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Rethinking Return from the ‘Left Ahead’: The Case of Filipino migrant workers in transnational spaces in Rome Italy

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Abstract

Taking a transnational approach to return migration, this article draws significance on the onsite migration experiences of migrant workers, dubbed as ‘left ahead’. Integrating transnationalism dimensions with the return preparedness framework, the study explores the return discourses ‘from above’ through institutional actors and policies in the Italy-Philippines migration nexus; and ‘from below’ through the narratives of migrant Filipino workers in the city of Rome. The article shows that return framings were seen as a process of preparation, rather than of permanence to the linear binary flow of human mobility. Such preparation is done by the migrant workers through economic, political, and socio-cultural transnational activities, which underscored the vitality of examining host-home links that migrant workers sustain under the conditionalities of both countries. The article highlights the vitality of the onsite stage of the migratory process, where development should also take place. It necessitates to critically look at how migrant workers are able to mobilize their resources under the host-home country conditions. The article supports the imperative of ‘deterritorializing’ development for the migrant workers for them to fully exercise their agency towards shaping their successful return.

Keywords: return migration; transnationalism; labor migration; return preparedness

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Transnationalizing return

Return migration has been a crucial component in analysing migratory flows. However, return dynamics now becomes multifaceted with the reality that return continues to become complex beyond the expected A to B and single out-and-return movement (Skeldon, 2012; Ammassari and Black, 2001; Guarnizo and Smith, 1998). Going beyond this dichotomy and understanding migrants' multiple attachments and varying migration return plans call for a transnational approach in return migration (Basch et al., 1994; Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002).

Positing a migration-development nexus¹, Cassarino (2004; 2008) emphasizes that for migrant workers to become development actors, return must be achieved successfully, and this calls for analysing the degree of maturation of migration experiences of migrants and how they are able to mobilize their resources in cross-border social and economic links and networks between their home and host countries. Nevertheless, the question remains why some returnees appear as actors of change while others do not (Cassarino, 2004; 2008). The same question is raised in the context of the Philippine's overseas labour migration (Go, 2012).

Filipino migrant workers, dubbed as Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), are practically in every corner of the world. Present in over 197 countries, the Philippines has been one of the largest migrant countries of origin in the world (Calzado, 2007). Despite being known for its labour export policy and institutionalized migration system, return migration has been the weakest link in the country's migration governance (McKenzie and Yang, 2015). Return and reintegration services were seen as a component of the government's overseas employment program that deems more attention (Go 2012; McKenzie and Yang, 2015).

In Europe, Italy has been the country of destination for the first wave of Filipino migrant settlers. As early as 1970s, single females and married women propelled the initial wave of migrants. Until now, such longevity continues as Filipino migrants secure a steadier and stronger foothold in the Italian society after maximizing the favourable laws for family reunification and permanent residency (Zafrini and Sarli, 2009).

Italy continues to be the top country of destination for Filipino migrant workers, including re-hires (POEA 2016) with Rome as the metropolitan Italian city having the second largest population of Filipinos with over 42,000 migrant workers (POLO, 2016). Philippines has the strongest participation rate of 80 per cent in the Italian labor market amongst all non-EU countries. Filipinos are the most active worker citizenry in Italy, of which 62 per cent are employed at the public, social, and personal service sector (Anpal Servizi, 2017). Filipino communities are heavily concentrated on the cities of Rome and Milan due to the high demands in the public and social service sector (Zafrini and Sarli, 2009). These cities, which Sassen (1991) referred to as ‘global cities’ serve as economic urban centers generating strong demand for international labor, particularly low-wage jobs in the services sector (Sassen, 1991). This is clearly seen in the case of Rome with the concentration of OFWs working under the tertiary sector.

Given the dynamics and longevity of the migration experiences of Filipinos in Italy, this study investigates both literature and empirical gaps in the case of return migration of OFWs working and living in Rome Italy, as it critically examines how return migration is framed ‘from above’ to identify how institutional actors and policies in the PH-Italy migration corridor, define and address return decisions and preparedness of OFWs; and ‘from below’ to unpack the lived migration experiences, resource mobilization, and individual return willingness and preparedness of OFWs in the

context of a transnational space in a host country. Accordingly, to determine what OFWs and their families can actually do or become as a result of their migration experience in Rome, the study provides a groundwork by critically looking at how OFWs are able to mobilize their resources and prepare for their return under the pre-return conditions in a host country in Europe.

Theoretical and conceptual framework

Typologies of Return

Various typologies of return migration have been argued based on the bedrock of migration theories (Cassarino, 2004) and on the length of stay and degree of acculturation in the host country (Cerase, 1974). Return underpinnings were also defined based on the intended return behaviour vis-à-vis the actual return outcome (Bovenkerk, 1974; Gmelch, 1980; King, 2000). Return behaviour was further differentiated based on the duration of return periods, which looked at return as occasional, seasonal, temporary, and permanent (King, 2000). From a country perspective, return typologies were also linked with the economic character of the origin and destination countries, which highlighted the return of labour migrants from developed industrial countries to their less-developed home countries (King, 2000).

However, a different notion on return emerged in the early 1990s with transnationalism advancing in return migration studies as migrants and their families maintain economic and social ties in both societies of origin and destination (Portes, 2001; Fokkema, 2011). This concept challenged the classical concept of linear binary flow of human mobility as it necessitates examining both links of migrants to their

home and host countries and how they sustain such links over time (Guarnizo and Smith, 1998; Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004; Faist and Baubock, 2010).

