
The Effects of Female Return Migration on Gender Equality Within the Vietnamese Household

Suzan van der Pluijm-Luscuere

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Supervised by dr. W.H.M. Leung

Executive Summary

Return migration is seen as a development actor for the country of origin. Return migrants can cause brain gain and flows of cultural values through social networks. This research aims to identify the effects female return migrants have on their ascribed gender role within the Vietnamese household. Gender inequality, especially on the household level, is a common occurrence in Vietnam, this undermines the livelihood of women. In the existing literature gender is often researched in relation to migration. However the focus usually lies in how gender influences migration, not on how migration influences gender roles. In this thesis a comparison is made between the effects on the lives of high skilled and low skilled female return migrants. The low skilled women migrated to Laos for labor purposes, while the high skilled women migrated to different countries to obtain a master's or PhD degree. In order to carry out this study, twenty-four retrospective interviews were held with female return migrants. The gender roles of the women were positively affected by their migration. Both groups of participants described they obtained a higher status within their families due to a higher income or a higher educational degree. The low skilled women expressed that they got more responsibilities after returning to Vietnam, while the high skilled women expressed a change of mind about how gender roles should be, though the situation did not change equally to their ideas. Although positive changes were made, within both groups of respondents the status of the women stayed inferior to their husbands'.

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Preface

“Before coming to Laos, we were here, working in the rice fields. We were only farmers. Our income was very low and we could not afford to cover our living costs. Then we migrated to Laos and the situation changed. My family can get more money to cover the living costs. And we have savings to buy some new things. You can see we built a new house.”

-Linh (31)

“I think it is a great topic to talk about return migration and the household. Because in Hue a lot of women are very submissive and settled at a young age. They do not expect themselves to be highly educated. But as a return migrant, we think differently about our role. That it should be equal with the man, in everything. Still there are some roles that the man can do better and some roles that the woman can do better. We can discuss with the husband, but the status should be equal in the end. A woman should not lower herself by being submissive and just do the cooking and cleaning and forget about her role for the community.”

-Yen (27)

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1. Introduction

Today we live in an interconnected world. Globalization made long distances become smaller and the corners of the world more interconnected. The world consists of a web of nodes linking flows of goods, information and people. The flow of people is considered migration. Migration is not a static phenomenon; migrants can change their location of destination or return to their country of origin. Since the 1990s and 2000s migration is seen as a possible development actor (Haas, 2012). This is mostly due to remittances and the opportunity for a brain gain. The remittances are a substantial economic gain for the receiving families and communities and play an important role in reducing house-hold poverty and increasing local development (Lopez-Ekra et al., 2011). Some migrants return to their country of origin and contribute to the development of this country (Waldorf, 1995). The biggest motivation for a migrant to return is an increase in education (Zhao, 2002). When a migrant returns home he or she can therefore cause a brain gain in the country of origin and positively influence the local development (Beine, Docquier & Rapoport, 2001). Sustainable development goal number ten describes well-arranged migration as a way to “reduce inequality in and among countries” (United Nations, 2016-a). Before this effect is mostly researched from an economical perspective. This research aimed to find out if the increased capacity of return migrants can influence cultural and social standards and change the ascribed gender role for women within the household.

Gender inequality is a worldwide persistent problem. Gender inequality “is defined as the difference of outcome between men and women” (Baudassé & Bazillier, 2014, p.20). This puts women at risk and gives them fewer opportunities to express and develop themselves freely. Topics that are often discussed in regard to gender inequality are education, healthcare, politics, the labor market and gender based violence. Gender equality is important to ensure inclusive growth. Sustainable Development Goal number five is to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” (United Nations, 2016-b). According to the United Nations (2016-b) “the lack of such equality is a major obstacle to sustainable development”. The migration of women contributes to redefining gender roles and cultural norms (Sijapati, 2016). Female return migration could therefore have positive effect on gender equality.

Return migration is seen as an important development actor of a country (Waldorf, 1995) and the interest in this subject has increased over the last decade (Kuyper, 2008). Return migration can positively influence development through a brain gain in the country of origin. This

research examines if the increased capacity of female return migrants will also lead to a different status for women within their households and if their roles might shift. Vietnam is used as an exemplary casus to research this effect. Vietnam is chosen firstly because of their migrations flows. Labor migration from Vietnam has more than doubled since 1990 (UN, 2015-a); and it is becoming more popular for Vietnamese students to obtain a degree abroad (Welch, 2010). Secondly, because the Vietnamese government supports return migration (Dinh, 2008). And thirdly, because the Vietnamese government recognizes the problem of gender inequality and puts this high on the political agenda ((Roubik, Valesova, Verner & Mazancova, 2014). The most persistent forms of gender inequality in Vietnam is household labor (Teerawichitchainan, et al., 2010). This research is about the possible shifts in gender roles after return migration. Although gender is often researched in relation to migration, the focus usually lies in how gender influences migration, not on how migration influences gender roles.

Moreover, this research focusses on the personal experience of female return migrants in Vietnam. A comparison is made between high skilled female return migrants, who obtained a Master's or PhD degree abroad and low skilled female return migrants who migrated to Laos for labor purposes. Although this research focusses on individual increased capacities, these capacities might cross scale and promote collective development.

1.1 Research Questions

The main research question that will be aimed to answer with this thesis is as follows:

What is the effect of female return migrants on their ascribed gender roles within the Vietnamese household and what are the differences and similarities between high skilled and low skilled women?

In order to answer this question and to guide the research, the five sub questions bellow are formed.

- 1. What are the ascribed gender roles in Vietnam and how do these influence the daily life of women in Vietnam?*

The first sub question explores the tasks and routines of the woman in Vietnam. The participants in this research have different roles in their families: Some are mothers, some are grandmothers others are single, living with their family. The participants are asked about their traditional roles as women as well as how these traditions influence their lives.

2. *What are women's and men's perceptions on gender inequality in Vietnam?*

In order to draw conclusions about the household role of women in Vietnam in regards to gender (in)equality it is important to find out what the perceptions, ideas and thoughts on this subject are. The male perspective in combination with the female perspective will draw a cultural framework about gender in Hué City in which the other results of this research can be placed.

3. *What happens with the role of a woman while she is abroad for a period of time?*

This sub question is about the continuation of the woman's role during her absence. What happens with the (household) tasks of the women when she migrates? And what is the role of the female migrant while she is abroad with her family?

4. *How do female return migrants experience the reintegration process?*

When migrants are abroad for a period of time reintegration in their country and culture of origin can be challenging. The larger part of this research is about the positive impacts of return migration. Possible negative impacts of return migration could be the social embeddedness of the female return migrant (Kuyper, 2008). The participants in this research elaborate on their reintegration within their family, their community and their work environment.

5. *Do women experience a change in their household roles after returning to Vietnam?*

The last sub question aim to make a comparison between the different role of the women within her household before and after she lived abroad. Different subject within this question are the tasks (cooking, cleaning, childcare, etcetera) and the status of the women.

2. Theoretical Approach

In this chapter different theoretical approaches and pieces of literature will be discussed to form a framework for this research. First the feminist approach provides a perspective for this research. Secondly different gender roles and the casus of gender inequality in Vietnam will be discussed. After this, the migration experience will be framed with the social network theory and the brain gain approach. At last, the reintegration process will be discussed on the basis of embeddedness and the livelihood strategy.

2.1 Feminist Approach

This research is conducted from a feminist perspective. Feminists believe that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities in all parts of life (Merriam-Webster, 2017). Feminism is “the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes” (Weber, 2017). Since the late 19th century there have been different waves of feminism (Peet & Harwick, 2015). When the notion of development changed with the emerge of modernization in the seventies, women were recognized as an essential component of development (Potter, Conway, Evans & Lloyd-Evans, 2012). The ‘gender and development’ approach recognizes the need to challenge existing gender roles and relations (Peet & Harwick, 2015). The Vietnamese government acknowledges gender equality as the corner stone of society (Schuler et al., 2007). Both women and men are seen as active agents of development (Potter et al. 2012).

2.2 Construction of Gender Roles

Throughout history gender is used as the bases to divide tasks between men and women. Often women are responsible for productive work (making money), reproductive work (taking care of the children and the household) and community management (working on social relations) (potter et al., 2012). These tasks are globally seen as women’s natural roles. Across many societies women work more than men, they participate in unpaid work like cleaning, cooking and child caring tasks, while they often have a paid job as well. The reproductive work of women are often undervalued. This led to unequal power relations between men and women: Men regularly have all the decision making power and men have more access to resources.

2.2.1 Gender Equality in Vietnam

The Vietnamese government recognizes the problem of gender inequality in Vietnam. With the implementation of the socialist law in 1954 (the North) and 1975 (the South), Vietnam has

been making steps towards a gender equal society (Roubik, Valesova, Verner & Mazancova, 2014). Vietnam has made big progress on promoting gender equality since. One of the most prominent results is gender equality in education. Another success story is on maternal healthcare (World Economic Forum, 2016; Schuler et al., 2007). Regarding access for education, Vietnam has almost eliminated gender inequality (United Nations, 2013). There is however still a big difference in the workforce, with men having more access to higher income and decent work. Regarding the Vietnamese politics, 24,4 per cent of the seats in the National Assembly are held by women (United Nations, 2013). The Vietnamese government continues to promote gender equality and has a central government agency representing women's interests, namely the National Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCFAW) (Asian Development Bank, 2005). "NCFAW is an inter-sectoral body that advises the Prime Minister of inter-sectoral issues concerning gender equality and women's empowerment nationwide" (United Nations, 2017). The government recently implemented two laws on this topic: The 'Gender Equality Law' came into place in 2006 (Thi Hong Thanh Nguyen, 2012). "This law provides for principles of gender equality in all fields of social and family life, measures ensuring gender equality, responsibilities of agencies, organizations, families, individuals in exercising gender equality" (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2006, p.1). In this law the government of Vietnam defines gender equality as the equal position and role of men and women. One year later the 'Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control' was added. This law describes the prevention and control of domestic violence as well as the protection of victims of domestic violence (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2007). In order to promote these laws a 'Joint Programme on Gender Equality' was signed between the UN and the government of Vietnam (Thi Hong Thanh Nguyen, 2012). This program was funded by the Millennium Development Goal Achievement Fund and ran from 2009 until 2012. The goal of the program was to improve the capacity to make the two laws more effective. After three years the awareness and understanding of these laws was strengthened. The program provides a foundation to work on gender equality and gender based violence. In the future this program should be taken to the grass-root level. Vietnam receives support from different international organizations and agencies to promote gender equality (United Nations, 2013; World Bank 2011).

The 'Joint Program on Gender Equality' has helped to organize government and donor activity in Vietnam (World Bank, 2011). Projects organized by this program provide for example medical care, counselling, trainings, safe housing and follow up visits for women

who are victims of gender based violence (Sustainable Development Goals Fund, 2012). Many projects are aimed at raising awareness among women about their rights, only some projects aim to involve men in their community based projects as well.

Gender equality in Vietnam is mainly caused by cultural aspects. Women did gain proper legal rights over the years, but this did not solve the problem of gender equality (Asian Development Bank, 2005). There is a clear gap between written policy and their implementations. The biggest challenges that remain are gender based violence, gender inequality within the household, and the role of women in the labor market (Asian Development Bank, 2005; World Bank, 2011; World Economic Forum, 2016).

Women's Union

The Women's Union is a Vietnamese government structure to promote the right and interests of women (Schuler et al., 2007). Their intention is to make women succeed on three criteria, namely: *Studying actively*, on gender equality and government policies, *Working creatively*, to create economic profits and become pioneers, and lastly *Raising children well and building a happy family*, including managing family relationships and contacts. The Women's Union does not suggest a role for the husband. Schuler et al. (2007) conclude: "The Union exhorts women to constantly improve themselves, while taking men's natures more or less for granted" (Schuler et al., 2007, p.392).

Household

In Vietnamese traditions women have a lower status than men (USAID, 2012). This can be observed within the household, within everyday society, within politics, within religious rituals and within the labor force. The biggest limitation of gender equality in Vietnam is the cultural embeddedness of gender equality and the way gender equality is implemented within the household (Schuler et al., 2007). Vietnam's socialist change, made education more available for women, this however seems to have little impact on the role women have in the household (Teerawichitchainan et al., 2010). While the Vietnamese economy developed, the household gender roles did not change much over time. As was observed in other developing countries. The traditional family values in Vietnam seem to be resilient to this. Most husbands do make statements which support gender equality (Knodel et a., 2004). Only in practice, and especially within the household, this does not seem to hold up. Women continue to have the main responsibility in the household and the household gender roles remain unequal in most

Vietnamese families. There is a small increased involvement of husband in more recent marriages. The role of the man as the leader of the household has shifted a bit towards a more equal position with the woman (Long et al., 2000). “Women (and men) in their 40’s and 50’s today report being able to discuss differences of opinion even though men are often reported to be the final arbiters. They also believe that younger men and women have more egalitarian relationships and that young women are more likely to question male authority” (Long et al., 2000. P.141).

A woman’s motivation to be employed is often to generate income for their household, since men are said to keep most of their income for personal expenses (Desai & Potter, 2014). In Vietnam there are many jobs that are culturally indicates as ‘women’s jobs’ (Long et al., 2000). When a woman migrates and leaves her family behind, she most commonly transfers her role in the household to other women (Lopez-Ekra et al., 2011). The men rarely turn into the main care takers of children or household tasks. How men and women spend their time differently, clearly indicates different gender roles in Vietnam. While women spend more time doing housework, men have more leisure time. This contrast is noted to be greater in rural areas compared to urban areas. The roles men and women fulfil in a household are used as a measurement for gender equality in the course of this research.

2.3 Transnationalism

The group of low skilled respondents live abroad most of the year for labor purposes, but keep their house in Vietnam to return to for holidays and celebrations. The group of high skilled return migrants did always plan to go back home after they finished their education, some even went home several times in between. This is called transnationalism. Migrants are considered transnational when they live in two different countries simultaneously (Salih, 2013). It is common for migrants to have a collective community abroad with people from the same country of origin. Transnational people keep contact with their community of origin while adapting to different locations (Vertovec, 2001). Transnationalism causes cultural flows and exchanges between local communities.

Female migrants who sent home remittances gain more influence and power in their families and communities (in their country of origin) (Lopez-Ekra et al., 2011). Remittances are an important source of income for Vietnam, since it makes up for 6.8% of Vietnam’s GDP (World Bank, 2016-a). Through remittances migration can create important benefits for the country of origin (Dang Nguyen, Tacoli & Hoang, 2003). “There is considerable evidence in

Vietnam that migrant remittances form an important source of income for many rural households. While remittances sent by internal migrants are often modest and used mainly for the immediate needs of those left behind, international remittances are much more substantial and may help to purchase consumer goods or to invest in agricultural modernization” (Dang Nguyen, Tacoli & Hoang, 2003, p.17).

2.3.1 Social Network Theory

Transnational people expand their social network across national borders. The social network theory by Durkheim explains the information movements within networks (Berkman & Glass, 2000). There are flows of information between different hubs by the connections people make. Interactions are vital in the exchange of information and power, they can be as one-way as well as reciprocal. Migrants are active, individual agents in this process. Social networks can change individual and cultural behavior. “The strength of social network theory rests on the testable assumption that the social structure of the network itself is largely responsible for determining individual behavior and attitudes by shaping the flow of resources which determine access to opportunities and constraints on behavior” (Berkman & Glass, 2000, p.140). There are four ways a social network influences the behaviour of an individual. Namely: “(1) provision of social support, (2) social influence, (3) on social engagement and attachment, and (4) access to resources and material goods” (Berkman & Glass, 2000, p.144). “Being involved in these networks creates and reinforces new values” (Curran & Saguy, 2013, p.72). Migration influences cultural expectations about gender by making new and stronger ties in social networks. This means that women can possibly be influenced by other cultures during their time abroad and change their ideas about gender roles. Upon return women might influence their local social network and challenge the traditional cultural norms of gender relations.

Social networks have an influence of the choice of destination by the migrant. Migrants would prefer a destination were they already have social contacts (Banerjee, 1983, p.185). This would reduce their psychological stress and economic costs and make their overall migration process easier.

