

The Filipino Migrants in Japan: Reconstructing Identity and Nation

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Abstract

Transnationalism, or the multiplicity of involvements that international migrants sustain in both home and host countries, allow migrants to reconstruct their own identity, proving that identity is an ongoing process and always changing. Using social semiotics as an analytical tool and in depth interviews among the Filipino migrants as methodology, this paper interrogates the symbols and representations manifested in a big Philippine Festival (Barrio Fiesta) held in Yokohama, Japan and analyzes the processes by which Filipino migrants in Japan reconstruct their identity and to what extent these symbols are internalized by them. The paper shows that objective reality enables these migrants to locate their identities while subjective realities fragment their reconstruction. Identities can be contradictory and therefore semiotic resources are not enough to fully recapture the nuances of these dislocations. The Filipino migrants' subjective reality, in relation to these shared resources and significations must also be considered. This reconstruction of identity shows that being a Filipino in Japan is not fixed and essential and that the idea of nation crosses beyond geographical borders and thus can be both negotiated.

Keywords: identity, Filipinoness, transnationalism, Filipino migration, Japan, social semiotics

INTRODUCTION

The development of migration studies necessitates reexamination of the widely held notions of identity construction and the meaning of nation. Transnationalism, a pronounced feature of globalization and defined by Basch et al. (1994:6) as the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement, can be an important

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framework and context which can challenge and explain the new meanings and reconstruction of the terms nation and identity.

Studies on transnationalism vis-à-vis identity and nation deal with attempts of the migrants to assimilate, negotiate their identity and finally exercise their own agencies in their host countries. Diaspora, as a concept, used to be closely linked to issues on identity. However, for most scholars, diaspora, which tend to be characterized by migrants' strong orientation towards the homeland, coupled with a longing to return once independence is granted did not take into consideration the transgressions of national boundaries and the new ways by which migrants experience and enact their membership in the host countries (Soysal, 2000). This is because migrants do not leave their origins and past behind, they take them with them and by maintaining their networks, they begin to act as conduits between the two or more nations where they have connections (Koopmans and Satham, 2001). There is then the blurring of social and geographical space, loosening of boundaries between countries and in the process migrants tend to imagine, negotiate and position their notions of identity and nations. Thus, the normative conceptions of citizenship, nation and identity cannot adequately explain the changes and meanings of contemporary citizenship and the idea of nation. The ambivalence of these terms and their nuances need to be explored and studied.

The formation of identity is anchored on "objective" and "subjective" elements. Objective elements are depicted as the properties shared by all members of the social identity unit such as symbols, myths, language, religion, ethnicity, geography, the mode of life, common history, values, traditions. Identity is shaped by the internalization of these elements by the implied units and determining which of these elements are priorities in shaping their identity. The subjective elements are defined as the relative indication of to what extent the internalization process of the objective elements are carried out. A strong subjective consciousness and perception is very important in defining the features in constructing national identity (Inac and Unal, 2013).

It is within this context that this paper attempts to contribute to the existing body of literatures on how the concepts of nation and identity can be reconstructed. The term reconstructed is used because the meanings and definitions are derived from

contextualization which are based on the migrants' experiences and cultural practices in their host country. Taking Japan and the Filipino migrants as case studies and using social semiotics as an analytical tool, this paper analyzes how Filipino migrants reconstruct the notion of nation and national identity by studying the symbols used and found in "Barrio Fiesta", a "Filipino" festival held in Yokohama, Japan. It analyzes the processes and strategies that Filipino migrants employ as they participate in the political, social and economic activities of their host country yet at the same time engage and maintain ties with their country of origin. Moreover, through the use of in-depth interviews among the Filipinos who participated in the festival, this paper will show to what extent Filipino migrants internalize these shared symbols.

In this article, basic assumption about the discursive construction of nation and identity will be discussed as to provide working definitions for these terms. It will be followed by discussion of social semiotics as an analytical tool and framework and an analysis on how Filipino nation and Filipino identity are reconstructed. This will be substantiated by data gathered from in-depth interviews of Filipino migrants in Japan and how they internalize "nation" and "Filipino" identity.