Return migration from a transnational perspective looks at return as a significant part of the migration cycle, wherein migrants prepare for their return and reintegration in a circular system of economic and social relationships and exchanges between their home and host countries. Return preparations involve periodic and regular visits in their country of origin as they continue to sustain their homeland ties (Cassarino, 2004). The attachment of migrant workers is not seen as linear, but simultaneous between two countries, which includes not just the migrants on the move, but also the non-migrants who are part of these networks and transnational practices. They are also being influenced by the migration experiences of migrants through both economic and social flow of capital, ideas, and information across borders (Levitt, 2004; Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004).

Gmelch (1980) and Cassarino (2004) further posited the importance of the actual economic and social environment in both the countries of origin and destination of the would-be returnees and how they are able to perceive their preparedness in meeting their expectations and targeted goals. Taking off from this argument, it is best to look at a return migration approach that links both structural conditions at host and home and analyzes the social spaces and blackbox of decision-making which captures the preparedness of the migrants themselves prior to their return.

Return Preparedness: The blackbox of return

Return preparedness covers both willingness and readiness to return. Willingness is the subjective power to choose the time of return. As migrant workers tend to weigh the

costs and benefits of one's return decision, they still have their subjective feeling on when they think is the right time to return (Cassarino, 2004; 2008). Correspondingly, this argument amplifies the concepts of capability, entitlement, and freedom articulated by Amartya Sen (1989), as migrant workers' cross-border mobility gives them the opportunity to choose the length, time, and manner of their own migration cycle and how they could develop their capabilities and achieve their aspirations (Castles and Ozkul, 2014; Skeldon, 2012).

Meanwhile readiness refers to how migrants are able to mobilize adequate tangible (economic) and intangible (social) resources they need to complete their migration cycle and return. Readiness posits return as an ongoing process wherein time, resources, experience, and other factors in both countries of origin and destination need to be sufficiently achieved (Cassarino, 2004; 2008).

By looking at both factors, analysing return preparedness brings the notion that return decisions are not merely based on personal choice, but also indicative of a migrant's degree of maturation and readiness. Cassarino (2004) noted that migrants may express their utmost willingness to return even if they are not ready to do so. Put differently, not all migrants who are willing to return will actually do so. Just as how the aspiration-ability model served as a benchmark for understanding how migration aspirations may not transpire into actual migration due to differences in aspiration and ability of migrants (Carling, 2002; Carling and Schewel, 2017), it is best to analyse and substantiate the same elements in determining a migrant's aspiration to return and his/her ability to return, wherein such ability is borne out of how he/she has been able to expand his capabilities and exercise his agency based on given structures in the home-host countries.

This raises the significance of looking at the blackbox of a migrant's willingness to return² and how it may or may not precede to the actual return behaviour.

Additionally, their return decisions may represent the general perceptions of migrants about their migration experiences and provide a better understanding of their future migration and return plans (De Haas and Fokkema, 2011; Bilgili and Siegel, 2014; Carling and Pettersen, 2014).

Towards operationalizing the return preparedness, two unit of analysis has been considered in this study. The 'transnationalism from below' (Guarnizo and Smith, 1999) takes individuals as point of departure and considers grassroots transnational activities, which are based on the lived experiences of migrants. To further organize the heterogeneity of transnational activities of migrants in the host country, this study employs the typology of transnationalism dimensions defined by Portes et al. (1999), wherein transnational activities are grouped into economic, political, and socio-cultural. In this context, these activities are considered as the migration experiences and pre-return conditions of the OFWs, which were used to assess the resource mobilization they have done while in the host country.

Meanwhile, the 'transnationalism from above' analyses the state-sponsored government activities from powerful institutional actors, particularly the state (Guarnizo and Smith, 1999; Portes et al., 1999). This study takes into account how return is framed from an institutional lens, and how the conditions in both home and host countries are able to facilitate or hamper the return preparedness of migrant workers. Figure 1 illustrates the study's framework showing the interrelationship of the concepts used in analysing return migration through a transnational approach.

(Figure 1 about here)

Method

Key Informant Interviews (KII) with the Philippine Overseas Labor and Employment Office (POLO); Italy's *Centro per l'impiego* (Center for Employment) staff; and migrant community and religious leaders were synthesized to compose the 'transnationalism from above' (Guarnizo and Smith, 1999) perspective on return. Alongside with the KII, policy reports and studies on Philippine-Italy migration also supplemented the institutional frameworks elaborated by the interviewees. Participant observations were also done for a month in common transnational spaces of Filipinos in Rome, which include Filipino restaurants; bus stops (*fermata*) in Ottaviano and Cipro areas with many Filipino migrants; *termini* stations where Filipinos meet up every Sundays; and Catholic churches conducting mass celebrations. Interviews with the key informants were conducted during a Filipino Community meeting at the Philippine Embassy in Rome last 2 July 2017. Graced by more than 50 Filipino communities, notable observations were also coded from the discussion during the meeting's open forum. These coded information were used to triangulate with other relevant points in the discussion of the study.

To be able to capture the migration experiences and return intentions of the Filipino migrant workers termed as 'transnationalism from below' (Guarnizo and Smith, 1999), face-to-face in-depth interviews using a semi-structured questionnaire were done with 22 OFWs in Rome³. The questionnaire is divided into five sections, namely: socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents; pre-migration experience and migration intentions; migration experiences in the host country, which were further divided into economic, political, and socio-cultural; and the return preparedness of the migrants, which intended to capture both willingness which has been operationalized as return

intention, and readiness to return; and the underlying determinants for their return decisions.