2.4 Brain Gain

Migration is the flow of people and people have knowledge. When people migrate they take their knowledge from one place to another. When migration patterns are linked to development, these processes are often referred to as ‘brain gain’ or ‘brain drain’. Although

migration can be a positive change for an individual, it can be undesirable for the community, since they lose a source of resources, represented as ‘brain drain’ (Willis, 2014). ‘Brain exchange’ can occur when out-migration patterns are compensated by in-migration patterns with a similar skill level (Glass & Choy, 2001). This research however studies the possible ‘brain gain’ return migration can produce.

It is likely that return migrants have a positive influence on the development since this phenomenon creates a brain gain in the country of origin (Dustmann, Fadlon & Weiss, 2011). A brain gain occurs when a return migrant comes back to their home country with new found skills and education and therefore contributes to the development of this country (Mayr & Peri, 2008). In that case the host country of a migrant serves as a learning center (Dustmann, Fadlon & Weiss, 2011). It is supposed that migrants, who return to their home country, acquired work experience abroad and therefore receive increased earnings in the home country.

Galor & Stark (1990) identify the economic situation and the savings of the migrants as an important factor in the probability that the migrant will return to their home country. As mentioned before the biggest motivation for a migrant to return is an increase in their level of education (Zhao, 2002), causing a brain gain in the country of origin. Return migration is known to cause a brain gain in the country of origin (Beine, Docquier & Rapoport, 2001). In earlier research the brain gain phenomenon is discussed as an academic and economic one. This research will try to find out if this brain gain will extend to the social aspects of life.

2.5 Embeddedness and Reintegration of Return Migrants

During this research the participants were asked to elaborate on their reintegration process. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines reintegration as the “Re-inclusion of a person into a group or a process, e.g. of a migrant into the society of his or her country of origin” (Perruchoud & Redpath-Cross, 2011). The IOM recognizes a cultural, social and economic aspect of this process. Half of the interviewed women take part in a form of circular migration since they often circulate between Laos and Vietnam. They do go to a reintegration process, however “Reintegration becomes a broader concept to include the maintenance of networks and links outside the country of origin that ensure meaningful re-incorporation into the community” (Omelandiuk, 2009).

Research conducted by Kuyper (2008) focuses on the embeddedness of returnees in social and economic networks. During the course of this research the embeddedness of return migrants is

translated to the reintegration of return migrants within their family, their community and their work environment. Different factor that influence the embeddedness of return migrants are identified (Kuyper, 2008): Firstly, return migrants who had more control over their migration experience found it easier to reintegrate in their country of origin. Secondly, the importance of the individual characteristics are identified. A higher education of the migrant made it easier for them to reintegrate in their social circles. Another factor are the social surroundings of the return migrant, the support of family and friends are important for the reintegration of the return migrant. Lastly, Kuyper (2008) indicates that return migrants who return to different locations, comparing rural and urban living, will have a different experience.

2.6 Livelihood Approach

Amartya Sen described development as freedom (1999). He argues that the aim of development is the freedom of all individuals. According to Sen (1999) the freedom to give shape to your own individual life can promote the sustainable development of a country. Individuals can use the livelihood assets available to them to influence structures in society. These existing structures do have an impact on the way individuals can use their capabilities as well. Figure 1 displays a schematic framework of Sen’s livelihood approach. The philosophy behind the different capabilities is that one is able to create their own livelihood and experience the freedom to live the life they have reason to desire. With livelihood assets people can form livelihood strategies. These strategies will influence the vulnerability of people.

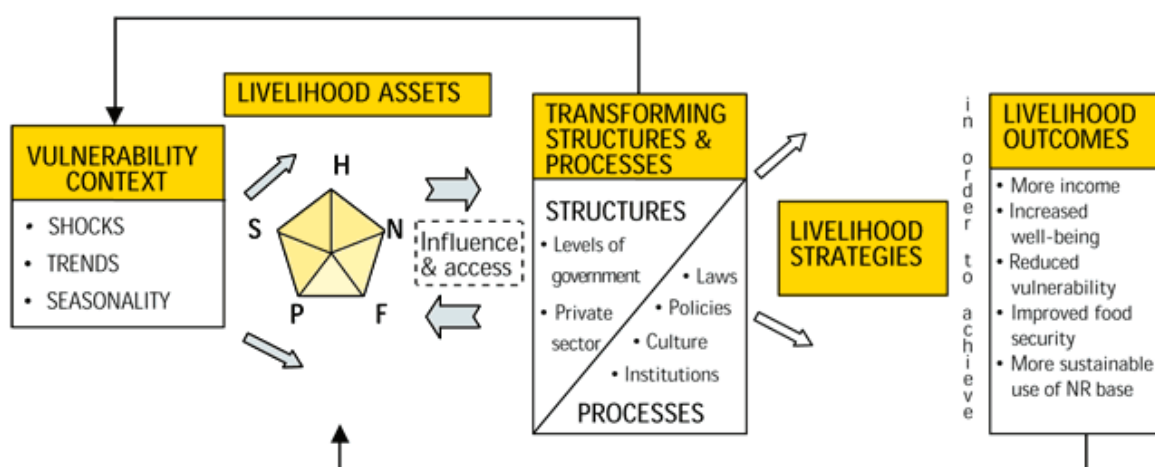


Figure 1. Sustainable livelihood framework (DFIF, 1999).

The livelihood assets shown in figure 1 can be defined as capitals. Sen (1999) identified five different capitals an individual can have access to and can use to shape their live: Social capital, human capital, natural capital, physical capital and financial capital. These five capitals are interconnected and presented in figure 2. Social capital is about the social resources an individual can use in pursuit of their own livelihood goals. Human capital refers to the individual capabilities of the person, for example their skills, ability to do labor, knowledge, and health. Natural capital consist of the natural resource stocks one has access to, for example a stream to offer fresh water. Physical capital comprises of the basic available infrastructure in the region of the individual. Financial capital includes of the money as well as the stock one owns (DFIF, 1999). Individuals can take responsibility in creating their own livelihood through the use of livelihood strategies and access to the different capitals.

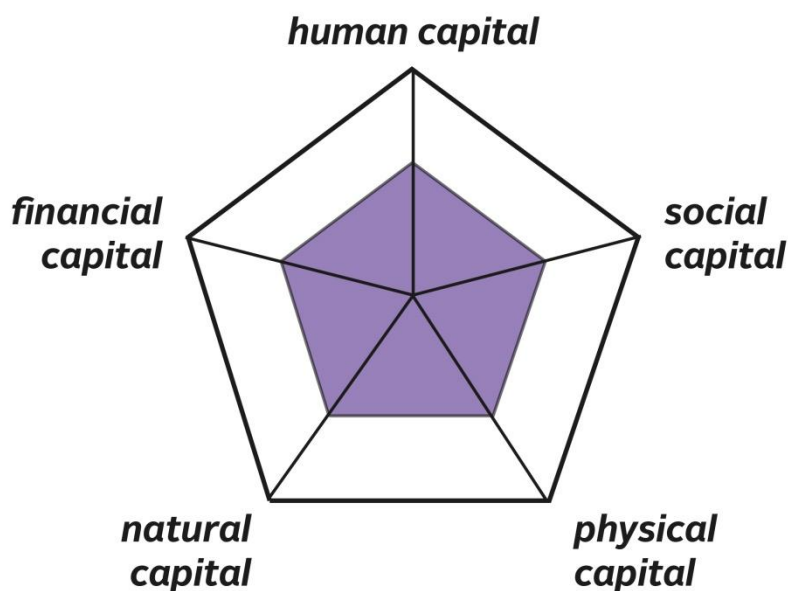


Figure 2. Livelihood assets (Krekel & Martin, 2014).

Equal gender roles create more sustainable livelihoods for women (Connel, 2011). “A social transformation in gender terms is needed to realize a more equal distribution of resources, more adequate recognition, more life-enhancing social embodiment, and more respectful relations with the land” (Connel, 2011, p.113). The livelihood approach is therefore a part of this research. Freedom in this research is about the social opportunities women get in Vietnam, and the abilities to make their own live choices and decisions. Social and human capital are the key capitals for this research. Social capital, because of the position of the woman in her family and human capital, because of the knowledge and skills women obtain abroad. It is recognized by the World Bank that there is gender discrimination when it comes

to the opportunity to build social capital for women (Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2002). It is therefore interesting to see if female return migrant did built more social capital. Since this research will link gender equality and migration, it is important to mention that gender inequality in the country of origin is not a push factor for women to migrate (Baudassé & Bazillier, 2014).

Female Peasant Migrants and Household Gender Roles in Peru

A research conducted in Peru on female peasant migration demonstrates that the migration experience from these women are an essential theme in their household livelihood strategies (Radcliff, 1986). Radcliff (1986) found that “A peasant woman's migration history is a function of the inter-relating dynamics of household strategies and gender-associated activities” (p.42). It is important to be aware of the local thoughts on gender roles when researching female labor migrating (Radcliff, 1986). This can have an influence on the woman’s decision to migrate as well as the possibilities a woman has to form her own life after her own ideas upon return.

3. Conceptual Framework

During the course of this research the three main concepts that are used are (1) *return migration*, (2) *gender (in)equality* and (3) *household gender roles*. Figure 3 show how these concepts relate to each other. The women interviewed for this research had either the ‘desire for higher education’ or the ‘desire for a higher salary’ as a motivation for their migration. Both groups of women found that to obtain their desires they best go abroad. During the time abroad the migrants obtained knowledge and economic wealth which both possibly lead to a higher status when the women return to Vietnam. Migration can cause changes in social networks, changes is socioeconomic status and changes in culture (Hernandez & McGoldrick, 1999). This research argues that return migrants who obtained social and human capital abroad influence household gender roles and that this can change gender inequality into a more equal position between men and women in a Vietnamese household. The following chapter will further elaborate on the three concepts mentioned above.

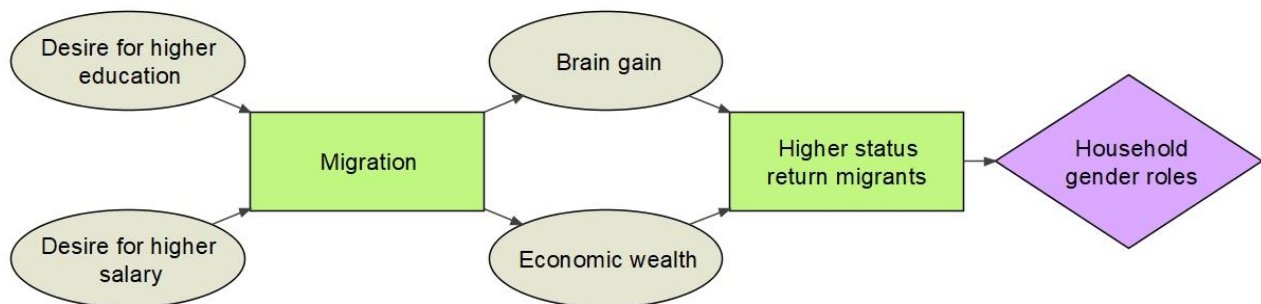


Figure 3. Relationship between different concepts used in this research.

3.1 Return Migration

“IOM defines a migrant as any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a state away from his/her habitual place of residence” (IOM, 2011). When a migrant returns to his or her place of origin, he or she is considered a ‘return migrant’. ‘Return migration’ is seen as the flow of people who return to their country of origin after living abroad.) A decision to migrate is a response to “where human capital can be acquired more efficiently and where the return to human capital is highest” (Dustmann, Fadlon & Weiss, 2011, p. 58). Return migration can be triggered through “higher return in the home country to skills acquired in the host country” (Dustmann, Fadlon & Weiss, 2011, p.59). A migrant acquires human capital in the country of destination. In this research acquired human capital is either a higher salary for the low skilled labor migrants or an educational degree for the high skilled return migrants.

3.2 Gender and Gender (In)Equality

Gender is a social construct that is embedded in the local culture. It is described as the typical rituals and behavior of men and women, which they reproduce in their daily life and in commonplace interactions (Connell & Pearse, 2009). “Gender refers to the socially constructed roles and statuses of women and men, girls and boys. It is a set of culturally specific characteristics defining the social behavior of women and men, and the relationship between them” (Njuki et al., p.5). According to USAID (2008) gender equality mean that: “Females and males have equal rights, freedoms, conditions, and opportunities for realizing their full potential in society” (USAID, 2008, p.2). Worldwide it is common that gender preferences favors men over women.

3.3 Household Gender Roles

Households are social constructs (Varley, 2014). Therefore what a household looks like can differ greatly over different cultures. “Household functions include co-residence, economic cooperation, reproductive activities such as food preparation and consumption, and socialization of children” (Varley, 2014, p.398). The housework of a Vietnamese household can be organized over three different categories, namely “household budget management, routine household chores, and childrearing tasks” ((Teerawichitchainan et al., 2010, p.58). Vietnam has a Confucian heritage (Hirschman & Loi, 1996). This strongly influence family-life and means that men dominate the public sphere while women are in charge of the household (Long et al., 2000). The men are the head of the family and the women have to fulfil their ascribed household gender roles, like preparing food, cleaning and taking care of the children.

4. Geographical Context

Vietnam (see figure 4), officially named ‘Socialist Republic of Vietnam’ is a country located in South East Asia. Over the centuries Vietnam has been occupied by different countries, including China and France (Stewart et al., 2016). From 1887 up until 1954 Vietnam was a French colony. After expelling the French, Vietnam was divided into North- and South Vietnam. A war between the communistic North and ‘pro-America’ South followed known as the ‘Vietnam War’. In 1975 the war ended with a victory for North Vietnam and Vietnam was unified under a communist government.

Since 1986 the Vietnamese government introduced several economic and political reforms (Stewart et al., 2016). The last 25 years, Vietnam has made a remarkable progress on the development agenda (World Bank, 2016-b). Resulting in strong economic growth and lifting numerous people out of poverty. Although Vietnam is still a one-party socialist state officially embracing communism, the Government is determined to imply reforms that will further benefit the development of the nation.



Figure 4. Map of Vietnam (Vietnam Travel Guide, 2017)

Vietnam scores 0.666 on the Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP, 2016). Vietnam's HDI is associated with 'medium human development'. Vietnam's GDP has been rapidly growing since 2000 and almost sextupled between 2000 and 2015, currently measured at \$2,185.7 per capita (World Bank, 2016-c). Together with a growth in life expectancy, the population of Vietnam has been steadily growing since 1960 and now exceeds over 92 million inhabitants. The GINI coefficient measures equality within a country, where a score of 0 indicates total equality and score of 1 total inequality. The GINI coefficient of Vietnam is measured at 0.376 in 2014.

Vietnam scored a 0.337 on the Gender Inequality Index (GII) in 2015, this puts Vietnam at rank 71 compared to other countries (with number 1 being most equal). A GII of 0 indicates total equality, while a GII of 1 indicates absolute inequality. The GII takes into account maternal mortality ratio, adolescent birth rate, seats in parliament, population with at least some secondary education and labor force participation rate. The Vietnamese government puts gender equality high on the political agenda.

4.1 Out-Migration Patterns in Vietnam

Out-migration in Vietnam used to be dominated by refugees, this was during the time of the French colonialism and during the Vietnam War (Miller, 2015). Since the Vietnamese government has been making reforms to promote national development, the Vietnamese refugees flow was followed by a flow of labor migrants. "From the mid-1990s, labor export from Viet Nam took a prominent place in the country's development strategies" (Nguyen Anh, 2008, p.16). Figure 5 shows the number of migrant from Vietnam living in different areas in the world over the last 25 years (Africa and South America are rarely chosen as destination, the migrant numbers are therefore negligible and not displayed). This figure shows that North America is the most popular choose of destination for Vietnamese migrants.

