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UNPACKING THE BALIKBAYAN BOX. LONG-DISTANCE CARE THROUGH FEEDING AND FOOD CONSUMPTION IN THE PHILIPPINES

This article explores caring through feeding as an important aspect of transnational family life, and analyzes the practices connected to sending food products home, supervising what the family eats, and changing consumption patterns. It focuses on Filipino migrants to the United States who maintain transnational ties with their families. With a history of colonial encounter, the United States has been a popular migration destination, and has also strongly influenced food consumption.

The study shows the ways in which packages from abroad (*balikbayan boxes*) express love and care, and how they allow migrants to control food consumption of the family in the country of origin. By looking at the goods the immigrants put in the packages, and the way these are received, it is possible to uncover the dynamics of love, care, and intimacy in transnational families, which often translate into power, tensions, and control among family-members. The article analyses how food products sent in the packages work, bringing with them new ideas and practices, creating imaginaries of migration, and building the social prestige of the immigrant. Using the concept of “social remittances”, the article also shows the changing patterns of food consumption in the Philippines.

Keywords: migration, food parcels, care, consumption patterns, Philippines

Rozpakowując *balikbayan box*. Troska na odległość poprzez karmienie oraz konsumpcja jedzenia na Filipinach

Streszczenie

Artykuł opisuje troskę na odległość poprzez karmienie jako ważny aspekt transnarodowego życia rodzinnego, a także analizuje praktykę wysyłania jedzenia do kraju pochodzenia, nadzór nad tym, co je rodzina, i jak zmieniają się wzorce konsumpcji. Bohaterami artykułu są migranci z Filipin do Stanów Zjednoczonych, którzy utrzymują silne związki transnarodowe ze swoimi rodzinami. Stany Zjednoczone, niedawny kolonizator, są jednym z najpopularniejszych krajów migracji i bardzo silnie wpływają na wzorce jedzenia na Filipinach.

Poniższe studium przypadku pokazuje, jak paczki z zagranicy (*balikbayan boxes*) stają się wyrazem miłości i troski oraz w jaki sposób pozwalają one migrantom kontrolować konsumpcję jedzenia w rodzinie. Bliższe przyjrzenie się produktom przesyłanym z zagranicy i temu, jak są one przyjmowane, pozwala odkryć dynamikę miłości, troski i bliskości w transnarodowych rodzinach, w tym także to, jak przekładają się one na relacje władzy,

napięcia i kontrolę pomiędzy członkami rodziny. Artykuł analizuje, co powoduje przesyłanie produktów z zagranicy – jakie nowe praktyki i idee produkty te ze sobą niosą, jak wytwarzają wyobrażenia o kraju migracji oraz jak budują prestiż migranta. Posługując się koncepcją „przekazów społecznych”, artykuł ten analizuje również zmieniające się wzory konsumpcji jedzenia na Filipinach.

Słowa kluczowe: migracja, paczki jedzeniowe, troska, wzory konsumpcji, Filipiny

Introduction

Vignette 1

And it arrives. Finally, after months of waiting. The cardboard box containing a piece of America. The box bears the signs of travel, its shape somewhat deformed. The addresses of the sender and the receiver mark its origin and destination. Auring, who sent the box, has been working for a few years in Boston as a nurse, and sending monthly remittances to her elderly father and siblings. She hands in the prepared packages to the shipping company. They offer “door-to-door delivery”, so after a three-month-long travel by ship the packages can arrive at the doorstep of her sister’s house in a mid-sized provincial town in the Philippines. Auring uses this service at least a few times a year, sharing the fruits of her declared success abroad with her family.

In this article, I explore the ways in which packages from abroad express love and care, and how they allow migrants to control food consumption of the family in the country of origin. I analyze how food products sent in the packages work, bringing with them new ideas and practices, creating imaginaries of migration, and building the social prestige of the immigrant. I also show the changing patterns of food consumption in the community of origin, using the concept of “social remittances” (Levitt 2001; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011). My argument is based on a case study of one migrant family spread between Boston and a medium-size Philippine town, in which support is provided by women through sibling and parent-child ties. This is complemented by stories from other families, which actively maintain transnational ties despite the distance, both in the United States and the Philippines.

