

Globalization, International Migration and Transnational Communication

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There is growing attention to transnational migration with the increasing involvement of both men and women in overseas migration. It is not a new phenomenon; in the past, migrants have maintained contacts with their homelands. What is new about transnational migration is the ease of transportation and communication, remittance flows, increasing dependence on remittances by sending countries, and the interference of governments in managing migration, the results of globalization. Globalization is a powerful driving force that moves capital, goods, technologies, and people across borders. With its tremendously increased speed of the circulation of people, goods, and technologies globalization has not only greatly facilitated international migration but has also enabled migrants to maintain close contacts with their places of origin. Consequently, the traditional notion of geographic and the social space is changing. The new transnational social spaces illustrate the contemporary relationship between the social and the spatial, which has emerged with new communication and transportation technologies, alongside the massive transnational movement of people.

Transnational families in which one or more members are out of the country for several years are increasingly common in the world today. These are the families whose core members are located in at least two nation-states and members in these families belong to two households, two cultures and two economies simultaneously. These take many forms and are marked by changing heads of household including grandmothers and youth who take charge of children while the parent(s) are away. Transnational communication which is known as the flow of ideas, information, goods, money, and emotions between family members in different countries is the most powerful technology use by the transnational migrants to maintain intimacy across borders.

Sri Lanka is seen as a country with increasing numbers of women who are employed as domestic workers overseas over the last three decades. Consequently, a greater number of transnational families have emerged with female members being away from their families for several years. These migrant women bring economic benefits not only to their families but also to the Sri Lankan economy. However, they have to leave their children in the care of their spouses or other family members to work for other families overseas and care for more than one family simultaneously. However, migrant mothers attempt to maintain the responsibility of nurturing their children while abroad, and maintain intimacy across borders indicating that many migrant mothers remain responsible for ensuring both the economic and emotional security of their children. Sending remittances and gifts, making telephone calls and writing letters are some of the alternative ways available to these migrant women. This paper attempts to address Sri Lankan female migration from a transnational perspective and to examine how migrant women make use of transnational communication to maintain contacts with their families from a distance. The paper is based on a study done in 2008 which collected both quantitative and qualitative data on migrant households in the districts of Colombo and Kurunegala. Although Sri Lankan migrant women use transnational communication to maintain intimacy across borders, the study concludes that it is not the only mechanism they can use to repress their feelings of separation and to lessen the social costs of migration.