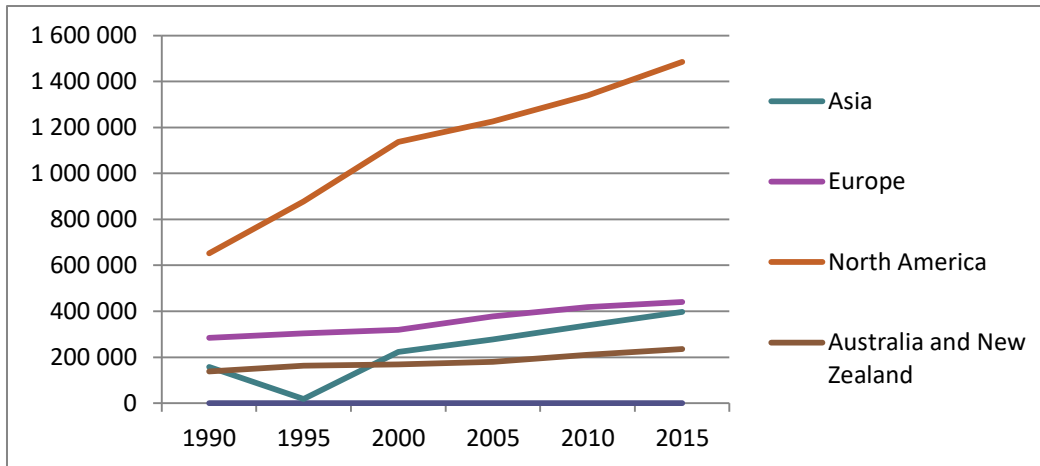


Figure 5. Number of Vietnamese migrants, by destination, by year. (UN, 2015-a).

Student migration from Vietnam has increased considerably the last 25 years (Nguyen, 2012). This is partly due to the increasing number of scholarships that are provided by different kind of institutions. Students are motivated to study abroad to obtain a degree from a higher quality university. The Vietnamese government uses student migration as a development strategy (Consular Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam, 2012). The government therefore promotes student mobility and provides some students with scholarships.

Both men and women migrate. Small differences are observed in the migration destination of men and women. Figure 6 shows how many male and female migrants from Vietnam are living in each region in 2015. In the total number one can see that there are slightly more female migrants. This evidently also applies in most of the areas of destination, with Asia as an exception. This is the only continent which houses more male migrants from Vietnam. General improvements in gender equality in the labor market is correlated with greater migration of women (Baudassé & Bazillier, 2014).

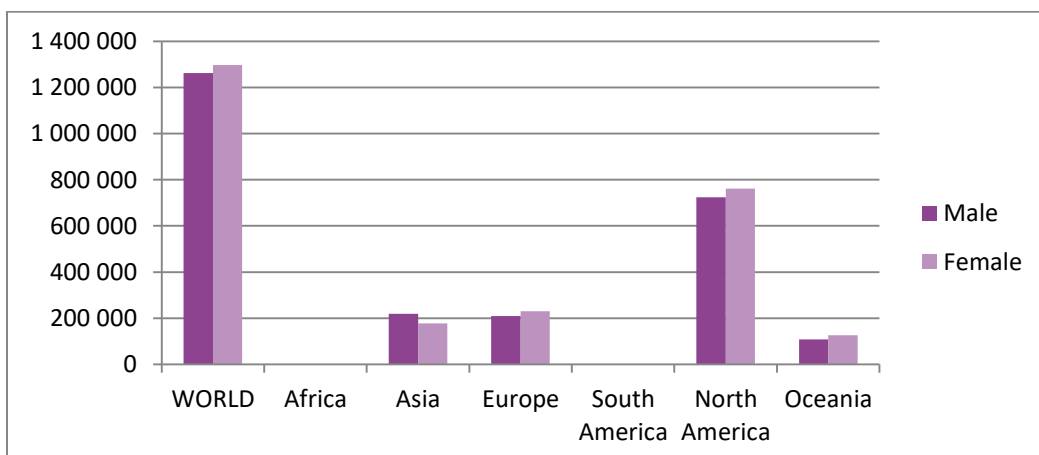


Figure 6. Male/Female ratio in migrants in 2015. (UN, 2015-b).

Return-Migration

Return-migration is seen as an important topic by the government of Vietnam. The consular department states that return migration is a positive contribution to the economic development of Vietnam (Dinh, 2008). The Vietnamese government has different arrangements to promote temporary and permanent return migrants. For example: “For the temporary return migrants, regardless of their present status of nationality: If they stay in Vietnam continuously for six months, they are eligible to buy and possess an apartment in Vietnam for living” (Dinh, 2008, p.2).

4.2 Central Vietnam, Thừa Thiên-Huế Province

This research will be conducted on two different sites, namely Huế City and Lộc Bồn commune. Both of these sites are located in Thừa TLPhiên-Huế Province in central Vietnam. Figure 4 highlight the location of Huế in Vietnam. Figure 7 shows a map of both areas in more detail.



Figure 7. Huế City and Lộc Bồn (indicated with red border) (Google maps, 2017).

4.2.1 Huế City

The high skilled participants are from Huế City. Huế houses approximately 350.000 people. According to the local government the GDP in Huế is 709.00 USD per capita (Huế City,

2016). This is approximately a third of the average in Vietnam. Huế was the Vietnamese national capital from 1802 until 1945. The emperor moved the capital from Hanoi to Huế in an effort to unite the North and the South of Vietnam (Stewart et al., 2016). Huế is considered to be a traditional and conservative city. Many citizens indicate that Huế is more traditional than Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh with more traditional gender roles. This makes Huế an interesting site to research this topic. Return migration could possibly have a greater impact on gender roles in a place where gender roles are more conservative.

4.2.2 Lộc Bồn

Lộc Bồn is a community approximately 20 kilometers south of Huế. This area is about 32 square kilometers, with five villages and a population over 12,000 inhabitants (Lộc Bồn, n.d.). Lộc Bồn is a green and lush area and somewhat rural as displayed in figure 8. The people living here struggle to find a job, especially during the rainy season. Migrating for labor purposes is therefore a popular alternative for the villagers. There are about 3000 migrant workers from Lộc Bồn, over two thirds of which are in Laos (Lộc Bồn, n.d.).



Figure 8. Road in Lộc Bồn.

5. Methodology

This chapter will discuss the methodology that is used during the research in order to answer the former mentioned research questions. This research is a inductive, qualitative research that consists mostly out of interviews. It is therefore important to notice that this research is not about generalizations. It will be about the personal experience of the interviewees, while highlighting the contrasts, differences and similarities.

5.1 Operationalization of Variables

All variables applying to the female return migrants are discussed in this paragraph. First of all are the *personal variables* of the female migrants, in particular their family situation, including: their marital status, children, living situation did if they migrated alone or with their family. Secondly, this research will make a comparison between high skilled and low skilled return migrant. The *skill level* of the participant is therefore an important variable. In order to make a clear distinction between high skilled and low skilled women, women with a master's or PhD degree will be considered high skilled and women who migrate for the purpose of practical labor and without a higher educational degree will be considered low skilled. *Motivation for migrating* is another variable taken into account. All the participants involved in this research are either labor migrants or student migrants. The motivation of a female migrant provides a background on the situation and status of the women before she migrated. This research is built around *household gender roles*, therefore this is possibly the most important variable. In order to map the different household gender roles the concepts explained in chapter 3.3 are used during the interviews (child caring tasks, house chores and budget management). The household gender roles are an important aspect of the interviews since people find it difficult or do not want to talk about other aspects of gender inequality.

5.2 Data Collection

This paragraph discusses how the data for this research was collected. This section will touch upon the sampling strategies and interview settings. The data collection for this research has been carried out over a period of three months, namely February, March and April of 2017.

5.2.1 Interviews with Return Migrants

The main method for the data collection of this research are the in depth interviews with female return migrants. One-on-one interviews are a proper way to gain information about peoples personal experiences, hear their personal stories and are a respectable way to talk about sensitive topics. The researcher will use semi-structured, mostly retrospective

interviews. The predefined interview questions presented in appendix 1 were used as an interview guide. The interviews are based around the experiences the female respondents had with migrating, returning and gender roles within their household. The three criteria developed by the Vietnam Women's Union (studying, working, family life) are used as input for the interviews conducted during this research. Note that the tasks proposed by the women's union are used to structure the interviews and not suggested to prescribe what women's tasks should be.

In total twelve low skilled and twelve high skilled female return migrants were interviewed. The researcher recruited participant until data saturation. A list of all the interviews is find in appendix 2. To protect the identity of the participants, all participants have been given fictitious names. Each interview is transcribed and coded by hand. When quotes are used in the empirical chapter the grammar of the interviewee is corrected.

Sampling strategies

Different sampling strategies are used for the different participants in this research. For the high skilled return migrants the contacts at the local university are used first. More participants are found through snowballing and asking the social contacts of the researcher in Hué city. The low skilled return migrants asked for an interview all live in the same area, namely Lộc Bồn. In this area the participant were found by visiting the area, asking around and snowballing. It is nice to note that almost all people who were asked for an interview agreed to do so.

Interview settings

The low skilled participants in this research did not speak English. The interviews were therefore carried out in Vietnamese with the help of two translators. Although both translators made great effort, it is noticed that some content from the questions as well as the answers was lost in translation. Quotes in the empirical chapter indicate the words used by the translator. The use of a translator resulted in more static conversations, which might negatively influence the quality. There is a noticeable difference in the answers given by female participants when working with a male translator versus working with a female translator. Women are more inclined to talk about gender inequality when there are no men present during the interviews, this was however not always an option. Especially with the low skilled participants it was more difficult to talk to women alone. Most of the time family

members were present during the interview. Husbands were often inclined to answer the questions for their wives. The researcher tried to avoid this situation by setting up interviews outside of the participants homes. This was not possible for the interviews with the low skilled participants, since they were not scheduled in advance. A strategy used by the researcher is directing questions very clearly to the female participant and ignoring the husbands in a polite manner.

All of the high skilled interviews were conducted in English with the exception of one. That interview will however not be taken into account due to insufficient translation. The interviews with high skilled participants are one-on-one interviews.

During this research the respondents are not given any compensation for their time. The researcher however did have a small gift from the Netherlands for the participants. Some participants did ask for time in return, mostly to practice their English. Commonly the researcher tried to hold off these commitments, due to time limitations.

5.2.2 Focus Groups

Two focus groups were organized to talk about gender (in)equality in Vietnam. The first focus group was with exclusively female participants, while the second focus group consisted of only male participants. These focus groups offer a general view on how gender (in)equality is perceived in Hué City. A focus group is a proper tool because it highlights disagreements between people, participants can change their opinion or correct each other. The focus group discussions are used to make a SWOT-analyzes on the changing gender roles in Vietnam. This identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats women have and face when changing gender roles into a more equal status between men and women. The respondents are found by asking the local social contacts of the researcher and snowballing.

5.2.3 Other Data

To provide this research with a framework about gender equality and the status of women in this region, members from different organizations were interviewed. Two NGOs working on gender equality in the region were found by an internet search, members from both organization agreed to an interview. The names of the NGOs will be anonymized. The Women's Union was mentioned before as the government organization in Vietnam to protect women's rights. Three women working for the Women's Union on different levels were interviewed during the course of this research. These women were found by asking the social contacts of the researcher. Their names are anonymized as well. Lastly, the empirical chapter

includes a paragraph with general observations. To provide this research with A framework for the cultural setting of this region and the different statuses of men and women in this region. These observations are unstructured, casual and natural observation.

5.3 Positionality of Researcher, Limitations, Risks and Ethical Issues

All interviewees gave informed consent to use their information for this thesis. Before arranging the interview the respondents knew the main topics that would be discussed during the interviews. Before the start of each interview the researcher explained the purpose of the interview and guaranteed that all information will be used anonymously and only for this thesis. All interviewees were, with permission, audio recorded.

The researcher of this project is a 27 year old European female. This could be helpful for the research because female participants find it perhaps easier to open up to another woman. The identity of the researcher could be unhelpful for the same reason, since men (in the focus group) might find it more difficult to talk about gender inequality to a female researcher. Another problem is the cultural background of the researcher. Participants might find it more difficult to identify with and confide in someone from another culture. The researcher tried to avoid this problem by keeping a neutral attitude towards the discussed subjects. One could wonder if the answers given might have been different to a Vietnamese researcher or to a male researcher.

The Vietnamese culture possibly influenced the data collection of this research. It is said that in Vietnam domestic violence is seen as a personal problem of a family and not something that should be discussed in other circles (Shiu-Thornton, Senturia & Sullivan, 2005). Although domestic violence is not the focus of the research, the same issue might occur on gender equality. Vietnamese people in general do not like talking negatively about their personal life. In order to avoid this problem, the researcher tried to connect with people and create a trustful atmosphere, by listening well and not judging the participants.

It is possible that retrospective interviews on gender inequality make women relive bad memories. This contradicts with the 'do no harm' duty of a researcher. Prior to the interviews, the researcher informed herself about support groups for women, so the researcher had the opportunity to refer women who would benefit of this. However there were no such experiences during this research and all interviews ended on a positive note.

Chamber (2014) identifies six biases that are important to keep in mind while conducting social research, namely spatial bias, project bias, personal bias, seasonal bias protocol bias and professional bias. Three of those are possibly problematic for this research. *Project bias* might occur because one can only research what is shown and visible. This research highly depends on what the interviewees are willing to tell about their experiences. There is no objective measurements for changed gender roles after migrating. *Protocol bias* can arise because sensitive and personal subjects are discussed during the interviews. This often results into polite behaviour, which can result in giving socially desirable answers and losing valuable information. The last one is *professional bias*, the vision of the researcher might cause important topics to be missed. In order to avoid this the researcher tried to ask broad questions so the interviewees are free to give a variety of different answers.

6. Empirical Chapter

In this chapter the collected qualitative data will be presented. All this data is collected in Vietnam over the course of three months. In this chapter the following will be discussed: interviews with two NGOs, the interviews with women working for the Women's Union, the interviews with the low skilled and high skilled return migrants, the focus groups with male and female participants and some general observations.

6.1 Non-Governmental Organization

Two local NGOs working on gender equality in Hué province were interviewed to provide this research with a framework about the status of women in this region. To protect the identity of the NGOs the names are omitted. Tu, one of the female employees of NGO 1 was interviewed about the work they do. NGO 1 focusses on developing the community, local communities affected by the hydropower dam and projects to promote *"the voice of women."* Not all their projects focus on gender equality, *"but the gender equality is always included in our projects."* The second interview was with Chien (male), the founder of NGO 2. The aim of this NGO is to support families in need. They do this through micro finance, livelihood support and community service project.

Tu explains the traditional gender roles in Vietnam. *"The role for women is to stay home and take care of the family. In the city the women can go out to work, but in the rural area, they just stay home. In some areas, the women, both take care of the family and go outside to earn money, but their voice in the family is lost."* Tu describes that in some rural areas men have total control over the women. *"To take care of their house is considered the woman's job. The women, they do they begin their day at 4 or 5 am until 10 or 11 pm. Especially in the rural area."* Women do all the household tasks, child caring tasks and work on the farm as well. Comparable situations are found in the city *"Women do not have time for themselves. They just have time for family and for their work."* Some of the men share a part of the housework with their wife, but not many. *"They think they should earn money, while the household is just for women. (...) The men, they have time for themselves."* According to Chien normally the women take care of the household and child caring tasks. *"In Vietnam we have some jobs only the women do, the men cannot."* The men might be able to help the women more with the household when they are more educated, but according to Chien the majority of that job belongs to women. Chien describes a change over time: *"In the old days the men were number one."* When parents had children, they preferred boys over girl. But that has changed

with the new generation. Women did gain a higher status over time *“For example if you went to the altar, only the man could go there, to burn the incense, the woman could not. But now that is different. Now sometimes the woman can go there.”* Chien says that the level education highly influences the status of women: *“The people with lower education still think the men have more power than the women.”* This is especially a problem in the rural areas. *“The local authority says that there is gender equality, that men and women have the same right and same opportunity. But in fact that is not true.”*

Tu thinks gender inequality is a bigger problem in Hue compared to the North and the South of Vietnam: *“There the men, they already share housework with the wife.”* In Hue just few men do this. This might depend on the old culture of Hue. Since more women are working a fulltime job they do however need their husbands to support them with the household chores.

The micro finance projects of NGO 2 are focused on women. Currently 500 women are supported with small loans. The loan provides these women with the opportunity to build their own livelihood. *“The family, the woman, can have a sustainable income. So they have money to take care of the children and their education.”* Often the person who earns more money will have more power in the family. Chien says that it is therefore important for women to have a paid job in order to obtain an equal status with men.

Other opportunities of improving gender equality lie in education. The cause of gender inequality is in the lack of education according to Tu. *“In the rural area the women lack information. They did not have a high education. For example the children in the rural areas: If the parents do not have much money and they have a boy and a girl, they just allow the boy to go to school and the girl is supposed to work to earn money.”* Another reason for gender inequality to be such a persistent problem is the social norms people have. Tu says that women think they are supposed to stay at home and do all the housework and not participate in activities outside of the house. Although this has been changing the last fifty years. Women, especially in the city to have more knowledge and they can go out to get an education. There is more awareness and people are changing their minds.

