants are brought in through irregular channels, including trafficking. In South Asia, the scale of trafficking in women and children is not insignificant. Thus, in a region where the official policy restricts female migration (except Sri Lanka), women move anyway, but they so clandestinely, or they are trafficked.

She offers an integrative approach to explain high levels of female migration from these countries and its absence or negligible levels in other Asian countries. At the macro level, she examined state policies; at the micro level, she looked at autonomy and women's role in decision-making; to link the macro and micro factors, she examined the issue of social legitimacy (as indicated by such variables as women's employment, the country's integration in the global economy, rural-urban migration, and gender equality in education). State policies concerning female migration are the main drivers at the macro level (*see also*, Lim and Oishi, 1996; Abella, 1995). The labor sending countries have varying degrees of openness in allowing female migration (Figure 3). Restrictions operate through age, destination or occupation (in some cases, employers); bans have been imposed and lifted in times of greater vulnerability or periods of strained relationships between the origin and destination countries. According to her, policies on male migration are "economically driven" as opposed to being "value-driven" (i.e., welfare/protection) for female migration. In the three major source countries of female migrants, various factors contribute to facilitate female migration: the state does not impose many restrictions on female migration (the state may even be perceived by other observers as encouraging or promoting female migration); women in the three countries have a wide latitude in autonomy and decision-making; and women's migration is compatible with the participation of women in economic activities, rural-urban migration, [18] and participation in education.

Comparing the Impacts of Male and Female Migration in Asia
• *Difficulties experienced by migrants*
There is much literature documenting the difficulties and problems encountered by migrants from pre-departure, to their migration, work and stay abroad, and to their return to their home countries. Migrant NGOs have been active not only in documenting these problems but also in responding to these problems through various programs and services and advocacy (SMC, 1997). Over the years, the problems migrant workers face have not changed much – illegal recruitment, illegal exaction of fees, or confinement prior to deployment; on-site, migrants have encountered contract substitution, breach of contract, withholding of passport, reduced/delayed/nonpayment of salaries, long working hours, limited/no days, limited food, bad living conditions, work-related injuries, no access to health care, or illegal termination of contract. In the case of migrant domestic workers or entertainers, sexual harassment and gender-based violence have been reported as well. Returning to the countries of origin can be fraught with problems as well. Migrant workers returning to Indonesia or Sri Lanka have had to deal with unscrupulous airport officials, or being tricked by transport operators. Economic reintegration and psychosocial adjustment are other changes that returning migrant workers face.

Much of the problems of migrants originate from structural constraints, particularly the role of state policy and practices. The stress on controlling migration has affected migrants' conditions. Aside from the restrictive terms of the work contract, some receiving countries, such as Singapore and Malaysia, impose a bond to ensure that migrants stay with the same employer and that they leave the country at the end of the contract. Such a condition – i.e., the employers as the police – puts migrants in a highly unequal relationship vis-à-vis employers. Concerns about losing their money predispose employers to keep a tight watch over migrant workers, resulting in violations of migrants' rights (e.g., keeping the passport, no days off).

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[18] In Southeast Asia, large numbers of women engage in urban-ward migration. In South Asia, urban migration involves mostly males in search of jobs while rural migration involves mostly females, a movement associated with marriage (women leaving their natal home to join their husband's family). This is changing, depending on the kinds of opportunities opening up. The garments industry of Bangladesh, with a base in Dhaka, opened avenues for female migration to the city.

One of the insightful analyses on how state policies affect male and female migrants is the comparison of male construction workers (MCWs) and female domestic workers (FDWs) in Singapore; these are the largest groups of migrant workers in Singapore (Huang and Yeoh, 2003). They noted that although migrant workers occupy a marginal position in Singapore, this marginality is gendered:

- Differential access to legal protection
    o MCWs have more legal protection against abuses. They are covered by the Employment Act, and as such, they have more access to legal protection; they have the means to air their grievances in public; they have access to other workers; they can join unions; they can present their case in the Labor Court; they are covered by the Workmen's Compensation Act.

    Except for publicized cases, FDWs suffer abuse in isolation and invisibility not only because of the conditions of their employment, but also by the lack of legislation protecting their terms and conditions employment. They are not covered by the Employment Act.

- Differential effects of state medical surveillance
    o All foreign workers must undergo a medical examination and be examined by a Singapore-registered medical practitioner before they can be issued a work permit, or six months prior to the renewal of a work permit. Aside from the standard tests – physical check-up, chest X-ray and HIV testing – female workers are subject to a bi-annual pregnancy test. Those who fail the medical examination are immediately repatriated.

