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Title of Research:

The Global Political Economy of Labour Migrations: Migrant Workers as Political Agents, Primitive Accumulation, Production of Everyday Spaces in Japan

Purpose of Research:

While specifically focusing on the context of Japan (one of the major destinations of Asian as well as other migrant workers), my research investigates the concrete, contingent and situated practices of global labour migration. The primary research question of my project is: how far and in what ways are global labour migrations implicated in as well as resisting the neoliberal restructuring of global political economy? The central hypothesis is that migrant workers, as political subjects, and their everyday social practices *not only* participate in and depend on *but also* contest and negotiate the neo-liberal re-configurations of labour-capital relations in the (re)constitution of capitalist relations of production and social reproduction. One of the subsequent yet related hypotheses is: migrant workers' everyday struggles even at the most subaltern level generate the possibilities for emancipatory project and political resistance against the contradictory extension of capitalism into social spaces of human life.

This research project that aims to examine the multidimensional and multilayered practices of global labour flows in their links with the historical transformations of capitalist relations of production and social reproduction through the restructuring of the global political economy offers important and innovative contributions toward both the study of international labour migration and the field of International Relations (IR)/International Political Economy (IPE). My project endeavours to *not* simply depict international relations "from the bottom up" by advocating the ambiguous notion of "global civil society," *but rather* unpack the linkages between global politics and individuals' everyday spaces, thereby explicating migrant workers as agential actors within the restructuring of the global political economy. In so doing it demonstrates how it is possible to advance a neo-Gramscian approach in a more encompassing manner in order to thoroughly depict the dynamics of global labour migrations and within such social practices the implications of multilayered intersectionality of class, "race," gender, ethnicity and nationality for the neoliberal reconfigurations of labour market on the global scale.

Content/Methodology of Research:

Content of My Research Project

Introduction:

The Neo-liberal Restructuring of the Japanese Political Economy and Foreign Immigrant Workers

- I. Theorizing Global Labour Migration Dynamics:
The Relevance of Neo-Gramscian Perspectives in Bridging Multiple Divides
- II. Migrant Workers as Political Subjects:
Primitive Accumulation, the Production of Everyday Spaces and Global Labour Migrations
- III. The Myth of Homogeneity and its "Others" in Japan:
Globalizing Japanese Political Economy and Foreign Migrant Workers
- IV. Immigrant Workers' Everyday Struggles and Negotiation in Japan:
The Comparative Analysis of *Nikkeijin* and Unauthorized Labourers
- V. Restricted Agency of Migrant Workers:
Foreign Trainee and Technical Intern Programs as the Mechanisms of Foreign Labour Supply
- VI. Care, Social (Re)production and Global Labour Migration:
Foreign Migrant Nurses and Caregivers in Japan

Conclusion:

Emancipatory Projects and Political Resistance in the Politics of Global Labour Migration

This research constructs the theoretical edifice that captures the dialectical relationship between global labour migrations and global political economy, but also aims to achieve the assembling of empirical evidence to demonstrate my conceptual hypotheses and to produce new knowledge about global labour migrations. It does so by undertaking a contextualized and historicized interrogation within Japan as a labour receiving site, specifically focusing on the dramatically transforming forms and trends of transnational labour inflows to Japan. Within such a context of intensified globalization and neoliberal restructuring of Japanese political economy and popular perceptions regarding the labour migrants, I have sought to reveal the agency of the migrant workers in various sectors in Japan, including that of care work. The number of foreign migrant workers flowing into Japan in regular and irregular manners has increased remarkably. Also, the rapid growth of an aging population combined with demographic and socio-economic changes in Japan has generated the serious prospect for further need for foreign labour to cope with acute demand for elder care, most recently even to the extent of Japan reaching an official agreement with the Philippine to

facilitate the labour migrations of Filipino nurses and caregivers into Japan. Here, the absence of critical research on the political economy of transnational labour migrations specifically in the context of Japan that exposes the agency of migrant workers in their everyday struggles influences the choice of my investigative methods.

I conducted ethnographic research—consisting of archival analysis and interviews—in Japan. As archival analysis, the empirical traits that I had investigated include historical shifts in state legislations on labour migration in Japan. Also, it was significant to analyze official statistics; researches on labour migration conducted by government institutions, intergovernmental organizations; and, existing academic study of global labour migrations. These primary and secondary sources provided background information. More importantly, my project obtained primary data by conducting interviews about the agential life history of labour migrants in Japan (from February to August 2007). My interviews were open-ended based on the participants' narration of their journeys to Japan and their everyday lives in Japan. These were guided by questions such as: how and why they chose to come to Japan as migrant workers; their views of working conditions and labour-market situation in Japan; their relationship with employers; their relationship with people in the “host” communities; the gap between their expectation and “actual” experience of working and living in Japan; difficulties and/or problems in working as well as living in Japan; their ways to cope with difficulties and/or problems; their ways to spend leisure; and, their plan to stay in Japan, temporarily or permanently. I have analyzed the findings from my interviews by situating the narratives of foreign labour migrants in Japan within a broader understanding of Japanese ethnic and national identity, *i.e.* disclosing how majority Japanese react to the escalating presence of foreign immigrants by examining the social, political, cultural, economic responses that the labour movements have elicited in Japan. I also interviewed selected government officials, business groups, the representatives of NGOs and labour unions, and academic experts. Furthermore, in the context of the recent agreement between Japan and the Philippines, given the lack of much study of its implications and contestations, I conducted interviews with students in Filipino nursing and caregiving schools in Metro Manila to explore their reactions towards the opening opportunity to work in Japan.

Conclusion/Observation

Overall, my project illustrates how the neoliberal political and economic transformations that have helped shape the gendered and racialized international division of labour play out in different environments but also to highlight the possible spaces for migrant workers as agential subject in shaping and contesting the emergent processes of Japan's re-location

within the broader context of global political economy.

More specifically, my investigation of the introduction of Filipino care workers into Japan under the Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement demonstrates that the transnational deployment of these commodified labourers leads to the moulding of a hierarchically structured regime of social reproduction along the lines of nationality, class, ethnicity or “race” as well as gender. It also highlights how state policy shifts toward neo-liberal market-oriented governance of social (re)production have facilitated the emerging global division of reproductive labour and simultaneously constituted Filipino care workers as potentially cheap, flexible and disposable racialized and gendered subjects. Indeed, this examination also points to some of the present and future everyday struggles, contestations and negotiations of Filipino care workers in Japan within their contested social spaces of family, work and leisure. Such an analysis of the practices of Filipino care labourers not only exposes the ways their social, economic and political rights may be limited, but also suggests some possibilities and constraints for these workers as political agents to change and challenge the discriminately circumstances surrounding their everyday experience of working and living in Japan.

In Japan, the historically unprecedented expansion of the aging population combined with demographic and socio-economic changes, particularly the dramatically shrinking labour-force, have sparked heated debates about how to cope with the acute demand for elder care. While most people involved in these debates do not completely reject the idea of the reception of “foreign” care labour, many are still concerned about the “negative” impacts of labour immigration on the Japanese society. Here, as my research discerns, resident Filipino *herupa* and other “foreign” immigrants have already maintained the current elderly care by working at the bottom of Japan’s care labour market. By taking this condition into serious consideration, my research concludes by addressing that it is absolutely imperative to recognize the introduction of Filipino and other immigrant care labour to Japan as not a “new” issue but rather the part of Japan’s inevitable task to cultivate a system of “multiethnic”/“multicultural” elderly care provision.