Home

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This article is focused on Philippine migration; how migrant Filipinos dealt with the challenges of life in their adoptive homeland — America. The characters' individual journeys from the homeland to the host country initiated changes in them that ultimately made each become more conscious of being a Filipino. This study presented a discourse on the Filipino identity as well as on identity negotiations by the Filipino migrants in America.

Doing menial jobs in America, the *first-generation* Filipino migrants were often faced with economic difficulties preventing them from making literal 'return journeys' to the homeland. Thus, they were reduced to drawing mental images of and maintaining an imaginary bond with their home and people. This was how they negotiated their *Filipinoness* as well as eased the loneliness they silently endured while trying to survive in their new land.

On the other hand, the *second-generation* Filipino Americans, who practically did not have memories of their homeland, regained their *Filipinoness* by coming to the Philippines and experiencing their parents' people and culture. Enriquez's *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (SP) underpins this manner of reintegration.

In conclusion, this study demonstrated the "journeying within" of the *first-generation* migrant Filipinos. These migrants could not afford to fly back home so they had to content themselves with reliving their best memories of their homeland. This was also their means of maintaining their Filipino identity. At the same time, it illustrated the "journeying back" of the new wave of *first-generation* migrants as well as their children who have already 'made it' in America and so they could now make annual pilgrimages to the homeland. Such journeying back to the Philippines was their means of getting in touch and/or coming to terms with their *Filipinoness*.

KEYWORDS: decolonization, Diaspora, dual identity, Filipinoness, imagined community, Sikolohiyang Pilipino (SP)

I am in search of the Filipino identity. Quite an ironic statement really, because this identity is the only identity I have known all my life, and like others, have taken it for granted. Why should someone like me—who is so attached to the motherland—care about knowing who I am, or what I look like, where acceptance isn't a problem and where culture has become a way of life?

Many of us in the Philippines do not bother to delve into the issue of national identity because we think there are more serious and immediate issues to tackle in our day-to-day lives—issues like the disparate rank-and-file wages, soaring prices of goods, finding a stable job, inaccessibility of health care, and corruption in the government.

In company with many other Asians, Filipinos in search of the proverbial 'greener pastures' consider it most ideal to migrate to North America. To this day, the Filipino exodus, particularly to the United States, continues so much so that almost every one of us can name at least one relative who has migrated to this "land of milk and honey." That there is now a new ethnicity called "Filipino-American" attests to the fact that many Filipinos have grown deep roots in the United States, bringing up children who now have to straddle dual ethnic identities. In the attempt to adjust to their new surroundings, Filipinos start becoming more conscious of who they are, reaching more into their inner selves as they have never done before. The journey from the homeland to the host country often causes the migrants to negotiate their Filipinoness as a means of survival.

In my childhood, I made sketches that depicted America as a fairyland, from the stories I often heard from my relatives. The imprint of colonialism was etched in my subconscious. I lived the idea that reading, speaking, and writing in English was a much greater advantage over using the mother tongue, and that, American goods were of a higher quality than our local products. I also believed that Filipinos who lived in America were people of influence and great wealth. When they arrived back in the country for a visit, much importance was given to them. All the relatives would be in attendance for festivities that would only end when these *balikbayan* "returning to country" were sent off at the airport once more. Indeed, every Filipino homecoming was always highly anticipated.

My eventual visits to America slowly changed my fairyland image of the place. Homelessness and loneliness engulfed me. I even counted the days of my homecoming. But once back, I had a sense of detachment from everything going on in the Philippines. I felt melancholic because the temptation to go back to the United

States always haunted me. These conflicting thoughts have led me to incorporate the experiences of migrant Filipinos in America, as well as to problematize the identity negotiations in this study.

For most Filipinos the inability to meet the basic needs in their homeland has caused their bleak scattering. Collado (2003) comments that push-pull factors of unemployment and poverty in their homeland, and labor shortages and increase of trade services in developed countries allow such international transfer.[1] Filipinos who go abroad to work, however, often realize that their pay and labor conditions cannot easily and quickly ascertain their own economic goals (Alegado, 2003).[2]

Even if migration proves to be a difficult beginning, the overseas workers still attempt to build a new life by embracing the new culture, struggling to distinguish their identity and self-consciousness from the new environment in the process (Muniz, 1991).[3]

