

Kwansei Gakuin University
Social Sciences Review
Vol. 21, 2016
Nishinomiya, Japan

Note

Migration and Aspiration

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Abstract

In these notes I will attempt to critique four works which investigated the identities of migrant English language teachers living in Japan. A key theme is aspiration within the context of migration in a globalized world. I will argue that cosmopolitanism is an aspiration of research participants which is assumed by the researchers in their methodologies. I will then use work by the psycho-analyst Julia Kristeva to suggest themes which can better explore the connection between identities of migrant English language teachers in Japan, their agency and the social structures of an internationalizing Japan.

I. Globalization

Advances in both transportation and communications technologies have led to a compression in space and time of our social, political and economic proximity to others, and the increased intensity in the diffusion of hitherto inaccessible information, capital, products and people. The effect of this is a world that is “molded by economic and technological forces into a shared economic and political arena” (Held & McGrew, 1999). A hyperglobalist definition of globalization as the inevitable homogenization of culture, economics and politics as a result of these interactions is balanced by a skeptical view that the processes involved are not necessarily new, or not necessarily as intense or equally impacting as assumed, especially given the lack of evidence for many of the hyperglobalist claims (Martell, 2007). Another perspec-

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tive is globalization as transformational. In this perspective, globalization is heterogeneous, with, for example, cultural globalization and financial globalization occurring at different paces. In the transformational perspective, there is no clear distinction between national and international economic, social and political processes, which changes people's life experiences (Martell, 2007: 185). Importantly, Martell (ibid: 186) cites arguments that while migration, a particular phenomenon in globalization, is statistically less globalized than in the past, there are significant qualitative differences arising from the intensity of cultural, social, economic and political exchanges of more recent times.

II. Migration

One of the transformations that results from the intensity and diffusion of ideas and cultural products is the aspiration for migration. While the number of migrants is a tiny percentage of the total world population, the number of aspiring migrants may be much larger (Bal & Willems, 2014). In their review, Bal and Willems (ibid.) quote arguments that a culture of migration can arise out of desires for modern commodities, the appeal of other cultures, and furthermore, that the process of assessing one's circumstances can bring about the imagination of migration. The impact of this on one's life can affect, for example, the decision of when to marry and decisions made in education. In short, the aspiration to migrate impacts on one's identity.

The traditional Push-Pull Model of migration in which economic poverty in one place facilitates migration to an area of economic opportunity (Papastergiadis, 2000) has been dominant in explaining migration, but it gives supremacy to larger economic structures and does not account for the agency of individuals. It is this agency which helps to drive globalization as a set of transformational processes. However, as Norton-Pierce (1995) and Block (2006, 2007) have demonstrated in their research into migrants and their identities, unequal power relations, differences in values and beliefs, and unexpected differences in practices can bring about ambivalence, and even withdrawal from their new community. Migrants may successfully arrive at the land they imagined, but they can fail to achieve their aspirations when they are faced with the reality in their new homes away from homes, a reality which may not be congruent with the community they grew to imagine and aspired to join. In other words, there is an interplay between the dominant social structures of the new home, the agency of individual migrants and their identities.

III. Transnationalism

Transnationalism is a concept that can shed light on the interplay between social structure, individual agency and the identities of migrants. Vertovec (2009) summarizes six particular takes on what transnationalism is: social morphology, type of consciousness, mode of cultural reproduction, avenue of capital, site of political engagement, and (re)construction of 'place' or locality. Social morphology refers to the idea that relationships and social patterns between diaspora in various parts of the world are mediated and reinforced through advances in technology. As a type of consciousness, transnationalism represents the idea that individuals' identities are not fixed to a particular location, that one might feel attached to multiple nations simultaneously, or that memories within a community about another place can bring about attachment and desire for that other place. As a mode of cultural reproduction, transnationalism is seen as the transformation of everyday practices, often through the flow of media across borders. As an avenue of capital, transnationalism not only includes transnational corporations with their flows of supply and investment which transcend national borders, but also the impact of kin relationships across borders whose exchanges stimulate the spreading of assets. As a site of political engagement, transnational agencies, such the International Red Cross, have the capacity to bridge global and local political questions through movements which promote the flow of resources from one area of the world to another for political change.

