

Themes in Globalization Studies in the Philippines: Towards Definition of a Research Agenda

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Conceptualizing Globalization

In this paper, I talk about the discourses and debates on globalization that can be found in discursive practices of scholars and public intellectuals, particularly those who are in different ways connected to the intellectual community in the University of the Philippines. My review covers a set of purposively selected publications by Filipinos and scholars on Philippine studies, which render more visible how globalization becomes embodied. The presentation includes a discussion of possible research questions under the rubric of globalization studies, and ends with suggestions for the conduct of collaborative and comparative research.

Scholars and public intellectuals in the Philippines speak of globalization as a *process* of increasing global integration of finance (Paderanga 1998), trade (Paderanga 2000), capital, production, and markets (Bello 2005). Globalization is the *flow* of money, goods, information, and people in increasing speed and magnitude of movement (David 2001, 51). They also speak of globalization in terms of how the creation of supranational *spaces* and transnational *practices* has prompted the problematization of what used to be stable concepts, such as "state," "nation," "identity," (Pertierra 1995; David 2001) and "family" (Piñgol 2001; Parreñas 2003, 2005), and in terms of how the globalization process has actually *transformed social life* (David 2001, 2002; Parreñas 2003, 2005; Tadiar 2004; Hau 2004). There is consensus in recognizing that this increasing integration, speed, and magnitude of movement is facilitated by advances in communication and transportation technology (Paderanga 2000; David 2001, 2002; Bello 2005; Tadiar 2004; Hau 2004).

The "darker side" of globalization became more apparent in events such as the Asian financial crisis and the financial meltdown in Russia (Paderanga 2000). Discussions on neo-liberalism have included how states should be capable of implementing, even minimally so, measures that will check market players and promote social equality. The problematic is how to insulate the Philippine state from vested interests, including transnational vested interests. Research on appropriate policy responses is now complemented by research on corruption, transparency, and accountability, and by studies which analyze how states in the South can gain the most from existing treaties within the GATT-UR, like the TRIPS (see, for example, Masungu, Villanueva, and Blasetti 2004).

A contending view holds that globalization is the resurgence of a particular tendency within the dominant system — a tendency which re-emerged out of a historically specific social context. Globalization is a desperate attempt to salvage the crisis-ridden corporate-driven capitalist (Bello 2005; Raymundo 2007) system, where myths about choice and freedom are promoted to conceal the process' violence and the social costs that are borne by the marginalized and the vulnerable (Hau 2004; Bello 2005; Raymundo 2007).

Globalization as a process is dominated by US capitalism through the deployment of both force and

persuasion (Hau 2004). But because globalization has been rendered as the only alternative, the globalized world is misconstrued as the "borderless world of bigger and more promising opportunities for the redefinition and extension of social identities" (Raymundo 2007, 37). Thus, they see the need to conceptualize the globalization process not simply as a choice between protectionism and liberalism, but as being about the *power* of transnational capital and its instrumentalities to homogenize every facet of social life and turn these into nothing but commodities.

Bello (2002) argues that the appropriate response to globalization is deglobalization. This is achieved, not by reforming but by dismantling the system — by denying legitimacy to its instrumentalities such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Bretton Woods institutions. Toward this, others argue that the appropriate response is to de-link or deny legitimacy and to create alternative policy spaces and alternative instrumentalities. Deglobalization, says Bello, entails re-empowering the local by building alternative systems, such as direct people-to-people trade, and by re-orienting economies from production for export to production for the local market.

Embodied Globalization: Globalization and the Small Farmer

The transformations brought about by globalization are etched in the changing landscape and lifestyles in the rural areas. There are contending views regarding the nature and direction of these transformations. There are those who speak of globalization as the inescapable and commanding beat of the march towards progress, (Magno 1994) where the values of individual choice and freedom reign supreme. It is a difficult process, where there are winners and losers, and some of us will have to grin and bear it while the whole country tries to catch up with the rest of the world. In 1994, political scientist Alex Magno articulated this view when he framed the heated debate over whether or not the Philippine government should ratify the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in this manner:

The strategy of liberalization aims to transform us into a trading economy. The path of high growth through participation in the global market is expected to open new jobs by opening new opportunities.

