“The Filipina is a fighter, a fighter for her rights, a fighter for her freedom to work and freedom to express herself”: An anthropological study about the feminization of migration in the Philippines

By Beatrice Maurin

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"The Filipina is a fighter, a fighter for her rights, a fighter for her freedom to work and freedom to express herself"

An anthropological study about the feminization of migration in the Philippines.

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Abstract

**Title:** “The Filipina is a fighter, a fighter for her rights, a fighter for her freedom to work and freedom to express herself”: An anthropological study about the feminization of migration in the Philippines.

This thesis is a result of a Minor Field Study with the purpose to examine the transnational labour migration by women in the Philippines who seek temporary employment abroad but plan to return to the Philippines after their contracts expired. The thesis is based on three months of anthropological fieldwork primarily in Manila between January and March 2013, using interviews and observations as my main methodological tool. I will reflect over the way in which women labour migration affect the women individually and socially by leaving one context and entering another. Migration places the Filipina outside the domestic sphere within their home country and increases their income-earning power. The Filipina has taken the role as the family’s breadwinner and is thereby challenging dominant gender roles within the Philippine society. The experience being a female migrant enhances their status, makes them stronger, more confident and provides them with the opportunity to make decisions independent of their male partners. Filipinas are being praised by their own society as ‘modern day heroes’, but at the same time blamed for leaving their obligation as dutiful daughters, nurturing mothers and caring wives. Ideas from state and society do not correspond to the reality, namely a reality where women have taken the position as their family’s main breadwinner. Which complicates the ability to induce a change in ideas regarding gender roles for men and women. Conclusively, the female migration has not resulted in a change regarding gender roles within the Philippine society.

**Keywords:** Female migration, The Philippines, Gender roles, Mother, Wife, Daughter, Gender obligations.
## List of acronyms

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EVP</td>
<td>Exchange Visitor Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFW</td>
<td>Overseas Filipino Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Government Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>OWWA</td>
<td>Overseas Workers Welfare Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>POEA</td>
<td>Philippine Overseas Employment Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>DFA</td>
<td>Department of Foreign Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMA</td>
<td>Centre for migrant advocacy</td>
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Cover Photo: 2013 Taken by the writer, Beatrice Maurin: A city in Metro Manila
Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I would like to thank my informants’ for giving me an insight into their lives by sharing their experiences and stories with me. I would like to give a warm and loving thanks to my host family that opened their home to me, took me in as a family member and made my stay in the Philippines joyful and meaningful.

To my supervisor Charlotta Widmark. I wish to thank you for the effort you have put in while guiding me through my writing. Pointing me into the right direction and reminding me over and over again to keep stringency.

I am grateful for the financial support I got from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) that made my fieldwork possible. I would also like to thank Per Eriksson for the information I got before entering my field, same applies to Elina Ekoluoma who also helped me with useful literature.

At last, I am forever grateful to my family and friends that have supported me, believed in me and encouraged me through my writing. Especially thanks to Simon Grudéus, Ann Maurin and Kenneth Pettersson. You have all been my solid and stable ground throughout my journey with the thesis.
Being back in Sweden I some times see Filipinas walking with a baby stroller in the park where I live, some times in the company of what I suspect is the child’s mother. I hear my friend, who work at a kindergarten, speak about the children’s nannies, most of them Filipinas that drops them of in the morning and picks them up in the afternoon. They dress them, feed them and tuck them in when it is bedtime. I hear people speak about their parents’ housekeeper being a Filipina, and they all speak of them with pride. Because having help from a Filipina can in some aspects result in giving the family a higher status in that the Filipina often of times have a college degree, and is therefore seen as educated - reflecting upon yet another one of the paradoxes regarding the feminization of labour migration in the Philippines?

- Notes from my field diary
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Chapter 1. Introduction

I earned a lot more than I used to before I went abroad. It has also made me stronger. I know that I have the capacity to take care of my kids financially. I know that I will be able to provide them with what they really need like food, clothing and education so it also gave me power and made me feel powerful for my own self. That, even though I have experienced a lot of hardship before, since I have worked abroad I have gained a lot experience so somehow it gave me power.

-Dalisay

We are living in an age of migration were the labour migration is being described as taking on a woman’s face, the so-called feminization of migration, reflecting the millions of women travelling abroad for income-earning opportunities. Recent studies in Asian migration have revealed five common trends; an increasing feminization of migration, a prominence of women as autonomous migrants, a shift from traditional family migration to the migration of individuals (Chow 2002: 20).

The Philippines is now one of the world’s two top labour exports where the government actively promotes outmigration as a politically expedient development strategy to deal with the country’s weak economy. Sending migrants abroad have become an industry and the women are being described as the “modern-day heroes” mainly because of the remittance they are sending back to the country have been showed to constitute the single largest source of foreign currency for the Philippine economy (Kanlungan 2009:18). Remittance is generally understood to be the money sent by Overseas Filipino Workers, so called OFWs, to their homelands. It has been showed that it has brought both positive and negative features and opportunities for the country and individuals involved. Women are today migrating alone as temporary workers and it has been shown that migration can provide women with new opportunities to improve their lives and challenge and change their current gender roles. Migration can provide women with a greater autonomy, self-confidence and status due to the fact that they have been able to provide their families with a vital source of income (Jolly & Reeves 2005: 1). Migration is an integral feature of the world today and it is known that women are today migrating on their own as heads of households and no longer, in the same extent, migrating in their capacity as wives dependent on their husband. Today women more often migrate independently and in
their own capacities as workers (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). In doing so, female migration has led to a disruption of traditional gender norms in the Philippines and generated into new ideals and new opportunities for women. However, ideas regarding gender roles (what is perceived as feminine and masculine talking about labour and household shores) are still strong within the society and therefore tough to transform and open up. At the same time, the fact remains that women migrate to do care work, as domestic helpers, nannies or nurses, employments and roles that have been rejected by men (Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2002: 3) and left for women. Women most of the times leave the Philippines to care, feed and nurture in other countries and therefore reproduce other societies. With that said, it is known that approximately 121 Filipinos leave the country every hour in search for a better life elsewhere (GMA News 2009, May 9). Of these more than fifty percent are women. It is said that the Filipina is the quintessential service worker of globalization, which reflect Nigel Harris saying,

Filipinas are everywhere, a genuine labour force - maids gossiping and smoking on their day off in downtown Hong Kong or Singapore, working Japanese farms, running the duty-free shops of Bahrain, cleaning most of the world’s cities from London to Sao Paulo.

Nigel Harris 1995: 15

Even though domestic work may be seen as something oppressive and retrograded when talking about women working in the private sphere, it can also be seen as something empowering. Women become stronger and more self sufficient through migration and the experiences that comes with it. The meaning of being a migrant depends upon the perceived experience of the arrival, consolidation and reorientation. “To migrate is to be industrious and strong enough to give up the familiar life at home in exchange for challenges and difficulties in the foreign lands” (Åkesson 2004: 93).

Defining female international migration

According to Ehrenreich and Hochschild migration has become a private solution to a public problem concerning poverty, social stagnation and the privatisation of public health care (2002: 18). “The female migrants are moving from the so-called third
World to the centres of global capitalism in order to take up low-wage jobs as service or domestic workers within a highly gendered economy” (Liebelt 2011: 5). The reason for migrating reflects a remarkable diversity. It has been showed that young women dominate the migration, but older women migrate as well. The women can be married, single, mothers or widows. They are strivers as well as victims, wives’ and mothers as well as workers (Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2002: 13). The women can be old or young and bear the faces of the low- and middle class but most of them have one thing in common - they migrate in the effort to improve their own- and their family’s well being and life standard. All migrants do not come from the poorest families. Looking at the social class structure in the Philippines there are also migrants from the middle- and upper class backgrounds. For that reason you need to place the migrants backgrounds in a context to reflect the opportunities that is available for them and at the same time make the assumption that economies alone do not determine the migration. In one sense you are migrating for your own welfare, but also for the safety and obligation towards your family, your kin group. According to Åkesson the “long-distance interaction between those at home and those abroad is crucial in shaping the migration project” (2004: 15).

Most of the women I met were so called, contract labour migrants. According to Castles, contract labour migration may be defined as “temporary international movements of workers, which are organized and regulated by governments, employers or both” (Castles 2000: 95), “where the Philippine government established an overseas employment administration to encourage migration and to safeguard workers’ conditions” (Castles 2000: 99). Governments of labour-sending countries see the migration as an ability to reduce their own unemployment, where the migration provides training and experiences and mainly because of the remittance workers send home to their families. The contract labour migration is often portrayed as highly organized system, it meets temporary needs, such as rapid economic growth, industrialization etc. The original idea to send workers to a receiving country for a specific period, who would not seek social integration and who would send their savings to their families back home, would be repatriated when the contract expires (Castles 2000: 101-2). The reality is often of times different where the Philippines have a long history of contract migration to be able to meet the unemployment that is current in the country. The lengths of stay have increased and when the contract
expires many women return back home just to be able to apply for a new or extended contract. It can be their employers that still need their service or the women themselves that do not wish to return back home, or feel the need that they still have to provide for their family. According to Friedman-Kasaba, migrants are “part of the on-going circulation of resources, both capital and labour, within the boundaries of single global division of labour, that is between a dominant core and a dependant periphery” (1996: 24).

Within migration studies a distinction is often made between forced and voluntary migration. Forced migration, in the aspect that the migrants themselves did not take the decision or the fact that they did not have a choice. For example a refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group (UN Refugees 9 June 2014). Voluntary, in the aspect that the migrant was the one deciding to migrate. People may choose to migrate, or have no choice, or the decision may fall somewhere on the continuum between the two. All the same, migration is the movement of people from one place to another. It can either be internal (movement within the country), or external (movement from one country to another). When reflecting on migration in general there is also a discussion about temporary- or permanent migration. Permanent migration can mean that people reside in another country for good and change their citizenship, whereas temporary means that you stay in the country on a short-term basis. The Philippines are known to reflect all these different movements. My study reflects mainly on temporary migration, namely those who work in a foreign country on a short-term basis and seek their fortunes of work abroad, bound to a contract of two or four years. Their immigration statuses are tied up with their employment status and they used to be called overseas contract workers but are today popularly known as Overseas Filipino Workers, so called OFWs (Kanlungan 2010:7).
Migrating women are not a new trend around the world. Instead researchers within different disciplines have begun to recognise the phenomena more widely. Today several streams of thinking and lines of inquiry have emerged within this field of gender and migration over the years, and many important works have been published, providing illuminating ethnographic data. Over the past years anthropologists have in a large sense concentrated on studying the sexual division of labour (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992, 2001) and women’s subordination regarding wages and their victimization, and downward mobility in the country visited (Stafford 1984). They have been looking at the meaning of household (Pessar 1988; Briody 1987), racial and class inequalities (Foner 1986), social networks (Wilson 2009), and on themes of gender, ethnicity and identity (Brettell 2003). Willis and Yeoh (2000) have been looking at the decision-making regarding migration and Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997, 2001) examined the definition and meaning of motherhood within the ‘transnational existence’. Where both the employers, who are themselves mothers and the employees rely on substitute mothering, using the concept of “transnational motherhood”. Grasmuck and Pessar (1991) have been looking at the question of return migration. Chow has stressed the importance of having a gender perspective while dealing with economic development and globalization (2002) and Mahler has illustrated how analysis of migration are being enriched if you bring gender from the periphery toward the core of migration studies (2006).

One writer that has influenced my work is Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2001, 2005, 2008). As a reader you will be introduced to her work at several occasions. Parreñas provides a perspective on the lives of the families of overseas contract workers in the Philippines. Her interviews with children of migrating parents provide an understanding of the changing dynamics of gender roles and the reformulation of patriarchal ideology within the Filipino family. As mentioned above, transnational families have previously been studied, however, Parreñas research offers a close look at the lives of the family members left behind, with a focus on the children. She looks at the impact of distance on the intergenerational relationships, mainly from the children’s perspective, and thereafter analyses gender norms in these families, both their reproduction and transgression in transnational households. According to
Parreñas the geographical separation unavoidably strains the family intimacy, while arguing that the maintenance of traditional gender ideologies intensifies and sometimes even creates tensions that plague many migrants families. The responsibility to care and nurture is still perceived as the mothers’ responsibility even though they are separated by geographical distance.

Claudia Liebelt, with her field in Israel, provides an understanding about the Filipinas life as a migrant in the so called “Holy Land” by using concepts such as arrival, consolidation, incorporation and/or reorientation to reflect the narration of her informants (2011:61). Where migrant’s domestic workers are often described as being subject to racial discrimination, labour exploitation and excluded from the mainstream society. Liebelt provides a more nuanced account and illustrates in what ways Filipina caregivers in Israel have succeeded in creating their own collective spaces, as well as negotiating rights and belongings. Liebelt further investigates how female migration has been regarded and presented as both threatening and strengthening for Filipino women and the Philippine nation. She is taking the concept ‘feminization of migration’ and turns it into a methodological tool by arguing that the Filipina care and domestic workers must be studied within a framework of a ‘gendered global economy’ (Liebelt 2011: 6).

While maintaining transnational ties and engaging in border-crossing journeys, these women seek to fulfil their dreams of a better life. At the same time they reflect the creation of a form of global citizenship, consisting of greater social, economic and political rights within the highly gendered global economy. According to Liebelt, the “Filipina women are global players in a literal sense and develop new subjectivities” (2011:184). They are being described as globetrotters and ‘natives’ of transnational spaces where they are negotiating lived citizenship on a global scale (Liebelt 2011: 184).

My study differs in relation to Liebelts research in the way she partly looks at permanent migration, whereas I look at the migration where women return back home after their contract expired. She looks at the way Filipinas create their own collective spaces, as well as negotiating rights and belongings in the receiving country, while I have a focus in what happens upon the return to the Philippines.
Purpose and aim, having a female perspective

Even though the study of female migration has started to be discussed in a serious matter it is a marginalized topic in anthropological studies. Significant research has been made about the female’s responsibility and duty to their family and relatives at home, and about the migrating female as victimized, excluded and marginalized in the labour country. Still there remain unanswered questions within this field and that is why I would like to, in my proposed study, collect more data about this phenomenon. I would like to move beyond the description of the Filipina migrant worker as merely a victim by using my informant’s subjective experiences, practices and future aspirations as a point of departure. They will be described as actively negotiating and therefore challenging dominant gender positions while being abroad. I will reflect over the way they perceive themselves and over the social and cultural changes that may result from leaving one context and entering another. Looking at the contemporary migration I would like to illustrate the social transformations engendered by the women migration in the Philippines and the meanings attached to the greater income-earning power that migration provides women. It has been argued that migration can provide new opportunities for women and change oppressive gender relations. Therefore I look at the way dynamics of change in gender relations have been brought by migration, but at the same time reflect on the influence from deep-rooted ideas from society and state. My main three questions are,

• What are the connections between female migration and possibilities of new role taking, liberation and self-confidence on an individual level?

• When labour migration by women is seen as being motivated by the search for economic improvement for their families, in what way can you at the same time see it as a way to transform ingrained gender relations in the household and in the society and as a way to escape oppressive or dominant gender relations?

• By focusing on Filipinas, what has changed in the way that they define and perceive themselves when they return, due to the fact that they have had an
economic influence for their family during the time they have been working abroad? And how is this change being practiced in their every day life in the household?
Disposition

The thesis consists of seven chapters, ending with a conclusion. In this chapter the reader has been given a general description of female migration, and a definition of migration. Followed by a summarizing presentation regarding previous research within the field and my purpose and aim.

In the second chapter my theoretical framework is presented by first examining how theories regarding migration has been debated within anthropological studies, followed by a short reflection regarding feminist critiques. I will thereafter bring the concept of gender central to the field of migration, while discussing its importance and how the concept can be used to generate change.

The third chapter will clarify the methodological approach that was used in the field. The performed fieldwork will be presented. The reader will also be introduced to my informants’, how I entered the field and dealt with my limitations. The focus in chapter four is on the meaning of family and home within a Filipino family. The general presentation will offer, and be useful for the reader while being given an insight of why women may decide to migrate. The part exemplifies how they depend upon the migration and how migration can meet struggles in society regarding healthcare and education.

Chapter five deals with gender expectations and obligations, discussing gender ideas concerning a woman’s role in society and her moral and gender obligations being a woman and a mother. Followed by a discussion regarding social costs that comes with the migration. In chapter six I will provide useful insights upon how the migration can provide women with the ability to expand their space. How they can become stronger, gain more self-confidence than before the travel and how, even though they may work as domestic helpers, can gain a higher status due to the fact that they earn an important income.

Chapter seven illustrates how the women negotiate traditional gender ideas by becoming a migrant and how this is being met by state and society. How, female migrants deal with the notion of return, and how they after awhile start to look for possibilities to return back abroad. In chapter eight, the conclusion, the thesis will offer an analysis of the main findings of the fieldwork and offer answers to the research questions. Namely that female migration does not contribute to a change regarding gender roles.
Chapter 2. Theoretical approach

In this chapter I will introduce the theoretical approach that I will use in the analysis of my findings. This chapter will start by giving the reader an introduction of how the debate around theories regarding migration within anthropology has been reflected upon. This will be followed by a feminist critique, arguing that the absence of women in theory reflect the patriarchal hegemony that creates gender bias. If there is an absence of gender realities women will be overlooked and generalized. Therefore the chapter proceeds by showing how gender matters and can be seen as a central aspect in the field of migration studies. By applying a gender perspective the analysis you can detect more dynamics then without, therefore the thesis will be mirrored within a gender context with focus on women. At the same time looking at the possibilities of taking new gender roles by challenging traditional habits, by constantly repeating new patterns.

A discussion towards the theory being used

Studies of migration have been and continue to be an important area of innovation in anthropological study and theory. The research field is broadened in its particular anthropological approach, focus and questions being asked concerning the migration. Brettell describes anthropology’s attention while dealing with migration as,

… the articulation between the place whence a migrant originates and the place or places to which he or she goes. This includes exploration on how people in local places respond to global processes. Equally, anthropology’s focus on cultures, which includes the study of the interaction between beliefs and behaviour, of corporate groups, and of social relationships, has resulted in an emphasis in migration studies on matters of adaption and culture change, on forms of social organization that are characteristic of both the migration process and the immigrant community, and on questions of identity and ethnicity.

Caroline Brettell 2000: 98

Expecting to be a part of presenting one of the heterogenic phenomenon’s within the transnational migration I lean on Brettells summary of the anthropological study regarding migration, namely,
Questions in the anthropological study of migration are framed by the assumption that outcomes for people who move are shaped by their social, cultural, and gendered locations and that migrants themselves are agents in their behaviour, interpreting and constructing within the constraints of culture.

Caroline Brettell 2008: 5

Some argued that the study of migration was well recognized by the end of the nineteenth century in the works of Marx, Engels and Weber. It began with the study of people moving from the rural to the urban communities, which was seen as corresponding to the distinction between developed and underdeveloped - modern and tradition. The people that moved were described as progressive types, who thought their move contributed to development and the breakdown of their tradition. Similar studies were made and in anthropology you had a critical view regarding the migration as seen as something that ruptured the culture (Bernard & Spencer 2002: 558).

Women who migrated were rarely the subject of anthropological research, let alone migration theory, until the 1980s. The male served as the prototype for all migrants and the female migration was seen as being motivated by social reasons, like following the footsteps of their husbands. Men were analysed and portrayed as being politically and/or economically motivated in migrating. To quote Libelt this view was based on, “hegemonic gender ideologies - according to which women are predominantly ‘social’ beings, responsible for the moral and emotional integrity of the family, whereas men are its breadwinners, adventurous individuals who like to travel - it hardly corresponded, nor corresponds now, to reality” (2011: 6).

Often in anthropology it has been assumed that transnational migration is motivated by people’s desires for a better economy and higher social status. Only by referring to the Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology (Barnard & Spencer 2002) the meaning of ‘migrant’ is straightforwardly defined as suggesting ‘upward mobility’. When using the term ‘transnational’ it is used to signify the fluidity with which objects, ideas and, capital and people move across borders and boundaries. The transnational perspective on migration arose in the late 1980s “largely as a way to comprehend international migration that paid attention not only to migrant’s incorporation into new societies as
they resettled, but also to homeland ties they sustain or build even as they settle abroad” (Mahler & Pessar 2006: 41).

There are several different perspectives while entering the field of migration. One focus has been drawn to the macro-structural level while interpreting transnational migration as “the outcome of the world capitalist system’s demand for labour”, whereas at the micro-level the neo-classical approach “views emigration as the outcome of an individual decision made for income maximization” (Åkesson 2004: 15, 17) also called the Harris-Todaro model (1970). It means that the potential benefits of migrating are weighed rationally against the investments and costs of the migration process, also called the ‘cost-benefit calculation’. The movement is seen as being motivated by the “desire for individual income maximization, based on rational comparison of the relative cost and benefits of remaining at home or moving” (Castles 2010: 1572). Human beings are seen as rationally in the search of their self-interest while being guided by the principle of maximizing gain and at the same time minimizing the cost and effort (Chow 2002: 28). One of the strengths that Åkesson declares regarding the micro-level of the neo-classical approach is that the agency of the migrant is emphasized. These approaches have nevertheless been strongly criticized in their assumption that the choice to migrate purely lies on the basis of cost-benefit calculations, reasons regarding economics. What is ignored is the fact that all “human practices, are always socially embedded and culturally informed” (2004: 15,17). The list of theories concerning migration is long and complex. The economic factors are important, but hardly, according to Castles, ever sufficient in order to understand any specific experience. He claims that, complexities also implies to diversity where a combination become infinite. Therefore you should point to the crucial role of context - “the links between migration and the other economic, social, political and cultural relationship at work in particular places at a particular historical juncture” (2010: 1573). For instance, an understanding of the phenomenon of female migration in the Philippines would not be complete without an understanding concerning their history of colonialism, trade and their creation of ideas of gender relations.

