

# Globalisation and the “Hidden” Insecurity of Women Migrants

by Seiko Hanochi

*The stories that follow are those of two Filipinas who succeeded in staying in Japan and hope to settle down with their families. Have they truly succeeded in overcoming the insecurity generated by surveillance and their being “hidden” from the public eye? Did they overcome their human insecurity by being admitted into Japanese society? Two Filipinas married to Japanese men share many examples of insecurity experienced in marriage in Japan and in settling down.*

## The Insecurity in the Process of Marriage and Settling Down in Japan

Ms. M had a love child in her home town when she was 17. She was unable to marry her boyfriend and decided instead to leave the Philippines so she could raise her child, give him a good education, and support her family at the same time. She left her child with her mother, and felt lucky that through an agency in Manila secured a job as an entertainer in Japan. She worked for a year and a half in a pub in Aichi Prefecture but was unable to tolerate

sexual harassment from the owner. She sought financial and physical refuge at the home of a customer and lived with him for two years, subsequently becoming pregnant. She then returned to the Philippines to bear her child.

Once in the Philippines, she frequently telephoned her partner asking him to recognise the child but could not get any commitment. Her insecurity kept increasing till the time of her delivery. Eventually, the father of her child came to visit with his mother. They married officially in the Philippines and the child was duly recorded as their daughter in

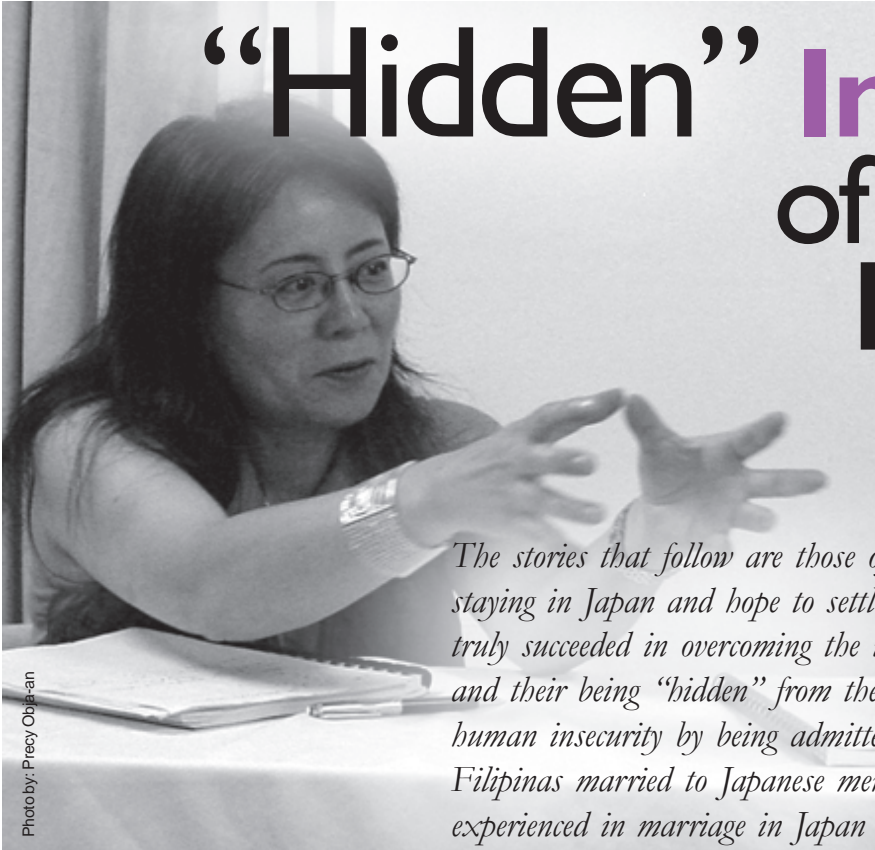


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her birth certificate. Her child's identity having been settled, Ms. M now could face the persistent issues of labour mobility.

