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# Door-to-door cargo agents: cultivating and expanding Filipino transnational space

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### Introduction

Within the context of Philippine migration, enduring belonging to the country of origin and continuing care for the ones left behind, are turned into transnational merchandize. This article puts forward the door-to-door industry as a typical Filipino immigrant business industry, sprouted from, and commercially exploiting, Philippine-specific state policies to retain the loyalty of the overseas nationals while also being embedded in culturally defined normative expectations of migrants with regard to lasting responsibilities towards their kin. The primary aim of this chapter is to show how basically simple and small business ventures, initiated at grassroots level, can actively stimulate transnationalization beyond the narrow kinship systems that migration usually engender, as they expand these pre-existing social relations into a dense and varied web of cross-bordering ties. Encouraging exchange, diffused forms of solidarity, and generalized forms of reciprocity, business owners/operators thus contribute to the emergence of a transnational community.

*Nothing comes between you and your dream. Not the hardships that come with working in a foreign land. Nor the loneliness of being far away from home. No matter what the distance, Express Padala helps you keep your promises. Our reliable remittance service reaches your loved ones fast and efficiently so you're never really far away.*

Within the context of Philippine migration, enduring belonging to the country of origin and continuing responsibility and care for the ones left behind are, such shows the above advertisement of a Philippine money transfer business<sup>1</sup>, turned into transnational merchandize. Quite directly, Express *Padala* (Tagalog for 'shipment') alludes to a sense of duty among those who left the country to maintain and reinforce their cultural-ethnic identity and solidarity with their native soil. This paper examines a line of business that first and foremost thrives upon the Filipinos' strong inclination to stay close to the country of birth, especially to family and friends left behind: the freight forwarding industry, in the Philippine context also known as the *balikbayan* box business.

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<sup>1</sup> This advertisement is repeatedly published in *Munting Nayon* (Tagalog for "little village"), a monthly publication published in The Netherlands, that discusses societal developments in the Philippines and within the Filipino community in the Netherlands.

While as a noun the term *balikbayan* refers to Filipino migrants coming home for vacation, as an adjective it is commonly used to denote the cardboard boxes in which overseas Filipinos send back goods to their loved ones left behind. The term was coined, and transformed into state policy, by President Marcos, during a major national speech in which he encouraged Filipino nationals abroad to visit their home country once a year during the holidays. Next to economic and legal means to facilitate the emigrants' bodily return, he also promoted the sending of goods from out of their overseas residences through the instalment of discounted tax tariffs (Glick Schiller, et al. 1992, Szanton 1996). While the migrants' monetary remittances have for long monopolized the attention of the Philippine government, who is renown for its extended state-led labour export program and has been in the leading top of remittances-receiving countries for years<sup>2</sup>, also "remittances in kind" are increasingly acknowledged for their importance for the country's economy and the well-being of its citizens.

Especially since in the last decades international transport and communication has become cheaper and easier, a massive industry has emerged in facilitating, maintaining and strengthening the long-distance linkages between the globally dispersed Filipinos and the stayers. Both within the motherland itself as well as beyond, Filipinos have seized this opportunity and put up cargo businesses to serve their migrated compatriots. Ranging from large, global carriers to micro companies operating bilaterally, these services are known to the consumers as "door-to-door (hereupon referred to as DrDr services)" as they (usually) pick up the packages from the sender's home and deliver them right to the beneficiary's doorstep in the Philippines.

This chapter puts forward the DrDr industry as a typical Filipino immigrant business industry, sprouted from and commercially exploiting Philippine-specific state policies to retain the loyalty of the overseas nationals as well as embedded in culturally defined normative expectations on the migrants' lasting responsibilities towards their kin. The primary aim is to show how basically very simple business ventures initiated at the grassroots level actively stimulate transnationalization beyond the narrow kinship systems that migration usually engenders, as they expand these pre-existing social relations into a dense and varied web of cross-bordering ties. Encouraging exchange, diffused forms of solidarity and generalized forms of reciprocity, the business owners/operators hereby contribute to the emergence of a transnational community.