Both NGOs work on raising awareness. Tu noticed that when they start a the project in a new community it are mostly men who participate. *“The women in Vietnam they take care of the family, buy food take care of the children and bring them to school. They do a lot of work in the household. Therefore they don’t have time for community activities.”* They promote the participation of women successfully by visiting to each household and talking to the women.

If women are not supported by their husbands to take part in the activities, NGO 1 tries to inform the men: *“When the men join our activity, we can raise their awareness about the woman’s role. They have to understand the woman’s needs. They can give women the opportunity to participate in community activities.”* Chien says they experience the opposite, when the NGO organizes a training about gender equality the participants are often women. They do try to invite men as well, so they can also learn about the rights of women.

Both Chien and Tu think return migration can bring new ideas and cultural values to Vietnam and contribute to the promotion of gender equality. They however both say that gender inequality is something that is difficult to change. Chien says: *“People want to keep the old customs. They would not like to change”* Tu says women do not recognize the situation as gender inequality, *“In their mind, there is no problem for them. Even though they spend a lot of time in the day working, they work from 4 or 5 am to 10 or 11 pm. The first time when we come to a community, it is difficult for them to change. Until now some of them still think there is gender equality in their family.”* Chien continues: *“But some families are very good. When you mention about gender equality, they are willing to learn.”* Tu ends with: *“In some communities the women are really active and they really want to participate in our projects. They can speak their voice about their issues and the problems they are facing. If the women join with us, they change their mind, they can become a community leader.”*

6.2 Women’s Unions

The Women’s Union in Vietnam is a government structure to protect and promote women’s rights. The existence of the Women’s Union dates back to 1930 (Namati, 2016). The Vietnamese government decided that all villages should have a Women’s Union. Women’s Unions are very hierarchical and exist on different geographical levels. Three ladies were interviewed who work for different levels of the Women’s Union in Vietnam. The name used in this chapter are pseudonyms. These women will elaborate further on gender issued in Vietnam.

6.2.1 Hué Province Level

Nga is the chancellor of the women’s union of Hué province. *“My main job is the implementation of what the government asks my organization to do. This is related to the national gender equality program.”* Her office works on women’s rights in society, family and organizations. They work on advertisements and government documents. Currently she is

involved in training programs to promote women working in offices to voice their thoughts and opinions. In this way women learn to stand up for their own rights and benefits.

Nga explains the structure of the Women's Union: The Women's Union consists out of Four levels: The main headquarters in Hanoi, the province level, the town level and the grass root level. At the grass root level there are a lot of small organizations that cooperate with the Women's Union. On each grass root level there is one woman, she does not receive a salary due to budget restrains. According to Nga there is a pro and a con to this structure. *"First there is an advantage, when there is something to implement. This is easy to do because there is a good structure."* When they want to implement something to the grass root level it is more difficult, since most people are not available for unpaid work. The Women's Union in Hue tries to spread awareness about gender equality. They try to accomplish this by organizing a lot of meetings and advertisements, so that women know what gender equality is.

Nga elaborates on the status of gender equality in Hué. She says that Hué is the ancient capital of Vietnam, with a very prude society. *"The women are highly affected by this culture and traditions, often they don't have any voice in the family."* Compared to other areas, the women have a lower position. *"To be a women in Hué, is very hard. There is a famous saying about Hue women in particular and Vietnamese women in general: 'The man builds the house and the woman builds the happiness.' They always put up with what the husband does, they should be a good listener and obedient."* Women have the duty to take care of the children and to earn money. *"Hué men are very lazy, after they finish their work in the office or in the farm, they just want to spend time drinking and watching television. They do not want to share the work in the house and the kitchen with their wives."* Sometimes women do refer to this division of gender roles as equal. Nga explains that his is because of the way women are raised: *"From the last generations, from their parents, their grandparents. They tell you, you are a women and you should do what your husband tells you to do."* Women frequently do not know about their rights. In case they do, they are often still scared to voice their opinion, because of mental, physical and sexual violence. *"Some men just consider their wives as slaves."* Women do not want other people to know about their situation.

According to Nga in order to reach gender equality firstly the local people have to be informed so they understand what their rights are. Secondly the women's union trains women in life skills, they are taught how to react in a violent situation with their husbands. Thirdly

mothers are informed about how to raise their children, so the next generation will never be in that situation. The Women's Union also argues for legal rights for women.

In the end of the interview Nga elaborates on return migration: *“There is an improvement in life when the women come back. Because they could go abroad to earn money and when they come back they have some money for their own and also for their family. So they can have higher status and a voice in the family. Even if it is not as high as the men, they get some respect from the family and family of the husband. It is a small but positive trend.”*

6.2.2 Lộc Bôn, Village Level

The second interview is with Minh who works in the same village were the low skilled participants of this research live. Figure 9 shows the municipal office of Lộc Bôn, accommodation among others the office of the Women's Union. Minh's job includes protecting the rights of women and children, encouraging women to be involved in programs and promoting the programs of the Women's Union.



Figure 9. Lộc Bôn's municipal office.

Minh carries out the programs made by the province level. She contacts the women working at the grass root level. The work of this Women's Union includes: Organizing seminars on women's rights, providing assistance in case of a family conflict, providing information on family planning and protecting the women who go to Laos to work.

Minh thinks the migration pattern to Laos *“Is good as a temporary situation. In terms economy, it increases the income for family. But for long-term it is not good, because children often drop out of school. Some children come to Laos to work.”* When mothers are in Laos to work, grandparents are often the main care takers of the children. According to Minh they are not suitable to do this properly. Children like to go to Laos to work because they see peers doing that and them having money to spend.

6.2.3 Grass Root Level

Kim works as a volunteer at the grass root level of the women’s union. Kim communicates with 250 women in the village about the activities of the Women’s Union. Her work includes supporting families in need, keeping the village clean and organizing women to clean up the waste and in case of heavy weather (storms and floods) ,she has the responsibility to inform every women how to prepare for this. Kim also organized donations to fund the new road that was built in the village.

Kim says that an important goal of the Women’s Union is to encourages each family to only have two children and to teach women how to raise their children. The Women’s Union organizes meeting were a spokesperson explains the benefits about a family with only two children. At these meetings different birth control methods are provided. These meetings are only for women.

Kim says that the hierarchy of the Women’s Union makes it difficult to do her work. Kim envisions that with a different structure in the organization she could encourage each woman to be more involved. She would like to encourage the community feeling and people to take more care of each other. *“For example, if someone in a family died, every women in the village will collect here, to do something to support the family.”*

6.3 Focus groups

Two focus groups were organized, one with female and one with male participants. The two main topics discussed in both focus groups is the current status of gender equality in Vietnam and changing gender roles. The thoughts on changing gender roles in Vietnam are structured in a SWOT analyze per focus group.

6.3.1. Female Focus Group

Three women were present during this focus group. Two of the women knew each other prior, they are 37 and 38 years old and both have two children. One of them runs her own shop, the

other works in the hospital. The third woman is 23 years old, single and a finance student, who runs her own NGO. All the following information is from the focus group and is according to the women who were participating.

Men and women in Hué

Men have a higher status than women, this is because Hué is strongly influenced by the royal traditions. Men have a higher position on the work floor as well as in the household. Women do all the work in the house and have a fulltime job as well, men only work outside of the house. The status of men and women might be more equal with new generations, but not yet completely equal. According to the law men and women are equal, but they do not have the same opportunities, because of the mind-set people have. It is difficult to change the status of women, because men prefer their higher position.

The way men and women interact depends partly on the way they were raised as children. The way this happens depends on the family. Traditionally young boys are given more opportunities and are being more spoiled. Girls have to work harder for their opportunities. One of the mothers voices that she lost changes to develop herself, because her brother told her not to study. She hopes this belongs to the former generation. She herself tries to raise her son and daughter equally. She says that she is teaching her son to do housework, the same as her daughter.

When talking about gender roles becoming more equal, one can notice a difference between classes. The problem of gender equality is the biggest in poor families and rural areas. In the lower class girls have a lower position, because their households are not well educated. The middle class is most progressive, because they are higher educated and experience more cultural exchange. In high class families the men are the main bread winners, this gives them a position of superiority. High class families are rich because of (long standing) businesses not because of proper education.

Changing gender roles for women

During the second part of the focus group, the opportunities to change the status of women into a more equal one, were debated. The participants were asked under what circumstances women will acquire a more equal status compared to men. The answers given are displayed in the SWOT analysis in table 1. The strengths are the way women can change gender roles for

themselves. The Weaknesses are ways women are holding themselves back. Opportunities and threats are external influences that can change the position of women.

Strengths (Intern)	Weaknesses (Intern)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New generation - Meditation - Sharing with friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women accept their position - Being used to the situation (habit) - Comparing with parents relation (see some/ little change, and think that is good enough)
Opportunities (Extern)	Threats (Extern)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education in general - Education: how men view women and how women view themselves - Sexual health education (health and how people see each other in relationships) - Education for girls empowerment - Cultural exchange - Big city, open mind-set, to imitate - Books - Open to other countries - Working with foreigners - Father has to be model for son - The way children are raised - Movies - Change from comes from family and continues into society - The Women’s Union 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Habit of men and family - Men drinking alcohol - Vietnamese culture; royal system - Old generations - Men are used to their superior position, they don’t want to lose this - Living with parents-in-law, mother-in-law says housework is for women - Village culture, rural areas - Poor families - Not open to the world

Table 1. SWOT Analysis changing gender roles, female focus group.

6.3.2 Male Focus Group

Three men were present during the focus group. Two of the men previously knew each other, both in their thirties. The third men is in his early twenties. All of the men are unmarried and do not have children. Two of the men are currently in a starting relationship. All the following information is derived from the focus group and is according to the men who were participating.

Men and women in Hué

Hué has a traditional culture and is a conservative city. Although a lot has changed, the male role is still more important. This is noticeable for example in the work place or on family events. Women do play a more important role in society compared to the past. Women are

more powerful and have more opportunities compared to a decade ago. The problems of gender inequality are more persistent in rural areas.

In Hué the men are responsible for generating an income. The wives have to cook, clean and wash the clothes. Women go straight back home after work because they do a lot of work at home. The husband decide the important things in the family. Men are nowadays more eager to help their wife at home with their housework, the younger men says: *“I want to help my girl in the house so she can go out as well.”* The other men have a slightly different point of view: *“I can do the housework, but it is her key role. I can help her, but I want to have more power.”* The men in the focus group prefer their higher status compared to women: *“I want to control the family, but I will have respect for my wife. There cannot be a country with two kings. The wife can be the king of the kitchen.”* Men have free time in which they like to drink coffee and beer, women do not have a lot of free time because *“Women have a lot of things to do.”*

Men are still in a higher position, but women are becoming more powerfull. The majority of men is against this. Some men support women becoming more active on the work floor: *“I want my [future] wife to have a job so she can express herself.”* The changing role of women will strongly influence the family: *“The children need their mom to take care of them”*, but when women work more they are more busy and this will influence the wellbeing of the children. People prefer to have sons, to maintain the family into the next generation. Although this seems less important with the younger generations.

Women and men are mentally and physically different. Women are perceived as not strong and therefore not suitable for physical labor. *“Men and women are different in their essence, this has to do with origin. We are different in the way we think.”* One men suggests therefore the following: *“The women should be active in doing chores, but the men should do construction work. We can classify the jobs for men and women.”*

Changing gender roles for women

During the second part of the focus group, the opportunities to change the status of women into a more equal one, were debated. The participants were asked under what circumstances women will acquire a more equal status compared to men. The answers given are displayed in the SWOT analysis in table 2. The strengths are the way women can change gender roles for

themselves. The Weaknesses are ways women are holding themselves back. Opportunities and threats are external influences that can change the position of women.

Strengths (Intern)	Weaknesses (Intern)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Earning more money (this equals more power) - Mental strength - Women living in modern cities, modern life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women don't relies their value - Traditional values and mindset
Opportunities (Extern)	Threats (Extern)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economic development, provides work opportunity for women - Work integration, women can become leaders and get more authority in society - Men take more responsibility for the housework - Men realizing the difficulties of the wife so he is more inclined to help her - Urban area: create more awareness, teach women about their rights - Higher education for men and women - Integration with the world (globalization) - Internet and modern media (raises awareness) - Western cultures influence in young generation Programs/projects on gender equality - How children are raised (with new values) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Husbands give their wives boundaries - More powerful women will cause more family unhappiness (less love for the kids) - Men are challenged by the women, there should be a dedicated leader. - Men drinking, become angry quickly - Rural area's - Tradition: honoring the ancestors is a men's task - Violence from husbands

Table 2. SWOT Analysis changing gender roles, male focus group.

6.4 Low Skilled Return Migrants

For this research twelve low skilled female return migrants were interviewed. All the stories that will be discussed in this paragraph are from women living in Lộc Bôn and they all migrated to Laos for labor opportunities. In most cases to work themselves and in few cases to support their husbands. The women are between 24 and 58 years old, all are married and all have children. A list of all the personal details is found in appendix 2.

“Before coming to Laos, we were here, working in the rice fields. We were only farmers. Our income was very low and we could not afford to cover our living costs. Then we migrated to Laos and the situation changed. My family can get more money

to cover the living costs. And we have savings to buy some new things. You can see we built a new house.”

-Linh (31)

The interviewees participate in circular labor migration, where they spend most of their time in Laos to work but they frequently return to Vietnam. All interviewees keep a house in Lộc Bõn where they return to during their time in Vietnam. They lived in Laos for at least two years, up until sixteen years. Most of the women do intend to return to Laos soon. Examples of the jobs these women did are selling vegetables, selling street food, selling water, nail stylist, hairstylist and sewing clothes

The interviews discussed in this paragraph all took part in the homes of the interviewees. During most of the interviews the husbands of the women were present. Appendix 2 has a small description of the setting of each interview. All the interviews in this paragraph were completed with the help of a translator. During ten out of twelve interviews this was a male translator, the other two were conducted with a female translator.

6.4.1 Migration Experience

The respondents describe more job opportunities, higher income and a favorable exchange rate as the reasons for migrating to Laos. The women describe their lives in Vietnam to be difficult due to a lack of work during the rainy season. Ngoc (34) says *“Life in Laos is easier, finding a job in Laos is easier. The jobs last longer and are more secure compared to Vietnam, because the weather in Laos is very good, so I can work the whole year. In Vietnam there is a six month sunny season and a six month rainy season. I cannot work during the rainy season.”*

Most of the interviewees went to work in Laos together with their husbands, but without their underage children. Anh, 58: *“My husband went to Laos first. Then he came back and took me to come to Laos with him.”* Some migrants indicate that their migration was the decision of their husbands. Migrating to Laos is however a common practice in this community, therefore some women were already involved in circular migration to Laos before they were married. For example Truc (28): *“I came to Laos when I was 14 years old in 2004. I worked there until 2007, then I returned to Vietnam. In 2010 I got married to my husband. At that time my husband was working Laos, so after our marriage I followed my husband to go to Laos, to*

work.” In two cases the husband stayed in Vietnam, in one of those situation it was so the husband could, together with his parents, take care of the children.

People find it easy to migrate to Laos because they have family or know people in their village who migrated there previously. The interviewees describe their migration process therefore as very easy. The costs of migrating are said to fairly low by several interviewees. However Ly (45) responded: *“My family had to borrow some money for me to migrate to Laos.”*

Most (9 out of 12) interviewees wish to go back to Laos soon. Some indicate to go back the next couple of days, others plan to go back within couple of months. Ngoc (34) wants to go back as well: *“I don’t know when I will go back to Laos, right now there is no person to take care of my children.”* The three women who are not going back stay in Vietnam to take care of their children, grandchildren or husband. Giang (52) is taking care of her grandchildren and is very happy she is not returning to Laos anymore: *“My family felt so lonely, a shortage of love, because I had to work abroad. My grandchildren missed their grandparents. My family is so lucky compared to other families, because I am not working in Laos anymore.”*

Most of the interviewees describe the Lao culture as very friendly. Lao people are said to be more kind and more generous compared to Vietnamese people. Ngoc (34) says: *“The life in Laos is very easy, because people are very kind, honest, no cheating, no gossip, all Lao people are so kind.”* Qui (37), who lived in Laos for four years describes the same experiences, she would even prefer living in Laos, rather than living in Vietnam: *“Because Lao people, they are so friendly. There is no fighting, compared to Vietnam. Even when Lao people were drunk, they do not have a conflict.”* Although none of the interviewees spoke negatively about Lao people. Mai (32) would not want to live there permanently, although she is planning to go back to Laos soon: *“Because I sow clothes, I work at home, I do not go out. That is why it is challenging for me to come in contact with other people, because I do not have the opportunity to go out and talk with local people. (...) Working in Laos makes it easier to earn money. But it is just or temporary, just for a short time.”*

6.4.2 Reintegrating in Vietnam

The interviewees discussed in this paragraph come back to Vietnam regularly, most every year during the Tet Holiday, few come back more often. The concept of reintegrating is therefore different but still applicable, as described in chapter 2.5. The interviewees describe reintegrating therefore as very easy and normal. The only difficulty that was mentioned by

one participant is that it was hard to find a job in Vietnam when she came back. The women all give the same reason for coming back to Vietnam, namely 'family'.