Filipinos achieve self-consciousness through the process of self-exploration. By breaking their silence, their small voices are heard, echoing through the mainstream culture; thus, negative stereotypes of these migrants created by the controlling public are replaced by positive criticism (Chan 1991).[4]

Jessica Hagedorn (1999) shares her personal story in *The Exile Within/the Question of Identity*, wherein she declares that, like most urban Filipinos, she straddles both worlds. But when she speaks of *home*, she still refers to life before America, in that magical place of her childhood, the Philippines.[5]

Roderick Labrador (1999) also defines identity as a recollection of the home. He refers to it as 'the immediate past'. This 'past' according to him, has constrained the process of his assimilation into his new place (America) where new memories are yet to be created. Labrador contends that a bilingual experience of both cultures cannot be truly achieved without negotiations because disregarding the American identity or the Filipino identity for him is not possible.[6]

When Filipino-Americans recollect their childhood memories, remember eating indigenous food, perform dances or listen to music, read folklore, and attend religious celebrations, they temporarily restore the trauma of removal and therefore affect their search for identity (San Juan, 2000).[7] Eric Erikson (cited in Atwater, 1996) theorizes that identity is repeated act of consciousness. It is the proposition that people possess a behavioral pattern, remaining the same individual over time. The behavioral pattern allows every individual to sufficiently provide conditions for the identity of the

self. Individuals are the same persons when they are conscious of their past and future thoughts and actions.[8]

Awareness of the self is known as '*being-for-self*' and the existence or recognition of the other human being is known as '*being-for-others*.' Hegel (2001) posits that selves are not born but made and are related to the social process of mutual relation among selves. This process continues through *"moments"* and is identical to the development of self-consciousness. As the self develops consciousness over time, so are the people who pass through stages in history. Hegel further explains that selfhood is a social product that a person craves whereby identity is made through interactions and relations to others.[9]

Identity as the integration of both personal and public individual must be more role-oriented than what others have discerned. Otherwise, misjudgment about people may hinder efforts to achieve goals and to find an acceptable place in the community (Atwater, 1996).[10]

The adoption of America as the new community of migrant Filipinos, involves dramatic changes that include the reconsideration of Filipino values and identity. Tabios (1999) explores this concept of self consciousness:

> Am I Filipino? I may be more Filipino than I am Filipino American. I am Filipino because the history of the Philippines includes the history of its diaspora. The diaspora brought me to the United States where I later was welcomed by a New York whose sophisticated and cosmopolitan perspective translates to an aesthetic openness in which the artist may thrive. Thus, I am more Filipino than I am Filipino-American, it is because the United States opened up the entire history of the universe to become mine through art. (p.152)[11]

Every Filipino-American, time and again, is confronted with the issues of identity. This searching of the identity is the mode by which a community explores the world and examines it. Other than that, it is the acknowledgment of the transformation of social forms and an awakening of the necessity for a fundamental and revolutionary change.[12]

ASPECTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF MIGRATION

Positive Aspects of Migration

The Filipino diasporic consciousness is not obsessed with a physical return to the homeland where common sacrifices are remembered or

celebrated. Rather it is a symbolic homeland indexed with kinship or particular traditions. Like the Babylon captivity, dwelling in Egypt or its modern surrogates, building spheres of solidarity so it may sustain identities outside the national space and time (San Juan, 2000).[13]

This symbolic homeland, where the people have lingering memories of home, compels Filipinos to keep in touch with their families as often as possible. Jonathan Okamura, an Associate Professor at the Department of Ethnic Studies at the University of Hawaii, Manoa and author of the book *Imagining the Filipino American Diaspora: Transnational Relations, Identities, and Communities* explains that migrants rekindle family ties through long distance communication and sending cash remittances, with some still relying on traditional communication through the Philippine Postal System. And even in their absence, they still participate in crucial decision making within the nuclear family.[14]

Family members in the mother country derive most of their subsistence from money transmittals sent by the migrants. Most of these remittances go to individual families for buying goods and paying for basic needs. Victoria Garchitorena in her paper "Diaspora Philanthropy: The Philippine Experience" (2007) points out that first generation migrants generally share their wealth or talent with their families and communities. Since most of them are nearing retirement and are doing financially well, they show compassion for the underprivileged and the poor.[15]

Their family's purchasing power often benefit local commerce and nearby small-town markets. The Smithsonian Institute reports that as long as close permanent immigrants are behind them, the flow of remittances will continue and the local economy remains viable.[16] Thus, migrants' sensibility and material links to the Philippines illustrate the "transnational circulations of capital, labor, goods and information and serve to distinguish diaspora communities from other racial and ethnic minorities."[17]

