

CHANGING THE DISCOURSE ON RETURN MIGRANTS: Cosmopolitanism and the Reintegration of Return Filipino Migrant Domestic Workers

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Recent literature on cosmopolitanism have begun to examine its emergence among the working classes, taking into account their increased transnational mobility in a globalized world. Labor migrants in particular have been seen to acquire cosmopolitan sensibilities in the course of migration as contact zones and cultural exchanges multiply. This paper presents a grounded attempt in approaching the concept of cosmopolitanism as it is negotiated in the return and reintegration of Filipino migrant domestic workers. It highlights the spatialization of cosmopolitanism as returnees find that cosmopolitan identities cannot easily be transplanted in their home countries. Migrant domestic workers are able to practice cosmopolitanism abroad, even within the context of capitalist-labor relations, in their consumption of cultural products and participation in class-based leisure activities within the context of a developed country, and in their cultural learning. However, the practice of cosmopolitanism in return has been constrained by place. Interviewees return to villages and not to cities, and the need to readapt to the norms and values of the community as well as the desire to be reintegrated, have led to a realignment of identities in favor of household and community expectations, although interviewees still construct themselves as more 'modern' and 'foreign' in their ways. This paper argues that the recognition of return migrant domestic workers as cosmopolitan would not only provide a more nuanced picture of reintegration needs but would also harness their ideas for the development of their communities.

Keywords: return migrants, cosmopolitanism, domestic workers, reintegration

INTRODUCTION

This paper is an attempt to explore the concept of cosmopolitanism as it is worked out among a specific group of labor migrants – return Filipino domestic workers. I have decided to use the framework of cosmopolitanism as it allows a different entrypoint and language in talking about female labor migrants that avoids the dualism of current discourses that see them as either heroes or victims (Gibson et al. 2001). In migration, cultural exchanges and encounters multiply, highlighting the significance of place as a site of consumption and cultural learning. The concept of cosmopolitanism could integrate such place-derived identities, new learning, new perceptions of class and status, as well as exposure to more urban ways of life. Using the concept in discourses that involve migrant workers and return migrants could be a key in understanding the migrants' constructions of self and their reconstruction of relationships upon returning to the home country.

This paper makes use of data gathered while I was doing the groundwork for my thesis proposal, and is therefore part of a bigger study on cosmopolitanism and labor migration. Return migrant domestic workers are the subjects of this study because of the Philippines' position as a major source of female labor to the developed world. Considering the gendered and power-laden spaces that women, especially those in domestic work, occupy, as well as the institutional mechanisms that keep women in reproductive occupations, it is important to note how agency is exercised (see for instance Devasahayam et al. 2004; Yeoh and Huang 1998; Law 2001) not only in emigration but also in return.

I started my research by conducting in-depth interviews with Filipino domestic workers in Singapore¹ to look at how life in a different geographical context and increased contact with other cultures, despite being in an occupation that is gendered, racialized, and embedded in asymmetrical power relations, can lead to the acquisition of cosmopolitan qualities. If cosmopolitan identities are assumed, then this would have significant implications on the reintegration of migrants when they return, as it would mean having to negotiate changed identities with the families and communities that they will be returning to, and that have also changed in their (physical) absence.

In the course of prospecting field sites and identifying possible contacts in the Philippines, I was able to speak to migrant domestic workers who have returned from the United Kingdom, Australia, and Hong Kong. These informants² have all worked abroad for more than eight years and are all

over 40 years old. They all consider themselves as heads or breadwinners of their households. Talking to them provided me with some background on how to think of the concept of cosmopolitanism as it has been experienced by those who have already gone back and are trying to establish life in the home country once again.

