The Case of Filipino Migrants: A Psychosocial Perspective
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Introduction

A "culture of migration" has emerged in the Philippines for the last 30 years. About 8.1 million Filipinos, nearly 10% of the country's population, are working and/or residing in different countries all over the world. The country has become, and still is, a major supplier of labor migrants to over 200 countries across different regions worldwide. In a nationwide survey, they found that 1 in every 5 Filipino adults expressed a desire to migrate if given the chance and resources to do so. In terms of ranking, Philippines is second to Mexico as migrants to the US according to Global Migrant Origin Database (2007) and 9th worldwide in the top migration countries based on the data from Bilateral Migration Matrix of the World Bank 2010. It is the top origin country of annual inflows to Canada and soon Filipinos will be the single largest group in Australia (CMR, 2013). The World migration figure shows that the Philippines ranked 3rd, first is China, 2nd India, in Asia in terms of Emigrant population (2013).

Our migration is characterized as one that is labor market driven and economically motivated, with an end goal of improving one's life and that of family through financial gains. Studies of international labor migration have tended to view this temporary movement of migrants across borders as a family livelihood strategy that aims to improve, primarily, the socioeconomic circumstances of both the migrant and those left behind (Graham and Jordan, 2011). Aside from work, marriage migration is also an important component of this outflow and is a significant component of the Filipino community in different countries.

Moreover, our migration profile is mainly that of out-migration country. Immigration to the Philippines, on the other hand, is relatively small, involving just an annual flow of less than 20,000 foreign nationals settling. But there has been an increase in the inflow of students coming to the Philippines who take

advantage of tertiary education or English language programs for the past years. The sprouting of BPOs and call centers has also invited more foreign nationals to temporarily reside in the country as they manage these companies. But still immigration to our country is far lower than those leaving our country.

Majority of Philippine migration is predominantly work related. Finding better job opportunities abroad seem to be the only answer to economic difficulties and the lack of employment opportunity resulted in the movement of skilled workers outside the country. Asis (2006) noted that in the Philippines, wanting to work abroad has become a national obsession. This exodus of Filipino workers has been seen as a consequence of the economic and socio-political context that plunged the country in the past decades. Hence, migration movement in the Philippines is best understood through the socio-political, economic context.

One of the significant push factors is the availability of jobs in the country. Philippine population is increasing and has reached already 100 million (National Statistics Office, 2015). But unfortunately, economic growth could not keep up with our population growth. Unemployment rate is about 6.6% as of January 2015. About 26% of population falls below poverty level (Country Migration Report, 2013; Philippine Statistics Authority, 2014). The country was hard pressed to provide jobs and decent wages. For years, Philippine government failed to established sustainable socio-political structural reforms and with high level of corruption, the country seriously experienced economic imbalances. It is still a very steep climb towards a strong and stable economic growth. Thus, overseas employment, which actually started during the oil crisis in the early 1970s, has become for many the most promising venue out of dismal local alternatives, making the opportunities abroad very attractive. Likewise, the continuing demand for workers in the Gulf countries and the opening of new labor markets in other regions, around Asia, Europe, Canada and the US, fueled further this plight of Filipino migrants.

An interesting characteristic of this migration flow is the increasing proportion of the rehires (rehires represent overseas Filipino workers who go back to the same employer in the same country). An indicator that this temporary migration is gaining some stability – a case of temporary migration becoming more or less permanent – and the experience of overseas employment is becoming longer. But the rate of permanent return is slow because of limited wage-competitive opportunities in the Philippines.

Filipino Migrant's Experiences

The experiences of these migrant Filipinos may vary though from one country to another. It depends on what the policy of the host country can provide them, a number of these Filipino migrants experience some challenges and difficulties. Of the various possible perspectives to look into these experiences, I would like to present here the psychosocial aspect. Psychosocial means the interplay of the psychological and social aspects of the person as he/she interacts with the environment. It refers to the interrelationship of social factors and individual thought and behavior. Here, I would like to focus on two levels: at the individual level and the relational. This is quite different from the usual perspective when looking at migration, nevertheless, I believe that looking at these aspects should also be an opportunity to dig deeper to some of the personal difficulties of these migrants and how it can affect their relational system. This is with the hope that policies that govern their lives as migrants will also incorporate/consider this side of their concerns.