However, Vertovec is also critical of the concept of transnationalism, in particular arguing that the idea of nationalism is central to its definition, and that there seems to be no escaping the inevitable units of analysis as national, regional or ethnic groups of people. Furthermore, the idea that every migrant is equally engaged in the transnational practices outlined above ignores the heterogeneity of practices that migrants engage in. In other words, some migrants may choose to focus on political activities, whereas other may opt for a focus on consumption of local goods.

IV. Cosmopolitanism

Another concept which is important in understanding the interplay between wider social structures, individual agency and identity is cosmopolitanism. Skrbis and Woodward (2013) outline four dimensions of cosmopolitanism: cultural, political, ethical, and methodological. The cultural dimension is defined in terms of an individual's openness to the world around them. Politically, cosmopolitanism is seen to take on an aspiration for the creation of transnational institutions which mediate global governance. This is observed in international law governing such cross-border issues as climate change, war and trade, and which Held and McGrew (1999) be-

lieve can form the framework of a cosmopolitan law. The ethical dimension encompasses worldliness, hospitality, particularly towards strangers, and communitarianism. The methodological dimension incorporates the above ideas on how transnationalism can describe the relationships between global and local processes.

V. Internationalization in Japan

Yamamoto (2012) outlines three changes to immigration and registration laws in Japan which took place in 2012. These are that foreigners remaining beyond 90 days are registered as “foreign residents”, foreign residents are no longer monitored as “aliens”, and anyone living here longer than six months is recognized as a medium/long-term resident. These come six years after the Japanese government developed a plan for “multicultural coexistence” (*tabunka kyosei*) (Nakamatsu, 2014). Policies of multicultural coexistence are supposedly an extension to the policies of internationalization (*kokusaika*), which themselves were a response to increasing intensity in trade and cultural exchange spurred on by globalization. Internationalization impacted on Japanese national and foreign policies (Kubota, 2002). In education, this can be seen in the slogan from the Ministry of Education, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) regarding English education in Japan: “cultivating Japanese identity with English abilities”. Internationalization is also seen in soft diplomacy strategies such as the implementation of the JET Programme cultural exchange scheme which sees thousands of foreigners enter Japanese public schools as assistant language teachers on a yearly basis under the banner of grass-roots internationalization.

However, Nakamatsu (2014, p.138) explains that internationalization was implemented through schemes focusing on assimilation of migrants for the maintenance of cultural, racial and linguistic homogeneity in Japan, and denial that immigration into Japan was even a phenomenon (Douglass & Roberts, 2000). She is critical of the recent policies on multicultural coexistence, explaining that they are “cosmetic” (Nakamatsu, *ibid.*, p.139), not comprehensive enough for migrants (p.138) and evaluated as poor by volunteers involved in grass-roots multicultural schemes, such as Japanese teaching (p.138). Nakamatsu’s analysis of policy documents reveals that there is greater focus on harmony in society over empowerment of migrants. This is reflected in findings by Nagayoshi (2011) that Japanese maintenance of ethno-national identity positively affects views on multiculturalism but has negative effects on the promotion of equal rights for migrants.

VI. English teachers in Japan

The recruitment of migrant English teachers in Japan has been part of a drive to internationalize education at the tertiary, secondary and primary levels, and even in the leisure and cottage industries of *eikaiwa* (English conversation) schools. Along with the recognition that these teachers are medium to long term residents as part of a multicultural society, investigations into how expatriates adapt to living in Japan have been numerous.

Simon-Maeda (2004) investigated the construction of female EFL professional identities in tertiary institutions and found that chauvinistic and paternalistic discourses and practices towards women in Japan were prevalent in this context. This could be seen particularly in comments by a Japanese colleague towards one female participant that, after her contract had finished, she would supposedly go back to her homeland and get married. This episode betrays a number of markers within Japanese thinking towards the identities of migrant English teachers. First, they are transient guests – they will go home eventually. Second, they are gender conformist – they are expected to behave in the same way in which Japanese are expected to behave with respect to marriage. One weakness of the article is that the role of agency is not examined, and thus potentially portrays female EFL teachers as agentless victims of social structures. Furthermore, while teachers' life histories are alluded to in terms of their achievements in reaching high status positions in academia, their futures are assumed to be at the mercy of social structure.

