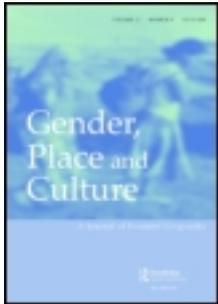


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### Identity construction and 'coincidental' entrepreneurship among gay Filipino guesthouse owners in Amsterdam

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## Identity construction and ‘coincidental’ entrepreneurship among gay Filipino guesthouse owners in Amsterdam

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This article centralizes gay Filipino entrepreneurs in the guesthouse industry in the city of Amsterdam, drawing on the narratives and trajectories of five of them. The article highlights the common threads of experiences of these immigrant entrepreneurs, as these provide interesting insights into the processes of their identity (re)construction and social embedding in the Netherlands and the role of their entrepreneurial involvement in these processes. In addition, the article describes how they relate to their home country, the wider Filipino community in the Netherlands, and the wider Dutch gay community. It will be shown that these experiences and relations sit uneasily with established positions in debates on home and belonging within transnational migration studies and queer studies, notably the idea that moving to western countries of destination cannot be treated as equivalent to moving to ‘queer cultural homelands.’ In addition, the article shows that immigrant entrepreneurship does not revolve around ethnicity *per se* in the sense that entrepreneurial practices cannot be understood separately from other identity forming structures such as sexuality and class.

**Keywords:** queer migration; transnational intersectionality; ethnic entrepreneurship; Filipino community in the Netherlands

### Gay Filipino immigrants in a ‘transnational intersectionality framework’

The Filipino diaspora is among the largest in the world (Barber 2000; Manalansan 2006). Compared to other host societies, the Filipino community residing in the Netherlands is relatively small. However, when it comes to the gender and occupational characteristics of Filipinos in the Netherlands, the community resembles Filipino immigrant communities elsewhere: this is a predominantly female migration, and many migrants are engaged as domestic workers and caretakers. In addition, a growing number of Filipinos opt for entrepreneurship (Van den Tillaart 2007; Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek and Kamer van Koophandel 2008). The present study has been conducted as part of a broader research project on Filipino entrepreneurship in the Netherlands (Maas 2005, 2011).<sup>1</sup> This project initially centered on women, who were, in most of the cases, part of a close-knit yet highly transnational community of Filipino migrants. While there are rather few Filipino entrepreneurs who opt for the restaurant and catering sector, as data from the Dutch trading register (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek and Kamer van Koophandel 2008) indicate, it remains surprising how little known these entrepreneurs are among their compatriots. None of the respondents interviewed for the broader project referred to any (other) Filipino running a bistro, café, pension, or other public catering

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establishment – none, until we met Godwin, who himself owned a Bed & Breakfast (B&B). This one meeting suddenly revealed a hidden ‘cluster’ or ‘niche’ of Filipino-owned guesthouses, all located in the city of Amsterdam. This hidden cluster is central to this article, which primarily draws on the narratives and trajectories of five Filipinos, closely intertwined with other Filipino entrepreneurs in the restaurant and catering sector in the city. Contrary to the image of the prototypical immigrant from the Philippines sketched above, these entrepreneurs are male. All B&B owners featuring in this article, moreover, are gay.

This article highlights the common threads of experiences of these entrepreneurial immigrants, as these provide interesting insights into the processes of their identity (re) construction and social embedding in the Netherlands and the role of their entrepreneurial involvement in these processes. The original project set out to explore the possibilities to develop a transnational approach to immigrant entrepreneurship. To take a transnational approach means paying deliberate attention to the enduring influence of political, economic, and/or social conditions and forces stemming from the immigrants’ society of origin, and material and immaterial connections and interactions between receiving and sending society, which may affect immigrants’ business decisions and activities.<sup>2</sup> Although, traditionally, research on the Filipino diaspora concentrated on labor migration to specific countries of destination and to specific occupations, in recent years, and through the use of a transnational perspective, more attention has gone out to issues of remittances, return, and to the social roles of migrants, especially women (wives, mothers), which connect home and host countries (Asis and Baggio 2008; Barber 2000; Parreñas 2005; Hilsdon and Giridharan 2008).

This article aims to contribute to this line of research in two ways. First, it broadly responds to the call made by Manalansan (2006) to include concepts and ideas from queer studies in migration research, in order to improve our understanding of the ways in which migrants identifying as gay or queer renegotiate feelings of belonging and exclusion in relation to their migration experience. In particular, this concerns the question how they renegotiate queerness as it intersects with other expressions of social identity, notably ethnicity, or, from an institutional perspective, their status as an immigrant (Grewal and Kaplan 2001; Manalansan 2006; Luibhéid 2008a, 2008b). Previous studies on the intersections of queerness, Filipino diasporic identity, and citizenship status include Manalansan’s own anthropological study on Filipinos in New York. This study shows how queer migrant subjectivities are formed through the processes of inclusion and exclusion at work in urban spaces such as queer districts and gay bars, and in symbolic acts such as dress codes and language (Manalansan 2003). Another study focusing on emergent entrepreneurship among Filipinos in Paris mentions the activities of a group of gay hairdressers (Fresnoza-Flot and Pecoud 2007). In their capacity as guesthouse owners, the gay Filipino immigrants who are the object of this study offer temporary homes to others, but at the same time they are building homes for themselves in the Netherlands on a more permanent basis. Combining insights from transnational migration studies and queer studies, the article will describe how they relate to their home country, the wider Filipino community in the Netherlands, and the wider Dutch gay community. Notably, inspiration is drawn from the ‘transnational intersectionality framework’ employed by James Thing in his work on Mexican men living in Los Angeles. He not only points out that gay immigrants cluster together and draw on ethnic social networks to make it through the first phases of adaptation and integration into the host country, but also that this clustering takes place at a considerable social distance from the white and middle-class gay community in Los Angeles (Thing 2010).