Another approach that has dominated the research is the historical- structural approach that has its intellectual roots in Marxist political economy and in world system theory. This approach stressed the unequal distribution of economic and
political power in the world economy. “Migration was seen mainly as a way of mobilizing cheap labour for capital. It perpetuated uneven development, exploiting the resources of poor countries to make the rich even richer” (Castles & Miller 2003: 25). Where the neo-classical approach, regarding ‘pull and push’ theories mainly concerned the voluntary migration of individuals, the historical-structural approach looks at the mass recruitment of labour by capital (Castles & Miller 2003: 25). The migration in the Philippines is an example of this where they have answered to the global labour demand and where the West stimulates the migration demand for cheap labour, and form the beginning was reinforced by their former colonizers, the Americans.

After 1945, anthropologists began however to make more positive evaluations while pointing out the importance of family networks within the new settlements and started to notice the growing trend of the movements of workers migrating abroad (Bernard 2002: 559). “Detailed analyses of the social and economic context that migrants, their families and communities operated in” (Bernard 2002: 559) started to form. According to Åkesson, the network theory was seen as capturing the migrants’ agency better and served as a catalyst of further emigration and worked independently of changes in economic ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors. At the same time it provided an insight into how particular individuals became migrants and others did not (2004: 18-9). Åkesson quotes Gardner (1995) who claims that much anthropological work on migration “… relies upon over-generalized theories which fail to deal adequately with the heterogeneity of migratory phenomena and the meanings which individuals or their communities give to it” (2004: 19).

One of the conclusions that can be drawn from the different theories that have been presented is that women in a large sense have not been the subjects of research. Instead, feminist critics have criticised that most migration theories have reflected a male bias where the male migrant has long served as a prototype for all migrants (Liebelt 2011:6). Therefore is my intention to through the thesis be aware of in what aspects meanings and understandings are connected to gender.

At the same time I will through the thesis stress the importance of the migrants agency. The decision to migrate is not only made on the basis of economic gain, instead the decision and choice are always socially embedded and culturally informed by impacts from the state, society, kin and the influence from abroad. The question,
why did you migrate? Is a question that concerns issues of gender inequality in the Philippines including domestic violence, labour marked segregation, unequal salary and unequal division of labour within the family. Hence, just to analyse from an economic perspective cannot fully explain the whole reason of the desire to migrate.

Feminist critiques

Even if we accept that some theories are gender-neutral we still have to consider the consequences of having a gender-blind perspective within research. The consequences can reflect the notion of only having “masculine standpoints and structures of male domination by muting women’s voices, devaluing their worth, and subjugating their position to men’s. The definitions, concepts, tenets, and language used in each theoretical discourse are interwoven with masculine meanings and viewpoints....” (Chow 2002: 35). To only assume that women are only incorporated to households through reproduction and not within the world system the researcher fails to see the women’s active roles as doing resistance (Chow 2002: 35) and her active role as taking on agency, making own decisions and acting accordingly. There is an absence of gender realities if women’s reality is overlooked, disregarded and generalized. By having a gender-lens ones research there is a chance to reveal power relations that privilege men and subjugate women (Chow 2002: 36).

Mahler and Pessar describes when the transnational perspective arose in 1980, gender was featured as much less prominently than other socially forces such as race, ethnicity and nation. Concerned that gender would be marginalized they organized panels and conferences where a gender perspective was brought into the debates. The problem was not the lack of interest, but instead the lack of a theoretical approach “for how to conceptualize and study gendered identities and relations when conducted and negotiated across international borders, as they relate to multiple axes of difference, and as they operate along and across many sociospatial scales - from the body to the globe” (2006: 42). This resulted in them developing a framework called “gender geographies of power” (GGP) that is composed of four fundamental building blocks: geographical scales, social location, agency and imagination or mind work. The model is meant to capture the understanding that gender operates, usually
simultaneously, on multiple spatial, social and cultural scales, for example as within the body, the family, the state, gender hegemonies and counterhegemonies (Mahler & Pessar 2006: 42). A model that been used by other scholars dealing with migration with a focus on gender (see Mahler and Pessar 2006).

Gender shapes migration - period. The question why it was possible to previously only focus their research exclusively on males and why gender haven’t been a common aspect within previous theories regarding migration can still be asked. Maybe it can be drawn from similar questions regarding, why women are invisible in history. Peczon-Fernandez concludes ironically it might depend upon the fact that,

Women must have wombs a hundred times bigger then their body size such that they can beget thousands of male children with one or two females only which would explain the scarcity of females and the overwhelming presence of males in recorded history […] A few women, on rare occasions, make history somehow, and that is because they are not truly women in the first place, but men in women’s bodies.

Albina Peczon-Fernandez 1996: 1

Until the feminists intruded, Peczon-Fernandez claims that historiography and the philosophy of history were grounded in patriarchy and that “even female historians, in general, were not free from gender bias. As it is with most women word-wide, they suffer from patriarchal colonization” (1996: 2). Namely, that they see and perceives the world as men like them to see it. “History, according to men, is history, not herstory” (1996: 4). Lastly Peczon-Fernandez claims that, “

The family, the Church, the school, the government, media, etc. become propagators of sexism. All effectively relegate women to the background thus clearing the foreground for the males, which they have appropriated as their own private preserve. They have put up the signboard which says: WOMEN: KEEP OFF OUR GRASS! And because women have kept off men’s grass, they have allowed men to become the gatekeepers of history. It is only through men and with men that women can make history. That is what men think. We will see.

Albina Peczon-Fernandez 1996: 18

According to Mahler and Pessar there are multiple sources of marginalization, where some are disciplinary, methodological and other ideological. Ideological
marginalisation in the aspect that scholars write that they are studying ‘gender’, yet examine only women (2006: 50).

To incorporate gender in migration research is not to ‘privilege’ it but to accord it the explanatory power it merits.

Sara Mhale & Patricia Pessar 2006: 51

Gender matters

Gender shapes human life in all its phases. It answers to the way people give meaning to the biological reality of two sexes. Gender is a creation and an on-going process that organizes people’s behaviour and thoughts. The concept of gender refers to the differences and commonalities between men and women while referring to different aspects such as social, economic, political and cultural forces. Bringing gender into migration studies provides a further analysis (Mhale 2006:29). Although it has not always been recognized migration has always been a gender question, whether talking about forced, or voluntary migration, migration for education, for work, for marriage, for return or reunification. Migration patterns are highly gendered, in terms of the causes and consequences of movement (Ghosh 2009:9, Mahler et al. 2006:29). Migration is gendered from the very first thought of migrating. It is not only the legal system in the country that determines whether or not the women are allowed to migrate, it is also the gender relations within the home. The attitudes giving women the ability to migrate alone reflects the social norms, attitudes and context in the home and within the society. The gender structure within the sending and receiving country often reflect the work that is offered to the women, and how they are welcomed back having been abroad - talking about return migration. Even the migration policies are gendered which provide differential opportunities for women and men, and how the remittance are spent and distributed.

Chow states that, “social and cultural attitudes and perceptions concerning women’s low social status and traditional reproductive role in the family, workplace, and society are such that women migrants often face gender bias and prejudice that may be different for men in both the sending and receiving countries” (2002:22).
Gender is embedded in the society and influences the way in which women and men follow through and experience their migration. By approaching my study through a gender lens the field becomes beleaguered with inequality, heterogeneity, struggles and contradictions derived from different hierarchies and structures (Chow 2002:9). As Enloe claim, you need to ask gender questions that will help you make a sense of things that are otherwise very puzzling. Women in this matter are not a minor sidebar interest, and if you ignore the meaning of gender you underestimate power (Chow 2003:1199-1200). Gender is embedded in social structures and shapes social processes, which affect women and men, and their relations to one another. Where the gender inequalities are based in material, ideological realities and household and migration dynamics (Chow 2002:44). According to Chow, gender, as a social construction is a central category in the analysis of relationships. By quoting Scott, Chow (2002) defines the aspect of gender relations as, “gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power” (2002: 43). Accordingly, gender is relational and social, and the focus per se is not on women but on the gender relations between men and women.

Relational analysis helps to problematize the dominant category of masculinity that depends on women as the subordinate ‘others’ in order to buttress the existing gender order and male status quo and seeks to understand how power relations affect the unequal access, control, and distribution of values, resources and justice. Making power [gender] relations the focus of analysis draws on the complex and fluid processes through which women and men negotiate over choices and dilemmas, which are perceived differently by women and men in varying positions and stages of the life cycle

Esther Ngan-ling Chow 2002: 43

With that said, by having gender as an analytical tool and as a point of departure and a consisting theme throughout the thesis I will focus on identifying and analysing the concept of gender within the field of female migration. By increasing awareness of how gender is made, constructed and reinforced in different situations are examples of how other actions and alternatives are identified and thereafter selected.

Gender is, as has been mentioned previously but may require being repeated, a human “intervention that organizes our behaviour and thought, not as a set of static structures or roles but as an on-going process that is experienced through an array of social institutions from family to the state” (Pessar & Mahler 2001: 442).
Conclusively, by conceptualizing gender as a process points to my advantage where gender identities, relations and ideologies are fluid not fixed. Gender is not a static condition or a product of nature, but rather a condition that is possible to change by repeated actions. By identifying the expected gender customs within a society you can challenge them and make a change through a *stylized repetition of acts* (Butler 1988).

**A process of engendering, degendering, and regendering**

Beauvoir states that, “one is not born, but, rather, *becomes* a woman” (2002). Gender can be conceptualized as both a process and a structure. Where gender, on the one hand, is a dynamic process and generated to the term “doing gender” (West & Zimmerman 1987). This means that, “perceived differences between men and women are socially constructed through human interaction in everyday life […] leading to differential outcomes for women and men” (Chow 2002: 43). Butler claims,

Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather it is an identity tenuously constituted in time - an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gender self.

Judith Butler 1988:519

Gender is according to Butler a constructed identity and a performative accomplishment that is by the social audience, and by the actors themselves a believed truth and reality that is performed in the everyday life. Gender identity is grounded through repeated acts through time, which conceals rules and norms of the society (Parreñas 2005: 95).

Butler understands acts not only as “constituting the identity of the actor, but also as constituting that identity as a compelling illusion, an object of belief” (Parreñas 2005: 95). Feminist theories have one thing in common, namely their criticism of the naturalistic explanations of sex and sexuality. That women’s social existence can be derived from some fact of their physiology. By distinguishing sex and gender feminists have contested the notion that the sex would dictate certain
social meanings for women’s experience. Instead you may, according to Merleau-Ponty reflections, see the body as a historical idea rather than a natural species (Parreñas 2005: 95). Whereas the body is understood to be an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities. The body is seen as a historical situation and is a “manner of doing, dramatizing, and reproducing a historical situation”, in other words to embody the structures (Parreñas 2005: 521). To clarify, Butler’s claim, “the act that one does, the act that one performs is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene” (Parreñas 2005: 526). Even Beauvoir claims that women are an historical idea, rather than a natural fact, when making a distinction between the sex (as a biological facticity) and gender (as a cultural interpretation). Rather than being a woman, Beauvoir would claim, that you become a woman, where you compel the body to fit into a historical idea, “to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project” (Parreñas 2005: 522). At the same time Butler sees gender performance as a strategy of survival, where discrete genders are what humanizes individuals within the specific society and culture, and those who fail to meet their gender right are regularly punished (Parreñas 2005: 522).

Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis. The tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of its own production. The authors of gender become entranced by their own fictions whereby the construction compels one’s belief in its necessity and naturalness.

Judith Butler 1988: 522

Your body becomes gendered through a series of acts, which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time, but the acts are not individual but rather shared experiences and collective actions. Indeed there are individual ways of doing one’s gender. What Butler means is that one acts in accordance to certain sanctions and proscriptions (1988: 523,525). To answer the question, in what sense is gender an act, Butler turns to Turner’s studies regarding ritual of social drama. He claims, according to Butler, that social action requires a performance, which is repeated. A repetition of already established meanings; “it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation” (1988:526). To make a gender transformation possible, Butler
states that, it needs to occur in action, under repetition, or in the failure to repeat the expected gender behaviour (1988: 520).

Gender is not passively scripted on the body, and neither is it determined by nature, language, the symbolic, or the overwhelming history of patriarchy. Gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure […]

Judith Butler 1988: 531

Chow draws upon similar assumptions namely that gender should not be seen as a “permanent result of early socialization, but as a lifelong process in which people construct, deconstruct, and then reconstruct the meaning, discourse, and accomplishment of gendering. The process of engendering, degendering and regendering is constantly evolving in everyday practices and interactions” (2002: 43). With that said gender becomes a structure when a variety of gender relationships are institutionalized in the social system, forming gender hierarchy, inequality and a specific order in society (Chow 2002: 43). By not forgetting, gender is determined by,

… culturally prescribed roles and statuses appropriate for women and men with norms and sanctions to regulate behaviour. However, the process of gender construction also involves the definition of specific situations, contexts through which women and men interpret their social interaction and shared lived experiences, assess their interests, and select appropriate attitudes and behaviour or modify them accordingly. Thus situations, as flexibly defined and redefined, create new meaning in gender relations and increase dynamism in the process of genderization as women and men continuously negotiate their ever-changing realities.

Esther Ngan-ling Chow 2002: 46

According to Foucault, actions primarily retain ideology, and therefore changes in actions can reconstitute and transform ideology. Parreñas states with help from Foucault’s’ discussion concerning ideology that “various actions suggests the reconstitution of the ideology of women’s domesticity, including the maintenance of single-parent households by migrant women; the role of migrant women as breadwinners; and the performance by migrant of nontraditional jobs. Migration, for example, enables a redefinition of the boundaries of what are considered morally acceptable jobs for women (2008: 11).
Gender can also be seen as a structure where Risman claim that gender cannot only be seen as something that is constituted in practises, but instead created in individual, interactional, and institutional levels. So to generate a genuine transformation in society there is a need to tackle all the three levels, but by tackling one of them can lead to the transformation in the others. Risman argues that, “gender expectations are socially constructed and sustained by socialization, interactional expectations, and institutional arrangements. When individuals and collectivities change socialization, expectations and institutions, the gender structure changes” (in Parreñas 2005: 95). According to Risman a transformation within the three levels could destabilize the norms to the point of engendering structural changes. For instance, “change could occur if women overcome their economic dependence on men, if society redefines domesticity and breadwinning, or if society includes nurturance in notions of masculinity” (Parreñas 2005: 96).

Labour migration is a process of negotiating gender for women and men, mothers and fathers in the Philippines. Female migration has the capability of opening the door for a reconstitution of gender by rupturing the structural constraints and encourages normative gender behaviour. Some women migrate to escape pressure to correspond to the expected gender norms or to escape discrimination that is gender specific. Throughout my thesis I will lean on the theoretical discussion above, namely that, through repeated acts there can be an opening for change regarding gender roles. By challenging your own habits and social expectations by acting consistently there might be a possibility for change (Butler 1988). Although according to Risman, to generate a genuine transformation you could be in need to challenge the thought of gender roles within the three levels (individual, interactional, and institutional). Although, by challenging one level you might just un-deliberately have made an impact on the remaining two (Parreñas 2005: 96)
Chapter 3. Methodological approach

In this chapter I will present how I carried out the fieldwork during my time in the Philippines. The chapter will begin by giving the reader an overview of my fieldwork. Thereafter I will give a formal presentation of my informants’, with a focus on three of the women you as a reader will be able to follow throughout the thesis. This will be followed by a general presentation of my host family and hopefully I will present them in a rightful matter. The chapter will then continue by describing how I found my informants’, who they were and how I conducted the interviews. I also believe that it is meaningful to present my own role in the meeting with my informants’, how I entered the field and decided to carry out my fieldwork in Metro Manila. The chapter will thereafter end by giving the reader a view about the limitations I met and dealt with during my fieldwork.

Fieldwork in the Philippines

The thesis is based on a three-month study mainly in Metro Manila, the capital of the Philippines, between January and March 2013. On one occasion I travelled to the provinces of Tarlac, Olongapo and Pampanga. The trip lasted for two weeks where I stayed at four different places with families that had family members that had or were OFWs. In total I have sixteen recorded interviews with women between the ages of 26 – 64 years old. I met some of the women more than once. In addition to the recorded interviews I lived with a Filipino family who I interacted with on a daily basis they provided me with a useful local knowledge. This family would prove to be the key to my field. They became my assistants during my twelve weeks in the Philippines and they enabled access to the field and provided relevant information for the purpose of this thesis. They helped me to get in to contact with potential informants’, informed me about the society of the Philippines and accompanied me on my interviews and sometimes even entered the role as an interpreter. The family members that I daily interacted with were four women between the ages of 30 – 64, three daughters, their mother and their father. One thing that I learned relatively fast living with this family was that if you wanted to have secure living in terms of having food on the table
everyday the family members had to have several occupations. The mother (Diwata) and father (Ricco) in the family owned a sewing workshop where they sew ballerina costumes for different schools in Manila. The family also owned a beauty salon for women where they offered the women mowing, braiding of their hair, coloring, perming, manicures, pedicures, etc. On the side of this two of the daughters were working outside the family company. One in a call-center and the other in an export company, while she at the same time was studying at the university, full time. The third daughter was helping her parents and at the same time taking care of her newborn baby girl. Even though the family had several occupations and worked seven days a week, and even during nights it was often of times hard in the end of the month to get the money to last for food and other basic necessities.

During my visit in the Philippines I met women that been recruited in both skilled and unskilled employments in different sectors. Most of them had however been working in so-called low-status work as domestic helpers, care workers and nannies. The women I spoke to were all mothers, most of them had graduated from the university but could not find a work that reflected their training and skill levels in the Philippines or in the receiving country. The interviews were performed of a narrative character, meaning the interviews were based on the informants’ telling me about their story and their own experience of migration.

In addition to the female migrants there were many others with whom I talked with and who contributed in various ways to my understanding of transnational migration. I contacted two Non-Government Organisations that were engaged to promote the rights of overseas Filipino workers and their families, Ellene from Centre for migrant advocacy and Noel from Kanlungan Centre Foundation. This gave me a more complete picture of the overall situation as well as new information to discuss with my informants’. I also talked to several men that were or had been overseas workers, with whom I also lived with. During my time in Pampanga we spoke about their view of the difference being a man or a woman while working abroad and their view concerning women travelling abroad for work.

This thesis is based on research findings gathered during mainly semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews and small talk combined with participant
observation and direct observations. Participant observation, in the meaning that I was communicating and was engaged in the happenings of one event. Direct observation, in the meaning that I was carefully observing and objective in my purpose where there was no contact or interference with the subject (Bernard 2011). The semi-structured interviews were only performed on an individual basis and a Dictaphone was always used with the permission to record from the informants’. The interviews ranged from one - to three hours a length. My questions were open-ended and covered four general areas: time growing up, reason to migrate, experience being abroad and the return back home to the Philippines. The interviewing process varied widely, where some respondents needed to be prompted with specific questions, while others spoke at great lengths on their own. Some of my informants’ chose to focus on specific happenings and experiences being abroad, events that were particularly important for them.

All my informants’ knew of my purpose for being in the Philippines and they knew that I was going to use their stories in my upcoming thesis, which was never seen as a problem or a difficulty. The conversations were conducted mainly in English and when spoken in Tagalog it was only a few words that were directly translated by my assistant into English and then approved by the informant as a good translation after being translated and explained in Tagalog. Most of the interviews were conducted in the house I lived in, (in Taguig, Manila) but I also made home visits to my informants’ after an approval of time and date. During the interviews I was most of the time never alone with my informants’. Often one of the members of my host family accompanied me, or the informants’ had their children nearby. It is hard to say how this affected my informants’, but I got the feeling that they felt comfortable this way. Many times I asked if they wanted to perform the interview in a more private space, but always got the answer that it did not bother them if there were people around, that they had nothing to hide. I also got the feeling that they wanted to have control- and still have an eye on their children while playing in the house. It was very evident that people spoke freely about the migration in the Philippines and that they wanted to share their experience and their story with others. They had an openness to strangers that resulted in the creation of a relationship based on an exchange, where I got access to their past experiences and memories being a migrant and they got the chance to remember and share their own life story. The empirical
foundation of this thesis consists of more than just the verbal. The participant observations that were conducted in the community entailed attending at birthdays, church services, and informal get-togethers during my informant’s days off and I got invited to different celebrations. I participated in the so-called value system that is related to migration that was articulated in various practices such as transmission of money (remittance) and gifts, transnational child fostering and migrants’ holiday visits. As a guest in a Philippine home I also witnessed the transnational flows of clothes and canned food that was shipped in a large box from their relatives living in the U.S. With inspiration from Åkessons dissertation these observations “of such social practices has enabled me to attend to the complex relation between the norms and notions related to mobility (...) and the everyday transnational activities” (2004:24).

Introducing my informants’

As mentioned earlier I conducted observations and sixteen interviews in four different provinces, Taguig, Tarlac, Pampanga and Olongapo. Most of my empirical work was conducted in Taguig where I lived at the longest while being in the Philippines. My informants’ were between 26 - 64 years, and fifteen of the women I spoke too were all mothers, were eight of them were separated from their former husbands, where some had met a new partner. They had all gone to college except for two of the women. Some had studied engineering, economics, communications and others had taken courses of nurturing and caregiving. I wouldn’t say that any of my informants’ would be classified as among the poorest in Philippines society, nor as representing relatively affluent backgrounds. Instead they represented a middle-class standard of living that they wanted to maintain by going abroad, with the impression that it was increasingly threatened by the country’s persistent economic crisis and lack of work opportunities.

In this chapter the reader will be introduced to my three key informants’. Throughout the thesis you as a reader will be able to follow Dalisay’s, Imee’s and Bituin’s stories about being migrants - their stories regarding why they became migrants, their
experience being abroad and their feelings and impressions being back home. The thirteen remaining informants’ will also help lead the discussion in the thesis but will not in the same way represent their own theme.

My second day I met my informant Dalisay. The mother in my host family came and woke me up telling me that she had spoken to one of her employees in the sewing workshop who knew a woman that had been abroad working and willing to speak to me. I got dressed and we were on our way to meet her. I remember this day in particular because Dalisay proved to affect my future research in many ways. Namely, in the way she narrated her experience being abroad both as within economic reasons, as a way to escape an abusive husband and partner, but also a way to travel and see the world, meet different people, cultures and religions. Dalisay also had a strong feeling of wanting to return back abroad. Dalisay lived in an inner courtyard that was sealed with gates. By the first glance of her house I got the perception that she was living in a slightly higher standard than those who lived on the other side of the gate. I remember she was shining with joy standing at her door while welcoming us (me and the mother in my host family) into her home. Dalisay was forty-two years old and a mother of four children - her youngest child was only one and the other three were between six and twenty-one, and all had different fathers. At the time we met Dalisay she was working at an American Call Centre, mostly nightshifts. She had been an OFW at two different times, being in the Saudi Arabia working as a private teacher, and in United Arab Emirates (UAE) working as a domestic helper. You as a reader will be presented a more thorough presentation about Dalisay’s experience being abroad in Chapter 5 where the reader will be presented to some of the meanings ascribed to the life of a female migrant, and different reason for going abroad.

Imee, I met during my visit in Olongapo. Her house was just next to mine and therefore our paths met several times a day. Imee was forty-two years old, unmarried but was living together with her son’s father who was working as a fireman. Imee had grown up in a province called Calite together with her parents and two younger brothers. She described her upbringing as turbulent. Her family had not been really poor in the aspect that they had managed to eat three times a day. She had gone to college studying electronics, communication and technology but because of family problems she had been obligated to take a one-year break. This had however resulted
in that she was no longer welcomed back to her class so she had decided to instead take a six-mouth course in caregiving. She thought that a course in caregiving could always work as a good plan B if she wanted to have, as she said, ”a quick fix going abroad”. It had become known that her father had secretly been hiding a second family and at that point Imee’s life had been thrown upside-down. The reason for not wanting to get married was because she had seen how her mother had been suffering when she had wanted to file for a divorce. She said that her father was giving them headaches and ‘noose bleeds’ and at several occasions tried to take their properties, business and land. Imee had wanted to go abroad since she was in high school and been the first one that from her village had travelled abroad when she in 2004 went to Taiwan to work in a engineering company. She wanted to travel, see the world and meet people from different cultures. At the time I spoke to her she was studying Korean with the prospect of going abroad for a third time and this time she was probably going to work as a domestic. You as a reader will be presented a more thorough presentation about Imee’s experience being abroad in Chapter 4 while dealing with the meaning of remittance and how migration can be seen as a way to assure a secure living.

The third informant I would like to introduce in this chapter is Bituin. Bituin’s story differs in relation to the other women I spoke to, during my visit in the Philippines, in that she is in Sweden without any working permit. The reason for wanting to present Bituin in this thesis is based upon the reflection that her story is a confirmation that women working abroad can become stronger and gain self-confidence they never had experienced before. My assumption is that her life journey mirrors many of the female migrants in the Philippines. At the same time she is the only woman I got the chance to meet while being abroad working. She has made it possible for me to see the changes that may occur when people migrate and the challenges one may face while trying to make a living in the receiving country.

Bituin’s experience of migrating began in 2007 when she travelled to Bahrain to work as a domestic helper while caring for an older lady. For once she had felt that her salary had been enough to support herself and her two children at home, but after a time her employer had died. She got a new employer, but her salary was cut in half. Her situation led her to seek for employment in another country and after a while she was offered to work in Switzerland. It ended however with Bituin staying in
Switzerland for only a couple of days. When she arrived and met her employer she told me how she had felt worried and when the employer asked her for her Visa she escaped. She got help from relatives in Sweden who bought her a plane ticket to Sweden in 2009 and since then she has been living and working in Sweden, in the beginning as a nanny and today as a cleaner. I will be present a more thorough presentation about Bituin’s experience being abroad in Chapter 4, discussing the possibility that women may become stronger, more confident while negotiating different gender roles while being a migrant.

Entering the field

The reason for me choosing to carry out my fieldwork in Metro Manila was because I had a contact here in Sweden that is raised back in Manila with the family I lived with. I saw it as a good opportunity to stay at their place the first week of my arrival so they could help me get a good start of my fieldwork. It ended however that I stayed with this family almost during my whole visit in the Philippines and this affected my research on many levels. I entered the field through their network. I met their friends, members from their church, their acquaintances and got relevant information from the family on a daily basis and therefore I would like to introduce them and also their network, by starting to describe where I lived.

I lived in the region of Taguig in the town called Upper Bicutan. There was a south and a north Upper Bicutan, where Muslims occupied the north side and Catholics and Christian the south side where I lived. The “Muslim neighbourhood” was just two blocks from where I lived and I was told on my first day of arrival that I was not allowed to go there. My host family never went there and neither did taxi drivers, which was sometimes a difficulty when I wanted to get back home. They described it as a neighbourhood that was controlled by gangs that did not like strangers. One of the sisters told me “if you go there, and those who lived there do not recognize you, they will shoot you in the middle of the open street”. Even taxi drivers have been found in the area lying dead in their trunk covers. The reason for me writing about this, is to let the reader get an idea about some limitations I had regarding finding
informants’ and that the ability for me moving around freely had some boundaries, which resulted with the caution of staying close to my host family.

My host family treated me as a family member in many ways. They looked out for me and always wanted to accompany me on my interviews and wanted to know who I was supposed to meet. In a way I thought that they were overprotecting but at the same time they knew the area much better than I did so who was I to question their recommendations. My host family was members of the Iglesia Ni Christo, also called the Church of Christ that originated in the Philippines in 1914. To date, the Iglesia Ni Christo membership comprises 114 nationalities. It maintains 5,545 congregations and missions grouped into 114 ecclesiastical districts in the Philippines and in 102 other countries. It is said that the Iglesia Ni Christo is the third largest religious denomination in the Philippines after the Roman Catholic Church and Islam. The church are said to represent unity, morality and holiness, peace and order, lawfulness and discipline, brotherhood and equality of members, sanctity of marriage, stability of the family and are strongly against the separation of church and state (for more reading see, http://inc.kabayankokapatidko.org/)

The family’s’ member church was just around the corner of their house. The membership in that church had a big impact on their daily lives. They visited the church service at least two days a week and the whole family participated in the daily work in the church where the father sometimes worked as a gatekeeper several days and nights a week. The wife of the pastor would often during the week make home visits to say a prayer, always led by the father in the family. Their whole life was influenced in their faith of God. They relied on Him that He would guide them through life through their daily prayers and their good deeds. They lived their lives according to the rules that the church had set up, that says that it is not allowed to get a divorce or get separated, live together before marriage, have intercourse before marriage, same-sex marriage, eat blood because it symbolises life, drink alcohol and if you do not participate in a worship service once a month you will be deprived of your membership, which could lead to your exclusion from the church society.

The family were being described as good and faithful Christians. Every time before leaving the house they would pray to God to give them a safe journey and that they would come home safe and sound. They even prayed for my wellbeing when going out to meet my informants’. According to the family and their faith, God
symbolises life and is the reason for them being alive. He surrounds all of us and if you do not accept his presence you are lost. In their eyes I was lost for not believing but they still welcomed me with opened arms and I felt their love every day during my visit.

The reason for mentioning their faith comes with the perception that it influenced my field in the way members in the Iglesia Ni Christo looked upon gender roles, what was perceived as female- versus male roles within the society. Some quotes from my informants’ can be observed to be quite conventional and conservative in the way they narrated a woman’s ability or place within the society. With that said, their experience being OFWs need not to differ from the majority only because of their religious beliefs, an aspect that I believe will be demonstrated throughout the thesis.

I found it to be an advantage being a European woman. People were interested about me being in the Philippines and the rumor in the neighborhood spread that I was doing research regarding the labor migration by women. The women in question even sometimes contacted me and asked if I wanted to hear their story. Talking about migration was nothing shameful or forbidden. It was obvious that migration played a major role in the Philippine society as almost all families I came in contact with had a friend or a relative that was or had been abroad working, both men and women. Articulations of migrants’ experiences and the meaning of being abroad were not located to a specific place or sphere. Meaning that even when I was merely ‘hanging around’, I could gain knowledge, understanding and an insight of the values and ideas that different people associated with their own, or others mobility. The women and men I talked with had their own story and opinion to tell and I believe that they thought it was meaningful to speak to me as I thought it was intriguing to speak to them. One of my informants’ that I was in contact with told me that, “Beatrice, you have lit my desire and passion to go abroad again”. She meant that talking to me about her experience and memories had made her remember the time being abroad - a life that she in some aspects missed. My neighbors were also a good source providing me with information and stories related to their own life but also about the life of migrants in general. I got the feeling that everyone I spoke with had sometime in their life thought about going abroad, but for different reasons not been able to, depending
on economic resources, networks, age or because they had the responsibility to care for their parents as a dutiful daughter, take care of their husbands as caring wives or care for their children as nurturing mothers.

Dealing with my limitations

When I left for the Philippines in January it was my first visit to the country. I had got the city described for me as very chaotic in many aspects and that the traffic was in a way unmanageable. That I would be satisfied if I managed to have one meeting during one day, mainly because of the perception of punctuality but also with regards to the traffic. With that said I still believed that I would manage to travel around in the city as I pleased and I thought that I would be able to speak to people in the streets. I soon realized that it would not be the case for me. The family I lived with always made sure to come with me when I went out and kept me company. They said that they did not trust the people in their neighbourhood, which resulted in that I did not trust them either. The family told me that they were afraid that someone would kidnap me because I am a Westerner, which was according to them occurring in the Philippines. Who was I to question their worries? It all resulted in me listening mostly to their warnings they issued and that many of my informants’ came from their network of contacts. At the same time I felt that I had to pay my respect to them, not only because they had open their home to me, but also because they treated me as a member of their family. In the beginning it was frustrating for me not being able to control my own space and walk around as I pleased, but I soon realised that my connection to the family brought positive impacts on my informants’. Many of my informants’ had some relation to the family, which meant that they had already some relation to me before we even had met. Even when we visited the NGOs one of the sisters presented me as her cousin and I got the feeling that it opened some doors that I had not been able to open without her presence and her mentioning us being relatives.

The time I spent with my informants’ was sometimes limited because of their tight timetable they had of free time. Time meant money for many of my informants’ and
to have a break was therefore not that common. Consequently many of my interviews were conducted during evenings. The time to build trust to the informants’ and build a relationship was not always conceivable. The risk of not gaining access to the deeper meaning behind their narratives and actions was sometimes disturbing. I was worried that I would return home with a one-dimensional picture of my informants’ lives that was reflected upon my own subjective perspectives. I think however that my short timeframe together with each informant was compensated by the fact that I stayed and lived together with people who had a connection and a relationship to migration and hence spent many of my waking ours with them. During the two weeks I travelled around in Pampanga and Olongapo I stayed in three different homes owned by OFWs. Two of the houses were owned by men, as I mentioned previously, where the third was owned by an older woman who was sponsored by her children - where two of her daughters where living abroad while sending her remittance and gifts. Living in these homes gave me an understanding of what it meant being a man while working abroad and how your life may change if you had relatives that were working abroad while sending home remittance for economic support.

In some aspects I found it difficult to emotionally detach myself from my informants’. We lived close and I was always invited to take part in most events and issues that took place within the families and was invited to their friends and different celebrations. We helped each other, they confided in me and I confided in them. I looked up to them in many ways for the incredible job they did every day. The struggle they endured while always looking back on what they had while feeling blessed, and I can still miss the moments where I together with the whole family, late at night, sat and worked with the costumes that we prepared for delivery.

When I left for the Philippines I already knew that my empirical study had one limitation that I could not disregard, namely the fact that I had not been able to see the changes the women had experienced during the time they been abroad. My case study will therefore reflect the women’s thoughts about their memories regarding their experience being abroad during the time we spoke. The thesis reflects upon the women’s stories about their memory regarding emotions, feelings and about the meaning and outcomes of their move. As Scott says with reference from Parreñas
(2001) “Experience is, in this approach, not the origin of our explanations, but that which we want to explain” (2001:32).

When it comes to the lack of knowledge of the local language (Tagalog) it turned out not to be an obstacle, since many of my informants’ spoke English. In this sense I saw it as an advantage doing my thesis regarding migrants that had returned back home to the Philippines because of the fact that they been abroad practicing their English while communicating with their colleagues and employer. It was only during one interview where the language became an obstacle, which resulted in me being forced to overlook the interview for analysing. Being a ‘neutral’ outsider as an anthropology student I sometimes found myself in situations were people said things to me outside the interviewing, things that they had not been sharing with someone else and that I at the same time found very interesting for my study. In those cases I often found myself asking the permission to take notes, resulting in me taking the role as a student.

Furthermore I have changed the names of my informants’, but also left out some details that could be used to identify the persons’ real identity. Like changing the name of the place they worked, names of their relatives and sometimes the name of the city they lived in. My choice of using different names in different occasions will not, according to me, lead to a different outcome of the thesis and will not interfere with the information, analysis or with the final discussion of the thesis. In some of the used quotes I have even taken the decision to not present the informant with the explanation that I did not find it to be relevant to the information presented.
Chapter 4. Background

In this section I will give a brief presentation regarding the meaning of family and home within a Philippine context. I hope to give the reader a short presentation by illustrating the most essential and central unit of their society, namely the family. Even though it might be short I believe that the information can be of significance because several migrants narrated their migration as a way to provide for their families. A history of female migration in the Philippines will also be presented by giving the reader an idea of the perceived value of going abroad, and how the migration even can be seen as a part of the Filipino society. A large part of the Philippines population is deeply affected by the migration, both socially and economically in need of the recurrent remittance transfers.

Meaning of Family and Home

As previously mentioned, I believe that a presentation of the meaning of family and home within a Philippine context is important so the reader will be presented with an idea of its central importance in society. Often the migration is being justified as a necessity for the family’s survival and narrated as partly carried through by their love for their families as for their well being.

Home is defined both as a private domestic space and as a larger geographic place where one belongs, such as one's community, village, city, and country [...] At the interpersonal level, homes are simultaneously places of nurturing and sites of conflict between family members who occupy different positions of power.

Yen Le Espiritu 2003: 2

The concept of home and family have long been debated and reflected upon. One of the classical definitions taken from Murdock (1949) is that a family,

is a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction; it includes adults of both sexes, at least two whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, owned or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults.

Belen T.G. Medina 2001:12
Unfortunately this definition does not fit for modern societies around the world where single parenthood, cohabiting arrangements, domestic partnership of homosexuals, families constituted by second marriages (also known as stepfamilies or blended families), or married couples without children are a fact and should therefore also be seen as families. The definition needs to be broadened. One definition that I will stand by is that a family consists of “two or more persons who share resources, share responsibility for decision, share values and goals, and have a commitment to each other over time. The functions attributed to families are economic consumption, socialisation of the young, and affective dimensions” (Davidson & Moore cited in Medina 2001:13, for more definitions regarding home and household, see Medina 2001). According to Jocano a Filipino family reflect the description of family as, “a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction” whereas for instance homosexual relationships and single parenting does not correspond to the welfare of the Philippine society (1998:62).

Before giving a general definition of a Filipino family it is important to comment on the fact that there is no such entity as a Filipino family, and instead keep in mind of their variations. It is not my intention to provide a genuine and existent pattern of the Filipino family. Namely by not seeing each culture having its own family structure and organization, but also the fact that there can be several different family structures within one culture, depending upon religious beliefs, living location, and so on. Instead I would like the reader to see the description as Medina claim as, “probably modal patterns or traits which are commonly perceived or accepted as ‘typical’ (Medina 2001:8). My focus lies with the expectation to present a Christian Filipino family as all my informants’ were Protestants, except for two who were Catholics.

The Philippines society changes and are influenced by other cultures, accordingly with the fact that the people in a large sense migrate and have done so in decades. This makes it impossible to permit an overall homogeneity. It is also worth mentioning the fact that the societies social, political and economic institutions have transformed and been affected by former colonial rulers. However, with that stated the family is perceived as being the only thing that has remained intact, surviving different kind of changes from colonial times to the present day. It is said that Filipinos perceive the family as the basic element of their kinship system, “it is its
invariant core [...] where personal decisions come second to those of family interests” (Jocano 1998:61).

It is within the family that individuals first receive and continue to receive their orientation to the basic norms and values of Philippine society. It is true that other social institutions help shape the individual’s normative behaviour. But it is in the family that Filipinos obtain most of their socialization, because the family provides them with the personal security that they cannot obtain elsewhere in society.

Landa F. Jocano 1998:61

The Filipino family is referred to as a nuclear family, reflecting a monogamous relationship, of a husband and wife, unmarried children, whether naturally born or adopted. These members are linked together by three certain bonds. Namely, the husband-wife bound, the parent-child bond and lastly the sibling relations. With that said it is not uncommon that members in the household include grandparents, grandchildren, in-laws, cousins and other relatives and friends, which makes the Filipino family both nuclear and extended (Medina 2001: 17-19).

Looking from the perspective that the family is seen as the basic element of their kinship system it is not difficult to draw the conclusion that the family in the Filipino society also performs the function of status placement. Where a person is not only seen as an individual, but as a member of the family and kin group the person is not only judged by his individual personality but also by his family’s reputation (Medina 2001: 60). Therefore one is born into a specific class system. This is however not a static system but changeable, but “differences in family positions do not allow individuals to have an equal start in life” (Medina 2001: 61). To put this in a context of migration one could change ones entire family’s class position by going aboard, while sending home remittance to your loved ones. This is of course easier said the done, but my informants’ stories have showed that going abroad can give the whole family another way of living in the aspect of economic improvement.

Upon marriage people obtain a new status as husband and wife, but the marriage thus not only affect the two persons getting married but also the two families. Only because you enter a marriage doesn’t mean that you are cut of from your family, rather you acquire an additional family.
When I lived with my host family the youngest daughter in the family was married and had recently become a mother. In the beginning I had a hard time understanding where everybody slept during the night. It was just too crowded and far too few beds in the house. After a while I figured out that the youngest sister lived just next to the house together with her husband in a small room of cement, which had an expansion where the families beauty salon was. The reason why I in the beginning was confused was because I presumed that the daughter still lived with her parents because of the fact that she was always around. When I woke up in the morning she always sat outside my room with her baby and when I went to sleep she sat with the rest of the family working with some garments or looking at television. She was always cooking food for her parents, sisters and me, but I also took note to the fact that she took a plate with food and went outside to her house. It turned out that her husband was far too shy to meet me, and it took almost two and a half month until I got the chance to meet him and that because they tricked him, saying I was not at home.

What I would like to say with this observation is that, if I hadn’t been around he would probably have been eating his meals and spent time with his in-laws most of the evenings during the week. They went to church together, helped each other in the sewing workshop and supported each other financially. Six days a week her husband worked and studied at the same time, which meant that he left home early in the morning and came home late in the evenings, while his wife (the daughter in the family) help her parents with the costumes and welcomed costumers in the salon. This meant that I many times took care of her new-born baby, helping the family in ways I could. The family treated their daughters’ husband as a son, and they all took care of each other.

I will not give a further presentation of a ‘typical’ Filipino family. I believe that the reader with be given more descriptions while reading and will therefore get a more accurate description. Explicitly, because they are descriptions from my informants’ own experiences and thoughts regarding their families and kin group.
The new migration?

