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Female Migrant Labor:  
A Case Study of Filipino and Thai  
Domestic Workers in Rome, Italy

Angkarb P. Korsieporn

1. Introduction

Italy is one of the few countries in Europe that has regularly furnished the European and non-European countries alike with a labor force. In fact, at a rate of million individuals emigrating to the OECD countries in 1974, Italy topped all other countries in terms of emigration. Yet Italy is a country to which there has been large migrant flow from the North African countries and to a lesser extent, from Southeast Asia. Of all the SEA countries, Philippines and Thailand provide the majority of unskilled labor for Italy. Between 1975 and 1977, Italy was the second most popular destination for Filipino migrants to Europe, the first being Britain. Most of these migrants were unskilled workers engaged in jobs such as household help.

Since the early 1970s there have been a large number of studies on emigration from Southeast Asia. They have tended mainly to focus on either male migrants as contract workers to the Middle East, e.g. Arnold and Shah (1984), Stahl (1986), Visetbhakdi (1986) and Abella (1984), or the migration of highly skilled Asian manpower

to the north American continent, for example, Joyce and Hunt (1982). International
migration of unskilled female labor has been accorded relatively little interest, and then
only since the late 1970s. Despite this new trend, no new studies have been carried out
on unskilled female migrants from Southeast Asia to Southern Europe.

This paper is an exploratory study of domestic workers in Rome, Italy, who
had migrated from the Philippines or Thailand. The information comes from in-depth
interviews with 18 domestic workers, 9 from each country, in January 1988. They were
chosen on purpose to facilitate a study of changes wrought over a period of time:
one-third have been working in Rome for ten years or more; one-third for 5 to 9 years,
and one-third for less than 5 years. These interviews were supplemented by personal
interviews with two government officials from their respective embassies.

The paper has organized into three major sections. Following the introduction
is a brief review of the literature on female migration. The following section begins
with a brief profile on the migration situation in Italy. It is followed by a report of my
research, some theoretical considerations, and finally, by certain policy recommendations.

2. Literature Review

In reviewing the current state of theory regarding international labor migration,
Portes identifies four main aspects that are dealt with in the relevant literature: the
causes and direction of migration, the functions of the migrants in the countries receiving
them and the manner in which they adapt to the new society. Immigrant flows have
been explained in terms of push-pull theories, the labor-recruitment hypothesis and
arguments derived from perspective of a world-system. These migratory movements
have variously been portrayed as a one-way escape from poverty, as a temporary
economic opportunity that will end with the return of the migrant, and as multiple,
cyclical geographical displacements. Migrant labor, in turn, is seen by neo-classical
theorists as the result of significant wage disparities between regions and hence as a
way to restore the equilibrium. Neo-Marxist structuralist theorists see migrant labor
in terms of internal colonialism, split labor markets and a dual economy, respectively.
Two major theories of immigrant adaptation are classic assimilation theory, and more
recent perspectives which emphasize the resilience of ethnic identities over a period
of time. Portes points out that this diverse body of theories can be classified into two
groups. Underlying the first group is the assumption that immigration is a phenomenon

4 J. T. Fawcett, B.V. Carino and F. Arnold, Asia-Pacific Immigration to the United States : A Conference
that basically takes place within a social order favoring consensus and the maintenance of equilibrium; underlying the second is the assumption that it is a process determined by and contributing to conflicts of interest between the social classes.

Literature on female labor migration, both internal and international, reflect one or the other opposing theoretical assumptions briefly described above, the only difference being that the neo-marxist theories are combined with a feminist perspective. Thus, we have such theorists as Morokvasic (1980), Philzacklea (1982) and Parmar (1982), who consider unskilled female migrant workers as a manifestation of "the articulation between the process of gender discrimination, racial discrimination against migrant workers, and the class exploitation of working class".\(^5\) On the other hand, we have such theorists as Trager (1984) who sees female migration from rural to urban areas of the Philippines as strategies on the part of rural families for both survival and mobility. In between, we have theorists applying the two theoretical perspectives to individual cases, such as Connell, who asks if female migration represents status attainment or subjugation.\(^6\)