All the women describe that due to a higher income their life is now easier and better. They have some savings that they can use in Vietnam. The women describe benefits for their family as well as benefits for their community. Qui (37) says: *"Most of the benefits are about money. Money because I have a higher income [in Laos]. First for my family. My husband has more money to rebuild the house or buy furniture. For local development, we can contribute to some charity fund and some funds for building roads and construction. Because we have more money, we can give more money."* Many interviewees expressed that they make contributions for the development of the village. For example donations to benefit the build of a road or a local school. Nhu (29) mentioned another local charity: *"I support my community by making a donation to buy some gifts for the elderly in the village when the holidays came."* According to Ly (45) another benefit of her migration is the money she has to spend: *"When I come back from Laos, I can afford to buy local products. That is good for the local people, in terms of economy."* Tan (42) would like to give the people in her community the same opportunities she had: *"For people who want to go to Laos, I will help to get them good jobs in Laos."*

Most of the money the return migrants bring home is to invest in their houses. All the respondents from Lộc Bón keep a house there which they only use a short period every year. Nonetheless people like their homes to be big and beautiful. Only one respondent, Tan (42), said she will invest her saving in education for her children, she would like them to go to university.

6.4.3 Challenges

The interviewees who migrated to Laos, describe two main challenges during their time abroad: The Lao language and the legal procedures in Laos.

Four women describe the language as a challenge during their time in Laos. They however also all described that they learned some Lao and that they are proud of this. Anh (58) was proud to show a small dictionary she made herself. One page of her book is showed in figure 10, it contains mainly words and small sentences she used selling fruits and vegetables.

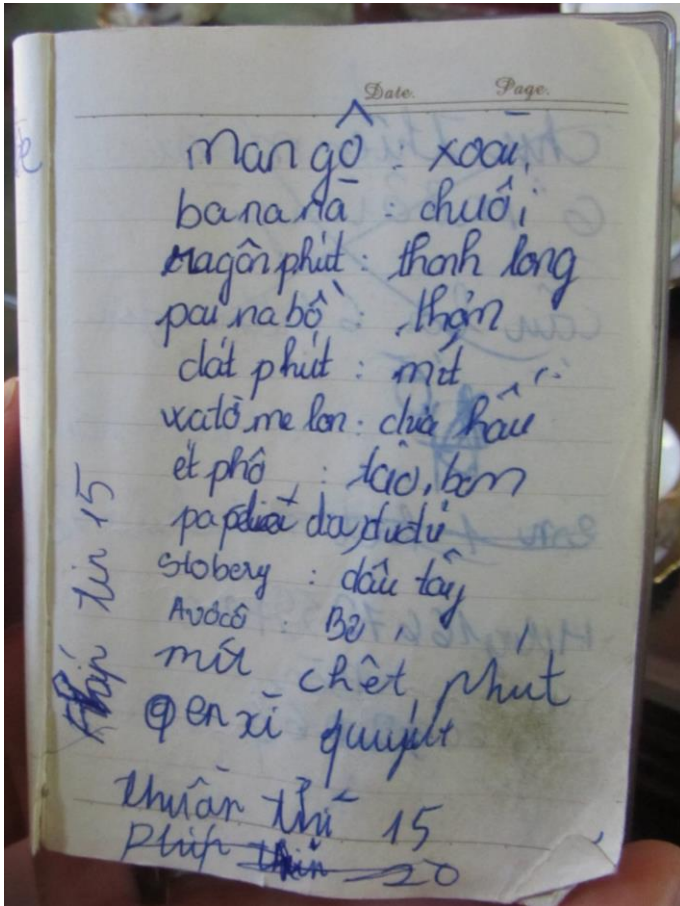


Figure 10. Homemade dictionary Lao - Vietnamese.

Most of the women interviewed describe problems with the legal procedures for migrants in Laos. Women describe being scared for the Lao police. The legal documents cause a lot of stress for the Vietnamese migrants. Some interviewees do admit that they sometimes work in Laos illegally, Ngoc (34) is one of them: *“Because there is a rule that you have to come to the border between Vietnam and Laos, to migrate. If I want to live in Laos I have to go the boarder every month. But I have no time to come back to the border. So I paid money to get an official paper, but sometimes this is fake information. I was really scared of being cached by the Lao police.”* Mai (32) who expressed before that she does not want to live Laos long term says: *“Working in Laos is just temporary, because we have no legal status. Even if we have money, we cannot buy land. Because we do not have the right legal status. In the long term we will go back to Vietnam [permanently].”* Over the last years the rules for labor migrants have changed. Working visas and labor fees have become more expensive. Respondents describe that now it is more difficult to work in Laos. Linh (32) says: *“The Lao police would like to condense the situation and always check for legal papers. I have to pay a lot of money for that, to become a legal worker in Laos.”* Giang (52) tells a similar story:

“The first time migrating to Laos it was so easy for us to work, to find a job and to make money. But now the situation has changed. (...) The government and Lao police would like to push us to have a residence card, but the fee for that document is very high and we cannot pay that amount. So that is why now migrating to Laos is very difficult.”

6.4.4 Gender Roles

This paragraph describes the different roles of wife and husband in the households of the interviewees. The interviewees are asked what the different tasks of each person are, what different responsibilities they have, whether this changed during and after their migration and what their opinion is on the gender roles in Vietnam. To give an overall impression of the opinion on the different roles of men and women the researchers asked the women ‘What makes a man a good husband?’ and ‘What makes a woman a good wife?’ The answers given are displayed in table 3. These questions were asked to six out of the twelve low skilled participants.

A wife should...	A husband should...
Take care of the children (5)	Take care of the children (3)
Take care of her husband (3)	Take care of his wife (2)
Work (2)	Have a job and earn good money (5)
Be active (1)	Not spend time gambling (2)
Save money (1)	Not go out to much and get drunk (3)
Take care of the household (1)	Protect his family (1)
	Love his wife (1)

Table 3. Expected qualities husband and wife by low skilled female return migrants.

*The numbers indicate how often that answer is given.

All the women, with the exception of Qui (37), indicate that the household tasks and child caring tasks are their main responsibilities of a wife. This did not change after their migration to Laos, although their husbands might be more involved with these tasks.

The respondents are asked what their thoughts are on gender roles in Vietnam. Nhu (29) answers: *“I feel that the husband is working to earn money to build up the family. The wife just has a submissive role in the family, like cooking and cleaning. I think that is normal, because some work, some jobs, I cannot do that, so my husband can work. I don’t think gender roles need to change, because it is so equal.”* Ngoc (34) and Anh (58) describe their relationships as equal and no different after their migration to Laos. Both however say that

their husbands are the family representative and in charge of the money. Anh describes her husband as the “*main person*” in her family.

Mai (32), Giang (52), Linh (29) and Long (42) do recognize gender inequality as a problem in Vietnam and would like this to be more equal. Giang (52) explains, “*The situation is becoming better, but there still is a big inequality. Inequality between a husband and his wife. Sometimes a husband can hit his wife. The local government has some activities to improve the situation, but it is still a big problem. I joined two programs to support gender equality, but in practice it is very difficult to change the situation. In the community meetings, the women always sit behind the men. I hope that in the future the situation will change.*” Linh (29) agrees, she hopes that in the future gender roles will be more equal and women will have more power. She argues that more awareness about this is needed: “*The biggest problem is that this preconception has been in the minds of people for such a long time, for so many generations.*”

Women described two main changes in their relationship caused by migrating to Laos: A higher status by earning more money and a more equal role in the household under the influence of Lao culture. According to Linh (29) there is more gender equality in Laos: “*Vietnamese women have to do everything, from taking care of children to cleaning the house. Lao women do not have to do a lot of things compared to Vietnamese women.*” In Laos men and women share the responsibilities: “*Lao families are more equal than Vietnamese families.*” The Lao culture inspired Linh to talk to her husband about this. “*When I migrated to Laos, there was more equality in my family when we were there. I found that my role in my family has changed.*” Now her husband can help her with cooking and cleaning. Linh says that the Vietnamese culture prefers men over women, but after being in Laos her family does not think like this anymore. Tan (42) explained that in Laos men and women share the different household tasks more: “*The role of women in Vietnam is not good. In Laos the women and men have other responsibilities and are equal. In Vietnam this is not the case. In Vietnam women are not respected like men. After my husband and I went to Laos, we still keep an equal role in Vietnam. I would like gender roles in Vietnam to be more equal, like the Lao family style.*” Tan notes that Vietnamese women are better in taking care of their family compared to Lao women. Long (42) tells a similar story. “*I feel in Vietnam the women are not respected like in Laos. If in Laos the woman has a problem, she can talk to her husband. In Vietnam the man is in charge of everything. Because I met my husband in Laos, if we have a problem we can talk to each other. We decide together.*” Nonetheless Long says her husband

is in charge of the money and due to her long working hours she has no time to go out and socialize like her husband does.

There are three ways in which the work of the women influenced their equality in their relationships: First, life is easier when there is more economic prosperity. Linh (29) says, *“If a family has enough money there is no conflict between husband and wife.”* According to Tan (42) the economic situation has a big influence on her relationship: *“When you earn money, you have more money, you feel life is easier. That is the reason husband and wife are more equal.”* Secondly, Truc (28) and Ly (45) explain that when they earned more money they obtained a more equal status with their husbands. Giang (52) expresses that her relation with her husband has become more equal because of the higher income she acquired in Laos: *“Because I am a wife and now women can make money. So women become more powerful and the balance between men and women had changed.”* Mai (32) explains the third manner: *“When we were in Laos, both me and my husband earned money, equally. Then the household tasks were also divided equally, we helped each other. And for the family representative, we always went together.”* When a woman has a paid job as well, the husband is more inclined to support her with the household tasks.

Qui’s (37) relationship differs from the other ones. She works together with her son and daughter in a hair salon. She says she makes more money than her husband, her husband is therefore responsible for the household tasks. According to Qui the gender roles in her family changed a lot over time. She declares that within her family it is *“quite equal.”*

Mai (32) says the situation in Laos was different because she did not yet have a baby to take care of, this seems to influence the equality in her relationship negatively: *“In general we are equal, but sometimes I have some disadvantages as a woman. When the children were little, I was the main person to take care of them. I was always busy, while my husband was still free.”*

Another way gender equality is influenced is described by Truc (28). Currently her husband is still working in Laos. In the absence of her, he takes care of the household himself. Truc explains that the household chores are now divided more equally because her husband knows how to do the housework. An additional change Linh (29) mentions is the relationship with her mother-in-law. She expresses that this has become much better and there is less conflict between her and her mother-in-law. Linh thinks this is because she earned a higher social status.

Physically limited husbands

Four out of the twelve low skilled women interviewed for this research have husband who are physically limited due to disabilities or sickness. In three cases this had an influence on the status of the women. Lan (33) is the mother of two and has been going to Laos for five years. The roles within her family changed significantly due to an accident her husband had: *“Before I went to Laos, my husband was the main person to make money. I was the main person to take care of our children and the household. Sometimes I was the family representative and sometimes my husband. My husband went to Laos for many years, maybe twenty years. At the start, when he was the main person to earn money, he was working construction. But then he had an accident. Now I am the main person to earn money. For the household tasks and child caring tasks my husband is now the main person.”* Nhu (29) describes a similar change: When Nhu met her husband, her husband was the main person to earn money. Nhu stayed at home to cook, do the housework and raise some cattle. Things changed when her husband got into an accident: *“Now I do everything. Now I go out of the house to work and I am responsible for the budget. I am also the main representative for communication.”* Linh (31) expresses herself about her role in her family: *“In general in Vietnam, husbands are more important in term of economics and family. They need to get money and take care of everyone in the family. But now my situation has changes. Now the roles are equal. I have to work, to get money, to share responsibility in terms of economy with my husband. Because my husband is not in good health.”*

6.4.5 Children

All of the low skilled return migrants interviewed are mothers. Some of these children are adults themselves, but most are still under age. Often the children stayed in Vietnam while the mothers went to Laos to work, especially when the children are of school-going-age. Tan (45) has three daughters and one son. She brings her children with her to Laos until they are five years old: *“After this they go back to Vietnam and stay with their grandmother [mother-in-law] (...) because in Laos you don’t have good education like in Vietnam”*. Tan describes the education of her children as one of the main benefits of her migration. Her salary allows her to pay for better school and university for her children.

In some cases young children come along to Laos. Long (24) has a baby of 19 months, the baby came with her to Laos. Ngoc (34) brought her children with her when they were small. Now she is looking for someone to take care of her children in Vietnam. The children are

often in the care of the mother-in-law. Ly (45) has two children that stay with her mother-in-law during her absence. She said that she worries about her children a lot, she is afraid that her children drop out of school.

In other cases young children are left behind in Vietnam. Linh's (31) mother takes care of her son and daughter. Linh returned to Laos after her kids were one year old. She does visit her children often: *"If this month I come back, next time my husband will come back [to Vietnam]. Sometimes we come back together, maybe for some family event, or friend's events, like a wedding."* Linh is sad that her family is apart. She says that in the future her children have to go to Laos to work as well. This is a fear of Truc (28). Truc currently stays in Vietnam to take care of her children to make sure they get a proper education. She heard from a lot of families that children drop out of school: *"Children just maybe finish secondary school, then parents bring them to Laos to find work and earn money. Because this is easier than when a child had a good education. If a child studies more and more it is more difficult to find a job."* According to Truc, children often start working in Laos when they are 15 years old. She herself started working in Laos at 14 years of age. This was motivated by her parents as well as inspired by friends who were working in Laos.

Qui (37) is an exception. She migrated to Laos without her husband, but with two of her children. Her husband stayed in Vietnam to take care of their other four children. Gaing (52) stays in Vietnam to take care of her grandchildren. Giang felt that her migration to Laos prevented her from fulfilling wifely and motherly duties.

6.5 High skilled Return Migrants

In this chapter the interviews with the high skilled respondents are discussed. For this research twelve female return migrants with a master's or PhD degree were interviewed. Due to insufficient translation only eleven of these interviews will be discussed. Those were conducted in English. The women in this chapter all went abroad to obtain a master's or PhD degree from a foreign university, some women went abroad twice for different degrees. The countries they went to are China (2), Australia (3), USA (2), New Zealand (2), Italy (2), Thailand and the UK. All women were born and raised in Hue city. The women are between 25 and 43 years old. Four out of the eleven women are unmarried. A list with more details is found in appendix 2.

"I think it is a great topic to talk about return migration and the household. Because in Hue a lot of women are very submissive and settled at a young age. They do not

expect themselves to be highly educated. But as a return migrant, we think differently about our role. That it should be equal with the man, in everything. Still there are some roles that the man can do better and some roles that the woman can do better. We can discuss this the husband, but the status should be equal in the end. A woman should not lower herself by being submissive and just do the cooking and cleaning and forget about her role for the community.”

-Yen (27)

All the women interviewed have spent time abroad, but not all are finished with their education: Phuong (33) is still working on her PhD and will therefore soon go back to Italy and Thuy (32) obtained her master's in Thailand, but will leave within three months to start her PhD in New Zealand. The interviews were all one on one held at different places, for examples coffee shops, their houses or their office at the university.