Ms. A on the other hand, worked in a Nagoya pub for six months and then returned to the Philippines. Later she went back to Japan and worked as an entertainer, again in Nagoya. She left the pub with two other Filipinas and moved to the bigger city of Tokyo, but finding difficulty in getting a good job, she decided to return to Nagoya. She found work in a Philippine pub, thanks to some Filipina friends. She left the pub and married the owner after five years of informal relations during which time she got pregnant.

(*koseki*) of her husband. At this bargaining, she saw clearly how weak her husband was in protecting her from his parents and sister, who criticised her incessantly. She had in all, four daughters and raised them while helping her husband work at his company. She worked all day, and at home suffered from criticisms about her way of raising children, her cooking and household management. Repeatedly, she asked her husband to live separate from his family. He refused and continued to side with his parents and sister. She felt so isolated and insecure, especially because she had none to consult on her many problems.

### Insecurity related to divorce and settlement

Ms. M's insecure life with the family of her husband ended when she was hospitalised following a car accident. The parents suggested a divorce in the aftermath. Physically and mentally unable to hold long discussions, she finally accepted the idea of a divorce on condition that she receives USD170,00 to enable her to open a Philippine pub of her own. The children would live with the father but she was supposed to come to meet them freely. However, these promises were not kept, and, she was unable to meet with her children.

In the case of Ms. A, she also lived with her husband's parents and one daughter, but her mother-in-law constantly quarrelled with her, and her husband avoided giving her any support. She divorced after two years and after living with her daughter under the protection of the municipality, she obtained a court ruling. Since the court decision, she has received from her ex-husband financial support for her daughter.

In both cases, M and A succeeded in marrying Japanese men but subsequently experienced another kind of overwhelming insecurity, this time in their relationships with the family of the man they married.

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### Insecurity from living with husband's family

Ms. M returned to Japan with her child and lived with her husband's parents and with the family of his elder sister. After a difficult negotiation, she succeeded in registering herself in the family record

These two cases indicate that settling down in Japan by marriage is often accompanied by great insecurity related to expectations of family members with whom they are forced to live.

### Difficulty in meeting with children after divorce

To bear children with men of Japanese nationality allows Filipinas to obtain

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Japanese nationality and to stay legally in Japan. However, the presence of children often causes them problems and insecurity based on racism and gender discrimination.

For a short while after her divorce, Ms. M could meet with her children but soon her husband’s family made it impossible to meet with them. They refused to transmit phone messages and told her that her children were not home when she would come. Her children were told repeatedly that Filipino people were dangerous and unclean, and that their mother was a bad woman. She often considered appealing to the Family Court and charge a breach of contract which clearly stipulated her right to see her children. She would like to return to the Philippines, but also feels that she cannot leave her children. She wants to

see them grow, and feels that to help them build a happy life is an important purpose of her own life.

### Remarriage as part of the process of settlement

After her divorce with her Japanese husband, Ms. A got acquainted with a Filipino and married him following pregnancy. He is an undocumented person and an “over-staying” guest. He was interrogated by the Japanese police in 2006 and was interned in a camp for forced repatriation. But marriage to Ms. A, who has a child of Japanese nationality, was viewed by the immigration authorities a valid ground to give him a permanent visa. He was released in 2007. Ms. A has found relative security with her child and her Filipino husband, thanks to the Japanese immigration law guaranteeing the right to settle to parents of children with Japanese nationality.

### From protection to empowerment

Ms. A, now 31, migrated to Japan when she was 17 years old and decided to tell her story to other Filipinas living in the same town. This disclosure helps her in her search for friends to support her, but she also believes that the women will find more security by getting together. She has organised a local network of Filipinas and continues to meet with them periodically, discussing ways to promote “community integration.”

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women discuss a variety of problems they face in their daily lives, how to overcome them, and face their future, especially the onset of old age.

The husbands, on the other hand, tend to believe they don't have to learn *Tagalog* since it is the women who need assimilation into Japanese society. However, many Filipinas want to return to the Philippines when they grow old, and hope their children will visit them there. This difference of opinion with their husbands is a source of constant insecurity. The Filipinas often meet opposition from their husbands when they join Philippine organisations. But the women overcome such resistance and continue to organise themselves. This trend is growing and some of the women's Japanese neighbours, beginning with some understanding husbands, support these efforts.

