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Ethnic moralities and reciprocity: towards an ethic of South-South relations

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Abstract

Normative critiques of South-South relations assess the extent to which solidarity and cooperation are achieved among partner countries. However, they tend to overlook the role of inter-ethnic tensions in partnerships and the ways global South actors exercise agency in achieving cooperation. Transnational skilled migration between global South countries is an emerging context where South-South cooperation takes place. Using the case of Filipino skilled workers in Indian cities, this paper aims to ascertain the sort of tensions that characterise South-South relations and the manner in which actors work out cooperative partnerships. The concept of boundary work, a process of defining 'us' and 'them' and relating to others through a set of socio-cultural criteria (ASR 73:37-59, 2008), is deployed to analyse Filipino-Indian interactions in the workplace. Ethnographic data reveal that while ethnic moralities constitute boundaries and tensions between Filipino and Indian workers, they also become bases of affinity. Cooperation is achieved when Filipino and Indian participants engage in personal and mutually beneficial arrangements such as guru-student and patron-client relations. An ethic of reciprocity thus animates South-South cooperation. I conclude with some implications for global South partnerships.

Keywords: Ethnic moralities; Boundary work; South-South relations; Cooperation; India; Filipino transnationals

Introduction

The normative turn in South-South relations

Recent scholarship on the global South has sought to articulate and evaluate South-South relations through the notion of solidarity. Nel and Taylor (2013) define 'South-South solidarity' as an attitude, feeling and relationship based on "the collective pursuit of a common good, the recognition and observance of reciprocal moral duties, including respect for national sovereignty, fundamental equality and mutual benefit" (Nel and Taylor 2013: 1091). The shared experience of colonisation (Grovogui 2011) and hardship among peoples of the global South becomes the basis for mutual feelings of empathy for one another (Nel and Taylor 2013). Drawing from the principle of solidarity, global South countries have developed their own models of cooperation. In contrast to conditional aid arrangements in North–south cooperation, global South models are characterised by mutual benefit, autonomy and non-intervention between partners (Quadir 2013: 324–325). For example, Brazil promotes horizontal cooperation in which partners work as equals to achieve mutually agreed development goals (Quadir 2013:324). China's model not only pursues mutual gain but also non-intervention between partners (DeHart 2012: 1367). Indeed, solidarity serves as the moral framework of South-South relations.

The normative turn in the literature on South-South relations assesses the extent to which solidarity or the principles and models of South-South cooperation are actually achieved. For example, Nel and Taylor (2013) report that foreign economic policies of IBSA (India-Brazil-South Africa) promote thin solidarity among global South countries. They point out that IBSA deliberately and unintentionally create unfavorable conditions for some of their Southern neighbours' development (Nel and Taylor 2013: 1091). For instance, India's restrictive food trade policy has affected Nepal's rice industry and food security as SAARC countries liberalise trade in the region (Ibid: 1095). Nel and Taylor (2013) suggest that trade policies adversely affecting Southern neighbours can be traced to the material interests of dominant class alliances of IBSA countries. In same vein, Fahimul Quadir (2013) finds that overseas development agenda of Southern donors are motivated by national self-interest and priorities and concludes that their commitment to horizontal cooperation does not move beyond rhetoric (Quadir 2013: 335). Indeed, normative critiques show that South-South cooperation and relations in practice are contradictory and complicated by interests of the state and national elites. Such studies theorise from a macro-level perspective and thus tend to overlook other dimensions that affect and shape South-South relations.

Micro-level analysis, however, could illuminate less visible but influential aspects of South-South engagements. For instance, Monica DeHart's (2012) analysis of Chinese and Costa Rican cooperation reveals the role of interethnic dynamics in the partnership. Using an ethnographic approach, she investigated the ways in which a Chinese development project in Costa Rica, a new stadium, was perceived by the locals, Chinese officials and members of the local Chinese community. DeHart (2012) finds that talk about work performances of Chinese and Costa Rican labourers of the stadium reinforces existing cultural misunderstandings and racism between them (DeHart 2012: 1370). Chinese workers were praised for their efficiency while Costa Ricans were criticised for being slothful. Yet the same discourse alludes to the reputation of the local Chinese community who are regarded by Costa Ricans as "wily and pernicious". DeHart (2012) points out that while China assumes the role of a development donor, the racial perceptions of Costa Ricans tell more of their identification with the global North than with their global South partner (DeHart 2012: 1370). She concludes that in the Costa Rican case, First and Third World distinctions are reinforced rather than transcended (Ibid: 1372).