Another way in which Filipino migrants express their love and affection is through the sending of *balikbayan* boxes right to the doorsteps of their families. Boxes stuffed with American goods substitute for the migrant's physical absence from the homeland. Alternatively, when migrants decide to have these return journeys to the Philippines, they patiently queue at airline check-in counters carrying boxes and boxes of *pasalubong*. Jocson (1999) narrates the process of box packing quite hilariously:

I'm not sure when Filipinos started to forsake suitcases for boxes, but the balikbayan box has been a fixture of my airport recollections for as long as I've been living away from the Philippines, which is about 14 years now… When you pack your balikbayan box, make sure there are no vacant spaces. Use your dirty laundry if you have. Tape all the seams. Tie it round with sturdy rope. This is no extraordinary leaf we are carrying." What makes it more amusing, "How, for example, does one reconcile a cache of make-up, a leg of ham, and 14 stainless steel faucets? I have found that the easiest way out of any explanation is to shrug. (p. 200)[18]

This gift-giving sparks happiness in every Filipino home. With much anticipation, Filipinos in *diaspora* weave beautiful tales of their American lives. They mask the real issues confronting them, most serious of which are alienation, racism, and cultural differences. Perhaps, many of those in diaspora do not want to reveal the kind of jobs they engage in because these are not the scenarios their families back home expect of them. Such storytelling, according to Alegado (2003), invites the next generation to travel with them. Serving as a labor pipeline, migration has been the common option of most Filipinos in seeking greener pastures in America.[19]

Migrants then, have become image-makers and advertisers of their lifestyles and have been perceived as role models among their circle of family and friends. Consciously or unconsciously, they are influential in promoting migration. Those who have relations outside the country have higher access and probability of international migration. This shift in migration pattern shows migrants are being sponsored by their relatives to live with the latter abroad. Known as the "chain migration," this phenomenon adds a second income to their families back home. Thus, the distribution of migrants predicts future migration patterns.[20]

Negative Aspects of Migration

Like any ethnic family, the first generation Filipinos leave the memory of the home and form a new life in America, becoming thoroughly absorbed in the struggle for existence. It is for this reason, they go into identity searching, becoming nostalgic and lonely as a result of their desire for closeness from their loved ones at home or in the community, and the failure to find it. "The U.S.-born Filipino Americans, however, see the other face of the mirror. Born on this side of the diaspora, they invest the Philippines with a more profound symbolism, a metaphor of their own invisible identity" (p. 22).[21]

First and second-generation Filipino-Americans are having

identity problems because they feel socially and racially segregated from the mainstream culture. Seifert and Hoffnung (1997) assert that prejudices are based on stereotypes, patterns of rigidity or overly simplified and inaccurate ideas about the characteristics of a group of people. Stereotypes involve negative ideas associated with race, cultural background, social class, gender, age, and sexual orientation. The prejudices of the dominant society are manifested through mistreatment and exclusion of the minority group.[22]

Way before the 1950s, exploitation in the work place was already committed against Filipinos. The men toiled like slaves from morning until night time and were often commanded to work overtime. Some were paid by the piece—three cents for carrying a cooler of 168 cans while others were paid fifteen cents an hour. The job might not have been so bad if the laborers were well fed and housed. But such was not the case. The Filipino workers slept in crowded quarters and were given poor-salted fish or meat and rice. It was only when the contractor's supplies would run low that these laborers were given salmon to eat (San Juan, 2001, citing Cruz, 1933).[23]

Filipinos during Carlos Bulosan's time were refused service in restaurants, barbershops, swimming pools, and movie theatres and were even prohibited from marrying Caucasians. This index of otherness, which was felt by the first generation through sweat and pain, is a stigma Filipinos have to bear even today. For whether one will like it or not, Filipinos still carry the "stranger's birthmark."[24]

It is therefore understandable if many of these migrants share the sentiments of Leny Mendoza Strobel (a *first-generation* Filipino American writer and teacher who migrated to the United States in 1983): "Coming home to one's roots—to an imagined homeland, to a cultural and ethnic heritage, to a native tongue, to an indigenous imagination—is made necessary when we find ourselves feeling displaced, alienated, not properly belonging to a place" (cited in *A New Twist of Filipino American Decolonization: Eileen Tabios' Poetry*, 2008).

