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~Book Prospectus~

Shifting Boundaries, Transforming Lives:
Globalization, Gender, and Family Dynamics in Thailand

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BOOK PROSPECTUS

Shifting Boundaries, Transforming Lives: Globalization, Gender, and Family Dynamics in Thailand, by Sara R. Curran (Assistant Professor of Sociology, Princeton University)

About This Project

Overview

Between 1985 and 1995 the Thai economy was one of the fastest growing economies in the world, if not the fastest.[1] While much attention has been paid to the bank office towers in Bangkok, very few studies have emphasized the impact of this growth for Thai villagers.[2] It is the villagers of Thailand who fueled much of this economic growth. It was the hard work of individual Thais, primarily rural, primarily from the northeastern part of the country, primarily young (between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four), and both male and female. The choices their families made about who migrated and who became educated were driven by both the social context of family and gender relations and the context of economic development in Thailand. The cumulative impact of their decisions, as well as the differential impact of education and migration choices, affected the rate, pace, and sustainability of Thai economic growth. In turn, their decisions have also changed the structure of social, economic, and cultural institutions of rural village life and, I argue, the form that globalization takes within a locality. *Shifting Boundaries, Transforming Lives* traces this interdependent dynamic to further our understanding of globalization processes.

Shifting Boundaries, Transforming Lives will answer these questions: How are people changing their local culture in order to adapt and benefit from globalization? What aspects of family life are more or less resilient? What does this say about how we understand gender and development, or women and men's current and future lives in a simultaneously local and global world?

Shifting Boundaries, Transforming Lives examines how global markets shape, and are shaped by, individuals in the developing world. Missing from the literature on globalization are examples of how individuals both embrace but also resist various global economic forces through migration and education. These choices, which have only emerged in the last twenty years, have significantly impacted Thai family structure and gender relations. This book explores the role of globalization in the changing social demographics of Thailand from the vantage of Nang Rong, a district in northeastern Thailand.

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[1] Bello, Cunningham, and Poh (1998), Phongpaichit and Baker (1998), Warr (1993).

[2] Mills (1997) and Phonpaichit and Baker (1998) both focus on some of the impacts, but their research agendas are different.

In order to understand the role globalization plays in recasting gender and family relations, *Shifting Boundaries, Transforming Lives* follows the life stories of a young cohort of Thai villagers from the 1980s through the 1990s. Thus, *Shifting Boundaries, Transforming Lives* fills a critical knowledge gap about how globalization is translated and transformed within a locality through a longitudinal study of a well-defined place. In this way, I argue that globalization is simultaneously dynamic, rather than either oppressive or liberating. I show how localities (villagers, families, and villages) can facilitate or resist the reach of globalization by invoking expectations and practices about gender and family. The result is considerable variation in the way globalization impacts individual lives.

By tracking the lives of several families for over ten years through ethnographic methods (1992-2002) and combining these observations with a larger, longitudinal survey of thousands of individuals and households from Nang Rong (1984-2000), *Shifting Boundaries, Transforming Lives* provides a rare opportunity to observe how the boundaries of globalization shift in response to localities – in this case, moving closer to village, villager, and family, provoking another renegotiation of family and gender relations. The simultaneous observation of a locality's response to globalizing forces and the way globalizing economic forces respond to the dynamics of a locality is the empirical contribution of *Shifting Boundaries, Transforming Lives*. *Shifting Boundaries, Transforming Lives* also provides scholars of economic and demographic change a conceptual framework for understanding the role of gender and family in shaping macro outcomes through micro processes. Policy makers will also gain insights on how the highly contingent micro processes of social life can yield profound and unintended consequences resulting from policy initiatives that initially promote aggressive marketing of labor and products for export processing.