As the example suggests, South-South relations have potential tensions that are rooted in pre-existing inter-ethnic dynamics. This dimension needs to be considered in understanding the complexity of South-South partnerships. While DeHart's ethnographic study considers the role of interethnic interactions in her analysis, it does not explore how actors might exercise agency in working out tensions in South-South partnerships. Hence, this paper extends normative critiques of South-South relations by exploring the specific ways in which actors negotiate tensions *and* achieve cooperation or solidarity. I use the case of Filipino skilled workers in Indian cities as the empirical basis to address the study's aims to ascertain the type of tensions in South-South relations and the emergent social mechanisms that actors use in achieving cooperation. Since the liberalisation of India's economy in 1991, emerging sectors, such as organised retail, have required global talent to develop the business and train the local workforce. According to the UN *Report of the Secretary General on the State of South-South Cooperation* (United Nations 2013), economic migration between countries and regions in the global South has increased (Ibid: 6). A type of South-South regional engagement that is rarely explored is between Southeast Asia and South Asia (Ibid: 11–12). By studying Filipino skilled workers in Indian cities, this work also fills the aforementioned gap in the literature.

Boundary work and ethnic moralities

If South-South relations have an ethnic dimension, how do we think about it? DeHart's (2012) analysis of how the Chinese and Costa Ricans ascribe characteristics to one another provides the lead. Implicit in her approach is the use of the concept 'boundary

work', a process of defining 'us' and 'them' and relating to others through a particular set of socio-cultural criteria (Bail 2008; Lamont 2002). The criteria individuals or groups use in making boundaries vary depending on the situation (Wimmer 2008), relationship and positions of social actors. The concept of boundary derives from theories of ethnic formation, which look at how groups form identities through the relational and symbolic construction of difference (Barth 1969; Cohen 1985). By inquiring into the bases or criteria for constructing difference, the boundary perspective veers away from reifying and essentialising group identity (Madianou 2005). Thus the question becomes what are the symbolic boundaries or criteria that groups use to identify themselves and mark others (Lamont 2002). While boundaries serve to establish difference, they also become a basis for building relations (Barth 2000). In other words, boundary work has a paradox in which a mode of distinction can also be a basis for connection (Fechter 2007: 25).

Viewed from a boundary perspective, the Chinese and Costa Ricans in DeHart's (2012) study use symbolic boundaries based on morality (i.e. notion of a good worker). Andrew Sayer (2005) defines the term 'moral boundary' to describe how "social groups often distinguish themselves from others in terms of moral differences, claiming for themselves certain virtues which others are held to lack" (Sayer 2005: 953). Moral boundaries in the context of inter-ethnic interactions bring to fore what I call 'ethnic moralities', which refer to moral evaluations deriving from a sense of ethnic difference. The following study of Filipino and Indian interaction will demonstrate how ethnic moralities are a source of tension in South-South relations. And so I ask what moral criteria do Filipinos and Indians in describing one another?

Following DeHart (2012), I deploy an ethnographic approach to examine boundary work between Filipinos and Indians. Ethnographic methods such as participant observation and interviews are used to examine everyday life, which is the realm of possibilities for human agency (Gardiner 2000). It is in everyday experience that we might locate the mechanism through which social actors deal with tensions. Thus, the second research question is: what are the social forms or connections through which Filipinos and Indians negotiate moral tensions? In the context of an inter-ethnic encounter, a plural understanding of morality (Zigon 2008) is appropriate to acknowledge both overlapping and differing notions of right and wrong. Given ethnic moralities at play, the question in South-South relations becomes not just about how actors negotiate and achieve solidarity and cooperation, but also what ethic emerges from a situation of diverse moral expectations[a]. Such ethic points to the contextually defined manner in which cooperation and solidarity are achieved.

The following ethnographic study of Filipino and Indian workplace interactions demonstrates that ethnic-specific understandings of work ethic inform their moral boundary work. Thus I argue that ethnic moralities are both sources of tension and connection in South-South relations at the micro-level. Cooperation is achieved through recognising and negotiating moral expectations and engaging in local forms of reciprocal relations, such as guru-student and patron-client relations. The case of Filipinos in India also demonstrates that cooperation is not assumed but negotiated based on mutual benefit of parties. Thus, reciprocity becomes an ethic that animates cooperation. I develop these interrelated arguments in the sections below. A brief discussion on Filipino and Indian contemporary situations is presented before the ethnographic elaboration of the paper's themes and arguments.

Comparing Indian and Philippine national situations

This section compares India and the Philippines in broad terms. Although both countries have unique histories, the common experience of colonisation and the process of constituting themselves as modern and developed nation-states provide a shared template for understanding their contemporary (national) situations. Moreover, the pre-colonial history of the Philippines, then maritime Southeast Asia, indicates trade links with

people from the South Asian subcontinent (Ray 1989). Like other languages of peoples in the Southeast Asian region, Philippine languages have Sanskrit root words (Pardo de Tavera 1887), which suggest historical affinities between South and Southeast Asia (Bin Yahya and Kaur 2011).

Both countries had Anglophone colonisers before gaining independence. The colonial legacy of English language instruction has enabled their educated populations to engage other Anglophone speakers and to work overseas. India claims to be the world's largest democracy; while the Philippines prides itself as Asia's first democratic state. The Philippines had its first elected leader and assembly after independence from Spain in 1898. Both countries are traditionally known as sources of international migrants. India has twice the number of overseas population as the Philippines and remits almost thrice (USD 70 billion) as much as Filipinos do (USD 24 billion)[c].