Appleby (2013) investigated a small number of white, heterosexual Australian men in the language teaching industry in Japan, and found evidence that marriage, as an institutionally sanctioned form of discourse, provided the symbolic capital for these men to position themselves as legitimate professionals. Appleby concluded that married men can avoid the “abject” singleness that would lead them to be viewed as interpersonal and institutional failures, or immature, promiscuous “white trash of Asia”, and non-integrated into an adult Japanese society. This study was limited in that it only examined a small number of teachers, all of whom were of one nationality, and it did not examine the role that investment in Japanese language skills might have played in providing agency for these migrants to build symbolic capital. The role of language in the success or failure of teachers to re-position themselves within societal and institutional structures was also not explored. Nonetheless, these experiences would point to Nakamatsu's claim above that Japanese society has not yet adapted to more inclusive social practices.

Rivers and Ross (2013) looked at tertiary level Japanese students' perceptions of race and how this impacted on their preferences for teachers. They found a strong preference for white males aged between 30 and 35, and they hypothesized that this

was due to their racial stereotypical “position as Japan’s sociohistorically constructed idealized other, and their position as a contemporary racial embodiment of the imagined non-Japanese EFL teacher” (p.330). They also found a hierarchy of preferences, with White teachers preferred over Black teachers, who in turn were preferred over Asian teachers. This study may be questionable insofar as it essentialized attributes of race through pictures shown to students in an experimental design, and failed to attribute students’ preferences to their experiences with teachers of various races. Nonetheless, this study provided an interesting attempt to account for the dominance of White males in tertiary EFL education in terms of “sociohistorically constructed ideologies of race and native speakerhood” (p.336).

Whitsed and Wright (2011) interviewed 43 migrant teachers in Japanese universities about their professional experiences, in an attempt to get an insider perspective of internationalization in Japanese education. The data were impressionistic about the institutions. They revealed that higher education practice is about “impression management” to stakeholders; there is an institutional indifference towards migrant teachers, who are often sidelined in policy and curriculum decisions and given lower status communication classes to teach; there is a sense that student satisfaction is more important than pedagogy; teachers are exploited as exotic foreign commodities; students do not buy in to the discourses of internationalization. Although this study claimed to examine the experiences of an invisible group involved in the processes of internationalization, I have doubts about the categories which emerged in this data. For example, participants spoke about their frustration with a lack of curricula and syllabus guidance, and being left to do as they please, and this was attributed to institutional indifference towards them. However, in my discussions with Japanese staff, this is something which Japanese English teachers also experience and so may have little relevance to processes of internationalization. Syllabus development is also an expected workplace responsibility of Japanese teachers in some conversation schools. In other words, this study failed to isolate institutional policies which are grounded in the rhetoric of internationalization, and simplistically attributed all teachers’ experiences to a façade of internationalization.

These four works around the identities of migrant language teachers examine different dimensions of identity: gender identity, sexual identity, racial identity and professional role identity respectively, and there is certainly an overlap with professional role identity throughout each work. National identity is the default lens through which interpretations are made about how foreign language teachers are positioned in Japan. There is a serious problem running through the methodology of these works which betrays a hyperglobalist interpretation of cosmopolitanism on the part of the researchers. In other words, inherent in all four works are the assumptions that cosmopolitanism is part of the habitus of the migrant teacher by virtue of

having crossed borders, that this is lacking in the Japanese perspective, and that the solution is for Japanese to become similarly cosmopolitan. In this way, the migrant language teacher would successfully be able to achieve his or her migration aspirations of cosmopolitanism.

