Defining Mutual Belongings through Transnational Practises: A Case Study of Filipino Labour Migrants in Finland.
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Hopefully this draft will give you some food for thought ... I will continue writing.

The objective with this paper is to show how mutual belonging can be created and maintained through active participation in practices, which strengthen the collective identity of the Filipino labour migrants living in Finland. Labour migration is not always a win-win situation for migrants and often requires different kinds of adaptation strategies. Filipino labour migrants, who have been recruited to Finland as cooks, cleaners and nurses amongst others have faced serious obstacles during their migration trajectory and adaptation into the Finnish society. Several of them have tried to solve their problems beyond formal contacts and with the support received from their compatriots, religious congregations and ethnic associations. This paper analyses sociocultural, religious, political and economic practices, which express the transnational belonging of Filipino labour migrants to the Finnish and Filipino society. The material consists of twenty open-ended interviews conducted with the previously mentioned occupational groups in the capital area of Finland.

1. Background

This paper demonstrates how dual belongings of Filipino labour migrants take place through cultural reproductions consisting of transnational practices. These practices encompass both the host and home country, providing a transnational everyday life for the migrants and their members left behind. Beyond practices, the migrants use their local and transnational contacts as an adaptation strategy. Since 2007 private recruitment companies have started to recruit Filipino labour migrants to restaurant and health-care sectors. Labour migration is not always a win-win situation for migrants and often requires different kinds of adaptation strategies. Some of the labour migrants have faced several kinds of obstacles during their migration trajectory and adaptation into the Finnish society. Several of them have tried to solve their

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problems beyond formal contacts and with the support received from their compatriots, religious congregations and ethnic associations.

Since February 2013 until this day I have interviewed eighteen Filipinos who have been recruited to Finland as cooks, nurses/practical nurses, cleaners or as domestic help. The educational background was the same as the occupational one for all informants expect for the cleaners and domestic employees. The latter ones had either continued to work as domestic employees or as cleaners after previous similar jobs or decided to work as cleaners instead of unemployment. The cooks and health-care workers represent also those occupational groups, which are currently recruited to Finland by private recruitment companies. Filipino owned cleaning companies and Finnish families have also started to recruit directly from the Philippines through their social networks. Additional background information has been received from: two key-informants who have been living in Finland over ten years, members from trade unions and recruiters. Beyond interviews I have also carried out participative observations in congregations and activities organized by Filipino associations in the capital area of Finland. The material collection is still on-going.

2. Dual Belongings and Transnational Practices

This paper demonstrates how dual belongings of Filipino labour migrants take place through cultural reproductions consisting of transnational practices. These practices encompass both the host and home country, providing a transnational everyday life for the migrants and their members left behind. Transnational practices in form of sociocultural, religious, economic and political practices are used both to strengthen the dual belongings to the Filipino community in Finland and to the one back home. According to Levitt and Glick-Schiller ways of belonging refers to the ideological attachment to the culture and the individual’s awareness of his/her identity (2004:1010). The everyday practices – taking place ‘here’ and ‘there’ – have also an important role as ‘complementary aspects of a single space of experience’ (Vertovec 2004:975).

Scholars have for a long time focused either on the incorporating mechanisms of migrants in the new home country with an assumption of that the migrants’ contacts and practices towards their home country will disappear with time (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004:201).
During the last ten years scholars have started to pay attention to possible simultaneous practices of migrants towards their receiving country and home country (Portes, Haller and Guarnizo 2002, Engbersen & co. 2013, Erdal and Oeppen 2013). This paper draws the attention to the mutual existence of local and transnational practices, which can both strengthen the inclusion of the migrants to the host society and maintain the connection to the home country. The Filipino labour migrants use diverse kinds of strategies in their adaptation to the Finnish labour market and civil society. In particular social networks consisting both of Filipinos living in Finland and in the Philippines provide social support for the labour migrants in their attempt to find their way in the new working and living environment. Finnish employers and officers often provide significant support in solving of practical problems related with working conditions, but these local contacts cannot replace the importance of the transnational ones.

Transnational practices can elaborate our understanding of the structure and function of the transnational social fields of the Filipino labour migrants looks like. Transnational social fields can be described as ideas and thoughts of individuals are exchanged and rethought in ‘interlocking networks of social relationships’ transcending ‘political and geographic boundaries’ (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, Itzighson et al 1999:317). Some of the migrants may participate frequently, whereas others only occasionally in transnational practices, which vary from permanent to occasional ones (Itzighson et al 1999:317, Waldinger 2008). These practices play a significant role in the lives of the migrants and their family members left behind, in diverse forms of cultural reproduction, such as life course strategies, child-rearing and collective sociocultural practices (Vertovec 2004).