This brings us to the second issue that we would like to address. With the understanding that the gay immigrants who are the focus of this study are also immigrant entrepreneurs comes the challenge to explore the ways in which their queerness plays out in the running of their businesses. In other words, how does the intersection of queerness and ethnicity (as markers of social identity) influence the business activities (aims, scope and network relations, and success) of these entrepreneurs? Although there is no room on this occasion to summarize the discussion on immigrant entrepreneurship in economic geography (see Maas 2011; Wang 2012), suffice it to say that ethnicity is considered crucial in the choices to engage in entrepreneurship and in a specific business niche or product. In addition, clientele is often found within the same ethnic group, although this is not necessarily what ethnic entrepreneurs aspire (Lagendijk et al. 2011). Business and entrepreneurship studies have only begun to examine the constitutive roles of gender and ethnicity in the context of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial networks (Essers and Benschop 2009; Hanson and Blake 2009). To our knowledge, sexuality as a specific identity forming structure has largely been ignored in (immigrant) entrepreneurship studies. Apart from a short observation in the earlier mentioned study on Filipinos in Paris (Fresnoza-Flot and Pecoud 2007), the influence of one's sexual orientation, and the complex intersection of this identity marker with other categories of difference, on the emergence of business activity and business networks, has remained an underexplored terrain.

The article is organized as follows. We begin by describing our research approach; then, we discuss the rise of the gay Filipino 'niche' within the B&B industry in Amsterdam, drawing intensively on interview quotes. In the two subsequent sections, we engage with these quotes in detail, disclosing why this group of Filipino entrepreneurs has stayed so strikingly invisible to the wider Filipino community in the Netherlands and how this echoes transnational behavior, also with a view to the running of their businesses. Important aspects addressed here are the identity negotiations of the interviewed gay Filipinos, that is, their privileging of some identities while suppressing others (Gonzales 1998), as well as their status as partners of native Dutchmen. It will be concluded that these themes, while their transferability to other contexts may be limited, sit uneasily with a number of well-known positions in different academic debates.

### **Research approach and limitations**

Responding to calls in the literature (Peters 2002; Pütz 2003), a research approach is used that allows the immigrants to voice their stories and explore their experiences and perceptions. Consistent with this actor-centered form of social inquiry (Mason 2002), the main research method is the qualitative, oral interview. For the broader research project, a total of 29, mostly female, entrepreneurs have been interviewed; all have been identified through snowball sampling. As discussed in the introduction, the five gay male guesthouse owners and, as a consequence, the cluster of gay Filipino guesthouse owners they turned out to represent were 'discovered' in the course of the sampling process. Although this subset is not large enough to make general knowledge claims, it brings to the fore a research topic that, in and by itself, cuts across literature divides and raises questions for further research. In particular, the situated knowledge obtained from reconstructing these transnational lives serves to underline the spatial variation in migration and gender regimes, and what this may mean for identity reconstruction.

These interviews were structured according to the life history method (Järvinen 2004), in which respondents are encouraged to describe the most important events and

experiences in successive phases of their lives – emphatically, therefore, the interviews concerned not only their lives as queer migrants or immigrant entrepreneurs, but also their roles as partners, sons, etc. This method made it ‘possible to look at actual decisions and actions and to perceive behind these practices the network of social relations that allowed these decisions and actions to take place’ (Vandsemb 1995, 415). In our experience, this approach stimulated the men to open up and expose sometimes surprisingly sensitive matters and underlying rationales for the choices they had made. The narratives and trajectories, moreover, are closely intertwined with those of other Filipino entrepreneurs in the restaurant and catering sector in the city of Amsterdam. In particular, the names and entrepreneurial pursuits of five men came up in the conversations with others many times as a frame of reference.<sup>3</sup>

The approach corresponds to the idea of placing the emerging properties of intersecting social identities at the center of attention rather than measuring intersectionality as the sum of discrete social identities (Valentine 2007; Bowleg 2008). Analytical emphasis then is on expressions and articulations of intersectionality as they emerge out of a larger set of possible expressions and articulations (Valentine 2007). In addition, we concur with Marx Ferree (2009, 85) in arguing that ‘[i]ntersectionality is not a concept added on to an analysis formed on some other theoretical ground, but is part of basic explanation of the social order as such.’ Accordingly, the life-course events and experiences brought forward in the interviews were linked to particular emerging properties of the multiple social identities of the respondents. This was done by means of reflexive interpretation (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000), which implies that the data were not just taken as empirical facts; rather, they were allowed to speak of the kind of interaction that took place between the researcher and the respondents, as well as to the different frameworks of reference mentioned in the previous section. To counterbalance the risk of ‘overplaying agency and rationality’ (Mason 2002, 235) inherent in the life history method, data collection was not limited to these oral interviews with the principal characters. Their personal narratives were supplemented with information derived from a variety of other sources, such as company websites and other promotional materials, attendance of cultural events, and social gatherings.<sup>4</sup>

