

The Impact of Socio-Cultural Norms on Women's Experiences of Migration and the Implications for Development

Rachel Murphy

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Social Science Research Council

One Pierrepont Plaza, 15th Floor

Brooklyn, NY 11201

P: +1 212 377 2700

F: +1 212 377 2727

migration@ssrc.org



SSRC

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Rachel Murphy | University of Oxford

Introduction

Gender relations - underpinned by cultural values and social norms - influence many dimensions of labour migration. Cultural values refer to shared understandings about what is important and about desirable ways of being, while social norms are the informal rules that shape understandings of acceptable behaviors and sanctioned pathways for achieving goals, with social opprobrium occurring in instances of transgression (Portes, 2006). Cultural values and social norms which pertain to the relationship between males and females undergird decisions about who migrates, who the migrant moves with, where individuals migrate to, their employment activities in the destination areas, their obligations to kin in the sending areas, the ways in which these obligations are carried out, the allocation of resources generated by migration and the coping strategies of people who remain in the sending communities (Curran and Rivero-Fuentes, 2003; Murphy, 2004).

Cumulatively these gendered dimensions of migration affect *development*. Development is a multi-faceted concept that encompasses changes in the cultural and socio-economic environment, which in turn are affected by national strategies to mobilize and equip citizens to partake in and benefit from global economic restructuring. The concept of development also incorporates corresponding changes in individuals' capabilities to improve their own wellbeing and to contribute to wider efforts to enhance the prosperity and wellbeing of their communities. Migration, understood here as the movement of people for work across regions and economic sectors, is both a cause and effect of development and a fundamental component of the development process.

The approach to the concept of development adopted in this essay is influenced by Amartya Sen's analysis of the factors that affect individuals' capabilities to achieve the 'functionings' that comprise their wellbeing. Functionings refer to the 'beings' and 'doings' that a person values; examples of functionings pertinent to migration include spatial mobility, being educated, accruing material possessions, having leisure time (not being overworked) and improving the lives of family members. In this approach the achievement of 'functionings' necessitates access to resources, for instance, money, land, labour, social networks and information (Murphy,

2004). But this approach also recognizes that people may need different bundles of resources to attain the same functionings, with their resource requirements being affected by personal characteristics such as marital status, age and health and by the socio-cultural and economic environment that they inhabit (Sen, 1983; Sen, 1992: 115-116). For instance a young woman may have money for a bus fare but she may still not be able to achieve the functioning of 'shopping at market' because she does not have the male companion who is culturally required to give her respectability and protection in public spaces. Alternatively, a woman who is culturally permitted to go to market may be prevented from doing so by the absence of roads and public transport.

The attainment of functionings also involves the exercise of agency. People may have the capabilities for achieving any number of functionings. Yet the functioning of 'exercising agency' - to choose freely which capabilities to convert into functionings - is itself integral to wellbeing (Kabeer, 1994:30). In his work on gender and household bargaining Sen shows that individuals' potential for choosing freely and for converting capabilities into functionings may be compromised by their internalization of norms about how the world is. This is because the internalization of socio-cultural norms pertaining to gender, age, kinship and class often cause underdogs to adapt their expectations to those that seem possible. Moreover, adaption may mean not only that the underdog colludes in her own oppression but also that she perpetuates the oppression of others. For instance, a woman may make a choice on behalf of her daughter in relation to marriage over school attendance; a decision which may be intended to improve her daughter's standing in the local community but which in fact devalues her (Sen 1991).

Migration interacts with both the ideational and resource dimensions of normative change. With regard to the ideational dimension, migration scholars have drawn on Edward Said's insights about how living in a different society creates possibilities for standing outside ones' own life and viewing it through another lens: this 'perspective' widens ideological parameters (Constable 1997; Levy 1989; Murphy 2004). Such perspective is clearly integral to women's experiences of migration. It has long been noted by migration studies scholars that women often pursue migration for reasons other than the wage differentials between origin and destination areas: for a feeling of independence, the opportunity to participate in commodity consumption and the experience of urban life (Fawcett, Khoo and Smith, 1984; Mills, 1997; Jacka, 2006). It has also long been observed that migrants who return to their home communities for visits are typically intensely critical of the community's customs and social arrangements, and that women are especially critical of the aspects of family relations that give women less voice and choice (Davin, 1999; Levy, 1989). At the same time,

however, exposure to norms prevailing in global factories or in destination area societies may present women with new agency constraints.