The interviews were conducted in three Filipino restaurants in Rome. The interview guide and the interview proper were done in *Tagalog*, the Filipino language, to fit the background, vocabulary, and comprehension of the respondents. With the researcher as her own research tool, probing questions were posed between questions in order to acquire more narratives and detailed information from the questions posed in the interview guide (Kvale, 1999).

Results and Discussion

Transnationalism from above

The Philippines' labour export policy could be traced back during the boom of deployment of Filipino workers in oil-rich Gulf countries in 1970. The massive contract-based employment kicked-off the beginning of an overseas labour program anchored on facilitating the demand for what has been originally termed as Overseas Contract Workers (OCWs) (IOM, 2013; Batistella, 1999).

At present, the policies of the country's overseas employment program remain strongly anchored on the contract-based, job order deployment system as Filipino migrant workers are continuously covered by an employment contract mediated by private recruitment agencies. This scenario posits a linear flow of return, wherein OFWs are expected to return to the country after the expiration of their contracts and/or renew and be re-hired under the same employer until such time that their services are no longer needed. Consequently, the Philippine government's return and reintegration programs

focus on services geared towards return migrants who would stay in the Philippines permanently. Although the programs cover economic, psychosocial, and social reintegration, the former is at the core of the country's return and reintegration strategy, where the idea rests on offering opportunities for income-generating activities such as starting a business/livelihood or upgrading skills that would fit to the needs of the local labour market (see Table 1). Consequently, such binary migration flow and management may pose problems to destination countries such as Italy, that provides favourable laws and programs for migrant workers who want to stay, work, and live, beyond the dictates of their work contracts.

(Table 1 about here)

The Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO)⁴ has the perception that Filipino workers in Rome are already in a much better socio-economic position, with their migration and return intentions continuously changing. Starting with an economically-driven pursuit to earn for their families, changes happen during their life cycles and migration experiences in Italy. Most OFWs realize how the Italian government could offer better social services and benefits for workers and their dependents, alongside with the lenient laws for family reunification. As such, their intentions to return also shift as most of them prefer to extend their stay, petition their family members, and settle in Italy until retirement.

However, this condition is being thwarted by the limited employment opportunities since majority of the jobs offered by Italians to Filipino migrant workers are only under the tertiary sector, specifically on public, social, and personal services. Evidently, the issue of a segmented labour market prevails for OFWs in Rome given

that over 80 per cent of the Filipino migrants are working under the domestic and services sector, these workers have already been boxed in their jobs as domestic workers (*colf*), caregivers (*badante*), babysitters, and other household work (*domestico operai*) (Apnal Servizi, 2017). Recognition of skills has been a great predicament for Filipino workers in Italy's labour market since their acquired degrees, trainings, and certifications from the Philippines are not being recognized by the Italian government (POLO, 2016). Such segmentation corresponds to the 'ethnic specialization' situation of the Italian labour market, which limits the opportunities for Filipinos to upgrade their skills and achieve greater employability in other sectors.

Accordingly, this scenario attests to the segmented labour market theory, wherein the gulf between primary and secondary labour markets prevails as an offshoot of structural and institutional policies. Wage differentials are evident in the multi-polarization of the labour market based on ethnicity, gender, or minority status and not of one's human capital (Castles, 2010). This complex segmentation is evident in global cities with demographics of labour supply creating demand for labor force who are willing to work under unfavourable working conditions with blurry chances for economic and social upgrading (Sassen, 1991; Massey et al., 1993).

Providing a picture of the host country, a representative from the Center for Employment or *Centro per l'impiego* of the Italian government in Rome, believes that the Italian government is doing its part in improving the employability and return preparedness of migrant workers. The Italian government has recognized the importance of migrant workers in both economic and social mainstream, and thus instigating a multicultural approach instead of total assimilation policies. Such socio-political structural change recognizes the individuality of the non-European citizens in Italy, which then open opportunities for everyone to actively participate in the labour

force. While the Italian government is offering a lot of programs for the development of its migrants, the problem is weak linkages and coordination of Filipino communities with Italian associations. Likewise, despite the promotion of free trainings that only requires 200 hours to get an Italian certification, Filipino migrant workers would still prioritize their work since they need to earn regularly.

Meso-structures such as Filipino Communities (FilComs) and religious communities have also significant roles in both the perpetration and circulation of migration and return in Rome. This relates to the transnational approach that asserts the need to go beyond territorial limitation and nation-state boundaries to analyse the social world of migrants. As such, the creation of social spaces has been one of the features of transnationalism as it looks on how migrants establish communities and collective spheres in host countries (Sassen 1991; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004).

In the case of Rome, strong networks of Filipino communities and associations are mostly bounded by the kind of job, ethnicity, and religion. Both Italian and Philippine institutions recognize the presence and value of FilComs as safety nets and support systems of OFWs as they economically and socially integrate in the Italian-Filipino way of life. Through social networks, migrants collectively reconfigure spaces in such a way that they are able to balance a simultaneous life in two or more nation-states. (Basch et al.1995).