The Discursive Construction of Nation and National Identity

The idea of nation has been challenged in studies that concern globalization. Benedict Anderson's (1983) influential definition and understanding of nation as an *imagined community* signifies that nations are to be understood as mental constructs. The contention that a nation is imagined does not mean that a nation is false, or unreal or to be distinguished from true communities. Rather, he proposes that a nation is constructed from popular processes through which residents share nationality in common.

Anderson (1983) outlined three processes which the nation can be imagined: it is imagined as limited, sovereign and as a community. Its elastic, finite and geographic boundaries make it limited. These boundaries compel one nation to self-define or set itself against other nations. Anderson is thus arguing for social construction of nations as political entities that have a limited spatial and demographic extent, rather than organic, eternal entities. As a concept which developed in the 18th

century to replace previous monarchical or religious orders, the idea of nation is imagined to be sovereign. In this manner, a nation was a new way of conceptualizing state sovereignty and rule which would be limited to a defined population and territory over which the state, in the name of nationality, could exercise power. Finally, it is imagined as a community because regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. This develops feelings of solidarity and affinity among its members to the extent that millions of people would die for these imaginings.

Related to this definition is Pierre Bourdieu's notion of habitus. Habitus is a complex of common ideas, concepts or perception schemes of related emotional attitudes shared with a specific group. It can also refer to similar behavioral dispositions of a group of person all of which are internalized through "national" socialization. In this sense, national identity can be regarded as a sort of habitus. Emotional attitudes may refer to how members of a specific group determine the "in group" in one hand and the "out group" on the other hand. Identities are always constructed along with the construction of sameness/difference dichotomies.

The construction of national identity builds on the emphasis on a common history, and history has always to do with remembrance and memory. Maurice Halbwachs (1983) notion of collective memory allows members of a group to identify a connection between rather theoretical discourses on national identity and myths, symbols and rituals of everyday life. National consciousness makes use of group symbols from different areas of everyday life and defines conventionalized structures as group-specific rules which are presented on the symbolic level in the form of representation, re-symbolizations and theatrical manifestations as well as in objects and materials.

While Halbwach's focus is on the concept of memory, Stuart Hall (1994) emphasizes the role culture plays in the construction of nations and national identities. He describes nations not only as political constructs but also as systems of cultural representations by means of which an imagined community may be interpreted. People are not only citizens by law, they also participate in forming the idea of the nation as it is represented in their national culture. A nation is a symbolic community constructed

discursively. Members who have the power to design national identities and national cultures aim to link membership within a certain political nation state and to identify with a certain national culture such that culture and state become identical. All modern nations, Hall added, are culturally hybrid because space and territories have become temporal and because of the processes of globalization which lead to the emergence of multiple identities.

Social Semiotics and the Reconstruction of Nation and National Identity

The above discussion shows the discursive nature of nation and identity. This section attempts to explain how semiotics as an analytical tool can be used effectively to analyze discourses about nations and national identities. Social semiotics originated in the work of Halliday who argued that the grammar of the language is not a code, not a set of rules for producing correct sentences but a “resource for making meanings”. With this, the idea of “language” can be extended to all semiotic modes-- anything that can convey message or meaning can be a text which can be interpreted. “Grammar” can refer to resource as the actions and artefacts used to communicate whatever means they are produced--- whether physiologically—a frown, a smile or anything bodily related or by means of technology –paper, ink or computer softwares. Traditionally, they are referred to as signs, which for Saussure is a union of the signifier and a signified. For example, the frown is a signifier to signify disapproval. In social semiotics, the term “resource” is used instead for sign because it implies an arbitrariness of usage, depending on how or in what context it is used, contrast to sign which gives the impression that it is somehow pre-given and not affected by use. Thus, in social semiotics, resources are signifiers, observable actions and objects that have been drawn into the domain of social communication and that have a theoretical semiotic potential constituted by all their past uses. These potentials and uses might be considered relevant based on their specific needs and interests. These potentials can best operate in a given social context; social contexts also have rules or practices that regulate how specific semiotic resources can be used or leave the users relatively free in their use of the resource (Van Leeuwen, 2005).

