

Positioning for their Future: Timorese Migrant Workers in the UK

ANN WIGGLESWORTH and LIONEL J. BOXER

Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia

In Timor-Leste, the national economy offers few work opportunities. As a result, temporary migration overseas has become a significant source of support for family livelihoods. The largest source of migrant work for Timorese is the UK. A small study of Timorese migrants who have worked in the UK was undertaken in 2016, including interviews in Timor-Leste with workers from UK who had returned, and with current workers in Northern Ireland. A follow up visit was made in 2018. Timorese migrants enter UK on Portuguese passports and, unlike the two official migrant worker programs to South Korea and Australia, the UK migrants lack any official support.

Migration to the UK offers opportunities and hardships. Positioning theory is used to analyse different migrant motivations and experiences of living in the UK. The diverse ways in which migrant workers position themselves and others in the host community is analysed. Strong ties with their home country carry a sense of obligation to their families which remains a driving rationale for Timorese workers' presence in the UK. Yet a range of positioning becomes apparent in that while most workers stay only to contribute to the needs of their families at home,

other workers have started to see UK as a more permanent opportunity for a better future.

Keywords: migrant workers, Timor-Leste, social positioning.

INTRODUCTION

Migration is driven by the desire for a better life. The movement of people from their place of origin is often influenced by diverse factors such as poverty, war or conflict, but also the desire for better education or experiencing other cultures. Migration for work has become an increasing phenomenon as a strategy for development, both sponsored by governments to create remittance streams and as an option taken up by families for improving their economic status.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP 2015, p. 10-11) reports that worker migration generally is beneficial for most of those involved, resulting in higher GDP growth in countries of destination and increased wages for migrants. Remittances sent by migrants have positive effects not only for their families, but also for communities and their country in general. In particular, countries of origin benefit when migrants return with new skills that are useful to the national economy.

In Timor-Leste, it has been the minimal opportunities for work domestically that has driven Timorese to export their labour to wealthier nations. One of the ways that young people escape unemployment is to migrate overseas for work (UNDP 2018, p. 70). The major destination is the UK, where thousands of Timorese stay for many years to contribute to the daily needs of their families, support education of family members, home improvements and setting up family businesses. Based on interviews with twenty one Timorese migrants who have worked in the UK, this paper analyses their motivations, their experiences and their contribution to their families through remittances. It uses positioning theory to analyse the Timorese workers' relationship with their home and host communities.

MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT UNDERSTOOD WITH POSITIONING THEORY

Migrant workers typically work in low skilled work; work that nationals do not aspire to do. It is this social divide as well as inter-cultural relationships that led to considering positioning theory framework for this analysis. A global analysis of the relationship between migration and development shows that migration patterns are structured by social divides, finding that migrants are often not from the poorest region, usually not the poorest in the areas of origin, and often

slightly better educated or skilled (de Haan, 2016). Networks are important and migration streams may 'mature' over time. Migrants tend to come from specific areas, and people who are better off may pave the way for migrants with fewer resources. De Haan (2016) argues that in spite of much migration research having taken place, it remains difficult to integrate an understanding of labour mobility within the wider development context, partly because migration is politically driven and partly because of the complexity of migration and the difficulty in drawing generalisations. It is suggested that positioning theory will introduce a new clarity and greater understanding of inter-relationships of people in labour migration.

To study the experiences of migrants is to see both how they see themselves and how they engage with their host community. This paper uses a social constructionist approach to analyse the positioning of Timorese migrant workers in the UK and when they return home. In positioning theory, people's stories can reveal how they contribute to achieving their aspirations. It is based on the principle that not everyone involved in a social context has equal access to rights and duties to perform particular actions at that moment and with those people. In many cases, the rights and duties determine who can use a certain discourse mode. A cluster of short-term disputable rights, obligations and duties is called a 'position' (Harre, 2012, p.193). Positioning theory draws on the discursive production of selves in a framework that analyses the interconnectedness of each individual self, groups of people, and the broader collective underlying mood of society (Boxer, 2005). Boxer argues that as positioning can be negotiated through deliberate discourse that creates an image of selves, people may choose to move closer to the opportunities to which they aspire. For example, women can influence the societal presumptions about gender by the aspirations that they hold in discourse and determination for change (Boxer, 2005). Migrants typically are positioned as participants on the margins of the society into which they have migrated and this paper explores how, if they personally introduce a new discourse, they may negotiate enhanced rights and duties in a foreign culture to be more than the positioning attributed by the culture's underlying mood towards them. Thus, how people use words and discourse to locate themselves and others has direct implications for how different host and migrant communities may relate to each other (Moghaddam & Harré, 2010).

