

A nighttime photograph of the Duomo di Milano in Milan, Italy. The cathedral's intricate Gothic architecture is illuminated by warm lights. In the foreground, a black street lamp with five glowing spherical lights stands prominently. Below the lamp, a sign with a large white 'M' on a dark background is visible. Further down, a sign reads 'infopoint Area B Area C'. At the bottom left, a red sign with the word 'DUOMO' and a white cross symbol is partially visible. The sky is dark, and the overall scene is a blend of historical architecture and modern urban infrastructure.

FILIPINOS IN MILAN:

**THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF A
TRANSNATIONAL SENSE OF PLACE OF
THE FILIPINO COMMUNITY IN THE
ITALIAN METROPOLE**

Milano



DUOMO

FILIPINOS IN MILAN

THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF A TRANSNATIONAL SENSE OF PLACE IN THE FILIPINO COMMUNITY IN THE ITALIAN METROPLE

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Seconda stella a destra, questo è il cammino
E poi dritto fino al mattino
Non ti puoi sbagliare, perché
Quella è l'isola che non c'è

E ti prendono in giro se continui a cercarla
Ma non darti per vinto, perché
Chi ci ha già rinunciato e ti ride alle spalle
Forse è ancora più pazzo di te

Second star to the right, this is the way
And then straight on till morning
You can't go wrong, because
that's the Neverland

And they'll mock you if you keep looking for it
But don't give up, because
Who has already given up and is laughing at you behind your back
Maybe he's even crazier than you

Edoardo Bennato - L'isola che non c'è (1980)

Acknowledgements

During my history bachelor at Radboud University I slowly became interested in both Italian history and the phenomenon of migration. In 2019 I went to Italy for the first time in my life, to Milan, and it was there that I noticed something: there were a lot of Filipinos. I was quite familiar with Filipino history as well as I had been to the Philippines before, but I could not explain why I saw numerous Filipinos in the Italian metropole. When I returned home I started to look more into the how and why of it. My passion and interests collided into this specific topic and researching it in my spare time only made me more curious. Therefore, when I started the Human Geography master I knew from the start what I wanted to write my thesis on: the Filipino community in Milan.

Although the topic for me was a given fact, it did not come without its problems. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, finding an internship spot was not an easy task. I contacted multiple foundations and organizations, but multiple had to decline because of the insecurities caused by the pandemic. Moreover, I started to question whether I should focus on the Filipino community in Milan and not on one in the Netherlands. After a couple of months of research, networking and further crystalizing my ideas the decision was made: I was going to follow my heart, my passion and interests and take a deep dive in my first field work abroad in Milan.

This project would not have been possible without the help of multiple people that I would like to thank. First and foremost, the owner of the internship organization Eleanor. Not only did she offer me an internship spot at her foundation MAIA, she also welcomed me in the warmest way possible and introduced me to multiple respondents. Thank you from the bottom of my hearth miss Eleanor.

Secondly, I would like to say a big thank you to all the respondents I interviewed. Not only were they willing to be interviewed for the sake of this thesis, they were also incredibly open, nice and welcoming. Many of them became closer friends during my stay. Without them this thesis would have looked much different.

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Finally I would like to thank all the people who I met along the way that helped me in various ways, and those who helped me that I am no longer in contact with. These people are numerous, but they all contributed to the making of this project and therefore I would like to thank them.

This thesis would not have been possible without the help, assistance and support from all the aforementioned people and therefore I would like to say one more general thank you to all of them. This project changed me as a person, I met people that have positively changed my life and I was able to do my true passion project.

Summary

This research has looked at how Filipinos in Milan have created a transnational sense of place throughout time. Within the combined and emerging field of transnationalism and sense of place, little attention is paid to the historic dimension, even though it can show interesting continuities and discontinuities in feeling at home for migrants. The purpose of this thesis was therefore to examine if and how transnationalism has influenced the making of a sense of place through a geohistorical lens. The theoretical framework is based on the *idiotope* and *idiotopy* concepts by scholar Pascual-de-Sans (2004). The former signifies a place identification whereas the latter a more surface level geographical connection. When these two concepts are taken together, they form a sense of place. Adding the phenomenon of transnationalism creates a transnational sense of place. In order to find out how *idiotopes* and *idiotopies* came to be, 16 semi-structured biographical interviews were held with Filipinos in Milan. Three distinct categorizations were made: those with a clear Filipino *idiotope*, those with a Milanese *idiotope* and a third collective of individuals who had no clear identifiable home.

First, the biographies were explored by starting in Milan. Filipino *idiotopes* often relied on nostalgia and a strong cultural identity to maintain connections to the Philippines. Moreover, the respondents in this group had a functional relationship with the Italian city. Milanese *idiotopes* were able to unmake their Filipino home and create a deeper place attachment with Milan. They often cited more resonance with Italian culture and having forgotten most of their Filipino identity. Nostalgia did create some binding, but it was not so influential. The last group had no clear *idiotope* and therefore disproved Pascual-de-Sans' (2004) spatial hierarchy hypothesis. These respondents loved Italy and had their livelihood primarily located there, but also had a strong sense of Filipino identity.

Next, the role of transnationalism was discussed in the forming of a transnational sense of place. Filipino *idiotopes* often had high transnational engagement, except one individual who solely relied on nostalgia as a connection with the Asian archipelago. They often sent back remittances, owned propriety in the east and sometimes wished to retire in the Philippines. Milanese *idiotopes* had little to none transnational engagement. However, some respondents started to reconnect and engage more with their previous place of residence. This made them more appreciate of their roots and it created a closer connection with their Filipino *idiotopy*. The final group – those with no clear *idiotope* – all had high transnational engagement which created an entangled transnational sense of place. Either their livelihoods were dependent on transnational facilitation or their families were split between Italy and the Philippines. Both

locations connected, seemed to strike a spatial balance in which one place would fill in the shortcomings of the other.

Lastly, one universal event was examined – the Covid-19 pandemic – and how it influenced the transnational sense of place of the interviewed Filipinos. Both those with a Filipino and a Milanese idiothepe often shared that their lives simply continued, just within the framework of the pandemic and the restrictions that came with it. There was, however, one respondent that became more connected to Italy. It was in the most volatile category – the entangled transnational homes – where the most shifts in place relations and pandemic transnationalism happened. Either creating more connection to Milan as the pandemic made it clear that Italy was the preferred place to settle, the Philippines as a mother could not physically visit her family anymore, or little to no changes.

The findings showed that a transnational sense of place is not static, but rather fluid and subjected to change throughout time. The analysis of the temporal and historic dimension has made this apparent. More generally, as the thesis sought out to examine, transnationalism did play an influential, but not decisive role in the forming of a sense of place for Filipinos in Milan. The lack of transnational engagement did not mean the entire phenomenon is to be dismissed, but it is another factor that should be taken into account when researching place attachments of migrants.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

The Filipino community in Milan has a relative long history. When Italians started to emigrate to Western-Europe in the sixties and seventies to find work abroad, some cities in Italy saw a small but steady increase of Filipino domestic workers brought over by church organizations and foundations (Katigbak, 2015). As time went on, the migrants started to feel at home. Some moved on to the United States and United Kingdom, but many stayed as well. Even after multiple years of living in the industrial heart of *Italia*, they still feel connected to their homeland in the Pacific Ocean (Fondazione ISMU iniziative e Studi Sulla multiethnicità et al., 2009).

Currently the Filipino community in Milan consists of around 50000 registered Filipinos (OECD, 2021). Figure 1 shows the development of the Filipino population in the Italian metropole. In a yearly report by the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies it was estimated that 157.664 Filipinos were residing legally in Italy, of which around 1/3 lived in Milan and another 1/3 in Rome (Ministero del lavoro e delle politiche sociali, 2020).

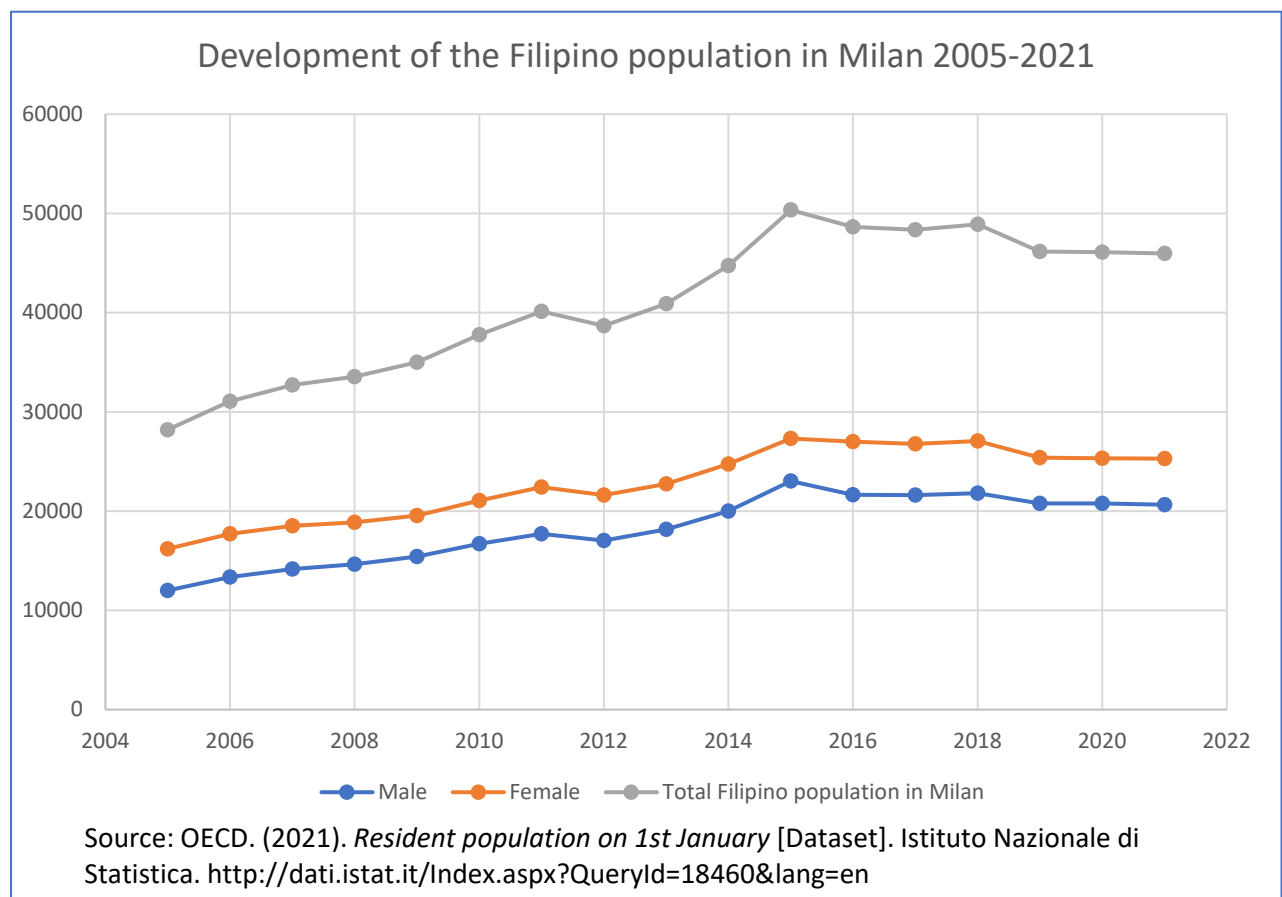


Figure 1. The development of the Filipino population in Milan.

Many Milanese Filipinos are still involved with their homeland even after many years of settlement (Fondazione ISMU iniziative e Studi Sulla multiethnicità et al., 2009). Parents often send their children back to the Philippines for educational purposes, shunning the Italian education system and preferring the more American oriented tuition in the fatherland (Lainati, 2000). Moreover, the Philippines is ranked second in the total remittance receiving countries from Italy. Around 8% of the total Italian remittances, equating to 413 million euros, was sent from the Mediterranean country to the Asian archipelago in 2020 (of which 27,7% was sent from Milan specifically). The total was, however, a 5,9% decrease from the previous year in 2019 which was just before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic (Ministero del lavoro e delle politiche sociali, 2020).

These transnational practises may raise the question how Filipinos in Milan feel at home in the city, because they are still actively engaged with their homeland. They can have a positive, ambivalent or even negative sense of place of the metropolis. Their durable history has shown that many opted to settle and make Milan their new home, but that did not mean they forgot about their place of birth. How has transnationalism influenced their feelings of belonging throughout history?

This thesis seeks to explore this question by offering a more geo-historical oriented approach. Migrants create an individual and collective sense of place of an area, city or neighbourhood. Not only through what is happening in that geographical area, but also through the ties they maintain with previous places (Pascual-de-Sans, 2004). This study will focus on how the members of the Filipino community in Milan have dealt with this relation throughout history.

1.1. Societal Relevance – A complicated position in society

From a societal standpoint, there are multiple reasons to look at the Filipino community in the Italian metropolis. In spite of the fact that the migrant group has been in the city for decades - many Filipinos started to migrate in the seventies (Lainati, 2007) – their position in Italian society has been contradictory. On one side, Filipinos feel disenfranchised, segregated and sometimes excluded. As one Filipino shared poignantly in an interview: *‘Why the Somali, the Moroccans, etc., are people that scream and make themselves heard even when they are doing fine and we Filipinos never? Have you ever heard a Filipino scream?’* (Lainati, 2007, p. 41).¹

¹ Original Italian quote: *‘Perché la Somalia, i marocchini, ecc. sono gente che grida e si fa sentire anche se stanno bene e noi filippini mai? Hai mai sentito un filippino gridare?’*

Moreover, the Filipino community in the Lombardian capital is underrepresented in Milanese politics, causing feelings of isolation and disconnection with Italian society (Pilati, 2010). The other side of the belonging coins shows, however, that because of the relative long history in Milan, the Filipinos are becoming *nuovi milanesi* (Palidda, 2000). Through an exploration of the temporal dimension, an illustration could be made about the changing and diverse attachments of Filipinos to Milanese society.

A second point of consideration is more recent: Covid-19. When the pandemic struck, migrants worldwide were immobilized through traveling restrictions, barring many people from visiting their family members and friends back home (Ullah et al., 2020). Therefore hindering physical transnational activities like commuting.

The pandemic also had the unfortunate effect of increasing anti-Asian racism in different parts of the world: Italy was not an exception (Rovetta & Bhagavathula, 2020). Racist attacks, hate crimes and discriminatory remarks were targeted towards people of Asian descent. Filipinos in Milan also had to deal with these problems, comments and assaults. Multiple incidents were reported in the biggest city in Lombardy of Filipinos being mistaken for Chinese and being harassed and attacked: *'Filipino father with child mistaken for Chinese and insulted on the tram, the reaction of the passengers: "Racist"'*² (Mannu, 2020), *"Filipino of mine' and the pack breaks his nose. Punches and insults just because foreigner"*³ (R, 2020) and *'Episode of racism in Milan: young Filipino assaulted'*⁴ (Bonecchi, 2020) to name a few hate fuelled incidents. Such painful and traumatic experiences can have dire effects on the well-being of migrants and their sense of place. It can, for example, push minorities back to their roots (Aguilar Jr., 2014) and it can result in topocide: the deliberate destruction of an attachment to a place (Hay, 1998).

Covid-19 has impacted migrants – specifically the Filipinos in Milan who are already placed in a complicated and contradictory position in society – in dire ways. Whether it is through increasing anti-Asian racism or through indirectly forcing them to adapt to new strategies to stay in contact with their homeland. The thesis wishes to explore how the impact of the pandemic has potentially shaped and influenced the experiencing of a transnational sense of place for multiple Filipinos in the Italian city.

² Original Italian title: *'Padre filippino con figlio scambiato per cinese e insultato sul tram, la reazione dei passeggeri: "Razzista."*

³ *'Filippino di me...' e il branco gli spacca il naso: "Botte e insulti solo perché straniero.'*

⁴ *'Episodio di razzismo a Milano: giovane filippino aggredito.'*

1.2. Scientific Relevance – Temporal developments in transnational homes

The scientific goal of this research is to connect and link up the following academic debates: that of sense of place and migrants, and that of transnationalism. The field of ‘sense of place’ has been born out of humanistic geography in the seventies (Gregory et al., 2009), most notably by geographer Yi-Fu Tuan who argued that people create their own ‘place’ and give meaning to it (1974). However, humanistic interpretations of space and place were overwritten in the eighties by the cultural and social turn in geography studies that emphasized external factors and exclusion for place creation. The traditional study of sense of place was revived in the mid-nineties with the influential essay by Doreen Massey *A Global Sense of Place* (1991). The geographer argued for a different understanding of ‘sense of place’: not seen as static, but fluid, borderless and diverse and conflictual.

Meanwhile, slowly during the late nineties and especially early two-thousands (Sheller & Urry, 2006), the social sciences underwent a mobility turn: focusing on the movement of people between spaces and places (Faist, 2013). Migrants go from place to place and create their own relationships with said geographical area too. As sociologist Pascual-de-Sans noted: *‘migratory movements as discrete, isolated acts by which people change their place of residence because of a series of constraints or decisions, to another analysis of migrations as social events taking place in time’* (2004, p.350). Moving forward, studies have examined the place-making processes of migrants, focussing on multiple variables, like emotional involvement, social relations, moment in the life course and economic recourses (Qian & Zhu, 2014; Pascual-de-Sans, 2004).

A decade earlier in the nineties, a novel concept was developed that emphasized the perpetual ties migrants had with their country of origin when living in a different place: transnationalism (Haas et al., 2020; Mendoza & Morén-Alegret, 2013; Schiller, 2007). Transnational ties and practises can influence the identity formation of a person (Vertovec, 2001; Schiller et al., 1992), and therefore their sense of place too.

The combined field of sense and place and transnationalism has slowly increased and resulted in some interesting research, for example Adams’ work (2013) that focusses on transnational children and Gielis’ (2011) study on the migrant house. Both articles explored how transnationalism has influenced the making of place in a geographical area.

My contribution is to continue this growing body of literature by adding a geo-historical dimension to the transnational sense of place creation: how a previous geographical area has throughout time influenced migrants’ feelings of belonging. The historic dimension is often

not included in transnational research (Vertovec, 2001), although it can show interesting (dis)continuities across time periods. After all, migrants have life stories that span over multiple spaces, places and temporalities that can be reconstructed as a biography. Moreover, places are areas where histories come together: every individual carries a story and when they migrate these historic and social trajectories come together in an area where they meet and merge, creating a unique place (Massey, 2005), so it would be interesting to explore the implications on place as history changes.

1.3. Research objective and research question

The principal objective of this research is:

‘to expose and scrutinize the transnational mechanisms and dynamics that hinder, facilitate and contribute to the sense of place creation of the Filipino migrant community in the Italian city of Milan.’

The main concern is, therefore, how Milanese Filipinos manage transnational influences with their place making practices of the city. Based on the research objective, the main question can be formulated which is as follows:

‘How has the relation between transnationalism and sense of place historically evolved in the case of the Filipino community in Milan?’.

The research question is furthermore divided in a set of subquestions that – when combined – will help reach the main objective of this thesis and to give a clear, purposeful and insightful answer to the main question. These are as follows:

- How are the biographies of the Filipino migrants related to place and transnationalism?;
- Which personal historical moments were important in the transnational sense of place creation of the Filipino community Milan?;
- How does the Covid-19 pandemic influence the creation and experience of a transnational sense of place?

The first subquestion seeks to describe how the biographies of multiple Filipinos in Milan are related to the different places they have visited and lived in – Milan and the Philippines – and how they are connected to and engaged with the phenomenon of transnationalism. The main goal is to get a sense of where their *idiotopes* and *idiotopies* are located. The biography should be viewed as the life story of an individual, covering the past (Cross, 2001). This will function as a fundament for the following subquestions.

The second subquestion dives deeper into the history of the individuals by focussing on their own personal historic moments and how those have influenced their transnational sense of place creation. These moments can range from large political events in the homeland like the People Power Revolution in 1986 or the start of the Philippine Drug War during Duterte's rule, to smaller and more personal experiences like family members falling ill and needing to be cared for. This moreover includes local moments that took place in Italy/Milan, like adaptation paths. Central to this question is the diversity of personal moments: every person has their own biography that influences their transnational sense of place creation in different ways.

