

“Building *another world* which belongs to us all”

**Women Changing our Lives, Making History:
Migration Experiences of Babaylan Philippine
Women’s Network in Europe**

by Malu Padilla [1]

“Doing it for ourselves is the essence of the women’s movement: it keeps us honest, keeps us real, keeps us concrete. And that is that doing – not just being, feeling, or sweeping the floor that gets dirty again - which brings women into history. It is new for women to be making history – not just a few queens, empresses or exceptional geniuses, but hundreds, thousands millions of women now entering history, knowing we have made history - by changing our lives....”

Betty Friedman, 1921, from *It Changed my Life*

Our Beginnings

We did it for ourselves; it changed our lives – knowing that we have made history by founding Babaylan – the Philippine Women’s Network in Europe. September 1992 Barcelona, was a milestone in the herstory of Filipina migrants in Europe. It was an unforgettable moment for the founding mothers of Babaylan in Europe.

The Babaylan network was the first initiative of Filipina migrants to establish a pan-European network of Philippine women’s organisations committed to women empowerment and service to the community. In the true spirit of the babaylanes [2] during the colonial period of the Philippines, we named our network after these priestesses who, during the Spanish colonisation, performed not only sacred rites but also exercised leadership roles in all aspects of community life. They fought alongside with the people for a peaceful society against the imposition of a foreign system by the colonisers. Though repressed by the Spanish friars, babaylan priestesses continued to be revered and respected by the people. The original babaylanes did it for themselves and made a mark in history which until today has inspired contemporary Filipinas like us.

Babaylan Europe grew out of a need to develop an effective and empowering support system for Philippine women living and working across Europe. We are a network of Philippine women organisations in 10 European countries – Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, and United Kingdom. In the past 14 years of our existence, we have reached a stage where we take Babaylan’s agenda to a level that would move Filipina migrant women beyond being on the agenda to themselves setting the agenda.

Babaylan believes that migration is brought about by a combination of socio-cultural, economic and political factors in the Philippines that push women to migrate as well as factors in Europe that pull women to immigrate. We also believe that Filipinas have common

problems that confront us as migrant women in Europe - the unequal and unjust divide between rich and poor; the colonial culture ingrained by years of colonisation by the west; the Philippine government's failure to address decisively the problem of poverty and its policies that encourage labour migration; and, the low value of women's work in the Philippines and Europe.

Like other migrant women in Europe, we experience racism, social exclusion and sexual discrimination. Most Filipinas are employed in low paid 'reproductive work', receive low salaries, suffer de-skilling, intellectual stagnation, unrecognized educational level, and often have language difficulties.

At Babaylan, the experience of poverty in all its forms is a thread that binds the Filipina migrant workers that form our majority membership. We began arriving in Europe in the 1960s for adventure, as wives of European nationals, as refugees, as professionals - but most of us came to escape the privations of an economy in free fall. We came to work as nurses, cooks, house cleaners, caregivers, nannies and other domestic employment. We keep enough of the euros, pounds, francs, and crones for the essentials of living, and send the rest to the Philippines. In this way, we have raised and educated our children and the children of relations who cannot otherwise afford to. We have built homes for our families, who are also fed and clothed by our efforts. Driven to leave our homeland by an economy that has been battered by recession and political instability, we struggle not just to alleviate the poverty of our own insecure social status abroad, but the poverty of our families in the Philippines [3]. The driving force behind this commitment to keep the babaylanes spirit alive is our belief that by pulling our skills, know-how, resources and experiences together, we can participate and integrate fully in our adopted communities and pave the way towards the empowerment of Filipina migrants. We believe that we can affect changes and improvement in our lives if we strive for it together. Our empowerment will not be served by others in a silver platter - we have to work for it, we owe it to ourselves. We see ourselves as agents of our own transformation.

Babaylan has taken a long journey in our 15 years of existence. We have learned a lot of lessons and gained new experiences along the way. We have developed our own migrant women orientation course which looks into the specificities of women conditions in the different European countries and its interconnectedness with her upbringing as a Filipino woman. At the country level, we have reached significant achievements which we can be proud of [4]. The intention of this paper is to give the readers a good glimpse and impression of Philippine migration to Europe by a specific group of organised Filipinas. It is also from this perspective that I present the analysis and context of our work in Europe.

Gender and international migration

Today, several studies and researches are conducted to address the importance of considering gender issues in migration. The proportion of women who are involved in global migration flows is rapidly increasing. An expanding source of data from ongoing researches, however limited, is making it possible to understand the significance and potential of the contribution of migrant women not only to gender equality but also to socio-economic development worldwide.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) estimates that almost half of the world's 175 million migrants are women (IOM 2003). Statistics indicate, for example, that the proportion of women among international migrants had reached 51% in more developed

regions. Women moved on their own as the principal wage earners or for family reunification purposes [5]. Historically, a large proportion of female migrants will have travelled as the spouses of male migrants, or other family dependants and this has been one of the reasons for the higher percentage of female migrants in developed regions. Today 50.9 % of migrants in the developed world are women, compared with 45.7 % in the less developed world [6].

The gender component in international migration is related to the motivation of men and women to move, to the migration process itself and to the conditions migrants find on their arrival to the country of destination. Unemployment and conditions of poverty are the major factors that push not only women but also men to migrate to another country. Both men and women see migration as a vehicle to improve one's living condition and one's share in development. Most women see migration as a strategy for a better life not just for them but primarily for their families.