Strobel (Mendoza, 2006) declares that the "conspiracy of silence amongst the oppressed, for fear of being blamed if we ever admitted failure or discrimination in America—the land of opportunity—continues to be perpetuated to this day as many immigrant Filipinos in the U.S. continue to regale their loved ones in the Philippines with stories of success and affluence while keeping quiet about their lack of sense of belonging and marginalization in this country" (p.174).[25]

Accounts of first generation Filipinos show their attempt to resolve their psychic damage of loss of status and alienation. That memory becomes an omniscient struggle for existence.[26] "The inner struggle has always been inner and is played out in outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the real world unless it first happens in our needs" (Anzaldua, 2001, p.2210).[27]

DECOLONIZATION: RECLAIMING FILIPINONESS

Bonding with the Filipino Community

The theme *Filipinos, Anytime, Anywhere* resounds throughout Anderson's (1983) "imagined community." Anderson believes that a nation is socially constructed by the people who perceive themselves as members of that group. The people draw a mental image of their affinity and even if they may not have met with each other face to face, they still share common interests. Anderson explains that a nation, "is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (p. 15).[28]

Given their transnational scope of expanding boundaries, the people's scattering directly challenges the "long held correspondence" among countries, cultures, self-consciousness, and place. That as people move from one nation to another, they take along with them their cultures, customs and racial identities. It is in this transcendental situation that they extend the social space of migration.[29]

Okamura employs Anderson's "imagined community" as a description of the Filipino *diaspora* in so far as *kababayans* (compatriots) scattered around the world become aware of each other's presence as well as the bonds of culture, custom, and tradition they share. These compatriots may never have met the great majority of their counterparts but, together, they unite to explore their national identity (Alegado, 2003).[30]

The power of mass media in disseminating information keeps an individual who is away from home, abreast of the issues and events in the homeland (Anderson, 1983).[31] The multiplier effect of communication, for instance, ABS-CBN's *The Filipino Channel* (TFC)—launched in 1994—has kept 200,000 Filipinos in America closer to home. They can access news and entertainment shows 24 hours a day

and so there are no reasons why second and third generation Filipino-Americans cannot become familiar with their culture.[32]

Anderson further states that these communities are imagined as limited and sovereign. It is limited in the sense that nations have "finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations" (p. 16).[33] These communities are sovereign since there is no dynastic monarchy controlling them. Anzaldua (1987) relates diaspora as a border of "narrow strip along steep edges' while Gupta and Ferguson claim that borderlands are an "interstitial zone of displacement and deterritorialization."[34] In this conceptual framework, border and borderlands do not necessarily refer to "any specific territorial boundaries or territorial locales between nations, communities or cultures" (Okamura, *The Global Filipino Diaspora as an Imagined Community of Hawaii*). As a location of crossing, border and borderlands represent places where ideas, information, goods, people and other cultural forms intersect with one another. Thus, border and borderlands are useful ideas in indicating the "liminal and marginalized" situations of many migrants. With limited rights and protection in their host countries, foreign workers and refugees may be subject to sexual abuse, economic exploitation, physical violence, denial of basic human rights, and gender and racial discrimination.[35]

APPLYING *SIKOLOHIYANG PILIPINO*

"We must engage decolonization as a critical practice if we are to have meaningful chances of survival even as we must simultaneously cope with the loss of political grounding which made radical activism more possible."

bell hooks (2001)[36]

One way of assimilating the Filipino culture with the other cultures in America is to decolonize children of Filipinos who grew up in the United States through the Sikolohiyang Pilipino (Philippine Psychology) developed by Virgilio Enriquez in 1975. As a visiting professor in America in 1991, Enriquez lectured in Filipino language classes for the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at the University of California, Berkley. He adopted a critical approach to language using the perspective of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (SP) as the framework of study, taking language as ultimately "inscribed in larger cultural, political and historical determinations in the case of postcolonial Philippines" (cited in Mendoza, 2006).[37]

SP as a tool in decolonizing the Filipino mind proposes three

primary areas of protest against colonialism. First, *sikolohiyang malaya* ("liberated psychology"), advocates against the colonial status of the Filipinos. It aims to "…correct the imbalance brought about by a Western-dominated psychology which is inimical to the aspirations of the Filipino" (Enriquez, 1994). By using local language in identifying and rediscovering the indigenous concepts, SP targets the provision of values through the Filipino experience.

