Au Pair Religion

Authenticity and Ambivalence among Young Filipinos in Denmark

Astrid Krabbe Trolle
University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark
a.trolle@hum.ku.dk

Abstract

As a typical example of mobile religious youth, Filipinos travel to Denmark for a two-year stay as au pairs (aged 18–30). During those two years, the au pairs either opt out of religious practice or intensify their relationship to God in new ways. Whichever they choose, migration brings opportunities to grow as individuals and as active advocates of faith. Using descriptive statistics from the Philippines and Denmark, I compare youth generations to show how Filipino youth inhabit religious traditions in different ways than their Danish peers. The macro perspective on age cohorts reveals that theories of generation and youth should be re-drawn to fit the local religious context. In the second section of the article, I analyse semi-structured interviews with au pairs to make clear how global ways of enacting religion comes to the fore through ideas of choice, authenticity, and ambivalence.

Résumé

Les Philippines qui se rendent au Danemark en tant que jeunes filles au pair sont un exemple intéressant de jeunes religieusement affiliées et géographiquement mobiles. Pendant leur séjour de deux ans, ces femmes, âgées de 18 à 30 ans, abandonnent leur pratique religieuse ou, au contraire, intensifient et renouvellent leur relation à Dieu. Dans tous les cas de figure, leur parcours migratoire leur donne l’occasion de grandir comme individus. La première partie de mon article repose sur la comparaison de statistiques sur la religion aux Philippines et au Danemark. L’étude révèle des rapports différents aux traditions religieuses chez les jeunes philippins et les jeunes danois. Elle suggère aussi que les théories sur les générations, et sur la singularité de la jeunesse en matière religieuse, sont surtout valables pour les pays occidentaux. Dans la deuxième partie de mon article, l’analyse des entretiens semi-directifs menés avec des jeunes filles
au pair montre comment le rapport des jeunes à la religion, dans un contexte mondialisé, est caractérisé par la possibilité du choix, la recherche d’authenticité et l’expérience de l’ambivalence.

Keywords

au pairs – Filipino youth – Denmark – generation – migration

Mots-clés

filles au pair – jeunesse Philippine – Danemark – génération – migration

1 Global Youth: Digitalized, Ambivalent, and Authentic

Youth has been theorized in multiple ways. Within religious studies, young people and their religious practice are often associated with a new and innovative generation of technologically smart cosmopolitans. The global dimension is captured in the theoretical framework of the Global-Market regime, coined by François Gauthier. According to Gauthier, religious practice has moved from a Nation-Statist regime to a Global-Market regime since the 1960s in the West. In the Nation-Statist regime, religious practice is centered on dogmatic belief, regular attendance, and institutional affiliation. In the Global-Market regime, religious practice is embedded in an expressive consumer culture directed by world-wide marketization. Within this logic, religion becomes commodified and takes on new and unforeseen figures, directed more at answering sensory, practical, and ethical questions than fitting the Westphalian formula of institutional and formal affiliation. In practice, religious commodification means that people’s religious choices and experiences are increasingly customized to cater for the individual’s everyday needs. These needs come with a global outreach as the ever-intensified digital connectedness moves beyond national institutions. Being young today also means being globally placed, connected,

2 Gauthier (2020), see also Woodhead et al. (2020).
5 Spickard & Adogame (2010).
and dependent. In the words of Paul Gareau and colleagues: “youth are actively appropriating our globalized world for themselves, or at least earnestly trying to do so. They will undoubtedly transform that world in the process of that appropriation and adaption, even if ambivalently and fluidly. Religion, or its cognates and fellow travelers, plays an equally ambivalent and fluid role in that process”." Key words in this understanding of youth and religion are ambivalence, fluidity, negotiation, authenticity, and agency. Within the framework of the Global-Market regime, I take these concepts as analytical focal points in my exploration of youth. Together, they point to the multiple ways that religion enters the individual lives of global youth on the move. However, the au pairs of this study are also part of the Global-Market regime as a feminine, export manual labour, travelling from the global South to the global North. Throughout the article, I will trace the religious practices of young au pairs within several layers of commodification that are all connected to their global enterprises.