According to UNFPA State of World Population 2006 report, the participation of women in the labour market showed rates close to those of men. However, women migrants continue to be vulnerable to gender-based discrimination as evidenced in the type of work they engage in. They find themselves incorporated into an already disadvantageous labour market for women, and these disadvantages intensify in the case of migrant women, especially for those who are undocumented. Specific gender-related issues come to fore when female migrants suffer abuses and violations by those who take advantage of their dual vulnerability as migrants and women.

Another gender issue that we should look into is the working condition of migrant women. Women are particularly vulnerable to various forms of abuse and discrimination as migrant workers in an already gender-segregated labour market. While men commonly work in groups (e.g. construction or plantation), women often go into individualised work environments (e.g. domestic service), where there is greater isolation and lower likelihood of establishing networks of information and social support [7].

On the other hand, the experiences of migrant women are as diverse as their backgrounds, where they come from and the communities to which they migrate. The demand for women migrants is at an all-time high and growing. While women migration has many advantages, it does not come without obstacles and challenges as will be illustrated later based on the experiences of the Babaylan network.

Feminisation of Philippine migration

The magnitude of the feminisation of Philippine migration has never been as significant as it is today. As of 2004, the Philippine government has estimated that there are over 8 million overseas Filipinos worldwide [8] - almost 10% of the total population of the Philippines, dispersed in more than 193 countries and destinations. However, the number may be higher due to a large rate of undocumented Filipino migrants who overstay or carry lapsed visa. The Philippines is the largest exporter of migrant labour throughout the world, the majority of whom are women (IOM, 2005). The Filipino diaspora is the third largest in terms of population among overseas Asian groups. According to the World Bank, the Philippines received in 2005 an amount of \$12 billion worth of remittances, ranking fourth globally trailing behind India, China, and Mexico.

International labour migration is not new to the Philippines and its colonial history, but the exporting of women workers is. At the end of the twentieth century, Philippine gendered

labour migration and its diaspora have become not only the primary means of keeping the Philippine economy afloat, but have also created new conditions and problems which affect the current Philippine social and cultural identities. In her two books [9], Rhacel Parrenas described in detail the consequences of gendered migration to the family and to the community. In her first book, Parrenas writes about Filipina domestic workers who leave their own families behind to do the mothering and caretaking work of families abroad, done at great cost to the relations with their own split-apart families. In the second, the creation of what she calls transnational migrant families where children grow up separated from one or both parents, as parents are forced to seek employment abroad to provide for their children.

According to the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) Summary Report 2005 Performance, a total of 988,615 Filipinos were deployed for employment in 180 countries, 75% were land based, 72% of those were women. The increase in the female deployment in 2005 may be attributed to the sizeable increase in the demand for household workers. Of the 3000 Filipinos who leave the country each day, 65 % are women.

In 2005, POEA further reports a total of 47,493 Filipinos went to Europe for employment. Of the estimated 500,000 Filipino migrant workers in Europe, around 75% are women. The above figures indicate a definitive trend towards feminisation of Philippine migration worldwide.

Aside from the Filipina nurses who worked in the hospitals, the majority of the Filipinas who came to Europe in the late 70's were employed as domestic workers. Their deployment was in response to the great demand for domestic labour in private homes in countries like Italy, Spain, France and Britain. We can attribute this growing demand for domestic work to the following factors:

- The emergence of a middle class population in Europe who benefited from the industrialisation in the 60's had the economic capacity to employ cheap labour for domestic and household work. However, the high cost of living also necessitated that European women had to join the labour force for additional income to meet the family's increasing needs.
- The women's movement, at the same time, called for a greater participation of European women in the economy, which led to a growing recognition of women as wage earners leading them away from their traditional role as fulltime homemakers and mothers.
- The availability of cheap labour of migrant women to do service and domestic work facilitated the smooth entry and participation of European women into the labour force.

Domestic and other service sector work, generally deemed by the workforce in Europe as low-paid, menial, offering little job satisfaction, or opportunities for career advancement, and done under appalling working conditions, created labour shortages which were filled by migrant workers particularly women. Migrant women became surrogate mothers in European homes- taking care of children, doing the housework, and taking care of the old and infirmed members of the family. Compared to the cost of hiring local labour, migrant labour was cheaper and easily affordable for middle-income families [10].

Our Issues and concerns

Within the context of the growing trend of international migration and its feminisation, the women of Babaylan are found in its core. Like other migrant women in Europe, we encounter

a host of problems. These problems can be divided into two categories in relation to our rights and our migration status as: a) employee/worker or b) partner in a relationship with a European male.

The fact that Filipinas come from a so-called “developing country”, the kind of employment they find is in the lowest categories. This employment makes them particularly vulnerable to different forms of exploitative labour practices – paid at a very cheap wage; their employers make use of their highly skilled and qualified labour. Found mostly in the private service sector work, their employment is generally stereotyped as women’s traditional work and, therefore, unrecognized and undervalued as productive labour.

Since most of them do domestic work in the confines of the home considered to be in the private sphere, the working conditions of these Filipina domestic workers escape official government scrutiny and supervision. As a result, they do not have access to standard labour practices with regard to wages, social security and welfare benefits, and the right of the workers to organise themselves and be members of a union.

The deterioration of skills and eventual de-skilling is another problem that migrants who are confined to do domestic, routine and repetitive work are confronted with. Emotional and psychological scars are the eventual results of years of unskilled menial work done by these highly educated and highly skilled professionals. They are denied of their right to live with dignity, stripped them of their confidence and pride of their own capacity to make their own choices and options for self development.

Others examples of problems that Filipina migrants workers experience in the work place are: withholding of wages and documents such as passports, low pay, long working hours, the lack of opportunities for meaningful career advancement, the lack of work benefits and job security, sexual harassment and racism.