With regard to the resource dimension of normative change, in affecting who obtains income as well as how, migration may transform the norms that prevail within families and communities with regard to the worth of male and female labour, the appropriate family and community roles of males and females, and perceptions of their resource entitlements. This process may benefit some individuals while disadvantaging others. The outcomes of such interactions among migration, socio-cultural norms and patterns of resource distribution become manifest in conventional indicators of development such as the labour force participation rates of males and females, income levels of households, and the health access and education levels of boys and girls. At an aggregate level, these indicators in turn affect the wider socio-cultural and economic environment with knock-on implications for the capacity of people with different attributes to obtain resources and exercise agency.

The remainder of this essay explores how socio-cultural norms mediate women's scope for exercising agency and their access to resources in migratory environments, and the implications for development. Specifically, the essay considers the following six gendered dimensions of the migration and development relationship:

- (1) The interaction between gendered social roles and how women participate in labour migration
- (2) The influence of family forms and associated social norms on decision-making and women's possibilities for migrating
- (3) The effects of social norms on the wellbeing of migrant women living and working in the destination areas
- (4) The effects of social norms on women's experiences of being left behind in the sending areas
- (5) The impact of gender roles on the arrangement of care and the allocation of resources to children in the origin communities
- (6) The influence of migration on the socio-cultural norms that underpin son preference in some societies.

Cumulative discussion of these six dimensions demonstrates that all decision-making, action and resource distribution occurs in settings that are permeated by socio-cultural norms, and that all facets of the migration and development relationship are therefore fundamentally gendered.

Gendered Roles and Labor Migration

Gendered social roles affect how women participate in and are affected by labour migration. Social roles refer to the set of expectations and duties associated with the position of an individual in relation to others in his or her social networks (Lopata, 1999). Several innovative micro-studies illustrate how migrant women are embedded in cross-cutting multi-leveled networks including the kinship and community networks of the native place, the horizontal networks which incorporate fellow migrant workers, and vertical networks with managers and administrators in destination areas (Jacka, 2006; Mills, 1999). Such studies show that migrant women must balance the conflicting demands of the multiple roles that come from participation in these overlapping networks, for instance, as mother, wife, daughter, worker and workmate (Constable, 1997; Mills, 1999). The influence of migrant networks on women's social roles demonstrates vividly that 'gendered roles' and corresponding identities are far from static or immutable (Lopata, 1999).

Despite the fluidity in gender roles, however, there exists across many societies a fairly stable perception of complementarity in the attributes and functions of women and men. Women generally do 'domestic, caring and lighter work in the 'inside' realm, while men do heavier farm work, maintenance work and business negotiations in the 'outside' economy (Jacka, 1997; Lessinger, 2001). Gendered work roles obtain even when the substance of the work changes because of labour migration: so on the occasion of predominantly male outmigration, heavy male farm tasks may become subsumed under the banner of light female domestic work (Jacka, 1997).

Attention to the multifaceted and gendered dimensions of individuals' social roles helps researchers to perceive more acutely the developmental costs and benefits of labour mobility and to consider possibilities for more sensitive interventions. As an example, many national planners and economists assume that only 'surplus' laborers migrate, a perspective which sees laborers as homogenous and substitutable entities. While at an aggregate level it may indeed be mainly surplus laborers who leave, at the household or community level people who fulfill a variety of essential economic and social roles also leave. In situations where people who perform key roles leave, those left behind take over new work tasks. But owing to the prevalence of gendered divisions of labour and the predominance of the cultural model of the 'male household head,' development agencies commonly overlook the fact that many farmers are women and/or elderly people and so omit them from agricultural extension services, micro-credit services and the distribution of community political information (Chant, 1992; FAO 1995; United Nations report).

There is also the matter of the less visible emotional effects of rapid disruption to gendered roles. Left-behind men may feel emasculated when they have to take over domestic chores and child care activities, and so resort to drinking, violence, womanizing and other hyper masculine behaviors (Parreñas, 2005). For their part, left-behind women may feel that they are enduring particularly intense physical and emotional hardship in cases where they are required to take over a work task in a social environment where that task (for instance, ploughing) is still seen as men's work (Murphy, 2004). In some countries in areas of high out-migration, for instance in the Philippines, there are a small number of social work and community organization programs which try to give emotional and practical support to left-behind men and women (Parreñas, 2005). For the most part, however, the gendered nature of social roles is not within the purview of migration policy-makers.

Socio-cultural norms and migration decision-making

Socio-cultural norms and women's family roles as daughters, wives, and mothers influence decision-making processes about resource allocation, which in turn affect female possibilities for migration. Family roles underpin how families allocate resources to daughters vis-à-vis sons, support females' migration and justify a claim on a share of their earnings. This works differently in matrilineal and patrilineal societies. As an example of the former, in the Philippines and Thailand a normative framework in which daughters migrate for the wellbeing of their parents is reinforced through a family system in which daughters have responsibility for caring for their parents in old age and in which they ultimately inherit the land and take over rice-farming (Lauby and Stark, 1988; Mills, 1997; Curran and Saguy, 2001). In this system sons are free to migrate for themselves to obtain the patron-client ties, knowledge and resources for their lives off the farm; accordingly they face less of an obligation to remit. This arrangement benefits the sons and disadvantages the daughters because on account of major shifts in the global organization of production sons build their futures in the more profitable and prestigious off-farm and urban sectors while daughters remain within the poorly remunerated agricultural sector (Curran and Saguy, 2001).

As an example of the influence of socio-cultural norms on migration decision-making in patrilineal societies, in Taiwan, during the rapid industrialization of the 1970s, parents strategically cultivated a sense of filial debt in their daughters by investing in their education. Yet they invested only in the vocational and general education that would enable their daughters to earn higher wages. The parents' rationale was that on account of their investment in education, their daughters would feel compelled to repay the debt through

remittances which could then be used to finance the senior and college education of sons, with sons in Chinese culture being entrusted with the longer-term care of their parents (Greenhalgh, 1988).

Perceptions of family roles also affect decision-making in relation to the independent or unaccompanied migration of married women. On account of the emergence of a culture of migration, over time, views in origin communities change so that taboos against the migration of females in general and married women in particular become diluted. For instance, in the case of China, increasing numbers of married women in their late twenties and early thirties have started to migrate, seeking the material gains that they have witnessed a younger cohort of village women enjoy (Roberts et al, 2005). Alongside this trend, new norms of good parenthood have been emerging so that now increasingly both parents show their commitment to their children by working hard in the city for several years to save for their future and education. This new normative framework for good parenthood is echoed in other regions too. For example, Latina female migrants to the US forsake deeply held ideas that biological mothers should raise their own children and instead define the mother as one who negotiates the provision of affection, care and financial support through translocal circuits of exchange (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997).

Across a range of cultural settings, women who have migrated directly by themselves often invoke the theme of sacrifice in their narratives to help them maintain their self identities as caring wives and mothers despite their protracted physical separation from husbands and children. This narrative theme has been reported by scholars who have interviewed female immigrant workers from Latin America and from the Philippines. In the mainstream Chinese media, too, *dagongsao* or married migrant women are officially praised for making a sacrifice to improve the lot of their families. During the late 1990s and early 2000s part of the logic for the official encouragement of *dagongsao* was to redress a shortage of cheap female labour in the 16-22 age group that had come about as a result of rapid industrialization and demographic transition (Cai, 2006; Yang, 2004). In other countries planners and capitalists also see advantages in the labour of 'older' married women. For instance in Southeast Asia some factory bosses reportedly prefer the practiced, mature and steadfast labour of married women (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997).

Migration not only underpins normative change that facilitates women's direct participation in migration, it also provides women with the information, connections and resources that enable them to exercise greater agency with regard to other aspects of their family lives. Even for women who do not migrate, simply knowing about the existence of an exit option may

increase their bargaining power. For instance in rural China unhappy wives may threaten to migrate, and grandmothers who do not receive enough remittances when caring for grandchildren may threaten their absent sons and daughters-in-law that they will go to the city themselves to work as nannies (Murphy, 2004). There are of course limitations to the extent to which women's agency is increased by 'perspective' backed up by the exit opportunity of urban labour markets. These limitations comprise socio-cultural norms such as taboos against divorce (Murphy, 2004), or requirements that good daughters share their earnings or return home (Silvey and Elmhirst, 2003). There are also constraints to mobility and therefore to exit opportunities which stem from individual characteristics such as those associated with education level or health that are in turn affected by longer term patterns of resource allocation within families. On the whole, then, family forms and roles have a strong bearing on the investment that women receive to support their migration, and the expectations that they must fulfill to those who remain in the origin community.

Socio-cultural norms and women's wellbeing in the destination areas

In destination areas, gendered socio-cultural norms constrain women's possibilities for achieving a range of functionings central to their wellbeing including enjoying decent living and working conditions, being treated respectfully and being informed about sexual health and contraception. As the following paragraphs show, even though women migrants in destination areas mobilize norms to serve their interests, their efforts are generally constrained by the wider discursive and structural processes of gender and migrant marginalization.

In countries pursuing export-led development strategies, the explicit use of socio-cultural norms which help to confine migrant women's work to low status and menial tasks is common. In particular, women are said to have psychological and physiological traits such as patience and 'nimble fingers' and are on this basis confined to assembly line and repetitive manual positions. In developed urban centers across the world, owing to their ascribed caring and home-maker roles, migrant women are also increasingly employed in domestic service: this is in part because the women of the emerging middle classes want more time for education, career development and leisure and so are prepared to allocate household income to hiring this help.

The gendered occupational bias experienced by women migrants is intensified by the tendency of employers and urban dwellers to use compounding marginal identities such as 'rural' (or 'ethnic' other) to extract further value from female labour. As an example, in China women from

Anhui province are regarded as better quality housemaids and women from Sichuan as cleaner housemaids than those from provinces further West because Anhui is more developed and Sichuan has more plentiful water: labour brokers therefore often try to represent “their” women as being from these localities in order to obtain a higher introduction fee and wage rate (Pun 1999; Sun forthcoming).

Conversely, within the work place it is common for employers to routinely invoke stereotypical socio-cultural norms about femininity when the labour control of migrant workers is at stake. Studies conducted within the manufacturing and service sectors show how managers urge women to regulate their bodily deportment, behaviour and attitude in ways that live up to the image of a modern woman, so gender serves as the medium for structuring and naturalising class subordination. Pun Ngai (1999; 2003) describes vividly how foremen call on women to be more lady-like and less clumsy in their assembly-line work, how they rebuke women for speaking crudely or out of turn, remarking ‘you still haven’t got yourself a boyfriend’, and how they call on women workers to be more patient and calm. Amy Hanser (2003) similarly reports that in China’s department stores the productivity and moral worth of women as workers are strongly correlated with their youth, consumerism and personal grooming and deportment.

Yet women do not conform passively to normative expectations of femininity, but use them in their pursuit of agency. For instance, an ethnographic study of Indonesian housemaids describes how the women consciously cultivate a pleasant feminine demeanour, a smart and uniform-like dress and a caring nature to secure a space for themselves within their employer’s home (Williams, 2005). Similarly, studies on Muslim women in Iran and parts of North Africa show that their entry into wage labour is accompanied by overt displays of feminine modesty. Such displays enable them to demonstrate to male family members that they continue to deserve respect, support and protection (Kandiyoti, 1988).

There are however at least two caveats when considering the empowering possibilities of women’s creative use of gender norms. First, as Tiantian Zheng cautions, the scope for migrant women to shape their identities remains constrained by the ways in which they are positioned within a wider political economy of representation. She gives the example of rural bar hostesses in Dalian city, China, and describes how they invoke different tropes of rural femininity such as pure and natural country virgins, vamps with untamed sexual appetites, or chic urban women, depending on the personality and tastes of the clients. Yet, as Zheng notes, even though such flexibility in self-presentation may create room for manoeuvre, the possibilities from which these women are able to choose remain limited by

wider power relations (see Zheng, 2003; Zheng, 2004). Even additional possibilities for womanhood opened up to some women migrants through the outreach activities of NGOs, including those with transnational linkages, remain constrained within the wider political economy of representation. This is because such activities prescribe a language of feminist action and self-improvement, 'development speak', that migrant women are required to use in articulating their experiences and hopes (Jacka, 2006).