There have been a few studies done on internal migration of domestic workers. Iberra (1979) studied rural-urban female migrants employed as "domestic helpers" in Metro Manila, the Philippines, in terms of recruitment, employer-helper household relationship, working and living conditions and future aspirations.\(^7\) She also discussed the implications of rural-urban migration on the status of women. Jelin (1977) studied the migration of Latin American women from rural to urban areas and the continuation of traditional female roles as "domestic servants" and housewives, the only difference between them being that the former role is carried out in the workplace while the latter is carried out in the home without financial reward. She postulated that households develop a "strategy of survival" including differential participation in the labor market and the division of labor within the household.\(^8\) Kaseyayothin (1983) studied occupational mobility and job satisfaction among female laborers who migrated from rural areas of Thailand to Bangkok.\(^9\) Focusing on domestic servants, construction

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workers, factory workers and food vendors, she used purposive sampling to obtain 100 respondents for each category. The findings relevant to this study are: (1) the majority of domestic servants acquired the job through the assistance of relatives and/or friends who themselves were domestic servants; (2) they were young and single, and had been working in Bangkok for less than 3 years; (3) they were not socially isolated but usually made friends with neighbours who were in the same occupation as themselves. Iberra’s study, using “interactive” sampling to obtain 126 respondents, found that roughly half of them migrated directly from Barrio to Manila; around one-third migrated from town to Manila while the remaining 19% migrated from other cities. This does not support the theory that migration proceeds in steps, from the less to the more urban area. Other relevant findings are: (1) most domestic helpers were recruited into the province either by relatives or friends who were maids, or by the employers themselves; (2) the majority of these domestic helpers lacked skills or did not have any work experience outside their homes; (3) the relationship with their employers was more paternalistic than contractual, resulting in low job security; (4) an average domestic helper received a gross monthly salary of 208 pesos excluding non-monetary benefits like free food and lodging; (5) almost 40% of the respondents intended to return to their home province finally and “do business”.

Beside the three studies on rural-urban female migrants who became domestic workers in cities, there is one article by Palliyaguruge (1986) that referred indirectly to the international migration of Sri Lankan women to work as house maids in the Middle East. She pointed out that, due to the state’s attempts to deal with its financial commitments, fewer jobs were generated and low-income families were forced to seek alternative means of income, which often meant that women had to enter the labor force in the most marginalized, low-skilled, low-paid and monotonous jobs, like sewing, doing piece-work in the Free Trade Zone or working as domestic laborers in the Middle East. Having worked as a house maid in the Middle East herself, Palliyaguruge maintains that Sri Lankan house maids are completely at the mercy of their employers. She describes the conditions thus:

Women have no access to leisure or recreation. Uprooted from their cultural environment and fend for themselves in an unknown world under very trying working conditions, they experience psychological traumas. Medical facilities are almost absent. The women can be compelled to do any kind of work, and many of the women are severely abused physically and sexually.  

3. The Migration Profile of Italy

Birindelli and Gesano, of the Department of Demographic Sciences, University of Rome, wrote in 1985 that Italy has been transformed from a manpower-exporting country to a worker-importing country. 11

The contention that Italy has been a manpower-exporting country is supported by the fact that emigration of Italian nationals during the past decade has averaged a little over 100,000 people per year. This outward flow, however, has been offset by a flow of returness and since around the mid 1970s, the net migratory balance has been consistently positive, albeit by a narrow margin. The emigration flow has recently been counter-balanced by the immigration of workers from developing countries, which Birindelli and Gesano claim to be "a completely new phenomenon." Between 1971 and 1981, the proportion of legal immigrants from Africa increased from 3.5 percent to 10.1 percent, while immigration from Asia increased from 7.6 percent to 13.3 percent within the same ten-year period. 12

While emigrants from the EEC countries or from North America are professionals, emigrants from developing countries are unskilled workers, employed mainly as "domestic help." The clandestine nature of this unskilled manpower hinders reliable estimation of their number. It was estimated that in 1977, unskilled migrant workers from developing countries had reached about 300,000 to 400,000. 13 They are found in the metropolitan areas of the central-north regions and in a few agricultural and coastal areas of the south.