The president of the Unified Democratic Filipino Community of Naples shared the sentiments of his Filipino migrant members working in Rome. He noted that those who have saved and attempted to explore opportunities for entrepreneurship during their return visits experienced failure to sustain their businesses. The unfavourable environment at home and the limited prospects, which have usually revolved in setting-up a small variety (*sari-sari*) store, owning a tricycle, or starting an agriculture or

poultry business, have made OFWs decide to return to Italy and stick to their household jobs, earning 500 to 800 euros monthly.

Clearly, the importance of a sustainable return for migrant workers was emphasized, wherein they would be assisted in planning, establishing, and sustaining their intended enterprises. While government programs are in place for migrant workers upon their return, often referred to as reintegration these groups elucidated that they first want to establish something at home for their families, and still go back and work longer in Italy, thus maintaining transnational ties between their origin and destination countries.

Transnationalism from Below

A total of 22 OFWs were interviewed to capture the ‘transnationalism from below’ perspective (Guarnizo and Smith 1999). These OFWs are either independent single women (35.3 per cent) who serve as financial supporters to their parents, siblings, and members of their extended family, or mothers (64.7 per cent) who led the ‘migration project’ of her family and thus acting as a breadwinner to provide for the household back home. They belong to the 40s to late 50s age cohort and have reached and/or finished tertiary education. In terms of geographical origin at the home country, the concentration of the regions of the OFW respondents are located in Luzon, with strong a dichotomy from Batangas and Ilocos provinces. Strong migrant networks have existed on these provinces, which facilitated the perpetuation of influx by means of kinship, neighbourhood or barangay connections, and family friends who are already in Italy. A summary of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents is presented in Table 2.

(Table 2 about here)

The main reason for migration of the respondents remains economic-driven as financial needs prevail as the main push factor for the migration decision of the respondents. The decision to migrate, particularly of women respondents with families at home were made as a strategy of the household. This supports the point of departure taken by New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) wherein decisions to migrate are being made as part of a household's strategy towards securing its own livelihood portfolio (Stark, 1991; Massey et al., 1993). While perceived by the respondents as a family decision, the intra-household power relations could be distinguished as spouses would decide that the woman migrates first since it is easier for them to find a job due to the high demand in the tertiary sector. It has also been seen as a form of sacrifice for the woman, having that obligatory feeling to help her spouse in supporting the family and earn some authority by means of contributing to the income of the household (Zafrini and Sarli, 2009; Ribas-Mateos and Basa, 2013).

Examining the means on how the respondents were able to find a job and settle in Rome highlighted the significance of social networks and the role of transnational ties maintained by the first-generation migrants. The role of the household/kinship, community ties, and friendship linking the home and host countries is crucial in perpetuating mobility and direction of international migration. The first-generation migrants have established strong social capitals, which also benefited their non-migrant household members and have influenced their migratory behaviour. In a meso-level, the strong linkages and social networks created by migrants in their communities at home have also sparked the migration intentions of other community members (Massey et al.,

1993). As such, this scenario attests that the mobilization of social networks allowed migrant workers from developing states to continuously engage in transnational flow of labour, which may not necessarily pass through the cumbersome legal process, but on the maximization of social capital (Portes et al., 1999).

Economic Transnationalism.

Filipino migrant workers are not exempted from Italy's 'ethnic-specialized' labor market scheme, being the prime labor force for the tertiary sector, specifically on social, personal and public services. Table 3 shows how the respondents are employed in the said sector.

(Table 3 about here)

Given the limited opportunities for labour despite having college degrees, most respondents have just re-defined the meaning of economic upgrading, which for them is their ability to acquire and maintain more than one job. For them, upgrading in their work would mean increased mobility, but still under the tertiary sector. These OFWs believe that if they could not improve the quality of their work into higher-paying jobs, at least they are able to earn more by securing more jobs available for them.

On the same note, most of the respondents have expressed that being a live-out or freelance worker for them is also a form of economic upgrading, wherein they could negotiate with their employers the schedule and length of working hours, instead of serving as live-in, wherein they have no flexibility in terms of time and opportunity to secure domestic jobs in other households. These workers affirmed that exercising their human agency, gaining control over their working lives, and freely choosing how to utilize their human and social capital towards increased opportunities and income have

already been their form of upgrading. For 46-year old Lorna, juggling her time in different houses every week has been her way of being economically upgraded in terms of additional income. She remarked, ‘I am serving in four different households in a week in different schedules. This is the only way I see to increase my income and send more for my family back home. It may look hard, but you just need a strong will to do everything’.

Still, majority of the respondents remain affirmative on the positive impact of their migration experience to the improvement of their lives and their families. For these OFWs, the need to earn and improve the socio-economic status of their family is much more important than their own personal growth. The meaning of satisfaction has been more of achieving their goals for the family through a job, which may not be their dream decent job, but a job that would give them income to materialize their goals for their non-migrant members. Job satisfaction or fulfilment has already been translated into their full acceptance of their stereotyped and bounded job prospects and making the most out of what is available for them in the tertiary labour market. This cultural trait of sheer endurance for survival is driven by the OFWs’ personal shame (*hiya*) of being empty-handedness to their non-migrant family members, if they would not accept their condition. For Filipino workers, the real failure of their migration comes if they are not able to bring the benefits of their migration efforts to their kin at home (Aguilar Jr., 2014).

This stance is reflected in the narrative of 35-year-old Jenny. She shared that as long as she has work in Rome, she knows she is fulfilling her responsibilities as a mother to her children back home. She emphasized, ‘As long as I earn and send remittances to my family, I know I’m doing fine here [in Rome]. I still have two little children back home and their future will be secured as long as I’m here working’.