- Differential valorization of skills and productivity
    o This is indicated by the levies the government has set for workers. In the construction sector, the levy for employing a skilled worker is S$30 and S$310 for unskilled; the levy for *all* FDWs is S$345. The government is also concerned with upgrading the skills of MCWs and providing decent housing for them; there is no such regard for FDWs. The state, thus, does not view domestic work as productive work, for which one can "upgrade" skills. Domestic work is not an "industry" as the construction sector. There is also no state discourse about the need to improve the housing conditions for FDWs (even as there are media reports on FDWs sleeping in the kitchen, etc.).

- Differential social control in public space
    o Migrant workers' use of public space on weekends has stirred public complaints and fears[19] about the "polluting effects" of migrants' (weekend) enclaves. The state has provided social entertainment and facilities to MCWs (in response to public complaints as well as to discipline MCWs); the gatherings of FDWs did not merit state attention. According to Huang and Yeoh, the state has relegated the task of "policing the maid" to employers (p. 91).

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[19] Similar concerns have figured in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Huang and Yeoh (2003:93) point out that the vulnerability of FDWs comes from not recognizing them as workers:

> In the eyes of the state, the FDW is not so much a worker within a key industry in the national economy but an appendage of the Singaporean household, brought in by private contract, and made necessary only because the "family" (and within it, women in particular) are no longer able to absorb what was traditionally unpaid work.

Chin (2003:60) makes the same point about the Malaysian state's exclusion of domestic workers from key pieces of labor legislation (Employment Act, Employee Provident Ordinance, Employee Social Security Ordinance, Workmen's Compensation Act):

> The absence of legislation covering domestic service at once highlights and obscures, the state's affirmation of an essentialized identity for women. … The performance of childcare and other aspects of housework are then considered women's duties within the innermost sanctum of society. Taken to its logical conclusion, housework should not be subject to the same kinds of utilitarian calculations of exchange value that characterize the public domain since it is an inextricable part of women's labor that is endowed by nature. In this sense, the conventional meaning and usage of the phrase "domestic service" aptly captures the dogged perception that women's work in the home is "service," as opposed to work.

In the Asian context, the experiences of migrants are not only modified by gender but also by ethnicity. Among migrant workers, Filipinos are generally better off compared to others. For example, in Hong Kong and Singapore, Filipino domestic workers earn more than their Indonesian and Sri Lankan counterparts; in Taiwan, Filipino domestic workers or caregivers earn more than Indonesian or Vietnamese migrants. The higher wages commanded by Filipino migrants and their reputation for being assertive about their rights have affected their marketability.

• *Migrants' access to support and assistance*
As noted above, migrants who work in the formal/productive sector have access to support and assistance; migrants who work in the informal/reproductive sector are outside the purview of labor laws. Thus, for migrant domestic workers (and entertainers), their best bet is to hope for a decent employer.

The state in the countries of origin has been called to task by migrants and migrant NGOs to address the needs of migrants. The state has responded to this clamor in varying degrees. The Philippines, for example, is often held up as a model and as a source of good practices for promoting the protection of overseas Filipino workers.

The state in the receiving countries has been generally complacent or disinterested in providing support and assistance to migrants. The gap has been filled by migrant NGOs and civil society groups (e.g., Lee, 2003; Yamanaka, 2003; Kim, 2003; Pudjastuti, 2003). In the case of Filipino migrants, the presence of the Catholic Church in many countries has provided migrants the space and the node to link up with other Filipinos, to get information, to find some support as well as to develop support structures. Various programs, ministries and services have developed from these loosely organized groups (Asis, 2002). Other churches and church-based organizations have reached out to other migrant workers.

Aside from programs and services for migrants and their families, migrant NGOs – both in the sending and receiving countries – have promoted the public discussion of migrants' issues and in advancing the human rights aspect of migration. Some NGOs are refocusing their energies into more economic empowerment of migrants and their families. Transnational networking among NGOs and civil society groups (Piper and Uhlin, 2002) is emerging, an important step towards transnational approaches to a transnational issue.

The coming into force of the UN Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families on 1 July of this year marks an important milestone. None of the receiving countries ratified the Convention; in Asia, only the Philippines and Sri Lanka are party to the Convention.

• *Economic impacts*
Remittances are the conventional measure of the economic impact of migration. All countries of origin acknowledge the importance of migrants' remittances to their economies. Recognizing the sacrifices of migrants to support their families back home and the economy in general, the Philippines regards migrant workers as the country's new heroes. The macro impacts of remittances are suggested by the volume of remittances, the share of remittances to the GDP or GNP, and the share of remittances compared to other dollar-generating industries.