These migrants leave the country as 'subalterns,' whose marginal positions come from being female members of the working class in a country that is highly class-based, and whose gender is exploited by the government in its attempts to keep the economy afloat primarily through the export of female labor. Thus, many female migrants take on jobs that are considered 'unskilled' and require the performance of reproductive labor in host countries, actions that further subordinate them in the structure of power relations. However, as part of the mobile non-elite, these migrant workers gain, not only the means to raise their level of consumption, but also cultural skills and a kind of awareness generated from a particular engagement with the world. They become in some way, cosmopolitan. In return, migrants go back, not simply to a country, but to homes and communities and to a particular way of life. Based on the interviews, as well as literature on Filipino return migrant domestic workers, I found that while my informants have become more worldly abroad, there are social (and perhaps some economic) constraints to the practice of specific aspects of a cosmopolitan identity in the home country. There is thus a kind of 'silencing' that takes place when they return, which again makes them 'subaltern,' albeit in a different form. Despite this constraint, return migrants do acknowledge that they are changed individuals as a result of varied first hand cultural encounters and the contact zones that they have navigated. The challenge then lies in harnessing the benefits of such cosmopolitan identities when cosmopolitanism becomes spatialized in return.

Cosmopolitanism is an old concept that has resurfaced as societies become reconfigured by increasing transnational flows. Some scholars deem it to be the humanist counterpart of globalization, which is evident in literature that look at the concept as a political term that indicates world citizenship and global governance (Nussbaum 1994; Archibugi 1995; Held 1995; Rorty 1998; Beck 2000). At the same time, the concept has also been used to describe an outlook or disposition of openness to difference and diversity (Hannerz 1990) that can be found among those who journey beyond borders, including companion servants, migrant workers, diasporas, traders, pilgrims, and scholars (Clifford 1997; Pieterse 2006; Hannerz 2007). The concept however, has had much more currency in popular discourse as a neoliberal tool to

promote brands, icons, narratives (Szerszynski and Urry 2002), and cities, neighbourhoods, and lifestyles (Binnie et al. 2006; Soderstrom 2006). As Pieterse (2006: 1247) notes, the “cosmopolitan appeal is part of the factor X that is to attract investors, top talents, visitors, tourists.”

Such capitalist discourses hinge on a class-based notion of cosmopolitanism that derives from the concept’s historical associations with a particular form of class consumption and mobility, as it has been presumed that only those with the requisite cultural and financial capital have the capacity to engage in a ‘multiplicity of cultures’ (Hannerz 1990). Association with the elite has imbued the concept with exclusivity in that places labelled cosmopolitan are those that are ‘Western,’ sophisticated, and worldly, while people labelled cosmopolitan are those who have privilege, education, expensive tastes, and globe-trotting lifestyles (Vertovec and Cohen 2002: 6; Robbins 1998: 248). This leads to the exclusion of the working classes from discourses of cosmopolitanism as it has become counter-intuitive to perceive as cosmopolitan those who have generally been seen as non-mobile and confined to the local (Hannerz 1990).

WORKING CLASS, SUBALTERN COSMOPOLITANISM

Recent years however have seen a growing recognition of cosmopolitanism among the working classes, ‘ordinary people,’ and subalterns (Werbner 1999; Lamont and Aksartova 2002; Gidwani 2006) with the growth of labor migration and the transnational flows of people and products, allowing the otherwise non-mobile to imagine, embody, and consume cosmopolitanism. Working class cosmopolitanism, based on Werbner’s (1999) definition, is less the appropriation of an elite lifestyle and mentality and more the knowledge of, familiarity with, and competence in, cultural traditions other than one’s own, gained primarily through migration and framed by one’s social position. For the working class, cosmopolitanism can come in the form of acquired cultural capital, as Nonini’s (1997) study on Malaysian Chinese working-class men sojourning in Japan and Taiwan show. In the men’s experiences of sojourn, they “acquire new patterns of commodity consumption and desire. They display new forms of habitus for coping with cultural and national differences encountered in their transnational travels. They have new perceptions of business opportunities . . . form new self-definitions . . .” that lead to new subjectivities and identities among working-class migrants (ibid. 221).