Meanwhile for OFW mothers like Gina, she highlighted that investing in human capital is tantamount to a financial investment. Sending remittances for the education of their children is her long-term strategy of expressing her preparation for return. When asked about her investment plans as a migrant worker, Gina shared:

I want my children to be educated and get better jobs with good salaries. I'm here at Rome to work and support their schooling. I can only go home if I have seen them all graduate from college. So that when I go back home, I know I have made a good investment for my children

Political Transnationalism.

On citizenship choice, only one out of the 22 respondents have already changed his citizenship from Filipino to Italian, and another one expressed intention to apply for dual citizenship. The remaining respondents were clear with their disposition that they do not want to renounce their Filipino citizenship nor apply for dual.

Most respondents conveyed that it is already enough for them to secure a long-term residence permit or *Carta di Soggiorno* to secure their social status and employment in Rome. Likewise, those with 2-year temporary renewable residence permits also shared that they don't have plans to change their citizenship. They just aim to meet the requirements in securing a long-term residence permit. The choice of preferring long-term residence permits instead of acquiring naturalization or citizenship change is indicative of the OFWs' return plans of still going back in the Philippines for good. For Linda, she believes that there is no need for a citizenship change as long as she could remain economically secure with a permanent residence permit. As Linda argued:

There is no need to change citizenship. Since we have an unlimited residence permit, it already allows us to move to and from the Philippines, have the same social benefits with that of the Italians, and live like locals here in Rome. Things will get more complicated if we change citizenship. Besides, we are just here to work.

Nevertheless, legality and status quo has been a recurring issue which critically affects the ‘agency’ of migrant workers on how they could have a certain degree of control and mobility over their resource mobilization and transnational engagements towards increasing their return preparedness. In the case of the respondents, it is clear that those who secured a long-term permanent residence permit are able to maximize more gains out of their migration experience compared to those with renewable 2-year working permits, who are at the mercy of their employers. Their status quo in the Italian society allows or constrains their aspirations and capabilities to mobilize their capitals, which may even cause their involuntary immobility to actualize their return behavior (Carling 2002). This highlights the significance that mobility is a migratory agency that affects migration and return decisions of migrants (Carling and Schewel 2017; De Haas 2014). Further, the mobility of migrant workers is being influenced by macro-level structures that could promote or prevent migrants to realize their full potential (what they want to do) and how are they be able to materialize such aspirations through their own capabilities (what they are able to do).

In terms of their connection with local events, the respondents have stronger ties with the news in their home country compared to their support to local news channels in the host country. All respondents update themselves with the latest happenings in the Philippines, particularly through social media channels such as *Facebook* and *Youtube*, while others have subscribed to Filipino global channels online.

Despite their physical absence in their national territory, Filipino migrant workers have been a crucial population of voters, which is recognized by the Philippine government, thus providing them means to vote through Overseas Absentee Voting. 36.4 per cent of the respondents still exercise their right to vote by participating in the Philippine elections. For them, it is their way of making their voices heard as overseas voters. Relating to return preparedness, the respondents raised their concern of choosing the right leaders that would support OFWs and would provide programs that would assist them in their future plans.

Socio-Cultural Transnationalism.

Cheap travel and instantaneous communication allowed immigrants to exploit social and economic interactions as they live a life across borders. As noted in this case, all respondents expressed their back and forth movement from Rome to Philippines through return visits. Looking at the frequency and patterns of their visits, 7 of them are doing return visits on a yearly basis, especially on Christmas season and other special occasions. Also, 7 have visits done every two years given that they cannot easily seek for vacation from their employer or transportation on their available schedules are already expensive. The remaining respondents have noted that they have indefinite schedules of return visits, which depend as the need arises. For these respondents, they perceive temporary return as pricey while believing that their physical absence is somehow compensated by the remittances they are sending regularly.

Technological advances have been identified by Portes et al. (1999) as one of the necessary conditions for transnationalism to emerge. Transnational movement has been made easier by advances in both transportation and communication, which allows back and forth movement of migrant workers with greater accessibility and

affordability. As such, the development of technologies has provided greater and more frequent connection of migrants with their home countries. This comfort of connecting to home in one touch has been maximized by all respondents in various regularities. All of them are keeping in touch with their families in the Philippines through mobile applications such as *Skype*, *Viber*, *Whatsapp*, and *Facebook*.

Language has also been a crucial factor for OFWs in Italy. They have seen the necessity of speaking the same language not just for formality, but as a tool for empowerment not only in their jobs and in almost all aspects of their everyday living. As a household service worker, Marian already felt the need to learn the language, so that she could understand the instructions from her employer. Her self-taught Italian language skills help her survive her daily toil. She remarked, 'You need to learn Italian especially if you are working as a domestic helper. It is the only way you could defend yourself from your employer. It will also be hard for someone here in Rome to live and work without speaking their language'.

Return Preparedness

Return Willingness.

To determine the respondents' return willingness, which was operationalized in this study through their return intentions, 18 of them expressed clearly that they want to return to the Philippines and stay there for good. Meanwhile, the remaining 4 conveyed their intention to stay in Italy.

