

Women, Migration, and the Mail-Order Bride Phenomenon: Focus on Australia

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The tragic stories of Filipino women abroad whether domestics, entertainers or "mail-order" brides point to contradictory fates among the migrant women. While many may have lucky stories to tell, others have a cluster of tales of sexual harassment, slavery and other morally alarming problems, compounded by a lack of support services from the Philippine Consulate. Veracity of statistics initially impede the understanding of the exact situation of these women necessitating NGO backup to substantiate hazy findings. So far, interracial marriage is figured out to be a major type of migration causing much female degradation especially in Australia and Germany. Seeking greener pastures had never been as desperate as this - gambling life and human dignity for prosperity despite education and a Christian outlook. Government has to firm up its stand on overall migration policies to protect Filipinas and coordinate support from OWWA, POEA, DSWD and NGOs to effectively reeducate them about this voluntary exploitation of brain, brawn and "body" resources.

Introduction

Now and again since the early years of this decade, newspaper headlines scream the tragedies of Filipino women abroad. As domestics in the Middle East, Singapore, and Hongkong, some of them face rape and indignities in the hands of their employers. In Kuwait for example, four *Pinays* in 1987 could not seek medical attention for illegitimate pregnancies caused by their employers. More recently in Saudi Arabia, a *Pinay* maid was beheaded when the child she used as shield against her violent employer died in her arms. In 1989, 300 *Pinay* dancers from Cyprus were stranded in Lebanon without papers nor means to come home, and had to take available (if indecent) jobs to survive. In Japan, entertainers falling into the trap of the *Yakusa* crime syndicate end up as *Japayuki* or imported prostitutes. A few of them have come home in burial urns. In Germany and Australia, *Pinay* mail-order brides meet mixed fortunes. While many of them live comfortable lives, some of them become virtual slaves of their husbands. There has been at least one case each in Australia and Germany of *Pinay* brides shot to death by their husbands.

There are many more amazing but true stories like these on *Pinays* who go abroad to migrate in different guises. They go where demand exists for them, by whatever means possible--domestics, entertainers, or mail-order brides. Non-governmental

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organizations based abroad continue to give information on their plight to policy makers in Manila. So far, there have been two responses: a temporary ban on Pinay tourists to Japan and a bill outlawing advertisements for interracial marriages. Nevertheless, the responses seem never to be enough, as the problems caused by Pinay migration keep mounting.

Pinay Migration to Australia

Filipino migration to Australia has been growing fast in the last decade. According to *Australia's Population Trends and Prospects* (1987), the Philippines ranks among top 20 countries of citizenship of Australian residents. They comprise .7% (32,000) of settlers born in other countries (Figure 1). Among the residents from Asia, Filipinos rank second only to Vietnamese in terms of numbers. Among the settlers who arrived in Australia in 1986-87, the Philippines ranked fourth (5.7%) among the countries cited as place of birth (Chart 1). Considering that the Vietnamese arrived in Australia as refugees, Filipino migration to Australia compared to other Asians, is staggering.