The Philippines is known for its migrant population worldwide, and has been analyzed as a textbook example of transnational migration (i.e. Basch, Glick Schiller, Szanton Blanc 1994; McKay 2012). Among different practices spanning the host and home country, one very noticeable is sending packages to the home country, the so called *balikbayan boxes*. Enabled by a tax exemption policy¹, multiple packages circulate between the Philippines and the countries

¹ The tax exemption functions under the *Balikbayan Bill*, which grants certain privileges to all migrants who stay outside of the Philippines for more than a year (Basch, Glick Schiller, Szanton Blanc 1994).

where Filipinos work (Aguilar 2009; Camposano 2018; Lamvik 2002; Hof 2018). The immigrants put clothes, food, and appliances into cardboard boxes, and send them home through one of the many specialized companies.

The existing body of work on Filipino transnational migration stresses the economic and political aspect of sending remittances and *balikbayan boxes* back to the Philippines (i.e. Basch, Glick Schiller, Szanton Blanc 1994; Rafael 2000), while the relational and affective side of it seems to be only recently gaining attention. The works of Filomeno Aguilar (2009, 2013), Gunnar M. Lamvik (2002), Deirdre McKay (2012), Clement Camposano (2018), and Karin Hof (2018) are important in showing this other side, explaining the practice of sending packages through an exploration of Filipino identity and values, the reproduction of gender roles, and the obligations inherent in kinship and neighborhood relations. Continuing this line of thought, this article will contribute to understanding these material flows of products as expressions of care. Caring for someone entails caring for his or her everyday needs: providing things close to the body, things necessary for everyday survival, and also feeding. Through providing food for the family migrants prove they are still part of the caring relations, which entails both affect and control: “By sending items for daily use, migrants remind their households of their long-distance affections and demonstrate, in a material way, how they continue to participate in those households” (McKay 2012: 103). I venture out to show the power relations, which are at work in such a transnational family arrangement, and the conflicts that emerge in long-distance intimacy. I also introduce the concept of “long-distance care” (Patzner 2010, 2015, 2018a,b) to describe the multiple transnational practices the immigrants engage in: here to analyze how immigrants engage in feeding their families from afar.

The article is based on the results of extended ethnographic research in the United States and the Philippines: 12 months of fieldwork in the two countries, including both participant observation, interviews, and the analysis of the use of new media². Following the method of “multi-sited ethnography” (Marcus 1995; Aguilar 2013), my research tracked the migrants themselves, their various connections and networks, and the metaphor and practices of “care” they engage in.

In the analysis that follows I focus on a case study of one migrant family spread between the United States and the Philippines, in which support is provided through sibling and parent-child ties. This material is supplemented by stories from other families of my research participants, which actively

² Part of the research was funded by the grant nr N N109 175534 “Changes in the Filipino family due to migration” from the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education (2008–2010), while another part was possible thanks to a scholarship at Harvard University from the Polish-American Kościuszko Foundation.

maintain transnational ties despite the distance, both in the United States and the Philippines. I also observed conversations on internet communicators, which were crucial for understanding transnational family practices. Participating in Skype conversations of the immigrant family allowed me to access a world that would otherwise not be accessible to me, and gave me a deeper understanding of transnational family practices (Patzner 2013, 2015, 2018a,b). On-line communicators allowed for a certain, albeit limited, participation in the life of those on the other side of the screen. In these exchanges not only speaking to each other but also gesticulating is crucial: laughing and joking together, reprimanding, checking on family members, gossiping, offering food to each other, showing items which were bought (i.e. clothes or novelty foods) or received (i.e. gifts from a *balikbayan box*) by either side. I argue that Skype conversations become a way of controlling others and exerting power over them: they reveal the family dynamics, the dynamics of helping, giving, and caring (Patzner 2015, 2018a,b).

The obligation to help and feeding from abroad

It has been stressed by many authors that one of the main justifications of migration is the will to help the family: parents and children, brothers and sisters, nieces, nephews, and cousins (Aguilar 2002, 2009; Hof 2018; Lamvik 2002; Urbańska 2015). Migrants and future migrants express the hope that their leaving for work abroad, seen as a sacrifice, will bring “good future” to their family. They seek financial gains, a freedom from want, enough resources for fulfilling their needs, but they also aspire to be a part of the modern consumption society. Those who migrate are seen as examples to follow and praised for giving up their comfort for the good of the kin group. Lamvik (2002: 24), in his study of seafarers, writes about the ambiguous connection between migration and family life: “They [immigrants] are willing to live a professional life – which has as its overall aim to improve the well-being of the family – away from the family. In other words, they sacrifice themselves, in the name of their families. Despite a strong family orientation”.

This pattern of providing for family-members from abroad, in exchange for the gratefulness of kin and a good name for oneself, is spread throughout the Philippines and fits the model of family ties as an obligation and support system (Aguilar 2009, 2013). It also indicates that Filipino migrants are more group-oriented than individualistic. The pattern of life-long obligations is especially strong in the sibling relationship, extending to the children and grandchildren of brothers and sisters (Aguilar 2009: 134–139). Referred to as “debt of gratitude” (*utang na loob*) in the ethnographies of the Philippines, this obligation to care

is a moral commitment expected of both the immigrants and those who stay. It is guarded by social sanctions, too: “the Filipino is taught from childhood that his primary loyalties belong to his nuclear family and, by extension, to his other kinfolk. (...) he finds security in the warmth of family ties and in the knowledge that he has a corps of persons whose particular duty is to aid him when he needs it, and whom he in turn should help when the occasion demands” (Hollnsteiner 1963: 67–68). This caring is continued, notwithstanding the distance. It creates migrant imaginaries and enables social mobility (see: Drotbohm 2014).

Food parcels have a special place among transnational practices, as connected to the bodily practice of feeding. Feeding is central to the creation of kinship relations: by living under the same roof and eating the same food (Carsten 2004: 38). If eating together creates relations between people, then, one can argue that without the effort to take part in organizing the family consumption, migrants, especially women, would lose their kinship ties. Sending food to relatives can remedy this problem. The relational aspect of food parcels has been described by Diana Mata Codesal (2010: 9): “these parcels have the ‘power to’ collapse both time and space and (re)constitute migrants [...] as kin’ (...) Same customary dishes are consumed at the same time by relatives who live very far away, but who are keen to keep their link. These packages nurture a love bond besieged by distance and years without physical contact”.

The duty to care for the family through feeding, mostly attributed to women worldwide (Allison 1991; Camposano 2018; Counihan 1999; De Vault 1991, Murcott 2001; Phillips 2009), does not disappear in migration. However, it has to be transformed: obviously, a migrant woman does not participate in preparing meals for her family at home, although she is often the main breadwinner for the family. Not being able to feed the family in person, she nonetheless influences what and how the family eats: by providing money, ordering what to buy, and sending food products home.

Today new technologies allow migrants to stay in touch with the home town or village and to witness and control the daily consumption of food in their families: with the use of an internet camera or social networking sites they can take part in family meals, both everyday and festive, see what products are being bought, and instruct family members on their diet. This possibility of being in a way present in both places is crucial for maintaining kinship ties through commensality (Carsten 2004; Belasco 2008). The power of skype face-to-face conversations is hard to miss: different from the bodily presence, it is still a very meaningful way of communicating at a distance. The power of words, promises, and obligations is strengthened in these interactions. The immigrants’ obligations to the family are fulfilled – the money from abroad helps build a new house, renovate the bathroom, pay tuition fee, buy rice for the family, and all this becomes visible in this conversation, thanks to the visual media.

However, the position of the benefactor gives the migrant the right to have demands on family members. Any request on behalf of the migrants must be met with certain actions in the everyday life of their families in the home country. Migrants often present a different view on life, values, and ways of doing things, and this influences the family back home (Levitt 2001; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011). Even if not fulfilling the migrant's requests fully, family members must accommodate them somehow. All these instances of communication are small fields where power can be executed, practiced, denied, and subverted, also by the use of different media (for a discussion of "polymedia" see Madianou and Miller 2011).

There are various ways in which family members in the Philippines deal with the demands made on them by migrant family members. One way is to deny communication by simply not disclosing oneself while on Skype, not showing up on camera, or not engaging in longer conversations. There were moments when the younger family members, supervised online by the migrant mother or aunt, became irritated, ashamed, or discouraged, but they tried not to show it, following a protocol of polite behavior. They covered it up by not looking at the interlocutor, not answering questions, playing with the cell phone. In these conversations, multiple family entanglements come into play – love and money, sentiment and obligation, individual plans and family futures.

Balikbayans and boxes

Before analyzing what is sent in immigrant packages to the Philippines, I will first describe the figure of the sender, the successful Filipino migrant. It is crucial to single out two very different migrant figures: the long-term migrant, living in his new respective country and already well-established there, identified with success and wealth, who is called a *balikbayan*³, and the mostly manual-labor contract worker, a temporary migrant, seen as hard-working, suffering, and sacrificing for the family, known as an *Overseas Contract Worker*, in short *OCW* (for further discussion of these concepts see: Aguilar 2016; Rafael 2000). Both of these groups send *balikbayan boxes*, yet they invest their long-distance care differently – the OCWs focus on the family, while the *balikbayans* also support development and humanitarian organizations in the Philippines. Interestingly, these NGO engagements, in which material things are sent to poorer beneficiar-

³ The word *balikbayan* is used to describe immigrants coming back to the home country, joining the word *balik* (to return) and *bayan* (town, but also nation). It has been in use since the 1970s, established during the Marcos regime, in connection with the growing number of labor migrants leaving the Philippines (Rafael 2000: 206).

ies, are also seen as instances of care and gift-giving (Patzner 2015; Silk 2004). A *balikbayan box* might be then used to care for a significant other: send books for underprivileged children, medicine for the sick, clothes for typhoon victims. In my research, I concentrated on highly-skilled migrants. They also supported their families by sending *baklibayan boxes*, especially in the beginning of their stay, before they fully achieved middle class status, which requires from them participating in development work as a way of showing their status (Patzner 2010, 2015, 2018b).

Balikbayans are however often seen with envy and anger, especially when they play out their new cultural skills and when they try to “bedazzle the natives” (Rafael 2000: 207) and make them act according to their newly-acquired ideas. Being openly angry or envious is seen as a negative cultural trait, not to be exposed publicly: these emotions should be contained within oneself and reworked (see: Lynch 2004a; Patzner 2015, 2018a,b). As any breach of this rule is met with contempt from the community, encounters with the migrants – both online and in person – are difficult and fraught with tension. As pointed out by Rafael, *balikbayans* are seen negatively by many, almost as neo-colonizers⁴ spreading ideas which are in conflict with being Filipino. This is opposed to the image of *OCWs* as heroes who sacrifice for the family and, as a consequence, also for the country. The juxtaposition enables us to see immigrant practices of care in the light of widening class differences, but also helps to reveal the possible conflicts and tensions in the relations between immigrants and their family members back home.

As I have shown, due to their newly-gained position and their differing views of Philippine social life, *balikbayans* become ambiguous figures. Thus, also their gifts sent in the packages acquire an ambiguous character: people are grateful for them, yet they are also clandestinely critical of the gift-givers. This interplay of gratitude and failed expectations can be pointedly illustrated by a recent parody of an internationally-famous Miley Circus’s song “Wreaking Ball”, sang as “Balikbayan Box” by a Filipino-Canadian comedian Mikey Bustos. His version of the lyrics is built on the dream commodities to be received in a package from abroad: brand clothes and cosmetics, but also food products. The imagined gifts Bustos enumerates come from a *balikbayan* mother, who works abroad:

I got my *balikbayan box*, I waited for it for two months,
I know it’s full of awesome stuff:
Some Colgate and new briefs, imported corned beef.

⁴ *Balikbayans* have been compared with the Tomasites, first American-era teachers and, through this capacity, also colonizers, who spread the view that Filipinos are or can be Americans, and lead to the wide acceptance of American values (Rafael 2000: 208–209).