VII. Exploring new themes

In no way are the transformational dimensions of transnational migration explored in the four works reviewed above. Kristeva (1991) offers a number of unique interpretations to the experience of being a foreigner, which can be rendered into questions and statements about the best approach to investigate the transformational dimensions of transnational migration, and thereby move away from assuming that conformity towards a hyperglobalist interpretation of cosmopolitanism is the way forward.

Kristeva writes: “A secret wound, often unknown to himself, drives the foreigner to wandering. . . . As far back as his memory can reach, it is delightfully bruised” (p.5). This leads to the question: is the foreigner searching for healing? Furthermore, is the lifestyle of the cosmopolitan the band aid that the migrant language teacher is seeking?

Kristeva also writes: “Moreover, had he stayed home, he might perhaps have become a dropout.” Remaining in the foreign land, “I do what *they* want *me* to, but it is not “me” – “me” is elsewhere” (p.8). Here, the themes of escape and conformity are rendered in counterpoint, which indirectly suggests the idea of sacrifice: sacrifice oneself by conforming in order to escape humiliation at home. In the four works reviewed above, to what extent does sacrificing the self or one’s agency to the larger social structures play a role in finding a safe place?

Kristeva further writes: “there are . . . two kinds of foreigners . . . On the one hand, there are those who waste away in agonizing struggle between what no longer is and what will never be – the followers of neutrality, the advocates of emptiness. . . . On the other hand, there are those who transcend: . . . they are bent with a passion . . . for another land, always a promised one, that of an occupation, a love, a child, a glory.” (p.10). This contrasts a loss of aspiration with a drive to achieve an aspiration. They share the common theme that aspiration is as yet unattained, but for different reasons. Understanding the factors which impact changes in aspiration could go some way to understanding what social structures are dominant within the host culture.

Kristeva continues: “No one in this country can either defend or avenge you. You do not count for anyone, you should be grateful for being tolerated among us. Civilized people do not need to be gentle with foreigners.” (p.14). The theme of

kinship runs through this extract and attests to the need to understand the socio-cultural connections between migrant language teachers and their homes and families. Since the concept of transnationalism suggests that this connection sustains a flow of ideas and goods across borders, this can give insight into the social and cultural capital which the migrant English language teacher has available to deploy.

Kristeva adds about second language identity: “You have a feeling that the new language is a resurrection: new skin, new sex. But the illusion bursts when you hear . . . that the melody of your voice comes back to you as a peculiar sound”. When a native speaker “lets you know that it is irritating . . . saying “I beg your pardon” . . . you will “never be a part of it”,” (p.15). Understanding second language use is vital to understanding the medium through which agency can be deployed by migrant English language teachers in Japan. It also becomes possible to understand what opportunities are available to deploy social and cultural capital imported from home and how those opportunities are created and managed.

About work, Kristeva writes: “But as far as the immigrant is concerned, he has not come here just to waste his time away. . . . It is true that, in the process . . . he aims at profits and savings for later and for his family, his planning supposes . . . an extravagant expenditure of energy and means.” (p.18–19). Understanding the purpose of labour for the English language teacher in Japan should be explored to understand the dynamic of how values and work ethic get imported into the host culture and how they affect internationalization in Japan.

On expatriate communities, Kristeva writes: “just because one is a foreigner does not mean one is without one’s own foreigner . . . the foreigner excludes before being excluded, even more than he is being excluded.” (p.24). The idea of conflict among migrant English language teachers has been unexplored, but undoubtedly colours both their own experiences, identities and the internationalization of Japan.

VIII. Conclusion

The tendency of research into the identities of migrant English language teachers in Japan to take a hyperglobalist interpretation of cosmopolitanism in understanding identities leads only to a clash of cultures. We need to broaden the contexts of the research in order to better understand how the internationalization of Japan and the identities of teachers are interconnected. The above extracts from Kristeva provide seven themes which can benefit from further research: emotional fulfillment in teachers; sacrifice of agency; factors impacting changes in aspiration; kinship; relationship with the second language; work practices and ethics; conflict among expatriates. Understanding these themes will shed light on the interaction between social structure, agency and the individual identities of migrant English language

teachers in Japan.

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