There is near consensus that *in general* and over the *short-term*, international migration has economically benefited families and households. At the least, international labor migration has helped families meet their daily needs. With repeat migrations, which allows migrants and their families to recover the costs of migration, migrants are able to put their earnings into other investments: land, better/durable housing structures, the education of children/family members, or capital to set start a business (e.g., see country reports in Gunatilleke, 1993 for male migration; Wille and Bassl, 2002 for female migration). In Sri Lanka, accumulating resources for dowry is among the priority investments of women migrants (Gamburd, 2003). The increasing costs of migration require several contracts or more years abroad before migrants could put their money into other uses.

Gamburd's (2003) village study of the use of the UN compensation money received by Sri Lankan domestic workers who were affected by the Gulf War of 1991 examined how migrants and their families made decisions about money, particularly a significant amount of money.[20] The 11 families that she studied used the compensation money to productive uses – land and house, dowry, and business – prioritized according to a hierarchy of local goals and objectives. Only after land, house and dowry have been secured would migrants put money into business (particularly in business ventures for which they have sufficient knowledge). This study thus demonstrates the need to consider local views and conditions to understand the migrants' perspective of what constitutes productive and non-productive investments.

This finding appears to hold true in other settings as well. After basic needs are met, migrants turn to durable investments such as the purchase of land or house construction. Housing is rooted to security or well-being. In the words of a woman left-behind in Kerala (Gulati, 1993:15):

> No one can take my land and house away from me. Even if my husband returns, we can always live here. No one can throw us out because we are poor.

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[20] The UN compensation amounted to US$4,000 per person; about 87,000 Sri Lankan Gulf returnees received this amount between 1997 and 2000. The money was given in two installments: the first was between 1997 and 1999; and the second was between 1999 and 2000.

If migrants tend to extend their time working abroad, it is because the family's needs also change over the life cycle. Also, the goal of providing for the children's education requires more of a continuing than a one-time investment. Thus, even if migrants had thought of saving money to start a small business, this will have to wait until the other needs are taken care of. Emergency situations like sickness or death in the family could erode savings migrants had allotted for other purposes. Considering the uncertain economic environment in the community (and the country) of origin, migrants' decision to continue working abroad makes sense than investing in a business whose returns are either uncertain or will take some time to materialize.

Studies that have examined return migration concur that migrants who voluntarily return – in the sense that migrants returned voluntarily because they have met their goals – comprise the minority. In the context of temporary labor migration, the return of migrants can be conceived of as varying degrees of forced return – those who returned at the end of the contract (but were not renewed), those who returned prematurely (e.g., due to family emergency or pre-termination of contract), and those who returned because of disruptive events (e.g., the 1991 Gulf War).

• *Family and gender relations*
Concerns about the impacts of migration on the families left behind are a major concern in the countries of origin; the alarm level rose with the migration of women. In the Philippines, for example, given the role of women as the "light of the home" (a complement to the father as the "pillar of the home"), the departure of women is seen as problematic for the stability of the family and the welfare of the children left behind. Women migrants bear a lot of guilt in leaving their children behind – and the fact that they care for other children (or other families) while they leave their own in the care of others – haunts them.

In the absence of men. Notwithstanding differences in cultural contexts, studies in South Asia and Southeast Asia find that while left-behind families encounter difficulties and adjustments, on the whole, families are coping well. Left-behind women initially feel burdened as they assume the duties and responsibilities of their husbands, but many women also acknowledged an appreciation of lessons earned and discovering strengths and talents (e.g., Go and Postrado, 1996; Gulati, 1993; Zachariah, Mathew and Rajan, 2002). In a study of Gulf wives in Kerala, India, the wives identified the following problems (in the order of importance): loneliness, added responsibilities, adverse effect on children's education, debt incurred to finance emigration, increased anxiety, and fear that emigration will not bring in financial gains (Zachariah, Mathew and Rajan, 2002: 79).[21] In the seven-country study in Bangladesh, India, South Korea, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand that focused on male migration to the Middle East in the mid-1980s, the case studies revealed the importance of the family in the successful management of migration. In the Philippines, many migrants acknowledged the role of the wife and the need for the couple to cooperate to make migration a success. In most of the cases, it was household-wide cooperation that spelled the difference (Gunatilleke, 1993:13-14).