MIGRATION WITHIN AND FROM TIMOR-LESTE

Economic inequalities between urban and rural Timor-Leste have been persistently present. The statistics show that 92% of urbanites occupy the high wealth quintile while the vulnerable poor are predominantly in the rural areas (McWilliam, 2014). Both internal and

international migration have had a profound influence on the lives of Timorese families. In Timor-Leste the mobility of young people to access education and work opportunities starts with school students moving to their district town or Dili to attend secondary school. Most of them do not return to the rural areas to live but remain in the urban areas seeking further education or the few work opportunities. In addition, internal migration from the rural areas to urban centres resulted in huge population increase in Dili in 1999 due to conflict. In 2009, around 22% of the total working age population living in Dili were migrants. Close to 39% of the working-age population moved to Dili for economic and educational reasons (ILO 2016, p. 11). But around 18,000 young people leave school every year with low skill levels, and the number of new jobs available, even in Dili, are just a few hundred (La'o Hamutuk, 2016).

Timor-Leste has two official programs to facilitate overseas work for Timorese run through the Secretariat of State for Vocational Training and Employment Policy (SEPFPOE). The first, the South Korea Temporary Workers Program, is a government to government program with Timor-Leste becoming the fifteenth Asian country to join the Korean Employment Permit System (EPS). This program has enabled two thousand young Timorese to work in South Korea over the six years 2009 to 2015 (Wigglesworth & Fonseca, 2016). Another program is the Australian Seasonal Workers Program (SWP) which started in 2012 to fill low-skill seasonal vacancies. This has to date enabled Timorese to work in seasonal activities in Australia for up to six months a year involving over 1,000 workers from 2012 to 2016 (Wigglesworth & dos Santos, 2018).

It is estimated that remittances are now Timor-Leste's largest source of foreign revenue after oil and aid, overtaking coffee, the major agricultural export. An estimated US\$44 million was remitted in 2017, US\$27m from UK, dwarfing the US\$9.6m from Korea and US\$5m from Australia (Curtain, 2018).

The Timorese government announced in 2016 that because unemployment across the country had reached 11%, the government was seeking further opportunities overseas for youth employment¹. This is needed because many more people apply to participate in these official programs than are accepted. Meanwhile the UK option is available to anyone who has a Portuguese passport and already has a family member or friend as a connection to potential accommodation and work opportunities, although this option may close after Britain has left the EU (known as Brexit). A National Survey of Public Opinion undertaken in November 2016 asked '*Do you have any family members (over 17 years) living and working outside of Timor-Leste?*'. The survey found 19% of respondents affirmed they did, implying almost one in five

¹ Press release by General Director of SEPFPOE Jacinto Barros Gusmão on 1/8/2016.

Timorese families are supported by remittances. Further, the most frequent place of residence were named as England (42%) followed by Indonesia (24%), Korea (17%), Australia (9%), Portugal (8%) and Ireland (6%) (IRI 2016). Some Timorese in Northern Ireland refer to being in 'Ireland' rather than 'UK'. As there are no known Timorese communities in the Republic of Ireland, it can be assumed that the 6% in 'Ireland' are in Northern Ireland (part of UK) and so 48% of the total migrants are UK residents.

Since independence, migration overseas for work, particularly to the UK, has been a major source of income for Timorese families. When Timor Leste became independent on 20 May 2002, Portugal granted citizenship to all East Timorese born prior to that date which came with the right to work across the European Union (EU). In Northern Ireland, Dungannon is the location of a meat factory which sought migrant labour from Portugal in 2000. A Timorese man who was in Portugal at the time took up the offer of work and went to Dungannon. He told his friends and they told theirs triggering a flow of Timorese workers to the UK (Peake, 2014). For the Timorese who arrived in UK in the early years of independence (2000-2005) they were escaping the hardship faced in Timor-Leste following the Indonesian military destruction and forced displacement, when many people lost their homes, were uprooted or if they worked in the Indonesian Administration lost their jobs. The hardship at this time was a strong motivator to seek work outside. The flow of Timorese migrants to UK since then has seen tens of thousands of Timorese arrive in the UK, with an estimated 16,000-19,000 Timorese currently residing there, at least 3,000 of them in Dungannon and surrounding towns. This unique situation by which Timorese have the right to live and work in UK as Portuguese citizens will discontinue for new arrivals after Brexit.

The linkages in England go back even further to the Timorese resistance to the Indonesian occupation. In the 1990s, small numbers of Timorese activists were granted political asylum to Portugal and found their way to the UK to continue their demonstrations and protest against Indonesia. They also provided a pathway for others to through offering temporary accommodation and links to access employment in England (McWilliam, 2015).

Cabral and Martin-Jones (2016) have analysed migration through concepts of dislocation, displacement and re-mooring in a socio-linguistic study with the Timorese migrant community in Northern Ireland. The research analysed re-grounding as 'the creation of spaces of solidarity and conviviality in local life worlds'. The construction of new identities and new forms of belonging throw light on what it means to be Timorese well beyond the borders of Timor-Leste. In research that resonates well with positioning theory, Cabral and Martin-Jones

(2016) find that accounts of detachment and dislocation can be counter-balanced with vivid and revealing insights into the ways in which moorings and re-moorings occur.

