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Chapter 9  
**A LONELY JOURNEY:  
 STRUGGLES OF FILIPINO DOMESTIC WORKERS IN MALAYSIA<sup>1</sup>**  
 Linda A. Lumayag

**Introduction**

Very few studies highlight the social costs of transnational migration, in particular, temporary migration, on family relations and the socio-psychological condition of migrant women. This is probably because migration is always associated with migrants and their sending countries' poor economic conditions so much so that other issues are always couched in economic terms. This paper discusses the salient effects of temporary migration on family relations and, consequently, Filipino women's re-interpretation of their own understanding of the real motive of women's engagement in transnational migration. The first section situates in context the unequal gender relationship between men and women and the ongoing onslaught of globalisation of work especially on unskilled employment within the region, thus arguing that globalisation has facilitated the production of an army of unskilled women to work in the social reproductive sector in more affluent societies in the region, thus commodifying women in the process. The second section looks at the motivating factors of Filipino women, this time, associating the prominent role of gender social relationships and the values system of the Philippines towards overseas employment. The third section explains the consequences of transnational migration on the relations affecting children, spouses and extended family in view of the social and work-related constraints that Filipino migrant women go through while being employed in Malaysia. The final section synthesizes the prevailing globalisation processes and their effect on the individual migrant women, their families and the social relationships necessary to maintain a wholesome family associated with long separation due to temporary migration. It also looks at the changing perspectives of Filipino women vis-à-vis their status within the family and the broader Philippine society, and presents the issues and challenges that women need to surmount to establish their lives with peace and dignity in the midst of threats of migration.

Data and other information in this paper were the result of an ethnographic study of Filipino domestic workers in Malaysia in 2001-2002. It involved year-long fieldwork that included interviews, focus group discussions and observations of sixty-four Filipino migrant women who were employed in the Klang Valley. Interviews with Philippine Labour officials, employers

<sup>1</sup> This is a revised and expanded version of a paper entitled, "Beyond Transmigration: Struggles of Filipino Domestic Workers in Malaysia", presented at the ASEAN Inter-University Seminar on Social Development on May 14-16, 2004, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia.