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Human Security
and Radical Democracy: A Beginning Position on Marriage Migration

by Maureen C. Pagaduan

Our Activism and the Research Process

This discussion paper is a product of the Philippine Research Project Team's (PRPT) explorations into the realities, experiences, and discourses of marriage and migration. The journey took us into an investigation of the multiple reasons and explanations for the condition of marriage migrants, a range of portrayals of victimisation on the one hand, and empowerment—a strategy of autonomy and self-determination—on the other. Our numerous discussions were punctuated by forays into migration literature, wading into conceptual areas of identity and nationality, citizenship and diaspora, human security and democracy, marriage and feminism. These themes consistently described relations of power not only in the more overt realms of public life but also, though less frequently, into the more intimate spaces of private relationships and personal lives. It was impossible for us, all feminist researchers, not to identify our activism with the discourses - and view ourselves as feminists engaged in the intellectual phenomenon of theorising lived experiences. Having found relevance in the problematique of marriage and migration, identifying the development issues surrounding marriage migration, framing these into varying perspectives while interrogating the tensions that inevitably arose— brought not only dynamism in our interactions but also a generous amount of laughter, enjoyment and community.

In the research activities we conducted, we sought to expand our discussion group to include others from both academic and advocacy groups. We held two roundtable discussions (RTD)—first, to unearth the multi-faceted conditions of marriage migrants, their explanations and ambiguities, the understandings of lived experiences. Korean participants were able to join because they were on exposure tour to the Philippines and had made time for us.

The second roundtable discussion involved a continuing attempt to frame our understandings into a more organised and more substantive weaving of points of analysis that could deepen as well as broaden positions, action, and advocacy. We had hoped that marriage migrants themselves could participate. But of course, they have migrated mostly to Japan, others to South Korea, some to Hongkong and others in Malaysia and Singapore. It was fortunate that even so, one joined us in the first RTD and another we interviewed. The literal space that afforded warmth, vibrancy, and comfort to our coming together was so generously shared by Isis International with bottomless coffee and healthy cooking. But the impetus came from ARENA and our sponsors.

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Our final engagement takes the form of a production of a sourcebook. This includes an annotated bibliographic reference and discussion papers on selected themes which the team hopes will be useful to the continuing research on marriage and migration.

First Stop: Human Security and Marriage Migration

Human Security Definitions

As co-chairs of the UN Commission on Human Security, Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen define human security as "protecting the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfillment." Human security is a framework to

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protect vital freedoms as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and other HR instruments. This new paradigm of human security aims to "protect people from severe threats, both natural and societal, and empowering individuals and communities to develop the capabilities for making informed choices and acting on their behalf." It provides a

framework based not on a defensive assumption of threats, or "guard against such threats but rather on the creative and integrative effort to prevent these threats from emerging, or to decrease their negative impact when they do by fulfilling all aspects of people's vital freedoms."

Given this working definition, an important aspect must be mentioned to provide a comprehensive view of human security as espoused by the United Nations (UN): the notion of freedom from fear and freedom from want. While the former encompasses political and civil freedoms, the latter encompasses economic, social and cultural freedoms. There is recognition now that both freedoms must be promoted simultaneously. While these two freedoms were recognised in the early years of the founding of the UN, freedom from fear was prioritised over freedom from want. Thus, the shift from a national or state-centred security perspective to an all encompassing concept of human security is the prime call of the UN.

The Imperatives for a Feminist Perspective of Human Security

The framers of the concept of human security intended to secure the freedoms from fear and from want and the exercise of choices in a safe and free environment. These are certainly laudable progressive ideals. To invest in risk assessments, protection, and compensation strategies to ensure human security is, as well, a valuable undertaking.

However, inadequacies in some significant areas, as well as the total lack of interrogation of the gendered condition of human society make

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The privileging of economic and political rights subordinates the gendered concerns of women. It would seem that the term "human" in human security refers mostly to "man" and his security. Though there is concern for women's paid work, violence against women, their children, their health and education, much less is said outside of these mainstream framing of roles. The discrimination and violence embedded in the culture, women's objective and subjective realities, the vast realm of women's rights that remain unexplored and located in sites of power and contestation (such as subordinated social institutions, their intimate relations, their sexuality, their emotions and spirituality) are all left uninterrogated.

Human security as a notion that is state-focused privileges the public areas of security and ignores the more private realms—the innumerable sites of women's everyday insecurities. Human security as a response to the organisation of social welfare, rationalises in some way the limitations and constraints to citizenship of marriage migrants. Marriage migrants as national security threats, a depletion not only of the coffers for social services but also of the purity of a nation's bloodline, makes security of the state a priority, prior to ensuring other securities.

Human security in this sense does not address the view that women and women's rights are dispensable, treated as mere collateral damage in war times, encouraging the support for militarisms and fundamentalisms. Women are also collateral damages of experiments in development, such as the trade and labour arrangements of states. These tend to commoditise and commercialise any social sphere that can turn giant profits, even marital relationships.

Marriage migrants are in many ways unlike "people on the move" that the migration and human security discourse speaks of. For one, marriage for migration isolates women, moves them from one space into another, in most cases with more severe social and physical immobility and isolation. Marriage for migrants often turns them into unpaid domestic workers, restricted in their movements by husbands, families, and societies. Thus, they are in so many ways not the "people on the move" that the discourse identifies.

Empowering women to be agents of human security is left unaddressed by the current discourse because the securing of women's political participation and leadership is left uninterrogated.

