

Immigration. The Second Generation Filipinos

Status of Second Generation Filipinos in Italy as Immigrants

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Through the prism of life stories & being an immigrant parent myself, I can't help but analyze & observe the construction of identities among the children of immigrants from the Philippines. It pays particular attention to the strategies that the second generation Filipinos use to construct multiple and overlapping identities, face the difficulties in assimilation which is very common and to rework dominant ideologies about their place in whatever country & society they're in. Because of the class status, racial positioning, and ethnic background of these second generation Filipinos, their reconstructed identities represent both resistance to and acceptance of class and racial hierarchy in whatever place in the world they're in.

Among the migrants in Europe particularly in Italy, the Filipinos are considered as a migrant group who could easily adopt well. This is maybe due to the fact of their mixed and unique culture, originating from the Malay race and being colonized by the Spaniards for 200 years where they acquired Christianity and then came the Japanese & Americans after (where Filipinos adopted most of the western culture). Based on researches and personal observation, Filipino immigrants are remarkably understudied & overlooked group both in European culture and in academic research. Some speculate that Filipinos are neglected in part because they blend in so easily to their European peers/counterparts. Another reason is due to the fact that Filipino immigrants tend to be proficient in English language, being the second language in the country where literacy rate is very high and have long been exposed to western life-styles, cultural practices and consumption patterns and not to mention that 97% of the population are Catholics where religion & beliefs plays a vital role in their lives.

When I think of these second generation immigrants, it is interesting to trace the history that pushed their parents (considered here as first generation immigrants) to migrate to foreign lands. There are many factors why the parents of these children migrated. The unstable economy and the lack of sufficient job opportunities in the Philippines is one of the main factors that pushed them to migrate for a better living condition. Besides, the fact of extending a better future & living standards to their children and families. Filipinos are considered hardworking, honest & industrious people. They usually land or accept jobs far from what they studied which is a need in the foreign land they are in. Has high educational attainments. Notwithstanding the educational attainment of some first generation migrants, most of them, if not all have finished a baccalaureate degrees in the Philippines. They were raised with solid principles, values & beliefs which contributes a lot to the psycho-social wellbeing of their children and how they grow and interact with their adopted land as well. These values & principles of parents usually creates conflicts between them and their children especially if their chil-

dren has been brought here from the Philippines at an adolescent age or were born & raised in Italy.

There are three categories of second generation Filipino migrants. First, those born in the Philippines who came here at a very young age. Secondly, those that were born & raised in the Philippines who were brought here at an adolescent age and third, those who were born and raised here in Italy.

Those who arrive here at a very young age do not find much difficulty in the process of assimilation with the Italian culture. The only common problem they immediately encounter is the language barrier & the system of education in Italian schools once they have enrolled since it's different from what they started in the Philippines (the Philippines follow the American system of education). Talking to educators in school, they emphasized that these children are very quick in adopting the school system in a couple of months. In fact, some of them emerged as brilliant than their Italian counterparts. And besides, they tend to be polite, quiet and dedicated to their academic subjects. However, the educators noticed that usually, these children immediately learn the negative side of the Italian culture being influenced by their friends. But when called to the attention of their behavior, they are easily disciplined & comply to rules & regulations.

The second category or those who arrived here at an adolescent age had the most difficulty. Here lies usually the problem not only within the families but most particularly in the challenging process of assimilation. Most of these children were left in the Philippines at a very young age, raised and cared for by "substitute" parents (such as grandparents, Aunts or other relatives). Besides the language barrier & the system of education, these children experience culture shock and homesickness which creates difficulty in their personal relationship towards their parents. Through personal observation and ideas shared by other Filipino migrant families, there are certain favorable and unfavorable perception that characterizes these group of children. The following are illustration of favorable and unfavorable perceptions:

Favorable Perceptions

1. Usually, these children are provided with good quality education back home
2. Most of them attended catholic & private schools in the Philippines, cultured & well mannered
3. Are academic performers because they are very competitive in every field, high achievers, outgoing, sociable and friendly
4. Motivated and goal oriented
5. They are challenged to uplift their status, guided with high moral values & solid principles and the will to make sacrifices
6. They live a comfortable life which is provided by their families

Unfavorable Perceptions

1. Spoiled brats
2. Bullies
3. Easily gets drawn to drug dependency & addiction since they are economically well provided
4. Some exhibits an inferiority complex and some has a tendency to self –pity especially when they face difficulties
5. Rebellious & they tend to become lazy in their studies & become stuck up to type of life they live with a mindset that they will be economically supported by their parents for the rest of their lives

Analyzing certain characteristics especially the positive ones, there should not have been difficulties in the first place. However, a lot of problems arise when they arrive here. And as a consequence, they are drawn to the negative side. Needless to say, there seem to be an overwhelming gap of understanding between parents and children falling under this category. Of course, parents always have the best intentions for them, but unfortunately, the intentions are often misunderstood. The need to make up for the lost times and reunite with the family, drives the parents of these children to bring them here. While some of them are brought here because they become rebels and problems to their substitute parents back home, most of the parents intentions is that the only solution is for this children to be united with them & be given proper discipline and instill in them the solid principles learned which they were not able to receive due to their absence. On the part of these children, they had also this longing of their parents love but with a different point of view in life.