Transnational practices are expressed through social actions taking place in all domains of society. For analytic purpose, social action can be divided into sociocultural, political and economic fields (Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999). However, transnational practices cannot be strictly divided in well-ordered categories but are influenced by each other and the external world (Guarnizo 2003). The outcome of transnational practices may go beyond individual goals and change entire nations, i.e. they may have an impact on global processes surrounding us (Portes 2003, Vertovec 2004). Similarly, in the lives of the Filipinos, transnational practices, such as economic remittances, do not only relate with personal interests but are part of a larger infrastructural development process. In this paper emphasis is
given to the sociocultural practices although also the other fields do play a role. According to Itzigsohn and Saucedo:

*Sociocultural transnationalism refers to those transnational linkages that involve the recreation of a sense of community that encompasses migrants and people in the place of origin. Sociocultural transnationalism concerns the emergence of practices of sociability, mutual help, and public rituals rooted in the cultural understandings that pertain to the sense of belonging and social obligations of immigrants. These practices constitute the backbone of emergent communities without propinquity.*

(Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002: 768)

In other words, the core features in the construction of a transnational way of life are the migrants’ experiences of sociocultural practices, which encompass both the receiving country and the home country. The nature of sociocultural transnationalism is more affective than for example political transnationalism (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002:768). Migrants’ involvement in transnational practices differs both in the frequency and function. For example, migrants’ participation through continuous and regular participation in transnational activities and associations can be defined as narrow transnationalism, whereas their occasional participation can be called as broad transnationalism (ibid:770, Itzigsohn & al 1999). The Filipino labour migrants’ transnational participation is defined in this context as broad transnationalism, mainly because of the nature of sociocultural practices and the way the Filipino describe their participation in these practices. The broad definition of transnationalism is also suitable for the analysis of the Filipino labour migrants’ dual belongings, which is expressed through transnational practices, amongst others. These practices may strengthen the dual belongings of Filipino. These belongings can be simultaneously expressed, on the one hand as belongings to the Finnish society and on the other as belongings to the Filipino society back home.
3. Labour migration from the Philippines to Finland

The Filipino labour migrants represent perhaps one of the oldest labour ‘sending’ brain-drain countries in the world. Main reasons for emigration have been un- and underemployment\(^2\) in the Philippines. Several Filipinos prefer to look for work abroad due to lack of sufficient working hours. By the end of 2011 the stock estimate of overseas Filipinos was in total 9,37 million persons of which 4.8 million had moved permanently and 4.51 million temporarily, the total number of overseas migrants includes also an estimation of 1,07 million irregular migrants (Commission of Overseas Filipinos). The main working domains have been in the health care sector, domestic services and entertainment (Alcid 2003:100). Nevertheless, not everyone is an overseas worker. The number of permanent migrants includes also those who have either a dual citizenship or a permanent residence and have migrated due to marriage or education (ibid).

The need of labour migrants has grown in Finland due to aging working population. Since 2007 private companies have started to recruit in particular Filipino nurses and cooks but also the demand of domestic employees and cleaners is attracting private companies to recruit Filipino workers. The number of recruited persons is less than couple of hundreds of which the majority consists of nurses and cooks. Before the Filipino labour migration consisted mainly of women but now also Filipino men are interested to come and work to Finland. Currently 2,111 Filipinos live in Finland of which 1,680 live permanently and 421 live temporarily and 10 irregularly (Statistics Finland 2012). Until the year 2007 the majority of the Filipinos consisted of women and their children who have moved to Finland because of marriage. Since 2007 the number of Filipino males has also increased along the recruitment of labour from the Philippines to Finland.

\(^2\) Underemployment reflects the underutilisation of the productive capacity of the employed population. The concept is integrated in the conceptual framework for measuring the labour force, and is based on similar criteria to those used to define employment and unemployment’. (http://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/statistics-overview-and-topics/underemployment/lang--en/index.htm)
4. Unexpected Consequences of Labour Migration

The Filipinos who participated in the interviews appeared to be fairly satisfied with their working conditions. The biggest differences between working conditions in the Philippines and in Finland appear to be in the regular and secure working conditions in the latter place. The Filipinos valued the regular working hours, monthly salary and annual vacation including two free days in a week. Security and the follow-up of working conditions was emphasised by the migrants: ‘Here it is safe. I don’t feel unsafe in my work. In the Philippines you never knew when they will kick you’ (Informant Nr:7).

Most of the interviewees had mainly positive working experiences. However there was one case where the working conditions of five Filipinos had been severely exploited by their employers and recruiters. These Filipino workers had been promised work as nurses, but got only cleaning work. The other case(s) related with the recruitment of nurses to Finland and their experiences of occupational downgrading.

The bargain position is often weak for the newly arrived workers who are neither familiar with the Finnish labour legislation nor the language. Particularly, foreign workers who lack social contacts and information are in a vulnerable position (Saksela-Bergholm 2013, Triandifyllidou 2012). Other kinds of unexpected consequences have been experiences problems with family reunification. The financial request of a minimum income for the third country nationals makes the family reunification difficult if not impossible for some labour migrants. Beyond these problems more common and less severe form of obstacles have been Finnish colleagues’ negative attitudes against the Filipino workers and a culture shock relating with the Finnish quietness and introvert behavior and with experiences of cold climate.

