

Mediated 'Multiculturalism' as a transcultural process?: Notes from South Korea

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Introduction

"Multiculturalism today has become a 'dirty' word." These are compelling words from Millson Henry-Waring in his analysis of the gap between discourse and policy of multiculturalism in Australia. This 'abandonment' of the multiculturalism policy was also a similar response to cultural diversity and demographic changes in other countries of immigration. Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel announced the 'utter failure' of multiculturalism because it produces two parallel societies – mainstream and migrant - hence it has remained a 'grand delusion'. In 2011,

French President Nikolas Sarkozy and British Prime Minister David Cameron echoed this 'failure' based on the assumption that migrant integration is not a very straightforward process as migrants often build 'segregated communities' and 'separate cultures' while receiving societies simply respond with 'passive tolerance.' While the 'demise' of multiculturalism is forecasted in Western Europe, South Korea (Korea hereafter) has witnessed its 'birth' with the Korean state employing multiculturalism not only as an apparatus to manage and accommodate diversity but also as a "means, indicator and object" of nation-building and national development (Kim, N. 2015). However, this statist rhetoric and top-down approach does not fully capture the nuanced dynamics of multiculturalism – interpretations, reproductions, negotiations, contestations and/or practices – by various social actors. These multiple responses to state multiculturalism also engender a web of social interactions and multilevel engagements

South Korea poses as an interesting case to examine multiculturalism as a process of migrant integration. Its long-standing belief in ethnic homogeneity is now being challenged or redefined by an emerging cultural diversity alongside a growing presence of migrants. In a short period of time, it has not only undergone a top-down process of multiculturalism as a developmentalist project of state and nation building but has also witnessed how migrants take advantage of state's multicultural resources and infrastructures through a bottom-up process of multiculturalism based on migrants' claims-making. However, collective claims-making for migrant groups is not bereft of structural constraints given the migrants' noncitizenship and non-access to public sphere based on gender, class, legality of status and nationality. As a result, migrants and their communities often rely on autochthonous and/or transnational civil society organizations which serve as mediators between migrants' claims-making and receiving society's resources in the context of 'multiculturalism'.

Based on a 13-month fieldwork in three Korean cities (Seoul, Suwon and Daejeon), this paper examines the relational process of mediation employed by civil society organizations, in this case the Catholic Church. Building up on Bruno Latour's idea of translation (2005), I explore how the Catholic Church mediates by translating three sets of input: (1) migrant input (imaginings, interpretations, and practices of multiculturalism); (2) state input (integration and

welfare regimes conflated with migration and multicultural regimes); and (3) receiving society input (public opinion about multiculturalism and context of reception). I claim that the Catholic Church translates migrant inputs into a language understandable, acceptable and negotiable in the South Korean public sphere while also filtering, sieving and modifying the unwelcoming and exclusionary tendencies of state and societal input to produce an output in congruence to its mission and interests. This output which I call as *mediated multiculturalism* which brings top-down and bottom-up processes of multiculturalism together is not only a transmission of the aforementioned inputs within social relationships and social institutions but is also a transportation and transmutation of a ‘borrowed’ ideology and philosophy. By adopting the notion of multiculturalism from countries of immigration which already declared its demise, South Korea appropriates and (de)constructs at multi-levels – state, societal, individual and mediational.

Below, I first present the migration context in South Korea and the emergence of multiculturalism as a state policy and public discourse. I then move on to consider multiculturalism as a mediated process. I focus on the Korean Catholic Church (Church hereafter) as a case study of the migrant-serving organization which acts as the ‘go-between’ in the circulation of ‘multicultural inputs.’ Driving the discussion is the following question: how is multiculturalism appropriated, re-packaged and translated at different levels and domains which eventually transform migrants’ lives and the context of reception.

The Root and Route of Multiculturalism

South Korea is one of the most homogenous ethnic nations in the world. The ‘purity’ or homogeneity of the Korean nation-ness is based on the legend that all Koreans are descendants of Dangun, the mythical founder of the Choseon Dynasty which is regarded as the first nation-state of Korea. Many Koreans still adhere to this idea of a ‘one-bloodlined’ identity that has been “uncritically transmitted, reproduced and reinforced” (Y.K. Lee 2009: 365) from one generation to another generation of Koreans. This later on became a very powerful ethno-nationalistic discourse in the ‘sacred’ national projects of modernization, industrialization and globalization. In spite of this myth’s significant contribution to Korea’s economic miracle, the beliefs of mono-ethnicity and common bloodline have been heatedly contested and challenged especially by the civil society and academic intellectuals. As Korean borders became gradually porous when it opened its doors to migrant workers from neighboring Asian countries, the preservation of ‘pure’ ethnic homogeneity came to be problematic.

