TRANSNATIONALISM AND THE MIGRANTS’ IDENTITY FORMATION DYNAMICS

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Abstract
This article is a theory-focus paper that argues that in the process of migrants’ transnational living, the children of migrants/1.5G eventually create a culture of their own which is argued to be different from the culture their own parents have. The author of this paper maintains that this happens by virtue of the children of migrants/1.5G’s exposure to the milieu of their parents’ work destination and their socialization with people whose cultural, social, political, and religious orientation is far from theirs. More specifically, this paper asserts that with transnational living, bottom-up and top-down trajectories of agents of transformation highly influence the formation of identities of the children of migrants/1.5G. To clearly illustrate this phenomenon, the author of this paper used two bipolar views illustrating the effects of transformative agents: from a bottom-up perspective is Herrera-Lima’s view called transnational social networks (2005) and from a top-down view is the commonly held one which is a combination of all other influences outside Lima’s framework. The author believes that the interplay of the two opposing trajectories can most likely impinge on the identity-formation dynamics of the children of migrants/1.5G.

Keywords: 1.5G, transnationalism, transnational networks, identity-formation

INTRODUCTION

Having played an active part in the global labor circuits for almost five centuries, the Philippines continues and fortifies its role as a labor brokerage state. In that respect, the country has been successful in turning "Philippine labor one of the 'natural resources' that the country could export" (Lorente, 2011, p. 187) and in being able to package an "internationally attractive labor force" (Tyner, 2004, p. 30) which it now markets to "numerous participants- including foreign employers, labor recruiters, politicians, and potential migrants--attempting to satisfy their own agendas (sic) as they simultaneously affect the global parameters of labor migration" (Goss & Lindquist, 1995 and Tyner, 1994, 1996a, 1996b, as cited in Tyner, 1999).

What is interesting, however, is that in the face of every Filipino migrant worker’s saga, a multi-fold of issues that probes into the very fabric of his personhood reveals his innermost pining. More often than not, the issues that propel him to leave home to eke a living in a foreign land are the very same concerns that constantly motivate and sustain him to be able to combat the numerous struggles and other forms of difficulties a migrant worker faces every day. Tons of studies along this line have already been done for a little more than two decades as “transnationalism has emerged as a new concept to describe new immigrant identities and communities in a globalized world” (Quirke, Potter, & Conway, 2009, p. 1; See also Goulbourne, 2001; Levitt & Waters, 2002; Portes, 1996; Vertovec, 1999, 2001, 2004)). A survey of existing related literature has made this author realize how transnational parenting, for one, has become one of the most-researched topics especially affecting migrant parents and their stay-behind children who have no choice but to live separate lives in order to survive. However, this paper discusses Filipino transnational families who, instead of being separated by geographical distance, have managed to live together in a foreign land. In particular, the focus of this discussion will be Filipino migrant parents and their children who are all currently based in Thailand. Unlike the Filipinos' migration pattern in the past, one direction that said labor force is now treading witnesses the case of the entire family joining the migrant worker to the latter's work destination, a pattern that rarely happened before. However, despite this relatively new trend, the author has personally observed that majority of the Filipino migrant workers today are still separated from their families geographically, longing to be reunited with their families someday. So much so that those who are given the chance to live physically together as a family are easily deemed privileged, enjoying a living arrangement most transnational ones could only dream of. Nevertheless, coming from a migrant work background herself, the author argues that there is great need to look at the non-economic consequences on families at a micro-level specifically the fact that raising a family in another country under the migrant workforce banner comes with a whole host of issues and challenges for both the parents
and the children (See also Parreñas, 2005). For most families, financial transformations serve as the main catalyst forcing them to leave home (See Parreñas, 2005; Guevarra, 2009). Their search, however, for said monetary breakthrough that is elusive back home gets repudiated by the toll it takes on the children. By virtue of being in another country, these children fall in any one or any two or all three of the following categories: migrant children, children of migrants (Thailand Migration Report, 2011), and 1.5G, a term “coined in the studies of Cuban and Southeast Asian youth” (Rumbaut&Ima, 1988, p. 1166).

For the purpose of consistency and clarity, the term ‘children of migrants’ and 1.5G will be used throughout this study, unless otherwise stated. The author purposely avoids using the term second generation migrants to avoid causing terminological confusion and ambiguities (See Rumbaut, 2004). Children of migrants who have been left in the migrant workers’ country of origin will be referred to as left-behind children (Asis, 2007). A left-behind child refers to a migrant worker's offspring who is separated from the parent/s because the latter has to toil abroad (See also Battistella&Conaco, 1998; Olwig, 1999; Parreñas, 2005; Nguyen, Yeoh, & Toyota, 2007).