In contexts where women do not have as much mobility, male migration breaks down women's isolation, as their added responsibilities (repayment of loans, investing money, etc.) bring them outside the orbit of the home. In her in-depth study of 10 women left behind by husbands or sons, Gulati's (1993) overall conclusion resonate with the survey findings of Zachariah, Kannan and Rajan, 2003): there were more successes than failures. In the absence of their men, women broke ground by taking on tasks (and did them well) that traditionally men have excluded them from.

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[21] The same study noted that some husbands left for the Gulf soon after marriage.

The case of seafarers presents peculiar challenges for family relations. Seafaring is more than an occupation than a particular lifestyle – "a lifestyle that involves a constant series of partings and reunions with associated transitions from shore-based life to the unique work environment of the ship" (Thomas, Sampson and Zhao, 2003:59). In their study of seafarers' wives in the UK, China and India, the majority of wives reported that the absences of their spouses led to problems, including loneliness and emotional distance when their partners return home. Communication with their husbands was very important for the wives left behind – it serves to "allay fears, to maintain close relationships, to improve seafarers' morale, to relieve stress (on board and at home) and to maintain relationships with children" (Thomas, Sampson and Zhao, 200368).[22]

In the absence of women. Given their closer identification with the family and things domestic, changes in women's roles and status tend to affect the family more than similar changes in men. The migration of women, especially mothers, has invited much speculation about the many adverse consequences that could befall the family, especially for the children.

If families have done well in the absence of their men, it is because women take up the slack. When it is the women who leave, the evidence is mixed. On the whole, families also adjust to the departure of the primary caregiver, but men do not necessarily take up the slack as women do. Instead, it is other female family members who assume the caregiving roles left behind by migrants. Some evidence also suggests some husbands taking a more active role in performing domestic chores and caregiving.

The migration of women is in itself a powerful statement. Even in societies which provide a leeway for female mobility, the ideal is a stay-at-home wife and mother if economic circumstances would only allow it. Out of necessity, families and households have learned to adjust to on-the-move wives and mothers.[23]

While they are abroad, women become the breadwinners, contributing significantly to the economic sustenance of their families. Problems such as husbands wasting their wives' hard-earned money or infidelity have been noted. Some marriages have not survived these problems. The economic independence women migrants have achieved has also emboldened some women to put an end to a bad marriage (Asis, 2002; *see* Asis, 2001, Sukamdi et al., 2001, Beesey, 2001, and Angsuthanasombat, 2001 in Wille and Passl, 2001).

In the Philippines, studies that have interviewed husbands of women migrant workers indicate a changing conception of masculinity (Pingol, 2002) and rearrangement of gender roles which has not threatened men's position in the family (Huang, Yeoh, and Asis, 2003). Men who have experienced juggling paid work and domestic work and the few who became full-time fathers and caregivers acknowledged gaining a better appreciation of the work that women do (Asis, Huang and Yeoh, 2002).

A survey in the Philippines by Battistella and Conaco (1996) on the children (pre-adolescent children) left behind provides useful comparison on selected outcomes of children of non-

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[22] We found similar sentiments shared by FGD participants in our ongoing study of children and families left behind in the Philippines.

[23] The migration of Sri Lankan women of Muslim background is a case in point. In general, males are the breadwinners and the women's domain is in the home. These women convinced their families and community to allow them to migrate by invoking migration as a way out of poverty; they also used their identity as Muslims to justify their travel to Muslim countries and to negotiate with local recruiters who cater to Muslim clients (Ismail, 1999:232).

migrants, children whose fathers are migrants, children whose mothers are migrants, and children whose both parents are migrants. Findings from the study suggest that the mother-absent children tend to have lower academic performance and had difficulties with social relationships compared with other children. The study also pointed to the role of the extended family in providing support and care to the children left behind.

Our center is currently doing a nationwide survey on the children left behind to draw a nationwide picture of migrant families in the Philippines have been affected by international labor migration. We have endeavored to include the children of seafarers in our sample in order to obtain more information about this sector.[24] The study involves a survey of pre-adolescent children (n=1640) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with adolescent children of migrant workers, left-behind caregivers (wives or husbands left behind), and community workers working with families of migrants. We are about to complete the data collection and we target to complete the report by March 2004.

• *Return migration and reintegration*
In some cultures in Southeast Asia, migration used to be a male preserve, an enterprise undertaken by men as a journey of achievement. Upon their return, those who have gone out outside the community, return with a badge of honor and recognition.