Enriquez (1994) elaborates that through culturally sensitive field methods, SP collects information on the Filipino psyche such as "*pagtatanong-tanong* (asking around), *pakikiramdam* (shared inner perception), *panununluyan* (staying with), and *pakikipamuhay* (living with), among others" (p. 27).

Second, SP is also against the imposition of *sikolohiyang pang-industriya* (industrial psychology); and instead supports *sikolohiyang pangkabuhayan* (livelihood/economic psychology). This concept focuses on serving the underserved in the Philippines who mostly reside in the rural villages. Third, *sikolohiyang mapagpalaya* (liberating psychology) condemns an elite-oriented psychology.[38]

While in America, Enriquez further enlightened the Filipinos in the San Francisco Bay area with ideas of *sikolohiyang mapagpalaya* (liberation psychology). He claimed that for an individual to gain *lakas na loob* (strength of the heart), she or he has to have "courage to be one's own self in the world that constantly strived to squeeze one into one sort of mold or another" (Mendoza, 2006, p.151).

These ideas of liberation inspired most of first generation immigrants and those who were acquainted with SP in the Philippines. Among those who became visionaries of Enriquez' *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* was Strobel. She chronicled the impact of Enriquez's discussion on his audience, saying that the indigenous Filipino culture had given the Filipino American college students a born-again Filipino experience. This consciousness allowed them the "new interpretative principle in looking at one's self and the world." Providing them a spoken language different from their experience and subjectivity had, therefore, decolonized these students and, at the same time, allowed them to recover their culture, which had been lost or repressed as they negotiated life in America. SP then served as basis for communal identification and unification (Mendoza, 2006).

In 1992, 12 Filipino-American students from San Francisco State University (SFSU) attended the ten-week Philippine Language and Culture class at the University of the Philippines in Diliman. SFSU faculty, Dan Gonzales and Antonio de Castro were the United States

coordinators while UP Psychology Professor Elizabeth Protacio-Marcelino was the receiving host. After the program, Protacio-Marcelino concluded that the program became a vehicle of identity construction among the students providing them cultural hands-on experiences from all over the country as well as informative lectures. Protacio-Marcelino reported that "decolonization" and "indigenization" were twin processes of attaining transformation of consciousness (Mendoza, 2006).[39]

Decolonization enables migrants to learn indigenous Filipino values and experiences. It separates the ethnic culture from the philosophies and influences of colonizers. Thus, it allows the migrants to reclaim and rediscover within themselves their indigenousness or so-called *Filipinoness*. In learning and understanding their native culture, these migrants are provided the opportunity to embrace their identity.

One important SP concept is the use of the word *loob* that Fr. Bert Alejo parallels with the Greek word *Aletheia* (truth revealed) or the Japanese *Zen* (the unnameable) and the Chinese *Tao* (the way). *Loob* empowers us to shape reality, link, or unite and even connect to our *kapwa* (our fellow human being). It is our *loob* that is related to the *loob* of our *kapwa* through the *pakikiramdam* (the capacity for compassion, empathy and sympathy). When our *loob* undergoes a deeper experience, the more we become connected with each other and become sensible to nature and the creator.

The presence of *loob* in every Filipino immigrant keeps them connected with each other and their inner self recognizing the thought that they are Filipinos, Anytime, Anywhere.[40]

Indeed, being a Filipino away from home is not easy. In the stories, first generation migrants hunger to come home but their interest in making a home pilgrimage remains largely an illusion. Early Filipino migrants are largely sojourners constantly wrestling with their identities while the later wave of Filipino migrants and their second generation children are often journeying home to the Philippines to reclaim their *Filipinoness*.

In their wanderings, the migrants are continually confronted with the issue of who they are. Many think that returning to the home country can help provide an answer to this question on identity. Those who cannot fly home content themselves with undertaking a "journey within"—where their best memories of home are stored forever, in the hopes of finding an answer there. For those who are able to come home, the pilgrimage to the homeland becomes an

occasion to "journey back" for cultural regeneration in affirmation of their Filipino identity.

And so Filipinos in diaspora receive a sense of belongingness through the actual travel and through the thoughts of coming home. In their hearts they know that there is a nation that will always embrace their return as long as they keep the myth alive—no matter how long it may take—no matter if the actual return never happens at all.

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