While India is home to five faiths with a Hindu majority, the Philippines has the most number of Catholic Christians in the region. Both countries have a visible Muslim minority. Ethnic, urban–rural, class, gender and religious modes of identification are common to both. However, what differentiates the two is how Indian and Philippine societies are characterised or associated with differing systems of hierarchy. India is commonly associated with caste; while the Philippines is usually characterised by class or status distinction. Moreover, Philippine society has more equitable gender relations. According to the *World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report*, the Philippines ranks 8th and India 113th in terms of closing the disparity between women and men (Hausmann et al. 2011). These differences shape the ethnic moralities between Filipino transnationals and Indian locals.

The dynamics of global capitalism, through international capital and labour markets, create the conditions for both countries to compete and collaborate. The English language capability, skills and the cheap cost of their labour have made Filipinos and Indians suitable workers for business process outsourcing. Because of India's prominence in information technology, a sector overlapping with BPO, it has made a reputation as the world's backroom office. However, in 2011, the Philippines overtook India in employing the most number of offshore call centre agents. Vikas Bajaj of the *New York Times* (2011, November 25) reported that US, European and their affiliated Indian BPO companies moved their call centre operations to the Philippines because Filipinos not only spoke American English but communicated with American clients better than Indian call centre agents. He implies that being a former colony of the US and the popular consumption of US media among Filipinos give them an advantage over Indian call centre agents who generally encounter American popular culture in their job orientation sessions. Bajaj reports that Indian BPO companies acknowledge this trend and set up operations in the Philippines. Such example indicates competitive and cooperative relations between businesses and workers from these two countries.

Filipino skilled migration to India

In 1991, India began a process of economic liberalisation. During the same period, India's information technology (IT) and business process outsourcing (BPO) sectors developed and have become the country's showcase of modernity and competitiveness on the global stage (Radhakrishnan 2011). However, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the main policy advocacy group of Indian businesses, claims that the expanding Indian economy still lacks a skilled workforce to sustain this process. While India's IT and BPO sectors are developed, those associated with the growing consumer market, such as manufacturing, organised retail and services have expressed this need (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry 2010). The large-scale government-initiated infrastructure projects also require foreign contractors, which have a multinational workforce that work on their project sites.

This situation has created an outsourcing of global talent with specialised skills to manage new ventures and to deliver projects. Aware of this skills gap and still mindful

of its local talents, the Indian state has adopted a selective approach to the recruitment of foreign workers. The Ministry of Home Affairs (2010) grants employment visas only to "highly skilled and/or qualified professionals (consultants or technical experts, senior executives or managers)" appointed by a company registered in India or a foreign firm engaged in a local project. The Indian state protects its citizens by not granting employment visa to jobs for which qualified Indians are available (Ministry of Home Affairs 2010). Indeed, the policy privileges the idea of attracting global talent who can impart skills to the local workforce. As a result of economic demand and state policy, India has opened up a migratory route for transnational workers.

In 2004, the year the Philippine Commission for Overseas Filipinos started recording the number of Filipino citizens in India, there were 776; in 2010, the year I started my fieldwork the number of Filipinos increased to 2,081. Filipino transnationals in Indian cities of Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore are comprised mainly of: skilled workers; women married to locals and their children; and accompanying spouses, partners or dependents (mostly Filipino domestic workers) of other transnationals. On the basis of their skills and work experience, Filipino workers occupy a high structural position in their respective companies. They tend to be managers or professionals. Their tasks not only include applying their skills in accordance to the company's expectations, but also introducing, testing and implementing standards in the workplace. This role consigns them to a position of authority.

Researching boundary work between Filipino transnationals and Indian locals

Studies on transnational migration indicate that boundary work is evident in talk about people. The criteria that groups use to distinguish 'us' and 'them' can be gleaned from formal interviews or spontaneous conversations (e.g. Lamont 2000; Lyon 2007). Through participant observation, one is able to place the utterances of research participants in context. I used both ethnographic methods to gather data for the study. I conducted fieldwork in Delhi, Bangalore and Mumbai from July 2010 until June 2011. Having lived and worked in India prior to fieldwork, I did not only gain familiarity with the place but also access to fellow Filipino transnationals whom I met in social gatherings organised by the Philippine embassy in Delhi. For the study, the purposive sample of Filipino and Indian participants was chosen based on the following criteria: employment visa status for Filipinos and other transnationals; and being co-workers or subordinates (of Filipinos) for the locals. I focused on Filipino workers in manufacturing, organised retail and service companies because of their high presence in these developing sectors. I also included research participants from other sectors such as aviation, banking, construction and development as a basis of comparison.