In the above two cases, the Filipinas showed their attempts to overcome their problems by themselves. To some extent, they succeeded but their invisibility and insecurity have not been totally eliminated, and they suffered from their husbands' lack of understanding. In this sense they are not too different from the majority of Filipinas still in the informal sector, with whom they feel a strong solidarity. The alternative of "community integration" attracts all Filipinas who must bond together and integrate themselves rather than be assimilated into Japanese society.

We have to take into account that there exist cases of Filipinas who overcome all kinds of insecurity in the informal sector and succeed in moving into the formal economy and society by marrying Japanese men and bearing children, which gives them legal guarantee to stay permanently in Japan. They achieve a

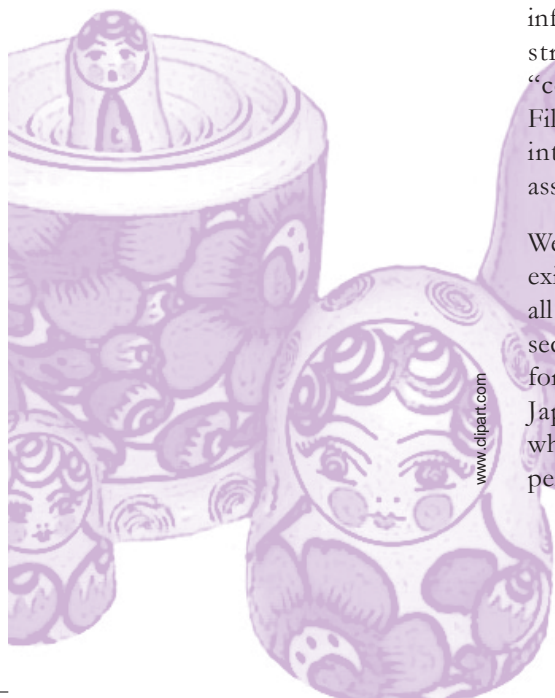
level of community integration among Filipinas which enables them to keep their identity while building a multicultural community with Japanese neighbours.

We must, however, not lose sight of women migrants who continue to live a life of permanent insecurity as entertainers trafficked into the grey zones of Japanese society. They live a life invisible to the eyes of Japanese society and have no secure place in which to live. The Filipinas who continue to live in the informal sectors of Japanese society indeed belong to this worldwide social category of displaced persons.

### **The Wider Picture: Filipina migrant workers and their insecurities**

Behind the decision to work abroad are a number of reasons. A majority of the survey respondents mention poverty, the necessity to improve livelihood, and to solve a variety of economic problems they face.

In the Philippines, applicants for the entertainer visa to Japan, applying through local brokers, have to pass a test administered by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). Cases of bribery and corruption among the staff conducting the tests are frequently reported. Applicants reportedly can pass the tests by paying 10,000 to 15,000 Pesos (USD21 to 321). This corrupt environment provides the background for the provision of entertainer visa to women who do not meet requirements, e.g., minimum age. The age condition was changed from 23 to 21, and lowered to 18 by the decision of the Director of the Philippine Overseas







Employment Administration (POEA). These modifications have not reduced cases of falsification and many faked cases of passports. It must also be noted that often the applicants do not possess exact data proving the date and place of their birth, and this leads to illegalities and anomalies in securing a performing artist visa.

According to the survey, all costs of the respondent entertainers are paid by the promoters including training, travel clothing, cost of tests and passport, and air-fare. These become “debts” to be repaid to the promoters and are subtracted from the remuneration obtained during the contracted period. In some cases, part of the debt is already subtracted from the one month salary prepaid before migration.

Filipinas arriving in Japan are farmed out to pubs, clubs and snack houses, some in large cities, others in small countryside towns. Their passports are confiscated and often it is too late when they find out their contracts are completely ignored, and that they have to work as sex workers.