The current immigration policies in Europe give rise to a range of gender specific issues that affect migrant women – they are either ‘tied’ to their employers or to their European husbands or partners as wives or fiancées. Because those deployed for employment are bound by their contracts with their employers, they are vulnerable to all forms of exploitation. The same can be said for those women with dependent residence permits based on the durability of their relationship with their European partners. In 2005, more restrictive requirements for admission and renewal of residence permits were put in place. As a result, the dependency of women migrants to their partners is longer with all the possible negative consequences.

Moreover, many Filipinas suffer the break-up or loss of their marriage while others are confronted by big challenges and serious problems in making their bi-cultural relationship work and in raising their children borne out of two cultures.

• **Gendered Violence**

Restrictive European migration laws and regulations contribute to the vulnerability of migrant women to become victims of violence. Denied of an independent immigration status, many of these women are forced to continue working under violent and slave-like conditions which deny them access to the legal justice system. In the meantime, the same system criminalises them if they decide to break free from their oppressive relationship and bonded labour.

Migrant women experience violence in the work place, outside and inside their homes. There are many reported incidents of physical abuse, sexual harassment, and in some instances rape of domestic workers at the hands of employers. It is not unusual that migrant women who escape from their oppressive employers and violent partners report constant fear and anxiety of being haunted by the authorities and being jailed or sent back home without any documents at all.

If, for whatever reason, a Filipina decides to separate from her husband or partner within the period of her 'dependency', she automatically faces deportation proceedings. Hence, many who are trapped in violent relationships have been forced to endure the oppressive and violent situation until they become entitled to more permanent residency in the country which can take three to five years.

• **Trafficking of Women**

A more serious situation is that of Filipinas who have been, under false pretence, recruited as 'entertainers' land into forced prostitution. As described in one report of the Netherlands-based Foundation against Trafficking of Women: "The women are recruited with promises of marriage or well-paid jobs. Some know or assume that they are being offered jobs as prostitutes, but they are misinformed about the conditions. Once they are in the Netherlands, 'forced labour' is the more appropriate term, and they become a gold mine for others. "

The devastating consequence of violence committed to 'trafficked' migrant women is enormous. Its short and long term effects have impact not only on the individual woman herself but also to her children and the society at large. It results to the continuing subordination of women and contributes to their low level of political participation and self development.

• **Undocumented Migrant Workers**

Today, data shows an increasing trend in the number of undocumented Filipina migrants in Europe. Their growing numbers need to be seen with in the framework of the current conditions both in the Philippines and Europe. The grave economic situation in the Philippines pushes these women to Europe where they are confronted with restrictive immigration laws and regulations. Both conditions have direct consequences on the entry and stay of migrant workers.

The view that undocumented workers are taking advantage of public benefits and causing unemployment by native workers contribute to their negative image. Changing the unfavourable image of undocumented workers and gaining public support is paramount in protecting their rights. Without public support, undocumented workers stand little chance of fighting exploitation and abuse, a reality that many endure on a daily basis [11].

If we consider the state of law, undocumented migrant workers are virtually invisible. As non-EU nationals and because they are undocumented, they have no official or legal access to any welfare benefits and social services, health care or medical assistance, to affordable and safe housing, and no freedom of movement to chose employment. Fortunately some centres/helpdesks were put up by progressive organisations to cater to the immediate needs of undocumented.

In Greece, according to Kasapi-Hellas, in spite of the difficulties and problems, almost 80% of the estimated 35,000 Filipinos were able to avail of the legalization programme implemented by the Greek government. All too familiar are the complaints of migrants that the requirements set by the government have put migrants in danger of returning to their status of being undocumented. The same requirements are necessary to be able to get a renewal of their residence and work permits. Among these requirements, proof of stable work, as shown in the social security payments. But it is common practice among employers in Greece not to meet the social security obligations for their employees. A specific number of social security payments are determined to qualify for a renewal of residence and work permits. Employers would rather lay them off [12]. Similar situations can be found in other European countries.

• “Fortress Europe”

Over the last 15 years or so, EU states have been gradually increasing cooperation and attempting to establish common policies and laws on areas related to immigration and border controls. Common rules regarding visas, asylum rights and controls at external borders were adopted and coordination of the police, customs and the judiciary was increased. As a result, rules and regulations have become more and more restrictive all over Europe. But no matter how tight controls at EU borders are, immigration to Europe is inevitable and people fleeing persecution, war and poverty, will continue to risk their lives trying to get into the EU zone. By maintaining strict control over migration into the EU, thousands of immigrants are forced to live in Europe illegally. This creates a workforce that will accept the most insecure working conditions together with the worst salaries and appalling conditions.

One of the first steps towards the creation of Fortress Europe was the Schengen Agreement which was originally signed in 1985 by five EU states [13] to eliminate border control between those countries and to establish a common visa policy. The agreement was said to be about the freedom of movement over the internal borders between the Schengen countries. Little by little the Schengen area has been extended to include almost every Member State [14], with the exception of the United Kingdom and Ireland.

By nature, immigration controls are racist in that they always aim to exclude particular distinct groups. They cause massive suffering, cost billions and promote racism. After 9/11, draconian measures are taken to increase police powers of surveillance at the borders, more and more migrants whose only crime was to seek a better future in Europe for her and for her family will be affected tremendously. The war on terror in practice has become another tool to strengthen the walls and close the gates tighter of Fortress Europe.