The final subquestion focusses on how the Covid-19 pandemic has influenced the creation and experiencing of a transnational sense of place. Whereas the previous question looked at the transnational sense of place creation from the migrant's personal historic experience, this question does the opposite and looks at how one certain and current societal event is influencing the individual's sense of place. Because the epidemic has been profound, global and still unfolding at the time of writing this thesis, this inquiry deserved its own subquestion. The goal is to examine how transmigrants have dealt with the rippling pandemic specifically in a transnational context.

When taken together, the collected answers to these three subquestions will adequately answer the main question and give interesting perspectives to the research objective. These smaller inquiries will be referenced during the empirical chapters and summarized during the final chapter of this project: the conclusion.

1.4. Overview

The structure of this thesis can be divided in different chapters. The first one was dedicated to the introduction of the project, its scientific and societal relevance and the research objective and questions. Chapter 2 will focus on the conceptual and theoretical framework. This includes an exploration of the relevant concepts (transnationalism and sense of place), the framework

used to explore the topics (idiotopes and idiotopies) and how these tools will be operationalized. Chapter 3 will explore the methodology – semi-structured interviews – and how the data was collected, edited and classified while also discussing some methodological and ethic reflections.

Chapter 4, 5 and 6 will be the empirical body of this work by focussing and following a handful of Filipinos from Milan. Around six respondents will be leading during the ethnographic venture, but all respondents will be mentioned. The fourth chapter will start exploring the migrants' biographies by departing from Milan and analysing which local personal moments influenced the creation of a transnational sense of place . The next chapter will go beyond borders and focus on how transnational practises and experiences have over time influenced these aforementioned place attachments. The final empirical part will be dedicated to the role of the Covid-19 pandemic in the creation of a home in a transnational world.

The final chapter – number 7 – will be the conclusion where the principal findings of this research will be summarized and the main question will be answered. Moreover, I will reflect on the contribution of my work for future theory development, highlight recommendations for future research and critically discuss the limitations of the presented work.

Chapter 2 – Conceptual and theoretical framework

Before elucidating on the main theoretical framework using the *idiotope* and *idiotopy* concepts of Pascual-de-Sans, a conceptual exploration of the terms transnationalism and sense of place will be discussed as well as a literature overview of the development of these terms.

2.1. Transnationalism

The concept of transnationalism was developed in the nineties when scholars tried to explain the perpetual connections migrants had with their homeland in an increasing globalized world (Haas et al., 2020; Mendoza & Morén-Alegret, 2013; Schiller, 2007). Transnationalism can be defined in different ways (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007), but the main idea is that migrants keep in touch with their homeland. Transmigrants foster, maintain and sustain linkages between the country where they are born and raised in and with the state they currently reside in. Slowly the study of transnationalism was extended to other domains regarding migration, like the impact on integration and adaptation (Vertovec, 2001) and how the second generation deals with transnational influences (Wessendorf, 2007).

The ties that transmigrants maintain with their homeland are not, however, clear and easy to disentangle. Transnational practises span over multiple domains and aspects of life (Maas, 2005; Maas, 2011; Vertovec, 2001; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Remittances – money that transmigrants send back to their family abroad – are often seen as a large indicator of transnational activity, but this only covers the economic realm (Maas, 2005). They also send back social remittances: ideas on society, culture and religion (Katigbak, 2015). Moreover, ideas on politics can be transmitted and migrants can be politically active abroad, for example through absentee voting and dual citizenship (Gustafson, 2006). Transnational activities not only cover simple money exchanges, but also deeper social, cultural and political transmissions. Individuals therefore maintain multiple layers of transnational engagement with a former place of residence.

Finally, another important typology of transnationalism is that it can be guided and facilitated both from ‘below’ and ‘above’. Transnational activities from below imply grassroots initiatives, and individual families and households that exchange contact and materials between two places. Transnational engagement from above consists out of larger organizations and states that allow and create the environment to produce certain transnational activities (Portes et al., 1999). For example, companies like Western Union make sending financial remittances easier and more streamlined for migrants. States, on the other hand, need to allow dual

citizenship and absentee voting for its citizens to engage in certain forms of political transnational engagement.

2.2. Sense of place

The other concept used is 'sense of place' which has been born out of humanistic geography in the seventies. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan pioneered the term in his books *Topophilia: a Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (1974) and *Space and Place* (1977). In his work *Topophilia*, the author described a sense of place as: '*the affective bond between people and place or setting*' (Tuan, 1974, p. 4). Central are the relationships individuals foster with a certain geographical area that will create an affective bond between the object and subject. An individual gives a certain meaning to a space which renders it a place. The scholar made a distinction between two types of sense of place: rootedness which implied a psychological state of being and the sense of place which meant a heightened historical consciousness.

Later, sociology and other disciplines also started to use the concept. Sociologist David Hummon defined sense of place as: '*people's subjective perceptions of their environments and their more or less conscious feelings about those environments*' (Hummon, 1992, p. 262). These perceptions and feelings could lead to multiple bindings to a place: alienation in which the individual feels not at home, or rootedness which meant a form of dependence. Environmental psychologist Fritz Steele, on the other hand, described sense of place: '*as the particular experience of a person in a particular setting (feeling stimulated, excited, joyous, expansive, and so forth)*' (Steele, 1981, p. 11). The scholar primarily focussed on the emotions generated from the interaction with a certain environment.

However, geographer Doreen Massey revitalized the concept 'place' in the nineties by offering a different perspective on it (Massey, 1993; Cresswell, 2014). The scholar differed from other academics' works by viewing a place not as a static single unit, but rather prone to change and connected with other spaces. The relationships an individual fosters with a space are in constant development, creating different meanings through the interactions happening with the place and influences that are not confined to that particular area. Moreover, globalisation was also an influential shaper that could alter someone's experiencing of a place (Massey, 1994). A place is not confined to certain borders and boundaries, but instead a meaningful space goes beyond that. Globalization has made it possible to extend such places more than before, connecting more spaces with each other. However, it can also cause increasing uncertainty and anxiety as expanding connectedness obfuscates clear delineated

places (Gustafson, 2006). Globalization therefore has an influential impact on place relations in both negative and positive ways.

As a result of the interdisciplinary nature and conceptual ambiguity of the term, sense of place has become an ill-theorized subject (Antonsich, 2010; Cross, 2001). Moreover, the concept in general has become an umbrella term (Shamai, 1991). At the core a sense of place is an affective bond between an individual and a space. However, this connection can both be negative and positive: creating feelings of belonging, loneliness or alienation.

Therefore, as a result of the multiplicity of definitions, I define a sense of place as an emotional and affective bond between an individual and a geographical area. This connection is (1) relational as it is formed between a subject and an object, (2) influenced by internal and external factors and (3) a result of historical processes (Massey, 2005).

2.3. Migrants and a transnational sense of place

The main topic of research is how, then, migrants create a sense of place and experience it while participating in transnationalism. Whereas older scholarship viewed places as reactionary, static and unlikely to change (Harvey, 1991), other scholars have argued that places are open, global and prone to alter over time (Massey, 1995). A sense of place can go beyond the borders of a home, a neighborhood or even a country as some people view themselves as cosmopolitan (Tomaney, 2015). Globalization plays an important role in this as it makes it easier to stay connected and engaged with a space that is far away from an individual. Specifically for migrants – who often experience profound modes of mobility - it meant that when they move, they no longer lose a sense of place, but rather create a new one (Gustafson, 2006; Cresswell, 2014). Transnationalism and sense of place therefore do not juxtaposition each other, but they rather acknowledge the multiplicity of feeling at home.

If anything, a transnational sense of place is a form of place attachment that is created and mediated through the place of residence in combination with the location the migrant has transnational ties too. As geographer Ruben Gielis explained: ‘*Studying migrant places in their capacity as translocalities means that, conceptually, we can no longer regard places as separate from each other. As transmigrants reside in several places simultaneously, we can no longer say that migrants are in this place and out of that place*’ (Gielis, 2009, p. 282). Transmigrants ‘reside’ in two places at the same time: their current place of residence and their previous. These places should be viewed as connected areas as transnationalism facilitates the interaction and engagement between the two places. As scholar Gielis argued, migrants have

two meaningful places they interact with, therefore one cannot be fully understood without taking in consideration the other.

2.4. Theoretical framework – idiotope and idiotopy

As mentioned before, humanistic geographer Tuan made a distinction between rootedness and a sense of place. Hummon (1992) likewise made different categories for bonds individuals had with their place, whether they felt alienated, attached or placelessness. Geographer Marco Antonsich looked, furthermore, at place-belongingness; when individuals feel at home (Antonsich, 2010). Scholars Junxi Qian and Hong Zhu (2014) examined another dimension called place dependence; a more functionalist approach. Finally, transmigrants have their own terminology of a sense of place, like transnational ways of belonging or being (Schiller, 2007).

The different kind of relations individuals can have with a geographical area can be overwhelming and difficult to determine and decipher. Moreover, there is little acknowledgement of the history of place making. Spanish sociologist Àngels Pascual-de-Sans (2004) therefore formulated the concepts of *idiotopy* and *idiotope* to help researchers find a clear and historical path towards a sense of place of (trans)migrants.

The sociologist views the migrant as a palimpsest of places: with each migratory move, a new place is unlocked that leaves its marks on the individual. The scholar argues that every migrant has a hierarchy of places in which they have lived in, where each area has a higher preference than others: the spatial hierarchy. The places where a person has the deepest and the most unique attachment to, is called an *idiotope*. Pascual-de-Sans notes further: ‘*An idiotope is not a once-in-a-lifetime phenomenon. It is a process of recognition and election - even if it coincides with one's birthplace or if one's choices are very limited* (2004, p. 350). An *idiotope* is not fixed, it can change when someone grows up and expands its boundaries or discovers a new place to be inhabited through mobility. Yet there is always agency involved: a person can choose its preference. Dimensions of place attachment and rootedness could fit into this category.

The other side of the coin is the *idiotopy* which is a geographical attachment to a place. It is the place where somebody lives and is bounded by, but it does not necessarily mean their identity is based on it (Pascual-de-Sans, 2004). Whereas an *idiotope* is chosen as individuals choose their preferred place to identify with and to live by, an *idiotopy* is more forced upon a person as it simply the space in which one lives. Feelings of uprootedness and dependence could therefore be included in the *idiotopy* concept.

Pascual-de-Sans identified multiple factors that contributed to the creation of an *idiotope* and *idiotopy*, like the physical surrounding of a geographical area, personal attachments, the material situation, social situation and the moment in someone's life. For this research I would like to add and focus on the influence of transnationalism. Although the sociologist did not explicitly mention the term transnationalism, between the lines the scholar does refer to this phenomenon: *'Nevertheless, those [places] that are left behind leave their marks and their reminders, to a greater or lesser degree, apparent to the subjects or not, subtle or obvious, which act upon different levels of consciousness. The impact of new places often seems to erase the presence of former places; however, the latter do remain, as layers hidden under the newer contributions. The old layers are still there, and are the foundations upon which the newer ones are built.'* (2004, p. 350). Previous places, like the migrant's homeland, can leave substantial influences in the creation of a sense of place in a different area. The (trans)migrant is therefore the sum of previous idiotopes and idiotopies. My contribution is then to further flesh out the historical dimension of these concepts. It could be that transnationalism has contributed significantly to the sense of place creation: moving between idiotopes and idiotopies. But the opposite could be just as true as well: transnationalism only influences such changes and creations marginally.

Pascual-de-Sans' concepts are ideal for researching a transnational sense of place, because transnationalism implies two areas are being connected. Therefore, there are – usually – two spaces at play at varying degrees. The scholar's framework allows for this multiplicity of attachments to various areas. It offers a framework in which different connections are conceivable and expected as the human palimpsest has both idiotopes and idiotopies. Transnational then serves as a bridge between connecting said places. A transnational sense of place is therefore the study and interaction of this relation. In addition, the fluidity and changeability of these concepts allow for a deeper historical look as migration introduces new areas and spaces to an individual.

When compared to other discussed conceptions and frameworks, Pascual-de-Sans' work also offers the most suitable approach. Hummon's conception of sense of place, for example, confines itself to one area, not so much focusing on what happens beyond the boundaries of a space. Massey on the other hand mentioned the role of historic processes and globalization, but the scholar did not explicitly question the potential effects mobility could have had in the forming of place relations. Pascual-de-Sans filled this scientific gap by explicitly focusing on how a sense of place is also a result of previously spaces an individual has lived in. As this thesis puts an emphasis on personal historic moments and transnational

connections, the sociologist's idiotope and idiotopy concepts offer the framework in which these two variables hold a prominent and central position. Other scholars' conceptions are certainly useful and influential, but for this project a more historic look was needed.

2.5. Finding attachments: Operationalization of idiotopes and idiotopies

To discover which place an individual feels the most attachment to, it might be useful and convenient to ask the person 'Where are you from?' considering this question is full of meaning (Pascual-de-Sans 2004; Myers, 2006). Although the inquiry is quite direct and it can lead to discomfort among the respondent (Armenta et al., 2013), the answer does signify where someone's principal sense of place is, but the response is often automated and it therefore deserves some scrutiny.

Instead of solely relying on the answer of this question and intuitive listening, it is wise to deconstruct what affects the formation of an idiotope or idiotopy. Such identifications are the sum and result of a myriad of factors and influences that – when combined – form a certain connection to a place (Hay, 1998). The previous paragraph introduced a few aspects that Pascual-de-Sans (2004) recommended and used for his and future research, like owning property, feeling cultural similarities and having a close support network. The scholar formulated six main categories that were at the basis of the creation of a geographical and place identification. However, these categorizations sometimes overlapped in certain aspects or were difficult to precisely differentiate. Therefore, I have created three separate categories that contribute to the creation of a sense of place to create more accuracy: sociocultural, economic and political. These are largely based on the Pascual-de-Sans factors, but further streamlined and delineated so that the operationalization becomes more transparent.

The socio-cultural domain entails having cultural similarities between the previous and new place, having friends and support networks, speaking the local language, sharing customs and values, nostalgia, being born and raised in a certain place and the moment in one's life course. The economic dimension covers owning property in the new place, having a job or a stable/fulfilling income. The political realm concerns whether the individual is politically active, is being represented in local politics, has citizenship or is able to vote.

Likely not a singular factor alone will be decisive enough to warrant an idiotope or idiotopy creation, but the combination and interaction these aspects have, will reveal whether the interviewed person leans more towards place or geographical identification for a certain location. After having described how these factors have created different attachments, it will

be explored how transnationalism has influenced these feelings and if the phenomenon was able to shift this sense of place in different ways throughout time.

Moreover, considering the fact that a space becomes a place after it has been given meaning (Cresswell, 2008), the connection to the area can evoke different kind of emotions: sadness, happiness, hate, marginalization, inclusion and more. The adequate sentimental assessment of the respondent will be translated and communicated clearly in their respective biographies during the thesis.

Finally, idiotopes and idiotopies are not set in stone. The spatial hierarchy may become more dynamic when it is placed in a transnational context. A transnational sense of place is the result of multiple sociocultural, economic and political factors, but it remains the question what will happen if another place is introduced with which migrants feel connected to and engage with. Such changes could, however, be temporary. For example, during disaster relief or fundraising transmigrants might stress their transnational ties and engage more than before (Vertovec, 2004). Therefore, it is important to look primarily at the fundamentals and to be aware of the environment and time the respondent was interviewed.

2.6. Conclusion: Finding changing homes between places

This chapter has looked at the principal concepts and theories that will be used during the thesis. A transnational sense of place is a place attachment that is mediated between two or more spaces for a migrant. As one expands its spatial boundaries through mobility, more locations leave their mark on the human palimpsest. Compared to other scholars like Hummon and Yi-Fu Tuan, Pascual-de-Sans' (2004) idiotope and idiotopy concepts give the researcher the tools to explore the meanings and spaces a migrant has been through and how this relationship could be interpreted. An idiotope is the primary place identification whereas an idiotopy is a geographical connection that has less meaning than the former one. Migrants often experience deep forms of mobility in which they encounter multiple spaces and places with which they sometimes stay connected to. This project therefore focusses on how the phenomenon of transnationalism has historically influenced the development of a 'home' for Filipinos in Milan. Dissecting what a place or geographical identification is, is not straightforward nor easy. Therefore I will look at socio-cultural, economic and political factors that have shaped multiple place attachments.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

The objective of this research is to develop a rich and deep understanding on how the Filipino community in Milan deals with the complex relation between their transnational practices and their sense of place creation over time. A methodology with ethnographic characteristics would be the most fitting. As research scholar John Cresswell explained: '*Ethnographers study the meaning of the behavior, the language, and the interaction among members of the culture-sharing group*' (Cresswell, 2012, p. 90). The main concern is the interaction and behavior of the Filipino community, therefore for the empirical body of this work, biographical interviews will be used. The way the research will be conducted is to dig into the mental archives of the migrant and unravel their personal life history (Robertson, 1983). How they themselves – the Filipinos - have experienced the past and which transnational events and practices were central to their personal and own sense of place.

Before elucidating on the main method of data gathering – biographical semi-structured interviews – the debate on ethnographic research will be discussed. Then the pros and cons of interviewing will be examined. Afterwards, the way the data will be analyzed will be discussed, how the respondents were found and the way the individuals were grouped. Lastly I will reflect on the composition of the group of respondents.

3.1. Ethnography and external validity

The main critique of ethnographic research stems from epistemic concerns: do the findings reflect the truth and can they be generalized (Heyl, 2007)? Contrary to quantitative research, qualitative ethnographic methods do not provide 'hard data' in the sense that they can be quantified. The external validity – the degree to which the results based on the sampling size can be generalized for larger groups – is a point of concern (Findley et al., 2021). Is it then possible for an ethnographic sampling size, which is much smaller than quantitative work, be used to make generalizing statements about the subjects of research?

There are two answers to this question of concern. First, the goal of ethnographic work is not to make sweeping statements about groups and cultures, but rather to seek an understanding of the specific and peculiar (Cresswell, 2012). Diversity of voices and emotions are domains to explore instead of hard facts like income and housing. Life histories are never the same, their diversity and uniqueness are the exact things this research wishes to explore. Secondly, scholars like Wolcott (1994) have argued that validity is not the main concern for ethnographic research. Rather, if a clear and deep understanding of the sampling size is given,

then the research has served its purpose. Not to extract the results to other groups and populations.

A final point can specifically be made about ethnographic research and sense of place. Mainly the concern around objectivity. A sense of place is always subjective, personal and unique (de Wit, 2013). Whether the research is objective is then again a question whether all the methodical steps were taken correctly, not if the person of inquiry was always being honest (which in turn also provides rich information).

3.2. (Biographical) interviews: debate

The main method of gathering information will be semi-structured biographical interviews. Conducting interviews seems to be the most suiting method for this type of research, because I seek to understand the life history of the Filipino migrant. Historian Claire Robertson defined a life history as a *type of oral history embodying the story of a person's life constructed by a researcher from the informants oral account* (Robertson, 1983, p. 63). In other words, a life history is the past of an individual reconstructed through oral methods. The goal of the project is to understand how the relation between transnationalism and sense of place has evolved through time. What matters are the unique and personal stories and experiences migrants had: their personal experience is central. The best way to unravel this would be through talking with a respondent and asking them questions. Interviews would offer this rich understanding (Agar & Hobbs, 1982). Specifically biographical interviews as they seek to reconstruct the subject's life in the form of a biography. The goal is to inquire about and highlight influential moments in one's life and other aspects that have shaped the interviewee (Rosenthal, 1993). Through this specific approach, the aforementioned life story can be recreated to uncover the personal historic moments that have shaped a transnational sense of place.

However, multiple scholars have also critiqued interviewing. From a more structural standpoint; interviewing is not easy as it takes considerable time and recourses (Cresswell, 2012; de Wit, 2013). These critiques are – in essence – correct. It takes time to find a suitable location to conduct the talks in and to gather the necessary equipment to record the conversations. Nonetheless, the benefits of gathering data this way outweigh the negatives. Quantitative methods could carry similar problems – for example creating surveys and handing them out - but they do not offer the rich information interviews would provide. Qualitative methods were, after all, partially born out of the frustration of lack of data containing quantitative techniques (Heyl, 2007).