Most Timorese who go to the UK participate in manual work in meat processing factories, kitchen services in restaurants, warehouse labour for supermarket chains and cleaning services. While the flow of remittances from UK to Timor-Leste vastly exceeds that from Korea and Australia, the focus of socio-economic research has been on the funded official programs to Korea and Australia. This research addresses this gap in Timorese migration research.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY AND PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

This migrant worker survey was carried out face-to-face in July-August 2016 to better understand the hopes, aspirations and experiences of Timorese migrants in UK. This resulted in rich discursive data that was suitable for analysis with a positioning theory framework. The interviews were based on the set of questions used for the 2015 research on Timorese migrant workers in Korea, but unlike the research on Timorese workers in Korea, there is no formal list of overseas workers who have been to the UK. The identification of eligible workers was done through talking to friends and colleagues in Dili about people who had worked in the UK. In this way a number of candidates were identified for interview in Dili with diverse experience in England and Northern Ireland.

A Timorese academic living in England who had undertaken some research in Northern Ireland was an important contact in introducing several Timorese living there (Cabral & Martin-Jones, 2016). A visit to UK by the authors in 2016 focussed on Northern Ireland, the largest Timorese community in the UK. This research involved interviews with 21 migrant workers, including nine interviewed in Dili and 10 interviews in Dungannon, Cookstown, Portadown and Craigavon in Northern Ireland. A follow-up visit in 2018 gave the opportunity to re-visit some of the respondents in Northern Ireland as well as interviewing new migrants in Cambridge.

As the research sample is only 21, no quantitative assessment is made, rather it is a qualitative portrayal of life, work and opportunities available to Timorese working in UK and how their positioning as migrant workers contributes to the development of their families and communities. Of the 21 migrant workers interviewed, 15 were male and 6 female. Eight respondents were in their 30s, another eight were in their 40s, three were under 30, and two over 50 years old. The majority had either some university education or had graduated (12 respondents) while six had secondary education and three had only primary or pre-secondary education. Regardless of the level of education, Timorese working in the UK experience were typically positioned as unskilled manual workers. The time they had spent in the UK varied

from a few months to 14 years. Eight respondents had worked there five years or less, eight from six to ten years and four for eleven or more years. Most of the participants had not altered their forced-positioning as being unskilled manual workers. Forced-positioning, being the result of the underlying mood of society; how society arbitrarily assigns positioning. Davies and Harré (1990) put forth the idea that positioning is an ever-negotiable definition of self. They argue that *position* is a *dynamic* alternative to the *static* concept of *role*. Furthermore, through the introduction of an alternate discourse people can redefine themselves in the perception of others; the dynamic nature of re-positioning.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Timorese Migrant Experiences in the UK

For most migrants, the opportunity to go to the UK to work arose because they had relatives or friends already there. On arrival, they would stay in the house of their Timorese contact person and start looking for work. Often the first work they get is casual weekend work. Some were doing casual work for months or years before they were offered a regular fulltime job. Some workers changed their jobs a number of times, sometimes to get regular full time work and sometimes to get a better paid job. Some live in overcrowded conditions, to minimise the cost of rent. Others choose to pay a bit more in a house where they can have their own room and enjoy a better lifestyle. Where the Timorese workers lived and worked with other Timorese, they reinforced their forced positioning and limited options for an alternate positioning.

Of the eleven Timorese migrants in Northern Ireland some seven worked in Moy Park chicken factory or another meat factory. In Dungannon, Moy Park chicken factory employs some 800 Timorese workers amongst a workforce of about 1,800 workers. As well, of 600 workers in Dungannon Meats 200 are Timorese, and more work in the Moy Park factory in Craigavon². It should be noted that many British people find the idea of working in a meat factory to be distasteful, but the Timorese explain they do not mind preparing meat which is routinely done within the family in Timor-Leste. However, two worked as interpreters for social services in addition to a chicken factory job, thus introducing an alternate positioning to manual work. As a result of their roles, these interpreters had a good ability to describe the challenges faced by Timorese workers, as well as reposition from the forced-positioning assigned to them by others.

² Interview 2, Northern Ireland, August 2016

The returned migrant workers interviewed who had lived in England had more varied types and locations of work. Most of these workers had lived in several different places in the UK, and had changed their jobs several times. Places of residence included Manchester, Crewe, Norwich, Great Yarmouth, Oxford, Peterborough, London and Cambridge, each hosting a significant Timorese community. Two worked in supermarket warehouses, two more worked in Chinese restaurants as kitchen hands and one worked as a cleaner. The other four had worked in meat or chicken factories in Northern Ireland for part or all of the time. In England many workers moved to a new town when they heard from other Timorese friends that there was better pay or full time work there. These options appeared to be become available to those who engaged in repositioning themselves by introduction of an alternate discourse.