The Obstacles and challenges we face

The issues and concerns illustrated above are further compounded by structural obstacles and challenges we face as migrant women in Europe. National immigration laws and policies are not ‘women migrant friendly’ which impede or prohibit the smooth integration of migrant women. They also do not offer easy avenues toward the socio-economic participation in the community of these women. To make matters worse, one big obstacle we face is language. Aside from the difference in culture, norms and values, Europe as a continent has different languages. Except those who are in the English-speaking countries like the United Kingdom and Ireland, we have to learn and speak a foreign language as a means to access important information which will enable us to integrate and participate in the socio-economic and political realms in our adopted country.

In the Netherlands, for example, the Filipino community is not recognised as an official ethnic minority. This eliminates us from having access to government support on the local and national level. In the meantime, big groups of migrants and other special groups are given substantive financial support to carry out integration activities and projects. For our part, if we're lucky, we are given a pittance to carry out small-scale activities. This lack of structural support from host governments weakens the potential capacity of Filipina migrants for self-empowerment. Painstaking and sustained lobby work is needed to move the politicians and policy makers for official recognition which, obviously, at this point, we do not have the capacity to carry out. Another issue we face is that Filipina migrants are seen more as 'victims' instead of self-confident hard-working women. The stereotype propagated by the media projects us as weak and meek. We are not seen as strong women who know how to solve our own problems and that we are very much capable of finding ways and means to make ourselves meaningful in the community. Moreover, the educational background and the skills we took with us are not fully maximised. We cannot participate fully in the labour market on the same level as our education and experience. Our diplomas are not recognised and given much lower value. What we need is to be given the chance to exploit our capacity to the fullest.

Furthermore, our role and potential as agents of transformation and trustworthy partners for development are not fully understood and appreciated neither by the host governments nor by the civil society organisations. This is experienced in our networking with mainstream organisation of women, trade unions and political parties. To illustrate: our issues are relevant or useful to them as long as they do not conflict with their own interests and internal agenda, and, we are only good as examples. Tensions become evident when Filipinas are used by mainstream organisations as 'poster girls' to promote/emphasize their own engagement on migrant women issues – they would speak on our behalf, as if we don't have the capacity to articulate our own issues, and when we assert our right to speak for ourselves, they feel challenged and become indifferent. Also due to the stereotype image of the Filipina migrants, there is lack of recognition in our diversity – that we have diverse professions and employments among our ranks.

On the other hand, we can also be accused of too much 'inward looking' – we are only concerned about our own problems. We do not take an active approach in forging cooperation and solidarity with other migrant organisations with which we share common issues of struggles. Babaylan realises, however, that networking and cooperation with other migrants organisations are necessary and are effective strategies to make our voices heard.

At the same time, rivalry and mistrust among Filipino organisations hinder us from moving forward together and in carrying out successful projects. We get entangled into intrigues and slanders which can result to de-motivation and de-fragmentation of our organisations. This phenomenon of rivalry and competition is not akin only to the Filipino community but is common in any migrant community. Forging unity and cooperation within the community is a challenge that Babaylan organisations are working on.

The lack of political will of the Philippine government to ensure the protection our rights is big concern for all of us. The Philippines is a signatory of almost all treaties and conventions on the protection of human and migrants' rights. However, it does not exercise its power to put pressure on the receiving countries for the protection of the rights of its citizens abroad. In addition, in some European countries, the Philippine embassies are indifferent to the woes we encounter. The common attitude is that it's our own fault so we have to solve it ourselves. Fortunately there are Filipino organisations which offer help and support. There are also

instances of good working relationship and cooperation between Philippine embassy officials and Filipino organisations.

Lastly, the financial sustainability of our organisation is a big challenge that we face and something that we address almost daily in carrying out our projects and activities. The Babaylan network is fully dependent on voluntary commitment of our members who give their time, effort and contribute money to attend meetings and carry out activities and projects. Without the selfless commitment of our members, we will not be where we are now. Fortunately, on the country level, some of our organisations get some financial support from local governments and funding organisations for specific projects and activities. Also through the initiatives of our local members are we able to raise some funds to implement some activities.

Our response and achievements

Our issues and concerns, made more difficult and complicated by the obstacles and challenges we face, are daunting, to say the least. In the true spirit of the babaylanes, our response was to develop strategies which are empowering and relevant to the community we serve. In varying degrees according to the particular country, our network had achieved a common and rich experience in terms of self-organisation, initiating campaigns and struggles to assert our rights, and building our capacities. This is found in the number, variety and dynamism of our organisations within the community as well as in our networking with Europe-wide and international organisations.

As a Filipina network, we have developed our own migrant women orientation course which looks into the specificities of women conditions in the different European countries and its interconnectedness with her upbringing as a Filipino woman.

Our organisations span both national and local levels which range from specific women organisations; youth and children; social and religious; support service and counselling centres; housing associations and cooperatives; savings and credit cooperatives; and, indigenous peoples organisations.

A great variety of our activities have been developed and organized around interests and issues: community, women, workers, youth, children, cultural, religious, micro-finance and social services. There are also initiatives for cultural expression in drama, song and dance. We are also active in chaplaincies and programmes for pastoral care and liturgy. Support of small-scale projects in the Philippines is carried out by a number of our organisations.

We owe all our achievements and success to our members on the country-level. This is where we are rooted and imbedded and where our communities are based. It is also where we are most confronted by the obstacles and challenges and the arena of our struggles. In the meantime, our coordinated Europe-wide activities focus mainly on capacity building of our internal network. Much as we would like to carry out Europe-wide activities more often for more impact and projection, our limited resources prohibit us from doing so. The lack from coordinated Europe-wide projects, however, is very much compensated by the collective efforts and activities of our organisations on the national and local levels.

• Networking, lobby and advocacy

For a European network like Babaylan, visibility and being heard are very important. By doing so, we make people listen to our issues and concerns, we build strategic alliances, make new friends and renew contacts. We also learn new experiences and share and exchange best practices of our work.