Working women are travelling the globe as never before. Millions of women cross the globe each year to find work. Ehrenreich and Hochschild say that this pattern of female migration reflects what could be called a worldwide gender revolution where fewer families can rely solely on a male breadwinner (2002: 3). They claim that it is difficult to find general patterns of international migration because it varies from region to region. The statistics can be frustrating because it only reflects the legal migrants and not the illegal ones, which some claim exceeds the number of the legal migrants. Another example that makes it difficult to trace trends over time is that many Third World countries lack data of past years. One thing is however certain, that women have been replacing men in the labour migration since the 70s and half of the world’s 120 million legal and illegal migrants are now believed to be women (Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2002: 5). It is common that women, like men, migrate from the south to the north and from poor countries to rich ones. Most commonly migrants travel to the nearest most similar country compared to their own country of origin. Namely a country whose language is the same or similar, or whose religion and culture they share, or a country they have had a colonial history with. Ehrenreich and Hochschild write about four migration flows that stand out. “One goes from Southeast Asia to the oil-rich Middle and Far East - from Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka to Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore. Another stream of migration goes from the former Soviet block to Western Europe from Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania to Scandinavia, Germany, France, Spain, Portugal, and England. A third goes from south to north in the Americas, including the stream from Mexico to the United States. A forth stream moves from Africa to various parts of Europe [where for example] France receive many female migrants from Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria [and] Italy receives female workers from Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Cape Verde” (Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2002: 6). The reason why women’s traditional service is being transferred from poor to rich parts or the world is said to depend on women in the West who are increasingly taking paid work in the public sphere. Therefore others need to replace their traditional place as domestics and caretakers for their children and elderly
generation. The Filipina has in other words responded to the global labour demands, thus producing employment that calls for gender-specific responses.

Migration is a part of the Filipino society and it is being said, according to Noel at Kanlungan, that Filipinos are naturally migratory people. With a history of poverty, landlessness, unemployment, war and internal conflicts, many Filipinos have been and are left with little options but to migrate for the purpose of surviving (Kanlungan 2010: 8). It is not uncommon for a family to have one or both of their parents working abroad with the expectation that their children will follow the same footsteps (Kanlungan 2009: 4).

According to Parreñas female labour migration from the Philippines constitutes the widest flow of the contemporary migration in the world today. The Philippine women have responded to the demand for domestic workers worldwide, where they provide service in more than 160 countries, where the Middle East is the flagship destination. Filipino women migrate often of times to do care work, as nurses, nannies, or domestic helpers. They leave their own homes to enter others, which suggests a clash in gender ideologies where the migration offers the women an opportunity to work outside their homes, but instead in some one else’s (2008: 3-4). The women in the Philippines make up the majority of the migrants in their country - a result of the demand of labour but also their limited options regarding work in their local economy.

It is said that the best-documented case of gender-included migration is that of Filipinos. The U.S. colonial government built military bases on the Philippine islands and under colonial rule Filipinas were recruited to the profession of nursing and women from all over the country were sent to respectable schools in Manila - promoting rural to urban migration that would subsequently become international. History shows that the U.S. colonial system laid the foundations for a Philippine Empire of Care (which was the name of the project being implemented). Documentation also exists where the American colonial government in the Philippines sponsored unique educational opportunity for young Filipinos to prepare the Philippine for self-rule. Filipinos, essentially only men, were sent abroad to the U.S. to attend college and prepare them to later assume top positions in the institutions back home (the so called pensionado program), which based on a colonial ideology “racialized Filipinas as caring an subservient” (Liebelt 2011: 12; Sobritchea
1996: 84). The students fates where carefully gendered in the meaning that “men were sent to study politics, law and medicine, while women were expected to study home economics, social work, religion and nursing” (Mhaler et al. 2006: 48). After the Second World War the program were replaced with the EVP (Exchange Visitor Program) - a program that sponsored thousands of Filipino nurses’ migrations to work and study in the U.S (Mhaler et al. 2006: 48).

The Philippine government started to officially look at migration as an economic development strategy at the 1970s when President Ferdinand Marcos was in power. The government implemented the so called manpower exchange program - “a labour exportation program intended to help workers to generate foreign currency as well as to acquire skills and technical know-how otherwise unavailable to them in the labour market” (Parreñas 2008: 5, Mhaler et al. 2006: 49). Since then the state has formulated laws, bureaucratic channels, regulations, procedures and promotion programs that aim at facilitating the placement of Filipinos abroad (Kanlungan 2009: 5). The government has established migrants’ institutions and recruitment agencies that directly tie a pool of prospective employers to a pool of prospective OFWs (for more information about the agencies and application process, see www.poea.gov.ph/).

Resulting in a change of women migration where women are able to respond to the growing demand of domesticity worldwide. It is no longer necessary to have the financial means or the network to be able to migrate when the agencies mediate the contacts and may cover the initial costs, such as airfare and travel documents (Parreñas 2008: 1). The receiving countries benefit from the migration, which points to the fact that they use statements and commodified terms such as “specially picked”, “unlimited free replacements” and “why pay more when you can pay less” (Chang & Groves 2000: 76). It is claimed that in 1992, “the services of Filipina women abroad earned the Philippines government approximately 12% of its gross national product” (Chang & Groves 2000: 76), a prospect that is still maintaining, if not with higher statistics.
Philippine families depending on migration

The Philippine economy has, now more than ever, become heavily dependent on the export of its own people, euphemistically termed as human capital. Despite official denial, overseas employment has been a major pillar in the Philippine government’s economic development paradigm since 1974. Trager (1984) argue that the overall socioeconomic situation in the Philippines is one in which large numbers of people live at, or below minimum standards of living. Many Filipinos are struggling for survival in the aspect that they are trying to obtain enough income to feed the members of their family. While others classified as the “middle class” are not in the starving position but wish to increase the family’s income to be able to afford other needs, as for example education. The economic situation in the Philippines is one of the reasons people decide to migrate. “For all, migration represents a possible strategy which may provide access to income and other resources” (Trager 1984: 1273).

The decision to migrate is difficult and involves many possible motives. It is not merely a question of being forced out of the country because of the poverty and unemployment that is most evident in the country. To migrate means having access to strong foreign currency, to be able to travel, experience a new culture and therefore fulfil a dream and even have the possibility to escape and leave marital problems and family pressure. An increasing number of families seek the higher salaries that are available abroad to be able to meet the short fall of care that is a result of the countries weak economy and fragile welfare system. To enable a life in the Philippines with access to good education, steady employment, and quality healthcare is most of times only seen as a possibility if you seek employment abroad. Because of the fact that quality is not something that is offered in the public schools many wish to place their children in private schools. Something that you can afford only with the security that comes from the higher wages, that is for some only offered in other countries (Parreñas 2005: 13,18-19). The Philippines is also known for their privatisation of different sectors, for example the privatisation of health care and water. The privatisation of sectors challenge peoples means of survival.

During my stay in the Philippines I experienced different occasions where people avoided getting health care because of the economic costs. They explained that it was too expensive but also that a visit to a hospital would cost them a day’s work. I met
people that avoided or delayed seeking appropriate medical treatment and who practiced self-medication. The mother in my host family took care of her younger sister who had ADHD. She was called a special child and her disease had brought her to a stage of blindness and bedridden. She could no longer speak but only make some noises to be able to communicate with her sister. When I asked about her condition and what the doctors had said she only cried and said that she was ashamed. She was ashamed about her sister’s condition but also that she could not afford giving her the medical treatment that she needed. Another woman that I met told me about the time when she gave birth to her firstborn child. Her daughter was born two months too early and the doctors wanted to keep them both for observation at the hospital for a week. She told me that she had only laughed at the doctors’ recommendation and two days after she had left the hospital with her new-born daughter. She asked me as an ironic question, “Who was supposed to pay for the medical bill?” The same women told me that it was not uncommon to see people dropping off unwanted children on the streets. Often of times they were children that had different sorts of handicaps or conditions like ADHD. It was not uncommon that people from the older generation also became abandoned. My informant told me that it depends on the economic situation of the family. When people get in a situation where money is running out people get frustrated and act uncontrolled and in desperation. Another story she told me reflect where the desperation and feeling of helplessness takes over.

There is one case, where a family became victims of their economic situation. One day the father in the family finds out that he got fired from his work. When he get’s home to his wife and new-born baby girl he does not tell his wife about him getting fired. When she later goes to the market and leaves the baby in the care of her husband he panics and strangles the baby girl and thereafter barriers her in the backyard.

With the examples above I would like to give the reader an idea about the absence of public service in the Philippines, which motivates people to seek employment abroad. Migration can be seen as a way to enable the security of care resources. “Stable wages abroad can reward families with better-quality food, schooling, and health care and most Filipinos are aware that foreign sources control the quality of their lives” (Parreñas 2005: 18). The need for quality healthcare motivates migration and the experience of stability is in this matter equal to the labour migration. According to
Parreñas the low salaries of teachers attest the poor state of public education, whereas teachers earn 200 pesos a day, an amount that is not enough to feed a family. According to the Department of Labour and Employment, the daily cost of living for a family of six is 441 pesos a day and at least 506 pesos a day in Metro Manila (Parreñas 2005: 19) (The numbers have to be understood as representing the time Parreña wrote her book in 2005). To be able to secure a good education for your children it requires the strategic formation of split-apart households. One of the women I spoke to, Raquel had three children, one that had passed away as a baby because of sickness. The woman in question had two jobs when I spoke to her. During the days she worked in the city of Taguig as a street sweeper, employed by the municipality and for that she earned 500 pesos a month. Due to the small income she was also forced to work during evenings and nights at her cousins’ soup kitchen. She had the full custody of her two sons and while working seven days a week, days and nights her sister cared for the children. In five years she had been working in Saudi Arabia as a caregiver and was now planning to go back abroad. She told me that the salary that she earned at the moment was not enough. Even though she worked twenty-four-seven it was not enough to be able to support herself and her children. Only by going abroad she could afford to offer her children an education, warm clothes and nice meals. She told me that it is hopeless in the Philippines and that the future is abroad.

In the Philippines, as mentioned previously, the family is the single most important institution. Filipinos are family oriented in the aspect that family goes first. According to Trager the decision of young, single women to migrate is generally made in the family context and the father has the final say regarding the migration (1984: 1274). Even Lieblt claim that, “even when described as individual decisions, migration was generally organized, financed and undertaken collectively. Migration must as a consequence be seen as involving his economic strategies of entire families or households, rather than just single women acting alone” (2011: 74). This might be accurate for some families in the Philippines, but I also met young women that of their own will decided to migrate, one of them was Amihan. When I met Amihan she was 26 years old, she was divorced and had the full custody of her son. She told me that she always dreamed of working abroad, travel and live abroad. “I would like to see the USA, what is happening there, and what is happening in other countries. If all
the stories from other people are true or not. I want to experience it on my own”. Amihan decided to go abroad of her own will but she also had the intention to help her parents and son. She knew that the salary that she would earn could provide them with a better life, where they at that moment only had money for food, and she wanted her son to have the ability to go to a good school. She went to Qatar to work as a private teacher and was at the moment we met planning to go back abroad, hopefully to the US.

Even though you might have a complete trust and respect for your father many of my informants’ went against their fathers will by going abroad. Hana, whose father did not want her to go abroad, explained it to me that “it is a personal decision, so they can import suggestions but in the end it is your decision. In the end you will make your own choice for the future”. Hana said that she knows that there are a lot of work opportunities abroad. She was planning to go abroad for her own self, but of course she would send remittance to her family back home so they might be able to build a house, get more food and even a safer living. As for personal winning she believed she would become more independent. “You will do your own chores, your own food, washing. Everything will be left upon you. You will become more independent for the future and more open minded about where the future will take you”.

Imee’s understanding of struggles in the Philippines

Imee had wanted to go abroad since she was in high school. She wanted to travel, see the world and meet people from different cultures. She had been the first one that from her village travelled abroad, when she in 2004 had been offered work in a company in Taiwan. She told me that her mother had been very hesitant if she would get by or not. Imee though this had to do with the fact that she was her only daughter, and after her mother separated from her father she had needed Imee’s help taking care of her younger siblings.

Imee narrated her experience abroad as an adventure, while working during nights and partying in the mornings at clubs that was meant for OFWs.
My experience there was that I really had fun. I had so many friends. We worked at the company during the nightshifts from seven in the evening to seven in the mornings because Taiwanese don’t want that shift, they want to work in the mornings. So the Filipinos are working there for twelve hours having nightshifts. We were as a family and we lived in a dormitory with about 400 Filipinos. You know there is a lot of Filipino food in Taiwan because there is a lot of Filipinos working there so it is like a Filipino community everywhere so you don’t feel homesick.

Imee worked for the same company during four years, by renewing her contract once. She had the plan of going to Canada right after Taiwan, because it is said to be easier to apply for residency when you are in another country. Then Taiwan was hit by the financial crisis in 2008 and all of the sudden there were no work and therefore no money to save to be able to go to Canada or stay in Taiwan. Imee returned back home to the Philippines and started a new life in Olongapo and after a couple of years she had given birth to her son. She said that people were happier in the Philippines but the government cannot take care of its people, like giving them basic medical care, or insurance. She once experienced being mistreated when she was going to give birth to her son visiting a public hospital. They did not admit her to the hospital because they had no doctor and Imee needed to have a caesarean. Imee was therefore forced to go to a private hospital in Calite where her family still lived and could take care of her. This journey had almost cost her own- and her son’s life.

During the time Imee had been working in Taiwan she sent home remittance monthly to her mother. Imee said that she was very proud of herself for doing this because she knew that it had helped her mother and her brothers in many ways namely, to pay for her brothers education at the university, put food on their table and enable a renovation of their house that had been starting to fall apart. When I met Imee she was planning to go abroad again, but this time to Korea. She told me that if you like to work in Korea you don’t have to pay a placement fee, instead you have to pass a language test and after that just pay for the Visa, the plane ticket and pass the medical tests. Imee was offered to go back to Taiwan and work for the same company but that would cost her around one hundred thousand pesos in placement fee, and that kind of money did not exist, so Korea were at that time seen as the only option. Imee did not know what kind of work she would be offered, of course she would like to work with something that was based on her educational background but if she were offered to
work as a nanny she would not refuse. The determination to go abroad, to be able to offer her family a better way of living and to travel again is what drove her. When I asked her how long she thought she would be gone there were sadness in her eyes. She told me that she did not really know, perhaps five years. She told me that she would miss her miracle - her son terribly, but that she was doing it for him.

[...] I feel that I can provide him with everything he needs when I go abroad because if I would find me a job here with my educational background, qualification and my age I am not qualified any more. Because they are looking for people that are 18-21 years old so my educational qualification and my age are not qualified here in the Philippines any more. So I really need to go abroad.

I asked Imee if her boyfriend, the father to her son, had any plans to go abroad to work and support his family as she was planning. Imee told me that she had her doubts and that he was more comfortable here in the Philippine.

But last week he told me that he wanted to update his resume because some of his co-workers are going to Libya to work there as a fire-fighter but I do not think that he is serious about going abroad to work, but me, I am more serious then him, but my husband - I don’t think so. He is more comfortable living here in the Philippines.

Imee felt frustrated regarding the lack of support you as a Philippine citizen gained from the government. She, as many other of my informants’, spoke of the age limit where it was almost impossible to possess work in the Philippines if you were over thirty years, even though you had an educational background with a college degree. The age limit was from the government an unspoken policy but according to my informants’ an actuality and reality. Consequential many turned their attention abroad. High costs to get medical treatment, lack of doctors and lack of quality in the education created an unease in Imee. She claimed, “In the Philippines you can just raise chickens and pigs and you have food”, but what about other securities as medical care, work opportunities and the right to have a education that equals with quality. Hopefully, this was something that she expected to find in Canada, namely necessities for a secure living for herself and her son. Imee reflect the feeling that migration can make it possible to meet the shortfall of the Philippines care system,
and the country’s fragile welfare system. Given the possibility for a higher salaries, a higher currency, equals with a safer living in the Philippines.
Chapter 5. Gender expectations and obligations

In this part the reader will be introduced to the depiction that migration can be seen as a motivation to escape poverty, unemployment and both physical and psychological abuse. It will illustrate the view of a ‘typical’ Filipina and her role within society by having a gender-lens and look at the costs that comes with female migration. The meaning of transnational motherhood and pain of family separation will be discussed and how come the society blames the female migrants for causing a care crisis. The status of the Filipina within the home will be discussed and how it contradicts to their new role as a breadwinner, and how her new role is perceived and accepted in society. Lastly, the reader will be given an example from a woman who states that she been giving up her own dreams to meet her gender obligation as a dutiful daughter.

Dalisy’s escape and response to the gender migration

Dalisy grew up in a middle-income family as the eldest of four siblings. She told me how she was allowed by her parents to study in school as a young child and even go to college where she studied media and communication. When she was a child she always dreamt of being a doctor but because of their way of living her parents did not have enough money to send her to medical school so she started having a new dream, namely being a movie director and writing scripts. However Dalisy’s dream did not come true this time because when she graduated college she had become pregnant and therefore decided to get married. She became a housewife and did not get the opportunity to pursue her dream. During the life as married it is not uncommon that women were not allowed by their husbands to engage in paid employment (Tacoli 1999: 670). She told me how she did not get the permission from her husband to work because of his jealousy and that she was not even allowed to go out and meet her friends. To wear makeup and dress up was out of the question. She describes it as an unhappy marriage that after a while led to a separation and her going abroad for the first time. She had been hearing a lot of people talking about their experiences being abroad. One of them had been her sister in law that had currently been working abroad and every time she had returned home to the Philippines for her vacation she
would tell Dalisay how exiting it was - of course with the premise that you found yourself a good employer. Dalisay thought it was a good opportunity for her to go abroad so she would be able to get away from her husbands’ abuse.

[...]... it is also a way to escape. Because if I would stay here in the Philippines he would bug me most of the times plus the fact that I really wanted to work abroad. I don’t know if I would say that it is a blessing in disguise but it is like an opportunity. The thing like this happened between my husband and me but I had also a thought that I would love to work abroad so it as just like everything came at the same time the domestic problem and then my willingness to work abroad. So I thought that this was the thing I really needed to do – to work abroad because I was testing myself like should I continue my thought of working abroad or do I stay here and continue the domestic violence, the domestic problems. So one it is an escape from domestic problems and the other one is an opportunity to go abroad which I wanted since I was a kid. It has always been my dream to travel and the third is earning more. Because if I would be alone I don’t believe I would be able to support my kids back then and the fact that I back then was not that young anymore because most of the jobs here in the Philippines would look for applicants that are 18 to 20 years old and things like that and then I was like 30 years old and even though I am a college graduate because of my age it was very difficult for me to look for a job back then but working abroad most of them would like applicants that are older then that so it was my chance.

The first employment she was offered was in Saudi Arabia for a family that owned a hospital in Jeddah. She thought she was going to work as a receptionist but when she arrived her contact person brought her to the house of her employers. At first she had been afraid because she had back home been hearing a lot of news about the violence against domestic workers and especially in the Middle East. However, the next day she met her thirteen co-workers that would the following two year become her family. In Jeddah she was working as a private teacher for the children in the family and she described it as a very enjoyable time. The employers treated her as part of the family, did not discriminate her and did not call her maid but instead staff, which she liked and preferred. After her contract expired after two years she decided to go back to the Philippines. The primary reason for going back home was because of her children. Her youngest girl was growing up and Dalisay had been hearing a lot of stories about girls in her age becoming pregnant so she was afraid. Because her parents that were taking care of her children during the time she was abroad were becoming old and could not look out for her in the same way that they used too.
When she came back home she worked as a preschool teacher and at a hotel where she met the father of her third child. This relationship was however, according to Dalisay, not successful and she therefore decided to go abroad for a second time. This time she worked as a nanny in United Arab Emirates while her parents once again took care of her children. Dalisay described this time as a period in her life where she had to endure a lot of challenges because the Madame in the family, in the beginning of her arrival, had not been trustful or kind. Dalisay told me that the Madame had a lot of tests.

The first time I went there she looked at me from head to toe and she did not smile. I just wanted to do my job and then after two days she called me and led me to their room and showed me the closet and there was one of the mops, the handle for the mop. She pointed at it and asked why had I put this here in the closet? I was shocked and I said “Madame I did not put it there” Once I was also blamed to have but garbage in the closet, why would I put garbage in the closet? And she insisted that I had put it there even though I said that I did not. And at the second time she told me that I had left the sponge in the bathroom. She told me that I had left it there but that she had thrown it away. There were a lot of certain things like that. She was inventing things that I did not do so I was crying and was asking the boss, the Mister, to just send me home, to send me back home to the Philippines. I was doing the best I could and I had worked abroad before and then I did not have this kind of experience. I told them that I had worked hard and that I know what I am doing so I was crying and did not want to go out from my room. I just told them that “please send me back home to the Philippines”. And then the Mister talked to me and told me that if they would send me back to the agency the agency would hit me, spank me and kick me because I did not want to stay. And I told him that there was no fear. I was so strong with my standards that I wanted to go back to the Philippines. If the Madame would continue to tell stories and blaming me for doing something’s that I did not do, then it is better to just send me back home. Maybe he talked to the Madame because the next day everything was quiet, she called for my attention and just asked me to take care of her kids. I did not want to touch the baby before so I just rocked the cradle and then she told me “you are a mother right? Then why don’t you carry my daughter? She is crying so why don’t you carry her?” I did not answer her because I did not want to carry her without her permission. Because most of them, Middle Eastern people, have said that their housekeepers are dirty especially if they come from other countries like Sri Lanka or Pakistan or India. They look at them as the lower people and Filipinos too sometimes they look at them as very low people.