The material presented here draws upon personal fieldwork conducted for my doctoral thesis on Filipino entrepreneurship in the Netherlands. This fieldwork took place both in the Netherlands and in the Philippines, where I met with several "home country counterparts", specifically the migrants' families who were actively involved in the business operations<sup>3</sup>. While I may allude to findings among entrepreneurs in other commercial sectors, the obvious focus is

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2 In 2004, the country was fourth among the top recipients of remittances, after China, India and Mexico, with estimated remittances totalling US\$13 billion in 2005 (World Bank 2006), and their contribution to the national economy steadily increasing; between 1990 and 2003 remittances, as a percentage of GNP, grew from 2.7 to 10.2 percent.

3 The entire survey exists of 34 cases of Filipino entrepreneurship, involving 39 first generation Filipino immigrants. In The Netherlands, the main data gathering method were oral interviews, based on a life history approach. Further fieldwork was conducted in The Philippines. This concentrated on 8 cases of 'home country counterparts', and took place in September-October 2001, January-July 2003 and January-April 2005.

upon the nine Filipinos in the survey who ran a DrDr service<sup>4</sup>. This chapter is organized in the following manner: the next section describes the prevailing perceptions among the entrepreneurs of their own cargo company as “an easy business” and as “hardly business”. As will be shown in the section thereafter, especially this latter perception ensues from the fact that the entrepreneurs generally would pursue a social and unselfish rather than a selfish, economic mission with their firm. Their social calling is to serve their compatriots and bridge the great physical distance between those in their adopted country and those who stayed behind. The chapter continues with the remarkable observation that some of these entrepreneurs, at the same time as their ventures uphold and expand a system of support and “giving back”, are, in fact, quite critical of this one-sided relation, and have established a structure of exchange in which also the stayers play an active, rather than a passive, role. The chapter then ends with the contention assertion that DrDr agents, and their transnational enterprises, can be seen as small though significant players in the consolidation and diversification of border-crossing ties and linkages, contributing to the emotional, symbolic and also material unification of a physically separated community.

### **Filipino DrDr services in The Netherlands: “easy business” and “hardly business”**

Like in other destination countries, Filipinos have put up DrDr services in the Netherlands; in point of fact, it appears the sending of gifts (*pasalubongs* in Tagalog) of fellow countrymen to the Philippines is a fairly popular line of business here: during the fieldwork period I came across some 15 Filipino-owned DrDr services. Considering both the small size of the Filipino population in this destination country and the few entrepreneurs among them<sup>5</sup>, this is a notable number, especially since nearly all of these 15 entrepreneurs simultaneously operated the same captive market (Kloosterman 2003, 315).

Unquestionably, the attractiveness of this kind of business and, as a consequence, the relative crowdedness of this industry in The Netherlands can partly be explained by the general perception that it was “only a small step to become a DrDr agent themselves”, as one of the research participants phrased it. Each of the nine entrepreneurs interviewed repeatedly stressed the ease to set up and manage their transnational venture. Without exception, office was based at home, and while most enterprises were formally “woman-owned businesses”, nearly all were effectively run as husband/wife firms. Aside of (semi-informally employed) contact persons throughout the country, whose primary tasks were to call around within their own social network on the shipments’ schedule and to next inform the entrepreneur on where empty boxes were needed and/or filled boxes were waiting to be picked up, all business operations were carried out by the business owners themselves, usually together with the life partner. In this, the

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4 Seven of these services were owned by Filipina women, one by a Filipino man, while one was a formal partnership of a Filipina woman and her Dutch spouse. Names used in this chapter are fictive to protect the privacy of these respondents.

5 In 2004, some 12.400 Filipinos resided in the Netherlands (CBS 2005). For the same year, Spaan, van Naerssen and Tillaart mention the existence of 194 Filipino enterprises and 238 Filipino immigrant (first and second generation) entrepreneurs (2005, 251).

most important activity comprised the distribution and pick up of the *balikbayan* boxes, which in point of fact generally involved more than merely the transaction of the box and related payment. When passing by their customers, the DrDr operators were often invited in for a drink and snack, and a friendly, yet more than once also fairly intimate, conversation. While these personal visits demanded much of the operators' time and energy, they emphasized it to be an essential and integral part of their works that was generally also the most enjoyable. Besides, as they generally only shipped three to four times a year, in the end, the business did on average not ask for more than a couple of hours work a week.