In this study, the semiotic resources to be studied are signs which are considered to be *essentially Filipino*. These are signs that are shared collectively by Filipinos -- economic, religious or political signs and are recognized to nationally identify and represent them as nation. These semiotic resources will then be analyzed for its “meaning potentials” –explore the signifiers and study their meanings within the social context. In this case, the “how” is much more important than the “what”, thus the processes or strategies on how these signs are used and given meaning by the Filipino migrants in Japan reveal their objective and subjective perceptions on what it means to be Filipinos in Japan, thereby discoursing the meaning of the terms Filipino identity and nation. It is also important to consider how Filipinos are regulated by the political and cultural conditions of the host country, thereby restraining their perceptions and manifestations of their identity.

Three dimensions will be considered in this paper on how the idea of nation and national identity- in essence the “Filipinoness” is reconstructed by Filipino migrants in Japan:

1. The cultural, economic, religious and political resources found in the festival.

This involves identification of signs that represent the Filipino migrants used in celebrating the two festivals. These can range from food, religious icons, advertisements, program, costumes, dresses, politicians, guests.

2. The sign system and the social contextualization

Semiotic resources cannot be taken in isolation. They function in a sign system which is the relations between signs and the meanings that are derived from it. This is the language of the signs and to analyze the language is to find out the discursive or the meaning making processes that are involved when meanings are either derived from or constituted to signs. This means that meaning is constructed around cultural assumptions and regulating orders embedded in these resources. In this paper, the semiotic resources will be studied according to how they are used, who used them, how they relate to the other resources and what concepts they signify. Signifiers of the

resources such as space, color, depth, utterances, gestures, facial expressions will be considered in studying the sign system.

3. Objective/subjective elements and perceptions of nation and national identity

Interviews from a number of Filipino migrants who participated in the festivals will substantiate the objective/subjective construct of nation and national identity. This dimension explores the personal perceptions of these migrants on their identity as Filipinos in Japan and in what spaces or settings do they feel the sense of “nation” and “Filipino”. More specifically, this dimension tries to analyze how do the Filipinos redefine and reposition their identity in the host country.

METHODOLOGY

This paper uses observation and in-depth interviews in gathering the data. The main source of data is the “Barrio Festival”, an annual gathering of Filipino migrants in Yokohama, Japan. In the year that the research was done, the festival was one of the most significant and most important because it commemorated the arrival of General Artemio Ricarte, one of the first Filipinos to arrive in Yokohama. Interviews of Filipinos who participated in the festival were also conducted. Informants are officers of the various organizations which helped organized the festival, Filipino wives who got married to Japanese and became permanent residents and those who have lived in Japan for at least five years. These are also the Filipinos who regularly participate in the said festival.

The researcher also observed the flow of the program, the booths and spatial arrangement of the festival. Semiotic resources such as the costumes, the conversation, food and other material cultures were also noted and observed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Filipino Migrants in Japan in Focus: From Assimilation to the Exercise of Agency

As of 2014, the number of Filipinos in Japan is about 214,000 which is about 10.5 percent of the total foreign population of Japan and the third largest migrant group after the Koreans and Chinese. Filipino migration to Japan peaked in the 1980s when the migration flows have become increasingly feminized. This means that more women than men migrated for jobs as nannies, maids, housecleaners, cooks and entertainers and in other helping professions and service occupations. Filipino migration to Japan by this time is basically characterized by women entering Japan to work mainly as entertainers. Filipino entertainers or the more official sounding Filipino Overseas Performing Artists (OPAs) end up in a variety of service jobs catering to male clients, including dancing and prostitution (Tyner 1997; 19). Tyner claims that the growth of female migration to Japan was founded on the particular construction of a particular image of Filipina sexuality by the media and social institutions. Aside from the OPAs, the Filipino-Japanese intermarriage is a major aspect of Filipino migration to Japan. Records of the Commission on Filipino Overseas (CFO) show that there were 5,771 marriages in 1992 between Japanese men and Filipino women. In 2006 this number grew to 12,150, but began declining steadily following the revision of the immigration law, dropping to 3,118 in 2013. Another factor affecting figures for international unions is the increased efforts by the government to crack down on fake marriages involving foreign women.