### **The emergence of a ‘hidden cluster’ of gay Filipino guesthouse owners**

The migration histories and resettlement trajectories of the men turned out to be strikingly alike. In the conversations, Rene was repeatedly named as the pioneer in the new direction their lives had taken. Several respondents emphasized that ‘it all started with Rene,’ with which they referred either to their migration to the Netherlands or to their current entrepreneurial engagement – or to both. But Rene himself had his own predecessors too. Friends had gone ahead of him and encouraged by their ebullient stories of the open social climate in this country, he decided to undertake this venture too. In the late 1970s, at the age of 24, he left his job as an interior decorator in Cagayan de Oro City, on the island of Mindanao, and came to the Netherlands. While Rene ‘fell in love with the country as soon as [he] set foot on it,’ private problems in his host family forced him to go back to the Philippines within a short time. Determinedly, he saved so he could return to the Netherlands as soon as possible. He did so in 1980 and this time took Robin with him, a good friend from his hometown. Rene’s enthusiastic stories in turn appealed to others in his hometown in the Philippines. Two years upon Rene’s – and Robin’s – arrival, his friend Elton came to the Netherlands. Another 2 years later, Rene’s cousin Eric came over:

Life in the Philippines before I came here ... well, actually, I had a real good life in the Philippines. I worked at the bank as an accountant, I had a paid job. Everything okay. But still something was wrong. Because, you know, I am gay. And in the Philippines, it is not easy to be gay. The Philippines is not as open as Europe. Or the Netherlands. Rene was already here, for the same reason you know. Actually, he is the cousin of my father, so my uncle. So I wrote him a letter and asked him 'How is life in Amsterdam?' And all he answered was 'Get here immediately!' Well, of course, I had already heard some stories from him. That life here was so open and people so friendly. Freedom for gays, that kind of stuff ... So I just packed my things and left.

During the first years of their new lives in the Netherlands, in the early 1980s, Rene, Robin, Elton, and Eric closely consorted together, confronting the unknown environment side by side. Compared to the comfortable lives they had had in the Philippines, they now had to take for granted a much more insecure existence. Expiration of their tourist visas soon forced them into a situation of *tagu nang tago*, Tagalog for 'hiding in illegality,' having to accept any job that came on their way: cleaning houses, washing dishes, or carrying luggage in hostels. Despite this, Rene nostalgically narrates how much he liked his new life full of adventure: 'It was fast, changing, never knowing what to expect. Every day was a new challenge. And nobody to tell me what to do or how to behave; life was all mine.' That life, for him and, so he stresses, for his homosexual friends, was 'so much easier' that they did not think about returning to the Philippines – or moving elsewhere. Nonetheless, after some years without any form of security, Rene started to desire a more stable life. Above all, he wanted the assurance that he would not be deported from the Netherlands – a threat that he had only narrowly escaped several times before, when the immigration services showed up unexpectedly in the places where he worked illegally. Rene placed a personal advertisement in the local newspaper and so came in contact with Dutchman Job. Not concealing his initial ulterior motives to get in touch with a native man, he immediately and against all odds fell in love, and as his feelings were reciprocated soon both men decided to live together. Job's willingness to act as a guarantor for his Filipino boyfriend was, indeed, Rene's way out of illegality.

Rene's first official job was as a cook in a Mexican restaurant. Working there, he gained experience in the kitchen and got the idea to start a restaurant of his own. Too often, he had yet experienced how his insufficient command of the Dutch language had limited his chances to obtain a satisfactory job on the regular labor market. Running his own restaurant business, even though not the occupation of his first choice, seemed to him more attractive than accepting jobs below his qualifications. The only impediment to turn his idea into practice was lack of funds. This changed when he met Ding, in the mid-1980s. For Ding, born and raised in Manila, Amsterdam, came into the picture after having moved first to San Francisco, Paris, and the German city of Düsseldorf, where he explored the possibilities of starting a restaurant. While still in Germany, Ding contacted his old acquaintance Rene, whom he had met during a visit to Amsterdam, and brought up their mutual dream and his determination and impatience to turn that dream into reality. Rene soon spotted a good opportunity to establish their eatery: the same year (1987) Rene and Ding opened the doors of 'At Mango Bay.' Proudly, Ding recalls At Mango Bay was the first Filipino-owned bistro serving Filipino food in the Netherlands. Eric, Rene's nephew who had come over to the country some years before and till then had earned his money with irregular and menial jobs, was employed as a waiter and kitchen helper. In the first 5 years of its existence, Rene and Ding jointly managed the restaurant and made, as Ding says, 'very reasonable money.' Nonetheless, in 1992, the business partners decided to split up and Rene continued as the sole operator of At Mango Bay for one more year. However, he had lost his enthusiasm:

I knew already for some time that I did not want to have a restaurant anymore. I just don't like to work at night. It is simple as that. It was just emergency then, you know. . . . But a good friend of mine, he already had a B&B. I met him on the streets one day and I asked him what he did. Which was running a B&B. So we talked about it and then I thought 'I want that too.' That's how it went. I just met this guy in the street and he told me he had a B&B and that it ran smoothly. So I asked him how he ran a business like that and he explained it to me. So that is how I got the idea to do this. It was just a coincidence.