I argue that the resulting variation in responses is not random but rather is systematically related to how individuals are embedded in social relations that either constrain or create opportunities for redefining their identity and consequent material and social opportunities. This process of embedding (including disembedding and re-embedding) facilitates, and is facilitated by, social and physical mobility achieved typically through migration and education. For example, individuals can be embedded in traditional kinship relations, and these social structures can serve as opportunities or constraints to social and physical mobility in response to the pull of global labor market opportunities through accountability schemas such as filial obligation or gendered expectations of care giving. However, if individuals move (socially or physically), the possibility increases that they may disembed themselves from these social

relations, and their associated accountability schemas, raising the chance of a shift in behavior in response to new accountability schemes residing in new sets of social relations. The ties that bind individuals to different sets of social relations, for example between tradition and modernity, can pull in more than one direction or at different times, forcing a negotiation of identity and behavior that is hard to observe at one point in time or only briefly, as is typically done in cross-sectional surveys.

Until 1997 Thailand was a poster child for the successful, export-oriented Asian model. Not only did it lay historic claim to being the only country in Southeast Asia never to have been colonized,[3] it had the highest rates of economic growth of any country in the world between 1984 and 1996.[4] Thailand's resistance to political incorporation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries did not preclude a vigorous participation in the world economy. This participation was partially responsible for the dramatic rates of growth at the end of the twentieth century, driven first by an export- oriented agricultural sector (in the 1970s), then by foreign direct investment in manufacturing (in the 1980s), and finally by foreign direct investment in real estate and finance (in the 1990s).[5]

During the 1980s, Thailand experienced an unprecedented economic expansion only to suffer in the late 1990s an equally impressive economic downturn. Young people in the early 1980s from rural northeastern Thailand were caught up in the whirlwind of change, often moving to Bangkok for work or schooling, to see the "city lights," and to take advantage of apparent opportunities to earn money in the increasingly cash dependent economy. In the early 1980s, choices to continue secondary schooling, to enter the urban labor force, or to remain agricultural wage laborers would, unknowingly at the time, result in profoundly stratifying outcomes as society became increasingly unequal from 1980 to 1999.

By the early 1990s these stratifying outcomes were beginning to reveal themselves concretely to young people and their families. Young migrants struggled to make ends meet in Bangkok factory dormitories or slum dwellings, felt pressures to work ever harder, and to become modern and enjoy their lives (Mills 1997) while at the same time sending money home to help support their families' rising debt load or help their younger siblings go to school. These pressures were greatest for daughters, who felt the obligations towards parents

[3] Although it was never colonized, it was economically integrated within the British sphere of influence in the nineteenth century (Phongpaichit 1980). Thailand also briefly incurred a Japanese occupation during World War II.
[4] Bello et al. (1998), Warr (1993).
[5] Bello et al. (1998)

and siblings, but who also stood to gain from inheritance of parental resources in origin villages. The few of their compatriots, mostly young men, who managed to continue their secondary schooling faced greater opportunities and returns to human capital but relatively small personal networks linking them to career opportunities outside of agriculture and wage labor. Toward the end of the 1990s these young people were facing a dramatic economic decline and uncertain choices about returning home or remaining in the urban market. At the same time, the forces of the global market were not standing still. Low wage export manufacturing jobs were moving ever closer (or even farther away to Vietnam and China), as patterns of economic globalization shifted away from the establishment of multinational corporate firms (MNC) in export processing zones (EPZs) to smaller, subcontracting local firms in more rural hinterlands. In detailing the stories of youth over a fifteen-year period, this study is the first to examine with temporal depth the shifting form of globalization and the consequent transformational effects upon individual, family, and village lives and livelihoods.

The above description begins to make concrete the ways in which globalization has shifted form, how family boundaries shift in response, and the ways young people's lives are transformed. In the 1980s, Nike, Adidas, Reebok, Ann Taylor, the Gap, and many other well-known companies and labels built large manufacturing plants in export processing zones outside of Bangkok. At the time, most Thais were living in rural areas (Thailand was almost seventy percent rural in 1980) making less than three dollars per day in agricultural and traditional trades. The rural economic structure was based on particular intergenerational relations, care giving, residence, and remittance patterns that were also tied to marital expectations and gender roles. While many young adults never expected to leave their rural homes, the extraordinary opportunity to make six dollars per day for Nike was far too enticing not just for the young people but for their families as well. Most of the jobs for women were in these factories, while young men gained opportunities in the more itinerant construction and booming agricultural wage labor markets in central Thailand. In the early 1980s agricultural exports were the highest foreign exchange earner for the Thai economy, but agricultural exports were soon to lose their first place status to manufactured exports.