In Northern Ireland where the opportunities were concentrated in a few factories they were more likely to upgrade their employment from casual to full time in the same factory. Two large Moy Park chicken factories operated 24 hours a day on three shifts (morning, afternoon and night) as well as weekend shifts. Often new workers were recruited for weekend shifts and made permanent if they worked well and a vacancy came up. Full time workers had opportunities for overtime in addition to regular shifts as the factory worker requirements depended on meeting production orders. However, these greater opportunities were limited to within the forced-positioning that they accepted without challenge.

Overall, workers felt that they were treated well with the majority (14 respondents) saying their treatment by their employer was “good” or “very good”. They explained that working in UK teaches you punctuality and teaches you to work hard, but in contrast to Timor-Leste, the salary is better and is paid regularly on time. Overall Timorese workers appreciated the systems in the UK which they said were non-discriminatory because they could claim and receive the same benefits as any other EU worker.

Those who talked of their treatment being less than “good” often talked of issues with other migrant workers as supervisors, typically Eastern European workers who had arrived in large numbers after 2010. It was said that the Eastern Europeans aspired to raising their status into supervisory roles where they wielded some power. Several Timorese workers explained that these supervisors would demand payment for fulfilling their functions, such as agreeing to changing worker’s shifts or approving their annual leave dates³. In these situations, workers in factories often had limited contact with their employers, unlike workers in smaller businesses who spoke positively about the fairness of the workplace and their employers.

³ Interviews 2, 9, Northern Ireland, August 2016

On the whole they said that life in UK was “easy” because their work roles produced salaries that were regularly paid, and life was predictable with clear sets of rights and duties. It was also said it was easy to live there with work although the high cost of living made it hard to live there without work. With two exceptions, the workers lived exclusively with other Timorese, and many did not get a good grasp of English even after many years in the country. Timorese workers explained that to manage in UK without English skills was easy because they lived in the Timorese community and even when they went shopping they would go to a supermarket where it was not necessary to speak English. Timorese largely accepted the forced-positioning and the underlying mood that limits their employment opportunities. Furthermore, while some took advantage of English classes offered by Moy Park for its workers, others said they worked long hours and did not have time. Some who did speak English found difficulty in understanding the Irish accent. This failure to achieve English competence resulted in them living largely marginalised from the host community. In the chicken factory there were so many Timorese that they did not need to speak English, reinforcing their positioning as unintegrated migrant workers. With little contact with their host community, many live on the margins of UK society just as a place of work to earn money before returning home.

In contrast to these experiences, a few workers did deliberately become proficient in English and engage with the British community. Some mentioned having English workmates or friendly neighbours that they spoke to, two played football on weekends with British friends, and another deliberately chose to rent a room in a house with a British family and to widen his experience by travelling in Europe⁴. In doing so, these workers engaged in repositioning, gaining a sense of acceptance, and sometimes wider opportunities. For instance it was a conversation with her British friend that led one respondent to talk about her previous role as a nurse and her to find a pathway into social services⁵. She is one of two workers who have taken on the role as interpreter for British professionals working in the local health services, social services, police and legal services, in addition to a job at Moy Park factory⁶.

For Timorese workers, the underlying mood in the UK is dramatically different than East Timor; in the UK salary is reliably paid, whereas in Timor the salary payments are notoriously unreliable. As a result, workers feel fortunate compared to their friends and family at home in Timor. It is perhaps this benefit that is the greatest attraction of working in the UK for Timorese, and why East Timorese are not inclined to engage in repositioning. That is, in the eyes

⁴ Interview 18, Dili, July 2016

⁵ Interview 9, Northern Ireland, August 2016

⁶ Interviews 3 & 9, Northern Ireland, August 2016

of their family they become providers of security and a source of income that gives a sense of satisfaction.

Positioning by the Local Community in Northern Ireland

Concerns about how the Timorese community was locally perceived were raised by workers in Northern Ireland. Three Timorese respondents have worked hard to try to build good relations with the host community, helping other Timorese workers understand the laws and mores of the host culture. Two hold formal interpreting roles and one acts as a community leader through a sense of social responsibility⁷. These were examples of where Timorese have engaged with the host culture to change the underlying mood of the community, thus re-positioning East Timorese in the eyes of the host community.

In the early years of migration to Northern Ireland, several former Timorese workers in Northern Ireland spoke of experiencing discrimination. These workers arrived in the early years of Timorese independence (2000-2005) which coincided with a time of continuing communal tensions in Northern Ireland. As Catholics, they experienced discriminated by the Protestant community, a problem that fortunately is no longer an issue. Some likened the communal Northern Irish tensions to the conflicts that had taken place in Timor-Leste.

In one incident of communal tensions in Northern Ireland in July 2011 there was an outbreak of violence when loyalist rioters tried to attack nationalist homes. For several hours, police were attacked by people armed with petrol bombs, bricks, bottles, fireworks and other missiles in the latest violence surrounding the high point of the loyalist marching season. It was reported that East Timorese packed their bags and ran from their Portadown homes when the area was engulfed in violence. Their neighbours tried to reassure the Timorese that they would be safe in their homes, but they were frightened and left⁸. This response reveals the continuing trauma that is legacy of the many years of conflict in Timor-Leste. Contextual differences between Northern Ireland and Timor affect the underlying mood and positioning of people; the Timorese experience of violent displays leads them to expect death, where in Northern Ireland overt violent displays (as opposed to surprise bombs) are made to impose political resistance and in the current period do not generally lead to death of instigators or those in their paths.