Individual Level

Language Barriers. Migrants may have difficulties in communicating in a new country due to challenges in learning the local language. Some countries though require incoming foreign nationals to learn the basic of the local language. This is typical for those coming in as students or fiancé, but less likely for skilled workers. Language barriers can hamper communication between employers and employee. Also, language is a necessity skill for day to day interactions and survival.

Culture Adjustments. Adjusting to a new environment can be a very stressful experience, how much more adjusting to a new culture. Migrants do experience (at least for first timers) cultural adjustments that may cause them some stress.

Health. Health of migrants is also a concern since many of them are exposed to unsafe living and working conditions. Some do not have their own health insurance either.

No social security benefits. Temporary migrants are usually excluded from social security benefits in the country they are working.

Vulnerabilities. During employment, migrants can experience many forms of hardships, especially among less skilled occupations, like women in domestic work who face risks and vulnerabilities for abuse from employers ranging from lower wage, maltreatment, etc. (CMR, 2013).

Identity challenge. Soon after migrants settled in their new country, psychologically adjusted to the culture, they may be confronted with whether to stay longer, perhaps consider applying for permanent residency and eventually be a citizen (if the country permits) or the decision to return to Philippines. Deciding for things like this depends a lot to opportunities the new country can offer, the opportunities that are also offered back home, and the opinion of significant others. Another question is whether migrants can sustain their social identities as Filipinos. Exposure to different experiences and the interactions one may have with the society and culture of the host country will definitely contribute to how they redefine themselves in terms of national identity and loyalty. The attractiveness of the host country, coupled with less option back home may lead migrants to consider not returning to the Philippines. But with the question on whether they still would like to identify as Filipinos in a foreign land, the answer is yes. Studies have shown that national identities (or social identity as a Filipino) will actually be activated in the presence of other social groups, in this case, other nationalities. This phenomenon is strongly supported by Social Identity Theory of Tajfel and Turner (1986). Some of them keep defining themselves or maintain their identity as Filipinos and see the host country only as a means to achieve a better economic status back home (Bradatan, C. et. al. 2010).

Problems with reintegration. Compared with the relatively more developed pre-departure and on-site programmes, reintegration can be problematic. The lack of sustainable reintegration opportunities or sufficient resources, lead many migrants to prolong the overseas employment experience beyond what they originally planned (CMR, 2013). Nonetheless, the Philippines established the National Reintegration Center for OFWs (NRCO) which aims at providing the much needed attention to the return and reintegration stage. The promotion of financial literacy among migrants and their families to stir savings, investments and productive use remittances has become an area of convergence of the programmes and initiatives of the government, both private sector and civil society.

*Relational Leve*l
Often the hardest thing for new migrants is to cope with leaving behind families and loved ones (Craig, 2015). This created the so called transnational families, where children are geographically separated from one or both parents over an extended period (Graham and Jordan, 2011). It is dramatically changing family structure with one parent working abroad and leaving the other to take the role of both father and mother. In the case of both parents working abroad, children are left with their grandparents or any relative.

Families divided across national borders may reap economic benefits, but they also make sacrifices in

terms of geographical and emotional closeness (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002; Orellana, Thorne, Chee, & Lam, 2001). The migration of a parent is a process that transforms not only family relationships and but also functioning (Graham and Jordan, 2011). Care arrangements for children must be reconfigured, and over time children may form new attachments to "other mothers" (Schmalzbauer, 2004) and change their perceptions of authority figures (Smith, Lalonde, & Johnson, 2004). It is thus plausible to suppose that transnational family arrangements could exact a high emotional cost from both migrant parents and other family members left behind.

Since women are now part of migration population, there has also been more concern on mother-child relationship than that when fathers are the ones who migrate. This has something to do with the role of women as the primary care taker of an infant or growing child. Fortunately, several studies (i.e. Cruz, 1987; Asis, 2000 & 2006; Parreñas, 2006; Reyes, 2011; Bryant, 2007; Graham and Jordan, 2011) have shown that there are no significant effects on the psychological well-being of children who are left behind. No evidence of poorer psychological wellbeing compared to children of non-migrant parents (there was a belief/assumption that children of migrants will have poorer psychological well-being than those whose parents are not migrants). Researches have not found any significant difference in the well-being of children whose parents are migrants and children whose parents are present. Reasons for such includes, absentee parent(s) among lower to middle class families are common and that there is no stigma to child fostering in communities where it is widely practiced. Also, modern technologies facilitate virtual presence. Support system among distant relatives or siblings is also a common practice among Filipino families.