A second caveat is that women's possibilities to empower themselves through creative use of norms are constrained by connections to the origin areas. The identities used or pursued by women in the cities often conflict with normative expectations grounded in the rural-based social networks to which many belong. As one example, studies of women in Africa and Southeast Asia who are involved in prostitution commonly report that the migrant women do not let people in the home village know of their work. Or else if they do, their migrant work is explained in terms of their sacrifice for the family, thereby subsuming it within the rubric of a moral femininity (Kempadoo and Doezema, 1998). As a further example, research on Filipina migrant workers' participation in commodity consumption in Hong Kong reveals that they often feel guilty when they spend in pursuit of an urban model of womanhood rather than sending more money to their parents or children (Constable, 1997).

The social networks that women form through communal working have however been identified by some scholars to be a resource that under certain circumstances may provide the basis for new and empowering norms (Pun, 2007; Silvey 2003). As an example, Rachel Silvey's comparative research conducted in two peri-urban villages in Indonesia illustrates a relationship between the nature of women workers' social networks and the gender norms within their immediate environment. In one village where most migrant workers lived with local relatives, Silvey observed that the influence of neighbors and family was such that the normative emphasis within the community was on being polite and dignified, bringing honor to the families and upholding community harmony. But in another village where most migrant workers lived a considerable distance from their home villages and therefore formed strong supportive ties with each other, a local culture emerged in which female activism was validated in daily interactions. Silvey (2003) quotes one young woman who told her: 'We young women all live together and do everything together including form strikes. We are like each other's family here.' Significantly though, whilst engaging in activism the women invoked the gender norms of motherhood and of natural feminine peacefulness. For instance, they argued that they needed higher wages to save for the futures of their anticipated or actual children. And they assumed

that on account of their peaceful and polite female models of protest that they would not face retribution from the authorities.¹

Whilst women's networks may be useful in enabling them to lobby for better wages and working conditions there are nevertheless factors which limit their emancipatory potential. The first is that employers often invoke other bases of identity formation to fragment the solidarity of women workers. For instance, in the case of China, managers allocate women from different native places to different production lines and then give bonuses to the most productive line. They also set pay for piece-rate work at a level that depends on the number of units produced by all members of a group, thereby focusing the attention of the women on their inter-group dynamics and the productivity levels of different group members (Lee 1999).

Second, as Maxine Molyneux has argued, women's networks should not be essentialized as the 'social capital' band-aid that can meet the development needs of the poor (Molyneux, 2002). The networks do not redress the lack of resources and institutional discrimination that migrant women experience. For example, even though rural migrant women in China's cities can turn to their female friends for access to pills and information, this does not give them adequate access to sexual health and contraceptive protection and many endure long-term gynecological problems (Hoy, 2008). Moreover, owing to cost and fear of penalties for unapproved births, pregnant migrant women in China avoid urban prenatal health services: in Shanghai migrant women have nearly four times the rate of stillbirths as local women (Wang *et al*, 2004).

Hence, whilst women migrants in destination areas certainly do mobilize both feminine norms and social networks to obtain support and exercise agency, such creative use of norms and networks is insufficient for them to overcome the disadvantages that they face on account of their marginalization as both outsiders and females. Indeed during the early stages of an export-oriented development strategy, much of its viability depends on securing the cheap and compliant labour of migrant women by confining them both discursively and institutionally to the margins of the host society and labour market.

¹ Through this comparison, Silvey reveals that social networks underpin diversity in how gender norms are used in women's responses to their incorporation in export-oriented development strategies. Silvey is therefore able to show that it is too simplistic to say that global capitalism appropriates traditional gender norms such as those of Islamic patriarchy to enforce labour discipline, a point that others have made with regard to the gender norms of dutiful daughters more generally (Bennholdt-Thomsen 1981).

Migration and Women's Lives in Origin Communities

Socio-cultural norms in origin communities mediate how family members experience being left behind in the village. Many aspects of socio-cultural norms underpin unequal relationships between men and women. Further, many aspects of these socio-cultural norms are also shaped by migration, while arrangements for migration are in turn shaped by gender norms and gender roles.