This shows from testimonies they shared me talking to some of them (adolescents) during parties, church activities & school functions. They shared their difficulty with their relationship to their parents; on how they cope with the Italian culture. When they learned that their parents are taking them here to reunite with the family, they say that the first reaction they had is a mixed emotion... happy & sad at the same time. Happy to be with their parents & to the new place & experiences they will encounter, but sad to leave friends and what they considered their roots. Most of them have high hopes and a longing for the love & attention which they expect to be given to them by their parents, different from what they experience back home from "foster or substitute parents". Only to find out, when they arrive here, due to working schedules & conditions of their parents, they are usually left behind alone at home or left to babysitters unknown to them. This means to say that there seem to be refusal or resistance to change because they were used to their comfort zones introduced by their substitute parents.

Another complain that I heard from these adolescents is, some of them are victims of discrimination from their peers and at times from the educators themselves in Italian schools which draws them to lose interest in what they do & destructive to their psychological well-being. So for them to assimilate smoothly in the society, they imitate what their peers do which is usually the negative part. Few of them says, that at times, they are left with instructions to do chores at home to help their parents. These chores however are not activities they are used to do because they were provided with helpers to do these chore for them by their substitute parents. In another instance, they claim

that they don't really care much if the foods they eat are re-heated in the microwave or freshly cooked, it's their expectations of being together to live as a normal family wishing to continue with the lifestyle they were used to. And these instances usually frustrate them. They consider these factors worse than being left behind in the Philippines where they say, even in the absence of their parents, they always have somebody else, a friend or a relative whom they can count their presence. This causes them to suffer a severe case of home-sickness that usually parents don't understand. And which triggers them to be rebellious and find other ways to make them happy that mostly leads them either to good or bad friendships and influences.

With the urge from parents to continue their studies, they are enrolled in Italian schools. However, where they had have difficulty with the language. The difficulty is not much with the younger ones though, because they could easily adopt and assimilate with peers. This leads them to be lazy in their studies since they are thrown in an ambience where everything is all new to them without having a background on how an Italian school is all about. But not everybody reacts in the same manner. Some strive to do well in school and accept it as a new adventure & challenge. Most of them, especially those who were used in the Philippines to be high achievers surpass academically their Italian peers. They integrate the good educational background acquired in the Philippines with what they learn in Italian schools. One fact is that, after receiving a diploma in superior or technical schools, they enroll in universities. And there are many of them who finished degrees and graduated with high votes (110 e lode). Being determined and goal oriented, education for them is the only gateway to uplift their socio- economic condition which differs from the lives their parents had experienced. To these children, I give a lot of credit to the parents who continued to instill in them untiringly certain principles of hard work & determination to achieve their goals despite of their busy work schedules & conditions.

The third category has less difficulty among the three categories. These children immediately adopt the Italian culture and they seldom have problems with assimilation. They are more quiet and well behaved but often curious about the Filipino culture especially when discipline (the Filipino way) are inflicted on them. A sort of a cultural conflict between them & their parents. But easily worked out since they grew with their parents and had seen & lived certain Filipino practices.

As a migrant parent & a church worker observing this second generation children... there are so much to be done for this generation. There's a need of collaboration between the community & various religious sectors to study well and create help desks especially for the adolescents who are drawn to the negative side of the Italian & Filipino culture which becomes a serious problem not only within their families but the society as well in the future. One of the factors that lost value to this generation is their spiritual ,moral & psychological development. These generation needs inspiration to find hope. The need for youth organizations with a strong spiritual guidance & support. Though there are various youth groups from the different sectors, it would not be enough to educate & inspire them to lead a good life and become God-fearing individuals. Even parents needs support groups ,guidance & counseling on various family problems & issues. Most of these parents were once raised with a strong & high moral & spiritual values but are trapped in their work; finding little time for their children. The

errors that some parents commit is their leniency towards allowing their children to indulge them with material things particularly on technological gadgets. They tend to forget what responsible parenting is all about. Of course they are not to blame because parents always has the best intentions for the future of their children. But without proper education on certain values and proper formation, the problems remains especially among the adolescents. They may find difficulty to adopt easily to the life & culture of the country they're in, they may integrate and assimilate more smoothly or may established networks within the community. Indeed, if the community can do something for them... a brighter future would be in store.

There are many struggles for immigrant families to raise these children. Where each with a different challenge, each with a different story.