There have also been a series of conflicts and incidents which have resulted in the Timorese community to be profiled in the media, not always for good reasons. For example in Northern Ireland it was reported in the media that clashes took place between some 50

⁷ Interviews 2, 3, & 9, Northern Ireland, August 2016

⁸ The Guardian 16/7/2011

Lithuanian and East Timorese workers outside the Moy Park plant in Dungannon⁹, and another reported that there had been an increase in racist attacks against migrant workers (in general) in Dungannon¹⁰.

Timorese instigated violence includes an incident of fighting between two Timorese, resulting in the fatal stabbing of one Timorese man and the arrest of the other¹¹. More recently videos of organised fights between Timorese individuals in Dungannon were circulating on the internet, said to be taking place in broad daylight and involving dozens of people, including young children, watching as two men attack each other¹². In another incident, fighting broke out between two rival martial arts groups in Dungannon. One man intervened and talked to the police on their behalf wanting to explain to the host community that not all Timorese were violent like that¹³. Such incidents position migrants in general, and the Timorese in particular as undesirable. This is an image that some Timorese in the community are working hard to overcome, by taking on a support role to help Timorese who have difficulties. With several incidents having taken place in Northern Ireland, Timorese are getting an unwelcome reputation for violence.

Without cultural awareness of the expectations from an European citizen, Timorese are unaware of the legal frameworks in which they operate, and inadequate English skills makes them dependent on others in the community for information. An example of this was given of a Timorese worker who bought a goat in a market and killed it, not knowing that in UK it was necessary to have a license from the government to kill an animal. A complaint was made by a member of the public. Another further violation of animal rights was reported after a Timorese was seen grabbing a dog and beating it. As a result of these incidents there was a petition from the local community asking the government to deport Timorese with people demanding 'do not bring your culture here'. This negative positioning of Timorese workers in eyes of the host community required considerable effort by English speaking Timorese to deal with. They explained that the less English spoken by Timorese workers the more likely they were to have problems, reinforcing the notion that repositioning is strongly linked to greater integration in the host community¹⁴.

At least four Timorese workers have died in Northern Ireland. Most recently a 34 year old worker died of a heart attack. One worker helped the family get the body home by paying

⁹ BBC 9/12/2005

¹⁰ The Guardian 3/2/2007

¹¹ The Irish Times, 2/8/2013

¹² The Belfast Telegraph, 3/8/2016

¹³ Interview 2, Northern Ireland, August 2016

¹⁴ Interview 3, Northern Ireland, August 2016

£6,350 for the plane ticket, and raising funds for this from the Timorese community. He contacted the Timorese embassy for support but they did not help, saying that the workers were there on a Portuguese passport. He felt this was not fair, because Timor-Leste is the country that is benefiting from these workers sending remittances home to their families¹⁵. This has been a particularly sore point, not only in Northern Ireland but amongst other Timorese communities in the UK¹⁶. This issue highlights the paradoxical positioning that Timorese put themselves in, perceiving themselves to be Timorese, but inadvertently denying themselves support by the Timorese government by virtue of their Portuguese citizenship and passports.

Revisiting Dungannon in 2018, two of the workers who have supported and translated for their compatriots in legal and social services noted that in spite of Northern Ireland hosting the largest Timorese community in the UK, no Timorese diplomatic officials have visited there since 2010. Yet, they complain that the government undertook the costly exercise of setting up voting centres in Northern Ireland and London for the Parliamentary elections in May 2018, with staff from the National Electoral Commission (CNE) spending several weeks in UK to oversee the process. While they were happy to have the opportunity to vote, they felt the government attitude toward them was inconsistent - not recognising them for support as Timorese citizens due to their Portuguese passports, but recognising them for voting purposes¹⁷.

Remuneration, Benefits and Remittances

Most workers received an income between £1,000 and £2,000 a month, mostly only just above the minimum wage of £950 a month. Three respondents earned under £1,000 and the two workers working in a professional capacity as translators earned more than £2,000. For the respondents, even a week's minimum wage in UK is worth more than a month's salary in Timor-Leste.

In the UK, all workers are required to contribute to the National Insurance (NI) scheme through which they receive a Health Card which gives the right to free health services. They do this through the Job Centre, as a National Insurance number is a requirement for employment. Once they have contributed to the NI they are eligible to receive benefits during periods of unemployment, some of those interviewed having benefited from drawing on NI while they were between jobs. Each year every worker must submit a tax return to the Tax Office, and they generally receive a tax refund.

