

## Keynote Address:

# TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES IN ASIA: WITH A FOCUS ON THE PHILIPPINES A LITERATURE REVIEW

**Marya Reed**

Deputy Managing Director  
Doha International Institute for  
Family Studies and Development  
Qatar Foundation

International migration from poorer Asian countries to wealthier countries, along with remittances from overseas workers, is seen as a way to help both the migrant's family and their country. Three countries that have seen a significant increase in migration, since the early 1990s, are Nepal, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Since the 1950s, Nepal has a history of migrants working in India. In the 1990s, additional work became available overseas – in the Middle East, and East and Southeast Asia – and between the early 1990s and the early 2000s, the number of overseas workers grew from less than 100,000 to more than 700,000. By the mid-2000s Nepal's total migrant workforce totaled more than 1.7 million (approximately 1 million in India and 700,000 overseas).<sup>102</sup> These 1.7 million workers remitted possibly more than US\$ 1.5 billion to Nepal.<sup>103</sup>

Following the 1997 economic financial crises shock, the number of Indonesians living in poverty increased “from 34.5 million in 1996 to 49.5 million in 1998.”<sup>104</sup> This

---

<sup>102</sup> Yamanaka, Keiko, Changing family structures of Nepalese transmigrants in Japan: split-households and dual-wage earners, *Global Networks*, 5, 4 (2005) 337, 340. See also, Seddon, David, (2005) 'Nepal's Dependence on Exporting Labor, Migration Policy Institute, Washington DC, available at <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Profiles/display.cfm?id=277> (last viewed 18 October 2009).

<sup>103</sup> *Id.* At 340-41.

<sup>104</sup> Tjiptoherjanto, Prijono and Sonny Harry Harmadi, (2008 draft) “Indonesian Migrant Workers: Analysis of Trends, Policies,

increase in poverty had a direct effect on the number of legal migrant workers, increasing from approximately 384,822 in 1994 to approximately 1.5 million in 2004.<sup>105</sup> During this time the remittances from migrant workers grew from less than US\$ 1 billion in 1997 to more than US\$ 2.93 billion in 2005.<sup>106</sup>

While Nepal, Indonesia and other countries play a significant role in exporting migrant workers, this paper will focus on migrant workers from the Philippines. It will look at the migrant father, the migrant mother and the impact on family members left behind, and how transnational families cope with the years of separation (the average Filipino worker returns to visit their children every four years and stays for two months).<sup>107</sup>

Since the 1970s, the Philippines has supplied all kinds of skilled and low-skilled workers to the world's more developed regions<sup>108</sup> and is the third largest migrant-sending country in the world. As of December 2007, roughly 10% (8.7 million) of the population was abroad. Of this 8.7 million, 3.6 million are permanent migrants to other countries, 4.1 million are temporary, documented labor migrants (274,497 of whom are sea-based workers), and 900,023 are irregular migrants. Remittances in the Philippines have grown from US\$ 6 billion in 2000 to USD 14.4 billion in 2007.<sup>109</sup>

In 1974, President Marcos implemented the Labor Export program, which encouraged, facilitated and earned revenue from the systematic and more or less orderly export of workers."<sup>110</sup> The program began, following the effects of the 1970s oil crises. The Filipino economy was severely affected by the increase in oil prices and oil-producing countries had an excess of money available to spend on projects

---

and Proposed Solutions," paper presented at Eropa Seminar 2008, "Governance in a Triptych: Environment, Migration, Peace and Order," 23-25 October 2008 in Manila, The Philippines. [get permission from the authors to quote statistics]

<sup>105</sup> Silvey, Rachel, "Consuming the transnational family: Indonesian migrant domestic workers to Saudi Arabia," *Global Networks*, 6, Vol. 1 (2006), pp. 23, 28.

<sup>106</sup> "Indonesian Migrant Workers: Analysis of Trends, Policies, and Proposed Solutions," at 12.

<sup>107</sup> Perrañas, Rhacel Salazar, "Mothering From a Distance: Emotions, Gender, and Inter-generational Relations in Filipino Transnational Families," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 27 No. 2 (2001), pp. 361, 367.