Another critique seems to be more incriminating: mainly that of positionality. Feminist and poststructuralist scholars argued that the interviewer structures the interview in such a way that the data reflects the ideals of the interviewer. Therefore, the data would not be a reflection of the interaction, but rather a mirror of the researcher's beliefs (Hay, 2007). These voices are true in the sense that the data is always a result of the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee, but there are different approaches to limit the own influence of the researcher. The first way is through a semi-structured interview which I opted to use for this thesis. Instead of sticking to a strict list of questions which will guide the data in a certain way, a semi-structured interview moves away from this rigid checklist by letting the interviewee speak more freely about their lives (Hay, 2007). A second option would be to develop a form of reflexivity as interviewer. This means looking critically and honestly at the data while being as transparent as possible in one's choices (Cresswell, 2017).

Appendix 1 shows an overview of the questions used during the conversations. Most of them were open so the respondent was able to answer them freely. The inquiries covered the main topics and themes of the thesis while leaving open plenty of space for the interviewee to talk about their own interests. Moreover, it was not uncommon that interviews had a length of over one hour. This was also done to let the respondent tell their story freely and to gather as many stories and answers as possible within the available timespan of the conversation and within the flow of the talks.

3.3. Data processing

The interviews were manually transcribed without the use of external software and coded according to their function and in accordance with the conceptual and theoretical framework. For example, when a respondent talks about seeing their family more virtually during the pandemic than before, then that body of text can be marked with 'Pandemic transnational sense of place: Philippines stronger', as there is more contact with the former place of residence. Or when a paragraph mentions that an interviewee has become more attached to Milan after having brought their family over, this could be marked as 'Transnational sense of place: Italy stronger', considering that being reunited in Lombardy will create less reason to keep in contact with the Philippines. This way the data becomes clearer for finding useful information for the researcher and more transparent for other academics (Boeije & Bleijenbergh, 2005).

The then coded data were extracted and inserted into Microsoft Excel to create a 'codingbook'. Methodologist scholars DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall and McCulloch describe such file as a *set of codes, definitions, and examples used as a guide to help analyse interview data*

(2011, p. 138). The Excel-sheet therefore contains all the codes used, a brief description of the meaning of said term and an excerpt from the transcribed interviews to show as an example. Moreover, I have added the frequency of the codes and a separate column mentioning to which chapter the passages are the most relevant for, so the data became more transparent and organized.

The cited quotes and excerpts from respondents are shown in their original form in the thesis and therefore are not edited from their original transcription.

3.4. Respondents and finding them

For this project 16 Filipinos living in Milan who previously lived in the Philippines were interviewed. The youngest respondent was 19 years old and the oldest 64. I refrained from interviewing people younger than 18 years old considering their sense of place has not fully evolved yet and often requires a different technique and theoretical framework to do so (relying more on emotional aspects) (Adams, 2013; Pascual-de-Sans, 2004).

The respondents were found through multiple ways. However, it all started through the organization I did my internship at: *Migrants' Advocacy for Integration Association* (MAIA). During the first week of my arrival, I was introduced to a group of young Filipinos with whom I held multiple interviews with shortly after.

After the first couple of weeks of meeting them, I found new respondents in two different ways. The first of which was the snowball method (de Wit, 2013). This entails asking the respondent if they happen to know any other person that were open to have a talk with me for the sake of this project. After having conducted the first couple of interviews, some of the individuals were eager to introduce me to their friends and relatives.

The second strategy was gaining access through a gatekeeper (de Wit, 2013). This would be a prominent person in the Filipino community in Milan who was willing to 'grant me access' to their network. This happened through the leader of the organization – Eleanor – who introduced me to the younger cohort of the respondents. Miss Dolores was the other gatekeeper that I got into contact with that showed me her friends and acquaintances, usually a bit older of age.

A point of critique, however, concerning these approaches is that the researcher will often stay in a certain network. Interviewees might be more hesitant then to share personal issues. Moreover, there is the chance that the data might become less diverse (Robertson, 1983). Therefore, as a way to combat these comments, I attended some Filipino gatherings and

conventions where I met respondents who were not strictly related to the individuals I had interviewed before.

Finally, I refrained from interviewing the respondents as soon as possible as it is important to establish trust to create a friendly and personal ambiance where the interviewee is more prone to sharing personally stories (Fontana & Frey, 2005). After having talked to the potential respondent for a bit and having spent time with them, I would ask them if they were willing to be interviewed for this research. This was especially important considering biographical interviews seek personal moments in one's life. Fostering a friendly environment was important so that respondents were more likely to share their biography.

3.5. Introducing and grouping the respondents

Each of the 16 respondents had a unique, intriguing and emotional story that they were willing to share for the purpose of this thesis. During the interviews, transcription and coding it became clearer where their idiotope and idiotopies were located. In short, around three distinct groups could be derived from the data collection that will be leading during this scientific and personal venture. It should be noted, however, that within these groups there is an amount of diversity too which will be further explored in the empirical chapters. This classification was made to structure the findings coherently and to highlight the principal differences in the transnational sense of place configuration.

The first group consisted out of respondents whose idiotope was located in the Philippines. This included Chris, Jacob, Dolores, Paul, Maria, Chesah, Arturo, Ian, Dari and Agwa. During the data analysis it became apparent that their primary home – largely belonging and identity wise – was located in the place in the Philippines where they spent significant time. Within this group there are furthermore different shades of attachment, but the principal point of interest is that Milan took a subordinate position to that of the Philippines in terms of feeling home.

The second group consisted out of individuals who felt the opposite: Milan was their idiotope. This collective was significantly less than the previous one and consists out of Gloria, Jasmine and Trisha. The common denominator for them was that Milan was their preferred home, not only in living standards but also identity wise.

The final grouping contained Filipinos whose idiotope was near impossible to determine. Their place and geographical identification were too entangled that decisively labelling one place an idiotope or idiotopy would be unfair and unjustified. Therefore, Malaya,

Eleanor and Luis have their own classification. For them, home is both in Milan and in the Philippines. A place that both the researcher and the individual has trouble identifying.

The thesis will focus primarily on six respondents: two of each grouping. These are Arturo and Ian for the Filipino idiotopes, Jasmine and Gloria for the Milanese idiotopies, and Eleanor and Luis whose idiotope-idiotopy relation was too entangled to establish. The other respondents will, of course, be present too, but their stories will be more interwoven with the main biographies of the aforementioned pairs. This selection is made for multiple reasons. First, highlighting each single life story is beyond the scope of this project. Adequately exploring the history of one interviewed individual takes considerable space and time. Second, this is done to present a more organized and clearer narrative for the reader to follow. Introducing too many people would only confuse the individual reading this work. A third and final reason is that there is a numerical imbalance between the groups. There are more Filipino idiotope stories than idiotopy ones or highly entangled ones. Focusing on two of each group would give enough room to explore each unique constellation of place attachment.

Lastly, the table in appendix 2 shows a schematic overview of the respondents, how their transnational sense of place is configured in terms of idiotopes and idiotopies and the main factors – based on the operationalization presented in chapter 2 – that lead to this typology.

3.6. Methodological limitations

Finally it is important to reflect on the methodological limitations of this project. Firstly, a brief reflection on the composition of the respondents. All the Filipinos that were interviewed resided legally within Italy. That means that they all had a residence permit: *permesso di soggiorno*. They either came to Milan through agencies in the Philippines that would offer them a work permit abroad. After which it was renewed and they were given the right to get a permanent residence permit. Others, usually the younger respondents, came through the Italian reunification program for families. Their parents requested to have their siblings united which was eventually granted, giving the children an automatic *permesso*. However, no migrants were interviewed that were residing in Milan without the necessary documents. This is important to point out considering that the legal status of an individual is influential in the experiencing a place (Sigona, 2012). Those who reside without valid papers in a country cannot rely on the same services and institutions that are available for those who have a permit. Therefore it is

important to emphasize that this research only focusses on Filipinos who are living in Milan that have the necessary legal documents.

A second point of interest is the scale of the location. The work exclusively focusses on Filipinos in Milan and not in other Italian cities. For example, although Rome has double the general population of Milan, it also hosts the most legal Filipino immigrants in Italy. Moreover, around Milan there were other vibrant Filipino communities that I encountered but did not look into, like in Turin, Piacenza and Naples. Therefore, this work cannot be compared to what other Filipinos are experiencing in other Italian cities.

3.7. Ethical reflections

Lastly, it is important to highlight and discuss some ethical reflections concerning this project. Firstly, I have decided to anonymize the names of the respondents. The topics discussed and the stories the interviewees shared were incredibly personal and profound. Although almost all of them agreed that their name could be used in the thesis, eventually I opted to hide the identity of all the individuals I spoke to. This was done to respect their answers, experiences and emotions. The original names are available within the transcription files of the interviews.

Secondly, I have redacted and ‘anonymized’ some personal moments that I found too personal and intimate to share in this work. The impactful events are still mentioned in the thesis in general, but in a way that certain details are omitted if they did not contribute to a further understanding of the central argument or message. The full stories are available only in the transcriptions and can be traced back if needed, but some details I preferred not to mention as they entered too much in the personal sphere of the respondent.

‘Ang hindi marunong lumingon sa pinanggalingan ay hindi makakarating sa paroroonan’

‘He who does not look back at his origins will not reach the destination’

-Tagalog proverb

Chapter 4 – Biography, place and local connection

Every migrant is unique. Each individual has a different life story, a different upbringing, different migration trajectories, different motives to move and different wishes and desires. The entire past of a migrant can be categorized as a biography: a collection of stories, histories and experiences. These biographies are not static and change over time as individuals grow (Cross, 2001). This chapter will describe multiple stories of the interviewed Filipinos in Milan and how they are connected to the Italian city solely through (historical) activities there and not through transnational engagements.

The objective of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it serves as a descriptive and analytic look at how the life stories of different Filipinos in Milan are related to the city. Secondly, the chapter will function as a basis for the previous subquestions. This part of the thesis will focus on the activities confined to the Italian metropole and take Milan as the starting point of the respondents’ biographies, whereas the next chapter will examine the transnational influences that bind the individuals to their transnational sense of place.

As mentioned before, six stories will be leading during the empirical body of this research. These are Arturo and Ian for the Filipino idioptope, Jasmine and Gloria for a Milanese idioptope, and Eleanor and Luis for an unclear idioptope-idiotomy hierarchy. Even though they are the focus of this chapter and the upcoming ones, other respondents are certainly present too and their biographies and feelings will be interwoven closely with the aforementioned people.

4.1. Home is home: The Philippines as idioptope

Within the group of Filipino idioptopes there were multiple shades and layers of connection, but the main point of interest was that all of them placed the Philippines above Milan in their spatial hierarchy and that their former place of residence in Asia was their primary place identification. However, some respondents were extra vocal and passionate about this ranking.

On a warm spring evening I was sitting in a park near Gorla metro station where many Filipino-Italians would gather and hang out. There I spoke to Arturo (30). An entrepreneurial

and intelligent individual who has amassed a large following on his Facebook page where he inspires Filipinos all over the world with motivational posts and advice.⁵ Arturo came about 14 years ago to Milan with his mother and brother. His father had started working in Italy a few months after Arturo's birth. In 2008 the family decided to move all together to Milan through the Italian family reunification program.⁶ Almost one and a half decade later, he still feels mostly attached to his home in Socorro than Milan. Arturo explains: *'I am born Filipino, I was born in the Philippines, I have the characteristic of a Filipino. I have the history in me of Filipino. I have parents Filipino.'* Culturally speaking, there is not a shadow of doubt for him that he is Filipino. For Arturo Milan is an idiotropy, his main place of identification is still his place of birth: the Philippines. So much that his future plans are all centered around the archipelago. He mentions later on: *'My mind is actually in the Philippines. I am ready to build something there. That is why I do not stick myself so much here in Italy.'*

Arturo gives a couple of reasons why he was not interested in deepening his bond with the Italian city. Firstly, this was a result of his past adaptation plan: *'And also because I am always together with Filipino communities ever since I got here [Milan]. I have been with the Filipino community ever since. So exposure to Italian culture is not that strong in me. I am from 2008, been with the community, especially religious community because back then I was so religious and if you want to integrate yourself in Italy, I guess that the only thing you can do is integrate yourself first with the Filipino communities. I thought that was the normal way. And then from the Filipino communities you will know some Italian friends, and then from there it starts your exposure with other people, Italian people.'* His plan was to first bind himself to the Filipino community in Milan and then slowly integrate into Italian society, but in the end it only made him stick to the environment he grew up in and shaped him.

This is not an uncommon occurrence as other respondents – like Agwa, Dari and Paul – also mostly involved themselves with the Filipino community instead of the Milanese one. This was often a conscious choice. Moreover, Dari is convinced that hanging out with more Italian people instead of Filipino will not change her: *'I would maybe have more Italian friends, but I would not see it as like changing me. Like my friends always say "Italianize", it won't change me. Maybe it is because I want to like make people know about my culture than me getting influenced by them.'* Migration is after all difficult and especially first generation migrants often tend to prefer to stick to their own communities than to immerse in a new and foreign one (Sam & Berry, 2010).

⁵ As of 15 November 2022, his page had 64000 likes and 74000 followers.

⁶ The *ricongiungimento familiare*.

Secondly, Arturo continues that cultural differences accentuated his proneness to the Filipinos in Milan: *'Yeah I was pushing myself to the Filipino communities, cause that is what I can relate to. Italians talk about culture or soccer, and they talk about stuff I do not have an idea about, like their foods, their culture or anything that is happening in their life. So I cannot relate to it.'* He has more affinity for typical Filipino culture, like basketball, than for the Italian one. Religion – specifically Catholicism – used to be a potential important link between the two cultures, but this connection faded away after he became atheist in Milan. However, this did not mean he felt less Filipino. If anything, he reconfigured Filipino identity in which religion did not seem influential anymore. This is not an uncommon occurrence as geographer Melissa Butcher argued. Cultural changes after migration do not automatically mean that there will be less allegiance to a national identity. Instead, as Arturo experienced, said identities can be reconfigured so that they still fit within a community framework (Butcher, 2009).

Here an important reflection needs to be made about the scales of comparison between Milan and the Philippines. The Asian archipelago is a diverse country in terms of religion, culture and ethnicity. Moreover, provinces and separate regions can have a strong local identity, like the numerous indigenous populations with unique languages and the sizeable Muslim community in Mindanao (Palces et al., 2015). Yet, the national identity is often codified as a Catholic Filipino that speaks Tagalog (also called Filipino and together with English the official language of the Philippines) (Maca & Morris, 2014). The respondents all spoke Tagalog, came from Manila or surrounding areas and they are/were Catholic, thus they fitted in the socially constructed Filipino identity. A regional identity was not discussed nor brought up during the interviews, so the Philippines was used as the scale of comparison as the interviewees all identified the most with that identity.

Thirdly, Arturo explains that his childhood was perhaps the most important shaper in his Filipino idiope: *'When you were 16 you have formed a lot of the foundations of...what do you call it.. the adolescent period where, you know, where you learned a lot about the language. Because at 10 years old you can adapt more to your environment. At 16 I guess it's pretty hard to adjust to a new environment. I think of it that way.'* What Arturo is trying to describe, is what Sam and Berry (2010) call 'ontogenetic development'. Mainly that the most influential years of an individual's formation are their younger ones. For migrants it means that learning a new language, being culturally embedded, learning norms and more are mostly done during their childhood. These developments, as sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argued, are a part of the primary socialization of an individual (Swartz, 2002). If these years are spent in a different place than the one the individual is currently residing – leaving aside similarities between said

locations - it could cause adaptation problems. This is what happened to Arturo: he is according to himself formed as a Filipino and is now experiencing a foreign society in which he has to acculturate. Sixteen years is for Arturo a long time for this development. This is not to say that it is impossible create a different home or to deconstruct a current one, as will be explored in the Milanese idiotopes.

However. Arturo is not dismissive of Milan or Italy in general. Even though the city is an idiotopy, there is still some connection: *‘For now it is economic reasons. Since my father died he left so many bills to.. what do you call this, debts. So I had to pay for it first, so I had to work something else now.’* He has a functional relationship with the city. Although his future is oriented towards his place of birth, Milan offers him many useful tools and opportunities – like a well-paying job – to achieve his plans. In this case, the metropolis as an idiotopy could be seen as a means to an end.

This is another interesting observation and it is in line with what other scholars have called place dependence (Pretty et al., 2003; Qian & Zhu, 2014). A (transnational) sense of place is not only a result of identity and the amount of time lived in a place, but it is also formed by the benefits the location can bring. With regards to the Philippines, by and large Italy would provide more privileges for the respondents. This form of place attachment does not need to contain a form of identification (Mascaro et al., 2008), but it does signify a dependent relation that binds the user to the space.

Ian (20) was the other person whose idiotope was firmly positioned in the Philippines, but for different motivations than Arturo. He was born in Italy, holds Italian citizenship and lived in Milan until he was 6. It was at that age his parents decided to send him to the Philippines. However, when Ian turned 10 his parents opted to bring him back to Italy where he stayed ever since. Although his years abroad were short, the Philippines still seems to be his primary home: *‘I feel Filipino. I mean just because I am born here [Italy], I am not ethnically Italian, but Filipino. I think that is the main thing. From the Philippines.’* For Ian personally, being ethnically and culturally Filipino seems to be an influential contributor to his sense of place. However, Ian does add that he feels a sense of belonging in Milan. As to why this is the case: *‘I guess the long period of time I have lived here. I got used to the way of how our people live here. In the Philippines 4 years, I didn’t have enough to make me feel more Filipino. The many years he has spent since his return in Milan has made Ian appreciative of the city.*

However, his migration process and adaptation path was anything but easy. When he returned to Milan, he attended high school which left a profound negative impact on him: *‘I mean I didn’t want to meet new people. I also think because of the friends I had in high school.*

They were the bad friends and after that I didn't meet anyone. I just thought to my head "the people here in Italy is not like the Philippines". I think that is the part I didn't want to make friends in Italy.' The friendships made with some Italian students left Ian feeling lonely and excluded. Instead of feeling more connected to Milan, he confined himself to his family at home. Often he thought about how his life would have been different had he not migrated back to Milan and experienced a form of marginalization: *'I think it is just me imagining what my life would be but not here [Milan]. I talked with others about this thing. If I stayed in the Philippines I would have grown way differently. Because I was super, super, super extroverted, talkative. Even if the person didn't want to talk to me, I would talk and talk and we would become friends. I think yeah, if I continued there my life, my life would be very different.'* Ian's difficult youth in Italy made him more adverse connecting to Milan. It is in his past – the few years in the Philippines – where he seems to seek his refuge and comfort.

This teenage and adolescent exclusion left a rippling effect on Ian. Racism, discrimination, exclusion and othering can hamper the feeling of belonging and place making (Aguilar Jr., 2014; Hay, 1998; Udah & Singh, 2019). The once so bright Ian was met with negative influences and it resulted in him going back to his shell for a while. In addition, Dolores recounts a story of a younger relative that was bullied in elementary school for being Filipino. As she remembers, that event inspired the young man to distance himself from Italian society. Yet, sometimes stereotypes and racist and discriminatory remarks also cause migrants and minorities to disprove them (Daoud et al., 2018; Mullins, 2008). This happened to some of the respondents. Jacob feels that there are certain stereotypes about Filipinos: *'Other countries, their people, other citizens. Like they expect Filipinos...they have a smaller expectation about Filipinos.'* Instead of listening to these voices, he and other respondents harvest this energy to reject them and to prove themselves to Italian society by working hard and getting higher educations.

Although Ian's connection to the Philippines is deep, he does want to stay in Italy and he is optimistic that he will change in the near future: *'Yeah I thought about it, but right now the bond is so strong [With the Philippines]. I think I am going to have that part where I will become more Italian. I am just going to talk to and work on everything. I literally will have that part of me becoming a bit more Italian, cause I can see it in my sister. She is doing everything in Italian right now. I can't even see the Filipino side in her anymore. But for me, I think it is still going to remain Filipino. Because I really want it, I really, really want it.'* Contrary to his sister, Ian did not develop a Milanese idiope, but he is accepting the fact that in the future this can change.