General Discussion

Migrant workers do have various experiences as they work hard in a country so foreign to them and at the same time leaving families behind. Clearly, the impact of this migration phenomenon in the Philippines has brought positive and negative changes in our society and can be seen at different levels. More often than not, it is the psychosocial experiences that can create so much stress and pose a threat to their wellbeing. Healthy interaction to one's new environment, assimilating to culture of the new workplace, and a stable social support system can definitely lead to a well-adjusted migrant who can withstand the pressures of being in a foreign land. Leaving abroad and being away from the family may satisfy financial needs and provide exciting opportunities, but this is not as easy as we would like it to be.

Republic Act 8042, also known as the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995 (amended

in 2009, RA 10022) was enacted to protect and respond to the needs of these migrant workers. The laws provision, however, focuses heavily on the legal protection of migrants. Other needs of migrants, like the psychosocial needs, may not be fully taken care of. Nevertheless, a number of non-government organizations in the Philippines have made it a point that they attend to these non-material/legal needs of the migrants.

Migration phenomenon in the Philippines, indeed, has brought some economic gains especially to family back home. But this is also at the expense of losing our skilled workers to other countries. The Philippine government has actually enacted laws and policies protecting the rights and dignity of Filipino migrants. But despite the government efforts, many Filipino migrants find themselves in a vulnerable situation. The implementation of policies seems to be problematic, ineffective and reactive. Even human and material resources intended for this purpose are also insufficient. At present, some countries are now changing some policies on migrant workers, like restricting their work permits and priority is given to nationals before offering the job slot to a migrant.

Going abroad to work, which is a predominant reason for migration, has become routine and is now incorporated in the strategies of Filipino families to better their lives. For various reasons, many of these different motives for going abroad and the different experiences of our migrants are not fully captured by existing data systems. Against the backdrop of increasing levels of outmigration since the 1970s, international migration is huge in our country and it has had a key role in defining the complexity of our society and our nation. With the distribution of Filipinos in virtually all corners of the world, the "national" borders have extended to where Filipinos are, bringing with them their Filipino identity, and presenting a mix of opportunities and challenges for the home country.

In conclusion, the absence of sustained economic development, political instability, a growing population, double-digit unemployment levels, and low wages continue to compel people to look for work abroad and eventually settle there. In a strange twist, the Philippines have become as successful as a labor exporter that it has failed to develop and strengthen development processes within the country. While the Philippines cannot stop people from leaving, the country will need to explore how migration can be an instrument for development. In this regard, the Philippines can learn much from international discussions and reflections on migration and how we can keep up with this global movement especially on how we can support the psychosocial needs of our fellow Filipinos abroad.

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　本論文は，過去30年間にわたるフィリピンの移住文化がもたらした，フィリピン人移住者の窮状を主題とする。また，極めて多くのフィリピン人労働者が世界各国へ移住する原因となった，フィリピンの社会政治的そして経済的状況についても考察する。　フィリピン人の移住の特徴は，労働市場または経済を動機とする点にあるという。移住はいわば国民的な強迫観念（Asis, 2000）となっており，その最終目標は，よりよい雇用機会の獲得，つまり経済的な利益によって，個人や家族の生活を改善することである。しかし，こうした国外への移住現象にはプラスとマイナス両方の経験が伴い，結果として，移住者の側にストレスを引き起こしたり，心の健康を害する可能性もある。本稿はこうした経験を，心理社会的な視点から検討している。ここでの「心理社会的」とは，個々人がその環境とかかわる際の心理的そして社会的な要素の相互作用を指す。本論文では，個人ならびに（社会的）相互関係という２つの次元が検討の対象となっており，フィリピン人移住者が経験した様々な心理社会的な苦難や，そういった苦難がどのように彼らの心の健康全体に影響を与えるかを分析する。