<sup>108</sup> Asis, Maruja M.B., *The Philippines' Culture of Migration*

<sup>109</sup> IOM, *Migration Initiatives Appeal 2009* at

[http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/published\\_docs/books/Migration%20Initiatives09.pdf](http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/published_docs/books/Migration%20Initiatives09.pdf), pg. 72. See also *Overseas Filipinos' Remittances* at <http://www.bsp.gov.ph/statistics/spei/tab11.htm>.

<sup>110</sup> Weekley, Kathleen, "Saving Pennies for the State. A New Role for Filipino Migrant Workers?" *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 34 No. 3 (2004) 349, 352.

that needed migrant laborers. President Marcos encouraged migration to help reduce unemployment in the Philippines and to increase remittances of foreign funds.<sup>111</sup>

Following implementation of the program, and an increase of both men and women in the migrant workforce, government officials and journalists criticized mothers who left their families and went abroad to work. The government officials and journalists claimed that, by leaving their families, the migrant mothers were causing the “Filipino family to deteriorate, children to be abandoned, and a crisis of care to take root in the Philippines.... [and] admonish[ed], those mothers must return.”<sup>112</sup> In May 1995, then President Fidel Ramos “called for initiatives to keep migrant mothers at home. He declared, ‘We are not against overseas employment of Filipino women. We are against overseas employment at the cost of family solidarity,’”<sup>113</sup> implying that the migration of women was acceptable only when the migrant was a single, childless woman.

In 1975, the majority of the migrant workforce was men, representing 88 percent of the population. By 1990, the workforce population was evenly split between men and women.<sup>114</sup> Between 1992 and 2006, women made up the majority of newly hired migrant workforce. In 2004, at their highest point, women represented over 74 percent of the new hires. In 2007 and 2008, the percentage of new hires was much closer, with women representing approximately 48 percent of the work force each of those years.<sup>115</sup> A major reason for the large increase in female new hires is the improving economy in many countries of the world. As economies expand and better paying jobs become available, local women decide to enter the workforce and they, in turn, look for someone to come in and help with, or take over, the housework and to help take care of the children. Many of the women who fill the domestic worker positions leave their home and children and become transnational mothers.

---

<sup>111</sup> *Id.*

<sup>112</sup> Perrañas, Rhacel Salazar, “The Care Crisis in the Philippines: Children and Transnational Families in the New Global Economy,” in *Gender Relations in Global Perspective*, Cook, Nancy, ed., p. 229.

<sup>113</sup> *Id.*

<sup>114</sup> Asis, Maruja Milagros B., Shirlena Huang and Brenda S.A. Yeoh, “When the Light of the Home is Abroad: Unskilled Female Migration and the Filipino Family,” *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, vol. 25(2), 2004, p. 198, 203.

<sup>115</sup> See <http://www.poea.gov.ph/html/statistics.html>. Last viewed 20 Oct 2009. Appendix 1 shows the total of overseas new hires between 1993 and 2008, the number of female and male new hires, and the percentage and female and male workers.

Children in Filipino transnational households “suffer from the emotional costs of geographical distance with feelings of loneliness, insecurity, and vulnerability. They also crave greater intimacy with their migrant parents.”<sup>116</sup> However, children suffer more when their mothers go abroad than when their fathers leave because of the Philippines’ “gender ideological frames of parenting.”<sup>117</sup>

Historically, there is a distinct division of labor within Filipino households. The father is seen as the pillar of the home and the mother as the light of the home. As the pillar of the home, the father’s primary duty is to provide for the family and to “build a home for [them].... It is he who... must literally build a home for his family.”<sup>118</sup> The father is also the authoritarian figure in the home. Thus, for a father to fulfill his role, he must “acquire” a home for his family. As the light of the home, the mother has the responsibility of caring for the children and managing the home. She is usually the parent who holds the family together.<sup>119</sup> Most “children see their mother as soft and calm, while they regard their father as strong and the eminent figure in the family.”<sup>120</sup>

When a father leaves his family to work overseas, the family continues to resemble a conventional nuclear family. “The only difference is the temporal and spatial rearrangement [caused] by the father’s work instead of the father... getting back home to his family at suppertime, he comes back... every ten months.”<sup>121</sup> Then the father leaves, the mother continues her role as caregiver and also steps into the father’s role. The family left behind seldom relies on help from extended family members.