Using a semi-structured interview guide, I conducted depth interviews with 22 Filipino skilled workers, 15 Indian colleagues and two co-workers from Brazil and the Netherlands. Interviews lasted 90 minutes on average. I asked about their experiences at work and everyday life, and how they regarded and related to one another. The questions were phrased in broad terms to allow spontaneous responses from the research participants. They were also asked to identify and explain tensions and issues in the workplace. Several of my research participants gave consent for me to conduct participant observation in their work sites and homes. I spent between a day to two weeks in their offices where I witnessed daily workplace dynamics and interactions. Participating in social events of Filipino skilled workers, where Indian colleagues were also present, provided an opportunity to observe how they related in less formal situations. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed thematically. I paid attention to terms or phrases that participants used in characterising one another; patterns in workplace issues; and ways they described their relationships in the workplace and beyond. To provide participants anonymity, pseudonyms were used.

Ethnic moralities and relations in the workplace
Work ethic: different notions of a good worker

Moral boundary work centring on notions of a good worker in superior and subordinate roles was a salient theme in my ethnographic data. Research participants claim certain qualities for themselves that others lacked. My analysis of interviews, including 'workplace talk', and my own observations suggests that, on one hand, Filipinos valued professionalism and, on the other, Indian workers expected local working styles. Research participants, especially Filipinos, attributed moral boundary to their ethnicity. How they evaluated their local colleagues' behaviour and performance at work referred to norms and practices in the homeland. In other words, they compared locals with their (idealised) notions of a Filipino worker, as exemplified in the following remark from Manuel, 32, a manager for a retail company:

> They have the talent; but the important thing is execution. Good in verbal [communication], but in execution very poor. I give you an example. If you ask them the basics, they don't know. If they know, they are very good in theory, but in actual [sic] they are very poor. That is a problem. Filipinos are very creative and innovative. We don't care about time. If there is a task, we will finish it first before we go home.

Conversely, Indian participants defined themselves by making distinctions between those coming from urban and rural areas.

I observed that local middle class informants, who usually come from the capital cities, tended to differentiate themselves from co-ethnics with rural backgrounds or with lesser educational credentials or capabilities. Such conflation suggests ethnic moralities. In the context of transnational migration, ethnicity becomes a salient type of identification (Williams 2006: 597–598). The moral framework from which participants evaluated others assumed an ethnic dimension. Such moral boundary making was apparent in the ways Filipino and Indian workers articulated their understandings of work ethic. Ethnic moralities based on different notions of a good worker were sources of tension in the workplace.

i. Professionalism

Filipino research participants' expected a good worker to be competent, autonomous, disciplined and compliant. Such qualities are consistent with professionalism. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines professionalism as the expected competence of professionals; however, certain characteristics such as self-responsibility, special skills and ethical behaviour are also bound up to this definition (Sanghera and Iliasov 2008). Changes in work and employment practices involving flexible forms of labour and employment terms demanded by advanced capitalism have triggered the deployment of professionalism in other occupational domains (Fournier 1999: 281). From an occupational value, professionalism has evolved into a discourse defined by the logics of managerialism and commercialism (Evetts 2011). It is linked to neoliberal reforms that seek to make workers accountable, efficient and responsive to market conditions (Duhn 2011).

Indeed, being professional means that workers are expected to assume appropriate work identities prescribed by an organisation (Fournier 1999). Professionalism, Fournier argues, has turned into a disciplinary mechanism that shapes a worker's conduct. The professional worker is autonomous, responsible and competent, and can be controlled from a distance through internalising these traits (Fournier 1999: 284–290). In other words, professionalism has become a defining quality of an ideal worker.

Using professionalism as a norm of evaluation, Filipino workers tended to point out their local subordinates' need for constant supervision, lack of competence and discipline and excessive demands. Leila, 25, a Filipino who set up a multinational company in

Delhi, narrated an incident and pointed out what she saw as the locals' lack of initiative and sense of responsibility:

> Hilda [a Filipino manager] approached an employee: 'Why are you texting? Don't you have anything else to do?' 'No, I'm waiting for the other to finish her part', says the worker. 'Look at her. She has a lot on her plate. Take some of her work!' In the Philippines we ask, have you got more? Let me help you! I got nothing else to do. It's voluntary…An employee in the Philippines feels shame if they sit idle and they get paid per hour while their boss sees them doing nothing.

Leila's comment suggests the attribution of a moral quality to her ethnicity and how its lack has the potential to elicit shame. That being an idle employee is shameful crucially reveals another moral issue: the obligation to reciprocate. Filipino workers took as a moral issue the failure or refusal of subordinates or colleagues to perform at work. I shall return to theme of reciprocity in the following sections.

My observations in the workplace and interviews further reveal the unpredictability of the local workforce as indicated by a high attrition rate and absenteeism. Keeping employees, especially at the rank and file level, was a challenge. The nature of the job and pay structure also made employment in retail and service sectors less attractive. Filipino managers who worked for Indian-owned companies pointed out low wages for the staff as the main reason for the high resignation rate. However, multinational companies that gave higher wages tended to keep their employees. Thus a combination of employee performance and general labour conditions shaped the evaluations of my Filipino research participants.