Relating with civil status, it could be observed that return intentions to go back to the home country is higher with Filipino migrant workers who have children left with their relatives and/or extended families. As first-generation migrant-parents, they strongly narrated that they do not want their children to join them in Rome, especially those with children who are in college and those who have already graduated. They do not want to put into waste the education they invested on their children, as meagre and limited labour market opportunities only await them if they try to join their parents in Rome.

Interestingly, one commonality of parent OFWs is that most of them have children working overseas, but in better destination countries where they could practice their degrees and profession. The OFW respondents believe they have influenced the migration decisions of their children on searching for better-paying jobs outside the country and bearing into their minds wiser selection of destination countries. Two migrant-parents, Beth and Ronaldo, both shared their certitude of having their children work in other destination countries and become professionals in their chosen fields. A 48-year old mother to her newly-graduated daughter, Beth shared that she encouraged her daughter to pursue her dreams of becoming a Pharmacist elsewhere. ‘When my eldest daughter asked if she could join me here, I refused. She has no future here. She also wanted to work overseas, but I told her to look for a country that will recognize her skills. Now, she is applying as a pharmacist in the Middle East’.

On the same note, Ronaldo feels contented and secured with the future of his children who are all migrant workers but are recognized professionals in other destination countries. He shared:

All of my sons are also OFWs. My eldest is in Canada, the second is in Singapore, while my youngest is in Dubai. I believe they have learned something from the

experiences of their parents. While we are about to retire in Italy, I'm more than happy to see them as OFWs but overseas workers who are practicing their professions.

The conflict of return intentions could also be observed between first and second-generation migrants in the host country. The case of teenage Filipinos who were born, raised, and schooled in Rome already have a different migratory projection compared to their first-generation parents who have clear plans of going home after retirement. These teens may have already envisioned themselves to integrate and stay in Italy for good. When asked, the parents would still insist to imbibe the Filipino way of life for their children and they do not want them to share the same fate.

On a different, yet optimistic note, return intentions are weaker in the case of single and separated women migrant workers. Most of them recount that they are more satisfied living in Rome and they are aiming to improve their human capital by exploring different learning opportunities such as skills training and language courses since their previous certifications and credentials are not being recognized. In addition, these OFWs have high hopes they could settle and create a family in the host country or in other possible third country destination. For Linda, she remains in high hopes that her she can build her future in Italy or in any country in Europe. She added that just being in Europe is already an opportunity that should not be wasted, as she shared:

Life is better here in Italy than going back in the Philippines. While it is true that there is no other work here and only for household jobs, I still want to start a life here and build my own family, whether it may be with an Italian or with a Filipino. Not all Filipinos are given the chance to have a life in other countries, especially in a European country like Italy.

Return Preparedness.

For the respondents who expressed their intentions to return to the Philippines, they were asked if they have a plan in mind when is the right time for them to return and what are the factors that they consider for them to say that they are ready to go back home. Table 4 sums up their perceived return readiness period.

(Table 4 about here)

Analysing return readiness with their structural situation, most respondents are unable to determine their level of readiness given their limited and weakening ability to mobilize their resources towards securing a better and more sustainable return in the future due to such conditions in Rome. It could be noted that the greater the ability of OFWs in resource mobilization, the higher level of readiness and preparedness, could be observed. Consequently, OFWs with higher preparedness level could contribute more by the time they return to the Philippines or through the transnational ties they continuously sustain at home.

Further analysing the factors that the migrant workers consider for their return readiness, they were asked to identify individual and structural factors that affect their return preparedness. Clearly, economic justifications remain as the topmost return indicator for Filipino migrant workers, which focus on their goal to achieve enough savings to either start a small family business when they return. All the same, most OFWs articulated that they are having a hard time to save something out of their income since they send the bulk of their salaries to their families, or even to relatives in need. It took some time for them to meet their target savings to materialize their return plans. This coincides with the target-saver image of migrants under return of conservatism

(Cerase, 1974), wherein return can only be achieved once they have reached their aimed aspirations for their return, whether through setting-up of business, having enough savings, and building a house (Abainza and Calfat, 2018).

For most female respondents, the fulfilment of educational needs of their children has been a main indicator. Despite the failure to save from their earnings, OFW mothers would equate financial savings with the accomplishments of their children in school. For them, human capital is the best investment they consider.

Secondly, life cycle is a factor in understanding return intentions of OFWs in Rome. Migrants in ages 50 and above have reached the maturation of their migration experience and are already counting years towards their retirement age. By the time they are already receiving their pensions from the Italian government, they would intend to go back in the Philippines and just return to Italy to maintain their *Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Sociale* (INPS) pension. Consequently, retirement is a preparedness indicator for them. Retiring from work is tantamount to a maximized migration experience in Rome. As long as their body could still endure their work, they believe they are still bound to earn. When they have reached their retiring age and secured their pension, it is a signal for them to go back home. Accordingly, these Filipinos frame their return in a 'return for retirement' perspective (Cerase, 1974).

By looking at both intentions and readiness expressed by the respondents, it holds true that even if OFWs would clearly narrate their willingness to go home, they cannot do it since they know they are not ready to do so. This reflects the aspiration-ability dilemma wherein return intentions may or may not actually proceed to the actual return and thus varying their return migration patterns (Carling, 2002; Carling and Schewel, 2007). Nevertheless, their intention to go back to the Philippines reflects their transnational migration experiences in Rome, wherein their ties with the home country

has always been embedded and at the zenith of their daily lives in all aspects, whether it may be economic, political, and socio-cultural.