If anything, similar to Arturo, a functional and beneficial bond is formed with Milan. This becomes apparent from his future plans: *‘I think I will stay in Italy. I will work here in Italy and maybe go to the Philippines. Cause I think lifestyle wise, I think Italy is way, way better than in the Philippines. I don’t think they get many chances there like here. So now that I am here in Italy, using the advantages to complete myself, to become successful eventually.’* Although his heart and idiope is located in the east, his mind is well-aware of the opportunities that the Italian metropolis brings. Ian’s warm nostalgic feels cannot deny that Milan will offer more benefits in terms of employment, career and future development than living in the Philippines. As Ian’s story showed, his idiope is not a one-on-one perfect place, but he has fostered different relationships between his geographical and place identification. Whereas the more nostalgic aspect seems to be more decisive than a functional one, henceforth shaping his idiope towards the Philippines.

Both respondents noted that their heart belongs to the Philippines. In terms of connection, feeling home and sometimes future plans. Interestingly enough, however, is that neither of them reject Milan consciously or with malice. If anything, they appreciate the city and see the positive sides of their migration journey too. But at the moment both of them do not have a deeper bond to the metropolis except for living and functioning there.

4.2. Changing homes: Milan as the idiope

The other side of the spectrum – albeit much less in absolute terms– is present among the respondents too: Filipinos whose idiope was rooted in Milan and not in a place in the Philippines. For them the hierarchy of places, as Pascual-de-Sans (2004) had stated, is inverted where the Italian city is on top and any other spaces are relegated to an idiope.

In mid-April I attended a Filipino art exposition that was fundraising money for impoverished families in Batangas. It is there where I met Jasmine (37) who was born in 1985 in the largest city of the Philippines: Quezon City.⁷ Ten years later she migrated to Italy where she attended Politecnico di Milano to become an architect. After two and a half decades in Milan, she feels deeply connected to the city: *‘It [Milan] is my home. I have lived here most of my life. All my friends live here. My closest relatives are here. So it is my home. It is the city I know and where I grew up in. And likely where I will be in for the future right now.’* On first

⁷ Quezon City is the largest city in the Philippines with approximately 2,9 million inhabitants, and consequently the biggest region in Metro Manila (a collective of cities in Luzon that also includes Manila).

sight, the long time spent in Milan has made her attached to the city. Moreover, her entire network is in Italy and her future is oriented towards the Mediterranean country.

As to why she feels this place identification, she explains: *‘Because if you ask me something Manila where I was born, I really don’t know anything about it. The city has changed so much. I did grow up there, yes, until I was 10 I lived there, but my life at that point was home, church and school. So I know three places: I don’t remember, I do remember lots of my childhood if you ask me where exactly, I don’t know, or if you ask me “do you know this place, etc.” I really don’t know. So if people ask me where I am, Milan is the answer.’* Whereas for the previous respondents their childhood in the Philippines was impactful and an important factor in their transnational sense of place development, for Jasmine it was mostly just existing there and doing her routine like church and school.

Moreover, during her migration process she also became less religious which led her to disassociate herself a bit with the Filipino community in Milan: *‘I would love to be in touch with other Filipinos, but I really like to be in touch with likeminded people, so it is difficult for*

Box 1. Religion in the Philippines and Milan.

In 2004, around 84% of the Filipino population identified as Catholic. The other 16% consisted mostly out of a protestant minority, Pentecostals and a sizeable Muslim community concentrated in the southern island Mindanao. Together with East-Timor, the Philippines is the only country in Asia whose population is a Christian majority (Philpott, 2004).

This religious diversity is also present in Milan as a result of the considerable Filipino community. In the Italian city there is a Catholic majority likewise, but other minority groups are present too, like Islamic Filipinos, Pentecostals, supporters of Iglesia Ni Cristo and protestants (Lainati, 2000).

me to be in a conversation with someone who holds the bible. And then wouldn’t talk more about it: I am very interested in religion but not in the religion itself, but the history of it. And lots of Filipino who say there are religious are not open to conversation about it.’ She nuances her stance furthermore by mentioning not every Filipino in Milan is like that and she knows many openminded ones too, but she feels less of an urge to connect with the local Filipino community.

Contrary to Ian and Arturo, Jasmine reconstructed a new home, as her previous one was unmade. Scholars Richard Baxter and Katherine Brickell described the unmaking of a home as a: *‘precarious process by which material and/or imaginary components of home are unintentionally or deliberately, temporarily or permanently, divested, damaged or even destroyed* (2014, p. 134). Migration could be considered one of those rippling effects that puts severe pressure on home, because the individual will be in a different place than where their home was. Marginalization and exclusion in those new places are potential factors that can stop

someone from wanting to construct a new home (Belloni & Massa, 2021). Jasmine did not mention having such rippling experiences, so the destructive effects of home unmaking were less influential in her subsequent Milanese home construction. Yet, whereas a child she felt at home in the religious sphere of the Filipino community, at the moment this spiritual home is no more as she prefers to stay away from religious people.

However, the archipelago still holds a special spot in her heart. The tight bond with Milan did not entirely cancel out any warm feelings for the Philippines or Filipino communities. This becomes apparent when Jasmine was asked why she still holds Filipino citizenship: *'I am not sure, it feels I would be losing touch with my roots. I have the occasion to go to gatherings like this, I would go.'*⁸ *I would support new restaurants or new shops that younger would open. I don't think I said this before, I specialize in commercial locations. So if I hear about a new, younger ones that want to open a restaurant, I am willing to help out.'* Milan might be her idiotope, Jasmine is actively trying to maintain some connection and identification with her place of birth which is kept alive through nostalgia.

Furthermore, citizenship does not only provide certain rights and privileges but it also consists out of a normative and identificatory dimension (Hall et al., 1999; Kofman, 2005). The piece of paper signifies moreover belonging to a certain collective. Anthropologist Benedict Anderson, for example, called such groups 'imagined communities' in which individuals do not know each other personally, but they are bound to each other because they assume they share the same language, norms, values and ideology (Anderson, 1991). Citizenship could be considered a tool that would formally signify the subscription to such community. Although dual citizenship is possible for Filipinos, they have to renounce their Filipino one for a certain period of time and then request it again later on. Therefore most respondents wanted an Italian paper in the future as they were still attached to their Filipino one. Such changes could have been impactful in the individual's sense of place. Maria – who leaned towards a Filipino idiotope – started feeling Italian around the age of 18 as she was expected to get her Italian passport: *'So from that time I am just fixated that I will get my citizenship and be an Italian'*. Sadly she did not get the piece of paper at the end, halting the creation of a deeper connection to the Italian metropolis.

The other respondent whose idiotope was primarily located in Milan was Gloria (30). She is a driven and focused graphic designer who graduated from Politecnico di Milano around seven years ago. She was born in Milan, but moved to the Philippines when she was three years

⁸ Referring to the exposition where this interview was conducted.

old. Her parents did not have the financial means to sustain her and her sister in Milan at that time, so they opted to send them to the Philippines where they ought to be until their eighteenth birthday. But then fate struck: *'But just really like.. I mean for me it was like 2 or 3 that they [Family and babysitters in the Philippines] raised us in those few years, but then it happened that there was a fire in our home. So the babysitter forgot the candle on the shelf and it was a wooden shelf of course. It was a huge cabinet, a wood cabinet. And then the first floor got fired and from then my parents decided to take us back to Italy.'* After escaping a dangerous fire, Gloria's parents decided to bring their children back to Milan. For around two to three years, her mom and dad decided to send her back to the Philippines every summer to attend Filipino education, but this lasted only a couple of years.

Ever since she stayed in Milan she developed a deep connection to the city. When asked about why she felt the city was so important to her: *'Because I was born here. Probably, yeah this kind of dichotomy, dualism. Sometimes, in some situations I tend more to the Italian and then the other moment I tend more to the Filipino. So I am not totally fully Italian, not fully Filipino, but I was raised here. So in terms of language and so on, I cannot speak properly like Tagalog or write Tagalog, as a true native one that was raised here. So I am more confident having an argument in Italian than Filipino. That is it. Also I would say I am from Milan, but originally from Milan.'* Even though she spent a couple of years in the Philippines, Milan is still her primary place of connection. She explains further that although she does not feel 100% Italian and they are still Filipino elements present, the principal place identification is the Italian metropolis.

In recent years she has become more attached to the Philippines, but Milan is still her idiope. A brief childhood in the Asian country was – like Jasmine – not enough to leave a decisive impact on her, nor did the commuting between Italy and the Philippines. She is also interested in helping the Filipino community in Milan, but a deeper connection was never that present. Gloria traced these sentiments back to her upbringing: *'The thing is, I always felt like the parents were the point of reference if you're more into the Filipino community or not. My parents are quite a lot traditional there, but they are not strong as in the religious part. So what I can see, since my parents didn't have a strong commitment to the church. They weren't attending any church. And they weren't so influenced in letting us go more in the community. And what happened for example, ate Eleanor founded MAIA [The internship organization] because they all belonged to a church. And I never had this church thing. And in Milan one of the things that really bounds you to the Filipino community is church. Jesus is Lord, Iglesia ni Cristo, Born Again is a similar, Evangelista an orthodox one, a lot. And we*

were Catholic. We are Catholic but I never attended a really Catholic one. Like attended, like I was raised with them due to the church, never. That is why we were more Italian probably.’ According to Gloria, her parents’ choice to not fully embrace the religious side of the Filipino community in Milan made them less connected and therefore felt more of an inclination towards Italian culture. This is not a surprising fact considering that for young immigrants,

Box 2. Mabini ‘Little Italy’.

Mabini – named after the first prime minister of the Filipino Republic Apolinario Mabini – is a city with a population of around 50000 people in the mid-south of the province Batangas. The town is not only known for its beautiful beaches and scuba diving, but also for its high amount of emigrants to Italy. It is therefore no surprise that it is nicknamed Little Italy (Espinosa, 2012). Economist Charito Basa estimated that in some districts in the city, around 75 to 90 percent of the households have at least one family member working in Italy. Some even have up to five working abroad (Basa et al., 2011).

As a result of chain migration and a culture of migration in the town, a geographical collective of Mabinians formed in Milan. The Mabini Hometown Association in Milan gathers every now and then to celebrate Filipino festivities and national holidays in the Italian city. Almost all the members are from Mabini and related to each other in some kind of way.



Figure 2. An event held in Milan by the MHAM. Photo taken by Daniël van de Zwan on April 25th.

parents often play an influential role in deciding which aspects of connection and place are important (Adams, 2013).

Religion seems to be an influential factor in Milan whether the respondent will feel more or less connected with the Philippines than with Italian city. As Jasmine and Gloria both feel that Catholicism became a barrier to connecting with the local Filipinos. On the other side, respondents that felt their idiope was in the Philippines were often religiously active in Milan, like Ian, Dari, Chris and Jacob. However, it is difficult to entangle this specific aspect as a decisive shaper for place identification. Moreover, in some cases – like Arturo’s – being less engaged with religion or not all, did not automatically mean disassociation with the Filipino community in general. It only removed one domain from the diverse Filipino society in Milan.

A final paragraph could be dedicated to the respondent Trisha who was born and raised in Milan and did not experience any migratory movement between Italy and the Philippines. She is the granddaughter of Dolores and a

relative of Chesah who migrated from Mabini to Italy around the 80's. Trisha's idiotope is in Milan and she shares some similar stories and developments with the previous respondents. Mainly the role her parents played in keeping the Philippines an active place in her mind: *'I really didn't think about it, but if I was 10 right now I would probably feel more Filipino, because I was more in my parents' control and didn't have the freedom to go out and see other people.'* Trisha explains that during her childhood she was mainly influenced by her parents who brought her up in a Filipino oriented environment. Now that she is gaining more freedom, she expects to become even more Italian: *'So I think I'll be more free to explore and explore more. And I become less Filipino than I am now.'* Just like Gloria's story, the parents can exert important influence on the forming of an idiotope or idiotopy. In Trisha's case it used to be more Filipino oriented whereas for Gloria it indirectly went towards Milan.

4.3. Where is home? The compression of the spatial hierarchy

The previous respondents all shared one thing in common: their idiotope was firmly placed above the idiotopy. This is moreover what Pascual-de-Sans argued: *'Places have a hierarchical nature among them, which can certainly be modified but is remarkably persistent within one's personal history'* (2004, p. 350). The scholar argued that there will always be one place – the idiotope – that is firmly set above other spaces that have less sentimental or identificatory value to them. However, as the following stories will show, this vertical classification is not as self-evident as presented, nor is it impossible to have deep rooted identical feelings for two places. Perhaps it is possible for two homes to coexist especially in times where globalization has made the world smaller and transnationalism – as will be shown in the next chapter – has become easier to engage in?

The first respondent where this hypothesis of a clear idiotope-idiotopy binary is being scrutinized, is that of the owner of the internship organization Eleanor (39). She was born and raised in the Philippines, but migrated to Milan when she was 17. Just a year before she was ineligible for the Italian family reunification program, her parents filed a case and succeeded in bringing Eleanor over. After 22 years, she describes her relation to the Italian city as: *'This [Milan] is a place where more than half of my life stayed here. I am 39 and arrived when I was 17 years old. I can say it welcomed me in a most warmest way. I really had a great experience being with the people welcoming from school. Like I also found friends. Filipino friends. And this is my second home, this is a place where I grew. I found things that I didn't know I could do before, my talents. This is where I had my family and met my husband. Where I have my*

kids. And this is where I found my mission in life which is MAIA. So this is my second home.' The metropolis is essential to her life course and it inspired her on multiple levels, but her primary home is still located in the Philippines. She calls Milan her second home, but it is also the place where she blossomed and discovered her talents.

However, the distinction between Milan as idiotope or idiotopy seems to become a bit complicated. When asked about how the Italian city could become her primary home, she explained: *'Yeah, that could be possible because we have our business here and so reality speaking, this is my first home. Because I cannot stay in the Philippines and just like start everything from zero, like having the business and etcetera. We wouldn't survive the way. Like we wouldn't live the way we are living like we are not in Milan. It would be really hard for us to start again in the Philippines if it will happen abruptly. But we are trying to build it up now and trying to brainwash our kids that we have two homes. I am not telling we only have the Philippines. As for me I want to take the beauty of the both sides, both worlds.'* Eleanor seems to contradict her earlier statement by calling both Milan and the Philippines her primary home. However, she refers to an interesting aspect about place functionality: she is bound to Milan in terms of dependence. She notes how starting from scratch in the Philippines is quite difficult. Her family's income is generated and dependent on the activities in Italy. Therefore, in terms of finances the city is her primary home, but identity wise the Philippines is. This moreover supports the claim that place attachments are layered and even contradictory (Massey, 1995).

This financial observation taps, moreover, into the debate about connection and time to a place which was present at the other respondents too. There is consensus in the academic literature that place attachment grows with the amount of time spent in it (Gustafson, 2006), but this relationship needs to be further examined. As it is clear from Eleanor's story, the attachment did not primarily come from living 22 years in Milan. Her binding did mostly come from the fact she set up a business in Italy and rents multiple properties. Chesah and Dolores, for example, have lived in Italy for more than three decades, but their primary place identification is mostly the Philippines. Therefore, temporality should not be confused with attachment. Time does allow for individuals to build up the recourses to create more binding, but the duration of a stay does not equate to inherent connection.

Moreover, as geographer Yi-Fu Tuan noted (2001), long stays can be void of meaning whereas short sojourns (relatively speaking) can be wildly impactful for an individual. This is what happened to Ian who spent only four years in the Philippines, but it was enough to leave a deep impact on him. Memories and nostalgia are powerful recourses that can grip someone

to a previous place, especially for migrants who have experienced long and large amounts of mobility (Rishbeth & Powell, 2013).

Aside from Eleanor's place dependence, sometimes she feels more connected to Italian society and culture than the Filipino one in Milan. After an intense and impactful moment in her life, she had to distance herself from some parts of the Filipino community: *'I really did and distance myself at that time because I had to protect myself and my child from them. And I would go out more with my colleagues and Italian friends until such time that I found myself a little bit stronger and then I started answering phone calls also from Filipino friends and being with them.'* Instead she preferred to hang out with her Italian friends where she found more comfort. When it comes to parenting, Eleanor also prefers Italian aspects over Filipino ones: *'The Italian part is mostly in my parenting with my kids. It is a lot different the way we were parented when we were young. Like talking to your kids as if they are adult. Taking seriously what they say. Taking seriously their emotions.'* She is raising her kids the Italian way according to her. Focusing on their emotions and valuing their opinions.

The entangled idioptope-idiotopy relation is furthermore complicated when Eleanor talked about her future plans and her childhood: *'I am so sure it is different for my kids, but I am really rooted to the Philippines. If you were to ask me or make me choose whether to live in Italy or in the Philippines. If I have only one option I would live in the Philippines because it is where I really feel home. I remember when I go to the Philippines and hear everyone speaking Filipino. It is just for me to listen and speak Filipino and I would feel home. And when I would go back in Italy and hear people speak in Italy, I would usually feel a little bit bad. Because I would think that "oh my gosh I am not home anymore"'. And yeah. When you ask me now that I am thinking about it.'* In Eleanor's case, her childhood and the subsequent nostalgia flowing out of it are important shapers too in her idioptope creation. Moreover, she would prefer to live in the Philippines if it was possible, but as mentioned earlier it is difficult for her considering she has her business in Milan. In short, there is no clear idioptope because different places offer diverse benefits and connections.

As Eleanor's biography showed, it is difficult to make a clear hierarchy of places where one location is the dominant one. A likewise observation can be made about Luis' (31) story. He comes from a typical OFW-family⁹: his mother migrated to Palermo in 1991 when he was only 9 years old. After his father passed away in 1997, his grandma took care of him. When Luis was 15, his family decided that he and his sister should move from their hometown in

⁹ Overseas Filipino Worker

Pampanga to Milan. There he studied hotel and restaurant management and became an active member in the religious life of the Filipino community. After having spent many years in the city, the place has become just as much as an idiotope as his hometown in the Philippines: *‘But for now I consider, yes, I consider the Philippines my home, but now I also consider my home Milan.’* When taken on his word, Luis cannot clearly choose between his country of birth and his currently place of residence. Both spaces are special to him for specific reasons that evolved over time.

First, Luis’ future plans are centered around the Italian city: *‘For now I see my future here in Milan. I want to start my business here, I want to bring back my family here.’* The city is likely going to be his idiotope if he sees his future here together with his family and his business succeeds. Just like most respondents, there is a strong functional aspect present: *‘But in terms of human, as practical as we are, we need to face the reality. The reality that there is more opportunity, there is more options in career, in businesses, your children have more options here in the Western countries, right? In Italy.’* It would not be wise to live in the Philippines in terms of future prospects according to Luis. Not only for himself, but also for his children who could have more opportunities in Milan than in the Philippines.

Moreover, there is a religious aspect that makes his bond to Milan special: *‘Yeah. For me Milan has been a big help for me. It is part of my growth. I think many things happened for a reason. Maybe my father died because there is this better future for us. Behind that there is a purpose. And I think my mother came here in Italy, it is not an accident that she didn’t maybe chose France or Germany. I think many things happened in our lives because we wanted it. Behind it there is a blessing in disguise also. I think for me was that blessing in disguise. In that particular moment of our lives as a family.’* It was fate that led Luis and his family to the Italian city: it was meant to be. These aspects all together would perhaps lead to conclude that Luis’ idiotope is rooted in Milan, but this is only one side of the idiotope-coin.

On the other hand, his childhood also plays an important role in the creation of a home: *‘Of course the Philippines haha. I mean home is home. So when I came back home, the feeling is really different. The feeling, the nostalgia is there.’* The warm feelings the Philippines give him are unparalleled. No matter when or how, his hometown has something no other place has. In addition, Luis sees himself as a true Filipino: *‘Philippines because that is my root. That is where I came from. Philippines that is my blood. That is for me where I belong. Yes I am here in Italy, working in Italy, but I consider myself full-blooded Filipino.’* He does tell his friends that he considers himself also half Italian because of the time spent in Italy and the relationships and networks he has built there, but at the core Luis will always feel Filipino.