I do not suggest, however, that professionalism is absent in Indian workplaces. It is a norm that is more associated with established industries such as the IT and BPO sectors (D'Cruz and Noronha 2006; Vaidyanathan 2012) and the work culture of the city of Mumbai, India's finance capital (Rajadhyaksha 2011). As pointed out earlier, emerging sectors such as retail, manufacturing and service were still in the process of introducing modern standards to its workforce.

ii. Traditional style

Analysing interviews with Indian and Filipino research participants, I learned that the locals had traditional expectations of superiors in the workplace. A good superior was "a strong leader who commanded power" (Bailey 1970: 75). Aside from the capacity to assert authority, a co-worker in a superior position is expected to be knowledgeable and to (constantly) provide direction and care. Local workers perceived their Filipino superiors or colleagues as generally knowledgeable, friendly but less assertive. Filipinos' professional approach, specifically promoting autonomy or initiative, was misconstrued. For example, locals perceived managers who delegated tasks as "lacking knowledge of the job".

Less assertive Filipino workers had difficulty in disciplining co-workers. Lisa, a Filipino manager, was told by the local owner of a company to use her *dandha* (crack the whip) to assert her authority in the workplace. She initially found the suggestion strange but had to change her style from an unassuming manager to a more assertive one.

Professional versus personal: contesting and negotiating workplace relations

The different expectations of a good worker also shaped the terms of workplace relations. There was a tension between professional distance and a personal approach. Consistent with their professional ethos, Filipino workers tended to define their engagements. An informant who helped set up a US business process outsourcing company in Delhi described how she related to her co-workers: "at work we are enemies, but after office hours we are friends" (Celine, 26). Filipino workers explained that personal relations

got in the way of exercising authority. Professional distance enabled them to carry out their task of disciplining workers or enforcing standards. At the same time, they cultivated personal relationships to maintain trust and retain good employees. Pressured by their local or multinational employers to deliver but also aware of the unpredictability of the local workforce, Filipino workers recast their work relationships.

Indian research participants I interviewed had contradictory expectations. They expected a colleague in a superior position to exhibit authority or maintain social distance. At the same time, they also wanted a more personal approach. They questioned the instrumental, impersonal and exploitative terms of workplace relations. Hari, a supervisor in a manufacturing company who reported to a Filipino manager, expressed such sentiment: "At the end of the day, we are all human beings, we are not machines. All the time we cannot work, work, work! You need to have a balance between two lives [personal and professional]". The locals expected a more personal form of engagement.

Filipino workers had to negotiate the tension between professional distance and personal closeness. Aware of their status as outsiders, they adopted an approachable disposition. They adjusted to local expectations and circumstances to motivate employees and ensure cooperation. Celine's experience in running a company in Delhi provides a revealing example. She was an administrative staff assigned to look after the day-to-day needs of employees. Summer came and, despite four split-type air conditioners in the office, employees felt the heat was unbearable. Celine bought cooler fans and placed them in all corners of the office. Still an employee complained that the cool air did not reach his spot. During my interview Celine, she pointed out the endless demands of local co-workers. She recalled a similar incident in winter when almost every employee wanted a portable heater. While she acted immediately to address their demands, her local colleagues did not seem to be satisfied. A Filipino informant who worked for a charity used the idiom "if you give a hand, they would take your arm" to describe such local behaviour. Celine felt that local colleagues took advantage of her goodwill or willingness to adjust. Other incidents in the workplace such as idleness, an example discussed above, underscored the problem of reciprocation.

Another case further illustrates this issue clearly. Amelia, 60, a representative of a multinational company, employed Sandeep, a driver and car owner, to provide transport service to get her to factories around the city. Whenever we meet or chat on the phone, she always complained about Sandeep's tardiness, incompetence and stubbornness: "He acts as if he is the boss!" One morning, I accompanied her to work. After a breakfast of *tinapa* (smoked fish), omelette and garlic rice at her place, we hit the road to visit a factory close to her vicinity. While we were chatting, she noticed that Sandeep took a wrong turn at an intersection. This meant a longer ride; and we had three more factories lined up for the day. "Where are you taking us? We have gone there many times and you still don't know your way!" Amelia vented her frustration in Filipino: "...*Binabayaran kita ayusin mo trabaho mo!*" (I'm paying you; do your job!). Amelia paid Sandeep INR 22,000 a month, an amount way above the official minimum monthly salary in Delhi (approximately INR 8, 900 in 2010), out of her own allowance as an expatriate worker. She expected her driver to deliver the terms of their contract but the latter could not.

The two examples above suggest that beyond the tension between personal and professional ethos is the issue of contractual reciprocation. The unwillingness or inability to fulfill the contractual obligation of work is seen as a moral breach. Such instances resulted in either conflict or termination of relations. Hence, it could be inferred that reciprocity ensured cooperative and amicable relations. Reciprocity had the potential to connect people with different moralities. In the next section, I explore further the nature and types of reciprocity that become an ethic of relations between Filipino and Indian workers.