The image of Filipino women in Japan, that of as entertainers and as *Ajia no hanayome* (Asian brides) reinforces the notion that Filipino women marry Japanese men for purely economic reasons. This notion tends to view marriage between Japanese men and Filipino women in a very negative perspective. Ballescas (1992) for example asserts that aside from the assurance and security of being able to stay permanently in Japan through a spouse visa, Filipino women, mostly entertainers, believe that they can be permanently secure once they marry a Japanese man because often, before marriage, the men would promise regular financial support for their families in the Philippines. Studies in the 1980s until the late 1990s tend to portray

Filipino in these international marriages as powerless, isolated, culturally disoriented and incapable of decision making. Furthermore, marriage for women is a heavy endeavor because they feel that they are housemaids rather than housewives. Other had become victims of domestic violence but still opted to remain in Japan because of their children (Almonte 2001). The prevailing literature for the past decades on these Filipino brides reveals that despite their presence in Japan for more than 30 years, academic and advocates tend to situate these Filipinas within a particular gender and sexual roles and geographical locations (Suzuki 2003). Particularly, the discourse on these women since the late 1980s has sustained earlier representations, stressing the structural and institutional oppression of women while taking little notice of their agency (Suzuki 2005; 2003). This continued even in the 1990s and during this time, discussions of domestic violence against foreign women in Japan have been similarly based on a narrow view of Filipino women as indirectly victimized by Japanese men.

Related researches, however, in the late 1990s, cast further doubts about the simplified images of the OPAs as passive victims found in earlier literatures. Fuwa and Anderson (2002), for example, illustrates the place of human agency in his discussion of the wider contexts of international labor migration including Filipino OPAs. The picture and stereotypes of Filipino women, which is considered by Filipinos as negative and derogatory, disallows the view of these women as “active female migrants positively contributing to society by providing reproductive and productive work (Nakamatsu, 2005).

Another pronounced manifestation of the exercise of agency of these Filipino migrants is how they accumulate strategies and move out of the confines of their being entertainers and hostesses in bars and how they “make their own world” and integrate both the cultures of their host and country and country of origin. These assimilation strategies enable the Filipino wives to feel that they are part of the Japanese society.

This assimilation strategy, however, according to more recent studies, ignores the capacity of a people to develop their own meaningful identity and denies the possibility of having multiple identities (Bao, 2005). It also obscures the diversity of people and tends to overlook the power within the politics of the host country. Thus, as Filipino migrants participate in the cultural and social dynamics of Japan, they also

interact with fellow Filipinos, build social networks and form communities. These communities show the active and apparent transnationalism of Filipino migrants, enabling them to create their own space and reconstruct their identities.

Filipino transnational communities in Japan always come in the form of religious organizations. This is because religion is an aspect of Filipino lives where the Filipino migrants can best assert their identity and where they can establish their ties to other Filipino migrants. Tigno (2007) argues that religious and religiosity are deeply rooted in the Filipino national psyche. The celebration of the Eucharist provides a social outlet and support network to Filipinos who are lonely and depressed overseas and reproduces their “Filipinoness” in the process. Furthermore, Japanese are not deeply religious people and thus, this aspect of social activity can be easily given up and allowed especially to their Filipino wives.

Recent studies on Filipino transnational communities also reveal these can be sites where new subject positions can emerge or negotiated. These are spaces where processes of identification can be formed and how Filipino migrants essentialized their identity and culture, then negotiate it in the context of their interaction with the Japanese and Japan’s political and social structure. As their personal and intimate lives are manifested in these communities, these spaces have taken new forms by revealing the complexities of Filipino migration to Japan and how Filipino migrants translate and form other modes of identification.

The Yokohama Barrio Fiesta: The Filipino Transnational Communities

Yokohama is considered to be as a special city by most Filipinos in Japan. In 1963, then Manila Mayor Antonio Villegas visited Yokohama and two years after, a sister city agreement was concluded between these two cities. Historical ties can be established between the Philippines and Yokohama. A memorial for Artemio Ricarte was erected in the Yamashita Park where the festival was held. Ricarte was a Philippine General who fought with revolutionaries against the Spanish and who landed in Yokohama in 1915 when he was exiled by the American forces.

There are more than 20,000 Filipinos who live in the Kanagawa Prefecture and most of them are Filipino women who worked as entertainers and got married to Japanese men. A number work in factories and companies. The largest Filipino organization in Yokohama is Community A⁷ which is composed not only of Filipino migrants living in the Kanagawa Prefecture but also their Japanese husbands and children.