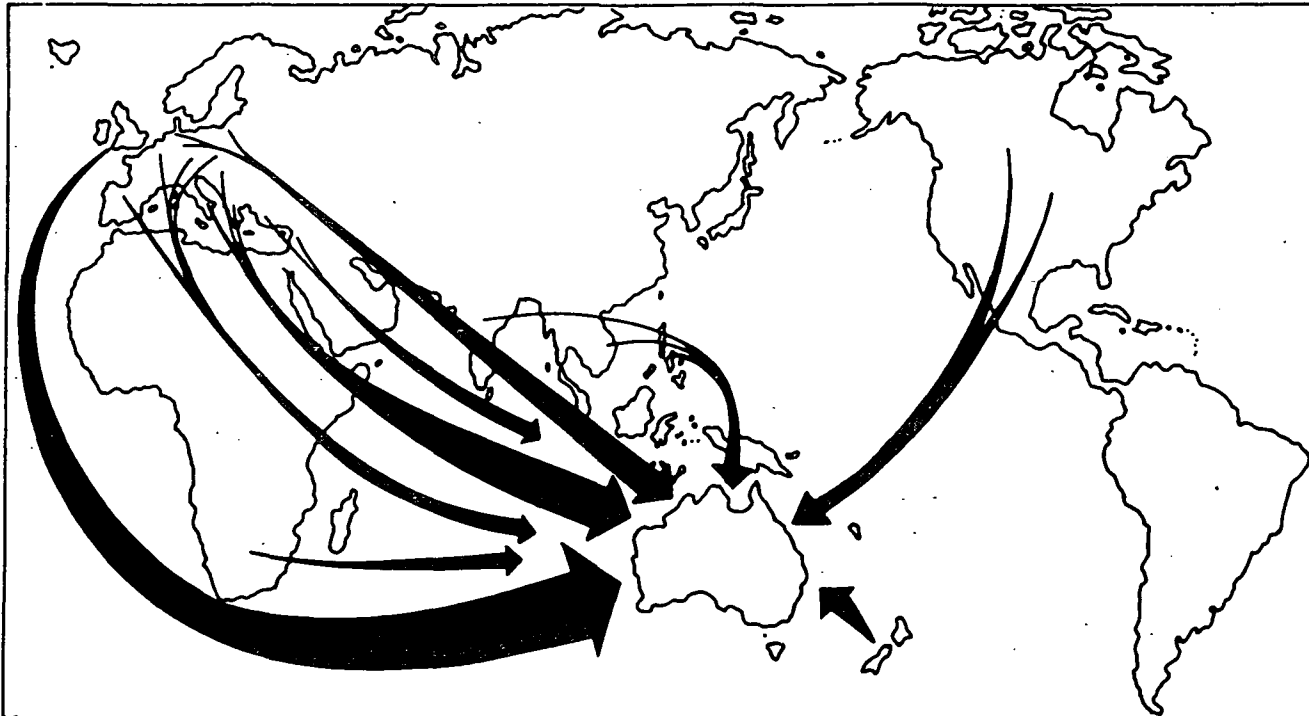
According to Australian Census reports, women have comprised a large percentage of Filipinos arriving in Australia since 1974 (166 women to 100 men). This unusual migration reached its peak in 1983 with 283 women for every 100 men, a level which has been maintained today. By the 1986 census, there were 33,727 Filipinos in Australia of whom 69% (23,272) were women and 31% (10,455) were men.

Jackson (1988) looked closely at the 1981 statistics. He noted that at the time, the sex ratio was 186 women to 100 men, a pattern "unique, in Australia, to Filipinos, since in general, migrant communities are predominantly male, at 92.9 females per 100 males; no other migrant community's sex ratios even approaches that of the RP born." He inferred that this phenomenon is accounted for by interracial marriages between Australian men and Filipino women. This is substantiated by another study which concluded that although migration from the Philippines to other countries is greater in terms of total aggregates, "the incidence of marriage involving Filipina brides in Australia is four times as high as in Canada and three times as high as in the United States if measured on a per capita basis" (Anglican Synod 1988). Again, according to 1986 census figures, there were 15,591 married Filipino Women in Australia, as against only 4,911 married Filipino men. Figures for 1987 about marriages conducted in Australia showed that "Filipinas married 911 Australian men, 607 men from an overseas country not the Philippines, and 239 men from the Philippines" (Anglican Synod 1988). These do not even include statistics on marriages conducted in the Philippines before the brides leave for Australia.