4. Italian emigration policy and the Southeast Asian policy as regards the export of manpower

Although Birindelli and Gesano maintain that Italy's migration policy has been "one of accepting foreign emigrants, at least on the fringes of Italian society", 14 the Italian government has in fact started to limit the entry of non-EEC immigrant workers and crack down on illegal entry into Italy.

In December 1986, the Italian government passed a law specifying regulations dealing with the employment and treatment of non-EEC immigrant workers and illegal

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12 Ibid., p. 150.
13 Ibid., p. 151.
14 Ibid., p. 154.
entry into Italy. It requires that the hiring of non-EEC workers for "household services" be done through request by name and only after having verified the unavailability of either Italian or EEC workers. Moreover, those who recruit illegal or clandestine migrant workers shall be punishable by imprisonment of up to five years and shall pay a fine of 2 to 10 million lire (US $1,600-8,000) for each recruited worker, and those who employ these workers shall pay a fine of up to 2 million lire (US $1,600) and shall be liable to up to one year's imprisonment. The Italian government also tries to legalize the irregular status of clandestine migrant workers by requiring the employers of such workers to inform the provincial labor offices which will legalize their status, without penalty, within three months of this law becoming effective (27 January 1987). Clandestine workers found in Italy after the end of the three-month period shall immediately be deported.

While Italy started to restrict the entry of immigrant workers, the Philippines and Thailand have been in favor of the export of labor so as to increase foreign exchange earnings. Their overseas employment policy, however, is seriously biased in favor of male migrants and focuses upon the Middle East. Female emigration from the Philippines is neither promoted nor restricted. Thailand, however, restricts the emigration of female Thai nationals to work in the Middle East on the grounds of protecting them against sexual and physical abuses, and requires that women applicants for passport must be interviewed by the Department of Social Welfare to ascertain that they have no intention whatsoever of engaging in prostitution!

5. Filipino and Thai domestic workers in Rome

The frequent scene of Filipino women milling around in front of a few of the Roman Catholic churches in Rome has intrigued me ever since I took up residence there in 1985. So has the same weekly scene which takes place on Sundays in front of the city's main bus and train terminals, and the EUR Park in the Northern section of Rome, the latter place also involving a number of Thai women. After a few initial inquiries, I was told that they are almost exclusively domestic workers, many of whom are illegal immigrants. I have wondered ever since why and how they became domestic workers in Rome, what their living and social conditions are like and how much future there is in this kind of female migration.

In late November 1987, I developed an individual research project with the aim of satisfying my own curiosity in a more or less systematic fashion. As the research

task needed to be limited enough for me to handle by myself, yet intensive enough to yeild sufficient information, I decided to interview only a small number of domestic workers in-depth. As I am also interested in the changes that take place over a period of time, domestic workers were also classified according to their length of stay in Italy.

Of the total sample of 18 domestic workers, one half were Filipinos and the other half Thais. Within each subsample, 3 had been residing in Italy for ten years or more, 3 had been residing there for 5 to 9 years, and 3 for less than 5 years. "Interactive sampling" was used, whereby a few individuals with an extensive knowledge of their community were identified and were in turn asked to identify friends of theirs who met the sampling requirements. Interviews took place during the last three weekends in January 1988, at the Santa Maria Maggiore church adjacent to the Piazza San Silvestro where most Filipinas gather, and at the EUR Park where Thai domestic workers usually meet. Two government officials, each from the Philippines Embassy and the Royal Thai Embassy respectively were also interviewed to obtain information on estimates of their respective nationals and to get their viewpoints on labor placement and the protection given to their nationals.

The following subsections describe the socio-economic characteristics of the migrants, their history in terms of migration, work record in Italy, the use to which income was put, their recreational activities and work-related problems.