The 2013 Philippine Barrio Fiesta, which was held on September 28-29, 2013 was organized mainly by Community A and was supported by the Philippine Embassy of Tokyo, the City of Yokohama and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. Press releases from the Philippine Embassy pegged the number of people at around 100,000 and was intended” to be a showcase of the best of Philippine culture, promoting friendship between Filipinos and Japanese and bringing together members of the Filipino community from different parts of Japan”. The Festival’s opening ceremony was graced by a number of dignitaries led by the Former President of the Philippines and Mayor of Manila Joseph Ejercito Estrada, Deputy Mayor of Yokohama Nobuya Suzuki, MOFA Deputy Director General Kenji Kanasugi and Philippine Ambassador to Japan Manuel M. Lopez. Ambassadors and diplomats from member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) were also present. Relative therefore, to other “barrio fiestas” celebrated by other Filipino organizations in other parts in Japan such as Nagoya and Osaka, the Yokohama festival is the showcase of what “Philippines” is in Japan.

“Barrio Fiesta”: Nomenclature and Sign Making

“Barrio” is a Spanish term which literally means neighborhood or in the Philippine context these are cohesive places sharing for example traditions and religious practices such as feast days. Barrio denotes rural character or a rural village. Barrio, as a political unit grew out of “barangays”, or family villages which originally referred to a group of boats and their passengers who migrated to the Philippines. “Barrio fiestas”, therefore, are festivals, usually in honor of a patron saint, held annually, with much fanfare and food. Barrio Fiesta, taken together and within the

⁷ *Upon the request of informants of confidentiality, real names will not be used.*

context of Filipino migration to Japan speaks of honoring and celebrating tradition and of going back to the “native” or the indigenous.

The Yokohama Barrio Fiesta is replete with these. During the parade for example, which is one of the highlights of the events, Filipino migrants donned on tribal costumes, danced to the beat of tribal music and proudly proclaimed that these are the “real” Filipinos. Semiotically, these speak of meanings. In this sense, the best source of identity is the indigenous identity. Thus, to be a Filipino is to go back to the roots, to go back to the nature of things and as what Gellner (1983) claims “to identify the essentials of a national character which remain unchanged through the vicissitude of history, changeless, eternal”. These tribal costumes and music, apparently, for the Filipino migrants in Japan are the constants that best symbolically represent the Philippines. (Refer to Figures 1 and 2)



Figure 1. The Filipino migrants wearing indigenous costumes during the parade

The order of the parade reflects representation of history of the Philippines from the pre-Spanish Period to the Spanish period. There is no conscious effort to represent the periods after these specific times. According to one of the organizers, “this is because the pre-Spanish and Spanish Periods of Philippine history is the “most historical” of all. The emphasis is on the religiosity of the Filipinos. The religious icons, participation of the organizations which claim to be religious in nature, all these linked the present to the past, shared and reclaimed. What the organizers probably imply is that Philippine traditions, despite the onslaught of modernity, were maintained and preserved. Thus, reconstruction of nation and identity of the Filipino migrants in Japan in this festival is to “recapture the past, restore past identity, and to turn back time where Filipino traditions are deeply rooted. It is to relocate the origin of this particular nation.



Figure 2. The traditional dances performed by the Filipino migrants in Japan

On the other hand, the folk and the traditional symbols are intercepted with the modern signs of globalization and the transnational activities of the Filipino migrants. These can be seen in the advertisements of banks and companies which process the remittances of the Filipino migrants to the Philippines. The broadcasting company which shows Filipino programs to Japan hands out pamphlets and materials to aggressively entice Filipino migrants to subscribe to the channel. Filipino organizations also set up stalls to sell Filipino food, religious trinkets and icons and other items which are staples souvenirs which are not easily acquired in Japan and

which Filipinos only get to have or eat when another Filipino will go home and bring them as souvenirs (See figure 3). As a characteristic of diaspora therefore, the idea of “home” and “longing for the homeland” are best represented by these semiotic resources.