Lamont and Aksartova (2002) focused on racial differences and the interpersonal relationships among people of different cultures and 'races' in their definition of ordinary cosmopolitanism. They see cosmopolitanism as comprising the strategies and cultural resources that 'ordinary people' use to counteract racism and bridge boundaries with people different from them. In a similar vein, Gidwani (2006) emphasizes an awareness of location vis-à-vis other people in the world in her discussions on subaltern cosmopolitanism. The notion of the 'subaltern' in postcolonial literature refer to those whose voices are not heard, although as Spivak (1988) mentions, the 'silence' of marginalized groups could also be an indication of their agency and their refusal to speak. Thus, the term has come to denote the ability or the desire for expression or non-expression.

Gidwani's (2006: 18) notion of subaltern cosmopolitanism through her account of an American 'domestic' who has worked in Guatemala and whose

"thinking is grounded in her experiences of places but surpasses their ever-present conservatism by realizing that the places she has inhabited are constituted by and, in turn, transmit their imprint and stain on other places through linkages and flows that crisscross regions, countries and continents"

illustrates the idea that among the working classes, cosmopolitanism also constitutes the awareness of one's location in the global system and the interconnection of peoples and places. At the same time, she notes that while working class cosmopolitans have this sense of shared experience with people in similar positions across borders, they also make "no easy proclamations of solidarity" (ibid. 18). On the same note, Mitchell (2007) points out how actual subalterns do not always use the "important symbolic power of a cosmopolitan identity" to struggle against dominance and injustice and in fact, they might even use it to reinforce parochial identities.

While conceptualizations of working class cosmopolitanism in the literature serve as an initial framework for my paper, changes in the identities of return migrant domestic workers do not necessarily adhere to these definitions. One of the aims of my thesis is to look into grounded, locally evolved notions of cosmopolitanism based on how Filipino domestic workers interface their experiences of the global, in their mobility, with the local, or their particular cultural ways. For this paper, cosmopolitanism as a concept will be interrogated based on how domestic workers themselves define their experiences.

Following Gidwani's (2006) premise on how subaltern cosmopolitans are not necessarily in union with other subalterns, my informants from the UK and Australia revealed that while they know of migrant domestic workers of other nationalities, they have not formed any ties with them. They distinguish themselves by saying that Filipino domestic workers were more valued than others because they are more educated and assertive, a belief that Parrenas (2004) notes, could further their racialization. In Singapore, there was a greater sense of solidarity for migrant domestic workers of other nationalities as my respondents told me that they did make friends with Sri Lankan and Indonesian domestic workers and try to help them out in times of need. This is perhaps due to the fact that domestic workers in Singapore are considered to be doing non-work and therefore not subject to the kind of legal protection that professional workers or even domestic workers in the UK and Australia have. Their time-space is determined by their employers and their bodies are strictly controlled. Perhaps these circumstances have brought about a greater sense of solidarity among those in similar situations regardless of nationality. One respondent mentioned how she would give food to her Indonesian domestic worker neighbor because it seemed like her employer was hardly feeding her. However, as with my informants, it was agreed that Filipino domestic workers were more capable and that poor English language skills, for one, placed domestic workers of other nationalities at a disadvantage. At the same time, nationality-based groupings were still preferred during the off-days.

Changes in the identities of my respondents and informants also reflect, though not entirely, the popular notion of cosmopolitanism that is based on consumption, class, and geographical location. This idea of cosmopolitanism is manifested in the practices of my respondents in Singapore who try to dress well during their off-days and who engage in class-based leisure activities that include travel to neighboring countries when they can. It can also be seen in their geographical imagination of places, where Europe is seen as more sophisticated than Asia and therefore, Filipino domestic workers in Europe would be classier than those in Singapore. In this sense, these domestic workers would probably see themselves as cosmopolitan only insofar as they compare themselves to Filipinos in the Philippines who belong to the same social class as they did when they were still in the Philippines.