I got my *balikbayan* box, so full of imported products,
I know I will be so so shocked, *parang* foreigner *lang*⁵,
Thanks to my mommy, I'll have nikes on my feet⁶.

Products from abroad – presents from relatives, symbolizing their financial success – all closed in a simple cardboard box, are overwhelmingly present in Philippine everyday life: films, songs, comic strips, news, and commercials. The portrayal of migration as a part of Philippine family life and the care coming from abroad is especially pronounced in television programs, commercials, and the yearly Christmas videos. This shows how deeply the *balikbayan box* has grown into the cultural landscape of the Philippines: recognized as a sign of migrants' success abroad and strong attachment to the family.

What's in a box?

Vignette 2

The box is thus opened and reveals its contents. The items are taken out one by one, and sorted: each of them has the name of the receiver handwritten on it. Everything, from toothpaste to t-shirts is marked, the latter ones on the tag. The opening and unpacking of the box resembles a ritual. The scheme is known to all: when the box arrives, the one who gets the package informs all of the family members, and they set up a date for the opening. Kids often accompany adults to this event to take part in the happy moment of receiving gifts from abroad. It is important that all are present: parents of the sender, sisters and brothers and their offspring, to help oversee the process, so that everyone gets his or her share.

By looking at the products the migrants put in the packages, the way these are received, and the way feeding from afar is done by immigrants, I aim to uncover the dynamics of love, care, and intimacy in transnational families and the changing patterns of food consumption. Filipino migrants send home a multitude of things, and food plays a prominent role among them. The significance of the act of sending food comes from its role in sustaining family intimacy despite the distance (McKay 2012), reproducing women's domestic identity and "re-embedding them into the translocal household" (Camposano 2018: 74). In the box one may find a variety of products, and I divide them into three categories, according to the role they play in the life of the recipients:

⁵ The phrase "*parang* foreigner *lang*" can be translated as "like a foreigner".

⁶ *Balikbayan Box* (Pinoy Wrecking Ball Parody), by Mikey Bustos, YouTube video, http://youtu.be/WSMw7trHUcU?list=PLFnjVs0N1NE3-QxAwTya25nsY3wn8_MtU. Accessed 25.06.2015.

novelty food products introduced by the migrants, food for the time of lack, and foreign products which serve as markers of social status.

The first category of products, “new food”, partly encompasses the other two categories. What sets it aside is that it has been “discovered” by the migrant: found good in taste, quality, or nutrition value. This way, together with food products, new ideas connected with consuming food travel across borders. Olive oil is one of such items: it is a novelty in Philippine cuisine that was previously consumed primarily by the highest classes influenced by global ideas about health and nutrition. Such food products form new surprising consumption patterns, in the Philippines as well as elsewhere, as Bielenin-Lenczowska (2018) demonstrated for the Macedonia – Italy migration, registering the practice of preparing such new fusion dishes as spaghetti with ajvar.

Among the newly-introduced products one can find different powdered products, i.e. pancake powder, which allows the Philippine families to enjoy the favorite American breakfast. A taste for pancakes is an older influence, developed through years of US colonization and exposure to American media (Pilcher 1998; Wilk 2006). Consumed by the middle class, both at home and in special pancake bars in the larger Philippine cities, pancakes are valued for the lifestyle they represent. However, among lower class families, boxes with pancake powder introduced by migrant kin, are stored and used at times when fresh food is difficult to obtain, which is discussed below.

An important category of food, which is sent from abroad is what I call “emergency food”: the food which is put in packages with the sole purpose of securing meals for the family in times of scarcity, i.e. during a calamity. Canned food, dry food, powdered products, all with long expiration dates, are sent to be piled and stored in the family houses. They are used when money runs out or when access to shops is limited, such as during a typhoon or flood. This fact itself can be seen as part of a cultural change in consumption patterns introduced by migrants: food is bought in large quantities and stored, instead of being bought on a daily basis, for one meal at a time. Similar patterns have been observed in studies of poor communities world-wide, also in Poland (Rakowski 2016; Tarkowska 2000). The ability to store food, connected with modernization, intersperses here with American colonial influence.