Figure 3. Religious icons sold by Filipino migrants

Traditions, however, are ephemeral in this festival. The donning of the tribal costumes and the dances and the music are best captured in the moment of the parade. The clapping and the appreciation from both Filipinos and other nationalities are fleeting and the feeling of nostalgia gone quickly. However, in the two day festival, the regular and the most persistent features are the companies that thrive on the economic ability of the Filipino migrants that comes in the form of giving discounts for subscriptions, of selling telephone and internet cards and of giving freebies to promote Filipino products specifically targeted to the Filipino migrants who long to get a taste of what Filipino and the Philippines are. (Please see figures 4, 5, 6). The straddling of the “folk” and the “modern”, recapturing the past and living the present—reconstruct nation and national identity.



Figure 4. A Filipino cargo and logistics company and its booth



Figure 5. A major Filipino bank and its booth



Figure 6. One of the Japanese banks where Filipinos send their remittances

The presence of the Mayor Joseph Estrada and the Yokohama Deputy Mayor Noboya Suzuki asserts the strong political ties between two cities. It is a strong indication that the occasion is supported and recognized by the Japanese government. This cooperation is best signified in the two effigies that are most noticeable upon entering the park (Figure 3). One of the effigy is a woman wearing the traditional Japanese kimono while on his right is a male wearing the traditional Filipino barong Tagalog. On both of them is a sash that indicates the name of one of the biggest sending company in the Philippines which has operations in all parts of the world, especially where there is a big number of migrants.



Figure 7. Mayor Estrada and other Japanese officials cutting the ribbon to open the festival

According to one of the officers of Organization A, it is much easier to facilitate the event as compared to church based activities because it is strongly endorsed by the Philippine Embassy (church activities, like the celebration of Station of the Cross, which is the reenacting the Passion of Christ and thus entails having the procession around the neighborhood is not permitted by the local government and thus need to be confined within the church premises). Thus, when Mayor Suzuki acknowledges the importance of festivals such as the Barrio Fiesta of the Philippines in strengthening the ties between the two countries and the contribution of Filipino migrants to the economy and labor force of Japan, it also signifies how the Filipino migrants are now perceived to be able to create spaces outside the stereotype notions of being entertainers and mere laborers, exercise their agencies in the attainment of a more dignified and respected occupations according to the standards of the host country. Perhaps, the best semiotic resource to signify is the person who oversees and leads the celebration: the president of Organization A. Standing side by side with local government officials of Japan and the Philippines and exchanging pleasantries with ambassadors from ASEAN countries, this female Filipino migrant signifies an upward

social and economic mobility, which practically all Filipino migrants in Japan aspire for.



Figure 9. Effigies representing the Philippines and Japan

Mayor Estrada reiterates this signification of the changing perspective of the Filipino migrants in Japan. Speaking in a mixture of Filipino and English, pausing in between for the Japanese translation, his message attempts to be humorous and at times deprecating. He acknowledges the political ties between Yokohama and Manila and expresses his gratitude for the city for absorbing in the Filipino migrants. Like any speech of a local government delivered in front of Filipino migrants outside the Philippines, it extols on the contribution of the migrants to keep the Philippine economy afloat. The Barrio Fiesta, according to Estrada and as said countless times before, is the showcase of Filipino culture and identity and encourages the Filipinos in Japan “to make their fellow Filipinos proud of them”. Taken in totality, the speech is familiar and predictable but nonetheless, given the context and the political condition is the proper and the correct thing to say. Estrada is also a unifying symbol for all Filipino migrants who are gathered in this festival. In his traditional “barong tagalog”,

considered to be the national costume of male Filipinos, Estrada's presence enabled the Filipinos in the crowd to disregard their ethnic differences and identity.

The Subjective Reality: Othering the Filipinos and the Philippines in Japan

Reconstruction of Filipino identity and nation, as reflected in this traditional Filipino festival is best perceived from the strategies and processes which Filipino migrants in Japan try to employ in order to manifest the shared symbols and significations of what seem to be essentially Filipino. Filipino migrants in Japan identify with each other because of these "traditional and folk" semiotic resources.

On the other hand, interviews with a number of Filipino migrants in Japan after the festival reveal that beyond these significations, they have different constructs of Filipino identity and nation. The concept of nation and identity is always built and constructed along the lines of similarities/differences. Although Filipino migrants admit that they feel their "Filipinoness" during the festival and that the best way to express this identity is through these signs and symbols, internalization of beyond these is quite weak as revealed by the interviews.