Factory work for women afforded them the chance to earn money for their families and themselves, as well as experience a bit of modern life. For some women it meant never returning to settle down in their villages of origin, only making visits on occasion. For men, cash incomes increased their ability to independently establish themselves from their parents, earn the bride price necessary to marry into a woman's household with relative ease. These patterns of life were particularly pronounced in the northeastern part of the country, an

economically and agriculturally marginal region where a majority of migrants came and among whom almost fifty percent were fifteen to nineteen years old, equally divided among men and women (Chamratrithirong et al. 1995).

The movement of so many young people out of villages, especially young women, had the effect of destabilizing traditional family structures and gender relations. As the 1990s came to a close, the young people I first observed in the late 1980s had now made their transition to adulthood, and in the process made life choices that variously linked them to the global economy and their villages of origin. These choices reflect new interpretations of what it means to be a father, mother, son, and daughter in Thai society. Further, the choices they made in the late 1980s and early 1990s also shape the character and nature of globalization and its particular imprint upon Thai society. This book explores how globalization both determines and is determined by these important familial and cultural negotiations.

This book also documents how globalization transforms life through rural-urban migration and secondary education. These two processes have increased previously isolated areas' dependence on international trade and contact with foreign ideas. Among rural northeastern Thais, they have intensified their consciousness of the outside world.[6] Specifically, rural Thais' insertion into the global labor force through urban migration and remittances and the subsequent spread of material goods, values, and technologies transforms the dependence of daughters upon parents and has thereby transformed family relations, inheritance patterns, and traditional systems of property rights and old age care provisions. These changes, in turn, have helped make Thailand's rapid insertion into a global market possible.

The temporal and social depth of the data offers rare opportunities for observing the social changes wrought by the interdependant dynamics of globalization, gender, and family. The temporal depth of the data captures precisely the era of rapid transformations (1984-2000). Further, the survey data include multiple levels of information, from individuals to households to villages of origin to migrant lives in places of destination (1984, 1988, 1994).[7] The survey data are complimented by longitudinal ethnographic material from three periods: 1992, 1998, and 2000. These data follow villagers' lives in places of origin (fifty-one northeastern villages) to places of destination (metropolitan Bangkok)

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[6] This definition of globalization draws upon Mauro Guillen's work (2001), which specifically identifies Gilpin's (2000) identification of interdependence and Robertson's (1992) identification of compression and intensification as key components for recognizing globality.

[7] The data were collected by the Institute for Population and Social Research at Mahidol University with assistance from the University of North Carolina and with funding from the National Institute for Child and Human Development.

and back again, over a fifteen-year period. This study of a district and its people reveals the dynamism of socio-economic development and the far-reaching but often unacknowledged effects of globalization on particular locales.

Related Works

Shifting Boundaries, Transforming Lives follows in the footsteps of several intellectual traditions including works about industrialization, development, and family and gender (Haraven 1978, 1982; Fernandez-Kelly 1982; Wolf 1994); migration and gender (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Menjívar 2000; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991); and gender in Southeast Asia (Esterik 1982, 1995; Esterik and Esterik 1992; Ong 1987; Mills 1997; Wolf 1994); and studies of the political economy of development in Thailand (Phongaichit and Baker 1998; Bello et al. 1998; Mulder 2000). Further, it contributes new and different evidence to studies of globalization by looking longitudinally at globalization's impact on a particular locality, showing how localities might impact the shape of globalization. In this sense *Shifting Boundaries, Transforming Lives* takes up the challenges posed by *Global Ethnography* (Buroway et al. 2000) and shows how localized, detailed descriptions can provide insights into the forces that reach beyond the boundaries of nation and region.

Specifications

I anticipate that the book will be approximately 300 manuscript pages. Some chapters will include tables and figures, for which I will supply camera-ready art. Qualitative material will be supplemented with photographs.