It is interesting to note that in the parents’ desire to keep their family intact, by way of bringing their children to their work destination, some crucial strands within the human and social dimensions get impinged upon by transnational living. Having said it, this paper argues that in the process of living transnationally, the children of migrants/1.5G eventually create a culture of their own which is argued to be different from the culture their own parents have. The author of this paper maintains that this happens by virtue of the children of migrants/1.5G’s exposure to the milieu of their parents’ work destination and their socialization with people whose cultural, social, political, and religious orientation is far from theirs. More specifically, this paper asserts that with transnational living, bottom-up and top-down trajectories of agents of transformation highly influence the formation of identities of the children of migrants/1.5G. To clearly illustrate this phenomenon, the author of this paper will use two bipolar views illustrating the effects of transformative agents: from a bottom-up perspective is Herrera-Lima's view called transnational social networks (2005) and from a top-down view is the commonly held one which is a combination of all other influences outside Lima's framework. The author believes that the interplay of the two opposing trajectories can most likely impinge on the identity-formation dynamics of the children of migrants/1.5G.

Research Questions

To situate this paper into its proper research context, this study will aim to answer the following questions:

- What is transnationalism?
- What roles do various transformative agents play in transnationalism?
- How significant is the role played by the new technologies in the migrants’ transnational activities?
- How can transnational living possibly affect the children of migrants/1.5G’s formation of their identity and other identity formation dynamics?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This author maintains that a study centering on the Filipinos’ transnational living and other migration-related issues will not be complete without laying into context the Philippine labor status. This is so because many of the Filipinos' ways of life as early as five centuries back, domestically or internationally, have already been deeply intertwined with the nation-state’s status in the labor market.

The Philippine Labor Brokerage State

Cordova (As cited in Wong, 2005) talks about how the Philippines' status as a labor brokerage state came into being with the establishment of the labor and trade economy of the colonized countries with the European and the American influences. When said labor and trade exchanges in the colonies became more settled, eventually giving Europe and America access to Asia and the Asian market, the diasporic activities involving manpower and capital in the Pacific and Atlantic circuits became more pronounced. This, for instance, was seen in the Manila-Acapulco trade estimated to have had happened in as early as 1565. Such a trade began what was to become well-entrenched for about three hundred years spanning the same period when the Spaniards colonized the Philippine Islands in 1521. Cordova noted this as one of the first precursors of the Philippines’ current status in the international labor market. Cordova further stated that said movement became an avenue through which Filipinos were able to migrate from Mexico to Louisiana in as early as 1763. Cordova (As cited in Wong, 2005) talks about how the Philippines’ status as a labor brokerage state came into being with the establishment of the labor and trade economy of the colonized countries with the European and the American influences. When said labor and trade exchanges in
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Fast-forward to the 21st century and one finds the Philippines not just an ordinary sending country, but, in fact, "the world's largest exporter of government-sponsored, temporary contract work" (Tyner, 2004, p. 1). This, Tyner emphasizes, does not even take into account the countless individuals who have illegally migrated. The author of this current study notes that such a situation is a total opposite of what happened in the past, notwithstanding the fact that "not too long ago, the OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers) or OCWs (Overseas Contract Workers) phenomenon was, to most Filipinos, a source of national shame as this reinforced the image of the Philippines as a poor Third World country incapable of generating jobs and containing the outmigration of its citizens" (Miralao, 2007, p. 6). TeodoroLocsin's caustic remark, "Filipino lives for sale at Philippine export market! All that's needed is to brand them 'Made in the Philippines' before being shipped off," echoes said national sentiment. However, this author also observes that while this "national shame" discourse has become a great source of contestation of the labor market situation in the Philippine society, so has the practice become well-entrenched. So much so that "Mag abroad nalangtayo(let us go/ work abroad)" is a "sentiment [that] echoed the everyday conversations of people I met....a place engulfed with the notion of overseas migration as Filipinos' ultimate 'opportunity'" (Guevarra, 2009, p. ix). Rhacel Salazar Parreñas' findings (2005), informed by a report from Ibon, confirm Guevarra's observation in the latter's Marketing Dreams, Manufacturing Heroes: The Transnational Labor Brokering of Filipino Workers. The Ibon Report (2000) corroborates Guevarra's and Parreñas remarks saying that the country's national budget on a very nominal per capita share indeed cannot guarantee a good quality of life.