...The dividing line is now drawn between those groups and sectors favoring the maintenance of the old regime of counter-productive protectionism and the extensive state subsidies this entails and those groups and sectors favoring the acceptance of short-term costs in order to move our economy out of the framework of low-growth and incoherence with the global economy.

...In this debate, *the progressive forces are those standing behind the package of reforms that will move us away from the oligarchic and protectionist arrangement. The conservatives are those who will resist moving into the challenging transition.* (Magno 1994, 1-2; emphasis mine)

Organizations of small farmers argue otherwise:

"... while the treaty may indeed spur some surge in trade revenues, *the gains will not redound to those who will primarily bear GATT's terrible costs — the country's embattled peasantry.*

...By agreeing to throw out all quantitative restrictions and increasingly reduce the tariffs

protecting local agriculture, government will pit our small farmers' produce against a flood of cheaper, more competitive imports. As expected, we *cannot ably compete with countries whose farmers were bolstered by years of government support, an advantage our farmers never had.*"(PPI 1994, 46; emphasis mine)

In 2000, under the Unitwin (University Twinning) program of UNESCO, PRELUDE (Production of Regional Electronic Teaching Aids for University Development) was established. One PRELUDE textbook and accompanying CD is a compilation of poignant stories and photos that document the everyday lives of seven farmers from across Asia (China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand). While the original intention of these narratives and images is to show how rice farming shapes social relations, reading the narratives through the lens of globalization studies reveals the kind of power that such macro-processes wield in the lives of these people.

That the fate of agriculture in Asia may be towards "de-farming" (Kato 2000) and increasing dependence on imported rice from the North is a grim scenario that emerges out of these compelling narratives. The number of farmers is steadily declining as income from agricultural production has gone way below marginal. In the Philippines, throngs of people from the rural areas are migrating overseas or to other parts of the country in search of better income opportunities. They hope that a better income will allow them to send their children to schools, which in turn could enable them to escape farming and destitution.

Aquino's chapter about a female farmer in one of the few remaining farming villages in Southern Luzon (2000), tells the life story of Na Trining as represented by her participation in different annual routines, events, and rituals. The story renders visible, in meticulous detail, what government neglect of agriculture means, and how small farmers like Na Trining are left to their own devices to keep body and soul intact, especially in the face of tremendous adversities like a drought and rat infestation.

Implications for Research: Rural Transformations From Below

There are institutionalized and non-institutionalized initiatives to resist and reform the subjectifying power of globalization at the local level. One such example is the MASIPAG¹ (Magsasaka at Siyentipiko para sa Agrikultura)² initiative. This organization of small farmers and scientists initiates the collection, conservation, distribution, and propagation of traditional varieties of rice and corn. They also promote the practice of more ecologically sustainable farming methods and practices. By bringing back the ownership and control of grain varieties to small farmers, they hope also to conserve their many practices of cooperation, which revolve and flourish around the practice of farming.³ Their group has been one of the most vocal critics of genetically-modified organisms (GMOs) and the WTO Agreement on Agriculture.

In conceptualizing alternatives, I feel it is imperative to learn from the many years of experience of initiatives such as MASIPAG's. It is interesting to find out under what conditions these types of initiatives at rural transformation from below thrive or flounder, and to understand their success or failure in building a system of grassroots governance.

Embodied Globalization: Globalization and the Migrant Worker

In the Philippines, perhaps the most perceptible articulation of the process of globalization is overseas migration. The process, the impact, and the faults and the promise of globalization are

arguably embodied by the overseas migrant worker.

The history of large-scale overseas migration of Filipino men and women dates back to the 1930s when scholars (referred to as *pensionados* or pensioners) who were being groomed to become the Philippines' future technocrats were sent to American universities by the American colonial government in the Philippines for higher education and training. These scholars were soon followed by throngs of young peasant workers who were recruited to work as farmhands in Hawaii and California. By the 1960s, large numbers of young professionals, who considered overseas work, especially in the United States, as a prestigious path for career development began jumping on the wagon of overseas migration. The construction boom in the Middle East in the 1970s shifted the destination of overseas migration, and the term OCW, or overseas contract worker, was coined to capture the transitory nature of overseas migrant work. It does not, however, reflect the reality that many OCWs have in fact become permanently transient and mobile, the term OFW or overseas Filipino worker has eventually gained wider acceptance. Still this term fails to capture the increasing feminization of overseas migration, which became more apparent in the 1980s when the demand for female labour in the garment, electronics, service, and entertainment industries dramatically increased, especially in newly industrializing economies in Asia. This was soon followed by increased demand for domestic helpers and female companions in many other parts of the globe (Pertierra 1995; David 2001; Choy 2003). The ongoing migration en masse of Philippine health care professionals, which started in the 1990s, has now captured the research interest of a growing number of scholars.