---

<sup>116</sup> Perrañas, Rhacel Salazar, “Mothering From a Distance: Emotions, Gender, and Inter-generational Relations in Filipino Transnational Families,” *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 27 No. 2 (2001), at 375.

<sup>117</sup> Perrañas, Rhacel Salazar, “Transnational Fathering: Gendered Conflicts, Distant Disciplining and Emotional Gaps,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 7, Sep. 2008, pp. 1057, 1061.

<sup>118</sup> *Id.* at 1062.

<sup>119</sup> *Id.* at 1062, [quoting Pabico 2005].

<sup>120</sup> See, “In the Absence of ‘The Light of the Home,’” available at <http://www.filipinamom.com/index.php/category/personal/abakada-articles>, last viewed 18 Oct 2009.

<sup>121</sup> Perrañas, Rhacel Salazar, “Transnational Fathering: Gendered Conflicts, Distant Disciplining and Emotional Gaps,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 7, Sep. 2008, at 1061.

While abroad, the father will oversee the building or remodeling of the home. By having a home built, the “father is symbolically present in [his family’s] daily activities” and it reinforces his status as the breadwinner.<sup>122</sup>

In her paper “Transnational Fathering: Gendered Conflicts, Distant Disciplining and Emotional Gaps,” Rhacel Salazar Perrañas interviewed 26 adult children who had grown up in transnational families. Of the children interviewed, all but one lived in a nuclear-based household.

While interviewing the children, many of them complained about a “gap” which they described as a “sense of discomfort, unease and awkwardness” toward their migrant father. The “gap” also referred to “the inability of the young adult children to communicate openly with their fathers.... [and] captures the ambivalence... they feel over the unfamiliarity that has developed.”<sup>123</sup> Understandably, the children whose fathers had worked overseas most of their lives felt more emotionally distant than children who were in their early teens when their fathers left.<sup>124</sup> When asked to describe the relationship with her father, an 18-year-old college student explained:

*The first time my father went home, it was as if I was really afraid of him. (Laughs.) It is because I was not used to having him around. See every night, I would kiss my mother good night. But when he is around, I am so embarrassed. So when he and my mother are together when I am about to go to sleep, I do not kiss my mother.... My mother of course noticed this. She asked me about it and I told her that I am embarrassed around him. She told me not to be because he is my father. She told me that I should try to be close to my father. So I agreed and I tried, but it is still the same. I am still embarrassed around him. Up to now, I am still very uncomfortable around him.*<sup>125</sup>

---

<sup>122</sup> *Id.* at 1063.

<sup>123</sup> *Id.* at 1064.

<sup>124</sup> *Id.* at 1065.

<sup>125</sup> *Id.*

The college student was seven years old when her father left and has few shared family memories. She believes “that the ‘gap’ in her family is due to the lack of shared experiences.”<sup>126</sup>

Also, many of the young adults interviewed talked about “distance disciplining.” The only time heard from their fathers was when he felt they needed to be punished. One young man, whose father has worked as a chief engineer on a shipping vessel for 15 years, explained:

*My father only writes letters to my mother. There he would ask about us and our school grades. Then he asks that my mother photocopy our report cards and sent them to him. Then if we have a low grade, he will call immediately and reprimand us. He will spend everything, his entire phone card, on scolding you. How do you feel about this? Nothing. He always says the same thing again and again and again.*<sup>127</sup>

This young man would prefer that his “incredibly authoritarian father... work permanently outside the country and never come home. He appreciates the monthly remittances... but would rather not interact with his father at all.”<sup>128</sup>

In questioning why fathers exercise their authority, Perrañas speculates that “not knowing how to act around their children, fathers... feel the pressure to act with authority, as that is what they think they ought to be doing to be good fathers... [T]hey assume that they must discipline their children to fulfill their parental duties.”<sup>129</sup> Perrañas recognizes that the fathers are good “material” providers but don’t provide emotional support for their family.