In the Philippines, young people make up a quite large proportion of the overall population. Unlike countries on the African continent where “the youth bulge” of especially young men is considered a destabilizing force in society, the Philippine young population promises economic growth by taking part in the booming Asian market economy. Filipinos remain one of the most technologically adept populations globally. A majority of the population own a mobile phone with internet access although the distribution of technology and internet access is not evenly distributed across the archipelago. In the capital, Metro Manila, approximately 92 percent have internet access whereas only about 22 percent have access in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. In addition, the cosmopolitan outlook of many Filipinos rests on a structural foundation as the extensive labour export from the Philippines ensures that there are Filipinos in every country of the world and through many generations. In this article, I only focus on a small fraction of the labour migration, but, as we will see, the au pair religion found in one of the most secular corners of the world still reflects the global youth trends of ambivalence, fluidity, negotiation, authenticity, and agency.

7 Cornelio (2019), p. 381.
8 Philipps (2018).
2 Methodology

I have used a mixed methods design to show how different forms of material can puzzle out different perspectives on youth. In the first section of the article, I apply descriptive statistics from the World Values Survey\textsuperscript{11} for the Philippines in 2019 and European Values Study\textsuperscript{12} for Denmark in 2017. I have chosen these two surveys because the \textit{WVS} is an extension of the \textit{EVS}, and therefore the surveys ask the same questions, making it possible to compare country responses. Although many of the questions reflect classical understandings of religion in terms of religious affiliation, dogmatic belief, and institutional practice, they are still helpful for comparative purposes. I have worked with the surveys in \textit{SPSS}. The material for the analyses of au pairs come from my PhD work on Catholic Filipinos in Copenhagen, Denmark, where I engaged in fieldwork from 2015–2018 in the Catholic churches, in non-religious organisations, and at private social gatherings in the Filipino milieus. In my PhD dissertation, I focused on the generational tensions between young au pairs (aged 18–30), the first generation of Filipinos in Denmark (aged 60–70), and the intermediate age groups arriving through marriage migration and family reunion. In this article, I draw on part of my overall material, the semi-structured interviews conducted with 20 au pairs aged 19–29.\textsuperscript{13} I interviewed my interlocutors in malls, over the phone, in their homes and at a language school. In addition to the formal interviews, my analysis rests on informal conversations with au pairs in the churches and at other social gatherings. All my interlocutors have been anonymized in the analysis.

3 Youth and Generation

In this special issue, we categorize youth as people aged 15–35. The generous time span is to ensure that a variety of national contexts and social conditions surrounding different understandings of youth are met. But if we zoom in on how age matters in research on religion, it becomes evident that youth is tricky as a meaningful global category. Should youth be seen as a liminal phase of life between childhood and adulthood? Or should we rather place youth in an age cohort and look at the societal conditions shaping their values and behavior? These questions represent two different approaches to the study of

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{WVS} (2019).
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{EVS} (2017).
\textsuperscript{13} Trolle (2019).
youth: Life cycle and generation. Life cycle studies tend to speak more to the subjective, interpretative approach that places the individual at the center of analysis.\textsuperscript{14} The liminal belongings of youth as a stage in life entails bodily experiences, kinship relations and social expectations. In contrast to the qualitative life cycle approach, generational studies are often associated with a quantitative take on society as an escalator where each generation represents a step on the escalator and a particular set of values. As the old generations are replaced by the younger generations, societal values change. Within this framework, youth becomes relevant because it is during childhood and adolescence that important values are socialized into individuals.\textsuperscript{15} Following Karl Mannheim’s early 20\textsuperscript{th} century thinking about generations, the main idea here is that “fresh contacts” create lasting social characteristics.\textsuperscript{16} Mannheim describes how the freshness of first encounters can be seen in youth or in some cases the migrant experience, and that these external experiences of novelty are often needed to actualize a generational consciousness. Besides being born within the same time and space, generations only come into being if they are seized as a common identity. It is useful to think with the Mannheimian notion of generation when studying young people and their societal conditions. The question must be if the current youth cohort constitutes a generation in the sense that they feel part of and act as a novel and separate generation in society. In other words, do the young au pairs in Denmark feel like they are a part of a generation? Or do they see their sojourn as a youthful experience setting them apart from other Filipinos in Denmark?