The phenomenon of unabated massive overseas migration of Filipinas has spawned a number of institutions dedicated to meeting the myriad needs of overseas Filipinas and their families, as well as a growing body of literature on the different dimensions of migration.

Causes of Overseas Migration

The US invasion of Iraq and the bombing of Lebanon by Israel revealed the thousands of OFWs, mostly women, who are working in these violence-prone areas, dispelling the notion that they are forced to migrate to escape violence in their communities in the Philippines. While violent conflict continues to cause massive displacement of people in many different parts of the world, the haunting image of OFWs who choose to risk life and limb in war-torn areas and are now caught in the crossfire becomes puzzling and unsettling.

Saloma (1999) tries to explain the puzzle of continued overseas migration of Filipinas in spite of overwhelming adversity by revealing the role of migrants' community of origin in rendering an image of their destination as less dreadful. Narratives about resilience and self-sacrifice lead prospective migrants to consider migration an adventurous journey in the name of serving one's family. For Saloma, these narratives figure into the prospective migrant's decision-making equation. Persistent migration even to destinations where one would have to endure the harshest of conditions is thus understood as resulting from the conscious choices of rationally calculating agents.

But narratives can also be seen as subject-forming discourses which are constructed and perpetuated through different social institutions, including schools. In her book *Empire of Care* (2003) Catherine Ceniza Choy traces the history of migration of Filipino nurses and other health care providers to the United States back to the early nineteenth century. This more recent wave of migration of nurses and health care providers can be explained in terms of conventional "push-pull" factors, thus highlighting the role of individuals' willful act of choice to maximize the opportunity

offered by a more open migration policy of the United States and the current shortage of health care professionals. Yet, the phenomenon is better understood, Choy argues, by locating it in the context of the colonial relations between the United States and the Philippines — and in the particular context of the colonial educational system, which has been one, if not the most, enduring legacies of the United States in the Philippines. The Philippine educational system, which perpetuates existing gender and racial hierarchies, now serves as an important provider of professionals for the United States. The rationally calculating individual is thus rendered as a subject whose practice of agency is hampered by the neo-colonial relationship between the Philippines and the United States.

Impact of Overseas Migration on the Family

Whatever is causing it, overseas migration, especially of women, has affected the Filipino family and their communities in many ways. Female overseas migration has revitalized Filipinos' extended family networks. The elderly become reactivated as primary caregivers as children of overseas migrant female workers are left in the care of grandmothers, or elderly aunts and sisters (Parreñas, 2005). Piñgol (2001) has discussed how men in female labour-exporting communities have redefined their masculinities as they assume the tasks of "mothering" while their wives are working overseas to be the family's breadwinner.

Still, much migration-related research focuses on the impact, especially the hidden social costs, of overseas migration (see, for example, Asis, Huang, and Yeoh 2004). In *Servants of Globalization* (2003), Parreñas identifies four types of dislocations resulting from migration, namely partial citizenship, pain of family separation, contradictory class mobility, and non-belonging. She argues that the globalization of domestic work has intensified the capacity of capitalism to penetrate and to commodify family life. In many instances, family discussions have been reduced to short text messages, and family ties packaged into "balikbayan" boxes. Parreñas notes that while states have willingly de-nationalized their demand for labour, these states remain hesitant in accepting greater responsibility or in granting more rights and privileges to these migrant workers. Many migrant workers live a liminal existence as non-citizens.

Remittances and Rural Transformations

That OFWs remain excluded in governance is ironic considering that overseas migration has been linked to rural development and to the country's overall economic resilience. A study on agrarian change in a village in Central Luzon showed that income from overseas migration "has accounted for a large part of the changes in distribution of land and other assets and economic diversification" (Banzon-Bautista 1989, 158). When the Asian financial crisis hit in July 1997, the Philippines turned out to be a peculiar case in that it was not as severely affected by the contagion. What kept the Philippine economy afloat was the huge amount of remittances coming from overseas workers (Bautista, Angeles, and Dionisio 2001).