As personally observed by this author, both from being a migrant worker herself and a keen observer of the day-to-day occurrences back home, Guevarra's experience speaks of how migrant work has become second nature to many citizens who have grown tired of the government's lack of support. This helps explain why the "national shame" discourse, over the years, has declined. Said decline, however, did not only come from that chord, but much of it also came from the government-initiated propaganda itself, commodifying migrant work under the guise of turning migrant workers "world class" through government-sponsored technical education and skills development programs (TESDA, 2007). Ultimately, this can be seen through the country's economic lenses propelled by the fact that "Remittances from overseas Filipinos are the country's premier foreign exchange earner, easily dwarfing foreign direct investments and exports" (Lorente, 2011, p. 184). The Philippine National Statistics Office notes how overseas employment has helped boost the Philippine economy, noting its significant effects on the household level (1992, Table 9). "In Manila, for example, approximately 11 percent of all families receive their main source of income from abroad" (Tyner, 2004, p. 1). This un-riddles the puzzle why the country's economy stays afloat in the midst of massive unemployment and economic slumps (Department of Labor and Employment, 2005). Having said this, this author concurs with Miralao (2007) in the latter's revealing commentaries. One, that the "...discourse on 'national shame' is receding [as discussions have focused] more on the monies sent to family and home...." and, two, that the country has been enjoying significant economic advantage since 2001 "...contributing to the country's macroeconomic stability at present" (p. 6).

This first body of literature provided here is not set against what the author of this current study aims to achieve, but is used as contextual and theoretical compass to gauge what has already been written about and which direction discussions are currently shaping and leading to.

**Transnationalism**

In *Transnationalism*, Steven Vertovec (2009) states how "the 'fractured memories' of diaspora consciousness" create overlapping narratives, "communities, and selves" as a way to reject anything that is fixed or stable, repelling self-restraining conditions either locally or internationally (p. 7). Vertovec also cites other writers who think along the same line such as Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1992). Gupta and Ferguson, for instance, talk about the transnational public sphere saying that it "has certainly rendered any strictly bounded sense of community or locality obsolete. At the same time, it has enabled the creation of forms of solidarity and identity that do not rest on an appropriation of modern space where contiguity and face-to-face contact are paramount" (p. 9).
Interestingly, James Clifford (1994) talks about the same experience and underscores the unusual sense of empowerment diaspora gives a person by saying that, "dwelling here assumes a solidarity and connection there" (p. 332). He adds that despite this, a transnational individual is made to believe that such an experience has more to do with "the connection (elsewhere) that makes a difference (here)" (p. 322). Clifford is quick to note also that this diasporic situation does not limit itself to a specific location. Neither does it confine its practice to only one state.

A more detailed look at transnational diaspora is provided by Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge (1989). They argue that "...diasporas always leave a trail of collective memory about another place and time and create new maps of desire and of attachment" (p. i). In this author's interviews with two transnational individuals, one is from Thailand, but is currently based in the U.S., whereas the other one is based in Canada, but who originally hails from Taiwan, she found both interviewees to have the same sentiment: "The feeling of being both here and there," they said (J. Binoe& M. Choi, personal communication, 2012).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In keeping with other existing frameworks involving transnationalism, the diagram that follows illustrates the argument this study puts forward.

Common-held View about Transformative Agents: The author of this current study regards this as a top-down trajectory

Herrera-Lima’s View (2001): The author of this current study regards Lima’s view as a bottom-up trajectory

Fig. 1: A schematic diagram of the top-down/ bottom-up trajectories propelling the national identity-formation dynamics of transnational children of migrants/1.5G

Herrera-Lima's (2001) view maintains that because the transnational family "is buffered by its extensive social networks, allowing the transnational experiences to form a fluid continuum, rather than a radical divide compartmentalizing life into two worlds," it (transnational family) then becomes a vehicle "- better yet agents- for both material exchanges and the creation, re-creation and transformation of cultures" (Lima, 2001, p. 91). Steven Vertovec (2009), in Transnationalism, discusses how Lima's explanation of the concept of habitus involving "transnational families allow[s] for the circulation of people, goods, jobs, and information as well as for the re-creation and modification of cultural values and practices" (p. 63).

The above-illustrated schematic diagram showing the biggest circle, with overlaying smaller circles inside, illustrates Herrera-Lima's view. The biggest circle represents the extensive networks of transnational families within which movements of people and exchanges between and among them results in the following activities in an overlapping fashion: distribution of material items and commodities ("goods"), dissemination of information, production, re-production, and transformation of cultural and social values. Vertovec sums up Lima's point: "Indeed,
for many migrants, living a transnational life itself entails a distinct kind of culture or set of norms” (2009, p. 64). Anchored on Lima's view about how transnational families' activities overlap within their extensive networks, this author offers a description of the activities occurring within Lima’s model linking it to the following characteristics: first, they are naturally occurring within and among them; second, they do not necessarily require intervention or participation from non-transnational individuals; and, third, they are intrinsic. In sum, given all said stipulations, the direction from which all these activities are originating organically moves from "deep within" or "deep under." The author then places Lima's view at the most bottom part of the diagram to establish this scheme.