**5.1 Socio-economic characteristics**

The Filipino respondents, regardless of length of stay, came from larger families, were predominantly single, younger and better educated than their Thai counterpart. They were more likely to have family members working outside the Philippines, and came from more varied occupational backgrounds.

The Filipinas came from families with 6 to 7 children, and had a mean age of 34 with a median age of 31. Over half had had a college education and had worked in so-called "pink" collar jobs, while one-third had at least one of their family members in Rome. The Thai respondents, in comparison, came from farming families with around 5 children and had a mean age of 42, the median being 46, respectively. Over half had had only a primary-level education, were married, and had been domestic workers in Thailand, mostly in the households of foreigners, before they had migrated to Italy.

**5.2 Migration history**

Of the 9 Filipinas interviewed, 4 had been born in Southern Tagalog (Batangas, Mindoro, Quezon), 2 were from Manila, while the remaining 3 were from the Cagayan valley and Iloilo in Western Visayan region. Five out of the Seven respondents who were born outside Manila came straight from their provinces of birth to Rome without
any work experience in Manila in between. All except two said they had come to work in Rome because of the better salary; the two respondents said they were looking for adventure. All except two had either a relative or a friend already working in Rome as a domestic servant, who had helped them find the same kind of job. The two who had neither friends nor relatives in Rome had found their jobs through job placement agencies; one was charged a fee of 5,000 pesos (in 1976), while the other paid a fee of 6,000 pesos (in 1979).

Seven out of the 9 Thai respondents were born in various provinces in the Central Plains, one was born in Bangkok and the other respondent came from a province in the Northeast. Seven out of the eight who came from upcountry had migrated to Bangkok, either to work or for family reasons, before they emigrated to Rome. While there were no noticeable differences in emigration patterns among the Filipino respondents over a period of time, the Thai respondents who had stayed in Italy for over five years displayed a pattern of emigration quite different from that of more recent migrants. That is, they were domestic workers before they emigrated and were offered the same kind of job in Italy by Al'Italia Airline personnel who were stationed in Bangkok until 1980. The job offer was made either directly or through the respondents' friends who also were domestic workers, working in foreigners' households. The more recent migrants found a job in Rome either through friends living there or through advertisements. They were also younger and better educated (i.e. they had received a secondary education). In the cases of the Filipinos, there was no correlation between age, education and length of stay in Italy.

5.3 Their work and their life in Rome

The Filipinas changed their job more often than the Thai respondents (3.8 times, compared to 2 for their Thai counterparts). Half of these Filipinas did so, so as to find a better-paid job, while the other half did so because of bad working conditions, e.g. long working hours (over 8 hours per day). Their median monthly salary was Lire 650,000 (US $578) in January 1988, but the modal salary was Lire 600,000 (US $533.) The Thai respondents received a median salary of Lire 690,000 (US $613), but the modal salary of Lire 800,000 (US $711). The higher wage on the part of the Thai workers can be explained by the fact that Italian employers prefer Thai domestic workers; they are more docile and take a more compromising attitude toward being exploited. The wage differential is also accountable for the much greater supply of Filipina labor compared to that of Thai females with the result that competition for jobs is stiffer and the wages lower.
All of the respondents, both the Filipinas and the Thais had to work more than the 8 hours per day stipulated by the labor laws. The Filipinas sounded more resentful about being overworked than the Thais, who tended to take a more compromising attitude, which might explain the fact that the latter changed employers less frequently. The greater resentment on the part of the Filipinas might be due to their higher level of education, which makes them more aware of their rights as domestic workers.

The level of job satisfaction seemed to be high, and can be accounted for by the fact that they compared their present work with their previous work experiences in their home country, instead of comparing it with ideal working conditions in Italy as specified by the Italian labor law. They all mentioned that they were paid many times more than what they would get back in their home countries for doing the same kind of job. Moreover, they were entitled to 1 1/2 days off every week (Thursday afternoons and Sundays), as well as to an extra 13th month’s salary at the end of the year, one-month’s annual holiday and a free return ticket to their home country every two years.