¹⁵ Interview 2, Northern Ireland, August 2016

¹⁶ Personal communication with Andrew McWilliam 21/4/2017

¹⁷ Interviews 2 & 3, Northern Ireland, August 2018

The money that was sent in remittances was principally used for daily living expenses (18 of 21) and for student fees (11 of 21). Four workers had not sent any money home in the past year. Most workers with spouse and children in Timor-Leste sent money every month, generally between USD \$250 and \$600 a month. A number of workers sent money separately to a brother or other family member for student fees, typically US \$150-250 a month. Some single workers sent money for their parents' daily needs as well as for their siblings schooling and one for his fiancée's tuition fees. Others send money only as requested but one had had to send US\$ 1,300 for the funeral of a family member which severely reduced the direct benefit he got from his time in UK. All these people could be said to having adopted positioning as providers for their families at home, some remaining longer in the UK to meet financial obligations than they may have originally planned to do.

Positionings of Short Term and Long Term Migrants

Among the workers interviewed in Northern Ireland, four of them had gone to UK in the early years of independence (2002-5) as a way to support their family during those years of hardship. They have now been resident in UK for 11-14 years, and have established families with children going to school there. Six workers have been resident between six to eight years, and two Timorese couples said they had arrived there single and had met in the factory and later married and stayed in UK. Their children born in the UK have the right to UK citizenship. Among the workers who had already returned from UK to Timor-Leste, three had stayed just one or two years, three for three to five years and another two for seven years.

Of the workers interviewed, five were single, and ten had partners and/or children living in Timor-Leste. They have regular contact with their families back home, most of them making contact at least once a week and often every day. A worker explained that they are in the UK only to earn money and send remittances home, to support their families in Timor-Leste and they endure a lonely existence¹⁸. They are reluctant to spend money on trips home because they need to maximise the money that is sent home, but they are homesick and want to return. Some said they could return only after certain obligations have been fulfilled, such as enough money to build a house, or support for the education of family members over a number of years into the future. These Timorese, despite spending years in the UK and retaining their positioning unchanged, are nevertheless achieving the objectives that they hoped for – a better life for their family back home.

¹⁸ Interview 1, Northern Ireland, August 2016

Families who have children going to school in the UK are in an altogether different situation. Their families are their main focus of concern and they will only send remittances to Timor-Leste on rare occasions when there is a particular request or need. Some have not returned for a visit for over ten years. For those with children in school their reality has changed substantially and they reap significant benefits through child support payments provided by the UK government in addition to their salary and free schooling. In addition many of their children are English speakers who have never visited their homeland. Their culture has become influenced by the English speaking environment and these children are schooled in the UK and are positioned with opportunities more akin to British than as Timorese migrants. On the minimum wage they can ill afford to travel with children to Timor-Leste on the other side of the world, so the children do not share what their parents have experienced and they do not know life in Timor-Leste, although they are imbued with Timorese culture through their parents' social connections and cultural activities, as shown by Cabral and Martin-Jones (2016). Nevertheless, parents recognise that their children's future lies in the UK.

One worker arrived in the UK in April 2003 and has now worked in Moy Park factory for 14 years. In 2006 his wife and baby son arrived for a visit but decided to stay. His wife has never worked in UK but stayed home to raise the children. They have one UK born child and in 2012 they brought over their other children, altogether six. The two oldest children are now working in UK, two are in college and the two younger children are still in school. The parents still do not speak English but speak to each other in the language of their home district. The children do not speak this language as they were brought up in the capital where the official Tetun¹⁹ language is spoken. They speak Tetun with their parents, but English with their friends²⁰.

This family offers a particularly clear contrast of positioning. There are four groups (1) the parents who have not learned English, (2) two older siblings who have learned some English, (3) two middle school-age siblings who are fluent in English, and (4) two younger school-age siblings for whom English is their major linguistic environment (at school and with friends). The parents have accepted their own positioning as unskilled migrant workers with limited opportunity for advancement. The older children who were partially educated in Timor-Leste continue to work as migrant workers, but one has been able to get a job in a car factory in Oxford, a more skilled job than that of his father. The middle siblings will have broader capabilities and employment opportunities as a result of their more comprehensive UK education. Different to the previous groups, the youngest siblings, as a consequence of their

¹⁹ Tetun is one of two official languages, along with Portuguese. Tetun is the most widely spoken.

²⁰ Interview 6, Northern Ireland, August 2016

participation in primary school with members of the Irish community, have a positioning only marginally different from their Irish classmates, and consequently should have the opportunity to achieve the same competence and capabilities in the workplace, and, if born in UK, the right to citizenship. Thus the demarcation of positioning is clearly different between these four groups in the same family.

The talk about Brexit cast a shadow over the future for Timorese residents in UK. Revisiting in 2018 it had become clear that while new migrants may be curbed, current migrant workers are likely to be allowed to stay, and indeed they have been advised to make an application for residency in the UK. In fact, many of them are more concerned about the deteriorating exchange rate of the UK pound due to Brexit than with their right to stay.