Most of the young adults understand that their fathers care for them, but would like their fathers to “cross the gender boundaries of fathering” to include nurturing.

---

<sup>126</sup> *Id.*

<sup>127</sup> *Id.* at 1068.

<sup>128</sup> *Id.* at 1069.

<sup>129</sup> *Id.*

“While appreciative of the material security afforded by migration, children would also like fathers to try to achieve intimacy with constant transnational communication... [to help] ameliorate the gap that plagues their relationship.”<sup>130</sup>

While many fathers may not think it’s their responsibility, or understand how, to emotionally provide for their family while working overseas, most mothers who work overseas are very good at staying in touch with their family and “mothering from a distance.”<sup>131</sup>

When a mother leaves to work overseas, she not only retains her role as the “light of the home,” but also adds the role of provider and breadwinner. However, even though they’ve gone overseas to work, some mothers don’t consider themselves a “provider and breadwinner.” Since their remittances are paying for children to go to school, or to purchase furniture, appliances and other improvements for the home, the mother considers her earnings as an additional way she can take care of her children and the home.<sup>132</sup>

Depending on the study, fathers may or may not become emotionally involved with their children. In “Long Distance Intimacy,” Perrañas found that when mothers go overseas to work, “fathers are physically present but emotionally absent from their children’s lives.”<sup>133</sup> In “When the Light of the Home is Abroad” Asis and her colleagues found that for six of the seven husbands they interviewed, “their wives’ migration initiated their entry into the world of ‘women’s’ work.”<sup>134</sup> However, most studies agree that fathers rarely become their children’s full-time caregiver.<sup>135</sup>

The mother’s day-to-day responsibilities in the home are often taken care of by an older daughter or female relation. One way a mother stays involved with the day-to-

---

<sup>130</sup> *Id.*

<sup>131</sup> Perrañas, Rhacel Salazar, “Mothering From a Distance: Emotions, Gender, and Inter-generational Relations in Filipino Transnational Families,” *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 27 No. 2 (2001), at 361. See also “Transnational Fathering” at 1059 and Long Distance Intimacy at 323.

<sup>132</sup> Find article where this is discussed.

<sup>133</sup> p. 327.

<sup>134</sup> p. 206

<sup>135</sup> Long Distance Intimacy, p. 327.

day family life is to co-manage a bank account, usually with an older daughter.<sup>136</sup> In interviewing young adult children of migrant mothers, none of the sons who participated in Perrañas' study co-managed bank accounts with their mothers.

While many sons received monthly remittances directly from their mothers, these funds were often designated for their own personal consumption. The responsibilities of sons did not extend to the well-being of other members of their family. Daughters, by contrast, often had to distribute their mother's remittances to other members of the family. Hence, in telephone conversations, mothers usually asked sons about their school performance, while with daughters, mothers enquired not only about their school performance but also about the well-being of other members of their family including their father and siblings.<sup>137</sup>

Co-managing bank accounts also allows migrant mothers to "imagine their life in the Philippines while they toil as domestic workers abroad."<sup>138</sup>

While mothers have learned to stay involved with their family financially, many "are trapped in the painful contradiction of feeling the distance from the[ir] famil[y] and having to depend on the material benefits of their separation. They may long to reunite with their children but cannot, because they need their earnings to sustain their families."<sup>139</sup> A mother's emotions may include "feelings of anxiety, helplessness, loss, guilt, and the burden of loneliness."<sup>140</sup> Perrañas found that mothers deal with these emotions in three main ways: "the commodification of love; the repression of emotional strains; and... [regular] communication to ease the distance."<sup>141</sup> In discussing the "commodification of love," one mother Perrañas interviewed stated:

---

<sup>136</sup> *Id.* at 324.

<sup>137</sup> *Id.*

<sup>138</sup> *Id.* at 326.

<sup>139</sup> *Mothering from a Distance* at 371.