Often the late modern notion of generation goes back to the 1940s baby boomer generation in the US.\textsuperscript{17} The baby boomers stand as the archetype of a generation because they activated a generational consciousness to create global political change, associated with the youth revolutions in the 1960s and 1970s. As an early kickstart on youth as a special (political) force, the term teenager also saw light in the US context in 1944, as a part of a new awareness of youth as a particular stage in life, increasingly tied to social change, secularization, individualism, and consumer capitalism.\textsuperscript{18} In many ways, these social attributes live on today in theories of youth as harbingers of social change. Although young people will – by natural replacement – be the shapers of tomorrow, there is reason to put more emphasis on the local and national con-

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Burnett2010} Burnett (2010), p. 42.
\bibitem{Twenge2015} Twenge et al. (2015), p. 324.
\bibitem{Mannheim1923} Mannheim (1970 [1923]), p. 284.
\bibitem{Edmunds2005} Edmunds & Turner (2005); Bouk (2018); Roof (2001).
\end{thebibliography}
text of young peoples’ opportunities, hopes and aspirations – instead of taking the US experience as exemplary. In fact, we need to redraw the boundaries of the religious and political potential of young age groups to better understand the contemporary global condition. In a Scandinavian context, the main trends of secular youth are being contested by new findings showing how some young people are turning toward a more traditional Christian outlook.\textsuperscript{19} Several studies – also from Scandinavia – find that young people are more depressed and insecure about future opportunities than previous cohorts.\textsuperscript{20} My point is that we need to contextualise youth and compare the young cohorts with older age groups to be sure that we catch the religious subtleties of each age. Although generation and life cycle are not always mutually exclusive, it can be helpful to apply the two different frameworks as a way of showing the multi-faceted reality of youth today. In the following, I will look at young Filipinos from the perspective of generation applying quantitative and comparative survey material and then from a life cycle perspective applying qualitative interviews.

4 Generations in the Philippines and in Denmark

In this section, I aim to show how age matters in the question of belief in two national contexts: The Philippines and Denmark. I bring comparative quantitative data into the analysis of youth because the macro level perspective can reveal how traditional and US-based theories of generation and youth are mainly valid in Western and secular countries such as Denmark. Therefore, the traditional emphasis on the revolutionary power of youth should be modified for each national context. Below, I analyse the survey data by looking at the distribution based on generational differences according to the following cohorts. The ages are estimated from 2022:

5. The silent generation (1928–1945), aged 77–94

Ideally, the generational cohorts should be based on country-specific preconditions as each cohort is shaped by a particular national and political history.

\textsuperscript{19} Botvar (forthcoming); Niemelä (2021); Ketola (forthcoming).
\textsuperscript{20} Klingenberg and Lövheim (2019); la Cour and Pedersen (2021).
Belief in God in the Philippines

In the Philippines, belief in God is exceptionally high. With a long colonial history of Spanish Catholicism followed by American Protestantism, the majority of Filipinos are members of the Roman Catholic Church (78% according to WVS 2019). The table above shows us how belief in God is distributed across the age cohorts.

A remarkable 100% of the population believe in God, and the high percentage does not change across the cohorts. Here youth is represented by Generation Z and Millennials who do not differ from the other age groups. The lack of statistical significance (using p-square) also testifies to the fact that the chosen age cohorts are not important in terms of belief in God. A quick glance at other questions of belief such as belief in Heaven, Hell, and Reincarnation show similar response patterns. In matters of belief, youth is not separate from the rest of the population. You could argue that a 100% cannot be a truthful number for any question of belief. In this line of thinking, a statement receiving a 100% is merely an expression of state coercion. However, the representative number of Filipino citizens who answered the WVS questionnaire divide their answers in every other question asked. Subsequently, believing in God is so self-evident that no one disagrees. Instead, I want to focus on what this result tells us about...