As well, by 2018 the Moy Park worker who interpreted on behalf of the social services, had left his meat works job to become a full time school teacher in English as a Second Language. Another migrant who moved into professional work was a new arrival in Cambridge. This migrant mother started work in UK as a cleaner, but she has an English degree from the National University of Timor-Leste and was previously teaching in a language school in Dili. Within a year she was able to improve her income and status as she progressed to waitressing in the Hilton Hotel, and then to working in a money shop handling cash for international transfers. She is living with other migrants (not Timorese) and plans to bring her son to UK to get a good education²¹.

Positioning on Return Home

Of the workers who had returned to Dili, most felt themselves to be in a better situation than before they went to UK. Two workers were employed, one in an NGO and another as Director of a training centre, both roles that required English language to work with international agencies. Five of the workers were able to build or renovate their house with the money they earned. One worker had returned from UK after four years, renovated his house and built another house to rent to foreigners for income and also improved his small family shop. ‘Now life is good’ he said²².

Women who leave their husbands and children at home to go and work in UK are proud to have contributed to the family wellbeing. ‘Having money from UK changed my life’ said one worker who was in UK for just a year, sending money to her husband and children every month. She had savings which she used to start a successful new restaurant on a main street in Dili, and

²¹ Interview 21, Cambridge August 2018.

²² Interview 12, Dili, July 2016

earns extra cash by helping workers to process documents to migrate to UK. She is happy about her experience and achievements²³.

Another female worker was in UK for three years and has now set up a small shop in the neighbourhood where she lives. Since she returned, but her husband has gone to UK and sends back \$500 a month for her and their two children. They plan to buy some land and build a house²⁴. A single worker who sent money for his brother's education and his parent's daily support was able to save and use the money for his wedding. Another was working for seven years then came home to his fiancée and to build a house with the money he earned. Two workers had arrived in Northern Ireland single but met and married a Timorese partner in the UK and intend to continue to live there.

Although they were receiving what is considered in UK to be a meagre wage, as a consequence of their work in the UK, workers could establish infrastructure (house or business) when they returned home, which positioned them with increased status in the community, having a superior economic situation compared to those that stayed at home.

CONCLUSION

The desire for a better life drives large numbers of Timorese to seek secure employment overseas because it is not available in Timor-Leste. The UK is the largest single destination. Most Timorese work as low skilled workers even if they have tertiary qualifications, limiting their opportunities as they do not seek to reposition themselves as having broader capabilities.

A major source of employment is various meat works in Northern Ireland, where few workers have learned English. They accept their positioning as temporary migrant workers on the factory production lines in spite of some having been there for 8-14 years. Without English there is little possibility to reposition themselves in supervisory roles.

The lack of knowledge of cultural mores and local laws resulted in some situations which resulted in negative perceptions of Timorese workers by the host community. Others, however, have gained good English skills and made English friends, gaining a broader sense of achievement and pride from their UK experiences, such that money to support their family was not their sole motivation. Some of these played critical leadership roles in the Timorese community, guiding others to understand the society in which they live, and acting as intermediaries with social and police services. By resolving problems that generated negative perceptions of the Timorese community, the use of their diverse skills repositioned them in the

²³ Interview 13, Dili, July 2016.

²⁴ Interview 14, Dili, July 2016.

host community, as exemplified by the meat factory worker who after many years got employment as a school teacher.

Among those who have returned to Timor-Leste there is an overwhelming sense of having achieved a better place or status in life than they had before they went to the UK. That is because the money they earned in the UK enabled them to improve their life in Timor-Leste, either through starting or improving a business, or by earning the cash required to get married and/or build a house. Not only did this improve their family's economic circumstances but often increased their status in the community as well. Those that have become fluent in English and gained an understanding of western workplace culture and ability to mediate relationships with other people from different social contexts, have an advantage in obtaining higher paid work in offices with international links when they return home.

A number of families have chosen to bring up their families in the UK, resulting in different opportunities and expectations among the UK born and educated Timorese children, whose positioning developed at school confers them with discursive rights and duties more aligned with UK citizens. These children have their futures in UK, and many of them have never visited Timor-Leste. Their parents' desire to achieve the best outcome for their children, positions them as permanent migrants often without prospects of improving their own status. Children born and partially educated in Timor-Leste benefit from greater educational and work opportunities in the UK. Those born in Timor-Leste and fully educated in UK continue to position themselves as Timorese but being fluent in English, and with their friends in the UK, are more comfortable with the idea of a future in the UK than their parents. Those born and raised in the UK have no memories of Timor-Leste and have a future as UK citizens. It does not appear that Brexit will deny any of them these options, only reduce new arrivals.

Positioning theory has provided a useful tool to analyse the various 'positions' that Timorese migrants have taken. It shows how some individuals have positively influenced their experience in relation to their host communities by engaging more deeply with the host community, while others who have failed to engage with the local language and culture have been more likely, and sometimes accidentally, to engage in anti-social or illegal behaviour. The majority are content to continue their positions as low-skilled workers living and working amongst a largely Timorese community isolated from the broader community. These workers lives have been enriched by the experience of working in the UK, either because it had enabled them to establish or improve a business or other improvements in the lives of their family.

