

Philippines

"I just sacrificed myself for the sake of my children"

In the early 1980s, Lorna left the Philippines for Italy to leave her husband who was having an extramarital affair. Since her siblings and cousins were already working in Italy, it was an opportunity for her to get away and to earn money for her five children. Divorce is illegal in the Philippines and the social stigma of separation provoked Lorna to migrate. She wanted to leave her situation, which she thought would be resolved through her absence. After five years of working in Italy as a babysitter, she returned to find out that her husband fathered five children while she was gone. She then returned to Italy to continue to work. After ten years of working abroad, her children contacted her to ask her to come home because their father was sick and needed someone to take care of him. Despite her personal issues with her husband, she decided to give in to her children's request. "Of course I took care of him, I was his wife, I just sacrificed myself for the sake of my children, because they didn't want me to separate from him. They wanted it, so I just sacrificed myself. They didn't want me to leave." She took care of her husband for one year and a half before he passed away from diabetes complications.

Today, Lorna is 55 years old. She never returned to Italy. Instead, her children went abroad to continue a cycle of migration that many families from their town of Lemery experience. Three out of her five children moved to Rome after she returned. Her first daughter went in 1990 and currently works as a babysitter, followed by her son in 1990 who is a chef at a popular Italian restaurant and more recently, her youngest daughter who left in 2006 and works in a household. Lorna took care of her son's four children in the Philippines for seven years before they were reunited in Italy. Her oldest and youngest sons who remained in the Philippines worked as fishermen before recently going to work in a factory in Korea.

Lorna has a couple of business ventures that she maintains. Initially her family had a fishing business which employed about 20 fishermen but when her husband died she no longer wanted to manage it. Lorna's main business is her sari sari (small goods) store. She also sells rice, which brings her more customers because she is endorsed by local leaders. Lorna also rents out a videoke (karaoke with a monitor) machine. Aside from these small enterprises, Lorna is not interested in investing in other opportunities. As the remittance manager for her family, Lorna is in charge of purchasing property for her children abroad and supervising the homes they have built. "The remittances they last sent over the past year and a half were used for my husband's medicine and hospitalization but after that I used the money for land. I looked at the land and my children were not really involved, they just told me to tell them how much to send because I'm their manager and I make the decisions. They just send me the money and they have no idea what the houses they are having built look like." Her children in Italy have no other investments other than property.

Migration and remittances is a permanent fixture in the lives of people in Lemery. As a former migrant and a mother of migrants, Lorna understands the sacrifices and benefits of having a transnational family. While she migrated to get away from her domestic situation in the Philippines, she recognized the benefits of working abroad and thus persevered to send her children abroad as well. So far, her family's experience has been quite fortunate as it was not difficult for them to go to Italy; today they are able to purchase land and make small investments. The social networks and connections they had in Italy and among their community in Lemery played a significant role in facilitating migration and in influencing their personal contributions to their family and to Lemery.



The Philippines is one of the largest labour export countries in the world and 10 million Filipinos are working abroad. Italy has the second largest Filipino migrant population after the UK with 128,000 permanent residents, 84,000 temporary workers and an estimated population of 20,000 irregular workers. The feminization of migration from the Philippines is evident and of the 260,000 Filipinos in Rome, 16 000 are women. The female Filipino migrants are a response to the demand for domestic helpers and caregivers, due to the integration of Italian women into local labour market. 77 percent of remittance senders from Italy are women, 90 percent of them worked as domestic helpers and caregivers.