Both Eleanor and Luis had a deep entangled and contradictory set of place identifications where the presumed spatial hierarchy of Pascual-de-Sans was not found. In their case, the supposed vertical categorizations should perhaps be reformed into a horizontal one which puts their homes on an equal level. Culture, religion, dependence, finances and nostalgia are intertwined tightly that not one aspect can be considered dominant. For them, a hierarchy of spaces does not exist, but rather a heterarchy.

4.4. Conclusion: Spaces, places and multiple homes

This chapter focused on how the stories and biographies of Filipinos were related to Milan and a Filipino space, and how local personal historic moments influenced the creation of an idiope or idiotopy. Ian and Arturo both felt that their place of birth in the Philippines was their idiope. Their childhood and the nostalgia resulting from it were important factors in their sense of place. Their primary socialization (Swartz, 2002) and their memory landscapes (Rishbeth & Powell, 2013) were detrimental in this process. However, never did they reject Milan fully. They both knew that the Italian city offered them opportunities that the Asian archipelago could not. On the other side of the spectrum there were Gloria and Jasmine who felt that Milan was their idiope. Although both spent a part of their childhood in the Philippines, their past experience was largely erased after the migratory move: forgetting bits of the Filipino language, attaining Italian cultural traits and making career for themselves in Milan. Regardless, they have a soft spot for the Philippines, opting to engage with some parts of the Filipino community in Milan and being aware of their roots. These respondents confirmed Pascual-de-Sans' (2004) spatial hierarchy where an idiope was clearly identifiable and another place – the idiotopy – was relegated to a space below.

The next respondents, however, seemed to nuance the scholar's hypothesis by not having a clear identifiable idiope and idiotopy. Both Eleanor and Luis had trouble identifying their primary home. Although both leaned towards the Philippines in terms of nostalgia and those warm feelings associated with home, they both acknowledged that in terms of livelihood Milan was their first. They have businesses in the metropole and both of them feel strong affinity for the Italian way of living. For them there was no hierarchy of spaces, considering both homes were both special to them and they were not competing with each other.

Finally, migrants have inhabited multiple spaces through their mobility (Gustafson, 2006). The next chapter will examine how those previous lived places in the Philippines have

influenced their transnational sense of place throughout time through transnational engagement.

‘Babalik ka rin’

‘You will come home’

Title of a famous Tagalog song describing the life of OFW’s

Chapter 5 – Transnationalism and the historic creation of idiotopes

In the era of increasing transnational engagement, multiple dilemmas of belonging come up (Antonisch, 2010). Where does someone feel a sense of home if they have lived in multiple ones? Moreover, how destabilizing and uprooting can a migratory move be for a sense of home (Ahmed et al., 2003)? How do families create homes that are physically separated (Tolstokorova, 2010)?

The previous chapter introduced the life stories of multiple Filipinos by departing from Milan. The three categories both confirmed and disproved Pascual-de-Sans’ (2004) hierarchy of spaces. The scholar also noted, however, that previous places can leave an imprint on a migrant, but he did not explicitly mention the phenomenon of transnationalism. Therefore, the next step – and the focus of this chapter – is to examine how transnational practices and engagements have influenced the making of a (transnational) sense of place for the aforementioned respondents in their respective categorizations.

The goal of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it examines how the biographies of the respondents are related to transnational practices. However, not all migrants are transnationally active (Portes, 2003). Secondly, it analyses how said engagements – or lack of them - have influenced the construction of a transnational sense of place throughout time. Transnationalism is after all a diverse phenomenon (Portes, 2003). It encompasses not only simple money remittances or commuting between Milan and the Philippines, but also less tangible engagements and activities like diffusion of religious and social norms and values. This chapter will therefore try to illustrate the most influential practices from all domains transnationalism covers.

5.1. Filipino Idiotopes and transnational engagements

This section will look at how a transnational sense of place came to be for those with a strong Filipino place identification. Arturo – the young social media entrepreneur who became atheist during his stay in Milan - had his idiotope firmly rooted in the Philippines. Like most interviewed Filipinos, he appreciated the Italian city for the opportunities it brought him, but

he sees his future back in his place of birth. He is a graphic designer but he also works for a Filipino company and he is selling real estate in the Philippines. Moreover, Arturo also has some relatives and friends in his place of birth: *'Yeah, well. My family is here, my relatives have been living in the Philippines, but I am not so close to them. So yeah my friends are also in the Philippines, but I also have friends here. So, I could live here or in the Philippines, it would be no problem.'* However, his nuclear family is in Milan and so are many good friends of his. Even though the connections he has in the Philippines are not that profound, they are good enough for an eventual move.

His strongest transnational engagement is, however, on social media. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Arturo has a Facebook page which has amassed quite a large following over the years. He explains: *'I am also a blogger. I do some inspiration blogging purely in Tagalog, or Filipino language. And there I connect with everyone in the Philippines there, cause the majority of my followers are from the Philippines, especially Mindanao. I have seen so much information on the demographics on Facebook and Instagram, I have so many followers from Mindanao and Visayas. I am so happy cause that is not what I had expected, that they would follow that page, cause it is all about motivational, financial, let's put it that way. Just improving yourself, improving oneself, motivating oneself on that page. It is called [REDACTED]. For now I recently had a break from that, because I had so many clients here in Milan doing graphic design, but I wanted to spend on it, but for now it is on a break time.'* Although his life in Milan has made Arturo less active on social media, he still wants to educate and teach Filipinos in the mainland valuable lessons, especially concerning finances.

Social media are important and influential tools in maintaining transnational ties and connections (Lam & Warriner, 2012). Whether messaging friends on Facebook, sharing posts on Twitter or watching news videos on YouTube about their former place of residence. Moreover, these media also provide a way to (re)connect with their far away home through keeping in touch with friends and relatives (Ulla, 2021). Chris can attest to this: *'I am more aware, I am more active in the Filipino things rather than Italian things because of social media. And I chat with my friends, I have very few friends there, maybe 3 or 4, but I get to talk to them, so I still feel very connected to the Philippines.'* This relatively novel development therefore allows the respondents to maintain a virtual connection to the Philippines.

Continuing, Arturo looked differently at the Philippines after he became an atheist. He noticed that many Filipinos rather pray instead of taking matters in their own hands. His goal was therefore to motivate young Filipinos to become independent: *'You want something? You work for it. Do not pray for it. You know what I mean. You have to sweat, you have to put an*

action, you have to put a lot sacrifices just to obtain your goal, or your dream. You don't pray. Something like that. You have to be by yourself. So gradually I am suggesting this to all those followers, cause a as a religious pupil you don't see it like yourself like that. If you are religious and you encounter so many problems in life, sometimes what you do is pray and you are not

sorting the problem in that way.'

Arturo hopes that he reaches out to many people in the Philippines and to inspire them to become self-sufficient.

Politically speaking, Arturo was neither engaged with Italian, nor with Filipino politics: *'No I am not voting. I have seen some of the politicians that are candidating for the presidency and the vice president, but you know, I don't have any bets on them. I don't see them as well, I don't see any of them of the leader of the Philippines, I don't want to waste my vote. Well I will waste my vote, but I don't want to vote.'* For Arturo, the 2022 elections were simply a waste of time. He does not believe any candidate could be a good leader for the Philippines, therefore he rather not vote at all.

In short, Arturo is heavily engaged with the Philippines. He has relatives and friends there, actively selling properties and he sends back social and religious remittances through his Facebook page. However, it is difficult to determine the gravity of those engagements on the forming of a Filipino idiothe. Undoubtedly it creates a sense of mutual dependence

Box 3. The 2022 elections: pink and red.

On May 9th the presidential elections were held in the Philippines. One of the candidates included famous boxer Manny Pacquiao, but the main battle was to be expected between the nationalistic Bongbong Marcos – son of former president and dictator Ferdinand Marcos – and progressive economist Leni Robredo. Eventually 'BBM' won in a landslide victory, solidifying the return of the Marcos dynasty.

In Milan their supporters could be heard and seen throughout the entire city, advocating for their preferred candidate. On April 3rd a large rally was held by Leni supporters near Castello Sforzesco. The square was colored pink: the color of Leni's party. A few weeks prior, however, the square was full with red caps and scarfs: the color of Marcos.



Figure 3. Leni supporters dressed in pink gathering in Milan. Photo taken by Daniël van der Zwan on April 3rd 2022.

by having personal connections in a different place than the one currently residing in and wanting to transmit ideas and norms. At the end of the day, Arturo mostly sees his connection to the Philippines as one formed through his childhood and adolescent years as described in the previous chapter. However, chances are that transnationalism has made Arturo more connected to his Filipino idiope than before. It therefore could serve as a multiplier effect that enhances pre-existing connections.

Ian was the other individual discussed: a bright and introverted young man who felt strong nostalgic feelings for his past that made him feel melancholic. It is then no surprise that he is still engaged with his Filipino idiope abroad. Economically speaking, he owns a plot of land there: *'I think I have one land, because of my dad bought me one land in the Philippines. He told me he wanted to build house, it was already reserved so I have the land. My sister has a land there too.'* Because of his father, Ian owns some land in the Philippines but at the moment he is not so sure what to do with it. In addition he has some relatives there, but he is not too engaged with them.

However, this is where all connection with the physical mainland ends. When asked how he would describe his engagement with the Philippines: *'Not much. I think almost nothing I think. Only my cousins. I have one cousin we speak, but not that much anymore. So yeah the connection in the Philippines is dead. Not really strong.'* Ian's idiope is not so much based on an actual location, but rather on a memory of the place. He notes that the connections he did have, all died down: *'I don't have many...when I left I couldn't communicate with them because they didn't have Facebook. I think that was 3 years, and after those 3 years I didn't have the courage to speak to them. Because I thought they had forgotten me and everything. So I just didn't talk to any of them.'* When Ian migrated to Milan, he tried keeping in touch with his closest friends but they all did not have the media to continue to do so.

This is an interesting and telling observation considering that maintaining transnational ties to family and friends at home influences the way of belonging in a different place (Moskal, 2015). Ian is in fact living with his nuclear family in Milan while his social network in the Philippines has disappeared. It could be argued that this would make him feel more connected to Italy considering all his contacts are there. However, it only caused more isolation for him. It strengthened the memory, not the connection to the mainland, that was decisive in his transnational sense of place creation.

Nonetheless, he did try to reconnect with them when he went to the Philippines in 2012. Physically travelling back to the place with transnational ties can invoke deeper connections and emotions than through the internet, both negative and positive ones (Ramirez et al., 2007).

For Ian it turned out to be a letdown: *'I think the first...cause we came back in 2012 for vacation for one month, but I try to, but I couldn't like the connection. I couldn't reach them. So that one month we stayed in the Philippines, I didn't see them, talk to them. I went back to nothing. I didn't connect with them again.'* The friends he had growing up were nowhere to be found anymore sadly. If anything, Ian feels like it is too late to fully engage and immerse with the mainland again: *'There was a part of me that thought it was too late to become more close to the people there [The Philippines], cause we were kids and now we are grown-ups and think differently. I don't think I'll have that connection. I mean I can be wrong.'* Now that he is an adult, Ian looks back at the Philippines with a bit of pessimism. Moreover, like Arturo, Chesah and Paul, he is not politically engaged at all with the Philippines: *'No. I don't follow politics in the Philippines.'* Although the Filipino government allows for absentee voting and dual citizenship, Filipinos abroad seldom make use of it (Aguilar, 2007).

His Filipino idiope is therefore marginally influenced by transnational activities. As Ian explains, the most important thing is his past: *'The memories. Yes the memories are stronger than the physical Philippines. I mean the memories for me, the emotional stuff, everything is there. I think it is more of a memory thing than a physical thing.'* The brief years spent in the Philippines were impactful enough to create a strong sense of nostalgia that would triumph even physical engagement with the country: transnationalism was not needed to keep that sentiment alive. Combined with a difficult migration process, it has left him yearning for his childhood years. No matter what Milan can offer him, it is simply different: *'The people, the friends, the family, the culture. Just the Philippines itself. I would say that the person that I was in the Philippines has made me. I don't know, it is just different. For me it is just the difference between Philippines and Italy. In the Philippines it is just much better. The people. I don't know.'* Transnationalism might be almost non-existent for Ian, the memories and warm feelings the Philippines arouse are strong enough to foster an idiope that does not require a physical space. This is in stark contrast with Arturo whose idiope has a physical dimension. If space is considered physical and place cultural/identificatory (Raffaetà & Duff, 2013), according to Ian there exists a place without materialities, just emotions and feelings.

The combination of sustained transnational ties and engagement on one side and on the other a Filipino idiope has been apparent among other respondents. Dari for example sends back remittances and she was actively participating in political rallies in Milan and online. Dari explains: *'I mean I can't stand seeing the things I see on social media the things I heard about the poor in the Philippines, the poor governance. I feel like more engaging with politics, letting my voice somehow be heard. I mean it won't really help, but it is something. I can't seeing the*

Philippines like that. Chris is actively investing in the Philippines, buying plots of lands for building condominiums. Moreover he also invests in the Philippine Stock Exchange. Paul likewise sends back remittances and is eager to buy land once he has the recourses to do so. All of these respondents are deeply engaged with the Philippines and have their idiotope rooted in their respective place of birth in the east.

Yet, a few others shared a similar relationship to that of Ian: little transnational engagement but an idiotope leaning towards the Philippines. Chesah and Dolores both do not have much family anymore in their place of birth as most relatives passed away or are in Milan. Moreover, they do not have many investments or properties abroad. Only Dolores has a small house in the province where she grew up. Both of them were not politically engaged either. However, Dolores did decide to vote in the 2022 elections: *'Since the time I voted, last time was 1976 if I am not mistaken, I voted for my Marcos but my family were so in love with him: always Marcos. But I was third year in high school when Martial Law was declared. And I think I could not forget all those... Even those I did not witness it personally, all the things that happened during Martial Law, I was already an adult, so I don't think I will be able to forget. But this time it is not only now I will be voting, I will use my right of suffrage now its 2022 so how many years is that.'* After 45 years she decided to make use of her voting rights. But at the end, both wished to return and retire in the Philippines. Dolores and Chesah love Italy, the Italian people, the culture and the food, but for them there is no place like home: the Philippines. It could be argued that these individuals have a form of 'nostalgia syndrome' as Swiss historian Ruldolf Braun noted. Meaning the wish to eventually return to the place of birth, even if it is not likely (Wessendorf, 2007). In short, less transnationalism thus did not mean forgetting their roots.

Summarizing the above mentioned stories, the role of transnationalism in the forming of a Filipino idiotope is complicated. On one side, the lack of it does not automatically mean a closer connection to Italy. Childhood and nostalgia seem to be important factors that keeps the individual bound to a previous place. On the other side, engaging in transnational activities seems to function as a tool that creates more binding between a migrant and their former place of residence. It could therefore be argued that transnationalism could be viewed as a multiplier effect: strengthening pre-existing ties and affirming the Philippines as an idiotope.

5.2. Milanese idiotopes and (dis)connection

The previous paragraph examined how transnationalism functioned when there was a Filipino idiotope. This section will describe and analyze the opposite side of the place attachment coin: how transnational engagement over time weakened, strengthened or influenced the forming of a Milanese idiotope.

Jasmine was born and raised in the Philippines, moved to Milan in her teenage years and now became a successful architect in the Lombardian capital. Her engagement with the mainland is not quite strong. The last time Jasmine went back to her place of birth was 2002, around twenty years ago. She wishes to visit the Philippines in the future again, but at the moment she is too occupied with other things. She explains why her connection has slowly faded away with the Asian archipelago: *'I think I lost my connection completely when my sister died. I have a smaller sister who was left in the Philippines because she needed 24 hours constant care. So we left her with an aunt who didn't have children who take care of her. When I was 18 we lost her. And I think that was one of the last times I went back to the Philippines. So the only things that made us go back every year went away. I think that is like...'* Her little sister was the only real reason she and her family still went back regularly to the Philippines, but sadly she passed away. As a result of this personal moment, Jasmine and her relatives in Milan felt less reason to travel back home and thus a potential Filipino idiotope waned.

Such prolonged and sudden illnesses can trigger a 'distance care' crisis in families which binds an individual closer to a different place (Baldassar, 2014). Care can be transnationally given through short visits and digital contact (Villa-Torres et al., 2017), yet acute situations can cause a crisis in which a longer stay and closer care is needed. For a migrant it can mean wanting to travel back for a longer amount of time. This is what Jacob thought of: *'For example one of my aunties died, one of my closest, so until then I was wondering that what if I stay in the Philippines, because I can offer care and help. Because she doesn't have a family. Just in case I can be beside her.'* Sadly, after the passing of an individual, the transnational engagement could end. This is what Jasmine experienced.

Economically speaking, she does send back remittances and she owns some property in the Philippines, but this was not a result of her own choices. Her mom is the one taking caring of the money transfers and real estate: *'So I give money to my mom and she takes care of it. I am not really sure what she does with it.'* Jasmine is rather a passive contributor than an proactive actor in economic transnationalism.

However, in recent years she has tried to reconnect with her past and the country she grew up in. She was adamant about voting in the 2022 elections, wanting to change the governance of the Philippines. Moreover, she is actively looking to better her place of birth through investments and humanitarian plans: *‘I would like to invest in smaller companies or startups for, I don’t know, something that has to do with the social investments in the Philippines but I haven’t found anything yet I would like to invest in. I am more preoccupied, not much for the construction of the Philippines, more on the social part of it. There are no jobs, lots of...the kids in the Philippines that graduated from college and stuff like that and end up working in call centers because there are no open positions for what they studied. So that is one of the parts I am more interested in. If the Philippines were more to invest in creating more jobs so that people would stay instead of migrate that would be a nice investment that I haven’t found yet.’* It is a goal of her to improve the livelihoods of those in need in the Philippines. Finally, Jasmine still wants to go back one day for humanitarian work.

She explains that this desire to reconnect started around 2016: *‘I am not sure when that happened, but gradually I started to think that okay, it is, how do you say it, I felt a little ashamed I didn’t know very much about my home country. So I got interested when – I think it was 2016 at the Architecture Venezia – the Philippines had a stand and there was a small exhibition about the Philippines. And while talking to the people who were there, they told me the Philippines hadn’t participated since 1960. So it was quite a shock, so from that moment on I tried to be present at the exhibition every year to see what they came up.’* At an art fair in Venice she felt a sense of shame for not knowing that much about the place she grew up in. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Manila was just the place where she did her school and church routine.

Jasmine mentions here the role of emotions in order to reconnect with her identity. Especially within a family setting, emotions can play important roles in facilitating transnational engagement (Katigbak, 2015). For example, families create ‘moral economies’ to sentimentally bind their relatives abroad to remit back money (Velayutham & Wise, 2005). However, in Jasmine’s case, it was not family that made her feel guilty or ashamed, but rather the mere presence of her peers performing in public. This historic event inspired her to engage more with the Philippines. Her childhood years and subsequent nostalgia did matter in the long run as they were indirectly acted upon when she recognized the Filipino booth. It is, moreover, the reason why she does not want to apply for Italian citizenship yet, because she would lose a piece of her past.

Gloria was the other respondent whose idiotope was located in Milan. Her transnational engagement slowly faded in recent years, leaving almost no connection to the physical mainland. Currently she has one best friend she sometimes talks to that lives in the Philippines and a couple of relatives, but Gloria is not that close with them. She neither sends back remittances, owns property in the Philippines, nor voted in the past elections. A series of (unfortunate) historical events have caused her to become less engaged with her previous place of residence. Firstly, Gloria used to be an avid spectator and reader of Filipino media: *‘Yes, the national tv-shows. Like I thought those were so familiar. There was a time where I was watching more Tagalog movies and then also I knew that who is this and that. I was more involved more in what was happening. I also used to have ABS-CBS news portal. I was involved in reading that. After the, you know, ending of CBS-ABS.’* The news and tv-shows made her feel connected to her Filipino side. However, interest slowly faded over time as she became more accustomed to Italy. In addition, in 2020 a controversy happened in the Philippines in which then-president Duterte refused to extend the broadcasting permit of the aforementioned news station – the biggest in the Philippines – therefore leaving its existence in a legal void. Yet, in the end ABS-CBS survived and is still airing to this day (Gutierrez, 2020). Such forms of ‘banal transnationalism’ – multimedia – should not be overlooked (Aksoy & Robins, 2003).