Both the Filipino and the Thai domestic workers interviewed did not feel very comfortable talking about their status in Italy vis-à-vis work indicating that clandestine workers might be the rule rather than the exception, and that they might not, in fact, be entitled to the various benefits that legal migrant workers are entitled to. Understandably, therefore, they were not very responsive to the question regarding use of income, but from indirect questioning, it seemed that most Filipinas regularly sent part of their income back to their families in their country of origin, while the Thais sent it to their spouse or saved it in Italy. The Filipino respondents stated more frequently that they also sent extra money back home to buy land or to build or renovate their houses. The Thai respondents were more likely to say that they saved their salaries so that they could build a house or buy some land when they returned to Thailand.

The activities outside working hours did not differ by the length of stay in Italy although there was a marked difference between the Filipina and the Thai respondents. Being Catholic, the Filipinas went to church on Sundays and engaged in church activities; otherwise, they would visit relatives and friends. The Thais would meet the first Sunday of the month at the EUR Park, where they engaged in both social activities, e.g. talking, card playing, and economic transactions e.g. buying and selling Thai food, clothes, jewelry, etc. This monthly meeting of Thai domestic workers was more organized and occurred on a more regular basis than the meetings of the Filipinas at the same place probably because for the Thais it was the only way to satisfy their cultural and social needs, in contrast with the church-going Filipinas.
Being Catholic in a predominantly Catholic society, and being better educated, the Filipinas picked up the Italian language more quickly and adjusted to Italian society better than the Thai domestic workers. However, they are still culturally distinct and in-group activities are more meaningful to them than those that are Italian-oriented.

5.4 Problems and Prospects

The majority of the Filipino respondents said that their two major problems concerned the remittance of money back to the Philippines and having to work longer hours than stipulated in their original contract. They were unable to come up with a solution to the first problem; and as regarding the problem of working hours and bad working conditions, all that they--indeed all that anybody--could do was to find a new job, which they said was not difficult at all. Most of the Thai respondents said they were very happy with their job and had no problem. When questioned as to whether having to work more than the stipulated eight hours was a problem, their response was that it was a natural tendency for those living and working on the same premises, and that it was compensated for by a greater degree of flexibility regarding the length of their annual holiday. Only one Thai respondent reported that her employer had asked her to work on Sundays and had not given her extra pay, although she did mention that, with the help of her friends, she was looking for a new job.

Of all the 18 respondents, only one Thai woman had sought help from the embassy and only one Thai worker had brought her case to court when her employer failed to give her her severance pay. Contact with their respective embassies was limited to passport renewal, and in the case of the Filipino respondents, none of them knew that there was a labor attaché at their embassy. Their general feeling was that their respective embassies were only able to play a relatively minor role in labor disputes, and that the Italian labor laws gave foreign laborers full protection. Furthermore, they felt that the three workers' unions (CGIL, UIL, APICOLF) could be depended upon to provide them with a lawyer if they had to take their case to court.

5.5 The officials' view

The labor attaché at the Philippines embassy, who took up the post in February 1987, did not know how many Filipinas were working in Rome as domestic workers. His rough estimate, based on Italian newspaper clippings, that in July 1987 there were approximately 75,000 working throughout Italy and somewhere around 20,000-25,000 in Rome itself. He referred me to Ms. Cora Sim, the representative of the Republic of the Philippines to the Holy See.

Having been in her present position for 10 years and having maintained a continuous interest in the problems of Filipino migrant labor, she is considered an expert
in this subject. She also helped set up the association of Filipino labor migrants in May 1986, called LIFE (Italo-Filippina Fillipini Emigrati), which gives legal advice and assistance in filing necessary documents, labor problems and other problems. Based on her contacts with informal associations of Filipino migrants in various major cities throughout Italy, she estimated there were approximately 10,000-12,000 migrants in Rome and 30,000-35,000 in all of Italy. As domestic workers represent roughly 80-90 percent of all migrants, their number should be around 9,000.