---

Table 1: Belief in God in the Philippines (WVS 2019): n=1200, no statistical significance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belief in God</th>
<th>Generation Z</th>
<th>Millennials</th>
<th>Generation X</th>
<th>Baby boomers</th>
<th>The silent generation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1200)

---

21 E.g. Pew Research Center (2010); Poulsen et al. (2021).
Turning to the same question of Belief in God in the Danish survey, we see a completely different situation. In Denmark, the majority of the population are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church which is constitutionally bound to the state. In January 2022, 73% of the population were members.22

Table 2 illustrates how Danish youth behaves differently in terms of belief compared to the older cohorts. In Generation Z and the Millennials approximately 37% believe in God whereas the number is closer to 70% in The silent generation born before or during WWII. In total, only about half of the population believe in God, often giving Denmark a reputation as one of the most secular countries in the world.23 In other words, the younger cohorts live up to the notion of young people being more secular – or religious in different ways than is captured in classical survey questions – than older age groups. The difference between the young and the old in the Danish survey continues in other questions of belief. This result confirms the traditional generational theories that expect youth to be a novel force in society – at least in terms of religiosity.

Table 2: Belief in God in Denmark (EVS 2017). N=3295, p≤0.001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Generations</th>
<th>Baby</th>
<th>The silent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

23 Zuckerman et al. (2016), p. 79.
7 Redrawing the Boundaries of Generational Theories

If we compare the two national contexts, the original Mannheimian notion of a potential generational consciousness based on age cohorts seem to be confirmed in Denmark – but not in the Philippines. Correspondingly, the generational theories that have originated in the US boomer experience mainly speak to a local, secular development where revolutionary politics have been intertwined with non-dogmatic belief and moral laxity. This secular development can also be found in the Danish case where youth is markedly less religious in general terms than their predecessors. However, the situation is very different in the Philippines. Here, young people are just as God believing as any other cohort. This suggests that our emphasis on youth should be sensitive to the local context and aware of the inherited notions of secular thinking within generational theories.

The lack of age difference on a macro level does not mean that there is no religious change with young age in the Philippines. Rather, the changes can be better grasped through an interpretative, qualitative perspective that makes room for the subtle changes taking place within the established religious traditions. In his study of religious identities among active Catholic students in the Philippines, Jayeel Cornelio convincingly argues that young people inhabit what he names indwelt individualisation.\(^{24}\) Indwelt individualization refers to the individualization taking place within the religious institutional setting where young and engaged Catholics make their own way between tradition maintenance and tradition construction. From a macro perspective they would look like other cohorts of Catholics, but their way of thinking, attitude and approach towards their faith and institution show a reflective and self-chosen religious identity that corresponds to global notions of individual choice.\(^{25}\) In other words, young and global Filipinos find new ways of practicing their faith within the established religious framework – not as a revolt against religious values as such. Where Danish youth seem to be more secular than their predecessors, Filipino youth find new ways of expressing the faith that they share with their co-nationals regardless of age. The Danish secular context is also important as a societal backdrop for the Filipino au pairs’ religious experiences during their two-year stay. The general Danish acceptance of morally ambiguous issues such as divorce, pre-marital sex, and abortion becomes part of a European cultural landscape that the au pairs either embrace or reject as a part of their personal, religious growth.