The influx of foreign workers and migrants did not only challenge this ethno-nationalistic discourse of Korean ethnic homogeneity but also prompted a rethinking of existing norms and structures to deal with “strangers”, “aliens” and “outsiders” whose presence has been initially deemed as temporary in Korean society. But these foreign workers were needed when rapid industrialization left the manufacturing sector with high labor shortage.

In this section, I will assess migration patterns and processes that occurred in South Korea from the 1990s until the present. These migration trends paved the way for the Korean government to enact and implement migration regimes. I will also describe how the Catholic Church translates and appropriates these migration patterns and trajectories in their mediating strategies between receiving society and migrants.

'Trainee' Migration to Korea: Needed but Unwanted (1990s-2003)

By 1991 when the trainee system commenced, the number of undocumented workers increased seven-fold to 41,877 out of the 45,449 migrant workers (Seol 2000: 3). In 1994, there were 28,328 trainees or 34.6% of the 81,824 migrant workers who entered South Korea. More than half or 58.9% (48,321) of these migrant workers overstayed, ran away from their workplaces and became undocumented. In the mid-1990s, some foreigners who entered Korea as "tourists" overstayed and worked as undocumented workers in manufacturing, construction and small restaurants (mainly for the Chosonjok or Chinese with Korean descent). From the trainee migration, another migrant category emerged in the form of 'runaways' and overstayers or the undocumented migrant workers. They comprised the majority of the migrant population which dropped from 148,048 out of 245,399 migrants in 1997 to 99,537 out of 157,689 migrants in 1998 after the Asian financial crisis. But this immediately picked up and reached 135, 338 (62.3%) undocumented foreign workers and 69,454 (32.1%) new trainees out of the 217, 384 migrants next year. In addition to this information, by December 2002 and a year before the commencement of the Employment Permit System (EPS), the total number of migrant workers reached 362,597 with new trainees comprising only 46,735 (14.2%) but the undocumented workers and 'overstayers' reached an all-time high of 289, 239 or 79.8% of the total number (Park 2008).

The situation of foreign trainees was worse than the conditions of undocumented workers. They were housed in "training facilities" and paid a meager "stipend, which was far below the prevailing wage rate, compared to both native Korean workers and even undocumented workers doing the same job" (Seol 1999:436-37). As a result, the trainees ended up being one the most vulnerable groups among foreign workers, as they were not covered by basic labor laws, minimum wage rate and the freedom for change of employment. In times of economic crisis especially during the 1997-1998 Asian Financial Crisis (more popularly known as the IMF Crisis among Koreans and migrant workers), this vulnerability of the foreign trainees, undocumented foreign workers and migrants in general became doubly serious due to their precarious status in Korea. Most of these foreign workers relied on overtime work and pay but when Small- and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) downsized or declared bankruptcy, their salaries and work/living conditions also suffered.

Stories of and experiences with loyal migrants who have been indispensable to SMEs became as common as accounts of deserting abusive and exploitative employers especially during economic crises in Korea. The 1997 Asian financial crisis was a breakpoint for SMEs as it became clear that without the foreign workers, some economic sectors would literally shut down. There were many cases where the Korean employer pleaded to their migrant employees to 'endure' until the factory returned to normal operation. These were crucial accounts for the Korean government and society as a whole to be persuaded that labor migration was not a "passing or structural phenomenon" (Park 2008:8). However, this realization did not immediately translate into the betterment of migrants' working and living conditions. The work-first mentality persisted to the detriment of the labor and human rights of foreign trainees and undocumented migrant workers. As a result, most trainees experienced being grossly underpaid/unpaid, overworked and vulnerable to exploitation and abuses, which led to a dramatic increase in the number of 'runaways', 'deserters' and undocumented workers.