“Flying booking” and “Dohan,” both unmentioned in their contract and which clearly violate it, are the two major causes of human insecurity experienced by the Filipinas. Among the respondents, 14 out of 37 had experienced “flying booking” and were sold to other work places by the original contracting institution. This kind of so-called “flying booking” is an illegal custom practiced by the clubs and other sex industries in Japan, and force the entertainers to work in workplaces which do not meet the conditions mentioned in the contract. This practice is reported as a major cause of insecurity. “I had to move to another workplace, (flying booking) occurs when

the manager is angry with the girl” (ibid., p. 96).

The other illegal practice causing insecurity is “Dohan,” a term which means “to accompany” and consists of dating a customer before coming to the club. This practice has been introduced by clubs to keep customers during hard times and assigns each sex worker a minimum number of times they must accompany customers. “Dohan” is considered part of the normal work in spite of the fact that it is not mentioned in the contract. “Dohan” provides an occasion for the club to avoid responsibility for the illegal sexual services provided by the sex worker outside the workplace, and is also useful to keep good customers, who pay about 10,000 Yen (USD100) on each “Dohan” out of which only 20 to 30 percent goes to the worker. The major part becomes additional income for the club (ibid., p. 96).

According to the survey, Filipinas experience a multitude of problems when they come home to the Philippines. Women with children are generally treated by their family members and by neighbours differently depending on whether or not their children are legally recognised by their Japanese fathers.

The returnees who do not bring back cash and gifts are often not welcome and the local community tends to discriminate against them. There are even cases where the Filipinas who return home after only a 6-month stay in Japan find that people they have known for over 20 years no longer interact with them.

Understandably, there are both success and failure stories. Some women come home with jewelry, electronic devices, and money enabling them to buy properties.

Others come back bankrupt after a short venture into business. Their narratives include stories about being discriminated against and treated as entertainer-objects. Some girls are called by the insulting term of “Japa-yuki.” However for the Filipina, coming home without money is a disaster, and cause of deep insecurity.

The survey shows most of the Japanese men the Filipinas have interacted with are more than ten years older than the women and have experienced divorce. In many cases, these men provide economic support, often when they learn of their pregnancy, often tell the women to return to the Philippines and there to give birth. Usually, this means the end of the relationship.

Behind the different types of insecurity, there is, however, a common ground: women feel they are not being understood by people around them. Their workplace as entertainer belongs

to the grey zone of society and they live in a nowhere place. They live in Japan but not really with their Japanese neighbours, remaining invisible to the common Japanese citizen.

As we have seen, the insecurity they experience at home before leaving for Japan, the insecurity during the pre-migration process, the insecurity after having left the Philippines are of different nature. The insecurity caused by their working condition, the insecurity waiting for them at home, especially their insecurity accompanying their wedding, divorce, pregnancy, child birth and other family-related insecurity involve a variety of causes. However, all these insecurities have in common two basic features, invisibility and surveillance. At all stages of their migration and return, the women live isolated from civil society, ignored by the citizens, and under constant surveillance by the authorities. It is necessary to determine the structure of this world to better understand their state of mind.

**Invisibility and Surveillance  
Accompanying the War on  
Terror**

In the post-9/11 age, where a system of global surveillance has been well established. More precisely we are wittingly or unwittingly involved in the War on Terror. This is characterised by the emergence of peoples who are under special surveillance and whose insecurity is usually made invisible to the eyes of the ordinary citizen.

The special surveillance of the Filipina entertainers is based on a suspicion of “illegal” foreigners as potential criminals, typical of the modern state of Japan where a homogeneous Japanese people

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has been seen as the cause of the high level of security enjoyed by the Japanese society. Japanese citizens believe that they live in a secure environment among themselves because they share a single ethnic origin, a single language and a single nationality.

The xenophobic fear of foreigners breaking this homogeneity has now been intensified. The War on Terror gives a pretext to the Japanese government authorities to increase the surveillance of the “illegal” foreigners living especially in the informal sex sector.