Asked to outline migration trends during the last 10 years, she said in 1977 there were fewer than 500 Filipino migrants; these came from the Philippines to Italy mainly to satisfy their spirit of adventure. Since the turn of the decade, however, the economic situation has become the major motivation behind the increase in emigration. Due to the difficult economic situation at home and relatively ineffective law enforcement in Italy, she expected a larger flow of emigrants in the future, a high proportion of whom would enter Italy as tourists, find a job and become illegal workers. Prospective employers prefer non-Italian, illegal workers for two reasons: they are more trustworthy and can be paid less than Italian domestic workers.

One Thai official, who has been handling the hiring of local staff in Italy for nine years, has over the years built a close rapport with the Thai domestic workers in Rome; he gave me some interesting information on the social security system of Italy and his views on the future migration of labor from Thailand.

The social security system of Italy protects foreign labor at the expense of employers. The Ministry of Labor, together with the National Institute of Social Security, determines the amount of money that employers have to put into the social security fund every three months. Once a prospective employer finds a foreign domestic worker, the legal procedure of hiring involves three steps. First, the prospective employer must provide a return ticket for the prospective employee, so that she can be sent home and re-enter Italy upon the renewal of her contract. Second, he must pay the first installment into the social security fund, the amount of which equals 45% of the agreed-upon salary, and will have to continue to make payments every three months. Lastly, he has to go to the Ministry of Labor to draw up a contract, which has to be renewed every two years. Once the employee has worked in Italy for 15 years, she is entitled to the major part of the social security fund in the form of a pension, which can be received even after repatriation.

Regarding future trends in the migration of labor from Thailand, the Thai official was of the opinion that the flow of migrants will be greatly reduced because 'Al' Italia' does not maintain a local office in Bangkok any more. Moreover, since Thai migrants, are not so apt at picking up foreign languages, they prefer to migrate to English-speaking countries.
Asked to comment on the use of income, he said that most of the domestic workers' income is sent home, and put in a savings account. Some is given to their families at home and some is used to buy land and other assets.

6. Some theoretical considerations

How do we explain the phenomenon of foreign domestic workers in Rome? It is my contention that no single theory can explain the phenomenon as a whole, but that some theories can help to explain the phenomenon to a greater extent than others. Edna Bonacich's theory of the split labor market, I believe, explains the presence of female migrants employed as domestic workers in Italy and their relationship with their employers and towards Italian society at large very well.16

Bonacich's theory of the split labor market has been used primarily to explain ethnic antagonism. A summary of her theory in the form of an abstract is reproduced here:

An important source of antagonism between ethnic groups is hypothesized to be a split labor market, i.e. one in which there is a large differential in price of labor for the same occupation. The price of labor is not a response to the race or ethnicity of those entering the labor market. A price differential results from differences in resources and motives which are often correlates of ethnicity. A split labor market produces a three-way conflict between business and the two labor groups, with business seeking to displace higher paid by cheap labor. Ethnic antagonism can take two forms: exclusion movements and 'caste' systems. Both are seen as victories for higher paid labor since they prevent undercutting.17

Applying Bonacich's theory with some modifications and additions, we get a rather coherent set of explanations, summarized in the following diagram.

17 Ibid., p. 547.
The most frequent answer to the question regarding the reasons for migration was the fact that salaries were higher in Italy. This wage difference must have been great enough to induce "pink"-collar Filipino workers to migrate to Italy to become domestic workers. Before the Italian law no. 943 of December 1987, there must have been an influx of foreign domestic workers who became illegal migrants and remained so because the Italian employers saw the illegal status of these migrants as beneficial to their interests. The Italian government, therefore, alarmed by the influx and the problems related to illegal aliens (and probably due to pressure from the Italian labor lobby) passed the law no. 943. This law, while trying to regularize the influx of illegal aliens, creates an effective barrier against the easy entry of foreign domestic workers by stipulating that hiring must be done by special request and by supplying name of the prospective employee and only after having verified the unavailability of Italian or EEC workers.\(^\text{18}\)

The wage gap between home and host country is substantial (about 15 times, in the case of the wages received by Thai and Italian domestic workers), while entry into Italy as tourists is relatively easy; thus the phenomena of illegal domestic workers and of the split labor market.