Family systems are possibly the most crucial element in shaping the socio-cultural world in which rural women live. In societies characterized by patrilineal family systems and predominantly male patterns of outmigration, some evidence indicates that women may gain increased scope for exercising agency: they may co-ordinate agricultural production, oversee house repairs, manage remittance savings and expenditure and forge new feminized social ties (Dendekar 1986; Murphy 2004). For instance, in parts of Fujian province China which have high rates of male outmigration, the relative stability of the women has endowed them with the perceived trustworthiness necessary for establishing and running their own credit rotation societies (Tsai, 2000).

However other scholars express caution about unreservedly celebrating women's autonomy gains. Scholars writing about communities in Africa, Latin America, Europe and Asia note that more responsibility means more work and more potential blame if things go wrong (Chant and Radcliffe 1992; Davin, 1999; Nelson, 1992; Menjivar and Agadjanian 2007). Moreover, in patrilineal settings across many parts of the world, scholars report that any increased power accrued to women on account of their husband's migration is often counterbalanced by the supervision of in-laws. Additionally, as is observed in a comparative study of Albania and Guatemala, the economic and status inequalities between women and men widen on account of the fact that while women remain within a patriarchal environment that has few economic opportunities, men gain experience and contacts from their employment in a technologically and economically more advanced environment (Menjivar and Agadjanian, 2007).

Further, as several scholars have pointed out, often, on account of socio-cultural arrangements woman's entitlements to use resources are conferred through men. As one example, in China, farmland belongs to the patrilineal family – a female's right to land is obtained first on the basis of being a daughter in her father's village and then, after marriage, on the basis of being a wife in her husband's household and village. In the absence of a fallback position such as a stable urban job, the option of divorce is effectively closed to her unless she can find another husband to take her in (Murphy 2002). This means that a man retains ultimate authority over major household decisions even if he is absent. As another example, in the

indigenous irrigation systems of some villages in Kenya, cultural expressions of unequal gender relations prevent women from partaking in the collective labour necessary for maintaining and repairing the channels (articulated as a concern that women's fluids pollute the water). Within this system, a household's entitlement to the water depends on male labour contributions. Female-headed households must therefore find a male relative to help them, or else rely on rainfall or turn to crops such as yams which need less water than the staple millet crop and are also less nutritious (Adams and Watson, 1997).

Given the restrictions on women left behind in patrilineal villages, it would appear that women who live in communities characterized by family systems that permit greater female autonomy stand to gain most from male outmigration. For instance, in the matrilineal society of Kerala state in India, left-behind women are reported to directly manage family funds, bank accounts and land and to obtain additional support for their caring and economic endeavors from their own extended family members (Gulanti 1993). As a further example, in family systems in parts of sub-Saharan Africa the household is a flexible entity (Townsend, 1997) and often the conjugal unit is secondary to ties between parent and child. Husbands and wives maintain their own budgets and houses, and the two engage in negotiated reciprocity, for instance a husband might labour on his wife's land in exchange for cooked meals (Kandiyoti 1988; Kabeer, 1996). However, a possible downside of male migration in the context of family systems in which there is much flexibility and in which women have more autonomy is that the risks of abandonment by husbands may be greater, especially if he forms a new family in the destination area (Kabeer, 1996; Nelson, 1992). Indeed Menjivar and Agadjanian note that in the patriarchal family systems of Albania and Guatemala, even though outsiders might perceive the migrant husband's instructions and calls as control and monitoring, these actions are interpreted by the women themselves as reassuring signs of his continued engagement with the family (Menjivar and Agadjanian, 2007).

The unequal gender relations in origin communities are such that women migrants are generally more reluctant than men to return home. In the case of Dominican migrants in USA, research suggests that whilst men want to return to their status as family heads in the home community, women enjoy their status as co-wage earners and try to delay or permanently suspend return by spending money and savings to establish the couple in the destination area (Grasmuck and Pessar, 1991). Research on rural-urban migrants in Turkey similarly reports that when men encounter hardships in the city they are happy to return to the village but their wives often insist on staying in the city because they enjoy greater freedoms than in the countryside (Erman, 1997). Whilst it seems that women's prospects for

exercising agency are greatest when they do not live in the home communities, it is nevertheless the case that the possibility of migration (Sen's 'fallback position') and the income from migrant savings and remittances afford some left-behind and returned women greater leverage when exercising agency and claiming resources. For instance, in rural China returned migrant women are often able to use the threat of re-migrating to bargain with their husbands for money to hire farm labour or machinery or to transfer land to another household and use cash to purchase grain (Murphy, 2002; Murphy, 2004). Hence, even though gender norms shape women's experience of being left behind, migration may nevertheless offer scope for some individuals to challenge unfavorable normative arrangements.