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Surveillance, however, covers all citizens, so that Filipinas share with their Japanese neighbours a common and broader security interest. The surveillance experienced by Filipinas is a particular case of the human insecurity of the neo-liberal “global panopticon.” “Illegal migrants” living in the informal sector have their information put in the global database built by the state for itself and for the market together with the data collected from the citizens. This database serves not only the prevention of instability and threats caused by criminals and terrorists but also the interests of private capital which needs information on the consumer to maximise profits.

Surveillance, in this way, covers all members of globalised societies, but it is targeted in a special way at the informal sectors, especially the undocumented migrants. Many of the Filipina entertainers belong to this category of “illegal” people especially targeted by the “panopticon” (Gill, 2003). As we saw from their testimonies, these women experience acute insecurity at different stages of migration, an insecurity invisibilised both in their countries of origin and of destination.

### Informalisation and Insecurity

The Filipina entertainers often experience a special form of informalisation when their contract as entertainer is not honoured by their Japanese employers or when their visa expires. The human insecurity they experience is, consequently, closely connected with informalisation. Whereas women in the industrial civil societies experience informalisation as a consequence of the gradual renunciation of the states to perform their welfare roles, women living in the developing rural regions of the South see their livelihood threatened by social breakdown through war, famine, disease and often by the loss of public support due to structural adjustment. Those who decide to migrate from the South to the North experience a different form of informalisation both during the process of their migration and in the informal communities they build on the fringes of the society to which they have moved. The human insecurity they experience is in this sense part of a worldwide trend for women migrants from the South to be constrained in the informal sectors in the North and live a life invisible to society.

The Filipina entertainers can be located in the third layer of the globalised world



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system described by Robert W. Cox (Cox, 1996), who sees a top global layer where the mega-competition among states and transnational firms takes place, a second layer of national agents subordinated to the first and competing for admission in the global market developed by the first, and a third layer of agents exploited by the first two layers without any hopes of ever benefiting from the global market. The narratives of Filipinas reported here are all characteristic examples of this third layer which is excluded from any beneficial goods monopolised by the first and second layers of the global world system.

As a consequence of the informalisation of the economy, politics and military/police aspects of globalisation, a particular dilemma is generated. The more the states try to strengthen the security of the civil society, the more they increase the human insecurity of the peoples living in the informal sectors. This is a “security dilemma,” different from the one experienced by states among themselves but quite similar to it, in that it opposes the citizens and the foreign migrant dwellers of the informal sectors who begin to fear and see one another as a threat. The state supporting

the civil society strengthens its police control and the resistance to it grows among the “illegal” migrants in the informal sector. This dilemma makes invisible to the eyes of civil society the Filipinas and other dwellers of the informal sector. Such a state of insecurity of foreigners in the informal sector can be eliminated only when the state realizes that this dilemma can be solved only by giving full citizenship to members of the informal sector.

### Conclusion

The human insecurity of the Filipino women we reported on is shared by a large variety of migrant workers in the informal grey-zones of the global economy. As Edward Said (1986, 1994, 1995, Japanese edition) has written about the Palestinians, the global age is producing a variety of exiled peoples: refugees, trafficked persons, undocumented migrants, etc. Their consciousness is one of being “exiled” or “displaced,” a consciousness shared by many intellectuals and artists whose creativity finds inspiration from their exiled status. The Filipina entertainers are in this sense migrating to Japan as displaced artists. They share with other migrant peoples living in the informal sector a particular capacity to understand and empathise with other displaced people. This empathy allows them to empower themselves, and to organise and build their own security based on their concept of “community integration.”

Their efforts to organise themselves in their local community can be seen as a building bloc in the efforts to organise globally in face of the global insecurity, as represented by the World Social Forum. The Gramscian concept of the “war on position” (Gramsci, 1971) is



an appropriate metaphor representing the will to build informal networks to overcome a common insecurity beyond the surveillance of the state and society. The cases reported in this paper can be interpreted not so much as cases of human insecurity only, but also as examples of migrant women of the informal sector seeking ways to build their common trench. The last two cases indicate that some of them succeed in building trenches where they fight a war of position against their common insecurity, building a common front not only among themselves but inviting also their neighbour citizens to join in their trench network. “Human security” is for them a “war of position” strategy. ■



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