Schedule

Completed manuscript by March 2004.

About the Author

I have worked on development issues for fifteen years, mostly focusing on Southeast Asian development. My passion for the region began as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Philippines, where I worked as an employee of the Bureau of Forest Development in northern Luzon (first in Ilocos Norte and then in Mountain Province). It was there that I first became curious about the impact of migration upon economic development and family relations. High rates of Filipina migration and their important remittances meant that households and communities lost important human capital but gained access to material and symbolic wealth through their *balikbayan*.[8]

[8] This is a Tagalog word for returning migrant.

My Peace Corps experience also left an indelible impression upon me regarding the paradoxical consequences of economic development. This led me to pursue a master's degree in rural sociology (minoring in economics) at North Carolina State, where I examined the impact of southern industrial growth strategies for individuals and communities. A Ph.D. in demography and development at the University of North Carolina and a Mellon Foundation dissertation award (which meant I could learn Thai and do my own fieldwork) brought me back to Southeast Asia. The dissertation research examined the causes of migration and education decisions using an intra-household resource allocation framework, *Household Resources and Opportunities: The Distribution of Education and Migration in Rural Thailand.* This research has produced one published work and several working papers. Following my fieldwork I served as a key member of a team from the University of North Carolina and Mahidol University responsible for organizing the design and collection of the 1994 Nang Rong CEP-CPC survey. Following the survey work, I served as a consultant on a population and environment research project also centered in Nang Rong, Thailand. These afforded several opportunities for me to continue to conduct my own ethnographic fieldwork in conjunction with these projects.

As a result, I have spent the last nine years traveling to Thailand at least once per year. My first stay, the longest, was for eight months in 1992, but since then I have returned for one-month to three-month stays. The friendships made during my first visit have endured and deepened – as friendships only can in Thailand. Most recently, in January 1999, I returned with my two-year-old son to conduct a set of follow-up interviews in one of the original study villages. Returning as a mother, when previously a student, rendered new ethnographic insights as villagers interacted with me in new ways. The experience has further cemented a relationship with the villagers of Nang Rong that will last a lifetime. In late March of 2004 I plan to return to Nang Rong to share my manuscript with the villagers, especially those profiled within its pages. I will read passages to them, garner their responses, correct any errors of fact, and gain their permission for a second time for inclusion in the study. Funding for this trip has been provided from several sources within Princeton University.[9]

Intellectually, my future work will move to other parts of Thailand and other issues. I am currently funded by the Mellon Foundation to conduct a study of how social capital and social networks influence adolescent migrant's livelihoods as they make the transition from youth to adulthood in Kanchanaburi province. This project is a collaborative effort with the International Center for Research on Women and the Institute for Population and Social Research at

[9] This approach to ethnographic field work is one proposed and implemented by Mitchell Duneier in what is now his classic study of street vendors in New York City (Duneier 1999).

Mahidol University, Thailand. This project explores how what we know about social networks and their effects upon individual behavior can be translated into practical interventions or policy initiatives.

A second, project examines the role of communities of origin and destination for influencing immigrant assimilation in the United States, especially in places outside of the major U.S. cities. This project is currently in the planning stages. And a third project examines the impact of the movement and network of transnational organizations in Southeast Asia upon democratic processes and civil society. This project has produced one working paper, currently under review for publication.

About the Market

Primary Audience

The primary disciplines with an interest in this book will include sociology, demography, anthropology, geography, and regional and urban planning. Within these disciplines the core audience will reside in three locales: development studies, gender studies, and Asian studies. The text will be written with scholars in mind, but the quantitative material will be presented in such a way as to be accessible to advanced undergraduates and educated laypersons. For example, results of any multivariate analysis will be presented in graphical form (with complete tables and methodologies described in appendices).

Secondary Audience

Policy makers will also be interested in the volume for the insights it offers about the complexity of education and migration processes, which can be used to inform programmatic interventions regarding labor policy and economic development. The volume will show quantitatively and qualitatively that individuals are active social agents in the process of globalization and consequently there are unanticipated outcomes pertaining to inequality as a result of economic development and globalization.

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