Gender Roles and the Wellbeing of Children

Gender norms affect how parents provide care in the context of migration, and this has implications for key dimensions of development such as educational progression and outcomes, and good physical and emotional health among children. A limited body of ethnographic literature on left behind children finds that there are strong gendered divisions in parenting roles with, for instance, the fathers as disciplinarians and mothers as the carers. These studies suggest that disruptions to such normative roles cause family stress (Kandal and Kao 2001; Parreñas 2005). It is not surprising therefore that the literature indicates that who leaves the household affects children's wellbeing. It seems that migration may exert a relatively neutral or even positive impact when the mother remains (Chen, 2007; Asis, 2007). It is possible that this is because mothers are more attentive to their children and are more intuitively responsive to their needs. Indeed a recent longitudinal survey of parenting and child outcomes in England produced a finding which has bearing on this point. Maternal absence was found to exert a detrimental impact on the child's cognitive and emotional development during the early years of a child's life whereas paternal absence did not. However in the child's later years and early teens, paternal presence and engagement was found to contribute positively to the emotional development of sons in particular (Washbrook, 2007).

Studies conducted in the Philippines, Indonesia and Mexico about the migration of fathers have found that even though children feel distanced from him, they nevertheless see the migrant father as reliably fulfilling his breadwinner role and appreciate his economic contributions, while the extended family offers compensating support (Asis 2003; in press Jampaklay; Lloyd and Kane 1996; Parreñas 2005). Moreover, as it is the mother who has greater say in the day-to-day allocation of family income and remittances, the needs of the children are generally well catered for – this corresponds with findings from the wider household economics literature that when income or

economic benefits accrue to mothers, the children benefit more (Kabeer 1994). Daughters in particular may benefit from living in a female headed household which ethnographic data among the urban poor in Mexico suggests may practice more gender equity than male headed ones (Chant, 1991). In contrast, in the literatures of both development studies and migration studies, research suggests that children whose mothers are absent are the most vulnerable. This is perhaps because it is more difficult for the extended family to substitute for the roles performed by the mother (in press Jampaklay; Parreñas 2005).

As mentioned earlier, in some situations, left-behind fathers may try to claim their masculinity by shunning domestic work and engaging in violent behaviors. In extreme cases, there are also situations where long-term outmigration of mothers is associated with the abuse of daughters (Chen, 2005). Meanwhile, rather than the migrant mother being seen as the breadwinner, which would challenge the husband's masculinity she instead uses money as well as phone calls to try to fulfil her role as maternal carer (Parreñas 2005). The prospects for her to do this vary according to her working and socioeconomic conditions. Parreñas reports that migrant women from the Philippines who worked as housemaids and in other occupations had sufficient money and autonomy to phone their children two or three times a week. By contrast, research conducted in China suggests that owing to their meagre wages, long working hours and a disciplined labour environment, many migrants are only able to phone their children once or twice a month, with calls generally lasting fewer than five minutes (Ye et al, 2004). Qualitative interviews in both the Philippines and China indicate that such gifts and phone calls are seldom sufficient to remove the children's feelings of abandonment and insecurity (Parreñas 2005; Ye et al 2004). Nonetheless, given that we know children's perceptions of parental support affect their self-esteem (Gaylord-Harden et al 2007) and that parental aspirations for their children's education positively affect school results (Hannum and Park, 2006) it is likely that these calls and parents' questions about school contribute positively to their emotional wellbeing and engagement with education.

In cases where one or both parents have migrated, children may experience greater demands on their labour (Murphy 2004; Xiang 2006), but owing to the 'fixedness' of the gendered division of labour within households, it is common for daughters to be called upon by parents or guardians to help more with domestic chores. Indeed even in studies of children's educational engagement which do not consider parental migration as a variable, the evidence for rural China suggests that mothers generally expect more time in domestic help from daughters than from sons (Hannum and Park, 2006).