[...] I just kept quiet and just prayed, I am a catholic, so I just prayed for guidance and that I would be able to pull this through, I hoped that I would be strong so I was crying every night. I was not crying because it was a very hard job or a very difficult job. I cried because of the way the Madame treated me. But I had one coworker there. She was also a Filipino and
she was telling me that that was the way she was the first time she met somebody and that she will change with time. So I just kept hoping and held my hopes high and prayed that once I proved that I could work hard I would gain her trust and she would change. And eventually I gained her trust, I took care of her kid like my own daughter because she was only two weeks old when I came there so I treated her like my own daughter and then everything changed. She became nice to me […]

After working as a nanny in the UAE Dalisay went back to the Philippines and met a new man in her life, and together they have a baby boy. As I mentioned, while introducing my informants’, she was at the time we met working in a Call Centre and for that she was grateful because it resulted in a slightly higher salary, being a foreign company. Before she went abroad they would be content by eating what could be found for the day but because Dalisay had been working abroad she could now offer her children food on the table several times a day, she could offer them an education, medicine when they were sick, give them clothes and be able to pay the bills. By sending home remittance to her parents every month while working abroad she knew that she had offered her children the opportunity of a better life. She also supported her siblings during the time they were studying at college. She told me that she wanted to take care of them, and while asking her if she thought they were grateful for her help she just looked at me and asked me if I wanted an honest answer. I don’t think they are grateful for that, because when I look back in it makes me cry. Because it is hard to work abroad. Even though I was fortunate to find a good employer who treated me well it was really hard to work abroad. Because you get to work with people that you don’t know, with different cultures and you did not know what they would do if you made a mistake. So they said thank you, but when looking back I think they already forgot that I have helped them, but that is fine, that is life. You cannot please everyone.

Dalisay told me how she loved to travel, see new places and experience everything that comes with travelling. By going abroad her and her families life had become improved socially, emotionally and physically. She told me how she gained self-confidence and became stronger by standing on her own two feet’s and by meeting new people with different cultures. It made her realize that she had the capacity to take care of her children financially, which made her feel powerful and proud of herself. Dalisay told me how she had been talking to her husband about her going back abroad. She told me that she’s been starting to look at the opportunity to go to
Europe and work as a nanny. She meant that her children were now starting to grow up and therefore saw an opening. The urge to return back abroad was lingering. Her face lighted up while she told me about the fascination of going abroad - to work abroad. Of course she would miss her children if she would work overseas again but she knew that they would be in good hands and if you wanted your children to have a good life you would think aside. She hoped that her children would one day be able to experience what she experienced and realize that there are opportunities outside the Philippines.

I believe that Dalisay’s story makes a good introduction to this chapter. Namely, because her story demonstrates how an “ordinary” woman in the Philippines becomes a migrant. She had big plans and dreams for herself in the aspect that she wanted to study and posses a profession so she could provide for herself. She was brought up in a middle-class family, she got her education paid from her parents and to get food during the days was not seen as a major problem under her upbringing. None of her parents had been OFWs but she had several friends and relatives that been abroad. She had however been the first one of her siblings to migrate, and at the time I met her, all three siblings had become OFWs. Even though Dalisay had a college graduation in media and communication she only worked as an OFW within the homes of her employers. Demonstrating the fact that many who work in the sphere of domesticity are highly educated. During her time abroad she faced several challenges, dealing with her employers, co-workers and her absence from her children. However, in the long run Dalisay became stronger while being abroad, pushing- and by proving to herself that she was respected and hardworking made her believe in herself as she never done before.

At the same time Dalisay spoke of a gendered type of vulnerability that made her want to leave more than once. She had gone through a series of problems with her male partners and the only way she could think of were to escape by going abroad. This reflect Ehrenreich and Hochschilds conclusion that migration may also be seen as a practical response to a failed marriage and the need to provide for children without male help, where migration is even sometimes called a “Philippine divorce” (2002: 11). Migration is often seen as the only socially acceptable option for women trapped in unhappy marriages (Tacoli 1999: 676). The Philippine law, in general, does not provide for divorce inside the Philippines. Although, there is the possibility to file
for a legal separation or an annulment - a process that is both time-consuming and expensive. I was told that filing for a separation could cost about 100,000 - 200,000 pesos [which is about a year’s wages for a typical Filipino] and the process can take up to 1-2 years. Being separated also meant that you could not remarry, and it was not uncommon that you lost the membership of your church. Seeing this through a gender-lens you might just ask yourself how a housewife would gain that kind of money. How a woman working as a street sweeper, earning 500 pesos a month, could save that amount and still put food on the table for her children and care for herself. According to Tacoli, “marital disruption often dovetails with economic constraints, as fathers rarely contribute to their children’s upbringing after separation and women often find themselves as the sole provider for their offspring (1999: 669).

It is a woman’s place

During several of my interviews my informant’s often started to describe typical identification regarding a Filipina in comparison with Filipino men.

Filipinas are very good, hospitable, hardworking and then they know how to respect other people and they love their families. That is what I have experienced with my friends that they are thinking about their families. And that some men here are only thinking about themselves, not all, but most of them. I like women because their priorities are their families their siblings, their future […] Now a days most women work abroad, and men stay here [in the Philippines] I don’t know what the reason is but maybe because now a days women are stronger, more confident like men and now women take the responsibilities of working rather than men […] Maybe because they are women, they are the mothers and you have a lot of responsibilities […] Before men had the responsibility to work for their family but now a day women have more responsibility.

One of my informants’, active in the church, explained to me what the household in the Philippines looks like. According to her the man is the symbol of the house. He is the pillar in the home and has a duty to provide for his family economically (haligi ng tahanan). It is the men’s duty to lead the family in the right direction, to give them guidance and security. It is the men that take all the decisions regarding the family, both financially and politically, and with that said only a man can be seen as a leader.
Talking about a woman she is a symbol for the ‘light in the home’ (ilaw ng tahanan). Her duty is to take care of her husband’s need, for example giving him food, wash his laundry and take care of the children and there is no exception even if she was working. I asked her why women couldn’t be leaders and she told me “women cannot lead people because they cannot stick to one decision and they cannot make up their minds. It is in their biological nature”. She believed that if the country where suppose to be “rich” again the women would go back being housewives, because that’s the way it should be. The quote comes from a woman that is a member of the Iglesia Ni Christo. Even though this was true for her, there is a need to also look at the Philippines history where they have had two female presidents, but also women in the government, dealing with politics and boards of directors. It is proposed that this statement could be understood on the basis of her faith, as a member of the Iglesia Ni Christo, saying that women are forbidden to lead the church.

Nonetheless, my informant comments reflect the thought of a nuclear family with a breadwinning father and a nurturing mother “that consists typically of a married man and a woman with their offspring” (Murdock 1949: 1). That women nurture and men discipline and where fathers earn income for the family, and mothers can choose to supplement it (Medina 2001: 17; Parreñas 2005: 34). This metaphorical reference binds the women to the domestic sphere and limits them to be accepted as a member of the labour force within the society. Even in the process of migration, actions and institutions constitute the ideology of domesticity, where the women cook and clean the entire day. Likewise, feeding, bathing and spending time with their employer’s children reinforce the women’s maternity. They have to contend with the wage gap, a sex-segmented labour market, and the devaluation of traditional women’s work (Parreñas 2008: 9,51). According to Parreñas it is clear that “conventional gender expectations of men and females roles in the family lead to the prescription of certain gender characteristics” (2005: 58). “Maternity, understood to include the care of the family, is one of women’s primarily duties to the state. For instance, women, as the mothers and wombs of the nation, are obligated to reproduce the population. Women are thus subject to regulation, with proper womanhood defined by their role as biological mothers” (Parreñas 2005: 36). However, not only are there expectations of specific gender characteristics within the home, but also within the working domain. There are studies showing that women are being preferred because they are being …
… regarded as more docile than men, used to doing boring and repetitive work (due to their apparently natural role in reproduction) and well-suited for fiddly jobs due to their apparently nimble fingers. Furthermore, because it is assumed that women only need to earn supplementary incomes to add to those of their breadwinning men, they are not paid ‘family wages’ which would suffice to cover their households’ or even their own expenses, but so called lipstick money instead.

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It has been shown that mothers being abroad “face pressure to nurture their children directly despite the distance, because violating gender boundaries of mothering risk stigma and the judgement of kin (Parreñas 2005: 118). Migration as a choice might not be easy for women because according to the established gender boundaries, to take care of their family, they are abandoning their responsibilities (Parreñas 2005: 131), whereas the care of the family is still the women’s responsibility. Even though mothers migrate it is not expected that the father will care for the children and perform a greater share of the household work. Instead women from the extended kin take the place as a nurturer and caregiver, whether they like it or not. It is a cultural expectation and even the children are showed to have greater care expectations of their mother than they did of their father, even though their father remained in the Philippines (Parreñas 2005: 113). Men are thus discouraged from participating actively in childrearing, even to the cost that younger girls is drawn out of school to care for her younger siblings (Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2002: 3,16).

According to Parreñas, numerous studies have repeatedly concluded that in the United States men’s household participation has only slightly improved over the years, despite the remarkable increase in the rate of women’s paid employment (Parreñas 2005: 112). Parreñas draws the assumption from a socialist called Presser who notes that the women’s absence from the home forces men to increase their share of household work. She writes that “the more hours husbands are not employed during times when wives are employed, the more likely husbands are to do housework that is traditionally done by females, breaking traditional gender expectations” (Parreñas 2005: 112).

This was however not a case in the Philippines. When women went abroad in the process of migration other women came forward taking their place in the domestic
work in the household. When mothers went abroad to work and act as breadwinners of the family it was most common that the children went to live and be cared for by another woman, most often a grandmother, sibling or aunt. In this case other women cushion men from taking on household responsibilities. It was seen as a matter of course to act as a guardian to the younger kin who were at risk of not growing up in the presence of a maternal guidance (Parreñas 2005: 113; Medina 2001: 154).

When asking Imee about who was supposed to take care of her son when she left for Korea she told me that it would be her mother for sure. She did not trust her boyfriend because of the fact that he was working a lot and was hanging out with his friends while drinking. She knew that her mother would focus on her son one hundred percent and she knew that her son would be safe in the care of her mother. This meant however that their son would move to another province away from the father, but that did not seem as a problem. This case was not seen as a problem by most of the mothers whom I spoke too. Where, while them being abroad, their mothers, their sisters, nieces or mother in laws had cared for their children.

Dalisay spoke of experience while claiming that her previous partners had certainly not taken their responsibilities toward their children. However, Dalisay said that if she would travel abroad for a third time her current partner would probably take care of the children and household.

Some fathers they increase their role as the women are suppose to do. I can see that there are certain husbands that increase their role in the family like doing laundry and cooking and taking care of the kids while the women are abroad.

When the mothers return Dalisay states that,

They still do the housework because the women just came back from abroad and she needs to be pampered because she was the one that earned the living so he should continue helping the women do the households shores, but not most of them not a lot of men are like that. You can only count them with your fingers.

Men taking over the responsibilities of their children and household were nonetheless a performance that after a while was restored to the mothers. Noel, at Kanlungan Centre Foundation, claimed that women working instead of men is a growing trend
within the Philippines. He had met several mothers during the time he had been working in schools out in the provinces. He worked within a project lead by the government to organize parents, having children in the public school, to teach English at home after school. First of all there had only been the mothers that had participated on the meetings, secondly Noel claimed,

When I asked them, many of them told me that their husbands were jobless and that they [the mothers] were the ones working in the family, many of them. And I had visited a lot of villages and every time I got in touch with the mothers, because normally the mothers are the ones going to the school activities, not men, not their husbands. So every time I asked them ‘who is working? You or your husband?’ They would answer, ‘No not our husbands! We are the ones working. Our husbands don’t do anything. Except you know, they drink’.

Social costs and moral obligations

Even though they are working, women are recruited into female specific skilled and unskilled work. Their work is characterised by insecurity, low wages, poor working conditions and lack of social protection. The labour export has not been without a price. Kanlungan Centre Foundation (2009) speaks of contract violations, illegal recruitment, and violence against women, trafficking of women and children and occupational hazards. Moreover, the neglect of the Philippines government has brought immeasurable pain and damage to migrant workers health and wellbeing. Women tend to be disadvantaged in the process of migration and face multiple challenges and adverse conditions based on the intersection of gender, age, nationality, class and ethnicity. The disadvantaged position of many migrant women leads repeatedly to increased exploitation and growing vulnerability of their health, bodily integrity and well-being.

For a large number of women, the experience of migration involves the pain of family separation (Parreñas 2008: 47). Because of the number of mothers that migrate many children in the Philippines grow up without the physical presence of their mothers. It has also been illustrated that the employers of the caretakers often prefer them to be mothers with the assumption that they can provide a better quality of care compared to childless women (Parreñas 2008: 47). At the same time the mothers that work as nannies often face painful moments of caring for other children while unable
to care for their own. According to Parreñas the demand for care has increased around the world, a demand to which women from the Philippines have responded in force that in turn have generated a tremendous social change. Namely that Filipino children are growing up in divided households separated from their mothers and it has been showed that it has brought them distress and emotional strains (Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2002: 39), but also among the mothers that “leave” their children behind in the care of others. Dalisay said,

I was working as a domestic helper and a nanny. It was like you were at home but just that that was not my real family. It is like taking care of children, making household chores, so it is not really that hard. The one thing that is hard is the fact that I am serving other people and not my family but regarding work I did not feel that it was really hard even though I was working 24/7. For me it was not really hard.

The migrating mothers challenged the notion that they belong in the home of their families, the idea that a woman’s rightful place is in the home. They challenge the normative nuclear family that reproduce a nurturing, physical present mother and a breadwinning father and thereby conflict with dominant cultural notions of the right kind of family (Parreñas 2005: 30). Even though the state is dependent on female labour migration Parreñas states that the constitution of the Philippines still regards the nuclear family as the norm and therefore denies public recognition of mothers leaving their children behind (2005: 30). Mothers that leave their children behind fall not only under the definition of bad mothers, but also as failing to fulfil their moral obligation and their duties to the nation (Parreñas 2005: 37). The Philippine government and journalists criticize the migrating mothers through media statements claiming that they have caused a care crisis in the society and made the Philippine family weak (Ehrenreich & Russel 2002: 40).

Transnational families challenge the cultural rules and symbols of the family in the Philippines. Therefore, the resistance against transnational families reflects a more general struggle against gender transformations in society. Parreñas refers to a study conducted by Graziano Battistella and Maria Cecilia Astardo-Conaco (1996) that shows that “children without their mothers seem to have more problems compared to the other children” they pray less and “tend to be more angry, confused, apathetic and more afraid than other children” (2005: 40). She also speaks of the mothers effort to
nurture at a distance and achieve intimacy in separation (2005: 104) by giving health advice, plan the meals for the coming week, speak about the school, friends etc.

Many of my informants’ told me how they on a daily basis communicated with their children or parents by regular phone service, text messaging or through the Internet. The migrant mothers nurture across great distances, which can be seen as them responding to the opinions of others, as if they would have abandoned their children. However, they do not only reinforce conventional gender norms, but do it in a way that enhances the gender expectations (Parreñas 2005: 106). Parreñas used the term ‘martyr moms’ in order to illustrate and describe the mothers complex position. According to Parreñas the mothers not only need to nurture and guide their children from a distance, they also have to grieve when doing so. “The role of ‘martyr mom’ however naturalizes the materialism of women and contests the gender reconstitutions instigated by women’s migration. To act as a martyr is to do the boundary work of keeping the care of the family the responsibility of women” (2005: 108).

Gender obligation, being a dutiful daughter

At the second day of my arrival I was home alone with the mother in my host family, Diwata. Her daughters were at work while their father was working in their sewing workshop, just four meters from their own house. Diwata was the one asking me if I wanted to hear her story. She started to tell me how she once had wanted to go abroad and work. When she was young she had not planned to get married, she wanted to be on her own and support her parents with remittance while being abroad. She had gone to college one year, but had to drop out partly because she did not afford the placement fee, but also because she had to support her parents. She explained that they were becoming old and could not manage to work and their lack of educational background made it all more difficult to possess work. Diwata had two siblings, a brother but also a sister that was disabled, also called a special child, as mentioned previously. She explained to me how her mother had given birth to her sister during her older days and therefore been ‘punished’ with a special child. When Diwata’s brother got himself a family they moved from the city and left Diwata to care for her parents and sister. She told me how he sometimes would send money home to her
parents (while working as a musician), but that it was never enough so Diwata had to apply for work. She had several occupations working as a secretary, “of the fact that I have a beautiful handwriting” and she worked as chef at a Japanese restaurant.

I have only one year in collage but because of job experiences I know how to speak English. Even though you need a higher collage degree to work there I can speak English because I learned by working. I know how to entertain.

Diwata struggled hard to be able to support her parents, sister and herself and when she was twenty-five years she decided to marry her current husband, Ricco.

Then I said that I will marry Ricco because I want to have a family also, because when I will become old somebody will take care of me too. Because I told to my nice that you will go with your mother abroad, but what about me, I will be all alone. That is why I got married.

Diwata told me that she married of the fear of being left alone in the Philippines. Her brothers’ wife had met an American man working for the U.S. Navy, and followed him to the U.S. taking her two youngest daughters with her, leaving her oldest daughter with her father. As previous mentioned her brother was working as a musician and was therefore always travelling to different places, and during his tour he also met a new woman. Diwata’s brother had therefore “asked” her to take care of his daughter, which she did till the day she grew up to be an independent woman. A woman that today is living in Sweden, married to a Swedish man.

Diwata had always had the feeling that she one day would be left alone in the Philippines and in a way she was right. After a couple of years her brother and parents had past away, which left her in the full care of her sister. Diwata is an example of a hard working Filipina that by her own ability manage to, although barely, meet her gender obligations to care for her family, and with that said ignore her own needs and dreams. She had been the only daughter in the family who was able to care for them, and Diwata gave up her own dreams and future aspirations to fulfil her duties as a caring daughter.

At the time we spoke she had, together with her husband, been able to start their own sewing workshop. This did however not mean that they were economic independent. To find customers was always hard work and even though they had
deliveries almost every month, in the end, the income did not meet the monthly expenses. With that said Diwata sometimes got help from her relatives abroad, especially around Christmas times. Diwata had by now started to cry when telling me about her dependence on her relatives.

[My niece] also in December gave me some money. I am happy because if [my niece] would not give me I think we might be able to survive, but it helps. They are very nice my nieces. They love me I am sure, because I am their only aunt.

When looking around in their house it was quite clear that their relatives abroad supported the family. For one thing, they had pictures on their walls of relatives living and working abroad. They wore clothes that they received from relatives and in their shelves there was several food cans, bottles with jelly, syrup and ketchup that was branded with American labels. You could probably buy these bottles and canes in the Philippines but I was sure they were a gift from abroad because under the dining table there was a huge cardboard box that was filled with similar food, and the cardboard was marked with U.S. stamps. Even though you might be able to buy the imported food in the Philippines, it would be more expensive because of taxes.

Diwata told me that when she was young she had so many plans for her future, and when asking her about her dreams she only shook her head while telling me that dream was no longer for her.

Because of my parents I focused on my job. They needed me so much. So everything I earned I would buy the things that they needed. I had plenty of dreams but they would not come true because I have plenty people to care for, what do you say. It is hard to explain but they need me so much, me and my salary.

Diwata told me that she wanted and wished that her daughters one day would get the opportunity to work abroad.

Because they will earn money, but for me myself, because I am getting older, I don’t need any more money. I don’t need money for a beautiful house, a beautiful car, or for a beautiful place. I don’t need that. I need that my family will have a good, loving and faithful life. Have a good hart, and that you are not sick. Because if you are sick you will die, and if you don’t have money you will also die [Diwata is laughing]. Of course it is better to have money, but God will give, you will prey with your hart, like: “please God lead me the way, give me some
costumers so I can help my family”. That is my prayers, “please give us health to get some more money, thank you so very much”. We need some costumers to be able to continue. I don’t want to have a big house or a big car or become a millionaire, because then I might forget about God. You just go to the Boracay to spend money, to drink and gambling. You then forget about God and then sometimes you cannot look for the children because you are always busy, too busy with your own business. I am too busy to look after my children.

Reflections

In this chapter the reader has come acquainted with stereotyped descriptions of a typical Filipina. Women in the Philippines have repeatedly been described with generalising identities as caring and nurturing. Repeated acts of describing the Filipina organise and create her identity as, Butler claims, a compelling illusion - an object of beliefs (Parreñas 2005: 95). To clarify, Butler claims that “the act that one does, the act that one performs is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene” (Parreñas 2005: 526), or as Beauvoir claims, you are not born a woman, you become one where you compel the body to fit into a historical idea (2002). Namely, the Filipinas identity and body reflects an historical idea, a conclusion drawn from the fact that all my informants’ had similar description regarding ‘the typical Filipina’
The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set facts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body.