The opportunity to establish a B&B was provided by another compatriot's success story, perfectly timed at the onset of a new stage in Rene's life: he and his partner Job had just bought a monumental mansion on one of the most popular avenues in Amsterdam. As their new home had more than enough room to rent out to tourists, Rene in 1994 passed on his restaurant to his nephew Eric and opened his guesthouse, then only consisting of a couple of rooms. While initially Job was his dormant business partner and still had paid work outside, soon enough the business produced sufficient income to sustain their household, allowing Job to become a working partner.

As with his migration to the Netherlands, Rene's turn in business would find a following. After he left, Eric went on to be the owner of At Mango Bay. However, he too increasingly started to dislike the long working days. Besides, his 'entrepreneurial spirit' fed his desire for change. Initially, Eric considered starting a business in clothing, but in the end he was again inspired by his uncle Rene who convinced him of the ease of operating a B&B and of the stability of the market since 'Amsterdam would always attract tourists in need of a place to sleep.' In 2000, Eric sold the restaurant and established a guesthouse, like his uncle in his private dwelling in the city center of Amsterdam.

Eric was not the first to follow Rene's entrepreneurial footsteps though: in 1999, Godwin had also established a B&B in Amsterdam, 3 years after his arrival in the Netherlands. In 1994, Godwin had been in the country for the first time, on invitation by his sister and her Dutch spouse. Like Rene and Eric, he had immediately 'fallen in love with the country' and back in the Philippines decided that he wanted to return and settle down here. Under the guise of study plans, he came back to the Netherlands in 1996. Rene needed a helping hand in his growing B&B. While Rene taught him how to clean and cook (in the Philippines, Godwin never needed to do any household chores), Godwin, with a degree in economics, in turn instructed Rene how to keep his administration. Then, again through Rene, Godwin met Dutchman Wimmo, with whom he soon started a love relationship. This relationship ultimately offered him the legal permission to settle down in the country permanently, and to start the search for a suitable place to locate a B&B. When he was interviewed in 2007, Godwin said:

Really, it has become an industry in Amsterdam. Because, when we started, there were just seven or eight, you know, like eight years ago or so. But now, I think there are at least some 100 B&Bs here in Amsterdam. The concept has really had a breakthrough in the Netherlands . . . it really goes from one to another, just like a rolling ball.

Elton (who had followed Rene to the Netherlands) had started a hair salon many years ago, yet recently established a B&B next to this. Another Filipino friend, Rico, started a B&B upon the end of his lease of a coffee bar. Giorgio and Dani, and several other men, also of Philippine origin, had engaged in the business as well. Ken, allegedly the first within this group of friends to engage in it, developed an entire chain of his own, with numerous rooms and apartments for rent all over the city. Rene, Eric, and Godwin each ran successful businesses too, considering the quick expansion of their activities. While they all began with hosting guests in their private dwellings, their company websites reveal that they presently each own and rent out several spacious apartments in hot spot areas in

downtown Amsterdam. Their successes show also in the external recognition and high appreciation of their lodging facilities: on a well-known website providing recommendations for hotels, resorts, inns, and the like, both Godwin's and Rene's B&Bs take in top 10 positions on a total of over a hundred B&Bs in Amsterdam. Moreover, *bedandbreakfast.com*, an online worldwide B&B directory, grouped Godwin's B&B as one of the 'Top 10 Urban Inns,' while Rene's company website states that his venture was recommended (from 2007 onward) by the Michelin Red Guide, the oldest and best-known European hotel and restaurant guide.<sup>5</sup>

### Identity (re)construction and homemaking

Broadly there are two, partly contrasting, views on the meaning of home and belonging for queer people (Valentine 1993; Fortier 2001, 2003; Pilkey 2012). One of these views holds that continuing to live in the (heterosexual) familial home where one was brought up is irreconcilable with 'coming out' as gay or lesbian. Coming out is equated here with moving away from home; when first immersed in the gay and lesbian community, people may even feel like coming home. In an alternative view, the familial home matters, after all, especially for gays and lesbians from supportive families (Gorman-Murray 2008). Instead of leaving the familial home behind physically and mentally, people negotiate multiple belongings and even come to reconstruct certain events and ways of behaving in their childhood as non-heteronormative (Fortier 2001, 2003; Pilkey 2012).

Following this idea, the notion of home cannot *a priori* be connected to particular geographical spaces of destination (Fortier 2001). As argued by Waitt and Gorman-Murray (2011), gay youth originating from rural areas experience push and pull factors with regard to both their rural hometowns and the allegedly gay-friendly urban spaces they aspire to live in. In a similar vein, according to Dasgupta (2009), the nature and confines of the Asian familial home are such that it is possible, albeit in ways that are not always outspoken or clearly visible, to express queer identities without moving away. In the Philippines, for example, a particular kind of gayness called 'bakla' is more or less socially accepted and coexists with ostensibly more western-oriented gay lifestyles (Manalansan 2003; Benedicto 2008).<sup>6</sup> Similarly, US and European cities often perceived to be 'epicenters of the gay globe' (Benedicto 2008, 319) tend to feature a patchwork of local scenes divided along lines of ethnicity and class. In these scenes, queer migrants may adopt transnational lifestyles, which in part still reflect the culture and habits of their 'home' countries.