The alarming increase in the number of undocumented workers and the wide array of migration concerns triggered a proactive response from multiple actors in Korean civil society. However, rallying for the cause of migrants' rights and welfare was yet an unpopular cause in the early 1990s. The Catholic Church was the very first institution to respond to the immediate needs of

the foreign workers through the establishment of the Chun Center for Migrant Workers (CCMW) for the Archdiocese of Seoul which became the “most influential actor in the movement [for migrant advocacy and activism] in 1992-95 before the Joint Committee with Migrants in Korea (JCMK) was formed. [Later on, it] has chosen to concentrate on labor counseling rather than reforming activities by participating in JCMK” (Kim D. 2007: 100). In 1992, the Foreign Workers Labour Counseling Office (FWLCO) within the Labour Pastoral Center (LPC) under the Archdiocese of Seoul was established. Apart from counseling, FWLCO/LPC provided comprehensive social services to migrants of any religious and ethnic backgrounds. Non-government organizations and faith-based groups such as the LPC catering to the needs of foreign trainees and undocumented workers became the only sanctuaries for migrants to have access to legal, medical, psychological services and urgent social services.

Immediately after the pioneering work of the Catholic Church, other faith-based and secular NGOs established counseling centers for migrants. This was followed by a public apology made by Cardinal Stephen Kim to the 13 Nepalese workers who staged a protest at the historic Myeongdong Cathedral (Reuters, 10 January 1995 in Lim 2002).¹ It prompted a government investigation into the plight of migrant workers and the enforcement of corrective measures of the trainee provisions. The Catholic clergy did not actively take leadership in the Joint Committee with Migrants in Korea (JCMK), the umbrella coalition of NGOs and church groups. For ten years, JCMK and other pro-migrant NGOs lobbied for the abolition of the trainee system and its replacement by the Employment Permit System (EPS). It was not just the dynamic efforts of the migrant civil society which contributed to the enactment of EPS but also the media coverage for the politicization and publicization of migrant issues and the proactive response of the Korean state especially under Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun, both considered to be pro-human rights and pro-civil society. Although, the EPS was a great leap forward compared to the trainee system, it still had many problematic areas such as stipulations on changing employment and re-entry scheme. This was a departure point from the trainee system that the Korean government initially adapted from the Japanese model of trainee system.

Employment Permit System: the Paradox of Exclusion and Inclusion (2004-present)

After the ten-year long struggle and triumph of urging the Korean state to pass the EPS as the legislative mechanism for the equal treatment of foreign workers, the challenge turned to how to monitor compliance to the law. Based on the file cases of four Catholic migrant centers and newsletters (2003-present), the number of labor-related and workplace-related problems slowly decreased in quantity only from around 2008. This period (2003-2008) was a crucial transition from a phase where migration mechanisms were non-existent into a phase of ‘test driving’ the roadworthiness of the EPS and this was also a period which witnessed the twenty-fold increase of foreign residents and migrants in South Korea from 45,449 in 1990 to a one-million mark in 2007 which caused a ‘celebration’ from Korean state and media. The total number includes migrant workers, undocumented migrant workers, marriage migrants, other migrant categories and all foreign residents with more than 90-day visa.

¹ On January 10, 1995, 13 Nepalese workers staged their own sit-in at Myeongdong Cathedral. They organized a protest to bring public attention to the human rights violations faced by migrant workers and trainees in South Korea. Their placards included statements like, “Do not hit us”; “Pay us our wages”; “Return our passports”; “We are not animals.” Their pickets were effective enough for Koreans to know about what took place at their workplace and what their Korean employers did to migrant workers: human rights violation, physical violence included, and exploitation of labor (See D. Kim 2007:1).

The Catholic agencies and civil society organizations found themselves serving as *watchdogs* and *translators*. To make the EPS work, the migrant civil society organizations have been watchdogs on the lookout for any violations of the law based on the complaints and grievances of the EPS holders. Additionally, they also served as what Bruno Latour's (2005) notion of "translators" of the stipulations in the law and the succeeding amendments to this law. As labor mediators, Catholic migrant centers informed migrants of their rights and the Korean employers of their duties based on existing migration mechanisms. Due to the vigilance of these mediators and translators and the state response to migrants' claims-making, one of the achievements of EPS is to guarantee that legally hired migrant workers are entitled to the same labor rights with Korean workers – protected and covered by Korea's Labor Standard Act, Labor Relations Act, and the four other social protection mechanisms – The Industrial Accident Insurance, Medical Insurance, Employment Insurance and Pension Scheme. A good number of undocumented foreign workers were given the opportunity to be "legalized." In the case of the Philippines, those undocumented workers who took the opportunity of the Voluntary Repatriation Program (VRP) at the designated time were given priority to be re-hired. The Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) as the mandated public agency has a separate list of applicants under the category "ex-Korea" workers.