Judith Butler 1990: xv

What the mothers are doing while responding to the separation from their children, drawing on Judith Butlers’ notion of gender performance, is to over perform their expected female roles. Namely, to over perform their role as a mother they might just have the hope that they could compensate for not being physically present. At the same time illustrate for the society that they performed their role as nurturing mothers from a distance, not forsaking their duties as mothers while becoming martyr moms.

Many felt the obligation to take care of their families in every way they could while being abroad. By sending remittance they could ensure that their family was cared for regarding basic necessities, education, house renovations and even given the possibility to start a business. The female migrants have entered the role as breadwinners of whole households and families and in that matter entered the expected male domain within the Philippine society. With that being said they are still being perceived within their expected gender roles and narrated as ‘dutiful daughters’, ‘caring mothers’ and ‘responsible wives’ (Liebelt 2011: 74). Which may limit their ability to receive and enter another social status, identity within the society, still being described and narrated as within women’s constructed gender terrain. Even though women left their families back in the Philippines they should still be seen as upholding their caring obligation by sending home remittance to their children and parents where they at the same time contribute to their country’s development prosperity. While being abroad they are still being dutiful daughters, caring wives and nurturing mothers, just by looking at it from an economic point of view.

The task of “measuring up” to one’s gender is faced again and again in different situations with respect to different particulars of conduct. The problem involved is to produce configurations of behaviours, which can be seen by others as normative gender behaviour.

Don Zimmerman et.al 2002: 30
Chapter 6. “A chance to expand their space”

In this section the reader will get acquainted with one of my informants’ that exemplified that she became stronger and more independent by going abroad as a migrant. Parts of her story will be used in this section to introduce the reader to the possibility of change that comes with migration. It will deal with the prospect of seeing domesticity as work while being given a salary and discuss how a female migrant can climb the status ladder even though she may work as a domestic helper - work, perceived as reflecting a low-class labour. Lastly, there will be a presentation regarding my informant’s stories of their experiences upon arrival, consolidation and reorientation, in an unfamiliar country.

Bituin becoming a stronger woman due to migration

December 27th in 2012 we met at a clothing store in the middle of Drottninggatan in Stockholm, Sweden. I choose the place to meet just because I knew that it would make it easier for us to find each other, namely of the fact that the store is the smallest one at Drottninggatan and I knew a good coffee shop right next to it where we could sit and perform the interview. The streets in Stockholm were packed with people, more than usual, with the reason that the Christmas sale was going on. It might not have seem to be the most wisest choice of place to perform the interview at, but my informant had just ended her shift from her work in the city and therefore it seemed to be the most convenient alternative. We had actually met once before, very briefly, at a Christmas celebration in 2009 in Sweden, which was the year she arrived in Sweden. One thing was for sure. The woman that I met in the clothing store at Drottninggatan was not the same as I had met three years ago. From the moment we met we started talk about her wellbeing and her comfort here in Sweden. I remember she was smiling a lot, she seemed more confident and speaking to me did not seem to make her nervous as before. When we met for the first time in 2009 she did not even look at me while I was talking to her. She looked down on the floor and when answering my questions she just whispered, and kept the answers short. I remember that her body language was telling me to not talk to her anymore, because she was shy and after we
all had been eating together she disappeared into the kitchen and stayed there most of the evening.

When we met in December she was in her thirties and had been working abroad for five years without going back to the Philippines once visiting her parents and children. Bituin told me that she never had a plan of working abroad and to leave her children behind, but when she got married she started to make up a plan step by step. Her husband did not have a job and she realized after a while that her salary, working as a midwife, was not enough to support her whole family with the necessities that they needed. Many times she had asked her husband to consider the possibility of going abroad but according to her he had refused. He wanted to stay in the Philippines and therefore Bituin had to make the choice and find work across the Philippine borders. She told me how her father had dissuaded her from going abroad. That it would only lead to a separation between her and her husband. Her mother had once wanted to go abroad but her father had threatened her that their family in that case would be separated so her mother had decided to stay in the Philippines. Bituin however was willing to take the risk and her father was right. Before she left to work abroad Bituin and her husband separated. She said she had not been given any choice, and that she needed to go abroad. “There is an opportunity and that is why I need to grab it. If you hide that opportunity it will not get back to you”.

In the beginning of the thesis (the part “introducing my informants”) the reader was provided with a presentation regarding Bituin’s destinations as a migrant. When we met in December 2012 she shared an apartment outside Stockholm, with another Filipina that was in the same situation as she as an undocumented migrant. She described her life here in Sweden as very difficult both psychically and emotionally, both regarding her work but also the fact that she missed her children. She was currently working five days a week for a cleaning company that offered their service to private homes, but when she first arrived to Sweden she had been working as a nanny. I remember I could see that Bituin had been very fond of the boy. She described the time as fun and loving and that she even got to experience the moment he took his first steps. When I asked her about her own children she became emotional and started to cry. Her daughter and son were at that moment thirteen and fifteen years old. She spoke to them as often as she could. Sometimes every day through Facebook or Skype and she called them every weekend just to say hello and to check up on them.
Every time I ask if they are okay, but sometimes they miss me. They are crying. Especially last Christmas, my daughter said ‘Oh mama when are you coming back?’ And I answered her that I do not know. If I go back home what am I going to do there in the Philippines? My salary is not enough; even if I work hard my salary is not enough. My daughter is crying and I tell her not to cry, but my heart is aching. I do not want to cry in front of my kids, but then I talked to my brother-in-law and I cried and I cried.

She told me how proud she was of her children and that her daughter dreamed of becoming a teacher and her son a mechanic. Bituin sent remittance to her mother in law every week. She sent around eight hundred kronor, equaling to four thousand eight hundred pesos. She said that it is not much, but it is enough. The money went to her children’s food and education at the local school. She had wished that her children would be able to go to a private school but it just cost too much. At first she had also sent her parents some money, but now she only supported them in emergencies. She told me that she had to save for the future, wherever the future may lead. She had the feeling of her mother in law not trusting her that she sent as much money as she could and for that she felt sorry. Bituin told me that she at the moment did not have a boyfriend that could support her. Otherwise that was, according to her, common among Filipinas, namely to be supported by a boyfriend with the objective to be able to send home more remittance to their families back home. While working in Bahrain she had two boyfriends. She explained that it was not love, but instead a sort of system that made it possible to be provided for in the aspect of support and as a way to be able to survive.

Bituin’s plan was to work abroad for ten more years and after that she would possibly return to the Philippines. Bituin was hesitant about returning back home.

When the days go by and the years go by I don’t want to go back to the Philippines. Because what will I do in the Philippines? I earn money here, but I want to get back. Only forty percent will go back to the Philippines and sixty will stay here […] If my kids are with me here, there is no reason for us to be in the Philippines. Maybe visiting my mother and father for a couple of weeks and then come back here.
Only when she could get her Visa to stay and work in Sweden she would start taking classes in Swedish and hopefully start studying to become a midwife here in Sweden.

I remember when I was in the Philippines. It is so hard now to find food, but if you are working straight you can survive, you can survive, but in the Philippines, if you are rich, you are rich and if you are poor you are very poor. Like here it is the same, I can see that. Because at some at my work they are rich. The food in the fridge is only the same in my fridge. They can buy this food and I can buy this food, but in the Philippines the rich can buy bacon, you cannot buy bacon. It is a big difference. […] I heard on the news, little by little it is going up [the economy]. It is just because of the OFW, like us, like me. Because we send home a lot of money. Because it is a lot of OFW in the Philippines. Especially in this month, in December, there is a lot of remittance that comes from other countries. I heard in the news that little by little. […] That is why they call us little heroes.

When travelling from Olongapo to Pampanga I made a stop on the way to visit Bituin’s family. I got to meet her cousins, sister, mother, son and many other relatives of hers. My travel company and I had brought some gifts from Bituin, both to her son, sister and mother. The gifts that were exchanged were clothes, accessories and money in the currency of US dollars. Bituin’s son was thrilled of the presents he got. When we were alone I told him that I had met his mother in Sweden. I remember that he had a big smile on his lips while telling me that he missed her a lot, but was very proud of her for struggling so hard to improve their situation in the Philippines.

I remember that I asked Bituin, while interviewing her, in what way she had changed as a person being a migrant, and she answered me that, “There is a lot of difference, like in the way I talk to you right now …”

As I said previously this was not the same woman I had met once before. She sat up straight in front of me. From the start she asked me questions before opening the interview, and in the end of the interview we finished our coffee while chit chatting. I remember she told me that in the beginning of her arrival to Sweden, when living in her relatives’ home, she had been very shy to her relatives’ children and husband. Even though the children had almost been in the same age as her own kids back home in the Philippines. Upon the arrival she had only the family to lean on, but at the time we met for the interview she had a lot of new friends and I would like to claim that she had started to feel comfortable in Sweden, confirming the observation
that she had become stronger- and more independent- and self-confident as an individual.

“Domestic work is work”

There is particular one day I remember quite clearly during my time in the Philippines. The day I met Ellene, the executive director of the CMA. I had tried to contact this woman for a long time by sending e-mails and calling her assistant without any answer, until one day. We set an appointment and I could indicate on her e-mail that she was stressed and overbooked, but luckily she could squeeze me into her schedule and she told me that I had one hour of her time. Ellene was an inspiring woman and I could sense she knew what she was talking about.

Ellene stated that migration is part of the Philippine society now and therefore there is this accepting attitude towards migrants. However there is a double standard regarding the kind of work you are suppose to perform while being abroad. There is always, according to Ellene, a concern when dealing with domestic work were domestic workers are abused even in the Philippines and it is known that it could be double or triple difficulty when being abroad and not being protected by the laws of the country. Regardless, women are willing to take the risk. Ellene told me a story about her cousin, who was the first migrant in her family. Ellene’s cousin went to college but after her graduation she could not get a job that corresponded to her level of education so she ended up working at a factory owned by the government and earned money so she could merely afford the essentials. Finally she decided to travel to Hong Kong and work as a domestic helper. This was in the early nineties. Her father was dejected by her decision. He just could not understand why she was going to work as a domestic helper when she had a college graduation and was therefore an educated person. She insisted that she had no future in the Philippines and went to Hong Kong even though her father disapproved. In the end of the nineties the economic crisis hit Hong Kong and when her employer moved to the United Kingdom he asked her to join him. According till Ellene she still lived in the United Kingdom and she had become the wealthiest person in their family, she had become a
citizen in the United Kingdom and had a passport that meant that she could travel wherever she liked.

... and I think that it makes her feel good about it. She has that sense that she made it and at the same time I think that, even for herself I think, when she started it she was not that proud to be a domestic but I think after her years of working as a domestic that she saw the value of it. So I think that it gives a sense of, a lot of sense that women have always been unrecognized or there is always this patronizing tone when it comes to women’s achievement.

It is common and no secret that domestic work has been linked together with femininity, believing that the women’s place is in the home. When women leave their own home to enter others to perform household chores and they get paid it is suddenly work. If they work they are workers and if they get paid, Ellene meant, that they get recognized - and workers are entitled to different rights like everyone else that are working. Ellene believed that there is a big gap between policy and reality. According to her, many Filipinas that are working abroad as domestic helpers do not know that the government finally have agreed that domestic work is work that means that they are entitled to different rights regarding economic, social and political conditions. You cannot deny that domestic workers are vulnerable and exploited for many reasons, but at the same time Ellene had come into contact with a lot of women that had been through horrible experiences abroad, they had come back home to the Philippines and then after a while decided to go back abroad. Interestingly, to the same destination and to perform the same work as a domestic.

So then we wonder why, why would they do that and now we are starting to look at some other facts, that are not perhaps very out in the open. One is probably and has something to do with … this is the double thing about separation. We say that migration has brought a lot of social costs to the family because they have to break up, they have to be separated, you are going to an environment that is totally and probably different of what you are used to, you are disconnected from everything that is familiar, disconnected from your support group etc. But maybe for just that maybe there is also that aspect, and this is probably more so for the women, were the separation would have a dimension of liberation. Of course they regret that they have to be separated but at the same time, because they have to be on their own, they have to be brave and smart to survive in the environment that they are working in and living in and somehow I think, despite the hardship, they get a sense of …. You are challenging yourself to do this and you feel good when you are able to do this despite the odds, despite the difficulties. Maybe it also has to do with the Filipino culture, the very strong catholic
influence that, especially for the women, there is that expectation from the society on how you should act, how you should behave and when they are overseas they are far away from these prying eyes from all of its pressures and so they may not be living as they should live because they are in a very precarious occupations but somehow there is the sense of the being that they become more true to themselves that they don’t like to work on their day of. They are most likely just lying there, you know there is that thing that ‘I am here on my own’ and maybe they feel good about it. Maybe they feel liberated about it. They also find joy in it that maybe this is one chance were they can expand their space. They can be more true to themselves and be more expressive all the way to the extent touching on the stage of sexuality.

My informants’ looked upon their migration abroad as both the outcome of economic motivation, as the desire for a better life, to escape poverty, or social and family pressures. One of my informants’ told me,

Women that are traveling or working abroad would like to save for her future and for her family. She does not want to live in poverty as you can see here in the Philippines it is very hard to find any job that can be higher compare to the other countries. So she wants to earn more for the future and if she finds a husband or if her family is on their own she does not want her children to experience the hardship that she felt when she was young or here in the Philippines. She wants to provide her family with the needs they need for the future

Migration would be justified as a way out of poverty and social stagnation, but with that said they had at the same time the very hope to improve their own lives. Some were very exited to go abroad with the expectation that they would see new places, meet different people, cultures and experience climates like cold winters with snow. Hoping that they would get the opportunity to experience things that they had only seen while listening on people’s stories.

When I was young I was dreaming to work abroad or staying abroad because I want to travel. I would like to see the USA, what is happening there, and what is happening in other countries and if all the stories from other people are true or not. I want to experience it on my own. Like that in the northern parts they said that it is good to see snow, so I also wanted to experience it and the traditions, the food.

- Imee

Imagination and dreams can here be seen as a fuel for action. Liebelt refers to the notion of global dreaming where the Filipino dream reflects the good and modern life
in the West. A dream and imagination that, according to Liebelt, play a major role in the Filipinos’ migratory moves (2011: 160).

Abroad they usually do not look at your educational background and as long as you can do the job, as long as you are willing to do the job they are asking you to do you have opportunities to work. Unlike here they are very choosy. There are certain companies that would only hire people that are college graduates but since the economy is not that good all Filipinos cannot afford to study at college. Sometimes when they graduate high school they don’t go to school anymore. They don’t go to college so it is hard for them to find a job here in the Philippines, but abroad, as long as you can make the job they want you to do abroad there are a lot of opportunities.

- Dalisay

Migration can provide women, as Ellene said, with the chance to expand their space with the offer of working abroad. Being on their own made them consider themselves as independent. Only by living apart from their parents and rest of their kin group, not having them care for them, made them have a “taste of independence”. At the same time migration provides women with the freedom and autonomy to decide whether they like to live abroad or return back home (Parreñas 2008:11).

Subjective experiences upon arriving, consolidation, and reorientation

The arrivals were often narrated as a time consumed by emotional pain. Many of the women told me that the first weeks consisted of a great homesickness. That they felt scared, nervous, sad, lonely and confused in an environment where they did not feel at home. Even at the airport many said that they felt the feeling of wanting to back out and return back home to their family. For many of my informants’ everything was, so to speak, a first time. The first time they were to be separated from their family, friends and travel outside their provinces. The first time they left the Philippines and travelled by an airplane and met and lived with people from different cultures. I remember when Dalisay told me about her first culture shock being in the Middle East.
When I first went there I went to the owner of the company’s house and I started to look for the tables, and I was shocked because the maid there started to put newspaper on the floor, and she put all the food on the floor and she said ‘let’s eat’. So I was so shocked because even the poorest of the poor in the Philippines have tables to put their food on. So I sat down and ate, and after I had been eating I wanted to go to the bathroom, again another culture shock because they don’t have any lavatory they only have a … it’s in the floor so you have to squat. So then I thought O My God.

Another informant, a thirty-four years old mother of two son’s, told me about her experience in Qatar,

At first it was quite different, it is a struggle because it is a different country and you have to learn how to mingle with them, the food, the environment, everything. After three months I could adjust. My first months were the toughest. It was my first time away from my family, the first time I was in a foreign country. First time I saw these people, first time I experienced the warm climate. I am used to a tropical country, and there, it was too hot. The time I came there it was almost summer and I had nose bleeds. And the food, and the people, this was the Middle East so I was told that I had to be careful. I did not want to be raped, so I always needed to be on my look out. I have not so much spare time, it was office, church, home - it was like that, no time to go around.

After a period of time they realised that they had found grounding in their duties, they had joined networks of other Filipinos in the nearby area, while their families at home also had become accustomed to the idea of them working abroad. While being abroad many had got the feeling of being able to manage on their own. They accepted their current situation and in a way made the best of it. They had to fight for their rights, their positions by proving that they belonged in the working field, both for their employers but also for themselves. As one of my informants’ told me, “the Filipina is a fighter, fighter for her rights, a fighter for her freedom to work and freedom to express herself”. The woman that was quoted just above knew that the migration had changed her as a person,

… because working there, my bosses are all foreigners so I have to stand on my own. Mostly I don’t know why they look down on women, especially in the Middle East. Men are like this and women here [she showed with her hands that the men are ranked higher compared to women]. And I have to stand equally with the men so I had to be up on my toes every day. I knew what my work was and that I could answer the questions. So I can meet the accruements so I will not be a failure, because I am a Filipina and I don’t want them to look down on me.
Because for them Filipinas are housewife’s, not a secretary or an administrative like me. I had to keep myself up-breasted, always […] When you are working abroad you are pushed to your limits. On the other side I see it as an advantage. You are pushed to your limits, you are struggling for more - you always want to go higher.

By leaving, you have the capacity to become more independent in relation to others. You were on your own and only you could make the best of it.

I like my work because I can explore myself there [in Dubai]. When I worked here [in the Philippines] my mother was always taking care of me. I did not feel that I had two babies because when I went to work she was the one fixing all my things, giving me food. I did not feel that I was a mother because of her. She was the one caring for my children. […] It has changed my personality. Because life here is so hard, but when I am abroad I am always thinking about the future. I am saving money and thinking for example when I am there I felt like even the coins are very important. Because if you are working hard you do not waste the money, and I always think about that. I think that I am here to focus on my goal only, how to make a good future for my children and of course for my mother because she needs medicine because sometimes she has a problem with sugar and are high blood pressure.

The quote is taken from my meeting with a young mother of two sons. Her dream and future aspiration were to travel to Italy to find work. She had the plan to stay in Dubai for ten more years and thereafter travel to Italy where she had a friend that at the moment was working in an office. My informant told me that is was possible to earn more money in Italy, giving the example that her friend had even been able to buy a car from her earned money. She explained to me that while being abroad she could enjoy her life in another manner. She could take care of herself, spend time with her friends and concentrate on her work and future career.

When I am here [in the Philippines] I am always thinking about my children, but when I am there [in Dubai] it is another matter. Because my children do not allow me to go outside, but they are big now. My biggest is ten and my youngest is eight, so they don’t allow me to go out. So when I am here I am always staying in the house taking care of them. I am picking them up at school, fixing their food in the morning etc. When I go here [to the Philippines] it is not like vacation.

Even though she missed her family while being abroad she felt that she made a difference for her family and herself. Even though she most of the time was exhausted.
by working all the time while being abroad she told me that she felt liberated and had the ability to make a change for the future.

This quote illustrated how a woman could feel limited within the home, in this matter while being a mother. Being a mother comes with social obligations towards your children. To act as you please does not correspond to the gender expectation that you should always look after your children and answer to their needs and desires.

There is freedom, relative freedom. They miss everything that is familiar here [in the Philippines] but at the same time I think we have gotten to a point, and maybe for the Philippines because we are like a clan, we always want to be bound together as a family. And maybe for the Europeans it is like ‘yeah we have a family but you have to give me that individual space that I must search for myself’. And I think for some - I don’t know if it is true or not, they are realizing that I need that space, I cannot … it does not mean that I love them less but they are realizing that ‘I can have that space and that is alright’

- Ellene, CMA

The quotations from my informants’ illustrates both their first meeting with culture shocks, their struggles to prove to themselves and to others that they belonged within the working field. That challenges they met made them stronger and more confident then they were before they travelled abroad.

Sampang wrote a book telling her story being a maid in Singapore. She describes her feelings and thoughts before going back home as,

A lot had happened since I first landed in Singapore. I have changed so much that even I could barely recognise myself. I have evolved from being a desperate person into happy, confident and secure individual. This time, I knew where I was going, and what I will do when I get there. I felt useful, knowing that I was providing for my family. My children and I could look forward to a more secure future. […] My life in Singapore had taken many turns and I was feeling good about myself. I was making enough money to support my family. I was dept-free, and I had little bit left over for my personal expenses. I had acquired a huge network of friends, and I had good references.