Many children are left behind with grandparents, a situation that is found across the developing world. This arrangement has been the subject of major concern in the Chinese media, with gender equality issues informing some of the criticisms. One charge levelled is that elderly carers are more likely to practice daughter discrimination in caring for left behind children because they are less likely to be enlightened in this regard than the children's migrant parents. Whilst this may hold some degree of truth, criticism of elderly carers overlooks their tremendous contribution to making the migration of rural labourers socially and economically possible, and the way in which their labour subsidises the labour costs of urban capitalists.

Both the gender of the carer and the gender of the left behind child have implications for children's wellbeing. Limited evidence suggests that in the case of a father's absence, the lack of role models negatively affects sons' academic performance, which is consistent with findings from the wider social science literature on the impact of paternal absence on older sons (Washbrook, 2007). Meanwhile daughters' appreciation of their mother's difficulties and sacrifice may cause them to study harder (Lloyd and Blane, 1996). The role of the child's gender as well as the carers' gender in mediating the impact of being left behind are poorly understood dimensions of migration, and scholars have called for robust quantitative and qualitative analysis to address these questions (Bryant 2005).

Migration, Gender Norms and Son Preference

A final area in which migration interacts with norms to change how agency is exercised and how resources are allocated is son preference. Whilst a vast body of literature testifies that migration is very much associated with changes in reproductive norms in origin areas, most studies address this in relation to family size rather than family sex composition (for a review see Hoy 1999; Portes 2006). Given that family systems in North India, Bangladesh and China underpin growing distortions in sex ratios at birth (Das Gupta et al, 2003) this is a grave omission.

It is only in recent years that scholars have started to investigate linkages between labour migration and son preference. In their study in Shenzhen, China, the demographers Li Shuzhou, Wu Haixia, Jin Xiaoyi and Marcus Feldman found that son preference remained more entrenched among rural migrants than amongst long-term urban residents (2006b). However, they also noted that some migrants had adopted the view that parents must rely on their own savings rather than on sons for their old age care, a perspective which may in the longer term erode son preference (2005; 2006a). Migration may also precipitate a change from virilocal to neo-local post-marriage residence patterns which could help to dilute son preference; this is because if

parents recognize that neither sons nor daughters are likely to be by their side in their old age then the sex of their child may matter less. Finally some qualitative evidence from rural China suggests that migration possibilities for young women and their resulting remittances may cause parents to value daughters more (Yan, 2003). Over the longer term such normative change with regard to son preference could help to bring about improvements in aggregate patterns for development indicators such as sex ratios at birth and mortality rates among female infants.

Conclusion

Through attention to the impacts of socio-cultural norms on migration, two processes become apparent. On the one hand the national development strategy of many low income countries depends on harnessing low-paid compliant labour so that the economy can participate competitively in changing global systems of production. Indeed national planners, municipal authorities, factory managers and destination area residents commonly invoke gender norms and stereotypical views about migrants in ways that sustain the marginalization of migrant women. On the other hand, migration precipitates changes in the normative environment in which migrants live and/or originate from. Migration can also increase migrant women's and left-behind women's access to resources. And such normative and resource changes increase many women's capacity to achieve functionings.

The effects of individuals' strategies to achieve functionings through migration and other economic and social activities are manifest at an aggregate level in conventional development indicators. Many of these indicators pertain to core Millennium Development Goals: for instance, the eradication of poverty through access to improved pay and working conditions, universal primary education for boys and girls, health care for boys and girls, and more balanced birth sex ratios. Improvements in such indicators in turn feed into changes in the wider normative and resource environment in which families evaluate the worth and roles of males and females, decide about migration, and deploy resources.

Some development planners, particular those who focus on labor markets or on the optimal deployment of resources, tend to see laborers as homogenous and substitutable – some surplus, some transferrable, some who migrate, some who stay behind. A more holistic approach to the relationship between migration and development would see both the migrants and those who stay behind as complex, interdependent and gendered human beings who struggle within socio-cultural as well as economic environments to exercise agency and achieve functionings. Such a revised approach would make gender

norms, gender relations and the gendering of social roles central to the analysis of the migration and development relationship.

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