Another “emergency” product is the very popular canned meat: corned beef, SPAM, or Vienna sausages. Although it is easily accessible in stores around the Philippines, it is still sent from the United States in large quantities. This can be partly explained by the low cost of this type of food in American stores, yet this phenomenon seems to be more complex. As one of the products easy to prepare even without electricity, it becomes a kind of insurance for the time of need. Identifying canned meat as emergency food is also rooted in Philippine recent history, when the American army fighting with the Japanese brought with

them cans of SPAM and shared them with the local population suffering food shortages at the time. These events popularized the product among Filipinos, and later on it has taken on a life of its own (Matejowsky 2007: 25–26). A very popular emergency product is sweetened condensed milk, also sold in cans, given to more vulnerable members of the family: kids, the elderly, or the sick. The idea that milk – a product not consumed in traditional Philippine diet – is nutritious and that it is a source of energy and potency, seems very strong. Influenced by American ideas about healthy eating and child nutrition, the idea of the desirability of condensed milk is shared by the migrants and their families in the Philippines. Cans of “Ensure” milk can be found in provincial food stores, but migrants still send them home in large quantities. This is because products from abroad are seen as products of better quality, which leads us to the next group of products.

Photo 1. Contents of a *balikbayan box*



Certain foods work as “prestige-building food”, marking the social position of the migrant, as well as building the position of the family who receives the food. The recipients of these products start to be perceived as more desirable friends or business partners. Through these foods they also take part in a migration success story. Products from abroad are deliberately used for showing off: they are often on display in a cupboard or on a special shelf, communicating to the guests the transnational connections of the household. Displaying the foreign coffee, choc-

olates, or alcohol also serves as a *proof* that the migrant family member *cares* for the family left behind.

This accumulation of products is a very good example of the global circulation of food, which we witness today. As Lynne Phillips writes in her review article on food and globalization: “tracing the trajectories of food might be a fruitful way to investigate the process we now commonly consider ‘global’” (2006: 38; see also Matejowsky 2007). Immigrants contribute to this circulation both by sending products from abroad, and by creating imaginaries of and a taste for foreign products.

Examining what is sent home in *balikbayan boxes* – food products, clothes, and cosmetics – one notices that their value is first and foremost in being gifts from a family-member and, secondly, in coming from abroad. Richard Wilk refers to this transnational aspect of food: “As Basch et al. (1994) point out, transnational migration is now at least partly motivated by what the emigrant can bring and *send home*. Foreign goods create local identity on a global stage” (1999: 391). Sending items home does not only help the parents, siblings, and other family members, but also shows the status of the migrants and the fact that they have achieved the “better life” they strived for. Similar examples are given by Basch and her co-authors: “If someone sends a barbecue grill home to Port-au-Prince, the grill does not stand in and of itself as an item of material culture (...) The grill is a statement about social success in the United States and an effort to build and advance social position in Haiti” (1994: 28). What is also worth a closer look, is how migrant family members prepare the packages they send home. The process of choosing items for the package takes a lot of time and effort. Looking for promotions and going to discount stores on the outskirts of the city is one way to obtain the various products. Another thing migrants do is collecting money, old clothes, and electronic equipment from their employers and colleagues. Such an arrangement works quite well: people are willing to give something to others living in a far-away country, because it enters the logic of helping characteristic of Western aid and development (Silk 2004).

Changes in consumption patterns caused by migration

Vignette 3

Late morning in the Philippines. We are in a modern-type concrete house, painted in light colors and surrounded by a fence, one of the “dollar houses” that can be found in many towns and villages in the Philippines. The living room is spacious and well-lit by the sun, furnished with fine wooden furniture. We hear the signal of a Skype call. A young woman appears in front of the computer and answers the video call.