The majority of the interviewees had looked for contacts with other compatriots and took part in diverse kinds of transnational practices. Both the Filipino community in Finland and the existing contacts back home worked as a kind of “adaptation strategy” for several of the Filipino migrants.

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5. Using Everyday Transnationalism as an Adaptation Strategy

Both individual and collective practices taking place at local and transnational level can work as important features in the daily lives of the migrants. This chapter is divided into three sub-chapters. The first sub-chapter shows how interactive technological communication can work as a replacement for the migrants and their family members left behind. Beyond personnel interaction, ITC has also become an important tool in sharing of images, feelings and events between ‘here’ and ‘there’. The second explores individual and collective ways of belongings, which are expressed through sociocultural and religious practices. The third sub-chapter discusses economic transnationalism expressed through monthly remittances and savings. Remittances are not only important at individual level, but play also a significant role in the development of the national infrastructure in the Philippines. Attention is also given to the first political transnational practice, namely the Pork Barrel demonstration against corruption in the Philippines and its worldwide support from the Filipino oversea migrants, including the ones living in Finland.

6. Discussion

This paper has explored the everyday transnational practices of Filipino labour migrants living in Finland. Since 2007 Filipino cooks and care workers (nurses and practical nurses) have been recruited to Finland. The recruitment of Filipinos to care and restaurant service has been seen by the recruiters as a partial solution to the lack of labour in the previously mentioned occupational groups. Filipino domestic workers and cleaners are also welcomed by private cleaning companies (often owned by Filipinos) and families. However, the labour migration to Finland has not always been a win-win situation for Filipino labour migrants. Recruiters and employers have in some cases used the weak bargain position of the Filipino labour migrants, or the workers have experienced occupational downgrading in Finland. Other kinds of obstacles relates with problem with family reunification and home-sickness. Local Filipino community in Finland and transnational practices have become important asset and support in the lives of the migrants.
The Filipino labour migrant is often perceived by recruiters and employers mainly as an object of commodification or as a global market product replacing the missing labour in several industrialised countries including Finland (Hochschild and Ehrenreich 2002, Lindio-McGovern 2012). In practice, the Filipino labour migrant represents the breadwinner of the family and is often a spouse/mother or father. Several of the Filipino migrants feel a strong moral obligation to help family members left behind by sending them regularly money remittances. The remittances are used to cover fees for education and day-care of children, medical and hospital cost of family members or are invested in farms or real estate.

The Filipinos interviewed expressed a strong belonging to the Filipino community in Finland but also to the community left behind. The interaction with family members back home is maintained by daily communication over Skype or Mobile phone. Interactive communication technology, such as mobile phones and Skype enable migrants to remain in daily contact with their family members who live in bigger cities in the Philippines. The use of ICT in both ends is not self-evident, particularly if the migrants’ family live in areas surrounded by mountains or jungle.

The collective culture of the Filipinos is reflected in their active participation in social events and practices. Social practices, such as get together events, karaoke evenings, weekly baseball lessons and participation in practices organized by Filipino voluntary associations in Finland are all important visible forms of practices in the lives of the migrants. Social practices permit both a rich and lively environment to stay active and incorporated in the Filipino community. Several of these practices have also a transnational dimension beyond their local function. Associational sociocultural practices, social media and get together events involve social relations and practices, which demonstrate the Filipinos’ ways of being as active members in their transnational social field. The collective culture of the Filipinos is also reflected in their active participation in sociocultural events and practices. A sense of unity and being part of a collective community is expressed through contemporary social and religious events. The Filipinos in Finland have found a natural way of dual belonging to the Filipino community in Finland and in the home country. The contextual meaning of the social and religious practices can guide the Filipino migrants to enact a (transnational) collective identity (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004:1011, Pries).
The dual belongings are also expressed through religious practices, such as Mass organised by the Catholic or by the ‘Iglesia ni Christo’ congregations. The latter organise their Mass mutually with the ones taking place in the Philippines. The Finnish Mass is not timely but contextually simultaneous with the one in the Philippines. The one in Finland receives a video of the congregation within few weeks and follow the same program and Mass. Iglesia ni Christo is in comparison to the Catholic church fairly small, but it has churches worldwide and organise also activities with unites its members, such as the ‘worldwide walk’, which took place simultaneously in several countries. The aim was to collect donations to the victims of the typhoon Haiyan at Cebu, Philippines.

A feeling of being united with compatriots and with the ones left behind has also been strengthened by a political transnational event including the Filipinos living in Finland. Last year, several Filipinos worldwide demonstrated against the politically corrupted system of the Filipino Government. The demonstration organised in Finland was the first political event uniting Filipinos in Finland against corruption in the Philippines.

It remains to be seen how the incorporation of the migrants to the Finnish society will look like in the long run. So far, the opportunities and motives to learn the Finnish language and the interest to learn Finns have been vague. There is a risk of segregation from the Finnish society if the Filipinos do not become familiar with the Finnish society and language.

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References