In the Philippines, all DrDr operators hired professional brokers to release the container from the customs. For the distribution and delivery of the boxes, some entrepreneurs contracted specialized services, while others had taken on relatives and friends to do the job, mostly on base of semi-formal arrangements.

All in all, operating a DrDr business was, as the entrepreneurs repeatedly suggested, a rather straightforward pursuit. Little capital or specific skills were required, the basic equipment (a telephone, computer and car) was often already part of the household effects, and the well defined nature of the tasks provided opportunity to run the service from home and combine it with other roles. Hence, in their view, this line of business was, as one put it literally, "open to just anybody." At the same time -and not surprisingly in view of the saturated market-, their businesses were rather insignificant in economic terms like size, profit, or turnover. In that sense, a DrDr business was, as one of them formulated it, not only "an easy business" but also "hardly business".

Yet, personal economic gain was seldom the main focus of the immigrant entrepreneurs. Only few (female) operators said they started their business to earn "something extra" next to the income of their spouse and/or their own earnings from a part time job. By and large, the entrepreneurs ran their business as a sideline and did not show an active interest to become involved in larger businesses. While some conveyed that the small market in the Netherlands and intense competition held back their opportunities to enlarge their business activities, the majority contended they did not wish to expand as they already had to juggle their time among a variety of occupations and interests - other (part time) jobs, hobbies, membership of organizations and their parental duties. Only three entrepreneurs seemed more "business minded" as they aimed for a bigger market share and had a more outspoken (though still not exclusive) economic goal setting. Yet, for none of the DrDr agents, "economics" comprised the sole rationale of their entrepreneurial activity; their motivations to start a DrDr service, or the objectives they pursued with it, were always accompanied by other non-economic motivations and objectives, which were usually held more important. This type of business thus appeared to offer opportunities not found in paid employment or any other kind of business. Indeed, as the following sections will show, the DrDr service lent itself exceedingly well for a variety of social missions.

## The social calling: serving and connecting

### *Helping compatriots: at home and abroad*

Unsurprisingly in view of the business premise, in all conversations I had with the DrDr agents, the poorer or more difficult living conditions in the motherland and the allegedly beneficial contribution of their transport activities on the well-being of the stayers played a prominent role. Accordingly, many of the entrepreneurs advanced this as an important incentive for them to start a cargo business. One woman said: “their hard lives are brightened by the goods their remote relatives send back to them; and I wanted to help in that, be part of that. That is why I decided to do this.” Some put it even more sharply and intimated that their “fellows back home” needed the shipped goods for their daily survival. Yet, their role in “improving lives” was emphatically believed to be not only in the transfer of material aid to their compatriots, but also, sometimes considered even more important, in “sending the love” of their migrated relatives, as one entrepreneur romanticized the industry. As these entrepreneurs saw it, what is inside the boxes would not be as important as the idea of them: keeping the family close even over great distances. These immigrants’ choice of business therefore seemed strongly inspired by idealistic and/or romantic notions attached to the work, as well as by feelings of solidarity and a sense of duty towards their fellow countrymen back home.