How do the Filipinos in Amsterdam fit within this discussion? Back in the Philippines, most of the Filipinos lived relatively luxurious lives – in fact, as Rico says about himself, he 'was spoilt to the bones.' The other men too come from rather wealthy families and had good jobs before they left their country of birth. Rather than an economic need, all five had more emotional motives to leave the Philippines and come to the Netherlands, hoping – expecting – here to find more acceptance of and freedom to express their homosexuality. Moreover, although, for some of them, migration was set in motion and facilitated by personal relationships, for all, their decision to migrate was an entirely individual matter and served an individual goal only. When they migrated, these entrepreneurs were all single young men, looking for adventure, independence, and freedom. More specifically, they were looking for freedom to express their homosexual identity – as this was accepted neither within their direct environment nor in the predominantly Catholic Philippine society in general. As an additional, and according to some interrelated, source for their yearning for liberty, some of these men point to the high social class in which they lived in

the Philippines, where prestige and certain outer appearances would be of utmost importance and demands on their behavior ('living a decent and respectable life') would go strongly against their own ideas. Godwin's parents had forced him to follow a study that he actually did not like; more generally, he had always felt himself the odd one out because his lifestyle did not meet the expectations of his family. Living in the Netherlands offered him the chance to live an independent life, free to do whatever he wanted and 'to be who he really was.'

Hence, for these men, their migration was an escape from a system that to a greater or lesser degree imprisoned or oppressed them. The social arrangements and normative expectations ruling in their premigratory personal networks as well as in society at large prevented them from feeling at home in their own country. Always having to explain or justify themselves, leaving the Philippines was an act of liberation from overt disapproval as well as more dormant expressions of othering. As Godwin asserts:

The gays, the Filipino gays, they don't come here just to earn some money and then go back. They come here for their freedom, for themselves. Because in the Philippines, we cannot really live our own life, because we are gay. Here, it is no issue you know, it is not important here. How you live your life, your sexuality, it does not matter. Sure, to us, it matters, because that is the main reason why we have come here.

Precisely because of their negative personal experiences, and their ensuing aversion toward the Filipino cultural value system, they all have, to varying degrees, abandoned their native soil, as illustrated by repeated and rather strong statements such as 'the only thing I miss are my childhood memories of Amsterdam,' 'Amsterdam is my only home,' 'I was born in the wrong country,' and 'luckily I do not have anything to do with that country [the Philippines] anymore.' Their emigration from the Philippines is therefore both a physical and an emotional break and, in some aspects, even a rejection of their ethnic and cultural background. Although the guesthouse of Godwin and his Dutch partner is called 'Barangay' (with the last syllable underlined), which in Tagalog means ward, or small village, Godwin's Filipino background cannot easily be read off from the way the guesthouse is decorated. Barangay has a mainstream western-style interior that even includes a small Buddha statue, a popular home decoration item in the Netherlands without any obvious religious significance. The men hardly maintain any social relationships with their country of birth anymore. Rico's bonds to his country of birth stay limited to a phone call or two a year. Since he came to the Netherlands in the early 1990s, he has gone back twice – the first time after 9 years – both times because of urgent family affairs. Both visits were, not unexpectedly, disappointing experiences as his parents (wealthy and devoted Catholics) strongly disapproved of his homosexuality. As a consequence, the main reason for Rico's dislike of his native soil has remained fully in force. Rene went back for the first time only after 12 years and Ding after 27 years. Godwin visits the Philippines more often; tellingly though, he and his Dutch partner stay with his family as 'short as possible' and spend the rest of the time celebrating their holidays on the more usual – and anonymous – tourist hot spots. These Filipinos will not go back to the Philippines, at least not in the short term – Godwin could imagine becoming more interested in his Filipino roots in the years to come. He knows one Filipino who is in his 50s now and who has recently bought a piece of land in the Philippines, whereas he oriented himself toward the Dutch society in the past.

Not one of the men is a member of a registered Filipino organization, and only rarely do they support collective activities organized by compatriots. Together with the fact that their businesses cater to a general clientele and not specifically to Filipino visitors of Amsterdam, this explains why this cluster was 'invisible' in the Filipino diaspora in the

Netherlands. Like Rico says: ‘We are just two different people. We know that they are there, but we don’t know who they are, and they even don’t know about us at all.’ Rather than seeking contact with other fellow countrymen in the adopted country, the men bonded closely together. Initially, they did so not just because of their emotional connectedness but with a practical reason as well: to cope with their new environment and their illegal and insecure status. Jointly they lived through a turbulent and exiting period (in Rene’s words, a ‘life on the edge’), which only furthered their association. However, as Godwin explains, once they one by one settled down with a partner (except for one notably all with a native Dutchman) and became more occupied as business owner-operators, their previous closeness became increasingly under threat of disintegration. To prevent this, they arranged a weekly get-together at someone’s home, which they named ‘the Monday Club.’ Although it was initiated by a small close-knit group of Filipino friends, more gay compatriots joined the club soon. Notably, homosexuals from other nationalities ‘enrolled’ in the group, which, again, illustrates that they went beyond the narrow ethnic thinking.<sup>7</sup>