However, the EPS is also a source of exclusion and differential rights entitlement for migrant workers. Under the EPS scheme, there are two type of visa issued: the E-9 visa for migrant workers from the 15 countries which signed MOU with the Korean government and the H-2 visa allows a multiple-entry employment to all workers from Chinese, Mongolia and the former Soviet Republics with Korean ethnicity. The differential rights entitlement and exclusionary tendencies occur as the H-2 visa holders have more employment opportunities and access to changing employment as E-9 holders can only change employment three times. The latter also need to rely on job referral by public agencies. This 3-time changing of employment has been the cause of discontentment of and demand for amendment by Korean activists and the Migrant Trade Union (MTU). It appears that EPS holders are still at the mercy of their Korean employers. From 2003 up to the present, almost 35 per cent of the workplace-related cases in the Catholic migrant-serving organizations have dealt with EPS holders seeking labor mediation for "release of employment." Korean employers often use this as a leverage to withhold the workers' salary, pension and other benefits. There are also many instances that even the labor mediators reinforce this asymmetrical and paternalistic power relation by advising the EPS holder to "endure" or compromise.

This tendency to "endure" discontentment or even "little" abuses in the workplace was fortified with the new amendment to the EPS on 12 July 2012. According to this amendment, EPS holders who have already completed their 4 year and 10 month-contract² *without changing workplace* will be eligible for reemployment with a 3-month exit in Korea and can be re-hired for another 4 years and 10 months. These 'hard-working foreign workers' and 'foreign workers who have worked with integrity in Korea' are also exempted from Korean language proficiency test or employment training. While the government-to-government scheme under the EPS does not require the prospective Korea-bound workers to pay exorbitant placement fees, migrants are still overwhelmed by the expenses demanded by the EPS-TOPIK (EPS Test of Proficiency in Korean) and the employment training. Recruitment agencies in home countries take advantage of this to earn money from prospective migrants bound for Korea. Another exclusionary aspect of EPS is that the contract period of 4 years and 10 months is in fact only 2 months short before EPS-holders qualify to apply for naturalization. Under the Nationality

² The EPS only allows a 3-year contract (renewed yearly) with 22-month extension making it possible for EPS holders to stay up to 4 years and 10 months.

Law of 1998, a foreigner who has resided in Korea for 5 years is qualified to apply for permanent settlement, technically speaking. It is also explicitly stated in the law that “accompanying family is restricted” which is not explicitly stipulated in the other 30 visa categories (See Oh, Kang et al 2012). This restriction for unskilled foreign workers is identified by Seol and Skrentny (2009) as a major factor for the “little migrant settlement” despite the dramatic increase of the number of migrant workers in Korea. In many respects, the rotation system explicitly stipulated in the EPS still demonstrates the liminality of migrant workers - wanted but not needed, visible but invisible, insiders but outsiders.

The exclusion of EPS holders from social integration and the undocumented foreign workers from the clout of legal and juridical protection was also magnified in the wake of a ‘paradigmatic shift’ in the discourse of the Korean state towards migration. This shift showcases the ‘grand welcoming’ of the ‘new members’ of the Korean society – marriage migrants and the ‘multicultural family’. The next section discusses the politics of multiculturalism in South Korea.

“Pali-pali”³ Road to Korean Multicultural Wave (2006-present)

The ‘multiculturalism’ discourse as a response to increased migration to South Korea has been highly debatable and problematic. There is serious confusion (Seol 2010; N.H-J. Kim 2012) among civil society actors, academics and policy makers about what it exactly means (discourse) and how it should be acted out (practice and policy). After the Korean government borrowed the term from the civil society, the multicultural wave swept the entire Korean society. There was a sudden surge in the usage of the term in the media, academia, government agencies, NGOs and ordinary Koreans yet there is really no clear definition of what multiculturalism (*damunhwa*) is except that it pertains to the social integration of marriage migrants and their children. In the multiculturalism discourse, migrant workers are invisible and excluded based on the temporal nature of their migrant status. In Korean society in general as well as among some of academics and civil society advocates, the invisibility of migrant workers in the social integration programs is seldom questioned.