Reciprocity as ethical relation
Filipino and Indian understandings of reciprocity
Given the tensions arising from ethnic moralities, how is cooperation achieved? I argue that an ethic of reciprocity animates cooperation and goodwill between parties.

Following Mary Hollnsteiner (1973: 69), I define reciprocity as "a principle of behaviour wherein every service received, solicited or not, demands a return, the nature and proportion of the return determined by the relative statuses of the parties involved and the kind of exchange at issue". Reciprocity has been acknowledged as a universal basis for moral human relations (e.g. Gouldner 1960; Mauss 1954). However, it has particular forms that are culturally or ethnically specific. In the case of inter-ethnic encounters, actors or parties exercise agency to negotiate acceptable terms of reciprocal engagements. My ethnographic data reveals similar meanings of 'debt reciprocity' between Filipinos' concept of *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) and the Indian Hindu idea of *rina* (debt). Table 1 presents a comparison of the two terms.

Hollnsteiner (1973: 73–74) finds that a reciprocal relation based on *utang na loob* is generated when a transfer of goods or services takes place between individuals belonging to different groups. The recipient is compelled to show her gratitude by returning the favour with interest to be sure that she does not remain in the other's debt. The type of debt that is created in the recipient is called *utang na loob* or debt inside of oneself or sense of gratitude. Thus, the type of favour received must be of special value and its timing right. Depending on the goods or service and the status of the parties involved, a debt of gratitude may never be paid in full. One can be indebted forever especially if the favour granted is incommensurable (e.g. saving one's life). Hollnsteiner observes that Filipinos are made aware of their *utang na loob* or their sense of obligation from those they received favours and should repay them appropriately. Finally, *utang na loob* reciprocity not only creates relations between different groups or bridges social classes but also serves to redistribute resources (Hollnsteiner 1973: 87).

Similarly, Leela Prasad (2007: 65) defines *rina*[b] as "debt, obligation, responsibility, bond [and] connectedness". Among Hindus, *rina* is one of central moral concepts that guide conduct. One is born with different types of *rina* (i.e. debt to gods, sages, ancestors and humanity) that must be repaid in specific ways. Prasad observes that *rina* does not distinguish between a sense of Hindu duty and a situation where one actually acquires debt. More pertinent, according to Prasad, is the everyday usage of the term to mean "…connectedness, the belief that *rina* draws individuals to each other and binds events and people even when they do not seem explicably connected" (Prasad 2007: 66). Indeed, like *utang na loob* it enables sociality. Prasad points out that *rina* binds parties in obligatory relationships that have material basis and implications. Such relations are usually asymmetrical, e.g. patron-client, a feature similar to *utang na loob*-based relations in the Philippines.

In comparing the ideal type notions of *utang na loob* and *rina*, I find points of convergence on the idea of obligation and connectedness. The sense of being indebted after receiving a favour or service/good is common to both Filipinos and Indians. Here lies the basis for moral affinity and sociality. Based on a careful ethnographic study of

Table 1 Comparative ideal types of debt reciprocity[a]

Feature	Indian *rina*[b]	Filipino *utang na loob*[c]
Definition	- Debt, obligation, responsibility, bond, connectedness.	- Debt inside oneself; sense of gratitude; obligation to return a favour.
Expected payment	- Has material basis and implications. - Appropriate hospitality toward guests (*Satapatha Brahmana* in Prasad 2007: 65).	- Variable (with interest, partial or incomplete) depending on rank (Hollnsteiner 1973).
Emotional involvement	- High	- High
Sanction	- No explicit sanction	- Shame (*hiya*)
Social function	- Draws individuals to each other in obligatory relationships or connectedness.	- Bridges different class groups - A mode of redistributing resources.

[a]Template of comparison adopted from Hollnsteiner (1973); [b](Prasad 2007: 65–66); [c]Hollnsteiner (1973: 73, 85).

ethnic relations in Cagayan Valley, Philippines, Pak Nung Wong (2010) suggests that "[t]he ethics of debt of gratitude allow people of different cultures to relate to each other despite their different ways of elaborating the idea in their own cultural terms". He argues that it is an indispensable moral guideline for building and cultivating personal relationships for Filipinos (Wong 2010: 126). Extending Wong's insight to the transnational context, I find the same ethic of debt reciprocity at work in personal relations between Filipino and Indian workers.

Personal relations based on debt reciprocity

This ethnographic study finds that personal forms of relation characterised by debt reciprocity enable cooperation. I identify them as guru-student and patron-client. Filipino and Indian research participants create a reciprocal relationship that involves the transfer of material and immaterial goods. In exchange, Indian workers cooperate by performing satisfactorily or being loyal to the company. Such relations are mutually beneficial and become a basis for friendship. While parties use debt reciprocity as a means of regulating social relations (Wong 2010), altruism also motivates them (Table 2).

   i. Guru-student relations

In a guru-student relationship, local subordinates see the value of the knowledge and skill that they could learn from transnational workers. They are convinced by the professional competence of a Filipino transnational, who in turn is willing to mentor subordinates at work. From this mutually beneficial arrangement, local workers acquire new skills and Filipino transnationals find personal fulfilment in sharing skills.