Authors studying queer migration across state borders have, on more than one occasion, pointed to the pitfalls of the ‘liberation’ and/or ‘freedom’ rhetoric that emerges from the narratives (Grewal and Kaplan 2001). Analogous to the above-mentioned discussion on moving away from the familial home in order to ‘come home,’ migrating to western countries of destination cannot be treated as equivalent to moving to ‘queer cultural homelands’ (Fortier 2001, 410, see also Waitt and Gorman-Murray 2011). It is in this respect that our research findings, in dialog with the other empirical literature mentioned, may serve to expand James Things’ transnational intersectionality framework in a certain way. For, although limited in scope, the men’s stories exemplify how the Filipino gender regime and the Dutch migration and gender regimes, the latter being institutionalized in the same-sex marriage and other forms of partnership, worked together to help the Filipino gays out of their precarious legal and work situations. By ‘gender regime,’ we broadly mean, following Luibhéid (2002, 2008a, 2008b), the way gender and sexuality are inscribed into a nation’s key legal texts, producing a particular form of governmentality that is imposed on citizens and on immigrants applying for legal status alike. Because they were able to formalize their relationship with native Dutch partners, the men at some point acquired a legal status as long-term residents or citizens, pushing them away even further from their Philippine roots.<sup>8</sup> This draws attention to the argument to include more systematically the role of the state and its associated institutions in research on identity construction and subjectivity of queer migrants (Grewal and Kaplan 2001), and in research on transnational migration (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004). In addition to recounting the inclusions and exclusions produced by being at a certain intersection of identities, it is important to ‘focus on temporal variation in the political constellations shaping the environment for trans-state ethnic and migrant social action and on the sources of any such changes’ (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004, 1189–1190). To this, we might add the *spatial* variation in migration and gender regimes that make queer subjects negotiate home and belonging in complex and dynamic ways.

### **Identity negotiations and ‘coincidental’ entrepreneurship**

In the Netherlands, like in other western economies, most immigrant enterprises are found at the bottom of the labor market. Here, especially trade and catering attract immigrants to run business. As a result, these sectors are tagged as the traditional sectors of immigrant entrepreneurship (Engelen 2002; Van den Tillaart 2007). Apart from these initial pushes

into business, the narratives also revealed how, subsequently, increasing frustration with this first business activity informed the decision to change course and start a guesthouse.

Still, notwithstanding these negative aspects, the narratives generally highlighted positive factors of choice. In the interviews, these came to the fore only indirectly or were mentioned casually. Even though their businesses display growth, this does not seem to be a deliberate strategy for these men. Both Rene and Godwin explain that they 'just grab the opportunity when it comes along.' When they see a potentially nice apartment, and have the necessary money and energy, they 'go for it.' To the question of their entrepreneurial goals and intentions, these men reply that they do not have any plans at all in business. Rather, they 'simply see how it comes.' Their lives do not merely center around business pursuits, having 'a life outside the work' is also, if not more, important. On the one hand, they abundantly make clear to enjoy the work in the business itself and seem to also derive pride from it. Taking care of other people and giving them a good time, being in direct contact with 'all sorts of people', cleaning and decorating are all activities these men like to do. On the other hand, while they prefer the work in the business to a white-collar job or, as for Rene and Eric, other business types (i.e. a restaurant), their business concurrently also offers them reasonable working hours and flexibility, with 'time left to do other things.' As such, the men strongly suggested that their engagement in a guesthouse was a rather spontaneous decision, and certainly not an action they had long thought about or strategically planned. They came here as young adventurers, without knowing really much more than that Amsterdam was 'where it all happened' and 'where [they] had to be.' Apart from wishing to experience this for themselves, they would have hardly any idea, concrete plans, or clear intentions on how to make a living here. Certainly, over time, they shook off some of their youthful impetuosity, settled down with a partner, and established a business to sustain their lives. However, in the main, making calculated plans for the future and charting a certain course were not how they lived life nor how they became involved in or operated their business.

Retelling the stories of their lives, the men were able to articulate and negotiate their social identity (Vandsemb 1995). It is in light of these identity negotiations that their articulated claims of 'coincidental' entrepreneurship must be understood. For if we take into account the wider context of their decision-making, their establishment of a B&B was definitely not so coincidental. Most obviously, each of these men had observed this business opportunity in their close environment, and one of them had even previously worked in such a business himself. Having a role model nearby, or having personal experience with the work, provided them with the idea, knowledge, and skills and thus encouraged their decision to take up this chance themselves. In addition, these factors coincided with other conditions in their lives at the time that furthered this decision: they had just bought a spacious mansion, started a relationship and desired to live together, or felt growing dissatisfaction with their then occupation. Also the Monday Club provided a pool of resources, and the B&Bs owned by its members constituted a fruitful and inspiring training ground, considering the subsequent establishments of such businesses by newcomers. Every time we visited Godwin's place, another Filipino was rumbling around working and living in his B&B, and at each subsequent meeting Godwin told us how these (informal) employees in the meantime had become legal residents and started their own guesthouse. Also at the time of our last meeting, a young Filipino student was being taught the ropes of the business by Godwin, like Rene had taught him. Finally, the fact that the men belonged to wealthy, upper-class families and, as a result, did not have to send remittances to the Philippines enabled them to fully concentrate on building their businesses.

These conditions thus contest the claim of coincidence. The men's trajectories, including their adaptation to the new environment, were closely interwoven and strongly embedded within their own social network. In addition, the stories showed that their social relationships with other Filipino gays, including the reciprocity, enforceable trust, and bounded solidarity on which these were built, played an essential role in the start and performance of their enterprises. These two findings, in turn, suggest that the nature and composition of migrant entrepreneurial networks are highly complex, as suggested in the recent literature. In particular, consideration of these men's processes of identity formation and negotiation reveals that the involvement of compatriots in business does not have to do with ethnic-cultural predilections or norms only.