The Pinay Mail-Order Bride Phenomenon

"Mail-order bride" is a convenient term used to describe marriages between Australians and Pinays. However, the term is technically incorrect. According to studies (Cooke 1986), only 30% of the brides met their husbands through introduction agencies; the rest met through the informal network of friends and relatives or through accidental meetings between them and Australian tourists. However, observations from the field led us to

Figure 1. Settler Arrivals by Country of Citizenship, Australia, 1945-86

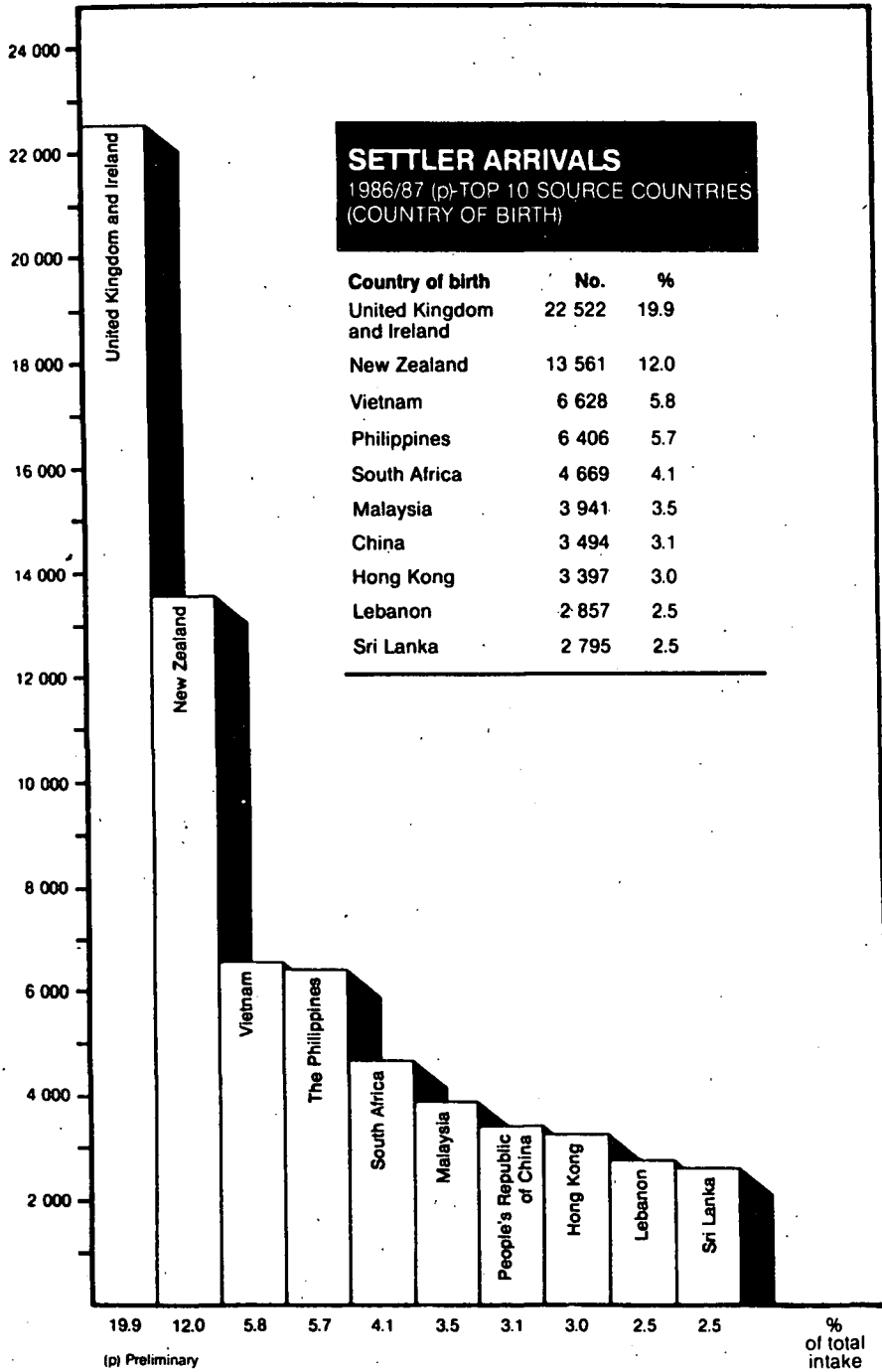


Country of Citizenship - Top 20 Source Countries of Citizenship

Country of Citizenship	Estimated No. (a)	%
United Kingdom and Ireland (b)	1 840 400	41.2
Italy	381 800	8.5
Greece	227 400	5.1
Yugoslavia	186 300	4.2
New Zealand (c)	175 600	3.9
Netherlands	167 000	3.7
Germany (d)	144 100	3.2
Poland	105 100	2.4
Vietnam	91 400	2.0
United States of America	76 100	1.7
Lebanon	63 900	1.4
South Africa (e)	36 500	0.8
Hungary	33 400	0.7
India (c)	33 100	0.7
Philippines	32 200	0.7
Turkey (e)	31 700	0.7
Austria	31 400	0.7
Spain	30 700	0.7
Canada (c)	28 100	0.6
France	26 200	0.6

(a) Includes long-term arrivals 1945-1958.
 (b) British citizenship was not sub-divided between constituent Commonwealth countries before 1959. Hence the figure for UK and Ireland is an over-estimate which is balanced by under-estimates for other Commonwealth countries.
 (c) Included with UK and Ireland from October 1945 to December 1958.
 (d) Comprises the Federal Republic of Germany, the German Democratic Republic and Germany so stated.
 (e) Included with USSR prior to July 1949.

Chart 1. Settler Arrivals, Top 10 Source Countries, 1986-87



Source: Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs

conclude that agency introductions account for more than 30%, because many Pinay brides disguise the actual method by which they meet their husbands. Few admit that they met through introduction agencies because it is embarrassing to admit so. Looking closely, pen-pal clubs are conduits of introduction agencies, and tours to the Philippines by Australian men seeking brides even through "accidental meetings" are arranged by such agencies.

Introduction agencies operate through advertisements in regular magazines and newspapers or through exclusive singles magazines sold only through subscribers. A variation is through video match. According to a manager of one such video match agency, he just goes to the Philippines, sets up his camera in a plaza on a Sunday morning, and waits for Pinays wishing to be taped. He is even amazed at the number of women willing to advertise.