\(^\text{18}\) Cf. p. 59
There is probably no worse combination than that of being an unskilled female and an illegal alien in such a macho and exclusive society as Italy. Even though the domestic workers I interviewed expressed a high level of job satisfaction and did not relate their overly long hours of work in terms of "class", it cannot be denied that, objectively speaking, they were being exploited by their employers. The exploitation, as I see it, manifested itself in three ways. Besides receiving a lower wage than the minimum required by law (Lire 730,000 in 1987), they were required to live in the employers' households and their passports were kept by their employers. The foreign domestic workers were thus underpaid, subjected to overwork and were kept under effective control by the retention of their travel documents. I would argue that this amounts not only to class exploitation, but also to gender exploitation, because for one thing domestic work has been left exclusively to the unskilled females, and for another the exploitation also occurred partly because of the very fact that the unskilled migrants were female.

According to Bonacich, ethnic antagonism can be manifested in 2 forms: exclusion movement and 'caste' system. I have identified the former in the guise of law no. 943, although my hypothesis that it was passed because of lobbying by Italian domestic workers still has to be verified. I also hypothesize, along the line of Bonacich's theory, that (1) Filipinas who become domestic workers but who used to have "pink-collar" jobs in the Philippines cannot get the same kind of job in Italy, probably because the displacement of local pink-collar workers by the Filipinas would be more threatening to the former and hence some kind of measures might be introduced to protect the market from being split by barring the qualified Filipinas from the job market; (2) the existence of ethnic communities, such as the Filipino and the Thai communities in Rome, might not be due solely to the cultural needs of the migrant workers, but might be due also to ethnic segregation caused by mutual ethnic antagonism. The testing of these hypotheses is still to be carried out.

7. Some policy implications

Both the Philippines and Thailand, in responding to the Middle East market for contract labor in the 1970s, established their overseas employment administration to participate as well as supervise and regulate private-sector participation in the recruitment of contract workers. By nature of the Middle East labor demand, the governments of the home countries have been concerned with male labor supply, recruitment and protection of male migrant labor, and have felt grateful for the extra foreign exchange earnings in the form of remittances from this male labor. Given the substantial number of female migrant labor from Southeast Asia in Italy and perhaps
in other European countries, it is time the Southeast Asian governments gave long-overdue attention to female labor migration. This should not take the form of gender discrimination such as the prevention of their female nationals from entering the overseas job market under the pretext of protection like Thailand had done, but in the way that they could enjoy the extra wage resulting from the wage differential, with minimal or no exploitation by prospective foreign employers. Though this paper is not the place to suggest a strategy to fulfill the above objective, it is worth noting that the existence of extensive, informal social networkings among female migrants and prospective female migrants who are their relatives or friends could be used for this purpose. The labor attaché could also be given an important role to play such that the objective is met, and so could such voluntary association as LIFE.

As being an illegal alien contributes to higher chance of being exploited, regularization should always be attempted. But as wage differential will also exist between developed and developing countries, and as international migration is permitted between these two types of country, the split labor market will always be with us. The critical question for the labor-importing countries, regardless of whether the import is by choice or is forced upon them by illegal entry, is how to regulate the split labor market, such that all the three participants, i.e. foreign labor, native labor and native employers, all benefit from it more or less equally.

The above discussions assume that the Southeast Asian governments have a policy of manpower export. One fundamental policy question, however, is whether a developing country should pursue a policy of manpower export and thereby linking its economy more firmly with the international economic system. If it should, then the question is how to enter new labor markets and maintain or increase its share of the markets, while simultaneously protecting its labor from exploitations. If it should not, then the question is whether and how it is possible to narrow the wage gap between developing and developed countries, such that international labor migration declines.