6.5.1 Migration Experience

All of the high skilled participants went abroad for their education and all of them received a scholarship to do so. Often the scholarship or their local university binds the women to a specific destination. Australia and New Zealand are popular destinations for overseas education, because these are Western countries with a good education system and relatively close to Vietnam compared to Europe or the USA. Nonetheless some other motives are mentioned. Huong (40) for example liked to keep her family (husband and son) together: *“Firs my husband applied for a scholarship to go to Shanghai. So I think it is the best way if I apply to the same university.”* Thi (40) had similar motivations, *“Because I have two children, I would like to come back frequently. Therefore I choose to go to China instead of the Netherlands.”* Several women indicate that they like a degree with a worldwide recognized reputation. Sometimes an overseas university provides opportunities like modern lab equipment. Two of the participants ambition a career as an English teacher. They therefore wanted to go to an English speaking country to improve their own language skills. Chau (27) *“I choose to study abroad because of my students expectations, they expect a good teacher.”* Half of the participant indicated that they wanted to go abroad because they had the desire to travel and explore.

Most of the return migrants describe that they enjoyed experiencing another culture and had an overall good time during their stay abroad. Huong (40) explains: *“I always went everywhere in Shanghai, to observer the way people live there and sometimes that makes me*

change my mind about our lifestyle. (...) It is good for me to see everything in life.” Yen (27) went to the USA and agrees, *“It was really fun and exciting. (...) Go to new places, eating new food, meeting new people, learning new skills, it is the best thing that I have ever experienced.”* Hoa (43) states: *“I got to understand another culture, understand another way people live. (...) And I experienced better living conditions.”* Hoa enjoyed the Australian culture, *“They are more relaxed, they enjoy more. They work very hard during the week, but for the weekend, I really like the way they spend their time in the weekend for their family.”* Several participants mention the friendliness of the professors at the foreign universities as a positive contribution to their international experience.

The interviewees mention several new skills they learned while they were abroad. All women say their migration helped them to improve their English. Other new skills obtained are: Learning how to work with people from different countries, problem solving skills, managing travel plans, time management skills, money management and the ability to create foreign relationships.

Most benefits mentioned are career related benefits, like promotions and new opportunities. Women can get a higher position in their university when they obtained a PhD. Dung (30) says: *“I got a higher job position. I am a senior lecturer now, not a junior one.”* Some universities obligate their staff to obtain a PhD if they want to stay on as lecturers. Phuong (33) says her PhD also benefits her university because *“it improves the quality of my university.”* Three women point out that their teaching skills have improved due to their experience overseas. Thuy (32) is a lecturer who according to her own saying let go of the Vietnamese traditions: *“I teach my students is a different way, more active. My students love the way I am teaching them”* Bian (32) states a similar change: *“I changed my style and my methods to teach students. Before it was always one direction, the teacher says something and the student just receive the knowledge. Now I make my students the center of the class and make them more active in class.”* Bian expresses that migrating benefits her in all different aspects of life, *“Studying abroad widens your mind and your knowledge a lot.”*

6.5.2 Reintegrating in Vietnam

All of the women interviewed planned to come back to Vietnam before they went abroad. Often it is a clause in their scholarship that they have to come back to Vietnam. The participants also indicate that they come back to Vietnam because this is where their families live. In some cases the women feel obliged to come back so they can take care of their

parents-in-law. Most women continue to work at the university they worked at before they went abroad.

Dung (30): *“I came back with a master’s degree from a famous university in Australia. My relations and acquaintances see me in another way. They have more respect for me and my ideas are more important than before.”* Dung is also more respected by her family. *“And my parents, they get more respect from their relations.”* Thien (25) describes the same effect. She says that there is a lot of admiration for people who study abroad and their families. The teaching reputation of the participants is increased.

Parents are usually supportive of the woman’s decision to go abroad. Words that were regularly mentioned are ‘support’, ‘proud’ and ‘respect’. Bian (32) went to Italy to obtain a PhD degree expresses her father’s feelings about her going abroad: *“Of course he is very proud of it. He can tell everyone, all of his friends, relatives. I did not tell anyone, but then everyone who knows my father, also knew that I was studying abroad.”* Bian tells her father is happier since her period abroad and that their relationship is better now. Thuy (32) also experienced a changed relationship with her parents, *“I can communicate with my parents easier. I can explain my perspective and my thoughts. We are friends now.”* Yen’s (27) relationship with her parents did change as well *“I think because I lived abroad for a while, I am really open to peoples lifestyle chooses.”* Her parents thought an education abroad is better. But her parents did not anticipate that her personality would change during Yen’s time abroad. Yen is currently more focused on her career than on starting her own family. She said her parents first did not agree with this, but now they are more accepting. In some cases the parents (in-law) are worried about their child’s marriage when a woman leaves her husband behind. None of the women did describe marital problem due to their migration.

Most of the participant do not describe any difficulties during their reintegration process. Thuy (32) describes she is happy to be living with her parents again. She says it is very comfortable and her parents can help her manage the household and child caring tasks. Thi (40) went to China and says she did not have a problem reintegrating because there are little differences between China and Vietnam. Bian (32) had no trouble reintegrating in her social and family life. However she is disappointed with the work environment in Vietnam, *“ I miss the time I was in Italy. I like the working environment in Italy, more than here. Here we work less productive and less professional.”* Some other difficulties reintegrating are mentioned by Sang, Chau and Hoa. When Sang (37) came back to Vietnam with her daughter and husband

it took her a bit of time to adjust to the Vietnamese lifestyle. She mentioned issues as getting used to the Vietnamese traffic and people who are being rude in line at the supermarket. She also find her relationship with friends a bit difficult, *“Some people asked me how much money I earned in Australia, but they did not ask me what I experienced I Australia, that shocked me.”* Sang therefore likes to adapt her life in Vietnam with some positive changes from Australia. Chau (27) had some difficulties reintegrating as well. She did not want anybody to know when she came back to Vietnam, because Chau experienced some culture shock and needed time to settle, *“I am so used to an independent way of working, and way of thinking. When I came back here, in the Asian style, everybody does everything with each other. That was kind of a shock, because I like to do things on my own.”* Hoa (43) did experience some similar reintegrating difficulties, *“It was not easy, being back from overseas. The living style are quite a bit different.”* In Australia Hoa was used to more freedom. Back in Vietnam she had to adjust to the routines of living with her parents-in-law. Hoa came back to Vietnam about ten months ago but is still reintegrating, *“Because I did not go out much, because a spent most of my time at home writing my thesis. You could say that I have not reoriented.”*

Some return migrants are motivated to make a contribution to the local development. This could for example be through donating money or setting up English classes. Yen (27) says *“I want to work for a local company.”* So she can have an impact on the local community. Hoa (43) is attempting to set up a reading group for children. Thuy (32) says *“I am Vietnamese, so when I come back I think I will help my country in a way, big or small.”* Thuy learnt some soft skills in Thailand and made some management recommendations for the local government which have been applied.

6.5.3 Challenges

The challenges mentioned by the high skilled women differ from the challenges described by the low skilled return migrants, although both groups mention the foreign languages as a barrier. Half of the women in this group mentions language as a difficulty during their time abroad. Thien (25) who went to New Zealand says: *“I thought my English was quite good, but when I used the English language I was totally misunderstood.”* Thien managed to overcome this difficulty, *“People can understand me if I use my body language and explain myself in another way.”* Bian (32) struggled with the Italian language, but did not take the time to learn this, *“Now I feel a regret, because at that time I did not take the Italian course seriously. So I can really integrate, really live in that country. I think the language is really important when you go to a foreign place.”*

The second challenge is mentioned by half of the participants. Namely their education and the stress that comes with it. Chau (27) wrote her master's thesis in New Zealand, *"It was so challenging, it was the most intimidating experience I have ever had."* Yen (27) also found the time management during her master's in the USA difficult, *"The most challenging was to balance between study and have fun as well."*

Two women mentioned that they were homesick during their time abroad and that they find it difficult to leave their families behind. Hoa (43) articulates : *"When I did my master's I went to Australia alone. I left my family behind. It was a very, very tough time for me."* Hoa did take her children with her when she went to Australia a second time for her PhD she said this was tough as well *"To find the balance, to be a mom and to be a student, was most challenging"* More women mention that they found it difficult to take proper care of their children during their time abroad. Either from a distance, when the children stayed in Vietnam, or in cases the children did come along. Sang (37) migrated to Australia twice, once for her master's and once for her PhD. Her biggest challenge during her PhD was to take care of her child at the same time, *"I had to learn how to take care of my baby in a new environment."* Sang's husband arrived a few months prior to her in Australia for his PhD. This was very helpful for her, *"When I came to Australia, everything was settled down, things like a house and so on."*

Another issue mentioned by three women is living on a small budget during their time abroad. Thuy (32) explains: *"Before I lived with my parents, I never had empty pockets. I never had that problem. But when I went to Thailand, a lot of time I had no money."* In neither of these cases this led to serious problems. Some women actually mention they had more money while they were abroad due to their scholarship.

6.5.4 Gender Roles

This paragraph describes the difference between wife and husband in the households of the interviewees and is comparable with the 'Low Skilled Return Migrants' chapter. To give an overall impression of the different expectations of men and women the researchers asked the women 'What makes a man a good husband?' and 'What makes a woman a good wife?' The answers given are displayed in table 4. These questions are answered by eleven women.

A wife should...	A husband should...
Do the housework (5)	Share (some) housework with his wife (5)
Take care of her family (6)	Take care of his family (2)
Take care of her children (9)	Share in the child caring tasks (6)
Take care of her husband (5)	Spend time with his family/ take care (2)
Have a good career (7)	Earn a lot of money for the family (3)
Balance family-life and work (4)	Balance family-life and work (1)
Love her husband (2)	Have compassion, keep the happiness (6)
Not go out to much (1)	Drink less alcohol, not go out (2)
Maintain social contacts (2)	Support his wife in her education (2)
Be happy (1)	
Not talk too much (1)	
Take care of your parents-in-law (2)	

Table 4. Expected qualities husband and wife by low skilled female return migrants.

*The numbers indicate how often that answer is given.

Four women pointed out that the two questions asked about the qualities of a wife and the qualities of a husband should have some similar answers. Dung (30) answered: *“I got the same answer for this similar question. (...) My husband has to do everything like me. For example take care of our son, clean the floor, clean the dishes, or cook. He can do everything a woman can do.”* Her opinion on ‘a good wife’ and ‘a good husband’ differed a little bit; a wife should focus more on the social contacts and according a good husband must *“Earn a lot of money for the family.”* Phuong (33) shares this opinion with Dung (30). Phuong answers: *“Maybe the same for the husband, but he has to earn more money than the woman. Because the women have to take care of the children, so the men have to earn more money.”* Hoa (43) also put emphasis on the similarities between husband and wife: *“Of course the very first thing is that we should have love, love from both sides, and tolerance as well.”* Bian (32) who says she not a traditional women agrees with these women: *“For me, nowadays, men and women are equal. (...) In the family everyone, the husband and the wife, they have the same rights.”*

The high skilled women agree on what the traditional gender roles in Vietnam are. Huong (40) explains: *“In my country men and women are different. (...) In Vietnam the men rarely do the housework. Sometimes my husband helps me, some easy work, but most of the work in the house I have to do.”* And when it comes to making decisions about money Huong says: *“I*

always let my husband decide. But for some easy, daily activities I decide.” Some of the women live by these standards, others differ from it more or less. Thuy (32) for example does not agree with the traditional gender roles, *“I think men and women are the same. They have the same intelligent and we can share the housework and the work for the baby. (...) Sometimes the men they just want to hang out with friends outside every night and do not really take care of their family. It is a social problem.”* Chau (27) thinks this is cause because men are more cared for, first by their mothers and then by their wives. Yen (27) says: *“Traditionally the man is the one who works and the wife is more inside, to cook, clean and take care of the children. I think taking care of the small kids should be the mothers job, because the mother and the children have a stronger bond compared to the father. But for cleaning and cooking, I think it should be divided. Because the woman is taking care and earning money for the family. So the housework should be shared. But taking care of the children is different, because mothers have a more considerate way of taking care.”* The capacity of a mother to take care of the children is mentioned more often.

Huong (40) says *“It is the culture of Vietnam, so maybe that is why the women always accepted this.”* Most of the interviewed women however indicate that they would like gender roles to be different. Huong (40) is one of two exceptions. She has a very traditional relationship, but she would feel better if her husband would recognize the work she does and give her some encouragement. Bian (32) thinks modern women would like gender roles to be more equal in the family as well as the labor market. Most women say gender roles are changing under the influence of Western culture and have already changed with the new generation. Sang (37) says: *“Vietnam is adapting to the Western culture. Because a lot of foreigners come to Vietnam to live and Vietnamese people go overseas a lot. I think Vietnamese people maybe therefore change their mind.”* Dung (30) thinks another reason why this is changing is because women often have jobs outside of the house and therefore obtain a more important role in the family.

Dung (30) thinks it is however difficult to change gender roles when the men are not open to this *“Because Vietnamese society evaluates a woman by the way she takes care of her family, not by what she has done outside of the house.”* Yen (27) tells that education and work for women are important to promote the status of women. Thien (25) agrees, *“Women should not rely only on their husband’s family. Because sometimes, that makes your husband look down on you.”* Chau (27) thinks that return migration can help to improve gender equality in Vietnam, *“When migrants come back to Vietnam they make major changes. I think that is why*

most governments are sponsoring young people to go abroad to study, because they want to help Vietnam as a developing country. And when these migrants come back to Vietnam, they bring back a fresh mindset.” Yen (27) agrees “I assume if I lived in Hue my whole life, I would have gotten married. My thinking would not have been improved, developed.” Thuy (32) thinks: “It is very good when people are open and go abroad to see some other things, to compare, to debate, the basic things in their home country.” Some women therefore hope to influence people around them as well. Thien (25), who is a teacher would like to transfer her experience in New Zealand to her students. Thien hopes that girls can adapt these ideas and build their family in the future like that. Yen (27) and Bian (32) hope to influence their friends, Bian says: “I will make a small change. When I speak to my friends I share my experiences, so it can influence my friends.”

The gender roles the women have in their relationship vary from more traditional to more modern. However, the women who are married do fulfill the traditional role of being the main responsible one for the housework and child caring tasks. The main variety lies in the role of the husband. Huong (40) has a traditional relationship where she wakes up at 5 am and takes care of her children and husband. Her husband does not take part in any of the household and child caring tasks. Dung’s (30) husband lives in another city, she lives with her parents. Dung does the housework together with her mother and grandmother, “My dad does not do anything related to the household tasks. Because he is a traditional man in the Vietnamese culture, so he just earns the money. Even when he is free, he does not do anything, because my mom and my grandmom have to do that, in his opinion.” Phuong’s (33) husband steps in occasionally, “When I am at home all the work is for me, cooking cleaning, taking care of the children. But sometimes, when I am sick, my husband can help.” Phuong continues to tell that this changed with the new generation, “My husband he can go to the kitchen, wash the dishes or cook a meal. But my father-in-law, no never. He said that the housework belongs to the woman.” Thuy (32) feels her marriage and life is balanced and shared with her husband; “Normally when I cook he can clean and when he cooks, I can clean.” This goes for the child caring tasks as well. Hoa (43) says “I am very happy with my husband. (...) “My husband is willing to share the housework with me. If I need him, if he has free time.” Hoa continues to tell that she and her husband are equal and both responsible, “But in my mind, I kind of feel more comfortable when doing the housework, better than when I see my husband doing this. If I need help, he helps and I think that is ok. But I rather take care of the housework myself than asking him for help.”