Competing return framings

Towards establishing the competing and complementing framings from the discourses and narratives culled from ‘above’ and ‘below’ framings on return migration, Table 5 recapitulates the salient points from the narratives on the ground. The discussion shows the varying constructs of each key player in the migration cycle.

(Table 5 about here)

Conclusion

This study established the return framings and realities from the narratives of structures and spaces in Rome Italy and if such returning and settling for good is essential for countries of destination to reap migration benefits toward its own development. From the empirical case of OFWs in Rome, return framings were seen as a process of preparation, rather than an end to a linear binary flow of human mobility with finality of reintegration. Such preparation was done by migrant workers through transnational activities, which underscored the vitality of examining the host-home links that migrant workers sustain under the conditionalities of both countries.

As this study explored labour migration from a transnational approach, the results challenged the conventional assimilation assumption wherein migrants are expected to adapt within the context of their destination countries. Even if migrants

were integrated in the host societies, they continue to maintain their involvement in the economic, political, and socio-cultural dimensions of their home countries. From the transnational activities done by OFWs in these facets, they have showed how they are able to frame return as a process with indefinite permanence and maturation that transcends various theoretical underpinnings of return. They sustain their ties with their families, communities, and the country in so many ways beyond remittance flows. Homecoming has been redefined more than a fixed physical movement of OFWs back to their home country but recognizing and maximizing the benefits of transnational ties until such time that they are prepared to return.

On a structural level, the trend of labour migration in Italy goes beyond the idea of the guest worker model, which is the anchor of the Philippine's current overseas employment program. While Italy as the host country provides the options for Filipino workers to be integrated in the Italian labour market and the country's society in general, the continuous transnational ties of OFWs, their economically-driven aspirations, and their return intentions, still reflect the temporariness of their stay in Italy.

Accentuating the salient points from the lived experiences of the OFWs, it is clear that their migration plans were merely functional with return intentions attuned to the return of conservatism. However, despite having their long length of stay and clear intentions to go back, their degree of maturation and readiness remains ill-equipped. This articulates the vitality of onsite structures of origin country, in this case the Philippine labour institutions onsite, on how it could provide meaningful interventions towards increasing the level of preparedness of OFWs. This pitches the imperative for 'deterritorializing' development (Nijenhuis and Leung, 2017) for increased return preparedness and thus going beyond in-country approaches. It deems to bring

development into the unfixed spaces where migration and the lives of migrants should also take place.

In terms of economic mobility and upgrading, these structures have a significant role to play in strengthening sound bilateral agreements to be able to establish a harmonious interplay of host integration and home reintegration. Return is not merely about the willingness of the migrant workers, but also on how they are provided with an enabling environment at destination countries where they could mobilize their resources and prepare for return.

Given the ethnic specialization and social exclusion evident in the Italian labor market, the POLO may work with the *Italia Lavoro* to negotiate on provisions on how Filipino workers and their families onsite could expand their human capital in terms of better working conditions; recognition of their skills and trainings; higher-paying jobs across other sectors; and increased access and mobility of social services as they continue to fuel Italy's Non-European workforce. This will allow migrants to exercise their agency towards achieving their aspired objectives from the migration process, and thus shape their pre-return conditions towards successful return.

Lastly, both Philippines and Italy are called to strike a balance between sovereignty and hospitality in dealing with Filipino migrant workers continuously on the move. Instead of strengthening borders and mapping return migration as a one-way streak and stop, return policies needs to acknowledge criss-crossing social spaces, blurring boundaries, inclusionary and exclusionary social mechanisms (Vathi et al., 2018) as the 'left ahead' transmigrants continue to re-define borders as they build their return decisions and preparations through time in today's transnational age.

Notes

1. Return is identified as one of the three Rs in the migration-development equation. Even if they would not return immediately, migrants are considered development contributors through the links and investments they maintain with their home countries. Returning migrants were seen as change agents who could accelerate development at home through remittances and skills transfer (Martin and Sirkeci 2017).
2. Return willingness in Cassarino's return preparedness framework was operationalized in this study by means of determining the return intentions of the respondents and how their intentions to return may or may not precede to their actual return behavior.
3. The names of the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) interviewed are pseudonyms to observe full anonymity and confidentiality.
4. The Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) serves as the overseas operating arm of the Philippine government in the implementation of labor policies and programs for the protection of the rights, welfare, and interests of Overseas Filipino Workers in various destination countries (POLO 2016).

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Table 1 Philippine return and reintegration programs

NAME OF PROGRAM	IMPLEMENTING AGENCY	DESCRIPTION
Livelihood Development Assistance Program (LDAP); <i>Balik-Pinas! Balik-Hanapbuhay!</i> Program (BPHP); and <i>Tulong Pangkabuhayan sa Pag-unlad ng Samahang OFWs (Tulong Puso)</i>	Overseas Workers Welfare Administration – National Reintegration Center for OFWs (OWWA-NRCO)	<p>All of these programs provide entrepreneurial trainings and start-up kits to support establishment of enterprises. The LDAP provides a livelihood/business enterprise start-up kit worth Php10,000 to undocumented OFW returnees.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the BPHP prioritizes women and/or OWWA members who were displaced due to hostilities and conflict in their host countries and distressed household workers. The BPHP program provides livelihood package/assistance through non-cash support via livelihood starter kits and entrepreneurial training, amounting to a maximum of Php20,000, to returning displaced or distressed OFWs. Aside from the livelihood package, OWWA will assist OFW-beneficiaries in partnering with other government institutions and market linkages in order to sustain their intended businesses and entrepreneurial projects.</p> <p>The <i>Tulong Puso</i> program of OWWA caters to OFW organizations and cooperatives aiming to start and/or restore their livelihood projects. OFW organizations with more than 51 OFW-members can avail up to Php1,000,000 amount of livelihood grant in the form of raw materials, equipment, tools, and jigs.</p>
<i>Sa Pilipinas Ikaw ang Maam and Sir</i> (SPIMS) Project	Overseas Workers Welfare Administration – National Reintegration Center for OFWs (OWWA-NRCO) in partnership with the Department of Education	This project encourages licensed teachers who worked overseas as Household Service Workers (HSW) to return and to pursue a teaching profession. It aims to