Interestingly though, the first thing that several entrepreneurs answered when asked why they had started this particular type of business, was that, in this manner, they thought to be of help to their compatriots in the Netherlands. Rather than the *receivers* of the *balikbayan* boxes, they notably considered the *senders*, i.e. the members of their own ethnic community in the host country, as the primary beneficiaries of their undertaking. As it appeared, taking on the task of a *balikbayan* forwarder was seen as a means to place themselves in the service of the community. Their ventures helped their migrated compatriots comply with the moral obligation to support the ones left behind. In the Philippines, assistance patterns within the family are reciprocal and carry a sense of obligation. Apparent in nearly all conversations I had with Filipinos, these moral obligations extend from the nuclear family to the extended family, including uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, nieces, grandparents and even fictive kin, and form crucial part of their Filipino identity. Cultural values such as *utang na loob* or “debt of gratitude” (Tyner 2002) and *pakikisama*, or the “sentiments of collectivism and mutual obligation among kin” (Parreñas 2001, 109) are the basic premises of the Philippine family – whether its members live close together or dispersed across the globe. By offering their co-ethnics in The Netherlands, according to the entrepreneurs, the “best price”, “quickest delivery”, “highest security”, or “most reliable shipment schedule”, they helped maintain the traditional kinship relations and so preserved an important aspect of “being Filipino”, even when physically remote from the native soil. Transporting *balikbayan* boxes made tangible the sentiments of belonging and helped generate propinquity with the distant home front.

At the same time, as shows the quote below, it is also the personal contact between the entrepreneur and the customers that was considered a support to the latter:

*It is just a little business, I won't get richer. How can you get rich with this business? ...But what really counts is the excitement of being in contact with your countrymen, you know... to have contact them en to help them. To be in contact with them is also one action of helping them. It really is a community thing you know... you give it to the Filipino community in Holland, Belgium, Germany.... So I put up this business because it is helping to my countrymen. (Jessica, interview, 08-01-04)*

Many of the business owners' accounts highlighted how socializing with the customers comprised an important, if not the most important, part of the operations in this particular line of business. The business operators personally (often with their spouses) passed by their customers to pick up the filled boxes, which was most of the time accompanied by a invitation for a sociable talk and drink in the customer's private realm. Accordingly, some of the entrepreneurs explicated that their business venture was in fact a kind of social work and they themselves were to be seen as social workers, rather than as businessmen: they assisted their co-ethnics not only in maintaining good relations with their relatives back home by sending their gifts, but also helped them by listening to their stories, telling about their own experiences, and giving them advice, often on life in The Netherlands. As the immigrant entrepreneurs could personally relate to the worries and needs of their customers and would practically as well as emotionally assist them in their adjustment process, in their perception, their DrDr service was not just a transport business but also functioned as a meeting place, or a help desk. While among all entrepreneurs in the survey, "the Filipino way of doing business" was commonly regarded to be "more social" than the "stiff and formal Dutch way" (Maas 2004), it seems especially the *balikbayan* box cargo industry is featured by close and personal relations between the business operators and the customers. In that sense, the strong sense of common identity/origin, and the shared migration experiences, was both a resource to as well as objective in business.

*Helping themselves: maintaining ties with those at home and abroad*

Many of the entrepreneurs thus advanced the desire to be of service to their compatriots, in The Netherlands and/or in The Philippines as the most important drive for their entrepreneurial engagement. Yet, while these entrepreneurs helped migrated co-ethnics adjust to life in the Netherlands and uphold ties with their loved ones back home, it also became clear from their stories that their businesses functioned in similar ways for themselves as well. Also for the operators themselves, the DrDr service served as a meeting desk with compatriots, as an outlet where they could vent their feelings and share experiences and through that cope with difficulties and hardships – which were often related to their migration and separation from home and family.

Moreover, besides forming a platform for adaptation and a vehicle of social integration into the Filipino community in The Netherlands, the transport services also functioned to support the entrepreneurs' own personal ties to their country of origin. They themselves regularly sent private gifts to their relatives and friends in The Philippines too; or they sent boxes for free for relatives or friends who also resided in The Netherlands. Notably, in more than one case, these non-commercial transfers of private goods turned out to over time take on an increasingly more prominent role in the total volume of their forwarding

activities, since often friends in The Netherlands started to give the entrepreneurs their second-hand belongings to donate in The Philippines.

The DrDr business thus preserved not only the entrepreneurs' own pre-migratory social ties to their remote friends and relatives; it also strengthened and expanded their post-migratory social network within their adopted country. What is more, donations made by friends and associates contributed to the expansion of the scope of the business beyond the original DrDr connection, that is, beyond the transnational but nonetheless bounded and intimate *kinship* connections as the primary axis on which it had its original premises.