Video match and singles agencies get back so much out of their investments. According to an Australian male interviewed, it costs between Australian \$300 - \$1,000 to become a member to have a pick of brides on advertisement, travels to the Philippines not even included in the price.

A study of the Anglican Synod in Australia bewailed the lack of guidelines for the operation of introduction agencies which are not even licensed but which operate openly. The staff of these agencies look on their jobs as purely business, and claim not to have "any knowledge of abusive relationships."

Abusive relationships or not, Pinay brides keep going to Australia. Two studies present profiles of the brides and husbands. Cooke (1986) and Byrne (1987) presented the typical Pinay bride as 25-34 years old, had attended some years of college, had been employed in a professional or clerical job in the Philippines, had a monthly income of P500-P1,500, single with no children, coming from the provinces (whether urban or rural). By comparison, the Australian husband is 35-54 years old and divorced or widowed. More than a quarter of them hold professional or clerical jobs while an equal percentage are skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled workers. Thus, while the brides are not very young and therefore no babes in the woods, the age difference between them and their spouses are wide (20 years or more), and they tend to have higher educational qualifications than their husbands.

A study of brides in the Melbourne area showed that only 25% of those interviewed could give categorical answers to the question of whether they are happy, even if only 10% of Australian-Pinay marriages ended in divorce. The brides cited problems of adjustment due to lack of knowledge about Australia before marriage. Some who did not feel they measured up to their husband's concept of a perfect wife, felt isolated because of very little social contact beyond their house especially with Filipinos. Some did not expect financial setbacks caused by alimonies paid, and some were surprised about children being taken care of by their husbands.

Beyond the scientific studies are horror stories played up in Australian papers or told by Filipino women leaders who deal with refuge centers for abused wives. The urbanited

and working Pinay is used to having her own money, having people around her and enjoying the security of the extended family suddenly finds herself isolated, lonely, and at other times battered. Even those raised in rural areas in the Philippines are used to having relatives around them, and find themselves isolated in Australia. Now and then, there are stories in local Australian newspapers of women chained at home, battered to pulp, and treated like slaves. There are stories of men turning out to be retired alcoholics, unemployed or physically or psychologically disabled.