<sup>140</sup> *Id.*

<sup>141</sup> *Id.*



*All the things that my children needed I gave to them and even more because I know that I have not fulfilled my motherly duties completely. Because we were apart... there have been needs that I have not met. I try to hide that gap by giving them all the material things that they desire and want. I feel guilty because as a mother I have not been able to care for their daily needs. So, because I am lacking in giving them maternal love, I fill that gap with many material goods.... (Author's emphasis.)<sup>142</sup>*

Regarding the “repression of emotional strains,” another mother told Perrañas:

*I have been lonely here. I have thought about the Philippines while I am scrubbing and mopping that floor. You cannot help but ask yourself what are you doing here scrubbing and being apart from your family. Then, you think about the money and know that you have no choice but to be here.<sup>143</sup>*

A mother who had not seen her children for 12 years stated:

*If you say it is hard, it is hard. You could easily be overwhelmed by the loneliness you feel as a mother, but then you have to have the foresight to overcome that. Without the foresight for the future of your children, then you have a harder time. If I had not had the foresight, my children would not be as secure as they are now. They would not have had a chance. (Pauses.) What I did was I put the loneliness aside. I put everything aside. I put the sacrifice aside. Everything. Now, I am happy that all of them have completed college.<sup>144</sup>*

Regarding mothers communicating with their families, Perrañas found that most of the women she interviewed phoned and wrote their children at least every two

---

<sup>142</sup> *Id.* at 372.

<sup>143</sup> *Id.*

<sup>144</sup> *Id.* at 373.

weeks. This allowed them to “keep abreast of the children’s activities and at the same time achieve a certain level of familiarity.”<sup>145</sup>

In her study of Filipino migrants in France, Asuncion Fresnoza-Flot found that mothers had similar strategies for “building family relations:” sending remittances, giving gifts, communicating (by various forms) and visits.<sup>146</sup> In explaining the importance of giving gifts, Fresnoza-Flot observes that “mothers use gifts to symbolize gratitude and upward social mobility, to express maternal love, and to affirm their place and existence in the family.”<sup>147</sup>

Although most mothers believe that, while not easy, their time away for the family is in its best interest, the children left behind do not always agree.

First, children disagree... that commodities are sufficient markers of love. Second, they do not believe that their mothers recognize the sacrifices that children have made toward the successful maintenance of the family. Finally, although they appreciate the efforts of migrant mothers to show affection and care, they still question the extent of their efforts. They particularly question mothers for their sporadic visits to the Philippines.<sup>148</sup>

Children do recognize the material gains provided by their mothers working overseas. For example, a survey by Paz Cruz indicates that “60 percent of the children do not wish for their parents to stop working abroad.”<sup>149</sup> However, in the same survey, although 82.8 percent of the students surveyed would advise their friends to ‘allow your parents to work abroad,’... [a] breakdown of the responses actually shows that 59.5 percent would advise friends to allow their fathers to go abroad, 19.7 percent would advise both parents, and only 3.6 percent would advise

---

<sup>145</sup> *Id.* at 374.

<sup>146</sup> Fresnoza-Flot, Asuncion, “Migration status and transnational mothering: the case of Filipino migrants in France,” *Global Networks*, 9 Vol. 2 (2009) 252, 256.

<sup>147</sup> *Id.* at 258-259.

<sup>148</sup> *Mothering From a Distance* at 375. On average, mothers visited their children every four years for two months. Reasons given for not visiting more often were the cost of travel, they couldn’t afford to take more time off, and fear of losing their job. See page 367.