*Bridging beyond the nearest and dearest*

A notable number of the entrepreneurs I spoke with indicated that, besides sending *balikbayan* boxes with private goods (for their customers as well as for themselves), they had in the course of time also begun to ship (second-hand) goods to civil organizations or community projects in The Philippines. Either they collected these goods themselves, within their own social networks or by going to clearance sales and asking around among hospitals, schools or other institutions in The Netherlands; or they offered co-ethnic associations in The Netherlands free container space to ship their aid to selected beneficiaries. Forging collaborative relations with private donors, ethnic associations and other institutions in both The Netherlands and The Philippines, these immigrant entrepreneurs capitalized on their venture to practice cross-bordering solidarity. They not only serviced their co-ethnics in the country of settlement but also used their enterprise as a relatively cheap and practical instrument for altruistic and humanitarian activities directed at the country of origin. Their small-scale cargo companies so additionally functioned to pursue a social mission that emphatically stretched beyond the core activities of their business. As such, these Filipino business operators made themselves known not only as economic actors, but also as a "philanthropic resource" (Opiniano 2003).

At the same time, transnational endeavours like these may provide immigrants political influence in the homeland. Flora, operating one of the older and seemingly more established DrDr services in The Netherlands, for instance explained that the charity activities she and her relatives back home carried out in their home village had certainly given her family more prestige and that her family was now, more than before, asked for advice or assistance in community affairs, such as in putting up an after-school child care program or equipping the new hospital. For some, eagerness to gain recognition, and some supremacy, in the immigrant community as well as in the place of birth may so have formed an incentive to engage in more dispersed acts of loyalty and solidarity.

In conclusion, whereas the nucleus of the DrDr business is in the immigrants' personal familial obligations and whereas the business operators were first and foremost driven by the wish to help sustain these closely-knit bonds across the miles, the wider benevolent efforts that many of them in addition carried out through their business were grounded in their general sense of reciprocity with the native soil, their ethnic/regional identity and feelings of solidarity with their place of origin, and –less altruistic perhaps- the desire to maintain or strengthen one's personal influence, at home and/or abroad. Bridging "beyond the nearest and dearest", their enterprises extended the specific reciprocity, traditionally

expected from migrants towards the home front, to generalized reciprocity (Faist 2004, 19-21), and solidarity from a focused to a more diffused form. As such, these enterprises encouraged a more widespread set of cross-border alliances.

One final way in which the DrDr business was used to link up with the former homeland – and, hence, provoked further transnationalization- moves beyond “giving back”, as it shifts the role of the stayers from passive aid receivers into active partners in the immigrants’ transnational endeavours.

#### *From giving back to exchange*

Apparently, while DrDr businesses first and foremost serve to maintain interpersonal relationships over long distances, they also give expression to and in fact promote a broader sense of solidarity and companionship, first and foremost within the Filipino immigrant community and with the country or origin, but stretching also, in as far as the immigrant entrepreneurs’ Dutch spouses, friends and/or native institutions are involved, into the adopted society at large. All the same, these enterprises still basically thrive upon a unidirectional sense of belonging and a one-way set of commitments and obligations from the immigrants towards their relatives and friends back home, and, as we saw, sometimes towards the wider home village. In the end, it is the immigrant who “gives back”, either to specific people, or to the motherland in general.<sup>6</sup>

Fascinatingly then, several DrDr operators, at the same time as they in fact exploited their compatriots’ sense of duty and reciprocity towards the former home and also personally used their business as a means to contribute to better lives in the country of origin, voiced a rather critical stance on this one-way relationship between those abroad and those at home. As it seemed though, their resistance specifically centred on “sending money every time they [family and friends in the Philippines] ask for it” (Virgie, interview, 23-12-03). As these entrepreneurs explicated, for them, this request was just not always that easy to comply with, or else they simply did not consider it the desirable course to stay connected to the former home front. The transport of personal goods through the DrDr service can be seen within this context of ambiguity:

*The business is primarily a help. Not for me, for them [the stayers], you know. You know life in the Philippines, all help is welcome. And I can give them money, but then they do not buy food for it. That is a common grief among us Filipino migrants you know. They always send money but so often the money just disappears into nothing. So this is my way to help them. (Roberto, interview, 06-01-04)*

As can be read from Roberto’s argument, remittances in kind are deemed an appropriate or practical substitution for financial remittances and the *balikbayan*

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<sup>6</sup> This is perhaps a somewhat myopic presentation of the situation. While presented here as a one-way set of commitments, it should be realized that support and charity activities carried out by Filipino migrants, as they themselves see it, are in fact indeed an act of reciprocity: they hereby repay their parents and families for their upbringing but also, more generally, repay their society at large for the lives they had on their native soil. Moreover, these acts for their part do not need to go unpaid: they may function as an assurance of future assistance from the receivers of support to the migrant. Alternatively reciprocity can take the form of visual signs attesting to the contributions of migrants, as in the case of memorials in their home villages or awards presented to Filipino associations or individuals for their contributions to the progress of the Philippine nation.

box system can be seen as an arrangement that assures the immigrants that their money is used as intended. Thus, the sending of gifts – rather than “simply money”- may not only be a mere sign of enduring love or responsibility towards those left behind, it may also be an expression of the urge of immigrants to control the format of the support expected from them.

More intriguingly however, the DrDr service also functioned to support the stayers in yet another way – and, while not openly expressed as such, likely the business owners themselves as well. Three DrDr agents explained that a DrDr business, more so than any other type of business, lends itself for active involvement of their relatives (and friends) back home: as an alternative to subcontracting professional forwarding businesses in the Philippines, these immigrants paid their own pre-existing social contacts to handle the delivery of the boxes. Employing the own relatives/friends supposedly helped save on overhead expenses, with contracting professional cargo enterprises most likely asking a higher price for their services. The entrepreneurs however first and foremost presented this business decision as an act of help to the ones left behind; as they explicated, providing the own relatives/friends with work, and thus offering them more or less steady wages, was a better way to help than by “slavishly” remitting money –as one of them put it - to them.

The gains for these stayers were, as the entrepreneurs also emphasized, not just financial. In point of fact, the direct income generated by the handling of the *balikbayan* boxes was in all cases rather limited, comprising no more than a sideline income (although the number of people receiving such a sideline income could be quite substantial, as shown by one case where some 15 to 20 people living all over the Philippines were involved in the business operations). More importantly, as not just the immigrant entrepreneurs but also their relatives back home elucidated, their transnational cooperation and shared interest had resulted in strengthened family bonds, the attainment of (business) skills, a greater confidence in their capabilities and, related to that, higher hopes for the future (Maas 2005).

This was directly observable in that the *balikbayan* forwarding linkages subsequently induced the formation of other, new businesses, put up and run by the immigrants’ close relatives. One sister, for instance, now felt confident enough to realize her dream of old, that is, to establish her own little shop in gifts and party goods. Whereas this woman purchased her merchandize on the local market and operated entirely on her own, the other newly established shops (in consumables, clothing and furniture) sold goods imported from The Netherlands and for that still relied upon the migrated relative. In point of fact, these businesses made use of, or were actually the direct offspring of the already existing *balikbayan* box linkage: the migrated relatives/DrDr operators in the Netherlands, also responsible for the purchase of the sales wares, simply added the merchandize in the shipments of these gift-cases. Remarkably, here too, the latter tended to portray this additional business activity first and foremost as a help to their families back home, and said they themselves “hardly earned” from the sales. Likely however, these material additions made their *balikbayan* box shipments at the very least less costly, and thus saved the entrepreneurs on their overheads.