However, the final nail in her transnational coffin came when her closest connections in the Philippines passed away: *‘So what happened, once they [Her grandparents] passed I tended to go there really less. Like I used to go there every two years, but then probably after 2017, also Covid hit, I didn’t go there 2019. Yeah.’* Because of her loss, she did not travel as much back as before. In addition Covid-19 happened, causing a further delay of planned travels.

This event accelerated a sentiment that started in 2015 when Gloria’s grandmother passed away. After her passing, she decided to write her master thesis about Filipinos: *‘Yes but then when my grandma passed away, I think the reason I ended up doing the thesis about the Philippines, was based on that. Because I wanted to reconnect, do some things.’* The loss of a dearly beloved person resulted in more curiosity and engagement with the Philippines. This feeling was intensified and multiplied when her other grandparents passed away around 2018. After that she decided to reconnect with her roots more: *‘I should be really embarrassed by this, but most of the time, because I was involved when my grandparents were still there. So I was concerned what was happening there. But when no one was left there, it was like my own idea of the Philippines is, I probably feel like, the reason why I wanted to go to the Philippines again was to rediscover it. Because I felt like after the bond with my grandparents, I totally*

kind of like split it. Because I wasn't so involved.' Henceforward, Gloria started to explore the Asian archipelago and document her experiences with her camera. The result was a marvelous exhibition in Milan in April 2022 centering around her journey in the Philippines, rediscovering her Filipino side. Whereas as Ian experienced frustration and disappointment when visiting the Philippines again, Gloria felt a deeper connection (Ramirez et al., 2007).

Although she is connecting more with Filipinos and the mainland – both in Milan and abroad – Gloria wants to do more: *'So the idea of doing the event in the Philippines, the fundraising, the thing of having the fundraising here and then giving the organizing this gift giving event in the Philippines this year, could be a way to trying to reconnect to the schools there. And I am really interested in what kind of projects I can do there. Now that I am more aware, more financially stable. And what can I do like, let's say more often to give back to the Philippines. I really want to have more time to reconnect there, so I am willing to. But I am not doing it.'* She wants to do more fundraising in the future now that she is financially more stable, but this is not easy undertaking. In the end Gloria wishes to do more. It is also important to note that she is currently undergoing her reconnection path which makes her emphasize her ties to her former place of residence. It is therefore the question in as how much this sentimental revival influences her feelings about her Filipino identity in the long run.

Just like Jasmine, Gloria underwent a transnational reconnection with the Philippines. For years she was not that engaged with her previous country of residence, but, perhaps paradoxically, a form of disconnection led to reconnection. Similar to Jasmine is that both developments did not lead to a change of identity. Both of them still consider Milan as their primary home and their place identification, but the reconciliation has made them more appreciative of their past. Once again, childhood, nostalgia and emotions play an important role in (re-)engaging with the Philippines. Compared to Trisha who was born and raised in Milan, her transnational engagement is primarily given through her parents: the language, going on holiday with them to the Asian nation and connecting with relatives abroad. Jasmine and Gloria both stated that reconnecting made them feel more Filipino, so transnationalism does play a role in the identity-identity relationship formation. However, this factor has not been decisive enough to completely sway one place attachment from one to another.

Lastly, from a historical perspective both of their stories and engagements are noteworthy. Mainly because it shows that throughout time, embracing one place does not mean the door is entirely closed for another one. The identity-identity relation is fluid, it can change throughout time during certain personal events.

5.3. Entangled homes and high transnational engagement

The final paragraph focusses on the respondents that had no clear idiope. Both Eleanor and Luis felt that the Italian city and their place of birth in the Philippines were their primary home for different reasons. Some activities in Milan – mostly functional – pulled them towards Italy whereas other processes – like nostalgia and childhood – made them reminiscent of the Asian nation. It is not surprising then that transnationalism plays an impactful role in both of their lives.

Starting with Eleanor, she could be considered an ethnic entrepreneur (Zhou, 2004). Her family's business model is primarily based on transnational facilitation between Filipinos in Italy and the Philippines, and her target audience has the same cultural and ethnic roots as Eleanor. The company not only sends remittances back home for their clients, but the employees also organize trips to the Philippines and prepare the necessary documents to live and work in Milan. Recently a new office was opened in Padova, expanding the business' audience to more Filipinos in Italy.

Aside from her impressive business venture, personally she and her husband Jason are also financially connected to the mainland: *'I have land, like two lands, two properties that I bought with my dad. Jason has his land property in Pampanga. And I and Jason bought a condominium unit, an apartment that we are renting now. And yes we are investing. We are also investing through paper assets, through stocks. From the platform called [REDACTED] and we would invest in some companies there.'* In almost all financial domains she is present: the stock exchange, real estate and land. Her economic engagement in Italy, however, is the complete opposite. Eleanor does not invest in the Mediterranean country at all. Almost all their economic recourses, except her business in Milan, are currently aimed at her place of birth.

This relationship shows a quite interesting dynamic between her place of birth and residence. Eleanor's economic activity is largely focused on the Philippines whereas her livelihood is generated in Milan. The income that is made is then used to invest in her former place of residence. More engagement with the Philippines is created if more income is generated in Milan.

Moreover, her personal connections are certainly alive in the Philippines: *'We have a big family in the Philippines. My cousins from the side of my mom and from my dad's side. The aunties, the uncles. The friends, the high school friends and the best friends near your home. We still have them. I am like, I am low profile friend. I don't often call people like send them messages or etcetera maybe on their birthdays. But I am not that one that always talks to*

someone, because I already talk a lot with my clients. I am a low profile maintenance with friendship. But I consider them friends when I go to the Philippines we get to see each other and catch up after 8 years.’ Not only does she have a large amount of family members in the east, Eleanor also still has her high school friends and other best friends which she stays in touch with. Albeit not as active, the friendships and kinships are still alive and present which connect the east and west together.

On the political side, however, the disconnection is omnipresent. She did not vote in the 2022 elections, nor is she planning to engage politically with the Philippines. Quite frankly, it will not affect her: *‘Everything that happens there in the politics. I don’t feel much attached to it. Because I know anyway I am staying in Milan and whatever changes they do there, I know that I have investments but I know that my first focus would be here. Because here is where my business is and where my family is. And I am not too much into politics. I am not that, maybe just lately I got interested a little bit, but everything that they will do there like the administration, I feel so detached. I mean I feel they won’t affect me once I am here. Maybe that is the one.’* She feels no political attachment to her place of birth, because her livelihood is dependent on what is happening in Milan. Eleanor’s stance is similar to that of other Filipinos – like Arturo – that felt that their political influence is neglectable in the Philippines. For many migrants in general, political transnationalism is mostly high costs versus little rewards (Waldinger, 2013). The Filipino community in Milan, for example, had to register a few weeks prior to the elections and then go to the Philippine Consulate General to cast their vote. A time-consuming effort just to use their suffrage rights. It is then no surprise that multiple respondents were not eager to go to the ballot box.

Moreover, Eleanor’s nuclear family is with her in the Italian city, so her priorities and dearly beloved are around her. These aspects make her question whether she sees her future in the Philippines, but if it is possible, she would like to retire in the tropical Asian country.

Except for her views on Filipino politics, she has warm and deep feelings for the Philippines. She is eager to go on holiday again with her family and to feel at home again: *‘I am happy to be a Filipino and tell people I am Filipino. I am so happy when they notice I am Filipino. I cannot explain that. But is like staying in your home. You go travel around but when you are home you are you. Stay on the couch and not think of anything. When I go the Philippines it is the same. I would embrace each person because I really feel home. Like here, staying here.’* She is proud to be Filipino, something other respondents also felt like Jacob, Chris and Jasmine.

Looking at Eleanor's transnational engagement, her idiotope-idiotomy relationship has become even more complicated. Whereas her income is generated primarily in Milan, a large amount of disposable income is being reinvested in the Philippines. Whereas she has many contacts in her place of birth, her closet family members are in Italy. And lastly, whereas she has a strong aversion to Filipino politics, there is no place like home for her. In Eleanor's case, transnationalism seems to provide a balance between two places. What one space is lacking, the other one is providing. Although this relationship is not perfectly equal, it seems that taken together a spatial equilibrium is being created. At the moment it seems that there will not be a major change in this relation, leaving a clear idiotope in limbo.

Similar to Eleanor, Luis was the other respondent whose transnational sense of place was everywhere and nowhere. Transnationalism is not a foreign concept to him because it is part of his day-to-day life. Primarily through the interaction and engagement with his nuclear family that resides in Pampanga. Luis tries to travel back to the Philippines as much as possible to see his wife – who he met in Milan – and his son that was born in 2019. Part of his future plans is to bring them over to the Italian city and keep them there for a better future. Luis notes that if it was not for his family, he would likely visit his home country much less: *'Maybe if my son and wife would be here, we would go back after 4 or 5 years.'* Mostly to go on holiday in the tropical pacific nation.

Having a (nuclear) family separated between Milan and the Philippines was often an influential historical moment in both transnational engagement and the forming of a place attachment. Eleanor mentioned earlier that her direct relatives are all in Milan now. Moreover, Malaya – who also has an entangled idiotope/idiotomy relation - is in a similar situation as that of Luis. Her husband and children are still in Manila which makes her more concerned with the east than the west: *'Okay I will always be attached to the Philippines cause my family is there. 100%. It won't change. But I think one thing that detach from the Philippines? Nothing yet. But I am more, I see Milan and Philippines they are connected. It is like there is only like a door. A door between the two that if I am financially stable, that door will be open always.'* She nuances this by saying the funds are needed to sustain such transnational support network (Katigbak, 2015). As long as Malaya's family is still in the Philippines, she will not be detached from it.

All those who had a complicated and entangled transnational sense of place mentioned the central role of family and homemaking. This first point of interest is that they emphasized the role of the nuclear family: parents and children. However, a family is personal and different for every single individual. Moreover, a family can also consist out of non-blood related people

(Lohnert & Steinbrink, 2005). Furthermore, in some Filipino communities the family relations are tied to an entire village: the *Isang pisa* (Katigbak, 2015). Both phenomena were not present among the respondents, but it is noteworthy to point out and to be aware of. However, multiple of them were raised with their aunts or grandparents with whom they became very close to, like Jacob and Gloria.

Secondly, the meaning of a home is different for every person too. A 'home' is not a sense of place, but a part of it (Qian & Zhu, 2014). Yet, for transmigrants the home is an interesting and telling place to study for a sense of place, because it is a space filled with emotion and it is at the centre where the current and previous place meet (Gielis, 2011). Luis, Eleanor and Malaya all emphasized the role of their family in feeling home, but it is also important here to be aware that home does not fully equate to belonging. It is an influential part of it, but not the entire picture.

Luis' family connections are also linked to economic engagement with his country of birth. Even though his wife is independent and does not need financial aid, Luis sends back remittances to assist his partner and son as a sign of help and love (Katigbak, 2015). On a larger scale, he also owned a coffee shop in the Philippines. However, currently he has started to diversify his portfolio more to not only focus on the Asian nation: *'Like any investor or entrepreneur, you cannot put all your eggs in only one basket, so that is the riskier job that you will do. You will put only in the Filipino market all your savings or investments, and after that if something happens in a country, so we need to also diversify. So that is why I also have some investments in foreign markets, in the US also. So that is the thing. I have my one foot in the Philippines, but I also have my other foot in the Western markets.'* He specifically notes that his capital could become disrupted if something were to happen to the country he put his savings in, so Luis decided to look at other markets.

His fear would – in his eyes – become true when looking at the political situation in the Philippines. Luis was planning to vote in the elections, but he forgot to register himself at the consulate in Milan. Although he has some friends that are congressmen in his home province, politics is not a thing that interests him. That changed, however, when Bongbong Marcos won the 2022 presidential elections and his financial investments became a topic of worry: *'I mean, I am not too dumb to pretend that maybe, in fact some of my friends are planning to pull out some investments and assets of the Philippines. To diversify other countries. There was this year, it was just 6 years, but imagine the effect for the poor.'* Luis and his friends do not have a lot of faith in the new Filipino leadership, leading them to maybe pull out their capital in the Philippines causing a bigger gap between them and their place of birth. Although this is

uncertain and a future event, it is interesting to see how transnationalism could change in an exact moment and be anticipated on.

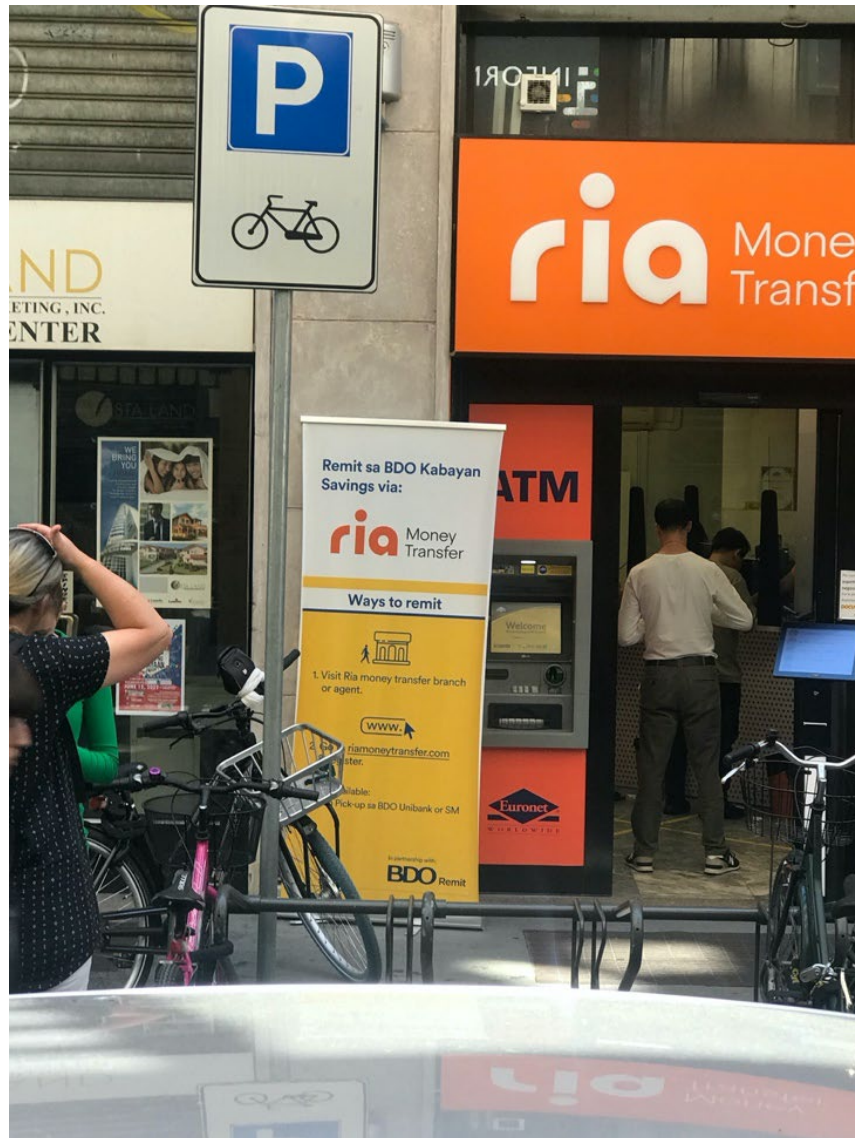


Figure 4. A remittance shop in the center of Milan. The text outside is written in Tagalog, likely because of the sizeable Filipino customer base. Photo taken by Daniël van der Zwan on June 10th 2022.

Aside from political detachment, socially Luis noticed a growing divide in mentality between his Filipino and Milanese environment. Transnationalism does not only connect places, but it can also accentuate differences between them and cause conflicts (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011). For Luis this was apparent in the social dimension. When he compared his life to his friends and family back in the Philippines, he noticed a few things that made him look at home in a different way: *‘I mean many people will say that the main problem of the Philippines is corruption, poverty, unemployment. Yes I do agree with that, but I think the main problem also that is not been talked at all for too many people, that they are not aware is the*

sense of the dependency. So what do I mean, they always depend on their relatives, on the government.' Luis – who became independent in Milan on his own strength – finds it bothering that many Filipinos are not trying to become more on their own too. He continues: *'The mentality here in Western Europe, at a very young age you need to be independent. In your twenties, you have your own job, your own house sometimes right, even if you are renting, but you are not depending on your friends. Most of the time. Majority of the cases are that. So I think that is the most underrated and unspoken problem in the Philippines.'* Luis cannot truly see himself anymore in a situation in the Philippines where he is dependent on others, instead it is Milan where he became self-sufficient.

In addition, this difference in mentality is also shared by other respondents like Chris and Malaya. Even Arturo finds it troublesome that there is a strong sense of dependence in his place of birth, but from a religious perspective. These growing differences did not function as bridge builders between the two places.

Luis' idiotope-idiotomy relationship has become both clearer and more convoluted at the same time when examining his transnational engagement. Even though he mentioned in the previous chapter that the Philippines is truly home and he feels like a true Filipino, he is leaning more and more towards calling Milan his primary home. Whereas Eleanor's transnational sense of place has reached a stalemate by having her nuclear family in Milan and being more optimistic about the future in the Philippines, Luis' place identification could drastically change in the coming years if his worse predictions for his country of birth come true and his family moves to Italy.

In an already complicated idiotope-idiotomy relationship, analyzing the role of that transnationalism has played over time in the creation of said relation has made it even blurrier and more entangled. Transnational engagements definitely pulled the respondents towards the Philippines, but it was quite rare for such activities to become decisive shapers in the creation of one certain home. If anything, transnationalism for them functioned as a tool to keep their lives in balance.

5.4. Conclusion: Pulling but not deciding?

Pascual-de-Sans (2004) noted multiple actors that influenced the formation of a place attachment. The scholar, however, did not mention the importance of transnationalism, even though it was gaining traction in the scientific world (Mendoza & Morén-Alegret, 2013; Schiller, 2007). This chapter has looked at this shortcoming by analyzing how Filipinos in

Milan combined their overseas engagement with the creation of a sense of place in the Italian city over time, zooming in on their biographies and personal historical moments. Moreover, it examined how the life stories were related to transnational engagement in general.

In general the phenomenon of transnationalism was visible in the forming of an *idiotopy* or *idiotope*. Overseas engagement created on one hand more binding through investments and social networks, but on the other hand it could also reveal growing differences and divides in the social domain (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011). Transnationalism therefore goes both ways: creating attachments but also detachments. For those with a Milanese *idiotope*, Gloria and Jasmine both saw their connections to the Philippines fade when a dear family member passed away, but when they started their transnational reconnection journey, the Filipino *idiotopy* started to develop more. Those with a highly entangled transnational sense of place were often split at the core: family members living abroad and high transnational economic activities. It seemed that both places – Milan and the Philippines – were in balance where the shortcomings of one area were compensated by the other.

However, for some respondents transnationalism was not influential in the forming of a place attachment. Ian, for example, is not engaged anymore with the mainland except through some property given by his parents. His memories and the nostalgia resulting from the brief but intense time spent in the Asian country combined with a difficult adaptation path, created a strong disposition for the Philippines. Chesah and Dolores likewise were not transnationally active, but still felt a deep identificatory bond with their previous place of residence. Transnationalism, therefore, did not influence their making of a transnational sense of place. After all, not all migrants are engaged with their place of birth (Portes, 2003). However, it is worth noting that the lack of transnational engagement and activities do not equate to the entire phenomenon being irrelevant. Perhaps reconnecting could intensify their Filipino *idiotope* as was the case with Gloria and Jasmine. Therefore it is not wise to dismiss transnationalism as an insignificant actor when it is not present.

This chapter and the previous one looked at the creation of a home through personal historical moments, both in Italy and through connections with the Philippines. The next chapter will zoom out and look at one universal event – the Covid-19 pandemic - and how this has influenced the making and experiencing of a transnational sense of place.