<sup>149</sup> *Id.* at 376.

friends' mothers to work abroad. Children are clearly less comfortable growing up with an absentee mother...<sup>150</sup>

A college student, who lived without either parent between the ages of 5 and 10, recalls being insecure because he didn't know when he'd see his parents again. He also wants his parents to recognize that he sacrificed for the family:

But I don't blame my parents for my fate today, because they both sacrifice just to give us our needs and I just got my part. . . . And now, I realize that having a parent abroad may be a financial relief. But it also means a lot more. The overseas contract worker suffers lots of pain. They really sacrifice a lot. *But, hey, please don't forget that your kids also have lots of sacrifices to give, aside from growing up without a parent. Specifically, for those who thought that sending money is enough and they've already done their responsibilities, well, think again, because there are more than this. Your children need your love, support, attention and affection.... The whole family bears the aches and pains just to achieve a better future ...* (Author's emphasis.)<sup>151</sup>

Also, when children have support from extended family they may not miss their mother quite as much. A young adult Perrañas interviewed who grew up in her grandmother's home was 6 when her mother went to Rome and 8 when her father went overseas to work. She states:

*It was not hard growing up without my parents because I grew up with my grandmother. So it wasn't so bad. I'm sure there was a time when there were affairs that you should be accompanied by your parents. That's what I missed.... I wasn't angry with them. At that early age, I was mature. I used to tell my mother that it was fine that we were apart, because we were eventually going to be reunited....*

---

<sup>150</sup> *Id.* at 383. [If possible get information / numbers from the Paz Cruz survey.]

<sup>151</sup> *Id.* at 379.

*I see my mother having sacrificed for our sake so that she could support us financially....*<sup>152</sup>

However, by taking the time, some mothers are able to achieve transnational intimacy, and their children appreciate the effort. A 22-year-old, whose mother was a domestic worker in the United States for more than a decade, explains:

*We communicate as often as we can, like twice or three times a week through emails. Then she would call us every week. And it is very expensive. I know.... My mother and I have a very open relationship. We are like best friends. She would give me advice whenever I had problems.... She understands everything I do. She understands why I would act this or that way. She knows me really well. And she is also transparent to me. She always knows when I have a problem and likewise I know when she does. I am closer to her than to my father.*<sup>153</sup>

While recognizing that transnational families are not the ideal, if parents and children communicate frequently, they can build a close relationship by sharing their experiences. In addition, if family members are willing to cross the traditional gender boundaries, they will be better able to cope with the emotional tensions that occur while they're apart.<sup>154</sup> The adoption of new gender roles would help migrant fathers become emotionally closer to their children, and relieve migrant mothers of their self-imposed burden to, not only be the "light of the home" but also breadwinner. Finally, the pain children feel when their mother migrates and is unable to nurture them can be decreased if the father goes beyond the traditional gender roles and adopts a more nurturing and caring role.

This paper will conclude with the story of a young woman who grew up in a transnational family. She was 11 when her mother left to work in Denmark. Some years later her father went to Spain to work. Her story relates to much of the

---

<sup>152</sup> *Id.* at 376.

<sup>153</sup> Long distance intimacy at 328-329. The young woman's father lived three hours away.

<sup>154</sup> Transnational Fathering at 1070.

research discussed in this paper. Also, she's had time to view her experiences over time, which helps put things in perspective.

*In a traditional Filipino family, the father is considered the head and the provider of the family and he is often referred to as the "Haligi ng Tahanan." The Pillar of the Home. While the mother takes the responsibility of taking care of the children and managing the home, she is called the "Ilaw ng Tahanan" or the light of the home. Children see their mother as soft and calm, while they regard their father as strong and the eminent figure in the family.*

*But in our case our mother is the one who has the strong character; she is not only a mother to us but she also does some of the things that my father lacks like handy man, and sometimes also making ends meet when my father's earnings can't support their 5 children.*

*My father tend[ed] our fishponds but sometimes typhoons, floods, and other calamities that always pass through our province [made] it a very unstable source of income. He also used to be a . . . merchant so we had market stalls in 3 towns . . . but it was still not enough to provide [a] good education for us kids which was [my parents'] dream since they had only [a] minimal education themselves.*

*In 1981 our lives changed when my mother left us to join her siblings . . . in Denmark to find work. I still can remember that time, I cried for several hours because I [could not] imagine what our life [would] be without her. In a family, the mother is the light for all the pains and comforts. She is the light for all the mistakes and corrections. She is the light for all the happiness and sorrows. Without that light, the house can still stand but, there will be darkness. And with the darkness, there will be constant searching for direction and survival.*