On the other hand, this author also further argues that Herrera-Lima's framework interperses with other agents that forge transformations in various facets of migrant families' lives through transnational connections. These other transformative agents, to a certain extent, work in a similar fashion as what Lima's view suggests. The author maintains that they also cause production, re-production, and transformation of the transnational families' social values and practices. Unlike Herrera-Lima's bottom-up view, however, these agents of transformation operate in different forms (such as new technologies/ media, reduced cost of transportation, receiving countries' cultural milieu, among others) and emanate from a top-down trajectory. Given this, this author asserts that these transformative agents can be best viewed from a top-down perspective given the fact that they transpire within the following observed conditions: first, they are not naturally occurring as they take shape from outside the transnational families' own networks; second, most require intervention or participation from non-transnational individuals and organizations; and third, they are extrinsic. In short, given all said conditions, this author notes that the direction from which all these transformative agents are originating realistically start from aboveground. These agents of transformation, she further observes, then are found at the topmost part of the diagram putting things within the right frame of reference.

In sum, this paper asserts that these transformative agents that come from top-down and bottom-up directions conflate and play a crucial role in the formation of and negotiation for (and perhaps contestation of) the children of migrants' 1.5G's identity-formation dynamics. By arguing that there is an interplay between the variables in Herrera-Lima's model (bottom-up trajectory) and the commonly viewed transformative agents (top-down trajectory), this study believes that transnational living contributes to the making of transnational children and their identities facilitated by the transformative agents.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In keeping with the paper's theoretical framework, this author puts forward the following four-point argumentation in support of her main thesis involving top-down and bottom-up trajectories of transformative agents as the main catalysts in the formation of the children of migrants' identity.

First, K. Scott Wong (2005), in Diasporas, Displacements and the Construction of Transnational Identities, remarks on the role transnational technology has played in creating the "global village and 'hyper-extended families'" producing "global or transnational individuals" that carry with them "shifting allegiances and transformative identities" (Wong, 2005, p. 58). In this sense, Wong underscores the undeniable influence technology has had on the lives of transnational individuals. He, however, zeroes in not on that issue alone, but on the fact that the identities of these individuals are not fixed. Rather, Wong suggests that under the influence of transnational technology, these individuals have fluid commitments and that their identities constantly change. Along the same line, the author of this paper maintains that the children of migrants/1.5G, just like their migrant working parents, encounter the same or similar transnational experience. If they do, the possibility of having their identities develop in the same pattern and mold and with the same tendencies is not far from reality as they themselves are living a transnational life. Castells (1998) reinforces a portion of Wong’s statement by stating that at the very core of people’s transnational activities and connections are the new media. Similarly, this paper asserts that new technologies such as the Internet, emails, chat rooms, social networks, and the like take the center stage in the lives of transnational citizens.

Second, consistent with Herrera-Lima's (2005) view, Kastoryano (2000) "speaks of 'transnational communities identities' constituted by migrants and which are delinked from country territories and sustained by structures and networks outside those of nation-states" (as cited in Mirlaio, p. 9). Kastoryano remarks that these migrants are situated within transnational communities. The organization of these communities revolves around their communal participation in border-crossing activities. Moreover, the relationships they develop are forged from and with others both within their own countries and work destinations or even "inter-regional and global spaces" (p. 9). Kastoryano’s observation attests to the fact how the formation of transnational individuals’ identities heavily involves networking not only from and within communities of people from the same country of origin, but also from those outside of their own.
Third, this author also argues that the identities of transnationals are formed not only from either bottom-up or top-down trajectories, but also from a combination of the two. In discussing how the two trajectories combine, this author notes they relate to Vertovec’s (2009) discussion of “diaspora consciousness” (p. 6). In Transnationalism: A new transnational perspective on Migration, Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton (1992, p. 11) remark that “While some migrant identify more with one society than the other, the majority seem to maintain several identities that link them simultaneously to more than one nation.” Wilson and Dissanayake (1996) have discussed this as the “new transnational imaginary” proving once again how transnationalism influences the way one develops his own identity (as cited in Vertovec, 2009, p. 7). Roger Rouse (1998) further remarks on how people nowadays are now living lives that are constantly and intimately intertwined with one another such that economies and meanings become deeply interwoven as well. Rouse adds that the world that results in can be perplexing and disjointed. Khu (2001) supports this same argument by saying that “…the concept of identity and concepts of race, ethnicity, gender, class, nationality, and the nation are interlocking and have become increasingly complex in a world ever more characterized by transnational and global exchanges” (Khu, 2001, p. 225).

Lastly, consistent with the observation of Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton (1992) about the migrants’ ability to keep several identities at one same time, Stuart Hall (1991) makes a general commentary that cultural hybridity results in “new ethnicities” and such a condition is typically observed among transnational youth. Moreover, in their patterns of socialization, which transpire within the interlaying of different aspects of their culture and identity, they “are often self-consciously selected, syncretized and elaborated from more than one heritage” (Vertovec, 2009, p. 7).

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