Interviews also reveal on the other hand, certain changes in the identities of the respondents in Singapore that give credence to conceptualizations of working class cosmopolitanism in the literature. For instance, a number of

them engage in volunteer work, enroll in self-improvement classes, and are knowledgeable of particular cultural elements such as food and language (e.g., Singlish). They also have notions of equality with fellow Filipinos that are not class-based. They, for instance, feel that they are on equal footing with professional female Filipinos in Singapore despite the differences in occupational categories, because they are all Filipinos in Singapore. Thus, they feel that they should not be snubbed by these 'high-rank' Filipinos.

For the return migrant domestic workers, the popular notion of cosmopolitanism is manifested in 'conspicuous consumption,' in the way they construct their houses, and also in their children's or siblings' education. Because this is the kind of cosmopolitanism that is evident in the everyday geographies of return migrants, it is also what has to be negotiated in the home and community.

COSMOPOLITANISM IN RETURN

Migrants return, not simply to the country of origin but to their households and communities. This means that they not only have to make their skills fit in the labor market, they also have to readapt their new identities to households and communities that have also changed in their absence. Return after all, means a *return to place*, where changing understandings of place and subjectivity are negotiated (McKay 2005). Reintegration is ultimately done at the level of household and community. However, reintegration, particularly its social aspects, has received little attention because it has "generally been considered a minor problem" (Battistella 1999: 215). The failure of reintegration and the lack of opportunities for migrants to make use of their capital can result in circular migration, in which migrants move out again after returning to their communities for a prolonged period of time (McDowell and de Haan 1997).

Constable's (2004) research on Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong illustrates the difficulties of return as migrants discover that "it is not always easy to fit back into their old lives and relationships because they have changed and home has been altered by their absence." The women's experiences abroad trigger questions "about what it means to be a worker, wife and mother, as they carve out new identities and political spaces in Hong Kong" and thus find that return means "'reworking' and 'creating another place [space]'" in their home countries (ibid. 123). Constable adds that while migration brought about new experiences, desires, options, and visions, there has been "no

ready formula for successfully transplanting them" (ibid. 124). An example of such is mentioned by Gibson et al. (2001) as they narrate the story of a return Filipino domestic worker who has been taught by her British employers how to make a good cup of tea. Since returning to the Philippines however, she has been unable to practice this skill because nobody really drinks tea in her hometown. This may seem like a small thing but a knowledge nevertheless that has been gained while performing retrogressive labor abroad.

A number of scholars have mentioned how knowledge creation is intrinsic in the migration process (Kapur 2004; Williams 2005) and can take place not just in the public sphere but also in the private spheres of the home. In the case of migrant domestic workers, Sarti (2006: 14) notes how 'access to the private sphere' of the families gives them an advantage in terms of immersion in local culture. Many of my informants mentioned learning a lot from their employers especially in terms of how the household is run and in the carrying out of common tasks such as cleaning and organizing. One of them noted how her reading habits have changed because her employer in the UK would always give her books to read. Another mentioned the idea of letting her children work for their own money so that they can be independent (as opposed to the notion of child labor in which children work to contribute to the family income). When asked which of the practices abroad would they like to see in the community, one informant replied

"There are supposedly so many things that can be taught to the community, things that I have learned abroad like the proper disposal of garbage, leading the pets to defecate in proper places. Here for example, we burn our garbage which is a no-no abroad but this is a developing country and there are no spaces where we can dump garbage."

All of these show an understanding and appreciation of how people in other cultures do things, even though these cultures may be those of a developed world and perhaps bear some novelty for migrants of a developing country, which may be contrasted to how they view fellow migrant domestic workers from the developing world. Nevertheless, these forms of learning go unrecognized and thus, there has been no structural support for the migrants to apply them. A common observation about Filipinos outside the Philippines is that they tend to be more disciplined than when they are in their own country. This is because in other countries, there are structures that enforce discipline. In the Philippines, concern for remittances tends to overlook the sensibilities the migrants acquire abroad and are thus unable to fully express.