Why do they keep going? Wall (1983) explained economic difficulties in the Philippines as an important factor. Jackson (1988) cited the sex ratio in Australian mining and cattle towns where men outnumber women. Chuah and associates (1987) said that one reason is status consciousness in Philippine society which make women of certain characteristics not very marketable. These include never-married women older than 29, women having had children without getting married, women separated from their husbands, women from low-income families, or women in the "hospitality" profession. Beyond these are reluctant though honest answers of Pinay brides interviewed. Some of them philosophically look at marriage as a gamble a woman takes whether she marries a Pinoy or a foreigner. Some have experienced being brokenhearted and have become cynical about relationships. Some have had children or have come from tourist-based professions, and have lost hopes of ensnaring a Filipino husband. But there are factors seldom mentioned. To colonially-educated Filipinos, marriage to whites is a status symbol, and many Filipinos dream of going abroad, especially to snowy climes. Moreover, the white skin is thought of as synonymous to wealth.

Probing my interviewees in Australia and Manila, and observing them, I was surprised at some answers. "Why did you choose him?" (a divorced 60-year-old Australian older than the bride's parents). "Well, he has definite and concrete plans in life," was the answer I got. Did the parents of Catholic Pinays approve of their divorced husbands? I received a reply of overwhelming yes. Apparently, even the priests approved. I saw photo albums of big church weddings in the Philippines among young, single Pinays and middle-aged, divorced Australians. The dreams of a better life in a developed country for the bride, and later, her relatives, becloud issues of age gap and Catholic taboos against divorce, and take away fears of uncertainty in a foreign land.

The Larger Problem

The mail-order bride phenomenon should not be looked at in isolation. It is only part of a larger problem of migration of Filipino women, and even of Filipinos as a whole. It is difficult to keep track of the exact number of Filipino women abroad. Estimates of NGOs are too far from government statistics. For instance, in 1985, figures of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) showed that there were only 22,010 Filipino women in the Middle East, 167 in Africa, 15,721 in Asia, 1,852 in Europe, 333 in Oceania, 408 in the Trust Territories, and 1,147 in the Americas. However, estimates from NGOs as tabulated by Orozco (1985) placed Pinays working abroad at 26,000 in Hongkong, 7,000 in Singapore, 15,000 in Japan, 10,000 in England, 500 in

Sweden, 5,000 in France, 50,000 in Italy and 15,000 in Spain. Later figures even exceeded some of those estimates. The 1988 Report of the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee placed the number of Pinay Japayukis at 80,000, of whom only 30,000 had employment contracts. The Philippine Ambassador to Kuwait estimated that in 1987 there were 18,000 Pinay domestics in that country alone.

Brides are even more difficult to keep track of. As already explained, for Australia, the number of Pinay brides can only be inferred from immigration statistics. In Germany where there are also many Pinay brides, the same inference was made by Salazar (1987).

Filipinos go where there is demand for them, at any guise. Heavy female Filipino migration to Japan as entertainers started in 1981 after sex tours by Japanese men to the Philippines indirectly encouraged by the tourist promotion campaigns of the Marcos regime were halted because of complaints of women on both the Japanese and Philippine shores. Recruitment agencies (and the Yakusa) took advantages of the situation, taking the women to Japan since the Japanese men could no longer come here. Migration to the Middle East, Singapore and Hongkong came with economic boom. Women hankered for maids to ease their domestic burden, and Filipinos who speak English best fit the specifications. On the sending side, economic policies of the Marcos regime encouraged the export of manpower abroad as a source of foreign exchange. (Filipino workers are known to send home money. Moreover, employment contracts stipulate large percentages of overseas workers' salaries to be remitted home.) In fact, the Ministry of Labor and the POEA actively conducted trade missions selling Filipino labor abroad. There are also other push factors. The deteriorating economy under the Marcos regime made people seek escape to other countries where employment was more readily available. Even in the United States in this decade, Filipinos are considered as the fastest growing ethnic community. Thousands of recent Pinoy migrants to the US are illegals running away from recent political and economic crises in the country. According to latest estimates, Filipinos now comprise the largest Asian group in the United States.