Chapter 6 – Covid-19 and the experiencing of a transnational sense of place

During the Covid-19 pandemic it was almost everywhere the norm to isolate and to avoid human contact as much as possible. Migrants, however, were extra vulnerable during these unprecedented times: travelling restrictions, lack of access to health services and higher risk of exposure to the virus as immigrants often worked in sectors that continued to operate during the outbreak (Clark et al., 2020; Guadagno, 2020). Specifically for the Filipinos in Milan, the situation was even more dire. Firstly, Lombardy was one of the worst affected regions by the disease in Europe (Mantovani et al., 2021). Secondly, as a result of the origins of the virus, a sharp increase in anti-Asian racism and hate crimes towards people of Asian descent was observed in Italy (Dipoppa et al., 2022). Something, as will be shown in this chapter, multiple respondents had experienced themselves.

The pandemic has influenced respectively transnationalism and place relations in multiple ways. Concerning the former phenomenon, scholars Nare Galystan and Mihran Galystan (2021) have called changing transnational related behaviors during the epidemic ‘pandemic transnationalism’. This pertains to any changes in transnational activities and engagements during the Covid-19 outbreak, but it also includes the actual transmission of health related ideas and notions during this period. Concerning the latter, the national health crisis has made people look differently at places: a less clear separation between home and the outside world, being less able to frequent meaningful spaces and being pinned to a place (Devine-Wright et al., 2020). The goal of this chapter is to examine how these pandemic changes have played a role in the lives of multiple Filipinos in Milan and their experiencing of a transnational sense of place.

6.1. Filipino idiotopes and the pandemic

Firstly the stories will be examined of those who felt that the Philippines was their idiope. Arturo – the bright social media entrepreneur who wishes to go back to the Philippines in the future – experienced multiple incidents that bound him both to the Philippines and Italy during the pandemic. On one hand, he became closer to the Filipino community both in Milan and in his country of birth: *‘Well I got more engaged with Filipino community, because most of my time I spent, after work, with Filipinos. Selling stuff, selling properties online. I have to talk with Filipinos, so I guess I am connected more during the pandemic with Filipinos. And then, yeah. Cause my friends haven’t worked that much during the pandemic period, so we have lot*

of times talking to each other.' In early 2020, the Filipino government restricted mobility in the country by enacting a strict nationwide lockdown. As a result, multiple workers were forced to work at home or were laid off (Jiang et al., 2022). Arturo described how this has caused him to transnationally engage more with his friends as a result of the pandemic, because they were likewise stuck at home. This created more binding with his peers abroad. In general, keeping up with family members and friends in a different place also relieved some stress during the epidemic (Hari et al., 2021). Whether this was the case for Arturo was not entirely certain from the interviews, but he did cherish the extra contact.

Furthermore, Arturo was ethnically targeted during a xenophobic incident. This happened at a hospital where he started working during the pandemic to generate some extra income: *'I don't know if it is being racist, but there were two doctors that were going to the elevator. And the one said to me, because I was also going the elevator. So one of the doctors said "no no no you should not go here because we will be infected". At the time there was a serious problem with the Covid cases, so I guess because of that, the limits back then was 2 people in the elevator, you are not supposed to enter the elevator. But you know, at times there were 4 people, sometimes they do not follow the instructions. So yeah, and I wanted to enter, but they told me "no no we will be infected" I don't know if that is racism. But I guess it's part racist, part Covid. But well I guess it's a racist move.'* Arturo was the victim of racial scapegoating during his work: because he looked Asian, he was targeted (Cheng et al., 2021). However, he mentioned during the interview that in the end it did not affect him much.

On the other hand, he started to feel more Italian because of the work he picked up at the start of the outbreak: *'Yeah, because of my work I have been involved with Italians. So I have been in the work for 7 hours a day, so I get more involved now than before in the Italian community. I get to talk to other people, the Italian peoples, I have more exposure now. Not before, I always interacted with Filipino people, now I interact with Italian more. My work before was involving a lot Filipinos. I mean I worked for Filipinos companies even if I was here.'* In the past Arturo used to confine himself to the Filipino community, but because of the pandemic he was emplaced in a space where he had little mobility (Counted et al., 2021) and thus he started to interact more with Italians which in turn made him also feel more Italian: *'When I started the work back in 2020 and from that I became so much exposed to Italian community. It was pretty much involved in Filipino community before 2020.'*

Here Arturo touches upon an interesting change that is related to pandemic place relations. Namely he experienced a form of place disruption. This means that an individual is separated from an area that holds significance to them which can result in identity undermining

or loss (Counted et al., 2021). For Arturo it meant that he could no longer interact physically with the Philippines, which resulted in a small identity shift. Whereas he lost a bit of Filipino identity, he started to develop his Italian one more creating more place attachment to Milan during the pandemic.

For the other person whose idiotope was in the Philippines and who had little transnational engagement - Ian - the pandemic made him initially feel even more marginalized as he was forced to stay at home like other Milanese: *'I mean, the pandemic I was...it was just I was at home and I couldn't go outside. It is just the same thing when I was staying at home and I wanted to be alone. I think that was the same. Cause when I met the people at YEP I started to open up more. It was the issue when the pandemic came and I started to be alone again, they tried to communicate to me, we chatted back, so this pandemic thing it did grow me up. I think it just worsened.'* YEP, youth empowerment program, is a project by the internship organization that helps to connect young Filipinos in Milan with each other and that seeks to encourage and motivate the youth. Just before the outbreak, Ian was finding his way in Milanese society by meeting likeminded people. However, when the Italian government announced lockdowns he retreated to his comfort space. He described the isolation he went through: *'And this pandemic thing staying at home and being alone. And I just started to watch videos again. Staying, not speaking to people.'* The social effects of the pandemic are still being discovered to this day, but preliminary research has shown that the isolation could have caused depression, sleep disorders, feelings of increasing loneliness and other negative psychological consequences (Fernandes et al., 2020).

Moreover, the anti-Asian racism and discrimination during Covid-19 made him feel angry. Ian did not experience any events personally, but the stories he heard from friends and the media made him angry. Initially he wanted to become more Italian so he would not be targeted: *'I mean, I think that I had that feeling but it didn't last long. It is mostly that I am angry. That I wanted to, like I said before I sided with them, the Italians so I wouldn't be discriminated.'* Ian had tried a similar strategy earlier when he hung out with some bad friends discussed in chapter 4, so this time he decided to not do anything differently in the end, but it was a thought for him. However it is interesting to see that one of the strategies to try and mitigate (perceived) racism, is to engage more with the dominant group in a society.

Ian was stuck in this exclusionary loop where immobility was the norm for everyone until the national restrictions were lifted. Yet in the end he considered the pandemic to have been a positive event in his life as the Filipino friends in Milan kept in contact with him: *'And after that the pandemic, fortunately, how do you say it? Like I am lucky they stayed, this bond*

we had, it remained. It didn't, they didn't think negatively. They wanted to come back again.' His companions managed to pull him out of his comfort zone and Ian is now starting to feel much better. This stresses again the importance of social networks, friends and relatives that stayed in touch during the pandemic in order to get through it (Hari et al., 2021).

For this final part I would like to look at other respondents and how their Filipino transnational sense of place has changed during the pandemic. Mainly in the economic domain there are some interesting stories and changes. First, some interviewees started collecting money and fundraising for Filipinos in the Philippines during the pandemic. It was not uncommon that migrant groups or diasporic communities abroad started to buy supplies or offered financial aid to their place of birth (Chekirova, 2022). Both Maria and Dolores wanted to help out their *kabayan*¹⁰ at home by making some economic contributions. It made them feel a sense of pride and happiness being able to help those in need. Moreover, it made them feel a bit more connected.

Second, changing patterns in remittances caused some friction in families and transnational engagement. Chris and his family were, for example, halting their remittances: *'Somehow it impacted our relations with our relatives back in the Philippines, because my parents are very generous: they send money to their relatives and their fathers and sisters, but during the pandemic they could not do it anymore. But they were hesitant, because we were all facing the pandemic and we all had our needs. So there were times where my mom said no, we need the money first, so whatever happens, we have money.'* Especially at the start of the pandemic in 2020, the amount of remittances dropped globally which could endanger the livelihoods of transnational families if they were too dependent on the money transfers (Murzakulova et al., 2021). This caused some tension in the transnational family relations, but Chris became closer to his relatives as they kept more in contact: *'Only in terms of money I think. Because, of course, during the pandemic you have nothing to do at home, so we kept video calling our relatives. We got to connect more with our relatives, because we had more time.'* Paradoxically the pandemic created both friction and connection for Chris to the Philippines.

Jacob experienced a similar thing where his relatives asked for more money, but they were not able to give much more considering his nuclear family in Milan needed it too. These events put pressure on their transnational engagement as the moral economy of the family was being tested (Katigbak, 2015), but they were intrafamilial incidents that were resolved. Like

¹⁰ Filipino for 'fellow countryman'.

Chris, Jacob became a bit closer with the Philippines as he was following the media closely: *‘Actually, yeah got more connected to the Philippines, because I get more news about the Philippines every time I am looking if the Philippines is doing better or worse, or they doing something or making an effort for the citizens.’* That what happened in the family did not cancel out his engagement with his idiotope.

In short, for Ian the pandemic did not explicitly influence his transnational sense of place as was the case with Arturo after he was emplaced in Milan and put in a position where working and interacting with Italians became more common. Both individuals did not plan to travel back home, nor were they forced to seek new forms of pandemic transnationalism. For others with a Filipino idiotope, transnational fundraising made them more connected to their home in the Philippines. Finally, some faced an economic dilemma where remittances were needed in the Philippines, but they were needed more for their own livelihoods in Milan. This put extra pressure on the transnational families, but it did not signify an impactful shift in place relations.

6.2. Milanese belonging during Covid-19

This subsection will focus on those who had a Milanese idiotope and how the pandemic influenced their transnational sense of place. Jasmine was not transnationally engaged much with the Philippines, but she wished to reconnect more with her past. The epidemic did not change anything about that sentiment. If anything, as she explained, she simply continued with her life: *‘I don’t think it effected anything at all. Not what I feel about Italy, Milan or the Philippines. It just delineated all of the problems that were there.’* This is in stark contrast with Arturo and Ian who experienced quite some changes during the epidemic.

An interesting shift in mentality and place relations happened to her however: *‘The only thing that Covid changed was the fact that I am spending more time with my loved ones. I mean the fact I couldn’t go see them or talk to them face-to-face made me think of the little time I have and I would like to spend more time with them than working.’* As a result of the immobility regime caused by the pandemic, Jasmine wished to see her dearly beloved more often as it was difficult to visit them regularly. Instead of being more attached to her workplace, she prefers to spend more time with her family. In the end her love for a different local place started to develop as a result of the pandemic (Counted et al., 2021). In short, for Jasmine Covid-19 did not alter her transnational sense of place as a whole but she did become more appreciative of what she had.

Gloria – the creative graphic designer that also started her reconnection journey a few years prior and felt that Milan was her home – underwent a similar development. She also started to spend more time with her family in Milan: *‘I was more able to connect with my parents because I wasn’t living here [Milan] alone, but at my parents’ house. So that allowed me to stay more with them, to my sisters. So I felt more connected to them. And I kind of somehow, like somehow solved a lot of things. We confronted and so on. In terms of like, I was able to kind of enjoy more my everyday life to slow down.’* Being surrounded by her Filipino family did not translate in feeling more Filipino or wanting to reconnect more as she explained: *‘But I didn’t have like, I think my identity wasn’t stronger cause it was rooted in my family and not what Filipino or Italian is.’* Her family was simply her family, not a unit that could alter her cultural or identificatory traits.

However, the pandemic and the subsequent travelling restrictions did bar her from visiting the Philippines in the summer of 2020 as she wished to go to her grandparents’ grave: *‘So we didn’t go there [Philippines] and it was a pity. So I wanted to go there this summer, also to go to the cemetery. And to bring things and so on. I still didn’t do it’.* She did not want to go for tourism, but for a more personal reason. Here an interesting mix happened between transnational behavior and general changing place relations as a result of the pandemic. The epidemic generally barred individuals from visiting meaningful places anywhere (Devine-Wright et al., 2020), but Gloria’s sentimental space was located outside of Italy. The transnational urge was moreover halted because of the lockdown and travelling restrictions imposed by the Philippines. For some transmigrants the restrictions hit both ‘here’ and ‘there’.

Trisha, who was born in Milan and is a relative of Chesah and Dolores, shared the same experience as the previous respondents: *‘I think it [Pandemic] didn’t really change that much, because if I think of the pandemic and how it affected me and the Philippines, the main reason was because I couldn’t go physically there, but I haven’t gone there since 2015, so it didn’t really change it that much. There was already a long time that I hadn’t visited the Philippines.’* Her life was completely centered around and rooted in Milan. The only thing she found unfortunate was the fact that she could potentially not travel to the Philippines, but considering she did not go there since 2015, it was not that important.

The individuals interviewed who had a Milanese idiothepe, all mentioned that the pandemic did not alter their transnational sense of place. There were definitely hardships and difficulties, but they could perhaps be considered global conditions as they were applicable to most people. For example, some lamented the fact that they could not travel to the Philippines, but tourism in general was restricted. Moreover, it was not sure if these travels were part of a

transnational activity or a form of tourism in which the former bears more meaning in terms of binding and engagement than the latter (Von Koppenfels et al., 2015). They shared that their place relations did not change much as they explained that physical life continued in the Italian metropole which they primarily identified with.

6.3. Entangled homes in an epidemic

The last section will look at the respondents who had no clear primary place attachment. Those who had no clear idiohome were often tightly entangled with the Philippines in all types of domains, ranging from investments to taking care of their families. For Eleanor, the ethnic entrepreneur and the owner of the internship organization, the pandemic halted her search for a house. She and her family were looking to buy a place to live in Milan, but because of the lockdowns they were not able to find anything. This unfortunate event could have prevented further place attachment to Milan considering house ownership is correlated to developing a more positive binding towards a place (Brown et al., 2003). Therefore it could be argued that the pandemic indirectly interrupted further attachment to Milan

Moreover, the pandemic ruined her plans to go on holiday with her family to her former place of residence. After eight years of not having been to her place of birth, she, her husband and kids wanted to take a trip, but they were stopped as a result of the imposed travelling restrictions. Looking back, however, it did not matter that much to her: *‘Like I am sorry, because I feel that the Philippines is home. But I didn’t really felt the urge that I must go back to the Philippines. Especially that I have my family here, my immediate family, my husband and my kids. And at that time I had here my parents. Maybe if it happened in those time my parents were already there that I would urge to immediately go to the Philippines. The moment I could go. But I didn’t have that urge because I felt like “okay we are here together so no problem with me.”’* She shared the same sentiments as Gloria and Jasmine: her closest relatives were all around here, so there was no deeper purpose to go to the Philippines except to have a good time.

Yet, as a result of the increasing isolation and negative social impacts experienced during the pandemic, Eleanor started to feel more connected to Milan: *‘Like I had moments of fear and uncertainty, feelings of uncertainty, but the moment I thought “Okay, I fear, but the best thing I can do is help other people cause other people are having fear, are afraid”. So I concentrated here more in Milan. In Italy I made videos to help people here. And I didn’t do anything in the Philippines. Maybe I helped my relatives and sent them some money because they are stuck at home, but nothing more than that.’* Her transnational engagement did not

increase too much except for remitting more money and helping some relatives out in other ways which could be seen as a form of ‘kin-keeping’: simply keeping in touch with relatives (Hurlburt, 2017). However, her primary concerns were concentrated in the Italian city as she channeled the anxious feelings into helping those in Milan. It could be argued that this made her feel more a bit more binding towards the metropole as she was more occupied with the wellbeing of the people there than in the Philippines.

Contrary to Eleanor, Luis felt heavily impacted by the pandemic. From 2019 until early 2021 he was living in his home town in the Philippines with his wife and son. During the lockdown he was only able to go out for groceries. Up until the height of the epidemic, he and his family owned a few bars near a university, but their customer base disappeared when the institution was forced to close. This led them to ceasing their operations: *‘We were forced to close our businesses, like the coffee shops it is in front of the university, so what will you do? The university is closed.’* When Luis returned to Milan in 2021, he came back with zero business activities left in the Philippines which made him orient more towards Italy.

Luis planned on staying longer in his home town in Pampanga, but he realized that moving back to Milan was a wiser move for him and his family: *‘In the first place I had no plans to go back in Italy. Maybe not too early, maybe after 5 years, not 2 or 3 years. Italy was always an option.’* He continued: *‘We saw the opportunity, but what we are going to do in the Philippines, because of the pandemic, when the businesses are shrinking, so all the businesses are draining. So as a father I had to do what I had to do, so that is why I am working really hard to give my family a better future. So that is why the decision making came from.’* It was a bitter pill to swallow for Luis, but he decided to remigrate to Italy as a result of the pandemic.

His move was further cemented by the support he got from his business partners and his religious peers: *‘I have talked to my friends who are entrepreneurs also, who are my closest friends and of course they always tell us that if you are a good leader in your congregation, like the Feast and Light of Jesus Family¹¹, if you are good in your congregation, you must be more good in your family.’* All of them reminded him to do it for his family, to leave the Philippines and create a bright future in Milan. Henceforward, his future became Italy.

Aside from social and economic effects, the immobility caused by nation states imposing travel bans as a result of the pandemic also caused pressure on transnational families as they were often barred from physically meeting each other (Popyk & Pustulka, 2021; Gerber & Ravazzini, 2022). Whereas the previous respondents all had their nuclear family and most

¹¹ A Filipino Catholic organization based in Milan.

beloved relatives in Milan, for Luis it was a different story. Although he struggled with the distance between him and his wife and son, Luis had the tools to stay connected: *'And being away from them. Yes my wife and my son are there [the Philippines], but with the technologies it is more easy now. It is more doable.'* In a humorous tone he remembers how his mom would keep in contact when he was a little boy: *'I remember my mother with no internet connection. She was sending only the cassette tape in the nineties. And then there is no, she would send it to some friends, and after that we will listen to the recorded voice tape.'* Compared to thirty years ago, he could not complain.

Malaya, whose entire nuclear family is still in Manila, had the complete opposite experience of Luis regarding her beloved ones. She became more occupied with the Philippines as she was not able to see her children and husband face-to-face: *'When there were lockdowns and you know the pandemic I just want to go home. I feel like I want to be there. I just want to stay there, whatever I got, I just stay with them [her children].'* Malaya became more and more concerned with her children as she was not able to visit them whenever she wanted. She continued: *'I was thinking about them, what will happen or what if the pandemic hit the Philippines, or my children will be sick. What will happen? What will I do? Who will I connect with?'*. For a large part of the pandemic, Malaya was primarily concerned with the things happening in the Philippines, wanting to travel back as soon as possible, whereas Milan became a bit less important to her.

Here it is also important to emphasize again that a family is different for every person and thus does not have to be blood-related (Lohnert & Steinbrink, 2005). Luis and Malaya both mentioned that their partner and children are their primary concerns, however, it could be the case for other people that their best friend or religious leader hold the same emotional meaning. This was not present among the interviewees, but it is a point to be aware of as transnational families can be more than meets the eyes.

In short, those with an entangled transnational sense of place had quite varying and unforeseeable reactions to the pandemic. Whereas transnationalism both seemed to struck a balance for them between their Italian and Filipino home, the epidemic made their place attachments go into multiple directions. Luis decided to settle in Milan and Malaya wished to return to the Philippines. Eleanor leaned more towards connecting with Milan. In this case the most 'volatile' group had the most diverse experiences.

6.4. Conclusion: One event, divergent paths

This chapter examined how one event – the Covid-19 pandemic – has influenced the transnational sense of place creation of multiple Filipinos in Milan. Not one story was exactly the same, but some experiences were similar. In most cases, the epidemic did not alter the configuration of idiotopes or idiotopies much. Ian, Eleanor, Gloria and Jasmine mentioned that at the core, the pandemic did not alter their place attachments. Although they had varying transnational engagement, the pandemic simply happened. They did not feel closer or more distant from either Italy or the Philippines. For one individual, Malaya, the event made her more appreciative and connected to her former place of residence. The anxiety and worries generated from the epidemic made Malaya reach out more to the Asian archipelago where her family resided. Finally, some individuals experienced a growing bond between them and Milan. Arturo started to surround himself more with Italians whereas Luis made a profound migratory move back to Milan where he likes to stay for good. In general, the experiences and changes went right through the categorizations made of the respondents for this thesis, except for the interviewees who had a Milanese idiotope who experienced little changing place relations.