### **Conclusion: no more *tagu nang tago* (hiding in illegality)**

Not only in *what* they told, but also in *how* they recounted their life-course events and experiences – light-heartedly, in an open and utmost amicable atmosphere – the men created a story, and a personality, that revolved around freedom. In summary, these stories speak of the dominant views held in the literature in different ways. First, their primary axis of identification or bonding is clearly not their ethnic origin but their sexuality, which not only distinguished them in their former home society but which also in their adopted country forms a strong social boundary that sets them apart from 'other Filipinos.' The men built a new life away from their origin country, maintained weak personal and hardly any business relations with the Philippines, and in fact with the wider Filipino community in the Netherlands. This challenges the tendency in the literature to portray Filipino migrants as transnational 'par excellence' (Barber 2000; Manalansan 2006). The lives of the key figures in this article largely evolved outside the transnational field. However, it did become evident that, in order to make it through the first difficult phases in the Netherlands, they had to consort together. This, of course, is well known from the literature on both transnational migration and immigrant entrepreneurship. Further, through the work of Manalansan (2003) and Benedicto (2008) and others, we can understand the transformative potential of queer migrant spaces – niches in the urban gay landscape where transnational lifestyles, framed around intersecting gay, ethnic, and other identities, are sustained. The Monday Club was such a space; its visitors were mostly queer immigrants from various backgrounds, though Filipinos assumed a central role since it started as a gathering for Filipino gays and their Dutch partners. For regular visitors, it was a place to share experiences and to strengthen (co-ethnic) bonds. For newcomers, the club provided essential cultural and economic capital into the city of Amsterdam.

Second, the findings presented here appear to contradict the progressive view, developed within queer studies, which argues against the modernizing discourse that has equated countries of origin with underdevelopment and tradition, and countries of destination with liberation and freedom (Fortier 2003; Grewal and Kaplan 2001). Yet, recurring accounts of liberation and freedom are precisely what emerged from the interwoven narratives. For the men, migration seemed to entail a near forthright liberating experience: their narratives strongly revolved around the freedom they had obtained by switching countries. Their migration was a purposeful disembedding from their old social world. These men, now, lived as 'free men,' with which they referred to a life unbound by confining family expectations and broader societal attitudes toward homosexuality. To explain these findings, we proposed 'a more complicated model of transnational relations in which power structures, asymmetries, and inequalities become the conditions of

possibility of new subjects' (Grewal and Kaplan 2001, 671), expanding the 'transnational intersectionality' framework from which we set out to the realm of state institutions and state-instigated practices. By recognizing gay partnership and by (conditionally) granting social and legal status to immigrant partners, the Dutch migration and gender regimes enabled the men to make their way out of illegality and out of the menial jobs at the bottom of the labor market. In our view, this contingent outcome stands aside to some extent from the fact that the men have perceived the city of Amsterdam as a queer homeland since they first arrived. While the fortunes of the Filipinos in this study have improved, other (aspiring) migrants are struggling to find ways into the real and imagined queer homelands across the globe. They find themselves without such a legal and social status, rendering them more vulnerable to various forms of oppression (Luibhéid 2008b; Benedicto 2008).

Third, and finally, an important finding of this article is that immigrant entrepreneurship does not revolve around ethnic identity *per se*. The men selectively activated and mobilized certain identities in dynamic interaction with their environment. They presented themselves as coincidental entrepreneurs, who nevertheless take pride in their successes and in being able to teach others the tricks and trades of the business. Beyond doubt, it was their sexuality, albeit in conjunction with other identity forming structures such as class and ethnicity, which stood out as the key factor that gave rise to their common bonds and largely shaped their life experiences, including their business engagement. At this intersection of identities, roles, and aspirations for the future, the men make a home for themselves as well as for guests from all over the world.

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### Notes

1. The broader project on Filipino entrepreneurship was conducted by Marisha Maas. She discovered the cluster of gay Filipino guesthouse owners and is responsible for a dissertation chapter drawing predominantly on ethnic entrepreneurship literature to explain the emergence of the cluster (Maas 2011). Roos Pijpers further elaborated the theoretical framework by connecting to the issues of home and belonging, and migration/gender regimes. In addition, she conducted a follow-up interview with Godwin and his partner to familiarize herself with the cluster and to refresh the empirical material. Pijpers and Maas have different, albeit complementary, reasons for being especially interested in this subproject, which include own coming out experience and experience running an ethnic handicrafts business. During the main period of data collection for the broader project (2001–2005), Maas stayed in the Philippines three times for several months. Interviews and more casual conversations with 'home country counterparts' rendered her insights into the cultural context described by the respondents as well as some understanding of Tagalog.
2. While some of the more 'abstracted forms of theorizing about migration and transnationalism' (Barber 2000, 401) may be more sensitive to the existence and significance of the symbolic or immaterial dimension inherent in transnationalism, these sometimes tend to homogenize 'the complexities of differing experiences and the framing of social relations' (*ibid.*) of transnational subjects.
3. The names of some of the respondents have been replaced by pseudonyms.
4. Research material for the broader project included Filipino newsletters and conferences and thematic meetings on (Filipino) migration held in the Netherlands.
5. Rene's website details are not disclosed because he preferred to stay anonymous.