In 2007, a year before Korea hit the one-million mark in terms of number of foreigners in the country, the Korean National Assembly enacted two incorporation policies: *Act on Social Integration of Mixed-Race Koreans and Immigrants* and *Act on Marriage Migrant Integration*. This same year, the late President Roh Moo Hyun stated in a speech that “the trend towards multi-racial and multicultural society is irresistible” and it was “high time to take measures to incorporate multicultural policies” (Kim, 2007: 65). This declaration was converted into a “grand plan” (H.K. Lee 2008) which later became known as *The Multicultural Family Support Act* which institutionalize the regulation of international marriage agencies, launching of social awareness programs regarding ‘multiculturalism’, provision of social welfare for foreign wives and children and taking care of those victimized by abuses (Shipper 2012). Alongside the

³ Korean word (빨리 빨리) which literally means “fast-fast” or “quickly-quickly” pertains to the Korean temperament and psycho-behavioral patterns among Koreans which engenders aggressive and fierce competition to catch up on the latest trend and/or the fast production of something

government's official launching of the program for the 'multicultural' children was the enactment of the 2007 Act on Treatment of Foreigners in Korea which was a reinforcing mechanism to the newly promulgated laws on marriage migrants. This law expanded the responsibilities of the state from the national level to the local and municipal governments in bestowing 'proper' treatment to all legal foreigners. One important aspect of this act is the establishment of the Foreigner's Policy Committee (Article 8 and 22) which is the governments' effort to work with the civil society and other relevant sectors.

At present the 'multicultural' policy mandates relevant government agencies and their 'social partners' (such as Catholic migrant centers) to assist marriage migrants in their 'social integration' into Korean society, support 'multicultural' children's education and develop 'multicultural' sensitivity and understanding among Korean people (Oh, Kang et al 2012). However, these multicultural programs which have been allotted KRW 1.33 trillion between 2009 and 2012 may not be as comprehensive and effective as hoped. Due to the lack of clear definition of what 'multiculturalism' or even social integration is, the corresponding programs and activities are mostly skewed towards assimilating marriage migrants into Korean society as part of both nationalistic and internationalization projects. On the one hand, it is part of a nationalist discourse as marriage migrants are isolated in the 'reproductive sphere' so as to "produce" 'good' multicultural children that will be 'good' Korean citizens (N.H-J. Kim 2009). The concept and image of a 'good marriage migrant' is one who can be a good mother, good wife, good Koreanized citizen and even a good contributor to the household coffers within the reproductive sphere. While marriage migrants and the 'multicultural' children are the center of focus and attention of multicultural programs, migrant workers become peripheral and the undocumented migrants become increasingly invisible. In the discourse of multiculturalism, social integration is customized for a top-down assimilation of marriage migrants especially those with children. For the "bad" marriage migrants who ran away, filed for divorce or produced no children, the promise of citizenship is no longer available. There are now more stringent rules such as passing Korean language test and proof of income at over 13,759 USD but the language test can be waived if the family can communicate in other languages or they have financial stability. With these new policies and the exclusion of migrant workers in the budget for the social integration of foreigners, migrants will still be in need of Catholic migrant centers to assist them in their varying needs.

Multiculturalism has become the tool for integration of marriage migrants. In 2005, there was a "multicultural explosion" (Kim, N.H-J 2015) at the level of media, state discourse, academia and policy. The media picked up the term "multicultural" (*damunhwa*) to describe the Korean society opening up to more foreigners. There was an invisibility of the idea of multiculturalism in the Korean media whereby only 235 articles mentioned it from 1990-1999 but from 2005, there was a sudden increase in the usage of the term in news articles: 15, 317 (2005), 19,233 (2006), 27, 894 (2007) and 36, 778 (2008). At the public policy level, there were major laws enacted to institutionalize migrant integration including migrants being able to vote in local elections, social integration of mixed race Koreans, act on marriage migration, working visit system, multicultural family support act. In fact, with the institutionalization of these laws and programs, South Korea ranked high in the Migration Policy Index (MIPEX). However, this state-led multiculturalism has become a site of contentions and locus of a unique case of multiculturalism whereby multiculturalism is a "means, indicator and object of development". Cultural diversity and granting human rights to migrants are not taken per se but as an acceptance of international norms which can be used as a pathway to improve Korea's global positioning and ranking. Due to the overemphasis of the surface of multiculturalism, state agencies concentrate on multicultural programs educating the public to act cosmopolitan by

welcoming strangers and accepting the otherness of migrants. To do this, they allot a big amount of money on social campaigns using media, multicultural curricula, institutionalization of “global villages” and promoting multicultural festivals in every city. As a result, migrants have been reduced to cultural fetishes and subjects of cultural paternalism (JK Kim 2011) or spectacles of “niche tourism products” as can be seen in the state-sponsored multicultural festivals and even the representation of foreigners in multicultural textbooks.