The Bride Trade

The bride trade follows a different pattern. In areas where the regular immigration route has become difficult, the easier way to migrate is through marriage. The outflow of Filipinos to Germany is documented by Salazar (1987). Filipinos arrived in Germany in the 1960s as medical and paramedical personnel because of demand of the burgeoning economy for jobs where German citizens were reluctant to go. In the 1970s, German shipping lines recruited sailors and medical personnel. However, in 1974, an agreement between Germany and the Philippines regulated the importation of medical personnel from the Philippines; in 1976, it was completely stopped. Therefore, Filipinos "had to find other ways to get to stay in the country. Thus, there would be: (1) a constant increase in the number of illegals; and (2) an intensification of the bride trade" (Salazar 1987).

The same pattern can be seen in the case of the Australian-Filipina bride trade. Racial exclusion was the basis of Australian immigration policy in its early years, with the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act or white Australian Policy (Collins 1988). In the 1960s,

however, "after more than 50 years of exclusion on the basis of 'race,' small intakes of 'non-white' settlers began, and in 1973 the white Australia Policy was finally dismantled and replaced by the principle of non-discrimination in immigrant selection" (Secretariat to the Committee to Advise on Australia's Immigration Policies 1987). When Australia met its aim of promoting economic growth in the 60s, it faced the problem of meeting labor needs in the 70s.

With the Labor Party's commitment to ethnic equality came a new system of evaluation for immigrants to meet labor needs, among which is the ability to speak English. Assistance which was formerly given only to British, and later Europeans, was extended to other nationalities. In 1974, eleven Filipinos formed the first batch of Asians to get migrant assistance from the Australian government. They were motor mechanics and highly skilled tradesmen needed by the growing economy. By 1975, nearly 10,000 Filipinos a month were applying to migrate to Australia. By the end of that decade, teachers, accountants and computer programmers were in demand in Australia, and Filipinos with those qualifications migrated. By 1983, migration was cut back, and the categories basically allowed now are refugees and relatives under the family reunion category (Milne and Shergold 1984). Byrne (1987) inferred from immigration statistics that Filipino migrants to Queensland (and to Australia) started arriving in bulk in 1977, and many of them were women. The bride trade therefore started in the late 70s, and became more lucrative in this decade, when entry to Australia has become more restrictive.

Thus, for both Germany and Australia, the timid entry of Pinay brides started when immigration regulations were relaxed, but became more aggressive when the rules became more strict. (In Germany, it was compounded by lax rules governing Filipino tourists who were allowed, until April 1989, to stay for two months without visas.) Pinays wishing to enter certain countries can most easily take advantage of the family reunion category. The marriages arranged by match-making commercial establishments in Germany and Australia therefore facilitate the migration of Pinays to those two promised lands.

What Now: Dealing with the Bride Problem

How do we alleviate the problems caused by the trade involving Pinay brides? A first policy solution has been mentioned: a bill recently passed the Senate on third reading declares unlawful "the practice of matching Filipino women for marriage to foreign nationals on a mail-order basis." It bans the advertisement, publications, printing or distribution of brochures, fliers and other propaganda materials in furtherance of the mail-order bride business. Penalty for the offense is imprisonment for six months and one day. If the offender is a foreigner, an additional penalty is deportation. A simple bill with unanimous intent took two years to pass the Senate, but it finally did. Nevertheless, it has not moved much in the Lower House.

There have been genuine attempts by the Australian government to curtail the practice. The Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs produced a video on

Australian - Filipino marriages which is shown to Filipina women applying for visas as wives or fiancées of Australians. The Australian government has also requested the Commission on Filipinos Overseas to counsel Pinays going to Australia. However, observations in the field point to the near uselessness of such attempts. Veiled warnings seem not to discourage the starry-eyed Pinay dreaming of Australia's greener pastures.