We do networking on the international, European and national level with civil society organisations and government agencies. The latter, on the national and local levels, are for us important and strategic targets.

At the same time we do advocacy and lobby work on issues, laws and regulations that affect us as migrant women and as workers. We do this as much as possible together with other organisations for more impact. These issues focus mainly on our rights and welfare i.e. recognition as a migrant community by the host government at national and local level; recognition of the au pair programme as a cultural exchange program; recognition of domestic work as migration status; rights and welfare of undocumented domestic workers; and, independent residence status of Filipina wives of European nationals. We also do lobby and advocacy to the Philippine government mainly on our rights and welfare as overseas workers.

Our networking, lobby and advocacy work are interwoven. We cannot separate one from the other. Through the years, as a network on the international and national levels, we have achieved some significant successes. To mention a few:

Our national organisations in Italy, UK, Greece and Spain have established good relations with local and national government bodies resulting to some lobby and advocacy successes, financial and material support of projects and activities, and recognition of the organisations' work. Even individual's outstanding work in the community received prestigious recognition, for example, the "Cavaliere della Repubblica" Award [15] was given by the Italian government to one of our members, Chato Basa of the Filipino Women's Centre (FWC). Chato is the first Filipina and one of the first four non-Italians to be conferred with the honour. In 2006, Adora Fischer, Babaylan chairperson 2004-2006 was named Woman of the Year with the Dunna Prize of the Frauenkulturarciv and the Federal Association of Women Academicians, Section Graubunden as recognition for her years selfless and untiring work among migrant Filipinas. Most recently Diana Oosterbeek-Latoza, one of the Babaylan pioneers received the ZAMI award in the Netherlands. The ZAMI AWARD is a yearly nominated prize wherein the strength, dedication, quality and uniqueness of black, migrant and refugee women are recognized and honoured.

In the Netherlands, the Filipina au pair issue received good media attention through the lobby and advocacy work of Bayanihan Philippine Women's Centre that it landed in the political agenda. As result, the Dutch government conducted a research on the working conditions and the rights and welfare of the au pairs to find out the level of 'exploitation' and if there is 'violation' of the EU Au Pair Regulation. A 'helpdesk' for au pair was set up afterwards as one of the recommendations, however, it does not work as was meant to be.

Even in its infant years, Babaylan understood the importance of networking with various women's networks. Its first big international networking was during the 4th UN World Conference on Women held in Beijing on September 1995. Twelve Babaylanes from seven countries were able to attend through the support of their local organisations and some on their own initiative. Babaylan organised a workshop on "Bi-cultural Relationships" at the parallel NGO Forum. The theme of the conference was "Action for Equality, Development and Peace". There were at least 25,000 women from all over the world present during the

forum. Since then Babaylan members have attended follow-up network activities based on the Beijing Platform for Action.

Up to the present, there are various initiatives in the international arena. The Filipino Women's Council in Italy is active in high-level UN lobby and advocacy work. It has participated in several UN international conferences and contributed to the drafting of important provisions concerning migrant women's rights and the proper recognition of women migrant workers' contributions. Most recently it took part in the expert meetings on female migrants by the UNFPA-IOM [16].

During the Association for Women's Rights and Development (AWID) [17] International Forum held in Bangkok in 2005, FWC invited Babaylan to take part in a workshop entitled "Me, us and them: Migrant women organising for change". During the workshop women shared their experiences and participants engaged in a broader discussion on migrant workers needs and rights internationally. Five Babaylanes from four countries participated in this four-day forum attended by almost 2000 women.

There are also continuing networking and advocacy initiatives at the European level specifically at the EU institutions with regard issues on migrants' rights and welfare, mobility and equal opportunities.

At the Asia-Europe regional level, Babaylan has also been active in its networking and advocacy. Most recently, Babaylan was invited to present its migrant organising experiences in the workshop "Re-thinking Migration & (Alternative) Development" at the Asia-Europe Peoples' Forum (AEPF) [18] held in Helsinki. The workshop discussed the challenges and organising strategies in 'sending' and 'receiving' countries. Together with migrant organisations in Asia and Europe the participants developed "joint agendas and new strategies" with regard migration issues. A year earlier, Babaylan-France attended the ASEM5 Peoples' Forum during the Asian hosting of AEPF in Hanoi. Babaylan-France is a member of the international coordinating committee of AEPF. At an earlier AEPF Asem4People this time in Copenhagen in 2004, Babaylan organised a workshop "Globalisation of Migration: Migrant Women on the Move". Babaylan-DK hosted a cultural extravaganza during the side programmes of the Forum.

In northern Europe region, Babaylan-DK took part in the conference of Filipino organisations in the Nordic and Baltic regions. This conference is a network of individuals representing various Filipino organizations from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. This was the first-ever regional conference that brought together leaders of Filipino communities in the Nordic countries, following the meetings of Filipino organizations in southern Sweden and Denmark.

• **Empowerment activities**

As a preventive strategy, Babaylan organisations engage in empowerment activities as part of our capacity building programmes. On the European level, we have conducted trainers' trainings on basic and advanced women's orientation; intercultural communication/culture crossing; leadership and organisational management; conflict resolution and management; and, organisational intervention and development. Through these trainings, we build our capacities to run and manage our organisations and we learn tools not only to analyse and solve our problems but also for self development as leaders of the community. These training

activities which we re-echo to our local networks are our strategy to inform and raise the awareness of our general membership and our wider target groups.