Translating and Mediating Multiculturalism

Mediating between migrants and the Korean state impels the Catholic migrant centers to forge an (un)intentional alliance of cooperation and/or co-option with the former. As pro-migrant juridical and legislative mechanisms have been institutionalized, the Korean state has launched various welfare programs based on migration status – migrant workers, marriage migrants, foreign residents, refugees/asylums, and even undocumented foreign workers. The ‘transformation of the state’ from a passive observer of migration issues into an active engineer of multiculturalism entails a ‘cooperative model’ of NGO-state relations (D. Kim 2011) or a ‘critical engagement without cooptation’ (Cho 2005). The Church’s alliance with the Korean state vis-à-vis social service engagement can be defined in terms of deliberate pragmatism and tactic-strategy interplay. Catholic Church may have the resources to ‘play all cards’ – cooperation, cooptation, disengagement, negotiation and/contestation. But in reality, these various approaches to engaging with the receiving state and the wider public are oftentimes employed strategically without compromising the Church’s position, status and reputation as a social actor.

This alliance has undergone two phases – and social partnership through funding of multicultural projects and translation of welfare regimes. The first phase of this Catholic Church-state alliance vis-à-vis social service provision is the establishment of a ‘social partnership.’ The Catholic migrant organizations are one of the many Korean NGOs which have taken advantage of the institutionalization of the state’s ‘cooperation with the private sector’ based on Article 21 of the 2007 Act on Treatment of Foreigners in Korea which stipulates that:

National, municipal, and local government(s) may delegate to the non-profit Organizations or the profit organizations part of their works regarding the policies on foreigners and provide funding for the delegated works or other necessary supports.

From the enactment of this law, huge amount of money has since been allocated to the multicultural project. According to the report in the Second Basic Plan for Immigration Policy (2008-2012), a total of KRW 1.33 trillion was spent on the following: immigration administration (4%), advocating human rights for foreigners (5%), open door policy (37%) and greater social integration (54%) between 2009 and 2012. Based on this figure, the Korean government, both the central administrative agency and local governments, spent a huge sum of money for the integration of migrants especially marriage migrants and the ‘multicultural family’ (*damunhwa kajok*). In the first wave of integration funding which mostly includes welfare programs, 95 per cent of the total budget went to “the inordinate social benefits for

immigrant spouses” (Korean Immigration Policy Commission 2013). At present, 11 out of 15 dioceses are recipients of these multicultural centers with some dioceses having more than three types of multicultural centers (day care centers, cram schools for young ‘multicultural children, women’s shelter).⁴

Religious orders-run and diocesan migrant centers with migrant ministry have the freedom and autonomy to apply for a short-term (small amount of money to fund summer/winter camping, sports festivals and Christmas parties of migrant communities) and long-term funding (multicultural support centers). Only two of the ten Catholic migrant centers I visited have undertaken the long and tedious process of application due to unwieldy paperwork and documentation requirements. These are two of the longest-running migrant centers with a good number of Korean staff especially with social work backgrounds. Two other migrant centers applied for the short-term funding. The foreign chaplains of these migrant centers are quite fluent in Korean having stayed in the country for more almost 10 years. One migrant center’s application for short-term funding was rejected. Based on the track record of the chaplain and the religious order of this ‘rejected’ center, I deduce that one of the reasons for such ‘rejection is their activist and critical stance vis-à-vis migration issues. Apart from competitive selection for funding, the state agencies, at the central and local government levels, scout for existing social service providers (especially to women and children) with ‘capacity and credibility’ to offer the ‘multicultural’ funding. These centers are fully equipped with physical space, building, facilities and human resources. On the part of these social service providers, it is a strategic alliance to procure funding for either the maintenance or expansion of their ministry and apostolate. When the centers agreed and/or were approved to be state’s ‘partner’, it is the responsibility of the Church to hire additional human resources – Korean language teachers, cram school teachers, baby sitters, social workers, counselors, and ‘experts’ who can teach marriage migrants to cook Korean food and take care of babies in the “Korean way.” The ideas of doing projects “the Korean way” and the lack of autonomy and creativity in innovating programs for migrants are two important reasons why some Catholic migrant shelters will not be renewing its contract with the Korean government. One of my Korean respondents believed that Catholic migrant centers ended up being a contractor to the Korean government. The center could not innovate programs that suit marriage migrants based on real ‘multiculturalism’ (Interview with Korean lay worker, 10 July 2012). An activist chaplain also intimated that he would never apply for those short-term funding again. In the past, his center needed to fulfill its obligation to the agreement with the local government even if the migrants did not find the project (candle making) useful at all.