Cassarino's (2004) analysis of the theoretical approaches to return migration discusses the structuralist position that while skills and financial capital shape return experiences, "local power relations, traditions, and values in home countries also have a strong bearing on the returnees' capacity to invest their migration experiences in their home countries" (ibid. 259). In the scale of the home and community, certain forms of social control tend to constrain the return migrants' new identities in order for reintegration to be more fluid. It is not simply an awareness of other cultures that these return migrants bring back but also a different lifestyle, which is negotiated with the expectations of their families and neighbors.

Identity and expectations

Many of the informants said that they have now begun to 'like fine things,' are 'more educated in terms of food and life,' and are also 'mixing' the practices abroad with their own ways in the Philippines. These indicate the learning of a particular 'class' culture through class consumption that members of the working classes in a class-based society can only gain in mobility. An informant said that her self-esteem has been boosted by working abroad, which somehow thwarts the notion of the suffering migrant domestic worker. To be sure, many foreign domestic workers do experience abuse and victimization, but the cultural capital acquired in migrant work gives a different picture of migration and can provide something to be capitalized on. Other traits that return migrants have acquired in their work abroad include being more 'accepting and open-minded about people' exhibiting a greater distance from everyday problems, and being more accepting of the fact that things work differently in different areas.

While there are changes in the lifestyles of migrant domestic workers, they also have to deal with the expectations of the community when they return. In doing so, they have to appear as if nothing has changed about them. One respondent said

"I think members of the community expected that I will change, see myself as superior to them, and thus, will not talk to them because I have been abroad. I think envy also has a hand in it."

This statement demonstrates the politics of envy and the expectations that go with it. If return migrants do not appear to have changed and remain 'simple,' the community will be more welcoming. One way of actually controlling changes in the behavior of return migrants is by calling them

derogatory terms. For instance, a common term for females who have returned from Japan, who put on too much make-up and accessories, and who dress in scanty outfits, is 'japayuki.' This indicates a female who has gained wealth in Japan by working in a questionable occupation and thus has loose morals. Furthermore, when I first came to Singapore, a Filipino friend told me, "You can't miss the Filipinos on Sunday. They're the ones who look like Christmas trees." Migrant domestic workers tend to be faulted for the way they want to articulate their newfound purchasing power as well as draw the boundaries between what they are during the weekday (maid) and what they are outside of their work, which they can only practice during the off-days. If this comes across as too loud, then it is only an indication of their working class (subaltern) backgrounds because as Bourdieu (1986) has said, cultural capital is a disposition of the mind and body that is acquired primarily through socialization and is thus accumulated cultural knowledge. Trying to look good during their off-days, however, is an attempt to show that domestic workers are also capable of 'accessorising themselves.'

Embodiment and presentation of self

In order to be reaccepted, migrants have to reorient their behavior to the expectations of the home and community and one way of doing so is through conspicuous consumption (Cassarino 2004: 260) rather than productive investment. Many of the informants did invest in material goods that would be of benefit to their families such as renovating their homes and buying appliances and nice furniture. But when it comes to the embodiment of what they have learned in the way they present themselves, female return migrants have encountered some restrictions. Añonuevo's (2002: 144-145) account of a returnee who

"complained that her husband noticed her acquired confidence and commented, "*Mayabang ka na ngayon.*" (You are arrogant now.) Her daughter remarked, "*Ma, ba't ganyan ka manamit mas mukhang bagets ka pa sa amin!*" (Ma, why do you dress that way, you look younger than we do!)"

shows a different standard of judgement for women return migrants. Women are still expected to perform traditional gender roles in the family and part of this is knowing how to present yourself as mother and wife, which could inhibit the expression of new socialities and identities. One of my informants revealed that upon return, she had to learn how to humble herself and adjust to members of her family. She said that she finds it "easier to adjust now." At

the same time, there were no restrictions when it came to spending economic resources, as long as this was for the family. As one informant mentioned, because of the financial gains from her work abroad, her household has now become 'a little more harmonious.'