Since preventive measures do not help much, curative measures are tried at the receiving end. The government's migrant assistance centers run by state governments in Australia work closely with ethnic NGOs which in turn work with refuge centers for battered women. Philippine women's NGOs are attempting to reach more brides to appraise them of their rights in Australia. Sadly, they are unable to reach as much. Pinay brides reaching Australia are whisked off from the airports by their husbands and taken to places hundreds of miles away from any Philippine Consulate. But even many of those staying in the cities are virtually isolated from their countrymen, and totally dependent on their husbands for money as well as for social contacts. Although many Pinay brides have reached college or have bachelor's degrees, their qualifications are not automatically accepted in Australia. They have to train for new trades or take appropriate examinations to practice their professions, and have to remain dependent on their husbands for a time. As an observer on the lookout for Pinay brides in New South Wales, I had experienced brides reluctantly talking with me and running away, afraid to be caught in conversation with me by their husbands. In the cities, nevertheless, small groups of Pinay brides get together if their husbands are not very strict.

A problem which is slowly being resolved is the non-integration of Pinay brides with other organizations of Filipino women composed mostly of professionals. Women professionals belonging to the early wave of migration generally do not wish to be identified with brides and are in fact very defensive about what they consider their higher status. However, some NGOs like the Women's Committee of the Filipino Forum of New South Wales have made initial attempts at embracing the brides. Their contact with NSW social service personnel have enabled them to directly help Pinays running to refuge centers.

The Catholic Church is trying its best, but Pinays disappear even from church. As Fr. Paul Byrne of the Queensland Bishops Conference said, the church is alarmed "that close to 90% of the 5,000 Filipinos in Queensland have 'dropped out' since arriving in Australia." The Filipino churches existing in major cities and suburbs in New South Wales cater mostly to the migrants with professional backgrounds, as observed from their Filipino Church Community masses and publications. Even within the Church, the problem is integration of the Pinay brides into the larger Filipino community. At least, the church is trying.

Yet, so much more has to be done. Like the domestics in the Middle East who have to surrender their passports to their employers and in effect become near impossible to locate, Pinay brides in Australia can disappear at will or at the command of their husbands. They have little knowledge of what help is available to them when they need help. They call the Consulates when they are already deep in trouble. For their part, Consulate officials do not know how to respond to problems of Pinay brides.

An employee of the Philippine Embassy lamented that "in the past two years alone, five women had asked for transportation to go back to the Philippines." Because the Embassy does not have funds, they just endorse cases like those to the Migrant Resource Center or charitable organizations. But those who want to go home are rare. "Most of them want to stay - *nahihiyang umuwi* (ashamed to go back home)." When one employee helped a distraught bride escape, the head of the Philippine mission said he did not have any official knowledge of the incident. Helping Filipino nationals escape from home is considered meddling in domestic affairs, and not a function of the Philippine consulate. But even assuming that it is their function, it becomes difficult when the Pinays become citizens. The Consulate loses jurisdiction. More important is the inability of any Philippine mission to keep track of every Pinay migrant.

How then, do we deal with the Pinay bride problem? It seems that, while it is a major problem in itself, it cannot be removed from other problems concerned with migration of Filipinos abroad. Necessarily, the problems become bilateral. As the Japayuki problem which entails strictness on both the Philippine and the Japanese governments and labor migration and calls for protective contracts for Filipino workers, the Pinay bride problem should be approached in terms of bilateral agreements. But as in the Japayuki and the Middle East labor problems, the solutions forged are not enough, because they aim to solve specific problems and not the larger one of migration. In turn, our migration policies are tied up to our economic policies, and these encourage out-migration of brain, brawn, and, to be blunt, of the female body.

The Need for Government Action

The mail-order bride phenomenon is part of a larger problem of out-migration which is tied to a host of other problems facing the country. The policy encouraging the migration of workers abroad has opened up the world to a bigger portion of the Filipino populace. Before such policy, only the elite (economic and intellectual) could go abroad to enjoy the scenes shown by the Philippines' colonial education. By the same token, immigration policies of the host country have affected the ways by which Filipinos seeking better opportunities abroad have tried to migrate. Therefore, the mail-order bride problem cannot be solved by itself. Its solution lies in a package of reforms in our migration policies and in our approach to our relative socioeconomic poverty. It also hinges on a more acute awareness and concern about the plight of Filipino women overseas in general.