Still, irrespective of the actual (financial) benefits for the immigrants themselves, what these observations show is an interesting change in the scope

and nature of the actual business pursuit. Using the *balikbayan* box system, actually meant to send private support to the ones left behind, these immigrant entrepreneurs initiated a more productive, and in a way also more truly reciprocal, relationship with their loved ones back home. These immigrants used their overseas social capital to establish an enterprise in their adopted country; at the same time, they themselves formed a resource for employment and business activity in their home country. The fact that the immigrants brought up only the latter as the advantage of running a transnational family business – in fact, as the *reason* to put up such business- is most probably expressive of the traditional Filipino kinship relations in which unselfish support to the more needy ones (those left behind in the motherland) is the norm. Yet, while DrDr businesses by themselves show how, within the context of migration, the expected practice of giving back has become an institutionalized phenomenon, encouraged and fortified from above, the instances described above, operating on the base of exchange within the family, show how the same practice may also be challenged and in fact modified from below, by migrants themselves. In my forthcoming thesis, I develop this point further (Maas forthcoming).

### **Conclusion: DrDr operators forge transnationalization**

Transnationalism, or transnationalization as the process towards more cross-bordering alignments, is generally recognized to start at the level of the household or kinship. Reciprocity and familial obligations between those who left and those who stayed form the bedrock for initial transnational activities, which primarily centre on the –one-way- sending of money and gifts to the home front. Such primordial bonds form a lucrative base for business transactions. The focus of this chapter was on the Philippine DrDr industry, transporting *balikbayan* boxes full of *pasalubongs* (gifts) from abroad to back home, exploring why and how Filipino immigrants in The Netherlands run businesses in this field.

As it appeared, these immigrant entrepreneurs were strongly driven by the very same values that their ventures cater to: social commitment, collectivism, reciprocity and solidarity, with compatriots both in the adopted country as well as “back home”, were commonly advanced as their prime reasons to be active in the DrDr industry. Listening to their stories, their business decisions were guided by altruism or compassion more so than by selfish objectives. As such, their enterprises both ensued from and projected values which to them were recognizably Filipino and evocative of Filipino culture.

This chapter furthermore showed how the DrDr operators, and their grassroots transnational enterprises, while rather insignificant in terms of turnover or employment creation, were the vanguard of new and more substantial transnational ties. In the first place, these immigrant entrepreneurs thickened and diversified the economic ties with the home front, and in the process challenged traditional, obligatory kinship ties typical for first-generation migrants. Whereas the *balikbayan* box that formed the base and focus of their cross-bordering pursuits is emblematic of the enduring commitment of migrants towards those left behind, these immigrants used it to forge more truly reciprocal kinship relations. At the very least, they implicated the home stayers in the production

cycle, turning the role of the latter from mere “passive receivers of support” to “active participants” working for a shared interest. Moreover, actively involving the relatives back home in the business operations, and so using them as a resource to the business while simultaneously offering them a vehicle to social mobility, turned out to incite these “home country counterparts” to additional productive activity – with or without assistance of their migrated relative.

Hence, while operating their businesses, these entrepreneurs, sometimes in close cooperation with their relatives who stayed behind, have discovered new opportunities and formulated new goals. Interestingly, these new opportunities and new goals more than once also moved beyond the original business realm. Empirical evidence provided in this chapter thus supports Portes’ claim that “while the original wave of these activities may be economic and their initiators can be properly labelled transnational entrepreneurs, subsequent activities encompass political, social and cultural pursuits as well” (1997, 15). Using the business linkages also for more humanitarian pursuits, the immigrants forged “generalized reciprocity” and “diffuse solidarity” among larger groups within the host country as well as in and with their former homeland, which complemented the “specific reciprocity” and “focused solidarity” (Faist 2004, 19-21) that initially formed the basis for their transnational involvement. Besides the symbolic value of these transnational ties and their contribution to local economic and social development of the former home region, the findings moreover suggested that immigrants’ cross-bordering pursuits may also constitute effective mechanisms for creating or upholding personal political influence in the locality of origin.

All in all, these entrepreneurs have set in motion a cumulative process that in the end has led to a qualitatively distinct phenomenon: the transnational social space that they have created surpasses the strictly migratory chains of first-generation immigrants, including more people from different sectors of society and more numerous and qualitative diversified linkages that carry more resources back and forth between home and host society. As such, the case of the Filipino DrDr services illustrates how immigrants may not only be participants in a transnational field, but also active contributors to, and catalysts in the emergence and consolidation of so-called transnational communities, in which more and more people build their lives.

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