In the national areas, our members conduct seminars and skills trainings on topics such as leadership, organisational management, gender sensitivity, assertivity skills and personality development, intercultural communication, participation in the labour market, rights and welfare of migrants, integration and security, and child rearing in a bi-cultural society.

We also organise human rights awareness-raising activities based on the different international instruments and treaties, such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The International Women's Day celebration is a common activity which our network members undertake every year.

• **Social service and counselling centres**

All our organisations are involved in social services and counselling. Most of us were established as a response to the needs for assistance of our kababayans. Some have established counselling and women's centres run by part-time staff and volunteers. The assistance we offer range from giving practical tips and advices on various issues to intensive guidance and counselling. We also give immediate and direct help, for instance in partner-related cases involving physical, mental and emotional violence. Telephone help lines were opened ready to receive calls from Filipinas who need information, immediate help or simply a listening ear. We have also opened temporary shelters for women. To be as accessible as possible to those who need help, we have formed networks of contact persons/counsellors who get professional trainings on basic counselling and social services.

At least two of our organisations have taken up the issue of Filipina au pairs [19]. One has put up especial support services for Filipina au-pairs which include giving information about au pair rights and obligations and lobby and advocacy work for the rights and welfare of au pairs. We provide practical assistance in their social and cultural adjustments in their host countries and, when necessary, act as mediator between the au pair and her host family.

• **Information and campaigns**

In the early years of Babaylan, we coordinated a two-year Europe-wide information campaign on violence against women aptly called "Kiss violence Goodbye!" This awareness-raising campaign was carried in all member countries of Babaylan. Our target groups included women of other nationalities and the wider European public. Later, small scale campaigns against gender-based violence including women trafficking are regularly initiated on the country level.

Furthermore, Babaylan participated in a number of international campaigns on issues which affect the welfare and rights of overseas Filipinos such as the ratification of the UN Convention for Migrants Rights. From 2000 to 2003, we took part in the international campaign of Filipino organisations worldwide for the approval by the Philippine government of the Absentee Voting Bill.

On the country level, we campaign on various issues which affect us directly. These issues include right to stay and against deportation; rights and welfare of migrants, violence against women; the right of family reunification; legalization status of undocumented migrants; strike action with co-workers in factories, on ships or in hospitals; independent residence permit for migrant women; and, the recognition of migrant domestic work as proper work. In Greece, Italy and Spain, we have participated in the campaigns for the regularisation of undocumented migrant domestic workers.

As part of our information activities, some of our organisations produced film/video documentary projects which depict the situation of Filipina domestic workers and the general condition Filipina migrants in Europe. We have also helped mainstream television networks in their documentary projects on the effects of the feminisation of Philippine migration.

• **Research and publications**

Most of our members have their own newsletters and magazines. The newsletters report updates of our activities and other issues that we are involved in. Some organisations have also produced books and pamphlets on poetry, Philippine culture, profiles of Filipinas, working and living conditions of migrant domestic workers and practical handbooks on how to find your way in your new adopted country.

On the national level, there are also on-going surveys like a survey on aging and migration by Babaylan-Switzerland and profile on the socio-economic situation of migrant Filipinas by Bayanihan Philippine Women's Centre in the Netherlands. In 2000, the Philippine Women's Forum-Germany in cooperation with Babaylan, published a book called *Trans Euro Express – Filipinas in Europe* [20]. It is a collection of more than 50 stories of Filipinas living in Europe.

In 2003, the Filipino Women's Council collaborated with the IOM in Rome and other 21 institutional partners for an EQUAL-European Commission funded project entitled 'The Image of Migrants in Italy through Media, Civil Society and the Labour Market'. This gave FWC the opportunity to conduct a historical community action research as its contribution to the project, which led to the publication of a book, 'Me, Us and Them: Realities and Illusions of Filipina Domestic Workers' [21] in 2004. It is a community research project which focuses on the social role of Filipina women in Italian society as service workers, as citizens, as mothers (both in Italy and in the Philippines) in order to help these women achieve a self-realization process to increase their own self-esteem.

Babaylan, on the European level, participated in the research project "Networks, Migrants and Natives: Networks of experience, Networks of Welcome" [22] by the Università di Roma Tre. Four members of Babaylan were also involved in this research project. Eight countries of the EU participated in the project with two EU candidate members. The objective of this research, among others, was to develop national and local policies in support of the integration of the migrant population in Europe.

• **Children and Youth**

Children and youth are two main concerns of Babaylan. In some countries, there are especial programmes and activities, such as theatre and drama; exposure and exchange programmes; summer schools; day care centres and primary schools; and language classes.

In Italy, Spain and Greece, day care centres were established. In 1995, the Munting Nayon day care centre in Athens evolved into a regular primary school. According to Debbie Carlos [23] , “the primary school is a response to an urgent need of migrants to provide care and early child education in a supportive, caring and familiar environment. The experience has shown that the project not only answers a concrete need but offers a new way of organizing and raising consciousness of migrant women on issues directly affecting them: children’s basic rights, care, early education and development”.

CFMW-Italy, likewise, has a day-care centre for children and two youth programmes (a summer activity for Filipino youth and training activities for multi-ethnic youth). It also organised a youth encounter and exposure trip to the Philippines for second generation Filipino-Italian youth. These encounter activities proved to be effective strategies to let these young people get acquainted with their roots. Babaylan-UK, through Lingap, initiates children and youth activities, such as theatre and drama. Other countries also organises children and youth activities during Christmas and around the Philippine Independence Day celebrations. In Barcelona, Amistad was one of the founding members of Iskwelang Pinoy(IP). Members of Amistad did volunteer work as teachers at the school. IP is a non-formal education/formation programme of Centro Filipino for second generation children of Filipino migrants.