*I was the eldest of the five children and I was 11 at the time she left us. Her responsibilities fell on my shoulder[s]: I washed our clothes, cooked our food, and cleaned the house. I also became the surrogate mother of my youngest sister who was only 2 years old at that time. My brothers were 6 and 8 years old and my other sister was 9. There was a constant feeling of sadness and deep longing for us to be with our mother. Birthdays, Christmas, graduations and all the special events without our mother will forever be etched in our hearts. Gifts we received like new toys or new clothes were a momentary plaster to the emotional sores that made us numb with longing for family togetherness.*

*I can't remember how I felt when I saw my mother for the first time in 4 years but what I can vividly remember was my youngest sister[s] reaction at that time. She could not recognize my mother, it took her a month to get... used to the idea that we indeed [had] a mother. The sight of the postman was a relief during that time. I can't describe the excitement whenever we received greeting cards or letters from our mother. That was during the pre-internet age and there were no telephone lines in our place. Whenever we missed her we would just read her letters to reassure ourselves that she [was] still with us... just thousands of miles away.*

*If it was difficult for us kids, it was even more so for our father who had to assume the mother and father roles at the same time, especially when we reached puberty. My father was very strict with us: no parties, no gimmicks and no discos. I almost did not attend the Junior Senior Prom (Dance Ball). There was a lot of resentment and confusion for a teenager due to hormonal changes to our bodies that were happening, but somehow we managed through [with] the help of my one and only female cousin. Most of my aunts and uncles were also abroad at that time so mostly we had to manage ourselves.*

*Later, our father left us to join my mother who moved to Spain 8 years later because there were already 2 of us who went to college. After a few months my sister followed him, leaving my 2 brothers and youngest sister under the care of my grandmother. I was in college and lived in Manila at that the time until my other siblings joined me when they went to college. My parents [came] home every 3 years after that.*

*Living without our parents was difficult but it made us closer to each other, and stronger to face life's challenges. We've been through a lot of problems like studying, jobs and relationship problems. We even experienced that our apartment burned down, not . . . once but twice, [along] with most of our prized possessions like pictures from childhood and most of the material things I gained while working. . . . We were lucky to receive help from other people like my employer at that time, who gave us financial help when we needed it most. But those experiences taught us that the family is more important thing than anything else in one's life. Material things can vanish any time.*

*My parents were present during our graduation, except my youngest sister's graduation. When we entered the Philippines Convention Center where our graduation was, one can clearly see the tears in their eyes and the pride to see us in our togas, when we went up [to] the stage to receive our diplomas.*

*I got a degree in Civil Engineering and [am] now pursuing another degree in [either] Constructing Architect or Architectural Technology here in Denmark. One brother is [a] dentist and one is a[n] Electronics and Communication Engineer. My youngest sister finished [her degree in] Chemical Engineering, and another sister finished International Relations studies.*

*It was the dream of my parent[s] for us to finish our education so we will have a better chance to have a good future.*

*But there's an anti climax to our story. After several years of working in the Philippines, we still could not see a better future for all of us, [so] we followed [in] our parents' footsteps and [have joined] the millions of global Filipinos trying to find a better future, which our own country unfortunately cannot provide us.*

...

*Did my parents dream turn into nothing because we are working and living abroad after earning our academic degrees in the Philippines? No, I don't think so. It is not our fault that the economy of the Philippines is in disarray and that it can not keep its highly educated citizens home. But we will always be thankful [for] the sacrifices of our parents because having [an] education [was] the best thing they can give us because it will never vanish and someday it will help us to find the right jobs here in Europe.*

*Even in the absence of the Light of the Home, we still functioned as a family because of the sacrifice my parents [made] . . . for the sake of a better future for their children. They became our guiding light to stay away from all kinds of temptations and we became responsible adults. It's the love for the family that drives many Filipinos to leave and work abroad.<sup>155</sup>*

---

<sup>155</sup> "In the Absence of 'The Light of the Home,'" available at <http://www.filipinamom.com/index.php/category/personal/abakada-articles>, last viewed 18 Oct 2009.