Sadly, that awareness if it exists, leads to efforts which are not orchestrated. Thus, there are solutions tried, no matter how ineffective, on Japayukis, and on advertising for mail-order brides. But the ban has been lifted, and the bill against advertising for brides has been passed only in the Senate and still awaits action in the Lower House. Moreover, there are yet no grand solutions focused on the welfare of women abroad.

In the initial meeting of the Senate Committee on Women and Family Relations to investigate the case of the 300 Pinays stranded in war-torn Lebanon, the surprise of the discussion was the denial by policymakers themselves of the existence of the 300 Pinays. It took the meeting to convince the government to send a plane to fetch the Pinays home.

Other problems emerged in the discussion. Among workers, only those properly documented are technically the concerns of the POEA and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), which even quarrel over jurisdiction. While the Department of Social Welfare and Development has offered to pay for social work attachés abroad, the administrative problem of jurisdiction over them by the Philippine Ambassador seems to hinder its implementation. And yet, the problem of our women abroad can be best served by social welfare attachés.

To remedy the situation, what can perhaps be done is to integrate governmental and NGO efforts. As mentioned, NGOs here are actively monitoring the plight of Pinays abroad. The most active among these are STOP (Stop Trafficking Our Pilipinas) and KAIBIGAN (Friends of Filipino Migrant Workers, Inc). Filipino women's organizations abroad are also actively assisting women with problems. In Australia, they have taken the mail-order brides as a responsibility.

What the Philippine government can do, is to expand campaigns for better treatment of its nationals through treaties and other similar arrangements. For instance, the lax visa policy for tourists from First World countries (21 days without visa) prevents us from screening would-be husbands for our mail-order brides. Cases of marital abuse in Australia show that the violent partner is usually an alcoholic or a psychologically ill person. Of course, these problems cannot be easily detected even in visa application interviews, but tougher visa requirements may be enough discouragement for some. The Australian government, for its part, has sought to protect its men from unscrupulous mail-order brides wishing only to use the men to enter Australia and disappear or leave their fiancés; men are now required to marry their fiancées before leaving, such that the women go as wives and not just girlfriends. The Philippine government has not provided similar protection to their women.

The Philippine embassy and consulates in Australia find it difficult to respond to problems of Philippine nationals, by virtue of the large territory they cover. Compounding the problem is the lack of a definitive policy on how to deal with what are generally considered as "domestic" problems. It is wiser, therefore, to come up with ways by which Filipino NGOs may be coopted to help respond to the problems. Because NGOs by themselves cannot perform the tasks without adequate financing, the Philippine government should seek means to provide Australian-based Filipino NGOs with some financial assistance. To speed things up, the embassies can coordinate with social workers and psychologists from among the Filipino residents themselves. What may ease the problem of agency turf is part-time employment of cooperating Filipino nationals by the consulate.

There are, of course, additional merits to coopting the Filipinos abroad to assist the embassies in the solution of Filipino problems. They know the problems best, know the environment better, have made significant contacts among the government agencies in the country which are in a position to help. The human resources to assist Pinays exist. They only have to be harnessed in a creative manner. However, a prerequisite to their effective cooptation is a basic awareness and concern for the women of this country. Women migrants can be helped in their problems abroad. But more importantly, through

a package of sound employment policies complemented by a more nationalistic orientation of education, they can be prevented from embarking upon irrational migration which causes further and larger problems.

But then as already mentioned, mail-order brides merely fall under one category of overseas Filipino migrants. What is needed is a broader perspective on the Philippine out-migration phenomenon. Many problems faced by overseas workers abroad are still awaiting solution. The Philippine government must think of ways of meeting the social problems caused by the dislocation of Filipino citizens going abroad for opportunities which the past and present administrations have not been able to offer.

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