⁴ **Seoul** (Salesian Multicultural Children’s center, International Family Support Center), **Chuncheon** (Good Family Center for Multicultural Families), **Daejeon** (Multicultural Family center), **Incheon** (Caritas Congregation Migrants Cultural Center), **Suwon** (St Vincent Center for Multicultural Families (Baby house), Suwon, Kumpho, Uiwang Centers for Multicultural Families), **Wonju** (St. Paul Center for multicultural Families, Chang Cheong Chapel, Hweng Song Kun Center for Multicultural Families), **Uijongbu** (Children of Heaven Daegon Caritas Congregation Multicultural Children Study House), **Daegu** (Catholic Workers Hall-Pastoral for Migrants, Multicultural Family, Education, Migrants Shelter, Saint Paul Daegu Multicultural Family Center, Kyong San Multicultural Center, Daegu Multicultural Family Support Center), **Busan** (Gimhae Migrant Support Center), **Gwanju** (Gwang San Gun Multicultural Family Support Center, Health and Family Support Center, Mokpho Multicultural, Jang Song Gun, Jin Do Gun, Kang Jin Gun Multicultural Family Support Centers, Harmony Multicultural Center) **Jeonju** (Multicultural Family Support Center, Multicultural House, Inbo Multicultural Family Support Center) except Dioceses of **Cheongju**, **Andong**, **Masan** and **Jeju**.

While this strategic alliance with the Korean state because of funding for marriage migrants can be interpreted as an indication of the Church being a ‘junior partner to the state’ (Trudeau 2008), a ‘shadow state,’ a ‘para-state apparatus’ (Wolch 1999), or ‘de facto state representative’ (Cordero-Guzman 2005), I posit that this asymmetrical relations is a form of tactical care mediation whereby some of the migrant centers utilize the differential exclusionary aspects and practices of multicultural projects to exploit state welfare system. Only two of the ten Catholic migrant centers I visited are funded for a long-term project (a multicultural support center for migrant families and marriage migrants) by local governments. However, the other migrant centers who are not recipients of government funding indirectly benefit from the government welfare program meant for marriage migrants and legal migrant workers. They send undocumented foreign workers in need of transient homes to the men’s shelter (supposed to be for registered EPS holders only) and female migrant workers to the women’s shelter (supposed to be for marriage migrants in distress only). Another men’s shelter at a Catholic migrant center receives a monthly maintenance funding of KRW 2 million (USD 2,000) from the local government. Most of the transient residents in the men’s dormitory are undocumented workers from South Asia. When I asked a migrant chaplain if the local government was not strict about the legal status of the temporary residents in the shelter, he replied: “No, they [local government employees] are not. They hardly check us. As long as we complete the paper work for the funding application, send them pictures, they are happy with that. They can have nice pictures to report to the government.”

Although what the migrant chaplain remarked is an oversimplification with a tinge of cynicism of how state agencies and local governments allocate funding under the banner of a state-engineered multiculturalism, many Catholic migrant centers explore the strengths and weaknesses of the system whereby a state-engineered multiculturalism is in many ways a conflation of welfare, migration and citizenship regimes in the name of social integration. The Korean welfare state arrangements include two important features –‘integrated’ social insurance programs⁵ and social assistance/welfare services⁶ (YM Kim 2006). Migrant workers who are EPS holders are covered by the former while marriage migrants with children are well protected by the latter as part of social integration programs. Marriage migrants who decided to divorce their Korean husbands and did not have children during the marriage lose many benefits from the multicultural assistance. In this state welfare arrangement, the undocumented migrant workers and marriage migrants-turned-economic migrants face many difficulties in accessing social services especially when they encounter illnesses, personal problems and the precariousness and insecurity of employment. At this juncture, mediation by the migrant serving organizations becomes crucial in ensuring that migrants are able to access the structural opportunities and entitlements available for their migrant category. For the undocumented migrant workers, the mediators make available whatever they can provide where the migration and welfare regimes fail or lack resources. One example is the creation and issuance of a special health card which undocumented migrant workers can use in several partner hospitals of the Catholic Church. Since undocumented migrant workers are not covered by the national health insurance, Catholic migrant centers usually extend financial assistance for sick undocumented migrant workers. All other social services funded by the state (day care centers for multicultural children, women’s shelters for distressed marriage migrants, Korean language classes, and sociocultural activities) are unofficially extended to undocumented migrants. These tactics and the visible presence of undocumented migrants in Catholic migrant centers are open secrets

⁵ This includes the National Health Insurance, National Pension Scheme, and Industrial Accident Compensation Insurance.