Pernia (2007, 17) notes that based on the amount of remittances that are sent through formal channels, the Philippines ranks third after India and Mexico as the world's highest recipient of remittances. Findings from his econometric analysis of remittances reveal that "the [country's] more developed regions send more OFWs than the less developed ones, resulting in appreciably greater shares of total remittances going to the former." However, the highest average remittance flows to the country's poorest regions, and "... remittances have a positive and significant effect on the well-being of poor households, as reflected in higher family spending per capita" (Ibid., 14).

Implications for Research: Rural Transformations From Below

In thinking about globalization and migration, one may ask the same conceptual question that Caroline Hau explored in her book *On the Subject Nation* (2004). Is the phenomenon of massive migration an act of resistance by a growing multitude to a decentred empire, or is it the primary means through which the system maintains its resilience?

For me, what has remained thought-provoking is the fact that the potential gains from globalization, as embodied by the migrant worker, to bring about meaningful and lasting improvement in our lives and our institutions have apparently not yet materialized (David 2001). OFWs and their organizations continue to lament the fact that aside from making it easier for them to remit their income, the Philippine government has failed to induce the meaningful participation OFWs in economic development. Risky exposure of hard earned money in untested entrepreneurial ventures is the best that the Philippine government could offer OFWs in terms of reintegrating them into the task of development. Engineer Rafael David, a returning OFW who worked in Saudi Arabia for more than two decades, remains frustrated that he cannot share his experience, knowledge, and skills on desalination techniques when he sees that his expertise could be beneficial to people in remote villages which have no access to clean water (Javellana-Santos n.d.). Sadly, OFWs and their families are identified primarily with brisk sales in consumer items like food, clothes, shoes, cell phones, and microphones.

It is interesting to map out the constraints to the systematic re-channeling of OFW remittances into domestic savings, investment, and capital build-up. At the same time, as I am reminded of Foucault's (1976; 1977) concept of resisting power where one confronts it, I am inclined to assume that OFWs through their small acts of resistance in their everyday lives have already gained small victories in transcending these obstacles. I would like to find out how they are able to resist and reform the power that subjects them through the linkages that they choose to nurture in everyday life, and to understand the net effect of their transgressions upon their communities. These may become more apparent by analyzing the narratives and life histories of overseas migrant Filipinos.

Institutional Embodiment of Globalization: Globalization and Education

Globalization and migration has also resulted in the formation of transnational families, (Parreñas 2005) and diasporic communities, where fluid identities and cultural hybridization are flourishing (David 2002). The everyday life of migrants, transnational families, and diasporic communities alerts us to the fact that nationalism can no longer be imposed by routine or by tradition, as these individuals and groups construct their own versions of nationalism (David 2001; 2002). Even those who choose not to migrate find themselves in fast-transforming communities where they encounter different identities and loyalties.

But even if we are now able to reinvent our individual, private identities in ways that were never possible before, most of us still tend to conserve some of the ideals that in the past have been obstacles to our quest for self creation. There seems to be an unquestioned acceptance of the prevailing bases of our current solidarities. David (2001) observes, for example, that instead of finding common cause with other minorities, overseas migrant Filipinas tend to identify with the dominant culture in rejecting the alien.

Explorations into media content reveal that popular culture has become dominated by middle-class culture, values, and desires. Commodity consumption and individualism has thus become the desire

and fantasy of oppressed and exploited classes who remain as media spectators (Tolentino 2007). Globalization has increasingly pushed fantasy-production into the innermost sanctum of the private (Tadiar 2004), comfortably far and away from public concerns.

In education, efforts to redesign and restructure the system are focused on producing skilled and English-proficient graduates, as government tries to train "world-class" (export quality) workers and to attract more business process outsourcing (BPO) ventures into the country (Del Rosario-Malonzo 2007). Subjects or courses which could develop critical thinking and nationalism are given less priority at the level of basic education and are sadly slowly becoming extinct at the tertiary level due to decreasing enrollment (Guillermo 2007). Efforts to develop the school curriculum in Indigenous peoples' communities toward integrating indigenous knowledge into the curriculum are at best token efforts at promoting multiculturalism (Lanuza 2007). By failing to show the connection between the prevailing system and continued marginalization, Indigenous peoples, like the rest of us, are incapacitated by default to question the way the dominant culture constitutes us as subjects.