Most women describe a change in their assigned gender role after they migrated. Three differences are described: a change in the household, whereby the husband contributes more, a change in their status or a change in their mindset. Dung (30) does not describe a direct change in her household, but she changed her perspective on gender roles after she came back from Australia, *“A good wife should have the same role in the family as her husband.”* Dung’s status did change in her household, *“Especially in making decisions and in giving opinions.”* She says this is caused by the higher position she got at her university. In Sang’s (37) household the traditional gender roles are still in place. Sang went to Australia with her husband and child, *“When I was in Australia, my husband was a very good husband. He went shopping every week, he did the cleaning for me and took care of the baby. But in Vietnam, when we came back here, he quickly adopted the Vietnamese lifestyle.”* Sang did however change her attitude towards the role of men and women and thinks a husband should step in and help more when a woman has a job outside of the house. Sang’s status did change. Sang and her husband can now discuss how to spend their money. Chau (27) is single, but changed her view on what a marriage should look like when she studied English in New Zealand. She liked the equal roles of men and women in the Western culture. Chau does think there are certain differences between men and women, *“The woman takes care of children much better than the man does. They do still need some help from the husband.”* Thien’s (25) time in Australia changed her mind completely. She wants her future husband to share the housework and the child caring tasks with her, *“I come from a developed country, a kind of different culture. I imitate that culture. Maybe if he does not change his mind about the woman’s duty in the family we might be in trouble, a lot.”* Yen (27) went to the UK and USA and tells a similar story to Thien. Hoa (43) says being abroad changed her perspective and gender role, she thinks coming in contact with different cultures is a positive experience. Hoa tells when her husband visited her and their children in Australia, her husband stepped in to help Hoa out with the housework, so she had more time to study. Bian (32) says her migration to Italy was very inspiring, *“For example, at my age in Vietnam, people will always ask you: ‘When are you getting married?’, ‘Are you married?’ Before I studied in Italy, I would feel bad about those questions, but now I think it is OK, because I saw lots of independent Italian women.”* Her relationship with her father, who she lives with, changed, due to her higher economic status, *“My father is already retired. His influence on the family is less than before. Before my father is the one who decide everything. We were always scared of him. (...) When I earn money, my voice becomes stronger.”* Bian’s father shares the household tasks with her equally. Yen (27) describes something similar to Bian: *“People of my age are all settled*

down. They think it is the perfect age to get married. People will think I look like a loser, if I do not get married. Some of them will think that way. I think that is very close minded. I decided that it is all my choice. I am not letting the community set its opinion on me.” Thi (40) and Huong (40) both migrated to China, fulfill the traditional gender roles in the household, and did not describe a direct change. Thi says she did obtain a higher status and says her relationship with her husband therefore improved, “*Before I went abroad my income was very low. That means your position in the family is less. My husband decided everything and I depended on it. I did not like this. I thought going abroad for a higher education might be the best situation. (...) When women have money, that means their role in the family changes.*” Thi think her relationship would have been more influenced if she would have migrated to a Western country. Phuong (33) went to Italy for nine months so far and does not describe any change in her relationship. While she is abroad her husband steps in with the household chores, the child caring tasks are than the responsibility for the parents-in-law. Thuy (32) went to Thailand with her husband, she does not describe a change in her relationship. She does however describe an equal relationship, “*We are friends and we understand each other. We try to keep our happiness.*”

Women describe that the influence from the parents-in-law, with whom most married women live, on their relationship can be big. Thien (25) says “*If you want your husband to share the household job with you is quite impossible. Because mothers do not want their sons to do some house jobs, because that is the girls duty.*” Sang (37) faces the same problem, “*My mother-in-law always thinks that he housework belongs to a wife, rather than a husband. So sometimes we have a conflict. Sometimes I ask my husband, could you help me with something, like cleaning. That makes my mother-in-law feel very unhappy.*” Phuong (33) had a different problem with her parents-in-law, “*When I was having a baby my parents-in-law they wanted me to have a son. If I had a daughter I could not serve the ancestors. But my husband is completely different. He said ‘I would like a girl, because boys are naughty.’ So that made me feel better.*” Parents-in-law can also influence the migration of the women, Phuong (33) says “*First when I told my parents-in-law I am going to Italy for my PhD, they said no. But my husband said ‘we have to let her go.’ My husband always supported me. I am lucky.*” Thi (40) describes she did not make the decision to go abroad alone. Her parents-in-law at first did not want her to go. The final decision was made by her husband.

Huong (40) and Phuong (33) both have quite traditional relationships. It was noticeable that Phuong said: “*In Vietnam there is an equality between women and men, so nothing needs to*

change.” And Huong mentioned: *“I do not want to say more on this topic.”* When the researcher asked about the different roles of men and women.

6.5.5 Children

Some of the children are affected by their mothers migration experience. Not all high skilled respondents are mothers. Some have children now, but not while they went abroad for their education. Others already had kids during this time, sometimes they came along and sometimes they stayed in Vietnam.

When the mothers who participated in this research do not take their children with them abroad they leave them in the care of their parents or parents-in-law. Husbands are in none of the cases the main caretakers. Huong (40) went to China together with her son and husband, but after a short while they found out their son had autism. They therefore decided it was better for their son to stay in Hue due to the language environment. The child stayed with Huong’s mother. Huong and her husband alternated their visits to their son in Vietnam. If Huong would be in Vietnam she takes over the care of her son. When Huong’s husband is in Vietnam the son stays in the care of Huong’s mother. Thi (40) has two children, a son and a daughter. Thi went to China without them. During this time her parents-in-law took the main responsibility for the care of her children. Thi also rented a housemaid to support her parents-in-law and traveled to Vietnam often. Thi thinks she is a better mother now because she has more general knowledge. Phuong (33) is currently in Vietnam, but is still working on her PhD in Italy. *“My parents-in-law, they have to take care of my son when I am abroad.”* Her parents-in-law take more responsibility in the child caring tasks than her husband. Phuong did however notice that her husband supports her more in the care of her son than before she went to Italy. Phuong also described that her son is more independent after her time abroad. When Hoa (43) went to Australia for her master’s she left her daughter in the care of her mother-in-law with the help of a baby sitter.

Between her master’s and PhD Hoa (43) had two more daughters. Because she disliked being apart from her daughter she decided to take all three girls with her to Australia for her PhD. Her husband stayed in Vietnam, *“So physically it was a bit though for me, doing a PhD while taking care of my daughters.”* Hoa’s girls went to school in Australia, *“Their English now is very good. So there is a very good change for them to perform well at school.”* They are also influenced by the Australian culture, *“Their living style is different, it changed. They seem to be more independent. They are better in doing housework, compared to other children at their*

age in Vietnam.” Hoa does struggle sometimes with the independence of her daughters. Some other ways the Australian culture influences Hoa’s family is the way they spend their weekends together, *“I do not like the way that most Vietnamese people spend their weekend in the café, especially with their kids.”* Hoa does prefer to live in Australia because her daughters received a better education there. Other mothers took their children with them as well. Sang (37) went to Australia for her PhD together with her husband (also a PhD student) and daughter. Sang thinks this was a good experience for her child because she can speak two languages now. This did cause some difficulties reintegrating, because her daughters English was better than her Vietnamese. It took therefore a bit of time to get used to receiving education in Vietnamese. Thuy (32) has her first daughter during her master’s in Thailand. She said it was easy to take care of her because she was in Thailand with her husband and this was during the end of her study when she did not have many courses. Thuy’s parenting did change because of her migration, *“Because I opened my mind, with the Western way to teach the kids. So I teach my kids in a different way from the Vietnamese. They sometimes hit their kids, but we do not do it. We changed the way we teach the kids.”* Thuy is soon going to New Zealand for her PhD, *“I think I go first, for 3 or 6 months and prepare everything. Like a school for my kids and a job for my husband. After that they will follow me.”* During this period Thuy’s mother will take care of her two daughters.

The other women interviewed do not have children or did not have children at the time. However some did describe an influence on their (future) children. Dung’s (30) son was not yet born when she went to Australia for her master’s. Nonetheless, her son is affected by her migration, *“I learned a lot of teaching ways from Western parents, to raise a child. I have applied this on my son. He is just 19 months old now, but he is so independent. I do the same way Australian parents do with their children”* Huong will soon go back to Australia for her PhD. Her husband and child are coming with her. Huong thinks this will be a positive experience for her son, *“My son can learn a lot of lessons from Australian culture. He can get a high qualified education. Although he is just going to childcare, I think it is better than one in Vietnam.”* Thien (25) does not have children yet. She feels inspired by the families she saw in New Zealand. She describes families coming to parks during the weekends and having a good time relaxing together, *“And all the kids play with their fathers.”* Thien hopes that she can adopt similar behavior when she has a family of her own. Yen (27) does not have children either. She does however states that the way her parents raise her younger sister did change

under her influence, *“The way that my parents teach, educate, my younger sister is quite different.”* Yen explains that this will make her sister more independent.

6.6 Other Observations

The researcher experienced some difference between men and women in Vietnam herself when interacting with people. A Vietnamese man was so kind to invite the researcher to a New Year’s celebration (Vietnamese Tet holiday). During this celebration a big lunch was served in extensively decorated party tents. Throughout this lunch the researcher noticed that the guests in the party tents were only men, with the exception of one woman who welcomed the (female) researcher. There were women present at the celebration. They however were situated inside a building with a much less celebrative atmosphere. Another thing observed by the researcher is a ‘Mum’s shop’ in Hué, as shown in figure 11. This shop sells mostly kitchen supplies, cleaning supplies and other household articles. The name of the shop makes it very clear that women are the ones supposed to shop there.



Figure 11. ‘Mum’s shop’ in Hué City.

Gender inequality is also observed in the schoolbooks of children. In which women are fulfilling the traditional Confucian roles within the household and men are portrait as strong and the one who should work to provide for their families.

The street image that can be observed in Hué City indicates differences between men and women in the Vietnamese culture. The women spotted on the street are working (selling fruits

and vegetables), buying food or taking care of children. During breakfast and lunch the number of men and women in restaurants do not seem to differ much, sharing meals seems to be done mostly with complete families. After breakfast- and lunchtime however men go out for coffee. It is very noticeable that the main guests at any time a day in any coffee shop are men. The same pattern is noticeable at night. Only this time men will drink beer and play gambling games at small tables on the side of the road. Very rarely women are seen out on the streets at night to enjoy themselves (taking the general view of the city into account, the researcher has not specifically looked for places women might visit).

Vietnam celebrates women on two different days. Vietnamese Women's Day is celebrated yearly on October 20th. International Women's Day on March 8th is also an important day in Vietnam. The researcher experienced the celebration of International Women's Day in Vietnam. The same sort of gifts were given to women as on Valentine's Day: chocolates, roses and teddy bears. A difference with Valentine's Day is that it is not focused on women who are in a relationship, but rather on all women. Men take care of household chores on this day so women have time to relax and enjoy themselves. There are no specific celebrations for men in Vietnam.

7. Discussion & Conclusion

This chapter will provide a discussion as well as conclusion on this research organized by the research questions. First the five sub questions will be discussed, after this the main research question ‘*What is the effect of female return migrants on their ascribed gender roles within the Vietnamese household and what are the differences and similarities between high skilled and low skilled women?*’ will be answered. Two important biases will be mentioned before: The most important one might be the language barrier. This makes it more difficult to obtain information out of an interview. It can also influence the trust relationship between the interviewee and interviewer. This brings the second problem. This research is based on retrospective interviews and therefore based on what and how the women remember situations and what they are willing to disclose. According to the women’s union people in Vietnam do not like to talk about gender inequality or their personal problems.

7.1 What are the ascribed gender roles in Vietnam and how do these influence the daily life of women in Vietnam?

Huế is the ancient capital of Vietnam. Many people therefore follow the traditional and ancient values. In Huế the women have a lower status than men. Gender inequality in Huế is a bigger problem compared to other cities in Vietnam. According to the Women’s Union it is hard to be a woman in Huế. Women are seen as those who should take care of the household, the children and their husbands. Some husbands are involved with the household tasks. These tasks are however always described as the main responsibility of the woman. The man’s voice is more important when it comes to making decisions. The husband’s main purpose is to generate an income for the family, but women are expected to have a paid job as well. It is said that women often do not have leisure time, due to their quantity of tasks, while men do have time for themselves.

Most of the Vietnamese families who were part of this research are quite traditional in the following sense: People live at their parent’s house as long as they are not married. When a man and a woman do get married the woman will move in with the family of her husband. The gender roles participants describe are in line with the discussed literature. Gender roles have become more equal over time, but there is not yet gender equality in Vietnamese families. This is as reported by the literature as well as by the participants.

Higher educated people have more equal relationship according to the NGOs, this seems to be the case with the respondents for this research as well. There seems to be more variance

among the gender roles of the high skilled population. This could be because the high skilled group is more heterogeneous than the low skilled group. The high skilled, married women fulfil the traditional tasks, but the husband's involvement in the household tasks and the opinion of the women varies.

The low skilled respondents face more gender inequality than the high skilled respondents. The literature suggests that gender inequality is a bigger problem in rural areas. Both NGOs and focus groups tell the same. The low skilled respondent do live in a more rural area than the high skilled respondents. The low skilled women describe that their lives become more difficult when they get children, since the child caring tasks are their responsibility and are added to their previous tasks.

With the 'What makes a men a good husband?' and 'What makes a women a good wife?' questions the high skilled women vocalized more qualities for men as well as women. This could be because they were in general more outspoken throughout the interviews. The low skilled women follow the Confucian traditions more in describing male and female qualities. The low skilled women are more negative about the way their husbands spend their leisure time by drinking and gambling. This problem is mentioned by the high skilled women as well, but to a lesser extent. Only the high skilled women mention that it is important for a wife to maintain social contacts. Something else exclusively said by high skilled women is their task to take care of their parents-in-law. Both groups of participants say it is important for a men to take care of his family and earn a good salary. Only the high skilled participant stress the importance of their own career. Four high skilled participants mention that these questions should be answered similarly to some extent, while none of the low skilled participant did so.

It is possible that this story is somewhat biased because the participants could have tolled a more gender unequal story about their life than it is in reality, because that is their perception of what a good wife should be. As is said before, women in Hué are judged on the way they take care of their families.

7.2 What are women's and men's perceptions on gender inequality in Vietnam?

The low skilled women commonly say that a wife should take care of her husband, her children and her household and a husband should generate an income for their family. The opinion of most high skilled women is similar. They however add that a woman should work

as well and be financially independent and a husband should help his wife with her household. This underwrites the Confucian gender roles in Vietnam and are equal to the construction of gender roles described in the literature (paragraph 2.2).

Some low skilled women say that gender roles should be more equal in Vietnam, but that this is not a problem in their own relationship. Most high skilled women express that gender inequality is a problem in Hué and that they would like gender roles to be more equal, in the family as well as the workplace. The women express this often through saying that they would like their husbands to help them with the household chores. Most high skilled women have higher educated and more modern husbands, therefore they are likely to be in more equal relationships compared to the low skilled women.

According to the female focus group, as well as high skilled interviewees, it is difficult to change gender inequality, because men prefer their higher status. The male focus group confirms that. They say men have to work so women have to take care of the household. Although they would like their wives to have a job as well. In the case of children, the male perspective is that the woman should be the main caretaker, women often agree with this statement. All the men spoken to suggest classified jobs for men and women. A few women agree with this idea. Men do think that gender roles should be more equal, they however do not want to lose their superior position.

Education and influences of Western cultures are often mentioned as an important factor to improve gender equality. Both men and women think gender equality could further improve this way as values are exchanged through social networks as discussed by Berkman & Glass (2000). Men add economic development and work for women as other opportunities to improve this. They stress the importance of a job for women, because money equals power. Both men and women realize that the habit and traditional mindset of women themselves could work against gender equality. According to both focus groups and the women's union some women do not know what gender inequality entails and do not recognize it. This seems to be the case in some interviews where women express to have a lower status to their husbands and clues indicating inequality, while they state that they are in an equal relationship. Other threats for gender equality discussed in the focus groups are the Vietnamese cultural traditions and the drinking and violent habits of husbands. There seems to be a role of mothers-in-law in maintaining gender inequality as well. Married couples usually live with the parents of the husband. The mothers-in-law are said to protect their sons

and prohibit them from doing household chores. This last problem is only mentioned by women.

It is noticed that when there are men present during the interviews, women are more prone to answer that they are content with the current way gender equality is perceived in their family and in Vietnam. In general people do not like to talk about gender inequality. While this was vocalized by some high skilled women, this was especially difficult during the interviews with the low skilled women. It is said that Vietnamese women will not tell you their whole story unless you are living in Vietnam for a long period of time and build a long lasting, trusting relationship with participants. The researcher did try to gain the trust of people by having a friendly and open attitude towards their stories, but the limited time available does put restrictions on this research.

There is more data to answer this research question for women than for men. This is because the men's point of view is only based on the focus group and the man working at the NGO, while there are a lot more women interviewed.

7.3 What happens with the role of a woman while she is abroad for a period of time?

The low skilled women, who are involved in a transnational lifestyle, are sometimes abroad with their husbands and sometimes without. When a couple is abroad together the tasks are usually divided similar to how they were in Vietnam, although this can be different due to influences of the local culture. Children often stay in Vietnam when they are enrolled in school. They live with the parents-in-law. The mother-in-law is often the main caretaker. Some mothers feel that they are neglecting their children by leaving them behind. According to the women's union this is indeed not beneficial for children.