Crisanata Sampang 2005: 101, 112

Feelings of becoming confident, a secure individual, useful to your family back home are recurrent feelings being told by the women. With that stated they have gone through a tough journey, excepting the fact that you are on your own, standing on your own two feet. A repeated description told by the women was that they got
“noose bleeds” while being abroad. This did not however mean that they were bleeding for real. It was more a saying when times got hard and “your brain was working in rapid speed”. When you were assigned challenging challenges it was common that your said that somebody or a task gave you “noose bleeds”.

I would like to end this part by taking a second quote from Sampangs book, where she describes the journey a maid (as a migrant worker) can experience being abroad. The quote is taken from a chapter called, “Hiking the nanny trail”,

Working as a maid in a foreign country is like exploring the Amazon jungle without a map. All you see before you are unmarked trails, but you know that all you have to do is go in a straight line. You go in, you grope your way through the undergrowth, take pains to avoid the leeches and the crocodiles, keep an eye out for the bogs and the sand traps… In a few years or so, you will have crossed this jungle, and there on the other side, your family will be waiting to welcome you back. If you’re fortunate, you’ll go home happy and fulfilled, and your life will be better than when you started. You’ll be richer in material things, and you would have gained friends and wisdom.

Crisanata Sampang 2005:118

Reflections

This chapter has illustrated that through migration women had the capacity to become more independent in relation to before. They gained confidence and became stronger. By challenging the idea of expected gender obligations, being at home caring and nurturing, they gained new identities. Being abroad they were forced to make their own decisions and thereafter act accordingly. It allowed women to challenge former patterns of male dependence and assert a newfound “freedom”.

The chapter also reflects upon the work within domesticity as bound to feminine work, while being rejected by men. Even though women challenge gender ideas when travelling abroad for work they still work within their perceived gender field, as within domesticity. Therefore there is a more acceptable attitude toward their migration from society, and easier for women to get employment abroad looking at the global demand of female workers as caregivers and helpers.
When looking at my informants’ comments concerning their experience upon arrival, consolidation and reorientation, most of them claimed that they after a period of time found grounding in their duties and that they felt that they became able to care for themselves and manage on their own. To place this within Butlers and Turners statement, namely that change requires performances that is repeated, it means that my informants’ developed new routines while being abroad. By repeating new ways of living, and challenging previous habits they assumed new roles. The challenge would however be proved to maintain these new patterns and roles, and not fall back to previous practices if there was a wish to maintain their new roles and way of living. Something that was not perceived as simple while returning back home to the Philippines after their contract expired.
Chapter 7. Stronger women and new role taking

Migrant women act contradictory to the gender expectations and constructions by earning an income of great importance, while being separated from their kin and country. The women are being shown to respond to the new environment as their own dependants and providers of their families back home. In this section the reader will be presented how the women perceive their return to the Philippines and how they experience their resettlement while being back home. A resettlement that after a period will, for my informants’, convert to new aspirations to return abroad. The reader will at the same time be presented with the gender clash that underlies the modernization-building project in the Philippines, as a way to ensure that the remittance are still being transferred into the country.

Negotiating traditional gender ideas

The Philippine society sends mixed messages to the Filipina. It tells her to work outside the home, by migrating, but at the same time the Philippine society maintains the belief that women’s proper place is inside the home (Parreñas 2008:22) together with their family and kin. Women have achieved tremendous economic power within the society, giving them a status as “breadwinners of the nation” and as the ”new economic heroes”. A status they have earned having helped closing the gap between the poor and the wealthy in the Philippines. Contributing to a growing middle class they have not only helped their families but also the entire country.

Parallels are being drawn between migration and economic development. Stating that the more female migrants there are, the more positive effects to the development of the economy it will have. In the rural Mexico migration has been shown to lead to positive effects for the homes the women left behind (Willson 2009). Dr. Lourdes Arellano-Carandang is a child psychologist that begs to differ looking at the part of the public discourse on migrating mothers. In an article published by the GMA News she stated that, “they remit more money because they are more faithful in remitting than the men, but that’s on the side of the money only. The emotional and social costs
are not talked about but the money. But we have to consider the entire [OFW] phenomenon holistically” (GMA News 2009, May 9).

According to Carandang, when fathers took most of the jobs abroad, it only had a small impact on the Filipino family. When the mother are today the one taking the leading edge of the migration the entire family had to adjust in a whole other matter, reflecting the name of the article, “When mom is away, the family goes astray”. The departure of the mother is said to redefine her traditional role as the primary caregiver by taking on the position of the father as the main provider. At the same time the father has been proved not being able to, and unprepared of assuming the role and status as the care giving person, taking the role as being presented as motherly and feminine. The fathers are being accused of performing the care of the household management poorly, including household chores, and the children’s needs - even taking it to the level of the discussion of incestuous relationships (GMA News 2009, May 9).

While the mother is being considered as a “new economic hero” she is at the same time being blamed for that the light in the Filipino home have gone out, meaning that she left her obligation to her home and family. That along with the feminization of labour migration comes the disturbing phenomenon of the “girl-child being turned into a substitute spouse” (GMA News 2009, May 9), which in the article is being described as one of the most damaging social impacts of female labour migration. It is a contradiction where women simultaneously are being pushed out from their homes and yet being pulled back in. According to Parreñas, Fidel Ramos at his time as president called for the initiatives in the Agence France Presse, in 1995, to keep migrant mothers at home and stated, “we are not against overseas employment of Filipino women. We are against overseas employment at the cost of family solidarity” (2008: 23). With this statement he made clear that only single and childless women had the moral right to pursue labor abroad (Parreñas 2008: 24).

Similar articles and statements are being found in the Philippine press, whereas the Filipinas are being described as heroes but at the same time as perpetrators. They are being blamed to have caused the Filipino family to deteriorate where children are “abandoned”, and where the crises of care have taking a setback (Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2002: 40). The women felt the pull from the outside world, and were at
the same time struggling with the paradox of push and pull factors from the Philippine government and its people. By just looking at the Philippines law, the Filipino family is declared as the foundation of the nation. Parreñas demonstrates how the ideas of gender clash underlies the modernization-building project of the Philippines. Parreñas quotes from the Constitution [Article XV, Section, 1 Constitution] “The State recognizes the Filipino family as the foundation of the nation. Accordingly, it shall strengthen its solidarity and actively promote its total development” (2008: 24). She continues,

The 1987 Family Code repeatedly reinforce conventional notions of women’s maternity, this providing the basis for President Ramos to argue against the attempted reconstitution of mothering by women in labor migration. For instance, article 213 of the Family Code declares that ‘no child under seven years of age shall be separated from the mother’. Such a provision sets the stage for the construction of women’s citizenship as defined by good or bad motherhood. Under the law, a child below the age of seven can be separated from the mother only if ‘the court finds compelling reasons to do otherwise [i.e., circumvent the Constitution]’ (Article 213). Financial reasons do not fall within the range of what is compelling under the law. Instead, compelling reasons are determined solely by the moral values of a mother.

Rhacel Salazar Parreñas 2008: 24

Reflecting the significance of the family to national identity, female-headed transnational families were seen as threaten the civic duty of women’s maternity (Parreñas 2008: 25). Even the female migrants purity are being claimed to be at risk due to the geographical separation, whereas the government-mandated training workshop had on their agenda to warn participants not to fall into the temptation of other men while being abroad. Parreñas claim, “the call for women’s sexual reservation reinforces the cultural construction in society as nothing more than ‘dutiful daughters’ and ‘suffering mothers’ whose sacrifice to the family exalts them as heroines and role models” (2008: 25).

To see to the facts women are still faced with a highly segregated labour market. They continue to suffer from a severe wage gap and earn less than men in all sectors of the labour market (Parreñas 2008: 30). The low wages of women leads to the fact that the Philippines are seen as an attractive source of labour for foreign companies. Where companies developed new establishments or upgrade existing ones (Parreñas 2008:
Where companies have the ability to maximize production, and at the same time minimize the cost.

It is not just the law that maintains the idea of female domesticity, also the economy depends on domesticity and therefore the government encourage the export-oriented economy to continue. According to Parreñas the Philippine state has realised that they are in need of the pull from richer nations for the low-wage services of women (Parreñas 2008: 30). The driving force of ideologies has been examined by Althusser (2001), who discusses the way they ‘interpellate’ individuals and solicit response, where ideologies compel individuals to act. Althusser describes, according to Åkesson, the relation between ideology and subject, where the “subject is both a subjected being who submits to the ideology and locus of initiatives, an author of agency” (2004: 21). To place this in the Philippine context it means that regardless of whether women take active stances pro or contra migration, they are still subjected to the encouragement to leave and work abroad. Where migration has been trickled down from generation to generation, and where working abroad is seen as a fate for most Filipinas. To work abroad is seen as taken for granted instead of vice verse. The ideology of migration in the country interpellated individuals, subjecting them to recognise that migration is the only way to achieve a better life for your family and country. Women are being encouraged to seek employment abroad, which support them to leave their expected gender sphere as within the home. The paradox however is the fact that they are still being stereotyped as naturally suited as cleaners and caregivers for the elderly and children in richer nations. As a result, “Filipino women continue to face dim prospects for mobility. Not surprisingly then, they still suffer from a severe wage gap, face a sex-segregated labour market, and remain without much opportunity for promotion” (Parreñas 2008: 31).

According to Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2002: 41),

To call for the return of migrant mothers is to ignore the fact that the Philippines had grown increasingly dependant on their remittances. To acknowledge this reality could lead the Philippines toward a more egalitarian gender ideology. Casting blame on migrant mothers, however, serves only to divert the society’s attention away from these children’s needs, finally aggravating their difficulties by stigmatizing their family’s choices.
My informants’ constantly negotiated between gender ideas and expectations from society and state. Paradoxically, as mentioned, the women are portrayed as national heroes, but at the same time as a moral threat to the community. Complaints are being made regarding their neglect of duties as mothers, wives and daughters in the Philippines, and that they sell their services abroad for economic gains (Chang & Groves 2000: 74). At the same time the government reinforces the migration by stereotyping the women as caregivers of the nation and globe, and therefore maintain the gender inequality. Female migrants are caught in a double bind: expected to be migrants and become a heroines, yet labelled as a betrayers if they do. The dichotomy heroine/betrayer can be served, according to Chang and Groves, as a control of the women, whose reputation and moral identities reflect these contradictory standards (2000: 74). The Filipina has the duty to be at service at home and abroad, reflecting the idea of the Filipina as the servant of the globe.

Stubbornness of gender norms and resistance from society and state

On the surface, the push for women to work outside the home seems to disagree with the state discourse on the ideology of women’s domesticity. However, these oppositional constructs of women actually mutually reinforce each other as a way to secure foreign currency for the Philippines. Despite the push for women to work outside the home, it is in the interest of the state to keep the ideology of women’s domesticity intact, because this ideology ensures that the Philippines keeps a pool of workers able to respond to the demand for low-wage labour by more developed nations in the global economy.

Rhacel Salazar Parreñas 2008: 31

According to Parreñas there is dialectical processes that take place in numerous ways, encouraging female labour and demanding their domesticity. First and foremost by addressing the work that women are asked to fill that stereotypes them as naturally suited caregivers. Secondly, the sex-segregated labour market ensures low wages, which are claimed to secure the inflow of foreign currency, namely, because it drives women to seek employment abroad with higher wages.

Even though women make gains within their position as women because of their income earnings, it is clear that it does not mean that it will be translated into major changes within their gender roles and relations upon their return, and it does not mean
According to Chant and Mc Ilwaine a major change within gender roles can only be seen with the participation from men and their involvement. They mean that if men are integrated into the same development initiatives there may be a greater chance for collaboration. Where exclusion would lead to a greater polarization between the sexes. “While recruitment into export-oriented activities per se is usually predicated on gender inequalities, it often has the effect of diminishing the divide between male and female roles” (Chant & Mc Ilwaine 1995: 316-17). Whereas a counter implication is of a greater alienation in terms of the women and men’s relations with another within the home as at the workplace. An awareness that of course is of value and need to be further discussed, however not within this thesis.

A woman could have power as a wife and a mother, but only within a carefully delimited sphere. The ideal where women’s place is perceived as within the field of domesticity exclude her from political, economic and social power. Economic improvement does not lead automatically into change in their roles or in their relations to men, and with that said gender couldn’t be reduced to economics. “The Philippine society has not smoothly accepted the gender transformations promoted by globalization” (Parreñas 2008: 37). There is a clash around ideas regarding gender where even though women enter the role as an economic provider it does not lead to a change regarding gender norms and obligations. Even though there are structural rearrangements it does not engender shifts concerning the constructions of gender ideas. While women are being abroad working and the men are still at home you could have the expectation that traditional gender beliefs would transform, but the kin and community are often proved to criticize migrant mothers for deciding to raise their children from a distance (Parreñas 2005: 138).

The earning power of migrant women has not enabled women to negotiate for more egalitarian relations. This is the case because traditional gender ideologies discourage gender egalitarianism (…) the media presume that men are naturally incompetent family caregivers. In public discourse, the gender imbalance in fixing blame for the supposed crisis plaguing the families of migrant mothers does not tell us only that the migration of women have not reconstituted gender notions of the family. It also tells us that women suffer from backlash against their efforts to reconstitute the gender division of labour in the family.

Rhacel Salazar Parreñas 2008: 34-35
Approaching their prospect through a gender lens the women are stuck in others expectations regarding their role in society. There is a need for a broader recognition of the women’s economic contribution to their family and country. There is a need for redefining motherhood to include providing for one’s family. According to Ehrenreich and Hochschild “gender should be recognized as a fluid social category, and masculinity should be redefined, as the larger society questions the biologically based assumption that only women have an aptitude to provide care” (2002: 54). Namely, by sending remittance to your children and kin should be understood and seen as a way of caring and nurturing. By broadening the society’s perception of what it means to be a woman in the Philippine and at the same time shift direction and pay attention to the men’s position might just make the government officials and media stop vilifying migrant women. As Ehrenreich and Hochschild suggest “they could question the lack of male accountability for care work, and they could demand that men, including migrant fathers, take more responsibility for the emotional welfare of their children” (2002: 54). Placing this into a gender matter the concept of gender could guide our view as to shift the focus, broaden our understanding and observation of the perceived problem. The problem of care would in this matter not just be seen as the cause of the women’s migration, but as the fathers conflicting desire and expectation to take on the role as a nurturer of their own children.

The Philippinian society has not accepted the gender transformations promoted by migration, which results in the fact that female migrants struggle against the norms promoted by the Philippines society. Women in the Philippines suffer from so called, “stalled revolution” where local gender ideas remains a few steps behind the economic reality (Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2002: 39). It has become clear that migrant women are being surrounded by particular social meanings constructed by ideas regarding norms and power relations in the Philippines. In any given society, people hold ideas about how a woman and a mother are supposed to be and how they are supposed to behave. These ideas are shared by the society and form the perception of the right kind of woman. They are bound to these social norms even when they return back home. Even though they have been away from home most part of their life they still carry the social meaning of what it means to be a woman and a mother in the Philippines.
Sitting in the car on my way to the province of Pampanga. It is difficult to describe in words the difference that exists between the Philippines rural district and Metro Manila. It's like opening a door to another world. Since we past the sign "You are now leaving Metro Manila" we are surrounded by greenery, rice paddies and what feels like healthier air. I am struck by the incredibly dramatic scenery of mountains, valleys and large rice fields where people go and harvest and toil for their living. My travel companion tells me how rice fields increasingly begin to disappear as the land is acquired for building homes. They think it is sad both for the scenery but also because there is a large part of the population in the Philippines that makes a living by cultivating rice. This has led to a more widespread unemployment and more expensive price per kilo of rice. I sit and think who would be able to afford to buy up that much land to build a house, but I don’t have to think for that long. All of a sudden there are big, grand and beautiful villas in the middle of what previously had been rice fields. “There you have your informants”, says [...] that sits in the front of the car.

(My fieldnotes)

The situation described above took place during my fieldwork in the Philippines. To separate the migrants, or the relatives of migrants from the rest of the population you could, most of the times, look at the houses due to the fact that many migrants invest in building new ones, or rebuilding old ones. The new houses do not only provide comfort but also mirrors the migrant’s success, and upward social mobility. Successful returnees constructed houses to settle in whilst they returned back home or returned on a holiday. The houses are seen as a central value and reflect both the aspect of economic security, but also their social standing as a migrant. As Åkessons states “houses are the primary signs of upward socio-economic mobility [and] the house is a reflection of the social person” (2004: 130). When travelling in the rural parts of the Philippines, one could see the beginning of house constructions, but also houses that had been renovated and abandoned. I also stayed in houses that had been renovated with the help from their migrated relatives, which according to me
demonstrated their wish to secure the future or their close relatives, or as Åkesson claim, it is a well-respected sign of unbroken solidarity with the family (2004: 141).

To be a successful migrant meant accordingly to be able to improve the life standards for your family and the status of your children through the improvement of offering a renewed, safe and improved home and of course at the same time a qualified education. The plan was however not only to be able to send remittance but also to be able to put away savings for the future after having returned to the Philippines, which proved to be more difficult than imagined.

The people “left behind”, so called homelanders (Åkesson 2004), often depend upon the people that migrate. They are heavily dependent on the remittance and resources that are being sent home (Åkesson 2004: 16) and therefore bind their economic and social security to some one else. Therefore, it is not uncommon that migrants are burdened with expectations from relatives back home. According to Åkesson it is expected that migrants send news, remittance and gossip among the homelanders (2004: 16), and migrants who forget their people back home are blamed for being selfish. This reflect the feeling of being subjected to, what Libelt refers to as, “the jealousy and lack of trust of family members, who wonder whether what she sent, gave and lent was really all she could” (2011: 68). Even when migrants return back home it is expected that they will continue to give and distribute money to relatives, but also lend money to neighbors and friends. It reflects the perception from the society that migrants who return are rich and financially independent, and by not offering financial help upon their return gave them an impression of being selfish and self concerned. The migrants who were perceived to have succeeded with their migration were both admired and resented. As Imee told me, you were at the beginning of your return a celebrity. Everyone spoke of your return and visited you for the exchange of stories about the country you had visited.

... you are becoming public because of the world of moth. Most Filipinos love to gossip especially if you are coming back from abroad they look at you with a higher status and you become public because of gossiping and because of the people that wants to borrow money from you, so you become popular.
According to my informants’ this shows the ignorance of understanding of what it means to be a female migrant. The decision to return can have multiple reasons. Their contract may have expired, their employers may have passed away, they may have felt mistreated, unpaid, exploited, or be affected by economic crisis that strikes the country they work in.

Imee had decided to return to Taiwan with a second contract with the idea of putting away all her savings to be able to move to Canada after her contract expired. She told me that it is easier to be in Taiwan when you apply for a contract in Canada, but when Taiwan was hit by a financial crisis in 2008 all changed, where all of the sudden were no job available and therefore no salary distributed.

We worked for about one workday a week so we did not have any salary. So I thought that maybe I need to go back to the Philippines because I did not have any work in Taiwan and I needed to survive as well but I did not have any salary and here in the Philippines you can just plant and raise chickens and pigs and you have food. In Taiwan if you don’t have a work, especially if you are an OFW, you cannot survive.

Imee was forced to return to the Philippines and the savings that she had put away with the dream of travelling to Canada was mostly spent due to the fact that she still had to pay for her food and accommodation while she was not offered any more working hours in Taiwan. The dream to travel to Canada was at that time shattered.

These houses are located in the opposite to each other on the same street, which demonstrates the difference, what it might mean or result in being a migrant.
Apart from cultural norms and social obligations towards your family members back home, many of my informants’ talked about their migration as a way of being independent and career seekers. It became clear that the migration also meant escaping the social control of one’s family, abusive husband or a life confined by traditional gender roles and expectations (Liebelt 2001: 182). Libelt quotes Parreñas (2001), “women hesitate to go back home not just because of poverty. Research on various groups of migrating women indicates that women achieve a certain degree of gender liberation upon migration because of their greater participation in public life. […] Like other migrant women, Filipina domestics fear that returning home will diminish their advances” (Liebelt 2001: 182). Whether migration leads to a loss or gain in the status of women as a result of changes in the distribution of power within the family depend on the context of the woman and her social and cultural background. Even though the women are being proved to have contributed with an important economic security and social responsibility does not mean that it will contribute to a significant change. Even though it is being said that Filipino women generate more foreign currency than men do, do not mean that women’s economic power have been translated to an gender egalitarianism within the society, family nor workplace. It is a statement that quite clearly tells us, once again, that gender cannot be reduced to economics (Parreñas 2008: 36). Parreñas states that, “still, migration enables women to negotiate and contest the notion of domesticity because of their greater decision-making power in the household, though only within the limits imposed by the force of domesticity” (2008: 12).
Women are being found to be more reluctant than men to return home, due to the fact that women often was proved of feeling that their social status had improved being abroad. Where men been showed to experience the opposite emotion. “Women often take up wage labour abroad, but may be asked to (or preferred to) stay at home ones they have returned in order to maintain the honor or social status of the family, or out of respect for local gender ideologies opposed to female wage labor” (Liebelt 2011: 9).