Thus, what is problematic about the way globalization proceeds at present lies in our slow, limited, and disjointed access to other visions that would allow us to question the way we are, that would enable us to imagine alternative values and desires, and that would link us with "others" who we might consider different from us.

Implications for Research: Linking Rural Transformations from Below

Is individual choice an alternative political practice or an ideological component of a new set of socio-political relationships created by global capitalism? (Tadiar 2004). The answer to this question may have important implications for how we would pursue social transformation. As Raymundo (2007) argues, reforms in the Philippine educational system should be toward creating a more transformative educational system, which would enable the questioning of power, the practice of freedoms, and the assertion of social dreams. In talking about the future of university education and the role of the humanities in it, David (2002, 118) writes: "...It is not just to develop critical thinking. It is rather to enlarge horizons and explore utopias, as well as to inspire self-reflection and hope in every generation." Thus, a more pragmatic version of Tadiar's question would be: How do you build alternative political practices?

There are educational reform projects being implemented at the school level which aim to empower school-level administrators, teachers, and students, and there are projects that aim to democratize access to better quality education through Internet connectivity. The School-Based Management Program (SBMP) and the SchoolNet program are two projects implemented in different countries. It is interesting to find out what subjectivities are constituted by these educational reform projects, and to understand their impact, if any, on identity formation and practices of autonomy. It is also interesting to find out under what conditions these projects may facilitate the formation of new linkages and the construction of new social dreams.

Conclusion: The Emerging Research Agenda

This brief and still sketchy review leads to the imperative of conducting a more systematic, preferably comparative, study of institutionalized and non-institutionalized practices and networks of alternatives. While one's choice of theoretical perspective will definitely shape her choice of specific research questions, my fascination with Foucault's concept of resisting power wherever it is encountered prods me to look for these "local struggles" (Foucault 1976, 1977), and to analyze under what conditions

they are most effective in resisting and reforming power.

Collaborative, Comparative, Cross-national Research

While globalization has led to increasing supraterritoriality, where the gaze of scholars is seemingly fixed at the moment, it should be noted that globalization has penetrated the local and the micro in interesting and alarming ways. I agree that this situation calls for a more nuanced understanding of the global by looking more closely at the local and vice-versa (Pertierra 1995). Taking a closer look at alternative practices and networking at the local would definitely gain from a comparison and synthesis of cases from as many similarly situated locales as possible.

Case study findings that are puzzling or seemingly unpuzzling are usually brought into sharper focus when compared with other extensive case studies. Cross national research is thus not only helpful, it is imperative in the context of globalization. The strength of comparative research lies in its facilitation of integrative thematic analysis of findings, a skill that would be helpful to both researcher and "researchee." Thus, a truly collaborative research endeavor should be participatory at all stages of the research process and should involve all stakeholders in the research process.

I find Appadurai's (2000) analysis of differences in research approaches and research ethics across the world relevant and helpful, especially in our country, in the sense that it promotes the amplification of the muted voices of people who are conventionally constituted as research subjects. I have declared my preference for reflexive qualitative research in my graduate thesis, wherein I wrote:

...Reflexive social research ... promises sensitivity to the hidden structures and complexities of social problems, which may not be easily discernible through quantitative methodology. Because of this, qualitative research has become more congenial to the needs of advocacy work, which in turn demands more rigorous interpretation and critical reflection... (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000)

...The researcher also needs to recognize that the research process should be a process of empowerment for both the researcher and the "researchee" (Reinharz 1992).

...The process of narration (during interviews) allows (interviewees) to create a sense of personal authenticity, or to give coherence to (their) lives and to the world that (they) live in. It also allows the narrator to move from the realm of the personal to the realm of the political because the process of narration is an opportunity to reflect on how (their) lives interact with larger social structures. (Frank 2002; Richardson 1990) Through unstructured interviews and discussions... informants will have more freedom to construct their own narratives (without fear of censure, or the burden of a perceived inequality in power relations), thus making their voices louder in the research process.

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Notes

1. The literal translation of the Tagalog word *masipag* is "hardworking."
2. Farmers-Scientist Partnership for Development, Inc.
3. MASIPAG News and Views