While imparting skills is embedded in the work of Filipino workers, a willingness to share or take on a mentoring role is a condition for the relationship to take place (Dougherty et al. 2007: 146). Local participants told me that Filipino workers tended to share ideas compared to fellow local colleagues who tended to keep knowledge to themselves. For example, Arjun, 30, a designer, pointed out the qualities of his mentor, Rolando, 50, a Filipino designer who was sent by the Philippine government to India as consultant for an Indian government agency. "He is a very nice person. And if you ask me, he has been more than a mentor to me. Whatever he knows, he doesn't hesitate to share it with you. And that's the biggest trait that all designers don't have. Because it is a trade secret".

Conversely the attitude and potential of a student are crucial for a mentor. Filipino informants willingly taught workers who were open, motivated and had abilities that could be honed. A common pattern was the local's interest in the job and openness to learn. Local workers who were most likely to be mentored tended to share the same work ethic with the Filipino workers.

The story of Oscar, a visual merchandising manager for an Indian multinational company, and his students, Gita and Puja, exemplifies a guru-student relationship. Gita, 26,

Table 2 Features of reciprocal relations between Filipino and Indian workers

Aspect of relationship	Patron-client	Guru-student
Currency of exchange (giver)	- Material (money, livelihood)	- Knowledge and skills
Obligation (recipient)	- Satisfactory performance at work	
	- Loyalty	
Benefit	- Mutual (meeting personal and professional needs/aspirations of giver and recipient)	
Trajectory	- Friendship and further exchange of favours	
Motivation	- Form of regulation and control (Wong 2010)	
	- Altruistic	

a staff member in the sales department, met the Filipino worker when he was new in the post and was starting to introduce visual merchandising standards to the stores. Oscar approached her and asked if she was keen to do visual merchandising. Gita took the offer and realised that it was what she liked to do. She described her mentor as "very friendly and not very bossy" and open to suggestions and ideas: "Whatever I say it's good, he'd do that; whatever he says it's good, we do it". Another student, Puja, 28, described the Filipino worker as 'hands on' compared to local superiors who "just order things around". She also said that Oscar treated her like his peer: "I don't feel he is my boss; he is more like same level working together". Hence, a feature of a mentoring relationship is its equalising potential. Oscar revealed to me that one of the subordinates he trained, Ravinder, resigned from the company, set up her own design firm and became successful.

A guru-student relationship also existed between Indian employers and Filipino workers. From the point of view of my Filipino informants, the nature of this relationship was more personal than professional. Indian business owners or work superiors not only mentored Filipino workers but also treated them like a family member. Such was the case with Manuel, the manager quoted above, and his mentor Anthony, a non-resident Indian from the state of Kerala who lived most of his adult life in the Middle East. They met in Dubai where they both worked for a retail company. The timing of their meeting was fortuitous. Manuel was duped by a previous employer and was not given the job he applied for. He left and found an entry-level position in a retail company where Anthony worked. The mentor saw his potential and taught him visual merchandising. When Anthony was recruited by a Mumbai-based Indian conglomerate to head the operations of its retail business, he took Manuel along to handle the stores' visual merchandising. Under his continued guidance, the Filipino worker's career flourished in India. He did not only win international awards for one of India's home grown organised retail companies, but also contributed to the expansion of its stores from four to 22 in four years.

Manuel confided that he owed Anthony a debt of gratitude for giving him a career opportunity. He elaborated: "I am happy working with the company, the owner they are very good to me. And my boss [Anthony] he's treating me like his family… You feel you are very important to them. Who are we? We are not even Indians". Being treated as part of family indicates the personal importance of the relationship (Lakha 2005).

In the next section, I describe another local form of reciprocal superior-subordinate relationship. If the guru-student relationship is premised on the sharing of knowledge, the employer as patron arrangement in the workplace is based on providing financial assistance.

ii. Patron-client relations

Filipino workers who manage multinational companies were expected to become patrons of their employees. In an ethnography of work relations in the textile industry in South India, De Neve (2001: 160) finds that the authority of an employer draws from his ability to become a patron, that is to provide jobs and lend money. Patrons dispense favours to clients in return for compliance and loyalty (Carney 1989: 43–45). From the pragmatic perspective of multinational employers, providing extra benefits and extending financial help to employees minimised the attrition rate and motivated employees to stay. Acting as patrons was a personal approach to the instrumental employer-employee relationship. To demonstrate this claim, I describe the experiences of Carlo, 32, and his Brazilian general manager, Rodrigo, 40, who came to Delhi in 2006 and started the India operations of a European manufacturing company. The case of Carlo and Rodrigo is illustrative of the way in which cooperation is achieved through mutually beneficial workplace relations.