Everyday geographies

If return migrants cannot fully express a cosmopolitan identity in the way they present themselves, then this is conveyed in investments in the home. The most obvious indicator of cosmopolitan consumption is in the way return migrants have constructed their houses. In the town of Alaminos, Laguna, Philippines, a community of return domestic workers from Italy have built homes in the style of Italian villas amidst a rural landscape. This supports a study on Yemeni returnees by Colton (1993) that notes the high expectations of the community for these returnees. These "expectations involve consumption, such as gifts and other expensive purchases, or roles, such as taking a bride, building a house, or starting a business. While migrant work has improved the standards of living of most migrants, the need to reintegrate into the community obliges them to fulfill expectations that do little to change their status upon return" (ibid. 879-880). According to McKay (2005), non-migrant constructions of returnees as economically successful leave very little space for the emotional needs of migrants to be reaccepted into their homeplaces. There is first the real experiences of returnees as opposed to the community's imagined and represented migrant women, who are valued mainly for their economic contributions. As such, little is done to help them adjust to the ways of life in the Philippines, a problem that migrants least expect (Añonuevo 2002: 142).

Most of the return migrants, such as those from Italy, can be found in provinces and villages, not in big cities. My informants from the UK and Australia live in a small town in the province of Leyte, which is in the Visayas region. Coming from developed countries with a fast-paced life and more modern technology, return migrants have to deal with the boredom and restlessness that come with the more laid-back lifestyle in rural communities. They have to adjust to doing everything manually, for instance, the washing of clothes, because of the lack of push-button gadgets (Añonuevo 2002). My informants also mentioned changes in food preference that would have to be incorporated in their diet. One of them said that she usually craves for mashed potatoes, and that this should always come with butter. Another said she has increased preference for salads, hamburgers, wine and tea.

RETURNING COSMOPOLITANS?

Based on the little empirical material provided, it can be seen that return migrants bring back not just memories but also certain ideas and ways of doing things, therefore a particular form of cultural capital. It is thus not only economic remittances that get transported back but non-financial gains as well, although these do not really get fed into discourses on return migrants. The changes in the identities and subjectivities of return migrants thus tend to be overlooked because it is considered a personal thing that the migrant would have to negotiate upon return in order to be reintegrated into the expectations and values of the household and community. In doing so, the return migrants I talked to have had to “silence” particular aspects of their identities in order to be accepted more willingly by their families and communities without the added burden of envy. In order to have more harmonious relations with family and friends, they have to recalibrate being cosmopolitan with the roles they had prior to going abroad, which entails being humble and presenting themselves in a way that would show that they are still the same mothers and wives, but also not being too sparing with their financial resources.

Even though the informants are not as submissive and dependent as before, and although they have a greater sense of empowerment that comes with increased purchasing power and the notion that they have ‘experienced luxury,’ there is a subaltern aspect to their reintegration, which derives, not from still being members of the working class, but from not being able to fully live out their new identities. Cosmopolitanism as shown by my informants, follows both the Western, as well as the working class trajectory. While they have gained new skills and a considerable knowledge of other cultures, these cultures are primarily Western, as this is where they have lived. Their desire for fine things also indicates this elitist aspect of cosmopolitanism.

Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan (2003: 345) see cosmopolitanism as “the (often contested and uneven) traffic and transfer of *techné* between worlds joined in a relationship of difference, by privileged or subaltern groups.” For them, cosmopolitans are able to deploy knowledge and ideas from one world to another in a way that will be advantageous for them, blurring the boundaries of the two worlds. Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan “reject the figure of an international or transnational subject as the standard bearer of cosmopolitanism” (p. 339) and maintain that the migrant is

“someone who transmits through movements in geographic space not just sensibilities and ideas, but also the materials and techniques that enable the production and transformation of the social space of multiple worlds (not merely the social space of the rural, but also of the urban, the regional, the national, and what gets inscribed as the global)” (p.361-362).

The informants I spoke to all conveyed learning new things while they were working as domestics abroad. In this sense, they have all tried to make abroad their home, bringing local knowledge in their intercultural relations with their foreign employers in a foreign land. In trying to recalibrate their subjectivities upon return, they are also deploying cosmopolitan skills to remake a home in the Philippines.

CHANGING THE DISCOURSE ON RETURN MIGRANTS

Based on the idea forwarded by Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan (2003), migrants are capable of producing and transforming the social spaces in which they traverse through the transmission of both the material and non-material products of their movements. However, as ‘subaltern cosmopolitans,’ there are limits to their engagement with the geographic spaces they occupy. Upon return, they often have to ‘silence’ certain aspects of themselves in order to be reintegrated into the communities they have left behind. Whether such silencing is the result of the politics of envy or the decrease in the purchasing power of return migrants, it also does not help that institutional discourses focus on the nature of the migrant’s job and income level. Institutional recognition of human capital, or the skills, knowledge, and competencies that migrants acquire and can bring back in return, has been growing but such ‘brain gain’ initiatives have been applied mainly to those in skilled occupations (Olesen 2002; ADB 2005).

Post-structuralists have theorized on the relationship between discourse, knowledge, subjectivity, and power. Foremost among them was Foucault who said that nothing has any meaning outside of discourse (Hall 1997: 44). Discursive practices are characterized by “a delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories” (Foucault 1977: 199), making it difficult to think outside of discourse. In discursive strategies then, concepts and ideas take “on the property of materiality: the abstraction becomes a real social entity” (Shoenberger 1998: 2) from which practice emanates. Thus, current discourses on return migrant domestic workers as

heroes, victims, low-skilled, low-income workers, or even as “supermaids,” impact on their social reintegration as it affects not only how these migrants are perceived, but also how they perceive themselves to be. In perhaps the same way that the use of the term ‘Japayuki’ has created a bias against Filipino female workers in Japan, discourses that include return migrant domestic workers as cosmopolitan could change the way these migrants are constructed not only by fellow Filipinos but also by members of the international community. Changing the discourse on return migrants could eventually harness what Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan (2003) says is the transformation of social space in terms of enabling the creation of structures that will allow return migrants to incorporate whatever they have learned abroad in home spaces and in the community.

Discourse of course has to be informed. In talking about cosmopolitanism, there is always the danger of furthering elitist notions of the concept. For instance, some domestic workers I interviewed in Singapore believe themselves to be more modern now compared to when they were still in the Philippines, given that they have more spending money and that they are in a more technologically advanced country. When such a disposition (of being more modern, which is based on consumption and class) is seen as cosmopolitanism, it could promote Western, elitist views of the concept and could possibly further certain class divisions between the mobile and the non-mobile. However, insofar as the concept does “capture the sense that certain experiences create people that are open to difference, to novelty” (Glick-Schiller 2007), there is potential for the concept to be emancipatory vis-à-vis traditional discourses on labor migrants. By acknowledging the female subject positions of domestic workers and recognizing the non-financial gains made in migration, a grounded approach to the concept of cosmopolitanism could lead to informed discourses, which could then lead to a better understanding of the dynamics of reintegration.

NOTES

- 1 These interviews were conducted to provide empirical material for another paper.
- 2 This is an anthropological term to denote the subjects of study in an ethnography who have provided anthropologists with information. I will

use the term loosely here to mean the return migrants that I spoke to while I was exploring the field. They are not really my respondents since I did not conduct any formal interviews with them.

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