The fact remains that the women that I spoke to were all proud to have been their families’ major breadwinner. They all had the idea to return back home to the Philippines after their contract expired, but after the return they soon realized that migrating hardly was rewarding in a financial sense in the long run. In a way “return is emphasized because it is an acknowledgement of loyalty and belonging to the homeland” (Åkesson 2004: 88). There is the idea of the good life after return, but by looking at the facts what my informants’ demonstrate is that they started to work as a street sweeper, some started a food business on the streets that meant that you took your pots and pans and placed yourself outside your home. Some started to work at foreign call centres with the reference that they could manage speaking English, and some became once again housewives. Others had dreams of starting their own business, but claimed that is was hard without support from people in the government. Dalisay, for example had a dream of offering women in the neighbourhood Zumba- or aerobic lessons. She wanted to teach art and craft for women like herself, and for women that did not have anything to do during the days except for gambling and gossiping. It would, according to Dalisay, not only be good for the women but also for the children in the neighbourhood, but without any power or support from the municipality the idea had soon been shattered.

It is also known that many Filipinos return home for their retirement, but because of the still remaining situation in the Philippines were there is not enough work opportunities offered, many retired women end up caring for the children of their kin. Where the next generation of mothers travel abroad for work (WFAE 2013).
Suggestions have been made that the wage earnings from migration has the ability to increase women’s power within the home and society and consequently affect their gender roles. Another suggestion is of the contrary, namely that that migrant female’s upon return would passively re-embrace their roles as housewives. I would like to claim that migrant women’s reality might fall somewhere in between. The women I spoke to gained self-confidence, they did become stronger in the sense they increased self-assurance in their ability to provide for themself and their family. They acquired new skills while working abroad, but nothing they could use in order to apply for work being returned back home. However with one exception - they were seen as an appealing manpower for foreign call centres because of their capacity to communicate in English and other languages. Dalisay for example felt confident in her speaking English, but also spoke Arabic fluidly. Imee had learned some Taiwanese, and was at the time I met her studying Korean - because to be able to apply for a working Visa you first had to pass the language examination.

Future aspirations and a reason to go back abroad

After my return back home I have dreamt of going to Europe. Yes it is my dream. Because when I read my books about Switzerland, Sweden, and Norway and other countries in Europe I can see different views, the views are fantastic, they are breath-taking and I would like to experience cold climate, I would like to experience the snow and the food because I am not very choosy with food. I like adventures of eating a lot of stuff, so I can eat everything that is edible. Sometimes I watch different cooking shows from different countries and I like to experience if I also would like that, like herbs and spices and those kinds of things. That is also one thing that makes me want to travel. Because of limited income, the best way to travel is to apply as a domestic helper.

- Dalisay

According to Dalisay her life and her families life had become enriched with her going abroad, socially, emotionally and physically. She even meant that the quality of her skin and hair had been improved, which she had been eager to show by getting her photo album. Together we watched all her photos from the time she had been abroad. She introduced me to her former colleagues, the children she had been taking care off and the places she had visited. Dalisay had a big smile on her face asking me, “now
you understand why I would like to go back abroad? I will definitely miss my children, but if you would look at your objectives of giving them a good life you will think aside. If you know that they are in good hands, then why not go back and work abroad?”

Many of the women I spoke to and the explanations I got was that women did not want to be economically dependant upon relations with “irresponsible men”. In their minds, they imagined that migration could offer them economic self-sufficiency and the liberation of the control by men. This time however, Dalisay was not planning to go abroad because of an abusive husband. This time she was planning to go abroad for her own personal will, but of course she had at the same time the motivation to help her family.

Considering the possibility in the company with Ellene that the women become frustrated after a while being back home and that, while the “family is considered a central site of support and assistance, some single women simultaneously desire to be liberated from the demands and responsibilities of familism” (Parreñas 2001: 64). Ellene said,

Of course that should be one of the reasons why they would continue to seek jobs abroad. They come back – heal for a while, they need time to rest to heal from the trauma and then they go out again. We have a case from a very young woman. She was working as a domestic worker in Saudi, she was not even in her twenties. And then one weekend the son of the employer arrived to spend a weekend with the mother and he raped her. She did not complain, one because she did not know that, she was too scared to complain but then she had to complain to her employer because she discovered that something was wrong with her body. When they went for medical attention the doctor told her that she was pregnant and so it is difficult because in the case of Saudi you cannot be pregnant if you do not have a husband and if you need to go home you need you need the permit and the exit visa from your employer.

Ellene explained how the agency, CMA, had helped the woman to leave the country without permission from her employer. The pregnant woman had returned home to her parents, given birth to her baby and shortly thereafter returned back to Saudi Arabia, working as a domestic helper. Ellene continues by giving another example of a woman who was working as an undocumented domestic helper in Lebanon that needed the agency’s help. The life as an undocumented can be very exhausting and dangerous, being without any rights with the fact that you are working without a visa.
I think that this is definitely not unique case because we have another girl – she has been an undocumented in Lebanon for many years. She got my number from another person from another Filipino and she was asking if I could help her to be repatriated because it is very tiring to be an undocumented. So I said okay, the first thing you have to do is to submit yourself to the labour office so they can start processing your documents, but she does not want to do that because if you surrender – if you submit yourself to the embassy there that means that they will ask you to stay in the shelter and that means that you cannot go out and continue working, which means that you cannot send money back home. So she would plea for assistance but she would not listen to our advises so after some time she finally agreed to submit and then she was back here. She visited our office. Her husband is working at a hospital out in the province, they have a small piece of land, and the children are in the school. So for a while she was okay. She would be texting me messages and after a few months she became restless again. She asked if she could come to our office because she wanted to visit some agencies in the province and when I asked why she told me that she wanted to go abroad again. So I asked her about her skills and she did not have any except domestic. She wanted to go back to Lebanon, but that was not possible because of the band, but then there is a way to do it by going to another country. She wanted to go back. She wanted to be a domestic. It is not like her situation, or her family’s situation is miserable but there is just something maybe for those who have been there that they miss, their recognition, probably their space, probably it is like that you are not being watched, not being pressured. Of course they work hard when they are overseas, but there is just that something that is difficult for them to explain, especially for their families – especially in the context, in the Filipino context. Like in your society [in Sweden] you can just say that you need space, I want to be alone, but that is not the option for Filipino people, especially not for the women.

Even though the experience abroad had created distress among female migrants, many were eager to return back abroad after the physical and psychological wounds had healed while being back home. Raquel, a woman that had been working in Saudi Arabia as a caregiver to an elderly couple experienced the trauma of being held as a prisoner. Being claimed to have had a relationship with a Saudi man. Raquel claimed that she hade made one mistake that would cost her the working Visa she had received, namely to speak to a man. Her friend had been in need for her help to buy a phonecard. Raquel had at that time been in Saudi Arabia awhile and could therefore manage the Arabic language better then her friend. So one day when she was going out to throw out the garbage she spoke to a man that could help her. Her speaking to a man had caught the attention from her neighbour who had called the police. After a while the police had come to pick Raquel up at the house she was working in and put
her in jail where she stayed for six months. Because she had been speaking to a man she
was beaten ninety-five times with a wooden stick by one of the guards. Raquel
told me that, while being in the prison she had been very scared, so she had prayed
every day to be strong and that she one day would be able to get back to the
Philippines. After six month her working Visa was withdrawn and she was deported
from the country without her belongings and without any salary.

You cannot do this or this or this, everything is Haram. I was in the prison for 6 months. I
called my sister from the prison while crying. She told me that I should not cry. That I had to
be strong and that I could spend this time to pray, so I prayed every day that I one day would
be able to go back to the Philippines. I was scared because I know that the Saudi Arabia could
kill me because I know that the Saudi Arabia is so very strict. Then my friend told me that the
new president has a brain and said that it would be no more killing because it was hopeless. I
thank God for that.

Today she would like to return back abroad, and had she had the possibility to choose
herself she would have wanted to go back to Saudi Arabia and work for her former
employers. That was however not an option due to the fact that she was not allowed to
enter the country for a second time, due to the fact that she had been held in prison,
seen as been broken the law. For that reason she though that she instead would go to
Dubai and work as a domestic helper. She did not see an option staying in the
Philippines at the moment, where there was no work opportunity that was suitable for
her regarding her lack of educational background and her age. The alternative to start
dating a man was according to Raquel not an option, even though it might have meant
that there would be a second income to support her family. She told me, that of
experience she did not trust men,

… they are not serious and I am scared of that. I have only my sons and my sisters on my
mind. I don’t trust other men […] a lady is thinking if her children and the man are not really,
he is a playboy. A woman thinks about her family. Not all the men. Because I have been
talking to my co-workers and they said that when their husbands were working abroad they
had a relationship with other women even though they have a family here in the Philippines.

When talking about her future aspirations she hoped that she would live in the
Philippines while running her own food business. She told me that she did not have a
dream to be rich. She only wanted to offer her sons, sisters and herself a good life in
the aspect that they had food on their table and that her sons may be given the opportunity to study at the university with the prospect of getting a decent job.

By working abroad Raquel told me it had changed her as a person. How the experience working abroad had made her a good person that she had matured and learned that life is hard. That she had become stronger and by seeing something different compared to the Philippines had given her perspective regarding how she wished to live her life. Raquel missed her employers. According to her, they had become her second parents, therefore she called them mama and baba. She had spent more time with them then her own family. She had learnt to interpret their gestures, learnt their daily routines and accompanied them when they were out doing errands and meting friends. They had respected her as she had respected them.

Freudian psychology talks about the ‘displacement’ of emotions meaning, according to Moukarabel, “if one person is unavailable to receive one’s lover, one will turn to another person to love” (2009:119). For instance, in Raquels case she might project her love towards her employers, which also confirms Liebelts comment that the Filipina has turned her job into a labour of love (2011:89). Therefore, Raquel had the feeling of not only been loosing her opportunity for a stable income but also the feeling of loosing two family members that she had cared for in a period of five years. Liebelt spoke of the physical and emotional intensity that often are implied when dealing with live-in caring. A relation that contains of bodily encounters, spatial density and continuous presence, where there is a daily, intensive and intimate interaction between the employer and the employee (2011:86).

Many of the female migrants I spoke to still considered the Philippines to be their home, but at the same time many minimized their time they spent in the country. They came home, spent the money they earned and return back abroad. Parreñas states that this binational split of “one earns money abroad and spends money in the Philippines” reveals the limited labour market options available in the country, whereas the women respond to migration. At the same time it reflect the life of a migrant woman as they are often limited in their ability to spend where they earn, and a reason for that are their low wages. This aspect reflects that women only achieve a relative degree of autonomy upon migration. Due to their limits of their economic gains, they became limited in their choices concerning a return (2008:11). By being able to support yourself and your family, providing them with security had given the women a taste
of a life contained of a brighter future for herself and her family. When returning back home they soon realized that the money they had earned and saved was easy spent. To maintain the life they had dreamed for, a life without concerns regarding their economy, they soon realized that the Philippines once again did not have anything to offer them. An itch to return back abroad hunted many of my informants’.

Saying god-bye for this time

Under my last conversation with Dalisay she asked me to have my ears and eyes open in search for work after my return back to Sweden. She was eager to go back abroad talking about destinations as Singapore, Norway, Switzerland, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Imee and I said good-bye and I wished her good luck on her next travel to Korea, and that she one day would be able to move to Canada in her search for work. Bituin is still in Sweden working at a cleaning company, while waiting for her working Visa to come through which would mean that she could once and for all work in Sweden legally with a permit. She had the wish to learn Swedish and continue her stay in Sweden with the hope of working as a midwife, which had been her occupation in the Philippines. Raquel has probably by now travelled to Dubai and last time I heard from Amihan she was thinking of going to the U.S. working as a private teacher. While one of the sisters in my host family is still searching for suitable work abroad, having the feeling of frustration being stuck in the Philippines - working twenty-four seven without any direct economic improvement or ability to advance within the company.

Reflections

This chapter illustrates how, by continually stereotyping women as caregivers bounds them to the field of domesticity, which prevents the ability of gender equality. As mentioned in the theory chapter Butler sees gender performance as a strategy of survival (Parreñas 2005:522). Meaning that those who fail to meet their gender obligations are regularly punished. Looking at the aspect that the migrating women are being blamed of causing a care crisis, and the most damaging social impact that have hit the Philippines society in modern time.
The chapter illustrated at the same time how the government use typical stereotyping concerned to gender ideas in their effort to maintain the flow of female migration. By describing the women as naturally caregivers and nurturers they encourage them to send home more remittance, not only to support their families but also their nation. Looking at the fact that the government at the same time calls for the woman’s sexual reservation while being abroad, make me draw the conclusion that they want to maintain the woman’s obligation to the nation and their families by encourage them to only focus upon their work. By not befoul the Filipinas reputation abroad, keeping their focus on their work and duties. A typical Filipina is namely not seen, according to my informants’, as liberated in a sexual sense.

As mentioned previously a woman could have power as a wife and a mother, but only within a careful delimited sphere, before and after return. By categorising women within the field of domesticity leads often to their exclusion from political, economic and social power. I believe that this reflect the claim made by Risman concerning the point that to make a gender transformation possible there is the need to challenge all three levels within society, mentioning the level of the individual, the interactional and institutional level (Parreñas 2005:96). Migration has illustrated how there is a change on an individual level, but to look upon the other two they have no changed or progressed at the same scale. Therefore it is common that women, upon return, are once again placed within their respective category being dutiful daughters, nurturing mothers and caring wives. For it to be a change the *stylized repetition of acts* cannot in this matter only be individual, but rather shared and experienced by the society.
Conclusion

Through my informants’ stories and experiences this thesis has followed mainly Philippine migrant mothers that have responded to the global labour demands, while working independently on their own capacity as workers. Where migration has become a private solution to a public problem regarding poverty, social stagnation and the privatisation of public health care. The thesis has showed that to migrate were usually not seen as an individualistic project in the first hand if you were to have a family. The intentions to leave were instead presented as to be able to help your family, a wish to improve the kin groups lives. In the case they were mothers the responsibility and welfare for their children influenced the aspiration to work abroad, but with that said they had at the same time the very hope to improve their own lives.

To draw a conclusion concerned to my first question regarding, what the connections are between female migration and possibilities of new role taking, liberation and self-confidence on an individual level, I would state that:

Working abroad within the field of domesticity did not only involve a downward mobility as for being described as a victim of mistreatment or being limited in gender obligations. It also involved in a certain degree of upward mobility reflecting the higher social status female migrants were assigned by people in the Philippines, just for being a ‘migrant worker’. This reflects the idea of migration as the only way to generate positive change for another life, but also the lack of opportunities of upward mobility on the local labour market. The mobility of migration in the Philippines is therefore linked to the prospect of a good life.

Even though my informants’ were experiencing the expectations from their kin and society migration gave them increasing control over their own lives as they became economically independent from their male partners. My informants’ experienced a certain degree of gender liberation and gained self-confidence by looking at their greater contribution to their household income. They felt proud of themselves for being able to support their families. Migration also provided them with a feeling of hope and optimism for a fruitful future and could provide the women with a chance to expand their individual space. By being on their own made them consider themselves as independent where they achieved a social and economic mobility that
they, in the same aspect, had not been experienced at home. Living apart from their parents, male partners and rest of their kin group gave the women a “taste of independence”. Some of my informants’ spoke of a gendered type of vulnerability that made them want to leave the Philippines, talking about their relatives and families control and the abuse from husbands. By leaving they became more independent in relation to before and they got to experience a new environment. By experiencing a different culture, meet different people and by challenging themself to their limits, they got the chance to try new roles, and listen to their own needs. The absence of a prying gaze from kin and society eased the possibility to act in a new order that differ from other realities back home.

This thesis has showed that social norms and ideas bound to gender expectations are being constantly negotiated dependent on the context. To be a female migrant meant that they were seen as abandoning their caregiving obligations towards their family. Abandoning the obligation towards their society and country in the aspect that the light in the Filipino home had gone out, and that they were trespassing on the perceived male gender obligation, namely by taking the role as the family’s breadwinner. At the same time they were perceived as heroines because of the remittance they contributed and therefore funded the county’s development and prosperity. They were perceived as martyr moms, where they left their children in the Philippines in the need for their own- and their children’s survival. Namely, migrant mothers challenge the conventional gender expectation that they belong in the home of their families, the idea that mothers and women’s rightful place is in the home. At the same time they challenged the idea of a Filipino nuclear family, with a breadwinning father and nurturing mother, conflicting with dominant cultural ideas of the right kind of family.

However, the paradox, where women increased their work outside the home has not been met with the decrease in the female’s responsibilities inside the home and in society. This answer to my second question namely, when talking about labour migration by women, as being motivated by the search for economic improvement for their families, in what aspect can you at the same time see it as a way to transform ingrained gender relations in the household and in the society and as a way to escape oppressive or dominant gender relations?
Even though migrant women may possess a job outside the home, she was duty-bound to the fact that she still was seen to be responsible for household chores. When mothers even travelled aboard for work, mostly, fathers did not meet the gender shift, instead other women took the responsibility to care for the children. This illustrates that other women cushion men from taking over household responsibilities. I therefore draw the conclusion that ideas of a woman’s obligation towards domesticity remains quite intact in the Philippine society and therefore has female migration not transformed strong gender relations. This left them in a situation where they negotiated new role taking, which depended on the experience and situation they were in while being abroad and when returned back home. The female migration is a complex process where they negotiated different systems of inequality in both the sending and receiving counties. Even though my informants’ felt like they became different persons, while becoming stronger, liberated and self-confident in the aspect of having the feeling they could take care of themselves and their families, did not mean they could hold on to these characteristics upon the return back home.

This leads me to my third and last question on whether Filipina migrants have changed in the way they define and perceive themselves when they return, due to the fact that they have had an economic influence for their family during the time they been working abroad? And how is this being practiced in their every day life in the household?

There is a clash around ideas regarding gender where even though women have entered the role as an economic provider it has not led to a change regarding perceived gender roles and obligations in the Philippines society. Even though there are structural rearrangements it does not engender shifts concerning gender ideas. Upon return, but also during the migration, female migrants struggle against ideas contained and repeated by the Philippines society, where local gender ideas remain a few steps behind the economic reality. They are bound to these social norms even when they return back home, still carrying the social meaning of what it means to be a female mother in the Philippines, what is perceived as appropriate forms of femininity. With that said, my informants’ were still proud of themselves and defined themselves not as heroines, but as being brave, and being fighters - fighters for their rights, fighters for their freedom to work and freedom to express themselves.
Even though many women are proved to work abroad as within domesticity the migration has challenged gender norms and expectations. Just by having been abroad, worked outside their own home, received a salary, increased their economic-earning power and acted as a breadwinner, the women have challenged the anticipated gender roles within the Philippine society. Regardless of a stylized repetition of acts there is a conflict they sensed between performing their traditional gender role (being dutiful daughters, nurturing mothers and caring wives) and at the same time explore and pursue an individual autonomy and self-achievement upon the return. Simultaneously, even though they had a geographical distance that helped denaturalize some of the mothering acts, the responsibility were submitted, as mentioned previously, to another woman, often of times within their own kin group. In order to generate a change it is required that of not only address the positions concerning the women’s presence abroad, talking about payment, working conditions etc. To generate a change I believe one have to deal with the underpinnings reflecting the gender ideas within the society, which shapes the gender position of the women in the first place. Just by looking at how the Philippine state mobilise their citizens for labour abroad and at the same time look at the way they produce a demand for migrants in the globe, you can see how gender shapes these two processes. Migrant mothers are being caught in gender expectations created by society and even though they contest the ideas while being migrants there is no greater change regarding their role within the Philippine society. There has to be a broadened recognition concerning the Filipinas role within society where there is a need for a redefinition of motherhood, and femininity. There is a necessity for redefining the concept of motherhood to include providing for one’s family in financial means.

At the same time, I believe that this reflect the claim made by Risman concerning the point that to make a transformation concerned to gender roles possible there is the need to challenge all three levels within society, mentioning the level of the individual, the interactional and institutional level (Parreñas 2005:96). The migration has illustrated how there is a change on an individual level, but to look upon the other two they have not changed or progressed at the same scale. Therefore it is common that women, upon return, are once again placed within their respective category being dutiful daughters, nurturing mothers and caring wives. For it to be a change the stylized repetition of acts cannot in this matter only be individual, but rather shared and experienced by the society.
By analysing migration from the level of the subject it has been my intention of not generalising in a large extent of the experience being a migrant Filipina worker. Each story should be seen as within its own meaning. Difficulties with generalization means accordingly that it is difficult to transfer information from one experience being a migrant to apply to several other similar experiences. I have identified the key actions that were revealed to me during my meeting with my informants’ and my observations while being in the field. Hopefully I have drawn attention to many of the different complexities of what it means to be a female migrant - the reason to travel, their experiences being abroad and the result from their own migration process.

According to me the research raises more questions than it might answer. The thesis provides us with a good starting point for further explorations, dealing with the female migration. Theories need to be broadened so they become more opened to the multiple causalities and contradictions which is very common when dealing with female economic activity. By not being gender-blind opens a whole new perspective and new fields within anthropology. By using gender as an analytical tool I believe the thesis has contributed with different meanings bound to the female migration. By not only reflecting upon the women’s endure of oppression, abuse and harassment while being abroad there is a shift of not only seeing the women as victims, but instead as their own agent while making own decisions.
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