	(DepEd), Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), Philippine Normal University (PNU)	re-train HSWs on the skills and competencies needed for a Teacher 1 position set by the Department of Education. The government targets to assist OFWs who already passed the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) through this brain-gain initiative that encourages teachers deployed overseas to practice their profession in the Philippines.
Enterprise Development and Loan Program (ELDP)	Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) in partnership with Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP) and Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP)	The EDLP program is an enterprise development intervention and loan facility. Individual OFWs can avail loans for their proposed livelihood and business ventures from a minimum of Php100,000 to a maximum of Php 2,000,000, while group loan borrowers can avail from Php100,000 up to Php5,000,000 with an annual interest rate of 7.5 percent for the entirety of the loan.
Skills Training for Returning OFWS	Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) in partnership with the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA)	TESDA will provide skills training and vocational courses for returning OFWs and their immediate family members to equip them in finding local employment opportunities or for re-employment outside the country. Onsite skills training in countries with high number of distressed OFWs will also be considered.
Recovery and Reintegration Program for Trafficked Persons	Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)	Comprehensive assistance program that provides adequate recovery and reintegration services to trafficked persons by addressing psychosocial, social, and economic needs.
<i>BaLinkbayan</i>	Commission on Filipino Overseas (CFO)	A one-stop online portal for diaspora engagement that links overseas Filipinos with national and local governments in starting a business as well as opportunities of volunteer and donations.

Source: Authors' compilation based on Go (2012), Monteramos (2015), <https://owwa.gov.ph/index.php/programs-services/reintegration>, <https://cfo.gov.ph/balinkbayan-overseas-filipinos-one-stop-online-portal-for-diaspora-engagement/>

Note: This table lists the programs that are currently active and hence not exhaustive of all return and reintegration programs that the Philippine government has implemented.

Table 2. Distribution of OFW respondents based on Socio-Demographic Characteristics

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS	FREQUENCY N = 22	DISTRIBUTION (%)
Age		
20 and below	0	0
21-30	1	4.5
31-40	5	22.7
41-50	7	31.9
51-60	9	40.9
60 and above	0	0
Civil Status		
Married	13	59.1
Separated	2	9.1
Widow	0	0
Single	7	31.9
Gender		
Male	5	22.7
Female	17	77.3
Educational attainment		
None	0	0
Elementary	0	0
High school	7	31.9
College	13	59.1
Vocational	2	9.1
Geographical origin		
Luzon	17	77.3
Visayas	2	9.1
Mindanao	3	13.6

Table 3. Distribution of OFW respondents based on Employment

EMPLOYMENT	FREQUENCY N = 22	DISTRIBUTION (%)
Household Service Worker (<i>Colf</i>)	10	45.46
Caregiver (<i>Badante</i>)	3	13.64
Babysitter	2	9.09
Physical Therapist	1	4.55
Driver	1	4.55
Service Crew (Restaurant and Hotels)	2	9.09
Others (e.g.Sales Staff)	3	13.64

Table 4. Distribution of OFW respondents based on perceived period of return readiness

PERCEIVED PERIOD OF RETURN READINESS	FREQUENCY N = 18	DISTRIBUTION (%)
3-5 years	5	27.8
6-10 years	1	5.6
11 years or more	1	5.6
I don't know	11	61.1

Table 5. Return Framings from Labor Migration actors in Rome Italy

ACTORS		HOW RETURN IS FRAMED	
FROM ABOVE			
Home Country (Philippines)		Return as binary and linear; reunification with the country of origin; and the end of the migration-cycle which is usually based under the provisions of an employment contract.	
Host Country (Italy)		<p>Return as opening doors to a plurilocal environment and integrating the influx and permanency of non-nationals in the economic, social, and political sphere.</p> <p>OFWs might only be seen as economically integrated, specifically on the tertiary sector only, but not in the Italian society in general. Specialization, which is already tantamount to segregation, implies the host country’s notion of return without any ties to reintegration of the migrant.</p>	
Meso-structures Filipino Communities (FILCOM)		Return as mobilization of social capital and networks towards collective action and aspiration of migrant workers in both home and host countries; and creation of ‘ethnoscapes’ to serve as OFWs’ second home.	
FROM BELOW			
Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs)		<p>Return as a process of accumulation and preparation, which involves transnational activities towards effectively mobilizing the resources they need and the targeted goals they aspire, which will be their indicators for return readiness in the future.</p> <p>OFWs are functional and economically-driven; they do not aspire for assimilation, but for maximized integration where they could make use of their capabilities for better mobility and economic upgrading.</p>	

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Authors' elaboration and interpretation based on Cassarino (2004); Guarnizo and Smith (1999); Portes, et al. (1999).