

**Sara R. Curran**  
**Comprehensive Professional Statement**

**September 2004**

My research attempts to answer two questions: How does the interaction between gender and social institutions affect migration, education, and marriage? And, how are gender and social institutions reshaped by migration and education?

I embarked on this research agenda when I examined rural industrialization in North Carolina as a graduate student (in a paper published in *Rural Sociology*), and subsequently developed my ideas substantially through graduate and postgraduate research in Southeast Asia, specifically in Thailand. This work, published or forthcoming in *Social Forces*, *Review of the Sociology of Education*, and *Journal of International Women's Studies*, demonstrates that individuals' patterns of migration and educational attainment are fundamentally influenced by the interaction between gender and social context. This research culminates in my book, *Shifting Boundaries, Transforming Lives: Globalization, Gender, and Family in Thailand* (under contract at Princeton University Press), which examines the relationship between these individual processes and global economic shifts.

*Shifting Boundaries* has two objectives: to detail the mechanisms by which macro processes like economic development influence micro level dynamics in villages in the northeast region of the country, and to demonstrate that gender and family relations shape the pace and patterns of economic development. Using both ethnographic fieldwork and quantitative analysis I have studied the northeast of Thailand for the past ten years, painstakingly amassing a large body of data on socio-economic transformations in the country. The book integrates an analysis of detailed ethnographic data; a comprehensive, longitudinal compilation of secondary data from government sources; and a longitudinal, multi-level survey of families and communities. I combine these varied elements of evidence in innovative ways to offer new perspectives on gender, globalization, and social change. The book will be in press in 2005.

During the past six years, I have continued this line of research in the United States through papers examining how gender interacts with social networks to affect demographic outcomes. In a recent paper, published in *Demography*, I examine how gender interacts with social networks to effectively influence whether individuals migrate within Mexico or to the U.S. In a second paper, published in *Social Science Research*, my co-authors and I investigate how gender interacts with divorce and remarriage to influence perceptions of social support. And, in a paper published in the *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, I offer theoretical and methodological alternatives to current conceptions of family and household dynamics, alternatives that allow for greater sensitivity to selection bias; more comprehensive, theoretical attention to causality and temporal dynamics; and, through the use of the sociological concepts of embedded action and accountability frames, a better explanation of household and family dynamics.

Recently, my interests in the interaction between global processes and individual choices expanded into the issue of environmental dynamics. This led to a series of articles

published or forthcoming in *Population and Development Review*, *Advances in Global Change Research*, *Population and Environment*, and *Human Ecology*, and a special issue of *Ambio*, which I co-edited, focused on the influence of migration on environmental outcomes in coastal ecosystems. As a result of these efforts, I am also contributing a chapter on population and environment to the *Encyclopedia of Sociology* (Blackwell) and am a lead author for the UN Millennium Ecosystem Assessment's chapter on coastal ecosystems.

In current work, I continue building on these themes through collaborative work in the U.S. and Thailand. I will continue my primary line of research on gender, migration, education and development with analyses of two different longitudinal surveys from Thailand (the Nang Rong Surveys 1984-2000 and the Kanchanaburi DSS 2000-2004). In addition, with the support of the Mellon Foundation, I am examining how social capital influences adolescent transitions to adulthood in Thailand. In this project our team developed and fielded innovative qualitative methods to elicit information from youth, parents and community leaders about how social support networks are affected by rapid socio-economic change. So far, we have found that downward or upward trajectories for Thai youth are quite different for young men and women, but all the patterns taken together provide important explanations for the growing HIV/AIDS infection rate among adolescents in Thailand. In addition to presenting results to the Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Education, provincial officials, local NGOs, International NGOs and academics in October, the research team has generated several proposed papers for international public health and population meetings.

Second, as a result of my research in Thailand and my line of research examining population and environment, I have begun to address three aspects of globalization – transnational organizations, trade, and migration. In all three projects I explore how the global ties generated via these particular exchanges are transforming social life in particular localities. For the first aspect, I examine how transnational economic and civic organizations are transforming political and civil liberties in Asia (under review at *American Sociological Review*). For the second aspect, I am examining how a commodities approach can illuminate the relationship between trade, development, and the environment through a case study of how trade in cassava (*manioc esculenta*) between Europe and Thailand lead to dramatic deforestation in Thailand and increased meat consumption in Europe. This work will be part of a collection of papers presented at a conference I am organizing on trade in agricultural commodities and its impact on development and the environment (Princeton University, February 2005) and subsequently published by Princeton University Press. For the third aspect, I am in the formative stages of a project that examines how dramatic increases in the foreign-born population outside of the major U.S. urban centers between 1990 and 2000 are transforming civic, economic, and social life in “middle America.”

In all of these research projects, I combine qualitative and quantitative research methods in innovative ways. For example, in my JMF paper I point to the importance of theory to understanding biases inherent in cross-sectional data about household divisions of labor. My research has convinced me that social life is contingent and reciprocal; however most

of our datasets do not accommodate this fact very comfortably. As a result of my thinking in this area, Ellen Perelman of the Social Science Research Council and I are editing a forthcoming collection and bibliography titled *Finding a Method in the Madness: A Bibliography and Contemplative Essays for Social Science Fieldwork* (under contract with Sage) intended to fill a gap in methodological training for graduate and undergraduate scholars. The volume provides essays on a variety of field methods and the practice of fieldwork authored by leading scholars in those fields.

I enjoy teaching and have experience teaching undergraduates, graduate students and professional students in a range of disciplines. I work closely mentoring students and have been recognized for my mentoring work by the Sociologists for Women in Society 2001 Mentoring Award, Princeton University in their inaugural Graduate Mentoring Award (2002), and by the Princeton Sociology department's advising awards for Juniors and Seniors in 2002 and 2004. I have taught undergraduate courses entitled: The Labor Force (University of North Carolina), Sociology of Gender (Princeton University), and Claims and Evidence in Sociology (Princeton University). I have taught graduate courses titled: Gender and Development (Princeton University), Migration and Development (Princeton University), Empirical Seminar (Princeton University), Ethics of Research Practice in the Social Sciences (Princeton University), and Sociology of Gender (Princeton University). My approach towards teaching is to encourage active learning approaches via a Socratic lecture style, student-initiated research projects, and community based research. For the latter, I worked with graduate students to publish the lessons learned from community based research in a paper in *Teaching Sociology*. I have also co-authored other articles with 8 graduate students as an important kind of teaching and mentoring. For similar reasons and because their professional demands limit their opportunities for academic publications, I have also co-authored work with junior and senior Thai colleagues, as well as one of Princeton's senior programmers. In addition, I have been responsible for administering Princeton University's Sociology undergraduate program for three years (2001-2004), a period during which the number of our majors doubled. I have served on a variety of departmental and university-wide committees and provided professional service contributions to the American Sociological Association via the International Migration Section (chair-elect, 2004) and the Sociologists for Women and Society.

For more details, please visit my website: <http://www.princeton.edu/~curran> where you will find my c.v., detailed research, teaching and service statements, and other relevant material.