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**Social and Cultural Dimensions of Labour Migration:
A Study of Overseas Female Filipino Workers**



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ABSTRACT

This study explores the reasons that more and more Filipino women are seeking overseas contract work (OCW) and why so many choose to repeat the migration cycle. The experiences of overseas female Filipino workers (OFFWs) are analysed within the framework of social exclusion theory (SET). Analytical concepts, such as capital and arena, are adapted from Bourdieu in order to enrich SET with cultural and personal dimensions. OFFWs are understood as social agents acting within overlapping social, economic, and political arenas before, during, and after OCW. Social exclusion is defined as lack of full participation in an arena in which a social agent acts.

Exclusion in home arenas, for example unemployment and frustrated social aspirations, are examined, as are exclusions within the arenas of labour migration itself, for example in recruitment fees and restrictions on freedom of movement in the host country. The ways in which state policy and political and market dynamics support these exclusions is addressed.

Questionnaires and interviews of current and former OFFWs reveal the considerable extent to which choices related to migration are influenced by local ideologies of age and gender, and by local social patterns. It was found that OFFWs voluntarily risk exclusion in the arenas of overseas contract work in hopes of overcoming exclusion for themselves and their families in the arenas at home in the Philippines. Short-term success and long-term failure of OCW to overcome exclusion in home arenas motivate many women to repeat their migration.³ The dissertation argues that persistent exclusion in the home arenas may be partly due to incommensurabilities among the various (social, economic, local, international) arenas in which OFFWs act, such that overcoming exclusion in one arena engenders exclusion in another.³

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ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

Abbreviations

| | |
|------|--|
| ARC | Alien Resident Certificate |
| CLA | Council of Labor Affairs, Taiwan |
| MECO | Manila Economic and Cultural Office, the Filipino attaché in Taiwan |
| OCW | Overseas Contract Work |
| OEDB | Overseas Employment Development Board |
| OFW | Overseas Filipino/Filipina Worker |
| OFFW | Overseas Female Filipino Worker |
| OWWA | Overseas Workers' Welfare Administration, the Philippines |
| PHP | Philippine Pesos |
| PDOS | Pre-Departure Orientation Seminar |
| POEA | Philippine Overseas Employment Administration |
| SCPM | Scalabrini Center for People on the Move |
| SET | Social Exclusion Theory |
| TWD | Taiwanese New Dollars |

Terms

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| <i>Ate</i> [ah-tay] | Tagalog term for elder sister |
| Jeepney | Popular form of public transportation, converted from American military jeep |
| <i>Sari-sari</i> store | Small variety grocery store |
| <i>Utang na loob</i> | Debt of gratitude / inner debt |

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