In this section, I present some of my qualitative findings from interviews with Filipino au pairs in Denmark. In general, the migratory move places the young Filipinos as both transnational cosmopolitans as well as infrastructure in an inequal global market economy. In 2000, the Danish government re-initiated the au pair scheme, making it possible for young Filipinos to enter the country for a two-year period. The au pair scheme is not registered as work by the Danish government. Instead, au pairs arrive on a cultural exchange where they live together with a host family, taking care of the children in the family in return for a monthly allowance from the host family. The au pairs work maximum 6 days a week and 3–5 hours a day. Conditions for becoming an au pair are narrowly defined: the au pair must be between 18–30 years of age, single, without children and able to speak English. From 2000–2022, the au pair scheme has been widely debated in the Danish public sphere. Au pairs have been portrayed as victims of structural inequality between the global North and the global South. Stories of host family harassment, violence, and au pairs illegally overstaying their permit have led to a range of restrictions on the first versions of the au pair agreement. Many of the new regulations (such as an obligatory Danish language course and an increase in allowance) have benefitted the individual au pairs yet have also moved the au pair scheme from something that many Danish families could afford to a more exclusive segment of society, resulting in very few au pair applications during the last couple of years. In a global context, au pair work is a part of a mass export of feminine care work from the Philippines to other countries. In fact, Filipina domestic workers constitute one of the most important land-based migration flows from the Philippines with 275,000 migrating as domestic workers in 2016. Since the Marcos administration aimed for an export-oriented national economy in the 1970s, the state-structured conditions for labour export have only increased. Today, approximately 11 percent of the GDP of the Philippines come from Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). The established and highly organized recruitment system also influences the migratory outcomes of the individual migrants. In the Danish case, the au pair scheme has led to a large intake in young, female, and

26 Ny i Danmark (2022).
27 Politiken (2014); Berlingske (2019).
31 Asis et al. (2019).
single Filipinos which has affected the established Filipino diaspora in Denmark in interesting ways. The Filipino diaspora in Denmark has always been very feminine. According to Statistics Denmark, 81% of the 11,471 Filipino residents are female.\(^{32}\) In addition, 6,367 citizens had one Filipino parent in 2020 where 91% of these had a Filipino mother.\(^{33}\) This is due to the migration history of Filipinos in Denmark. The first group of Filipinos arrived as guest workers in the late 1960s and early 1970s to work in the hotel industry as maids and cleaners. These first female migrants name themselves the pioneer generation because they have established the current Filipino community in Denmark.\(^{34}\) When the guest worker scheme closed in 1973, Filipino migration to Denmark began a new phase where people migrated through marriage (mainly to Danish men) and family reunion. A couple of hundred Filipinos entered annually from 1973–2000.\(^{35}\) As mentioned, the au pair scheme began in 2000 with an influx of about 2000 young Filipinas annually.\(^{36}\) As the au pair scheme is a two-year agreement, the individual au pairs were not a permanent addition to the established Filipino community in Denmark. Instead, the au pairs came to embody a young, mobile, and somewhat sexualized Filipino presence in the Danish public opinion as well as for the elderly Filipino residents. In her description of the sexual citizenship of Filipinas in Australia, Shirlita Espinosa notes that the feminized migration flow becomes sexualized and fetishized through a combination of a Catholic ethos and the dream of a westernized third-world women.\(^{37}\) For Espinosa, the global market consumerism produces a particular type of feminized migrant who “buy their citizenship through their sex.”\(^{38}\) Although the rate of Filipina marriage migrants is less extensive in Denmark, the feminine profile and different ways of migrating (work migrants, marriage migrants and au pairs) produce similar debates on sexual citizenship and moral behavior among Filipino residents in Denmark. For many of the first Filipinos who migrated to Denmark as guest workers, the marriage migrants and the au pairs bring unwanted public visibility to the Filipino community as a sexualized (and racialized) minority population. My reason for sketching out the community worries related to the young au pairs is that the elderly generations of Filipinos in Denmark often view the young newcomers as too morally relaxed. But as I

\(^{32}\) Statistics Denmark (2021).


\(^{34}\) Andersen (2017).

\(^{35}\) Andersen (2017).