The Skype video screen is loading on the screen. When it loads, we see a place on the other side of the globe: the room looks rather ordinary – we see a bed in the background with a pile of clothes, some pictures and souvenirs standing on a chest of drawers in the corner. Facing us there is a woman in her mid-thirties, slim and short-haired, wearing big headphones – Auring. She is speaking with a clear American accent. The girl in front of the computer is her niece, Nicole. The conversation follows:

- Please tell your mother to give the \$ 200 to Mr. Ed and get the rice.*
- Ok, we will do it this week.*
- And first give the check to Tita Anna, so she can exchange the money. And remember to find a good exchange rate!*
- Yes, will try to find a good one...*
- How much is the exchange rate now? Did your mom check it?*
- No, I don't know the exchange rate yet.*
- I already computed it. It should give 10 000 pesos, so there will be 8 sacks of rice for the family. Mr. Ed should give you 8 sacks, no less! Just look for a high exchange rate!*

The situation described above illustrates the way immigrants change consumption patterns of their families by their everyday transnational activities: by influencing what they eat and how they buy food. As seen here, extending long-distance care happens in long-distance conversations on Skype and other on-line communicators. Those especially telling are the conversations centering on receiving and unpacking the *balikbayan box*, talking about the daily food consumption of the family, or planning long-term food expenses, also contrary to how it was arranged by the family prior to migration.

The long-distance management of family resources can be seen on a daily basis in a transnational migrant household (Aguilar 2009, 2013; Camposano 2018; McKay 2012). Migrants pay for many of the family house (very often a newly-constructed “dollar house”) maintenance expenses and also provides for the everyday needs of the family-members. The expenses covered by a migrant family member start with electricity, internet, and water bills, and end with household appliances, furniture, and decoration. Running the household also means providing members of the household with money for clothes, items of everyday use, as well as commuting. Migrants might also be responsible for providing pocket money. A common arrangement might be that a family member lives in the “dollar house” and takes care of it in exchange for financial support from the migrant.

Having the resources and the accompanying social capital, puts migrants in a position of power. Being the breadwinners for their families allows them to decide how the money they send will be spent. Not fully trusting all family members, they control the flow of money, deciding who receives the remittances, making sure a high exchange rate is found, and ordering what and when to buy. The whole process is monitored using new media and phones and is maintained by

constantly asking questions, checking the bills and receipts, and even introducing a family system of accounting, where one person is responsible for noting down all the expenses, which is then reported back to the migrant. I have often observed these forms of control when participating in or listening to Skype conversations between the family in the Philippines and migrant relatives in the United States. I heard the migrants asking not only if and what their family members have eaten on that day, but also who paid for the meal, what they bought for breakfast, and who cooked. Even everyday chores can be placed under the control from abroad, and this scheme is designed by the migrant herself (Patzner 2013).

Such practices do not, as I have argued, unfold without any resistance on the side of the family members who are dependent on remittances. Despite that the dependence is real, there are ways to negotiate or even escape the overarching surveillance of the migrant. One popular strategy is refusing contact by not appearing on the online video or pretending the camera is broken. In extreme cases family members do not open internet communicators, for which there is always a good excuse in the form of a broken telephone line or other technical problem. A voice-only or telephone conversation does not offer the same possibilities for surveillance, it is thus possible to play out the role of the obedient recipient better (see: Madianou and Miller 2011).

The economic scheme, in which the family traditionally operates, is close to what has been described as “subsistence economy” (Blanc Szanton 1972; Scott 1976; Snel, Staring 2001, among others). In the context of the Philippines Maria Cristina Blanc Szanton (1972: 83) writes about “subsistence marketing” by local vendors: “In essence, they view market vending as a way of life, rather than as an enlarging business (...) the purpose of their business is to help them meet their daily requirements and larger emergency expenses”. In such arrangements people lead their lives from day to day, making sure they have enough money for the next meal. They do not plan ahead, which is connected not only with the scarce material resources, but also with a local, more traditional way of life. It is also strengthened by the way wages are paid in the Philippines: for most people it will be paid daily or weekly, limiting the capital at hand. This results in consuming food in a different way: trips to the market happen before every meal, food is bought in small quantities, and there is almost no accumulation of products.