In contemporary times, the journey of achievement has been recast into labor migration with all its problematic implications (separation from the family and the problems it can engender). Although economic gains may be most recognizable, migrants also acknowledge other non-material gains: a better sense of self, experiencing a new world, or spiritual enrichment.

A common challenge facing all migrants is economic reintegration; this issue may be even more important to migrants than social reintegration. Note that most of the migrants are in less-skilled occupations, hence, the prospects of skills acquisition may be limited.[25] Migrants who had been abroad for some time will find that upon their return, they will be considered "old" for the labor market. Men and women also face different challenges. Women migrants, most of whose experience is in domestic work abroad, are not likely to find other options in the country of origin. Even those who acquired other skills may not necessarily be more marketable because they will still be disadvantaged by their background as domestic workers (*see also* Ismail, 1999:239). The situation is worse for those who had been in entertainment work because of the stigma attached to this kind of work. Those who had ever been entertainers will also have to deal with failed relationships and children whom they will likely raise on their own.

The question of how long changes in gender roles persist upon the return of migrants has not been sufficiently answered. The changing contexts of migrants before migration, during their time abroad, and upon their return home give rise to different forms of vulnerability and empowerment.

Some Recommendations/Further Questions for the World Survey
Based on the labor experience in Asia, the following are examples of issues and themes that the World Migration Survey can look into:

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[24] Some 20 percent of the world's seafarers come from the Philippines.
[25] In the case of Filipino migrants, there is the issue of de-skilling as they may have more qualifications than what their overseas jobs require.

- Further examination of how migration can promote development

  The economic difficulties of return migrants (and the cycle of remigration) are indicative of the lack of options in the countries of origin. How can the development potentials of migration be linked more directly or indirectly to development processes? How can receiving countries provide more development assistance to countries of origin? How can migrants be transformed into agents of development?

- Identifying options for linking potential migrants and labor markets/economic assistance package for migrants' families

  The high costs of transaction/placement fees push migrants into a debt trap and predisposes them to accept difficult working conditions. There is a need to identify a system that will link migrants and jobs without having to go through the profit-oriented migration industry. Related to this is the need to design an economic assistance program that would provide basic safety nets for migrants and their families before, during and after migration.

- Further examination of the links between internal and international migrations

  What are the implications of time-space compression on the internal-international migrations divide or interface? To what extent do the issues and questions we raise in the context of international migration apply to or affect internal migration and vice-versa? For example, the two-tiered transfer of reproductive labor is not only true in the global context but in the national (and local) context as well. How has the situation of women migrants who work as domestic workers been affected by the international migration of women in the same occupation; has the advocacy for the rights of domestic workers abroad also led to advocacy for the rights of local domestic workers?[26]

- Exploring the role of communications technology in enhancing migrants' access to support and services and linkages with their home countries and families

  There have been dramatic changes in communications technology in the latter half of the 1990s. The proliferation of cell phones and the significant drop in the prices of long-distance calls have contributed to "transnationalizing" migrants' lives, facilitating contacts with their home countries (specifically, their families) while living and working in other countries. Fro example, having a cell phone enables migrant workers (particularly domestic workers) to subvert their employers' restrictions against the use of the telephone and communicating with co-nationals. During the war in Iraq, Philippine embassies in the Middle East region resorted to the cell phones to keep in touch with Filipino communities. Data from our ongoing study on the children and families left behind also attest to more opportunities for communication among migrant families, a factor that sustain families together despite the distance. Among seafarer families, e-mail and phone calls allowed them to communicate day-to-day events that may not figure in letters or have long gone at the time of visit (Thomas, Sampson and Zhao, 2003:69).

- Family issues

  Family-related questions have been explored more in relation to female migration than male migration. The voices of men concerning family-related issues continue to be underrepresented in the literature on transnational families. In our experience in the Philippines, it is difficult to access male respondents; this calls for devising strategies to reach them and to secure their

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[26] I owe this point to Dr. Ron Skeldon and Dr. Nicola Piper.

participation.

Other related issues: the life cycle of the family; the migration of unmarried men and women; longitudinal approaches in examining the impacts of migration on families

• Studies on the social impacts of migration in receiving countries
  Aside from the economic-oriented studies, there is a dearth of studies on how migration has affected receiving societies. The lack of understanding and misconceptions about migration (and migrants) contributes to migrants' lack of support in the receiving societies. Misconceptions abound as to the supposed links between migration and the rise in criminality, spread of diseases, the decline in entrepreneurship, values formation of young children (in relation to foreign domestic workers), and so forth.