\(^{36}\) Most au pairs in Denmark are Filipino, but au pairs also come from Ukraine, Russia, Brazil, and Thailand: Stenum (2008), p. 7.


aim to show, the au pairs are not concerned with tradition maintenance\textsuperscript{39} in Denmark as they are only in the country for two years. The limited timeframe provides a window of opportunity to either opt out or go further into individual religious practice. The Global-Market regime equally frames the individual, religious growth of the young cosmopolitan consumers as it provides the structure for a sexualized market of feminine migration.

9 Authenticity and Time-Out from Religious Practice

Returning to the key notions characterizing global youth, I want to highlight how the young au pairs in many ways live the ambivalence, fluidity, negotiation, agency, and authenticity that are part and parcel of religious practice today. In 2018, I conducted a group interview with 10 Filipino au pairs at a language school in Hellerup, North of Copenhagen, where I asked about generational understanding and morality.\textsuperscript{40} Although a group interview could facilitate group dynamics toward a common identity as young cosmopolitans, the au pairs were individually more connected to their families back home than their classmates. Many of them told me that the generational identity did not matter to them. Rather, they felt that other characteristics such as lifestyle, educational level or region were more important. The Mannheimian understanding of generation did thereby not apply to these au pairs. In religious terms, the au pair profile is somewhat diverse as the au pairs frequent the Catholic Church as well as several Pentecostal congregations in Denmark. Their relation to the Catholic Church is one of traditional belonging in the sense that they are often born and raised Catholic and have gone to Catholic schools. After arriving in Denmark, many stop attending church due to their new living conditions with full-time work often placed far away from the nearest Catholic church. Amy, a Filipino au pair in her twenties, explained how being in Denmark created a new situation of religious freedom as well as insecurity. The following quote is from the group interview where Amy was one of the most outspoken interviewees:

\textsuperscript{39} Cornelio (2016), p. 127.

\textsuperscript{40} In the group interview and later individual interviews, I asked about three historical episodes in the Philippines to gain a clearer understanding of people’s relation to the Philippine Catholic Church. The three episodes are the EDSA revolution (also known as the People Power Revolution which overturned former president Ferdinand Marcos in 1986), the recent debate on reproductive health, and the former president Rodrigo Duterte’s war on drugs.
Amy: When we are a part of a church in there [the Philippines], and somebody is looking after you. When you have problems and you have someone to talk to, and you just run to them and tell them what your fears are, your problems are. But in here [Denmark], there's nobody doing that.

Astrid: Okay.

Amy: And then ... if you have a church in here [Denmark] and you can fit in. But when you're alone, and nobody will oversee house life, are you okay, and then because of that, we can do whatever we want. Nobody's checking me, and like I was in the Philippines, I was a member of the church. I was so active in church, but then here, because I'm not a member of anything, I'm not active anymore. I can do what I want. I mean, I know in my conscious that I'm not supposed to do it, but then I'm doing it because I have problems, you know, so what. I'm so busy, my work is so tiring, I'm just, I want to chill.

Astrid: Yeah (laughs).

Amy: So that's why I do what I want. That's why this has become a religious change in me. I'm not religious as I was before ... Because in the Philippines, I mean, you can express who you are, but there are limitations. Cause you're afraid of what people might say, what your parents might say. Unlike in here [Denmark], they just give you the freedom to do what you want. And you can freely express yourself. I'm one of those persons who experience ahmm suppressing myself because of religion. My inner self. Cause they tell me that's what the Bible says, so you have to do this and that, so I tend to suppress who I really am when it comes to expressing myself ... So for example in my church they told me that, “Amy, you have a very loud personality and it's nice for you to lessen that ... with dressing, keep it simple. Or else you're gonna feed your narcissistic side and it's not good cause it's not about Jesus any more with you” and stuff. And when I came here, nobody tells me that, so I'm like, I can do what I want.41