The migrant caring for the family from abroad comes into this scheme with her or his new ideas about shopping, consuming, and accumulating, and tries to convince family-members to adjust to them. The money sent as remittances becomes a tool of control, giving the migrant women the power to decide what should be bought and how. The obligation to provide for the expenses leads the migrant to check how the money is spent, and express discontent during on-line encounters with the family. If the latter happens, family members often agree to

do as the they are told and perform a few grand trips to shop for food, however in their everyday life they maintain the one meal – one visit to the market scheme. At the supermarket they buy the new types of goods – status foods and newly-introduced products, which they then consume as snacks. However, the main everyday meals still follow the old pattern, and thus they refuse to follow the plan set forth by the breadwinning migrant. How the Filipino families' consumption patterns will change in the long-term perspective calls for more detailed and prolonged studies of everyday consumption. The future studies should take into account the impact of global economic developments on the local markets, prices, and products.

Conclusions

Changes in the way Filipinos consume have been happening for many reasons. The most visible of these is globalization and the activities of transnational corporations that transform local markets. Their influence can be seen in the expansion of global fast food chains, grocery stores, and the import of food products from abroad, which has been happening in the Philippine provinces in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Matejowsky 2006). However, migrants who maintain transnational connections with their families are also agents in the process of change (Patzner 2015). The transformation happens through several different activities: sending food products home, influencing the way the family shops by sending money for food to the relatives and demanding that they account for it, supervising family consumption online, as well as participating in family meals through internet communicators.

Feeding the family by sending remittances and packages with food home is, as I have argued, an aspect of care (Patzner 2015). It becomes crucial for the keeping of family intimacy and relatedness, especially when migrants are mothers, daughters, and sisters, i.e. family members of whom care work at home is expected (Aguilar 2009; Belasco 2008; Camposano 2018; DeVault 1991). However, remittances and packages are also a tool for controlling and influencing the consumption of the family. Through the act of supporting the family, the migrant influences its daily life and controls what family members do, what they eat, and how they spend their money. What changes first, and very visibly, are the food items the family eats: they start to use products sent to them from abroad but also to buy the products that they never bought before, marking their rising social status. In the Philippines, these products include bread and cakes from the famous “Goldilocks” bakery, cereals, and dairy products, condensed milk, in particular. These products are not part of the traditional diet but they are a sign of aspiring to Western lifestyle, which at the same time means that

the family has middle class aspirations (see: Matejowsky 2006; McKay 2012). Family members start sharing the migrant's view that some food products are healthier than others, i.e. that olive oil is healthier than other kinds of oil. Under the migrants' influence many families try to change their diet. The result is a change in everyday meals, on the condition that the required products are available on a regular basis.

Through the practices presented above migrants change the consumption patterns of their families in the Philippines: what they eat and how they eat. As neophytes of the culture of the receiving country, OCWs and *balikbayans* are eager to share their newly-acquired cultural habits and ideas. In this way, migrants become agents of change: their views on modernization and development affect those who depend on them. The role of online communication in this process is hard to miss. The concept of "social remittances" (Levitt 2001; Levitt and Lamba Nieves 2011) allows to grasp all that is remitted together with material objects and which influences the everyday life of the families at home: the different norms and values, practices, and social capital. Remittances travel both ways, to and from the migration country, although I concentrate mostly on one direction of this circulation: what is sent home by migrants. If we look closely at food-connected migrant practices, we will notice a difference in consumption patterns between the migrants and their family-members in the Philippines, and an emerging conflict between them.

The analysis presented in this article allows for a better understanding of how cultural and social practices connected to food travel across borders and change the patterns of consumption and culinary practices of the sending community. Through the close examination of consumption practices and "long-distance care", a better understanding of how people culturally construct social ties as well as the role food plays in creating and sustaining them is achieved (Patzner 2015). Another important issue discussed is the control migrants exert over their families in the area of food, and the tensions this produces in everyday life (see also: Aguilar 2009). It is our contention that transnational connections of migrants with their loved ones can have an equally strong influence on individual consumption patterns as global trends and forces. These changes unfold in an on-going process of the transformation of food consumption patterns, and also trigger new tactics of resistance.

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