6. The meaning of the term bakla revolves around 'effeminate mannerism, feminine physical characteristics ... and cross-dressing' (Manalansan 2003, 25). Folk belief says that, in the figure of the bakla, a female soul is male embodied. Apparently, none of the men interviewed were bakla. This is not surprising given their wealthy background: according to Benedicto (2008), bakla lifestyle is not only effeminate but also distinctively lower class, as it is dominantly adopted by those who cannot afford upmarket clubs and fashion.
7. The Monday Club does not exist anymore but has been a distinctive phenomenon within the Amsterdam gay scene for quite a while. Fresnoza-Flot and Pecoud (2007) observed the same among gay Filipinos in Paris, who formed their own associations from which other Filipinos were excluded as well.
8. Hunt and Sta Ana-Gatbonton (2000) note that 'both the Catholic church and the Philippine State scuttle the debate over homosexuality,' and even though homosexuality is not illegal in the Philippines, SIBOL (a legislative advocacy formation of women's organizations in the Philippines) asserts that 'The treatment of homosexuality and homosexuals in the legal system may be described in three ways: (1) homosexuality is an aberration; (2) homosexuals are invisible; (3) homosexuals are denied rights granted to heterosexuals.' This treatment of homosexuals in law is, the organization argues, reflective of the homophobia pervasive in social institutions and Philippine society in general. In the Netherlands, the same-sex marriage and other forms of gay partnership have resulted from long and difficult struggles to move homosexuality out of a discourse of abnormality and deviance. In this sense, like elsewhere in the world, LGBTQ rights in the Netherlands are 'intimately tied to the abjection of queers and queerness' (Luibhéid 2008a, 172).

### Notes on contributors

Roos Pijpers studied Economics at Tilburg University, the Netherlands. She moved to Radboud University Nijmegen in 2002, where she defended her Ph.D. thesis in 2007. She currently works as an Assistant Professor of Human Geography at the same university. Her primary research interests center on the geography of work and employment, with an emphasis on labor migration. In her Ph.D. thesis, she discusses the origins of the transitional restrictions that were imposed on the free movement of labor for the citizens of new member states in the European Union and reflects on the relative success of these restrictions in lessening the potential migratory pressure on the respective national labor markets of 'old' member states. More generally, she draws on various mainstream and alternative approaches to economic geography to understand the quantitative and qualitative changes in the global economy and the localized consequences for working people.

Marisha Maas studied Human Geography at Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands. In 2000, she started as a Ph.D. student at the same university. Between 2001 and 2005, she stayed in the Philippines three times, for periods up to 5 months. In 2003, she was awarded the Frye Stipendium, a grant designed to encourage women's participation in academia. In 2007–2008, Marisha stayed in Guatemala to work as a volunteer, helping several women groups in the rural hinterlands build up a market for their handicrafts. To this end, she cofounded the project Y'abal Handicrafts, in which she continued her involvement upon her return to the Netherlands. Marisha defended her Ph.D. thesis in 2011. Her research on Filipino immigrant entrepreneurs and her work in Guatemala amalgamated in a new career: at present, Marisha is personally testing the waters of entrepreneurship, marketing, on a fair trade basis, 'Y'abal-products' in the Netherlands.

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## ABSTRACT TRANSLATIONS

### La construcción de identidad y el emprendimiento "coincidente" entre los dueños gays filipinos de casas de huéspedes de Ámsterdam

Este artículo se centra en los emprendedores filipinos en la industria de las casas de huéspedes en la ciudad de Ámsterdam, basándose en las narrativas y trayectorias de cinco de ellos. El artículo resalta los trazos comunes de las experiencias de estos inmigrantes emprendedores, ya que ellos brindan interesantes miradas sobre los procesos de su (re) construcción de identidad e inserción social en los Países Bajos y el rol de su participación empresarial en estos procesos. También, el artículo describe cómo se relacionan con su país de origen, con la comunidad filipina en general en los Países Bajos y con la comunidad gay holandesa. Se mostrará que estas experiencias y relaciones no encajan cómodamente con las posiciones establecidas en los debates sobre estudios del hogar y la pertenencia dentro de los estudios sobre migración transnacional y los estudios *queer*, en particular la idea de que mudarse a los países occidentales no puede ser tratado como un equivalente a mudarse a "la patria cultural *queer*". También, el artículo muestra que el emprendimiento inmigrante no gira en torno de la etnicidad *per se*, en el sentido de que las prácticas empresariales no pueden ser entendidas en forma separada de otras estructuras de formación de identidad, como sexualidad y clase.

**Palabras claves:** migración *queer*; interseccionalidad transnacional; emprendimiento étnico; comunidad filipina en los Países Bajos

### 阿姆斯特丹的菲律宾同性恋家庭旅馆主人的认同建构与“偶然的”创业精神

本文聚焦阿姆斯特丹家庭旅馆产业中的同性恋菲律宾创业者，并运用其中五位的叙事和生活轨迹。本文凸显这些移民创业者的共通经验，这些经验对于他们在荷兰的认同（重新）建构与社会镶嵌的过程，以及他们的创业参与在这些过程中所

扮演的角色，提供了有趣的洞见。本文同时描绘出他们如何连结至其祖国、荷兰广大的菲律宾社群，以及更广泛的荷兰同志社群。本文将展现出，这些经验和关系，与跨国移民研究及酷儿研究中有关家和归属感的辩论中所建立的立场，存在着不安的关系，特别是移民至西方国家不可被等同于移民至“酷儿的文化国度”之概念。同时，本文亦显示出，移民创业家精神并不围绕着族裔本身，就此意义而言，创业实践不可独立于其他如同性与阶级的认同形构结构而单独理解之。

**关键词：**酷儿移民；跨国多元交织性；族裔创业精神；荷兰的菲律宾社群