41 Amy, group interview, 2018.
Amy’s notion of expressing her inner self and choosing to do what she wants talks directly to the religious authenticity that young people seek on a global scale.\textsuperscript{42} Her two-year stay in Denmark gives her a new freedom to opt out of the expectations that she feels limit her in the Philippines. Yet we also find religious ambivalence surrounding the institutional relation. For Amy, as for most of the au pairs that I talked to, the church is a place of refuge as well as control. Her description of church life in the Philippines is of safety. People look after you at church but simultaneously also try to restrict your expression, at least in Amy’s case. The profile of safety/control reveals an all-encompassing presence of church life – regardless of Christian denomination – in the Philippines, something that was also confirmed in the high percentage of belief in God in the first section of the article. Amy grew up in the Catholic Church but switched to Hillsong Church during her work as an au pair in the Netherlands.\textsuperscript{43} Her migration has thereby also meant religious experimentation with a more outspoken religious practice at Hillsong. From a life cycle perspective, Amy is experiencing a liminal period between adolescence in the Philippines and adulthood in later life where she can afford to take some time away to decide who to be. It was evident from Amy’s comments that travelling to Europe also meant becoming an independent person. I have no doubt that Amy has returned to an engaged church practice since our interview because she has found a church that matched her individual personality in Hillsong. Staying true to herself, Amy viewed her time in Denmark as an experience of growth where she could find the space to criticize her former practice in the Catholic Church.

10 Freedom as Individual Growth and Moral Experimentation

Although freedom was often mentioned as common ground in the interviews, it is also important to acknowledge that many au pairs – like their co-nationals in other generations – work abroad to help their families in the Philippines. The sacrifice emphasized by the export of labour from the Philippine state is very much alive among the young Filipinos who often feel isolated in their host’s houses but continue working to send economic remittances back home.

\textsuperscript{42} Here I understand religious authenticity as the quest for your true self, based on the work of Charles Taylor (2002) and the further operationalization of his thoughts by Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (2005).

\textsuperscript{43} Many Filipinos engage in several au pair stays, especially in the Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway as these countries have comparable au pair schemes.
Besides helping their families, the au pairs frequently see their temporary stay in Denmark as an opportunity for adventure. The anthropologist Karina Dalgas has drawn attention to the educational aspects of au pair migration to Denmark. Many au pairs experience upward mobility by working abroad, turning their work migration into a narrative of personal growth as well as an economic investment for their families. The two-year stay reflects different trajectories within a limited time frame. Migration forces au pairs to navigate in different cultural terrains during their travels. In the following quote, we hear Josie, an au pair in her twenties, describing how working in the Netherlands gave her the opportunity to experiment with things that are otherwise not acceptable in the Philippines.

Josie: My first country is the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, they are very open of everything. It’s like, yeah, if you’re in Amsterdam, you have this red lights’ district, prostitution is very open. So we also went there and tried it. But it’s like curiosity. So just like you go there and then try it and then leave … Yeah, we also watched what is in there.

Astrid: What’s in there? Is it like prostitutes or?

Josie: Yeah, you watch live sex. Yeah, we also do that. We also went to the bar, and if you enter the bar you have like a room in that one, and there you can see live sex.

Astrid: What did you think about it? Were you like, ok now we tried it?

Josie: No, it’s like, okay, I feel bad, I feel so bad watching people doing it. They were not happy. They were just doing it to earn money. It’s like, oh it’s so bad. And it’s just not, just seeing it live, and then if it’s okay, if it’s something okay in Amsterdam, then oh, my heart breaks. Because oh my goodness to think that people would do that. And we could buy weed while we were there, so we tried that also. … I am open, I travel a lot. I am okay with that. I am open in the Philippines, and when I travel to other countries, I am more open. I understand why those things are happening, that’s part of the culture.