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Human security privileges rationality by not challenging the binaries of emotion and rationality. Thus, the possibilities of agency and empowerment in the process of marriage migration are overcome by stories of victimisation and powerlessness. When every woman takes the risk to marry and migrate, knowing the dire fate that has befallen other women, rationality dictates that she avoids this situation. But this is not the case. She marries and migrates and soon enough suffers the fate that has been foretold. Her story amazes for its seeming lack of reason and her inadequacy to come to terms with her ill fortune. Often, women are perceived to be all emotions and sorely lacking in rationality. To seem to lack any sense of self-preservation and ability to employ personal faculties opens the migrant to vulnerabilities that bar her from participation in strategies for redress. The situation is so absurd that the only way to describe it is to believe that the woman herself must be benefiting. To add insult to injury, the male who contracts her gets off the hook, his irrationality unquestioned, his intentions unexamined, and his gains normalised.

Radical Democracy

The processes whereby human security are secured are ultimately democratic ones where human rights are protected. Thus, it is imperative that women's security be located or contextualised in these processes. The tradition of democracy that serves as the springboard for its definition is liberal democracy as distinguished from socialist democracy. A major principle of liberal democracy is equality; people-centredness is another. It is also more representational rather than a practice of direct democracy. Participatory democracy strengthens all areas of governance and people's political participation, makes people's voices heard and substantially considered in public decision-making. This implies the need to strengthen the practice of citizenship to make democracy vibrant.

The gendered condition of political participation, citizenship and democracy constrains women's participation. Patriarchy as embedded in social, cultural, economic, and political institutions, in everyday relationships, constructs inequalities that substantially make democracy ineffective for women's participation. These inequalities are even more pronounced for the poor and coloured, young and aged, or the differently abled.

Housewives as liberal democrats seem to be valid only as long as they are identified with their husbands, their status, and social power. Women are primarily constructed as wives, mothers, and daughters—not primarily as citizens. Women's contribution to community and public life before marriage and before migration are constrained by inequalities in their relationships, making them less

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informed, more domesticated and isolated. Often, they are seen as dependent, docile, and non-resistant to subordination and marginalisation. Because their experiences, their needs and desires are constantly subject to the interpretation and de-prioritisation of men and families, the women become excluded, submissive and vulnerable. They are rendered non-citizens.

Radical democracy takes this condition and challenges the positions prevailing around its understanding. "Radical democratic theory aims to generate an anti-essentialist politics that continually attempts to redefine itself in order to resist the exclusion of individuals and groups in the formation of social order" (Rasmussen and Brown 2002). Drawing from the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, both Rasmussen and Brown frame their discourse on citizenship based on a radical democratic experience. Their position leads to a redefinition of the term "political" so as to democratise the notion of "citizenship." "To expand the field of the political is to expose the hidden source of power within the private sphere"—levels where human beings shape their identity and their relations

with the world – sexuality and the construction of the private, forms of entertainment and aesthetic pleasure, etc. Consequently, democracy and its practice become very unfixed, contested and transformative. Citizenship, rather than becoming an identity or a signifying force, becomes an activity, referring to continuous political struggles to be included and named.

Feminist work has constantly sought to unfix the fixed, to challenge the givens of everyday existence. The boundaries of meanings, whether embedded in social structures and macro levels of analysis, in texts and grand narratives, or in privileged strategies are ever pushed from their past rootedness, made to stand the challenge of gender inequalities. Thus, love and marriage, intimacy and desire are taken from their roots to become powerful sites of choice and autonomy, freeing them from past dependence on the male sex, the privileged male social structures and "othering" processes, the makings of the victim identity.

The Democratising of Personal Life

The home and the family as sites of democratic practice, the promotion and development of democratic culture have to be significantly considered for the substantive realisation (not just legal ones), of women's rights and other human rights. Within these spaces are personal relationships, intimate and sexual.

The importance of rights as means for the achievement of intimacy can easily be seen from the struggle of women to achieve equal status in marriage. The exercise of the right of women to migrate through marriage, a right to seek the means to escape poverty, to seek

wealth just like anyone else, without moral stigma, and the more acceptable right to divorce (which is, in most Catholic countries, still a negative sanction) actually has a major equilibrating effect. "Their balancing consequences do more than empower to escape from an oppressive relationship, important though this is. They limit the capability of the husband to impose his dominion and thereby contribute to the translation of coercive power into egalitarian communication" (Giddens).

"No rights without obligation—this elementary precept of political democracy applies also to the realm of the pure relationship. Rights help dissolve arbitrary power only in so far as they carry responsibilities towards the other which draw privileges into an equilibrium with obligations. In relationships as well as elsewhere, obligations have to be treated as revisable in the light of negotiations carried on within them" (Giddens).

The End, for Now

This paper may seem to be all pure text, as most other papers which informed it. The lived experiences have, it seems, all but disappeared, drowning in ideas and their relationships. In the making of this paper as well as in our discussions, I have often wondered about the power

that lies in people who write papers, especially those written and disseminated in English. I remember our own half an hour talk on Diaspora, a word with Jewish roots defining a Filipina, an Asian or Muslim experience of community that I resisted. This, to me, is textual power. When words stick to the description of a condition, signifying identity and meaning, there is something that is not just simply powerful about it but also something I can only identify as spiritual. Perhaps, this is my source of energy, our team's source of light, a lightness that I hope you engaged with in the process of my presentation. ■

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