The high skilled participants are separated from their children in less cases. Not all women who migrated had children at the time. Others took their children with them. When the children did stay in Vietnam, the mother tried to come back frequently. In these cases the mother-in-law was usually the main caretaker, similar to the children of low skilled migrants. When the husband is in Vietnam as well, he will not take over the child caring tasks. The women who migrate in most cases leave behind a household, either from their parents or their parents-in-law. The household chores are taken over by other women, a mother-in-law, an aunt or a housemaid.

When high skilled couples were abroad together, the women often expressed that their household was arranged differently compared to their lifestyle in Vietnam. Roles were divided more equally and the men seemed to be less dominant. This was often a temporary change during their time abroad. This effect is also observed with the low skilled participant, but to a lesser extent.

As discussed in the literature, women who go abroad usually transfer their household or child caring tasks to other women while they are abroad (Lopez-Ekka et al., 2011). This is often observed with the participants of this research as well. Since the women as well as men believe that women are more suitable to take care of children, it is logical for both groups of participants to transfer the child caring tasks to another women,

7.4 How do female return migrants experience the reintegration process?

The low skilled return migrants often come home to their country of origin for their family. The migration destination of the low skilled participants is often influenced by their social contacts, as described in the literature (Banerjee, 1983) and is a well-known migration pattern within this community. This could be a reason why the women described no problems reintegrating in Vietnam, both from the perspective of their cultural and social embeddedness. The low skilled women have their family and keep their houses in Lộc Bõn. Due to more economic prosperity the lives of these women are easier when they return to Vietnam, this contributes to making their reintegration easier. Most of the families will use some of this money to invest in local development. This indicates that they are still involved in their community in Vietnam. The majority of low skilled participants will invest most of their money in building more prestigious houses in Lộc Bõn. The low skilled women describe a better relationship with their family-in-law due to a higher status. The support of family seems to have a positive effect on the reintegration process, as Kuyper (2008) suggested.

The first reason for the high skilled women to go abroad was their education. They often had the desire to travel and explore other cultures as well, making cultural flows possible. Social networks however do not seem to influence the migration destination of most high skilled participants. The women give the same reason for returning to Vietnam as the low skilled women, namely family. However, there is often a clause in their scholarship obliging them to return to Vietnam after graduation, and work at their university, facilitating their economic embeddedness in Vietnam. Most of the high skilled women describe that it was easy to

reintegrate in their community. The higher status they obtained with their degree was helpful with that, because they were more respected in the community.

The destinations seems to be have an influence on the reintegration process of the high skilled return migrants. When they went to a Western country, they have to readjust to the Vietnamese culture. This goes for the family of the return migrant as well. Parents have to get used to the new ideas women have about their lifestyle due to a brain gain. Parents are often proud of their children for graduating abroad. This can improve their relationship, as a result of more respect from the parents. The high skilled women did not describe major problems with their social embeddedness, though they did say that their contacts sometimes had to get used to their new ideas and opinions. Some difficulties with the cultural embeddedness are experienced with the Vietnamese working style and the collectiveness of the Vietnamese culture and with that, the loss of their individuality. In few cases high skilled women express a culture shock when they came back to Vietnam and needed time to adjust. Few others experienced the opposite, they were homesick and very happy to return to Vietnam.

The literature suggested that it is easier to reintegrate for higher educated people (Kuyper, 2008). This does not seem to be the case in the group of participants for this research. Although both groups did not have difficulties, the high skilled participants did describe some. One could argue that the high skilled women had less control over their migration process, since they were bound by contracts to be away a certain amount of time and return at a specific time as well. According to Kuyper (2008) this could be one of the reasons the group of high skilled participants had a more difficult time reintegrating. Another reason could be that their migration experience deviates more from their lives in Vietnam, compared to the low skilled women.

Only some high skilled return migrants are motivated to be involved in small local development programs. This is in contrast with the big group of low skilled return migrants who all contribute to the local development. This might be because the low skilled women do not lose their sense of community when they are in Laos, since many of the people from Lộc Bồn migrate to Laos.

The reason participants might not have described big problems with reintegrating is that both high skilled and low skilled women planned on returning to Vietnam within a maximum of three years. When the researcher asked the participants why they came back to Vietnam they

all answer 'for family'. This indicates how important the family values are in Vietnam. Family to take care of is a reason for the low skilled women not to return to Laos.

7.5 Do women experience a change in their household roles after returning to Vietnam?

According to the NGOs return migration can bring new cultural values to Vietnam. The women's union says you can get a the higher status as a women by working abroad. Different women describe different changes after their return to Vietnam. Some women describe big influences and say that their experience with a Western lifestyle changed their complete view on family life. Other women say that their role might not have changed but their status has, due to a higher degree or a higher income earned abroad. The women's union indicated that a woman obtains a higher status when she earns more money, though never as high as a man. Both groups of return migrants are inspired by other cultures during their time abroad and cause a flow of cultural ideas through transnationalism and their social networks, as described in the social network theory.

Low skilled women mention that they have more responsibilities after returning to Vietnam. The women are inspired by the Lao culture, which is more gender equal, and experience a brain gain through social networks. Especially when couples went abroad together they are inclined to take over these values to a certain extent. Bigger changes are however due to a higher status. The low skilled participants indicate that they obtained more responsibilities, they are more in charge of the family money and that they are more often the family representative. The responsibilities mentioned change from being the husband's tasks to being a shared task. The household tasks are still focused upon the women, but the low skilled women do mention that since migrating to Laos their husbands help them more frequently.

Something worth mentioning is an outcome within low skilled families. A few of the participants interviewed for this research were women whose husbands are in bad physical health. All these women described difficulties due to this. However these women also describe a more equal relationship with their husbands. The husbands take on more tasks within the household and the wives more responsibilities outside of the house. These women often have a higher status compared to women with healthy husbands.

High skilled women express a shift in their gender roles. However they expressed that the biggest change are their views on gender roles and how they should be. This was influenced by their time abroad and brain gain in their country of destination. Women who obtained a

degree in Western countries indicate a larger effect on their household roles compared to women who obtained a degree in China. The participants point out that their more liberal views on gender roles is partly caused by their time abroad and partly by the fact that they are higher educated women. Different people spoken to by the researcher in Vietnam state that education is the key to gender equality. Most of the high skilled female return migrants experienced a change in their relationship with their husbands after returning to Vietnam as expected by Curran & Saguy (2013). Often the explanation is given that they are more respected because they obtained a higher educational degree abroad and due to this a higher position in the workplace. The interviewees tell that their husbands became more active within the household. Nonetheless, the main responsibility for the cooking, cleaning and child caring tasks still belongs to the women.

More economic wealth for the low skilled women makes their life easier and causes less conflict between wife and husband. This is not mentioned by the high skilled women, possibly because they did not face economic problems to begin with. A similarity in both groups is that husbands are more inclined to step in with the housework when a women works more, so the tasks are more evenly, though not equally, divided. Both groups mention that men sometimes had to take care of themselves in the absence of a women. This can have a positive influence on gender roles later. The same effect is found with child caring tasks. When a high skilled women left her children behind, the women noticed that their husbands became more involved. In both groups remittances did not seem to play a role directly. Although both groups of women were able to make more money through their migration. This did cause a higher status as is explained in the literature (Lopez-Ekra et al., 2011). According to the literature women often seek employment abroad to generate income for the family, because a man keeps his income for his personal expenses (Desai & Potter, 2014). None of the women described this problem, there is a more overall lack of work and income. Almost none of the interviewed women see themselves as the main bread winner for their family.

Other family members can be affected by the return migration of a woman as well, most importantly, the children. Some high skilled women explain that their view on how to raise a child has been influenced by their time abroad. Other affected family members are the parents (from the husband as well as the wife). They experience a higher status for the family. This happens with the low skilled participants as well as the high skilled participants. Either because of a higher degree obtained or because of the higher salary a woman earned.

According to the high skilled participants studying abroad widens your mind. So even if the role of women did not change, their ideas often did. High skilled women often like to spread these new found values. Either through teaching students, talking to friends or in the way they raise their children. The social network theory therefore can cause a flow of cultural values in Vietnam as well. Not all high skilled women are married. The single women often became more carrier oriented and feel they refrain from Vietnamese traditions. Unmarried women do describe a bigger change of mind or brain gain compared to married women. Often they express the desire for a completely equal relationship. It would be interesting to see how these perceptions develop in the future, especially when these women get married.

7.6 What is the effect of female return migrants on their ascribed gender roles within the Vietnamese household and what are the differences and similarities between high skilled and low skilled women?

In conclusion it is likely that the role of a woman within her household does change after migration abroad for a period of time and returning to Vietnam. There are noticeable differences between the high skilled and low skilled female return migrants. Low skilled women describe a slight shift with the household tasks, and that they are allowed more responsibilities, like taking care of the household budget and being the family representative. After the reviewed literature these findings are comparable with the expected results. It is however possible that women who migrate are already women who are more empowered.

High skilled women describe a bigger change in their household. But often their opinion on how a household should be arranged changed more than how their household is actually arranged. An explanation on the bigger change within the high skilled household could be due to their higher education or the country a woman migrates to. Participants described that Western influences will make gender roles more equal. All low skilled participants migrated to Laos, while the high skilled participants migrated mostly to Western countries. When comparing the high skilled and low skilled respondents, it is important to keep in mind that the marriages of the high skilled respondents were possibly already more equal before they migrated. This could be because the high skilled women are raised in an urban area, often in well-educated families and were already well-educated themselves.

Female return migration seems to contribute to Vietnams program to eliminate gender inequality. As discussed in the feminist approach, women are active agents of development (Potter et al. 2012). Some women did not only change their perspective, but try to influence

their community as well. Some women express to raise their children with a more gender equal perspective. The next generation can therefore also benefit from return migration. Education is often said to be an important factor in promoting gender equality. One low-skilled mother will invest in the education of her children. High skilled women who brought their kids with them said they received better education abroad.

The women's union argues that it is important to train the life skills of women so they can be more independent. This is in agreement with the livelihood approach discussed in paragraph 2.6. The female return migrants increased their social capital, human capital and financial capital. Hence, the women did learn new life skills during their time abroad. According to one of the NGOs women can build their own livelihood by earning money. Equal gender roles are important in the livelihood strategy and when individual freedom is the aim of development.

Although gender roles seem to shift, women did not gain an equal status to their husbands. Unless their status was equal before the woman migrated or the women are not yet married. In the last case, women claim to want an equal marriage in the future. In conclusion women did experience a brain gain, but less of a social change.

8. Recommendations

This chapter will shortly discuss the policy recommendations and recommendations for further research that followed out of the discussion and conclusion.

8.1 Recommendations for Further Research

1. In a future study on gender equality and return migration male participants should be included. It would be interesting to see how they influence gender roles in their family after returning from a Western country.
2. Because many women indicated they are raising their children differently since their migration, a study should be conducted on how the next generation and their gender roles are influenced by the migration patterns from their parents.
3. The parents-in-law seem to have an important role in the construction of gender inequality in Vietnam. One should consider researching how this effect occurs.
4. If one wishes to repeat this research topic, the researcher advises to study the relationships before, during and after the migration period in a longitudinal research. In that case the bias that occurs with a retrospective research would be avoided.
5. Further research on this topic, or any other sensitive topic, should be conducted in the mother tongue of the participants.
6. In order to further research gender roles in Vietnam one should become a trusted member of the community.
7. This research was highly dependent on the information given by the participants. A time mapping study could provide clearer image between the difference of the male and female role within a household.

8.2 Policy Recommendations

1. The Vietnamese government should consider providing more men and women with scholarships to study in Western countries. This will promote an exchange in cultural values and it will create a brain gain and more equal gender roles in Vietnam.
2. The women's union and NGOs should continue informing women about their rights and organizing empowerment seminars. Though this is already happening, according to different sources it is not yet sufficient. It is important to include men in the women's right discussion.
3. The local government in Lộc Bôn should consider creating awareness among parents migrating to Laos about the influences on their children.

4. Public facilities should consider creating an environment where local people and foreigners can meet and exchange ideas. Now facilities like restaurants, are either focused on tourists or on locals. Social networks create a valuable exchange of ideas.
5. Political departments and big corporations should be bound to employed a minimum percentage of women. So women can get equal opportunities on the labor force. This will stimulate the economic status of women.
6. The Vietnamese modern media corporations should consider welcoming foreign influences in their content. This makes people aware of other cultures with different values.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

- Could you describe your family for me? (Household, extended)
- What was your reason for migrating? (Who made this decision?)
- Where did you migrate to?
- How was your migration arranged? (Did you go with people you knew? Did your family come with you? What organizations were involved?)
- How much time did you spend abroad? When was this? Since when are you back in Vietnam?
- In your opinion, what makes a woman a good wife?
- In your opinion, what makes a man a good husband?
- How was your household arranged before you migrated? What were your tasks and what were your husband tasks? (budget, children, household tasks, communication husband and wife)
- What happened with your household tasks when you were abroad? Who took these over?
- Is your household arranged differently now, after your period abroad, compared to before you left Vietnam? (budget, children, household tasks, communication husband and wife)
- How did you experience reintegrating in Vietnam? (Family, community, work)
- What was most challenging during your time abroad? And reintegrating?
- What did you experience as the most positive aspect of migrating? And returning?
- What is your perspective on gender roles in Vietnam? And in your family?
- Would you say that your time abroad changed this perspective? If yes, how so?
- Would you like gender roles to be different? If yes, how so?
- What kind of impacts could return migration have in Vietnam?
- Did you learn new skills during your time abroad? Which?
- How has migrating benefited you? Your family? Your community?
- How does your time abroad influence your household now?
- How did your family feel about you going abroad for work/study?
- Why did you come back to Vietnam?

Appendix 2: List of Interviewees

The table is an abstract of some of the personal characteristics of the female return migrants.

#	Name*	Age	Skill level	Destination of migration	Time abroad	Family situation	Translator	Interview setting
1	Ly	45	Low	Laos	2y	Married, two children	Male	At her house, husband present
2	Anh	58	Low	Laos	10y	Married, son, daughter-in-law, grandchild	Male	At her house, husband involved in interview
3	Ngoc	34	Low	Laos	4y	Married, two daughters, son	Male	At her house
4	Qui	37	Low	Laos	4y	Married, two sons, two daughters	Male	At her house, many family members present during interview
5	Lan	33	Low	Laos	5y	Married, son, daughter	Male	At her house, halfway husband joined in the interview
6	Mai	32	Low	Laos	4y	Married, two sons	Male	At her house, husband present
11	Tan	42	Low	Laos	16y	Married, three daughters, son	Female	At her house, husband present
12	Long	24	Low	Laos	6y	Married, child	Female	At her house
15	Linh	31	Low	Laos	12y	Married, son, daughter	Male	At her house, other family member present
16	Giang	52	Low	Laos	7y	Married, two sons, daughter-in-law, two grandchildren	Male	At her house, grandson present
18	Truc	28	Low	Laos	9y	Married, son, daughter	Male	At her house

19	Nhu	29	Low	Laos	2y	Married, son, daughter	Male	At her house, husband in the same room
7	Huong	40	High	China	3y	Married, one son	None	In coffee shop
8	Dung	30	High	Australia	3y	Married, one son, husband lives in HCMC	None	In coffee shop
9	Sang	37	High	Australia	2y, 4y	Married, one daughter	None	University office, men in the room
10	Chau	27	High	USA, New Zealand	3y, 2y	Single, lives with parents	None	At her house
13	Thi	40	High	China	3y	Married, one son, one daughter	None	University office
14	Phuong	33	High	Italy	9m	Married, one son	None	In coffee shop
17	Thien	25	High	New Zealand	1y	Engaged, lives with parents	None	At her house
20	Thuy	32	High	Thailand	2y	Married, two daughters	None	In restaurant, husband present during first part
21	Yen	27	High	UK, USA	1y, 1,5y	Single, lives with parents	None	In coffee shop
22	Hoa	43	High	Australia	7y	Married, three daughters	None	In coffee shop
23	Bian	32	High	Italy	4y	Single, lives with father	None	In coffee shop
24	Trinh**	-	High	-	-	-	Female	At her house

*These names are pseudonyms, as explained in the methodology.

**This interview is not taken into account because of inadequate translation.