As a company that manufactured and sold products for the local market, the stakes were higher. Its mother company invested millions of euros to start a business and expected to recover and make a profit. In my interview with Carlo and Rodrigo, I learned that the main challenge was to keep good employees. They offered higher wages and salaries compared to local manufacturing firms. Carlo declared that many of the employees who were recruited when they started were still around. Two employees, one manager and one supervisor, who resigned, decided to come back after a short stint with other companies. At the same time, there were certain posts in the company that were perennially vacant because qualified employees were difficult to find. The situation in Carlo's company contrasts with the prevailing trend among Indian workers in the private sector who do not stay long in one firm. When Carlo introduced me to his superior, Rodrigo, the latter, having learned of my research, asked me, "What motivates the Indian worker? Is it money?" He requested that I survey his employees because he was simply baffled or, as I found later, in need of validation for the strategy he and Carlo adopted to keep their good employees.

I fulfilled my obligation to my hosts and came up with a report. In response to Rodrigo's question, I found that employees felt satisfaction in a supportive and learning environment where they could also enjoy a stable job. The satisfaction in learning was linked to Carlo and Rodrigo's mentoring roles. Employees recognised their effort in "teaching everything about how to do our job". However, what was not revealed in interviews with the local employees was the fact that Carlo and Rodrigo provided extra financial assistance to their employees. Carlo confided that they usually gave loans (payable by salary deduction) to help employees in emergency situations, prepare for their wedding or purchase a car. I witnessed Rodrigo approve a request for a salary loan, which, according to the employee, would be used for a relative's wedding. Carlo himself helped Sunil, a security guard, get a permanent employment in the company. The latter was grateful and said he regarded Carlo as 'god'. Sunil told me that he displayed a picture of his boss alongside Hindu gods in the *puja* (shrine) corner of his house. Carlo told me that he relied on Sunil to look after the factory premises, especially at night or during the weekend. Transnational employers acted as patrons and moneylenders, thereby securing goodwill and loyalty.

While patrons are cast as benevolent (Carney 1989:45), patronage is criticised for being a relationship of simultaneous exploitation and benefit (Stein 1984: 34). However, in the context of the aforementioned case, patronage becomes a social form through which actors deal with an unpredictable work environment. The mutual benefit among parties sustains the engagement. Compared to mentoring relations where a subordinate party can achieve equal status, relations of patronage tend to reinforce inequality (Stein 1984: 34). The implications will be discussed in the concluding section.

Conclusion

Using a boundary perspective to South-South relations, this ethnographic study examined relations between Filipino transnationals and Indian locals in the context of work. I have argued that ethnic moralities are bases of tension and connection between Filipino and Indian research participants. Cooperation is achieved when they engage in personal and reciprocal relations such as guru-student and patron-client. Under pressure from owners of capital and the market imperative to deliver profits, Filipino research participants seek to transform de-personalised, instrumental or exploitative relations into a mutually beneficial arrangement. Hence, an ethic of reciprocity emerges from the negotiation of ethnic moralities between Filipino and Indian workers.

Contractual reciprocity or professional engagement was insufficient to ensure cooperation. The ethic of debt reciprocity, a source of moral affinity between Filipinos and Indians, presents a more organic basis of connection and cooperation. Personal forms of

relations based on *utang na loob* or *rina* nourished the contractual or professional relationship. Beyond their position as managers or professionals, Filipino transnationals assumed personal roles such as being mentors and patrons to their local subordinates. Hence, this paper highlights the role of ethnic moralities and local forms of relations in building cooperation. My conclusions apply to its ethnographic context. Ethnographic investigations into South-South relations in other contexts will provide material for comparative work to further our understanding of cooperation and solidarity in practice.

The study's findings have implications for South-South engagements, especially at level of human resource management. Recognising ethnic moralities and the role they play in international cooperation and relations may help minimise tensions at work. The case of Filipino-Indian relations at the micro level also suggests that a contractual arrangement is inadequate. Hence, more personal and mutually beneficial terms of engagement animate cooperation. Mentoring arrangements are found to be mutually satisfying and can be institutionalised in organisations or integrated into programmes of cooperation. While relations of patronage can be mutually beneficial, the paper has shown that it is used as an expedient measure in the context of a profit-driven venture. Considering the criticisms against such relationship (i.e. fostering dependency and inequality), relations of patronage can be a hindrance in achieving equal partnership, an ideal that global South cooperation strives to achieve.

Endnotes

[a]The shift from morality to ethics is informed by the notion that morality is akin to structure, while ethics is more concerned with agency, deliberation and reflection (Stafford 2010). Hence, in a situation where social actors confront different or competing moral expectations, choosing an appropriate course of action that is acceptable to one's self and others is becoming ethical (Zigon 2008: 165).

[b]Related to *rina* is the notion of *dana* (gift giving). Both are elements of a Hindu understanding of reciprocity (see Prasad 2007: Chapter 2).

[c]Data from the World Bank (2012).

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