A challenge for Timor-Leste and the development community is to create an environment where migrants who have gained workplace skills can apply these to contribute to the development of

their young nation. Future research could focus on how Timor-Leste can better capitalise on new skills and how returned migrants can be positioned as enablers of local enterprise.

REFERENCES

- Boxer, L. (2005) 'Harness hope and Make Opportunity Happen' in (Eds) Charlesworth et al. *Women and Work*, RMIT Publishing pp125-142
- Cabral, E. and Martin-Jones, M. 'Moving north, navigating new work worlds and re-mooring: language and other semiotic resources in the migration trajectories of East Timorese in the UK' C. Kerfoot and K. Hyltenstam (eds.) *Entangled discourses, south north orders of visibility*, New York: Routledge 2016
- Curtain, R (2018), 'Timor-Leste remittances update' DevPolicyBlog Australian National University, <http://www.devpolicy.org/timor-leste-remittances-update-20180327/>
- Davies, B. and R. Harré (1990), 'Positioning: The discursive production of selves', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 20(1), pp. 44-63
- De Haan, A. (2006) 'Migration in the Development Studies Literature - Has It Come Out of Its Marginality?' UNU-WIDER Research Paper No. 2006/19.
- ESCAP (2015), 'Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2015 – Migrants' contribution to development'
- Harré, R. (2012), 'Positioning theory: moral dimensions of social-cultural psychology', in J. Valsiner (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Culture and Psychology*. New York: Oxford University, pp. 191–206.
- ILO (2016), 'Structural transformation and jobs in Timor-Leste', International Labour Organisation, Dili.
- IRI (2016) 'National Survey of Public Opinion' November 2016, Centre for Insights in Survey Research, International Republican Institute
http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/english_timor-leste_2016_public_opinion_poll_for_public_release.pdf
- Lao Hamutuk (2016), 'Rights and Sustainability in Timor-Leste's Development', November 2016 www.laohamutuk.org
- Moghaddam, F. and Harré, R. (2010) 'Words, conflicts and political processes', in F. Moghaddam and R. Harré (eds) *Words of Conflict, Words of War: How the language we use in political processes sparks fighting*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger

- Peake, G (2014) 'Hard-working, respectful and warm... we could learn from our Timorese guests' Belfast Telegraph 24/6/2014
- McWilliam, A. (2015) 'Backing themselves: East Timorese labour migrants in Oxford' University of Oxford's Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) 14 May 2015 <https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/2015/backing-themselves-east-timorese-labour-migrants-in-oxford/>
- McWilliam (2014) 'Migration and Rural-Urban Inequalities in Timor-Leste' State, Society and Governance in Melanesia - In Brief 1/2014 ANU.
- UNDP (2018) *Timor-Leste Human Development Report 2018: Planning the Opportunities for a Youthful Population*, United Nations Development Program, Dili.
- Wigglesworth, A & dos Santos, A (2018) 'Timorese migrant workers in the Seasonal Workers Program' presented at the Australasian Aid Conference 13-14 February 2018. <http://devpolicy.org/2018-Australasian-Aid-Conference/Papers/Timorese.migrant.workers.in.SWP-Wigglesworth&dosSantos.pdf>
- Wigglesworth, A. and Fonseca, Z. (2016) 'Experiences of young Timorese as migrant workers in Korea', Development Policy Centre ANU website: <http://devpolicy.org/2016-Australasian-aid-conference/Papers/Wigglesworth-Fonseca-Experiences-of-young-Timorese-workers-in-Korea.pdf>

ANN WIGGLESWORTH has extensive experience in international development, working in Asia, the Pacific, Africa and Latin America, including seven years in the north of Mozambique. She became involved in East Timor when she started work with Caritas Australia as Program Manager for East Timor in 1997. Friendships that were developed with the Timorese during this critical period were formative in her ongoing interest in the Timor-Leste. Her doctoral thesis was a study of the early years of Timor Leste's independence, specifically through the perspectives of the younger generation. Her book on the topic is '*Activism and Aid: Young citizens' experiences of development and democracy in Timor-Leste*'. She works as a research and development consultant and is an Honorary Fellow at Victoria University, Melbourne (annww@ozemail.com.au).

LIONEL J. BOXER, CD, PHD, MBA, BTECH(IE), is a management systems auditor with a multinational certification agency and an independent researcher. His research interests relate to application of positioning theory in business organisations. He has served with the Royal Canadian Engineers and Royal Australian Engineers from 1974 to the present, where he currently manages safety and welfare for army reserve training and plays bagpipes. He studied industrial engineering at the Royal Military College of Canada and Ryerson University and business at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. In 1993, he was listed in the International Who's Who of Quality and made a fellow of the Quality Society of Australasia (Lionel.Boxer@saiglobal.com).