Central to the chapter was the influence the pandemic had on place relations and transnational practices. With regards to the former, the epidemic made the respondents emplaced in one area, whether the individual was in Milan or in their home town in the Philippines. They were all subjected to the immobility regime (Devine-Wright et al., 2020) and thus were unable to visit meaningful and faraway places. This also caused the interviewees to become more appreciate of their direct environment and the relatives they had around them, but this caused attachment to a space that was separate from an idiotope or idiotopy. Concerning the latter, pandemic transnationalism was palpable too as oversea networks requested extra remittances or transnational connections were strengthened as many were at home all day. Anxieties grew as the epidemic hit both sides of the transnational spectrum. This chapter showed that for transmigrants, Covid-19 had double the impact: hitting as a global phenomenon and striking in their transnational engagement.

Chapter 7 – Conclusion

During one evening walk in Milan near the Duomo I heard a street musician play the song that is quoted on the third page of this thesis. The author, Edoardo Bennato, wrote the text in the eighties when Italy was experiencing the most violent period in history since World War 2. The Years of Lead (roughly 1968-1988) were characterized by bloody terrorist attacks from both the far left and right. In 1980 Edoardo released the song, singing about a place where there are no wars, no weapons and no police and soldiers needed. Such place might be nonexistent, a sort of Neverland as the author called it, but he reminds the listener that people should not stop looking for one, nor stop creating one.

Second star to the right, this is the way
And then straight on till morning
You can't go wrong, because
that's the Neverland

And they'll mock you if you keep looking for it
But don't give up, because
Who has already given up and is laughing at you behind your back
Maybe he's even crazier than you

When hearing the specific lyrics mentioned above, it reminded me however of my own work. Specifically the people that I was interviewing. That for migrants, or those with a migrant background, they might look for a place to feel connected to. In this sense, 'Neverland' could also be an elusive home that they seek to find. And during this journey they will encounter people that will make their venture arduous and they will encounter struggles, but hopefully those looking for a place that does not exist (yet), will not give up. Because migration is anything but easy, unmaking a home is painful and creating a new positive environment where someone feels welcome is not a given thing either. The respondents for this project all had to look for a new home after moving to Milan and deal with the hardships that came with it.

7.1. Findings and research questions

The Filipino community in Milan is one with a complicated position in Italian society. The initial modern migration wave occurred in the seventies and slowly the amount of Filipinos started to grow in the Italian metropolis. Little by little they started to settle, but many of them were still connected to their place of birth: the Philippines. This research has looked deeper

into this development by asking how and if transnationalism has influenced their sense of place throughout time in Milan. Whereas the combined study of transnationalism and a sense of place has been gaining traction in the scientific world (Gielis, 2011; Adams, 2013), the historic dimension seemed to be missing in this emerging field (Vertovec, 2001). This was remarkable because analyzing a temporal overview can show interesting continuities and discontinuities in someone's transnational sense of place. Therefore, based on this shortcoming, the main question of this project was: '*How has the relation between transnationalism and sense of place historically evolved in the case of the Filipino community in Milan?*'. The goal of this research was then to show, expose and scrutinize the transnational practices that have contributed to the forming of a sense of place. Before answering the main question, an analytic summary will be given with the most important findings.

Chapter 4 was the start of the empirical body of the thesis by diving into the respondents' biographies, beginning in Milan. Pascual-de-Sans' (2004) hypothesis of a hierarchy of spaces - a clear divide between a geographical and place identification - was confirmed by two distinct groups of Filipinos. Firstly, those with a Filipino idiothepe all felt that their primary place attachment was located in the Philippines. They cited a strong sense of nostalgia, identity and many childhood memories that bound them to their home in the east. Some of them mentioned stories of racism and discrimination that happened when living in Milan, but they used these negative experiences to work harder and to disprove prejudices instead of falling into isolation and despair (Daoud et al., 2018; Mullins, 2008). Although the Philippines was their preferred place, they did not dismiss the opportunities and possibilities Milan offered them. If anything, they had formed a functional relationship with the city (Pretty et al., 2003; Qian & Zhu, 2014). This form of place dependence among the respondents did not lead to more place identification, but it did cause a deeper attachment to the city. Underlining the importance to differentiate between what kind of attachment an individual has to a space.

Secondly, those with a Milanese idiothepe were able to unmake their Filipino home into a Milanese one. These individuals often traced their changing sense of place back to their upbringing: not participating in influential Filipino practices like religion and preferring not to engage too much with the Filipino community in the Italian city. Yet these respondents did not dismiss their Filipino idiothepe entirely. If anything, nostalgia and childhood memories often offered some binding to their previous home in the Philippines. Even though their time spent in the Philippines was longer than some of the respondents who had a Filipino idiothepe, this did not equate to more binding. Therefore it is important not to equate time spent in a place to

more attachment. However, it is wise to look at the contents within that period that could create binding (Tuan, 2001).

The third group, however, did not fit into the spatial hierarchy created by Pascual-de-Sans. Those with two homes – the Philippines and Milan – had no clear identifiable idioptope. These respondents had their livelihoods generated in the city and often preferred to spend their future in Italy too, but the Philippines was still a primary home as the memories of the past were strong and there was tight involvement with the local Filipinos community. Therefore, chapter 4 concluded that the scholar's hierarchy of spaces was not applicable to all (trans)migrants). Places attachments were equal, not ranked.

Chapter 5 examined how transnationalism was related to the life stories of the respondents and had influenced their transnational sense of place throughout time. Pascual-de-Sans (2004) mentioned the importance of previous places in the forming of a sense of place, but he did not take into account the influence of sustained transnational ties and engagements with a previous place. Those with a Filipino idioptope were in most cases still active in the Philippines through family networks, overseas political activism, remittances, investing or sending back norms and values. Those who were transnationally active, often cited feeling more connected to the Philippines, whether through media or keeping in touch with their beloved ones. However, it was difficult to determine in how much it influenced their Filipino idioptope. It is safe to say it did create more connection to their idioptope, but there was no clear evidence that the phenomenon was the most important factor in the forming of a transnational sense of place. Moreover, within this group there was a vast diversity of transnationalism, so it was difficult to establish a clear pattern. Ian, for example, had little to none transnational engagement as he relied primarily on nostalgia for his Filipino idioptope.

Respondents who had a Milanese idioptope often had little to no transnational engagement. Both Jasmine and Gloria lost a dearly beloved which signified the end for most transnational activities. However, both of them experienced a moment in their life where they were reminded of their roots which played on their emotions. This caused them to engage more with the Philippines and the Filipino community in Milan. This in turn started their reconnection journey which caused a tighter connection to their Filipino idioptopy. This was not enough (yet) to alter the hierarchy of places, but it did signify that transnationalism does play a role in creating attachments and that the described hierarchy by Pascual-de-Sans (2004) is not set in stone, but it is rather fluid and changeable.

Finally, those who I spoke to that had no clear identifiable home, often had high transnational engagement which made their transnational sense of place tightly entangled. For

Luis and Malaya the overseas engagement was a result of having their nuclear family split between the Philippines and Italy, which made them feel connected. They moreover sent back remittances and had some property in the Asian archipelago. Both of them wanted their family with them in Milan which in the future could mean less transnationalism and more binding to the Italian city. Eleanor already had her most beloved relatives with her in Milan, but her livelihood is focused on facilitating transnational contact and she does not mind retiring in her former place of residence.

Concerning transnationalism in general, which affected respondents from all groups, it is important to note that the phenomenon not only causes binding, but also detachment in some cases. Some respondents – for example Luis – shared that keeping in contact with friends in the Philippines also accentuated differences between them, which as a result he started to distance himself from other Filipinos. Others also started to notice an increasing contrast in mentality between them and their acquaintances in the Philippines. Whether it was related to raising children, finances or religion, keeping transnational contact made these differences palpable. Therefore, transnationalism should not be seen as a homogenous phenomenon that causes straightforward attachment, but it can also cause growing divides between people.

Lastly, concluding chapter 5, although the Philippines allows dual citizenship and absentee voting, many respondents were hesitant to exercise these rights as there were either restrictions on them, or they took considerable time. If they were to request Italian citizenship, they had to renounce their Filipino one for a certain time. This was for multiple respondents a bridge too far – even those with Milanese idioypes – as citizenship was tied to culture and identity. This finding shows that a transnational research needs to take into account both the host country and the country of birth. Moreover, it showed that for the respondents transnationalism was often transmitted from below instead from above.

Chapter 6 looked at one historical moment and what influence it had on the respondents. The Covid-19 pandemic inaugurated both new forms of transnational engagements – pandemic transnationalism – and a general change in place relations. By focusing on one specific event, the categories of respondents that were leading in this work became more scattered. The pandemic did not cause any decisive shifts in anyone's idioype-idiotype configuration, but some interesting developments happened, mainly in the already volatile category of entangled transnational sense of place. Whereas on individual decided to settle in Milan for good, another person became extra occupied with the Philippines

In general, those who were transnationally engaged the most, also underwent the most fluctuations in their transnational sense of place. It was not uncommon for transnational

families to request extra money, but this caused friction too in the family economy. Highlighting again that transnational practises also cause conflicts and detachment. Others, nonetheless, became more attached to the Philippines as anxieties and worries started to grow. For those with little transnational engagement, they mentioned that their life simply continued in the Italian city. Although they dealt with the consequences of the pandemic in their own ways, it did not cause place disruption as one individual had as a result of the place emplacement. Some however started to feel more attached to certain aspects of life, like their family, but this did not cause more binding to a specific place, but rather more appreciation for what was around them.

With these extensive findings it is possible to give a meaningful and adequate answer to the main research question: ‘How has the relation between transnationalism and sense of place historically evolved in the case of the Filipino community in Milan?’ Transnationalism has played an influential role in the historic forming of a (transnational) sense of place for the Filipino community in Milan, but it was mostly an additional factor instead of a decisive one. Transnational engagement created in most cases more binding to the Philippines, but in some rare occasions it also creating detachment between an individual and the overseas place. Moreover, the lack of transnationalism did not mean that the entire phenomenon was to be dismissed. Not only because when it was present, it did play a role in developing place attachments, but individuals can also rekindle transnational engagement and therefore open another door to create binding. Therefore transnationalism can be seen as an another factor in the general forming of a (transnational) sense of place as local actors and primary socialization likewise played influential roles.

7.2. Further theory development

This research focused primarily on the phenomenon of transnationalism and how, throughout time, it could have influenced the creation of a sense of place. The findings described in this thesis are useful for future theory development for multiple reasons. First and foremost, it has shown that transnationalism did – in fact - play a role in the forming of a sense of place for transmigrants. Therefore, for future research in the combined field of sense of place and migration, it is wise to integrate a transnational dimension in the conceptual framework and methodology as it is another factor that creates place attachment.

Secondly, pertaining to Pascual-de-Sans (2004) work on idiotopes and idiotopies, this thesis has tested his hierarchy of spaces hypothesis of which the results have both confirmed

and contradicted the scholar's findings. The majority of the respondents can attest that one certain place is positioned above another that has less meaning to it, but there was also a smaller group who had no clear ranking. Therefore, future research should not confine itself too much to rigid categories of spaces and places as migrants have multiple homes and attachments that do not compete for each other, but rather complement one another.

Thirdly, by analyzing the temporal dimension it has become more apparent that attachments are fluid and prone to change. Migration research has always had a spatial bias, but in recent years scholars have started to pay more attention to the role of time (Cwerner, 2001; Wang, 2020). As migration often focusses on the *ad hoc* situation of mobility, researchers started to discuss the added value of adding a temporal dimension. As sociologist Saulo Cwerner explained: '*The focus on the temporal experience of migrants can illuminate the nature of migration itself, its twists and turns, meanings and ambivalence, and the way that, in a diversity of ways, it dis-places and re-embeds people and communities around the world*' (2001, p. 32). By examining continuities and discontinuities of migrant experiences, paths and lives, a deeper understanding of the world of migration could be offered. Especially in a time when borders are more secured and deportation regimes are becoming more common, migrants face different struggles throughout different times (Schiller, 2018).

This research has applied this temporal turn to the creation of a transnational sense of place by migrants. Throughout time personal moments happened that contributed to the continuity and discontinuity of their place attachments. Instead of offering snapshots of the respondents' lives, a biography was reconstructed that showed the development of creating a new home and which factors contributed to that. Not only focusing on politics and economics, but also culture and emotions (Amrith, 2021). For future research it is then a reminder for the scholar that behind the then recorded place attachment, a wide array of different bindings went before and are perhaps to occur after too. The migrant is in that specific space now, but perhaps will not be in the near future. Analyzing temporalities has given migration research a deeper look into the wellbeing of migrants and the development of place attachments

7.3. Recommendations for praxis

Reflecting on the societal relevance of this project – the complicated position of Filipinos in Milanese society – the results of the thesis have offered some interesting insights in their societal standings. Although some respondents fared well in the Italian environment and became *nuovi Milanese*, there were multiple societal issues that need to be addressed that were

discovered in this work. This section therefore offers some recommendations to improve their position in Milan and to facilitate a better environment for them.

Racism and discrimination are dire problems that multiple respondents were struggling with. Although some used those horrid events to work harder and prove themselves in Italian society, multiple interviewees were negatively impacted by those moments which could have caused feelings of exclusion and marginalization. Sadly, as Paul put it: '*Still racism is living in our 21th century I guess.*' Therefore, it would be advisable if the Milanese or Italian government would invest more into racism awareness programs and campaigns to curb discriminatory behavior and hate fueled incidents. Moreover, multiple respondents had shared that the internship organization helped them immensely in feeling at home, connecting to likeminded people and finding their way in a new and foreign environment. As a result of this finding it would be desirable if the Italian government would subsidize similar foundations and to encourage the founding of more organizations that would help Filipinos (and migrants in general) acclimate to a new society.

7.4. Reflections and limitations

Although the research has offered a diverse and in-depth look at the lives of Filipinos in Milan and how their transnational sense of place came to be throughout time, there are multiple limitations to this work that need to be discussed and reflected upon.

The first issue is the used methodology and the subsequent effects it had on the findings and the conclusion. Because of the relative limited size of the data collection – sixteen interviews - the conclusion primarily applies to a small group. The findings therefore cannot be extrapolated to other Filipinos in Milan, nor to other cities. A quantitative approach, like surveys, would have had more authority to make more generalizing statements. However, it then runs into the risk of not offering a too profound look in the studied phenomenon. Therefore, for future works, a mixed methods approach would be useful that combines quantitative and qualitative aspects so that the findings both reflect external validity and in-depthness. The downside to this method is that it is time-consuming having to combine two distinct approaches (Driscoll et al., 2007), but it does offer an answer to the methodological limitation of this research.

Secondly, although the composition of the sampling size reflects a diverse group in terms of gender, life stage and career, it would have been desirable if had I had spoken to more older individuals. As personal historic moments were central in this research, senior

respondents could have experienced more of such events. However, this does not automatically mean that someone that has lived longer, has experienced more meaningful interactions than someone who is younger (as the findings have argued). Yet it would have been beneficial for the thesis to have further tested this hypothesis by including older respondents.

Third, although this thesis argued that comparing Milan and the Philippines – in this specific context – was appropriate, it is important still to reflect on this scalar difference and the effects of methodological nationalism. A city cannot be compared one-on-one to an entire country, but many respondents fell into the codified Filipino national identity. However, there are multiple Filipinos who do not fall into that and feel more connection to their home town or province than the entire nation. It was a missed opportunity for this research to try and look for those that felt that their place attachment was more regional than national. This work therefore holds some form of methodological nationalism by primarily focusing on an entire state (Dahinden, 2016). This was not a conscious choice as all the respondents themselves shared that their primary attachment was the Philippines, but it would have been more fruitful for the research if Filipinos were interviewed whose place attachment was a specific province, region or city.

A final reflection could be made about the location where the data was collected. Transnationalism implies the connection of two particular spaces. However, this work stayed only in one specific area: Milan. This thesis could have been extra insightful if it also opted for a multi-sited approach (Marcus, 1995). Focusing not only on the Italian city but also going to the places where the respondents' other attachments were found, like in Manila, Mabini or Pampanga. For example it would have given me the opportunity to further examine the transnational activities, follow overseas ties and talk to the receiving end of this engagement. It would have been enriching to interview also the relatives and partners of some of the respondents, how they experience a sense of place and if they have formed a type of attachment to Milan. Moreover, I could have looked for those who have migrated back from Italy to the Philippines and see how their transnational sense of place has been constructed and altered throughout time. Unfortunately this was beyond the scope of this thesis, but it would have been a magnificent addition to it.

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Appendix 1 - Overview of the interview questions

Subquestion 1:

Where are you from?

How does Milan make you feel?

Did you experience any racism or discrimination?

How are you connected to the Philippines?

How are you economically connected to the Philippines?

How are you politically connected to the Philippines?

Subquestion 2:

What events or experiences made you more connected to Italy?

What events or experiences made you more connected to the Philippines?

Subquestion 3:

What happened to you during the pandemic?

Did the pandemic made you feel more connected to the Philippines or Milan?

Appendix 2 - Overview of respondents and justification of typology

Respondent and age	Date of interview	Transnational sense of place: Idiotope-idiotomy relation	Motivation
Chris (29)	1 April 2022	Philippines – Idiotope Milan - Idiotomy	Proud Filipino, grew up in Philippines, many investments in country of birth, but very appreciative of Milan.
Jacob (19)	12 April 2022	Philippines – Idiotope Milan - Idiotomy	Proud Filipino, wants to improve Philippines, functional relation with Milan.
Jasmine (37)	16 April 2022	Milan – Idiotope Philippines – Idiotope	Largely childhood forgotten, works at high level with Italians, more Italian than Tagalog.
Dolores (64)	16 April 2022	Philippines – Idiotope Milan - Idiotomy	Childhood in Philippines important, always culturally oriented to Filipinos and wants to spend last days there.
Paul (22)	18 April 2022	Philippines – Idiotope Milan - Idiotomy	Culturally tightly connected to the Philippines and only few years in Milan.
Maria (21)	20 April 2022	Philippines – Idiotope Milan - Idiotomy	Awareness of being Filipino, close friends Filipinos, wants Italian citizenship to feel more home.
Arturo (30)	22 April 2022	Philippines – Idiotope Milan - Idiotomy	Strong Filipino identity, income generated in Milan to invest in the Philippines, completely apolitical. Childhood in the Philippines important.
Chesah (55)	25 April 2022	Philippines – Idiotope Milan - Idiotomy	Feels 100% Filipino, plans on migrating back soon. Largely speaks Tagalog, sent daughter to study in the Philippines.
Trisha (21)	25 April 2022	Milan – Idiotope Philippines – Idiotope	Born and raised in Milan, most Filipino elements from parents and feels big difference in mentality between places.
Ian (20)	28 April 2022	Philippines – Idiotope Milan - Idiotomy	Functional relationship with Milan, strong nostalgic

			sentiments keep him bounded to the Philippines
Gloria (30)	3 May 2022	Milan – Idiotope Philippines – Idiotope	Childhood commuting between Philippines and Milan, teenage years formed her culturally Italian.
Dari (21)	6 May 2022	Philippines – Idiotope Milan - Idiotope	Culturally feels 100% Filipino, difficult adaptation path in Italy, wishes to return to the Philippines. Politically only engaged with country of birth.
Luis (31)	15 May 2022	No clear idiotope/idiotope	Milan and the Philippines both a home. Income generated in both places, family in place of birth, culturally Italian.
Malaya (39)	28 May 2022	No clear idiotope/idiotope	Culturally mostly Filipino, family in the Philippines. All income made in Italy and feels sense of belonging in Milan.
Agwa (26)	9 June 2022	Philippines – Idiotope Milan - Idiotope	Feels very Filipino, born and raised there. Culturally surrounded by Filipinos (media and community).
Eleanor (39)	10 June 2022	No clear idiotope/idiotope	Livelihood, business and family in Milan, culturally Filipino and nostalgic for place of birth.