• Identifying factors related to integration/multiculturalism in the receiving countries
  The restrictive migration policies of receiving countries have severely restricted migrants' integration. However, case studies suggest some good practices developed by local communities to welcome migrants (e.g., Japan). A documentation of good practices promoting integration or multiculturalism, as well as obstacles to it would provide some baseline information for exploring the possibilities of integration and multiculturalism in the different regions.

Design issues such as the use of multiple approaches, the adoption of a multi-level analysis, and a gender framework are indispensable in understanding the complex and messy ramifications of migration.

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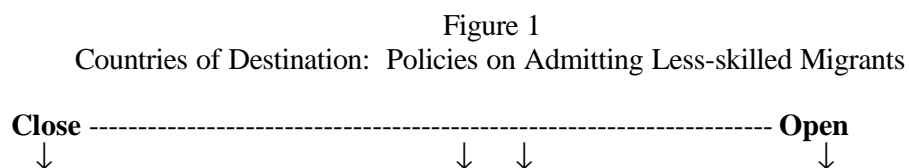Wille, Christina and Basia Bassl, eds.
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Figure 1
Countries of Destination: Policies on Admitting Less-skilled Migrants

Close --- **Open**
  ↓   ↓ ↓   ↓

Japan   ↓ Malaysia   Brunei
South Korea (pre-2004)   Thailand (pre-2004)   Hong Kong
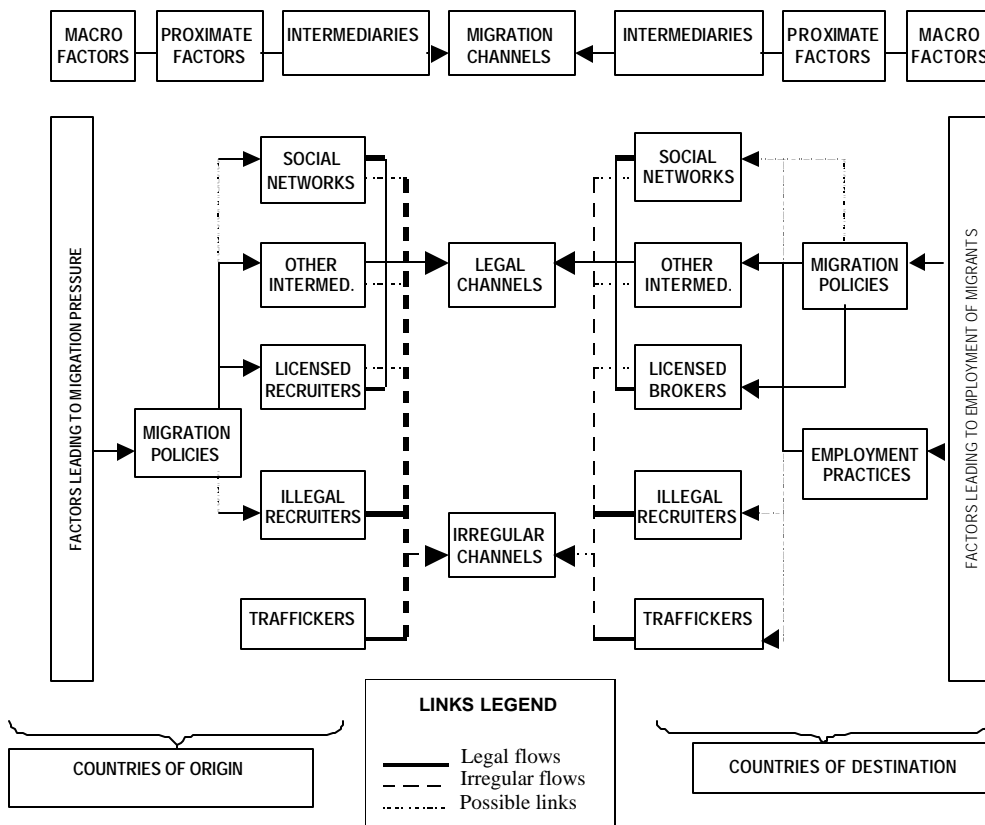   Singapore
                                                                      Taiwan
                                                                      Thailand (2004)
                                                                      South Korea (2004)

Figure 2
Analyzing Legal and Unauthorized Migrations

Source: Battistella and Asis, 2003:14

Figure 3
Countries of Origin: Policies on Allowing Female Migration

Close --- **Open**

Pakistan

Philippines

India

Indonesia

Bangladesh   Thailand

Sri Lanka

Vietnam