Jessa, for example, claims that aside from these activities, she would not rather not interact with other Filipinos.

I do not get anything good from the members or from joining the organization. I get benefit from my God. Sometimes, I don't want to be a Filipino because all they do is destroy each other. They should be more formal. They don't have any right to be arrogant.

Jessa's identification of being a Filipino is somewhat anchored on her belief in God. Religion, specifically that of the Catholic faith, is an indelible aspect of Filipino culture. The Philippines claims to be the only predominantly Christian nation in Asia and is among the leading countries that deploy their citizens for overseas work (Figer 2010:1) Tigno (2007: 3) also argues that "religious practice and religiosity are deeply rooted in the Filipino national psyche" and provides social outlet and social network.

On the other hand, Maureen finds other more “meaningful” spaces in her construct of her identity in the Eucharistic mass:

I feel my being a Filipino when I hear the mass in Filipino; the priests are Filipinos; the songs are in Filipino. Because of this, I can identify more with the mass than with being with Filipinos.

In this sense, Maureen seems to equate the mass with her “Filipinoness”. It is in the mass where she can find solace and comfort while interacting with other Filipinos usually mean trouble and more difficulties in Japan.

This is somewhat reinforced by another migrant. When asked whether she feels being a Filipino when interacting with other Filipinos in the organization, she answered carefully:

Some members are different perhaps because they come from different regions of the Philippines. It's not that I don't like to...(hesitates)...People are different....different personalities...nothing important...

It is quite predictable that these differences do not surface during the festival. The Filipino migrants' identity and their sense of being a nation are constructed along these lines. However, another discourse seems to surface as revealed by their experiences outside that of the festival.

Ambivalence is also apparent when migrants are asked about their being Filipino outside the organization. Yeng, for example, dislikes the conflicts that ensue among members. She attributes this to the feeling of regionalism that arises every time Filipinos gather. For example, those who come from Manila tend to gather in one group and those who come from Mindanao also form their own group. Because of the animosity among members, Yeng feels that she is not one of them:

Yes, I am a Filipino but I am not that kind of Filipino. We are the same but we are also different. My relationship with the other members is just okay.

Subsequent interviews with Yeng reveal that “that kind of Filipino” that she is referring to are those Filipinos who are noisy, engage in bickering and conflict and dress like an “entertainer”. In Japan’s context, For Yeng at least, these projections of a Filipino must be avoided and not emulated.

These interviews reveal that the Filipino migrants’ subjective construction of nation and identity do not reinforce the feelings or perceptions exhibited in the festival. What is revealed, on the other hand, is somewhat an emphasis on the differences that they experience or feel outside this specific space. Subjective identity, for these Filipino migrants, is an examination of their inner self, as in the case of Jessa, and a conscious effort to be different from other Filipinos, as in the cases of Yeng and the search for identity in other space, in the case of Maureen.

CONCLUSIONS

The reconstruction of nation and identity among Filipino migrants in Japan can be multi-dimensional. The objective component is easily discernible and can come in the form of semiotic resources such as signs and symbols that are shared by Filipinos in Japan. Certain spaces, such that of the Barrio Fiesta in Yokohama, allow these resources to emerge and to be utilized and such may foster unity and similarities, of remembering tradition and acknowledging the folk and indigenous. These are attributes which may pave the way for the reconstruction of a national identity and that sense of nation. On the other hand, the subjective reality, which involves self-processing and self-examination emphasizes on the differences rather than the similarities among Filipino migrants in Japan in the reconstruction of these concepts. They find stronger identification in other spaces such as religion.

Within the context of international migration therefore, identity and nation, as shown by the Filipino migrants in Japan, are slippery notions. This is because in the influx of globalizing forces, these concepts are shifting and dislocated. Objective reality enables these migrants to locate their identities while subjective realities fragment their reconstruction. Identities can be contradictory and therefore semiotic resources are not enough to fully recapture the nuances of these dislocations. The Filipino migrants’ subjective reality, in relation to these shared resources and

significations must also be considered. These will make the relationship between the public and economic spheres of the migrants and their internalization and projection more predictable and understandable.

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