⁶ This comprises of National Basic Livelihood Security System that covers medical, educational and housing assistance and living allowances those who are unable to work due to disabilities and old age.

known to the Korean state but are morally justified and even effective through the religious lens of caring for migrants, strangers, outsiders, and ‘different others’ as God dwells in them. In some instances even state agencies take advantage of the Catholic Church to circumvent migration regimes. Jorge, a social worker and the former manager of “Umbrella Center”, illustrated how state agencies exploit the positionality and resources of the Church vis-à-vis issues on undocumented migration.

Government people use established migrant centers when they do not want deal with serious problems like crime, deportation and marriage migrants. One case was when the immigration office wanted to release an undocumented migrant worker from the detention center.

After an undocumented foreigner is caught, he should be deported, right? But this undocumented migrant worker was experiencing a serious depression and trying to hurt himself by banging his head on the concrete wall inside his detention cell. The immigration officers were worried because they had to keep him for a while due to some wage issues and severance pay (taechikum). They decided to release the migrant in my care. I had to act as his guarantor just in case he’d ever get into trouble, you know like crime and health issues, and St. Paul Chong Hasang Center will be held responsible. I agreed to take care of the migrant. I just assume the immigration officers don’t want anyone to die in their jurisdiction. It was funny and interesting. I said goodbye to the migrant in front of the detention center and never heard from him again (Interview with Jorge, a Korean social worker and former manager of a migrant center, 15 May 2013).

Conclusions

South Korea has embraced state multiculturalism as a response to the growing number of migrants and cultural diversity. While other countries of immigration have shunned the idea as a ‘failure’, Korean government borrowed the term and appropriated it as developmentalist apparatus and assimilationist tool to integrate certain migrant groups. However, the implementation of such state multiculturalism necessitates a forging of an unusual partnership with migrant civil society such as faith-based organizations like the Catholic Church because these organizations have longer experience in interacting with migrants. Due to their organizational capacity, institutional infrastructures, expertise, existing organizational structure of migrant communities, direct interaction with migrants and moral ascendancy, Catholic migrant-serving mediating structures are ‘desirable’ state partner in implementing multicultural programs. Because of this ‘desirability’, ‘credibility’ and ‘capacity’ (cf. Martin 2011), some migrant centers take advantage of state resources and tactically use the funding to support and facilitate the integration of their target population, including those who fall outside the parameters of welfare, integration and legal systems. As a result, migrants, who do not possess the linguistic, bureaucratic and cultural competencies to directly deal with the state, make good use of the access and opportunities offered by the mediation of migrant-serving mediating structures. It is at this juncture that I claim that mediation process is necessitated and essential in the inclusion of migrants. Without the institutional mediation, migrant-led organizations and hometown associations encounter difficulties and hindrances in even making their associational life sustainable and feasible. Therefore, individual migrants’ well-being, social relationships and identity-making which are integral in their social inclusion/exclusion both shape and are shaped by their access to public resources, rights and entitlements.

The translation and transmutation of a ‘borrowed’ notion of multiculturalism from classical countries of immigration such as Canada, France, Germany and the Netherlands has permeated the everyday lives of migrants yet it is a mediated process due to the structural constraints and opportunities. Each social actor – context of reception (receiving society and receiving state), migrants and their communities and the mediators – has their own translation of multiculturalism based on their everyday needs and vision. In this paper, I demonstrated how the Catholic Church served as a translator of various inputs – migrant input, state input and the receiving society input. As a translator, the Church eventually ends up as a mediator of social actors that are (un)intentionally assembled to produce alliances. This is not to say though that this flow and exchange is an equal process. In fact, the Church as a mediator and translator has become either a complicit of the receiving state’s perpetuation of differential treatment of migrants or migrants’ maneuvering of existing migration and integration regimes. As Bruno Latour puts it: translation is a process “in which one actor or force is able to require or count upon a particular way of thinking and acting from another, hence assembling them together into a network not because of legal or institutional ties or dependencies, but because they have come to construe their problems in allied ways and their fate as in some way bound up with one another” (Callon and Latour 1981 as quoted in Miller and Rose 2008:34).

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