• Cooperatives and micro-finance

Recognising that economic independence is one important aspect of empowerment, Babaylan members are involved in the cooperative system. For example, Bahay Kubo, a member of Babaylan-UK, is a housing cooperative in London which provides housing advice and advocacy on housing issues relevant to migrants especially to the Filipino community. There are also some initiatives to set up micro-finance projects. One exemplary initiative which needs mentioning is the savings and credit cooperative by Diwata in Greece. Diwata women put up their own cooperative as an answer to their constant cash flow problems. Today, they are proud of what they have achieved – putting on their own hands their economic independence. Their experience has inspired other Babaylan women who are now members of savings and credit cooperatives in their local areas, while others are looking into the possibility of setting up one.

Conclusion

Today, given all what we have achieved, Babaylan realises that they are just small steps towards our long journey to a productive and meaningful life in Europe. Broad strides to empowerment and protection of our rights entail small steps taken together. There are more daunting challenges facing us in this era of neo-liberalism and globalisation which spawned the trend of not only the free flow of capital and goods but the internationalisation of migration with all its negative impact on women.

On the other hand, we have to recognise that through migration, there are benefits and positive experiences for women. Migration has an empowering impact on women in terms of higher self-esteem and increased economic independence both as family members and as economic actors. It is a life-changing experience. We get exposed to new ideas and other social norms and values which make us aware of our rights and our potentials to participate fully in society. Our awareness can also contribute to the gender discourse within our community in Europe and back home.

Since the onset of migration, the issues of migrant women have been ignored and have always been at the back burners of the international policy agenda. Today, we have a unique opportunity to transform it. The explicit recognition of the human rights of women and the call for gender equality are basic criteria of any sustainable, effective and equitable policy framework that wants to address migration in a sincere and humane manner. Government bodies, politicians and policy-makers, civil society organisations, the media, and international bodies like the UN, are increasingly paying attention to the socio-economic and political significance of the international migration of women.

International migration of women, specifically of our women compatriots, is an intrinsic part of today's globalised world. Philippine migration can play a key role in development and poverty reduction in our country if 'managed' properly both by Philippine government and the receiving countries. Furthermore, it has clear benefits for women empowerment that could be enhanced and disadvantages that could be minimized.

Women are on the move and will continue migrating, so will the Philippine women. The protection of our rights deserves priority attention. Our needs are urgent and should be addressed immediately. Only then will the benefits of international migration be maximized and the risks minimized.

The women of Babaylan, just like millions of other migrant women, face serious obstacles and challenges that have critical consequences in our very survival. Yet our experience need not be fraught with danger when migration can be such a positive experience for so many millions of migrant women like us. In spite of the obstacles we face, as evidenced by our response to uplift our own situation, we took matters in our own hands and are able to affect changes in our lives.

The obstacles and challenges we face can be forestalled through courageous measures and actions designed to empower migrant women like us and to protect our human rights. Our hard work deserves recognition, and our human rights, protection. Our voices must be heard.

Enlightened public leaders can help manoeuvre current debates in Europe from rightist sentiments and its emphasis on our differences to recognition of our common humanity which brings us together in a world increasingly without borders. Sensationalised incidents involving migrants and sensitive debates about migration policies have both highlighted stories of migration gone bad. In the meantime, the hundreds of stories of migration gone good - of women who leave their families behind and contribute to both their adopted and home countries through their skills, labour and remittances – tend to go largely untold. Their stories must be told.

The Babaylan network representing hundreds of Filipina migrants in Europe has a mission to have our voices heard in chorus with millions of other migrant women in Europe. We will tell our stories and that of the others and make people in Europe listen to our voices. We will build alliances and networks and devise new strategies towards defending human and migrants' rights. Only by organising ourselves, and taking small but determined steps can we thread this long journey towards empowerment, participate in society and its development, reap the benefits of migration, and build 'another world' which belongs to us all. Every small step we take, we know we make herstory by changing our lives.

The full version of this paper entitled "Women changing our lives, Making HERstory: Migration experiences of Babaylan Philippine Women's Network in Europe" is published in

the book 'In de Olde Worlde: Views of Filipino Migrants in Europe' by the Philippine Social Science Center, Filomenita Mongaya Hoegsholm, editor.

Footnotes:

- ▶ [1] The author was Babaylan chairperson from 1994-1998 and is a member of the Babaylan Advisory Committee. She served as coordinator of Bayanihan Philippine Women's Centre in the Netherlands (a Babaylan network in NL) and is at present working at the Global Society Foundation.
- ▶ [2] The word babaylan means priestess. In pre-colonial Philippine history, it specifically refers to a holy woman and a woman leader. One of the significances of rediscovering the babaylan figure in Philippine history is that we came to know that before the Spanish colonizers came, the native woman of the Philippine islands did not hold a subjugated role in society; rather she was a leader and an equal. She was also essential in spiritual practice of the community.
- ▶ [3] "Remembering Rome", Babaylan Conference Proceedings, Rome, 2001 by M. Padilla, conference coordinator.
- ▶ [4] Country reports in the proceedings of Babaylan Conferences – 1992, 1994, 1996, 1998, and 2001 and Babaylan websites (Aut. & DK).
- ▶ [5] Summary submitted by the Chairperson of the Commission, High-level panel discussion on the gender dimensions of international migration, www.un.org/esa/population/hldmigration/Text/CSW_2006-15.pdf, 3 sept. 2006.
- ▶ [6] Women, trade and migration by Don Flynn and Eleonore Kofman, ID21 Gender and Development, Vol 12, No 2, pp 66-72, July 2004, <http://www.id21.org/id21ext/s6aek1g1.html>, 3 sept. 2006.
- ▶ [7] See "The importance of considering Gender Issues in Migration" by Gloria Moreno-Fontes, a Migration Specialist of the ILO Migration Branch. <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/migrant/projects/gender/>.
- ▶ [8] Estimates according to figures by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas from CFO, DFA, POEA and other sources covering 194 countries/territories, while independent estimates by various Philippine civic organizations estimate the number at 11 million.
- ▶ [9] Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work (2001), and Children of Global Migration: Transnational Families and Gendered Woes (2005) both by Rhacel Parrenas, both Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- ▶ [10] Paper presented during the NEWR Workshop on Women's Social Entitlements by Debbie Carlos, 10 – 11 October 2003, Athens, Greece.
- ▶ [11] See "Ten Ways to Protect Undocumented Migrant Workers" by Michele LeVoy and Nele Verbruggen, PICUM 2005.
- ▶ [12] Example cited by Kasapi-Hellas, Women's Social Entitlements NEWR Workshop, 10 – 11 October 2003, Athens, Greece.
- ▶ [13] France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands are the signatories of the Schengen Treaty.
- ▶ [14] When it started in 1952, the EU of today had only 6 members. Now it has 25 member states, as of 2006, at least seven (possibly even more) are expected to join in the future.
- ▶ [15] In 2004, Italian President Ciampi presented Chato Basa with the Ordine al Merito della Repubblica Italiana and was named "Cavaliere della Repubblica".
- ▶ [16] In May and September 2006, Chato Basa participated in the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) expert group meetings on female migrants and development. For a full copy of the proceedings entitled: "Female Migrants: Bridging the Gaps Throughout the Life Cycle", see <http://www.unfpa.org/publications/detail.cfm?ID=313> and/or <http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/>

shared/mainsite/published_docs/books/female_migrants.pdf

- ▶ [17] The AWID international conference was held on 27-30 October, 2005 in Bangkok, Thailand, attended by four Babaylan members (It, CH, DK, and NL). For more information and proceedings of the forum, see http://www.awid.org/forum/plenary_reports.htm.
- ▶ [18] The most recent Asia-Europe Peoples' Forum (AEPF) was held in Helsinki, Finland on 3-7 September 2006. For more information about AEPF and the proceedings of the forum, see <http://www.aepf.net>. For other information about earlier AEPFs, see <http://www.tni.org/asem-copenhagen/declaration.htm> and <http://www.tni.org/asem-hanoi/aepf2004.htm>.
- ▶ [19] Since 1996 Bayanihan, Philippine Women's Centre in the Netherlands, has been giving assistance and support to Filipina au pairs. (More on Bayanihan's work about au pairs can be found in a separate report elsewhere in this book). Most recently, Babaylan-DK has started attending to the problems that Filipina au pairs face in Denmark.
- ▶ [20] "Trans Euro Express – Filipinas in Europe" by M.L. Hardillo, Horlemann, 2000. M.L. Hardillo was Babaylan's chairperson in 2000-2003.
- ▶ [21] "Me, Us and Them: Realities and Illusions of Filipina Domestic Workers", by C. Basa and R. de la Rosa, Ograro, 2004.
- ▶ [22] This research project was conducted from 2003-2005. FWC through Chato Basa, facilitated the inclusion of Babaylan in this research project. M.L. Hardillo, then chair of Babaylan participated in the first phase together with C. Basa of FWC-It. Later they were joined by D. Carlos (Diwata-Gr), D. Oosterbeek & C. Nalagon (Bayanihan-NL). The project was funded by the European Community. Documentation of the research is published in book form entitled "Welcome? Migrants and Natives Network", F. Brezzi and I. Perreti, Aracne, 2006.
- ▶ [23] Debbie Carlos served as the first chairperson of Babaylan from 1992-1994. She is a founding member of Kasapi-Hellas, the spirit behind the founding of Munting Nayon primary school and the establishment Diwata.

Other references:

- ▶ "International Migration: Globalisation's Last Frontier" by J. W. Moss, Zed books, 2006
- ▶ "Gender and Migration" by S. Jolly with H. Reeves, BRIDGE Institute of Development Studies, 2005
- ▶ "Gender and Migration: An Integrative Approach" by N. Oishi, University of California, San Diego, 2002
- ▶ "Migration, development and the EU security agenda", Chapter 8, by B. Hayes with T. Bunyan, Europe in the World, Statewatch
- ▶ "A gender perspective on migration and integration" by Long Litt Woon, European Foundation Centre Session, Brussels, 2006
- ▶ "Women and Migration: Incorporating Gender into International Migration Theory" by M. Boyd and E. Grieco, Migration Policy Institute, Washington DC, 2006
- ▶ "Migration and development: the European Policy" Speech by Vice-President Franco Frattini, European Commissioner responsible for Justice, Freedom and Security, Forza Italia meeting, Bologna, 2005
- ▶ "Agency in Philippine Women's Labour and Provisional Diaspora" by Pauline Gardiner Barber, Women's Studies International Forum, Vol. 23, No. 4, pp. 399-411, 2000
- ▶ "Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work" by Rhacel Parrenas, Stanford University Press, 2001
- ▶ "Migrants as Transnational Social Actors - Developing New forms of organising" speech delivered F. Jusay, Commission for Filipino Migrant Workers, during the ASEM5 Peoples' Forum, Hanoi, 2005.
- ▶ Annual reports and various reports by the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA).

► CMA Working Paper on Overseas Migration, Centre for Migrant Advocacy (CMA) Philippines. www.pinoy-abroad.net