---

Josie explains how travelling makes her more open and understanding of cultural difference. She started to tell me about her experiences in the Netherlands when I asked her if she could mention an episode during her travels that had meant something to her. The openness described by Josie refers to a permissive attitude towards contested topics such as prostitution and drugs. She also defines herself as open in the sense that she can navigate in different cultural terrains. Josie’s idea of openness also speaks to an experimental fluidity where the boundaries of moral behavior are renegotiated. The time-out of ordinary obligations during her time in Europe poses an opportunity to experiment with new things, to learn more of the world. Like Amy, Josie understands her au pair stay as a period of personal growth where she can gain new moral insights that she can use to reconfigure her individual religious practice. In Josie’s case, her conclusion to the experiences in the Netherlands is that this form of sexual liberty is awful. It broke Josie’s heart. As we saw in the descriptive statistics from the Philippines, Josie, like all in her age cohort, believes in God. She was born and raised Catholic, and within that framework she is interested in shaping her own way of practicing built on her openness towards other ways of living. By trying out alternative cultural terrains, she can whole-heartedly choose to maintain her Catholic practice in the Philippines. Again, we see how notions of individual authenticity are redrawn by seeking out moral negotiation and the religious fluidity introduced by the European migratory move.

11 Migration as an Intensification of Religious Practice

Another way of embodying the freedom that the two-year stay as au pairs gives young Filipinos is by becoming more religiously active. Unlike Amy and Josie who have momentarily opted out of church practice, several au pairs also told me a different story of increased religious commitment:

Belinda: When I was in the Philippines, I’m not so active in the church ... because my job is very hectic. My employer don’t want me to go off for Sunday because Sunday is a lot of customers, a lot of people who come to the store. So I go in the morning. I wake up in the morning, and then I can attend the first mass, and then I can go to work ... But it’s different here. I can go every time I want. I can volunteer for anything I want in the church, and then I can talk to the priests, I can join the choir, not like in the Philippines.46
Belinda's comment reminds us that migration also offers freedom to commit to her faith in new ways not directly available in the Philippines. Belinda was raised Catholic, and she tries to attend mass on a weekly basis, just like many of her peers are used to attending mass together with their families as a regular activity. Yet due to her work situation in the Philippines, she is prevented from active engagement in church life, something that her stay in Denmark provides her with. In Belinda's case, her story of individual growth is related to new possibilities of religious intensification and outreach. From the perspective of the Catholic Church and the Pentecostal churches in Denmark, the influx of au pairs has also revitalized local church life in terms of engaged young people that are willing to volunteer for choir service and similar activities. Many of the young au pairs are also an active part of evangelization in especially the Pentecostal congregations and Jehovah's witnesses. In other words, the new situation brought on by migrating as au pairs introduces a window of opportunity that many seize to venture into religious involvement.

As the au pairs are heavily engaged with housework at their host family's home, they also intensify their religious practice in a personal and privatized way. The 28-year-old au pair Aika practices her faith at home. Like Belinda, she has capitalized her two-year time-out to weave religious practices into her everyday chores:

Yeah. I think when I came here yes at first ... the Danish culture is very light or very chilled ... But as time goes by it affects me in a better way because ehm my ahh my faith when it comes to how I relate more to my Christianity. Even if it's not Sunday, I do worship here at home. I'm always more alone here in the house, so I have more time to read the Bible, to read, to worship, sing songs. It gives me a different way of worship. It's not just a Sunday thing that I do. It gives me a more personal approach in how I worship my Lord.47

The many hours alone in the house of her host family gives Aika room for developing new religious practices. As a Born Again Christian, Aika finds it important to adapt her religious practice to the new situation, thereby also growing in her individual relation to God. Many of the au pairs paint a picture of time as lonely spaces where the two years spent working in people's houses in the North are characterized by a freedom that is equally adventurous and frightening. Within this space, several intensify their religious practices by

47 Interview with Aika, 2018.
privatizing them, building their personal connection to God or Jesus in prayers that they can carry with them anywhere. Integrating religious intent into everyday chores reflects a sense of religious agency. Although confined to private spaces, the au pairs build up their religious selves by internalizing and cultivating a range of religious practices. This expansive view of religiosity is also reflected in a recent study of Filipino students in Manila and Mindanao where the young people's concepts of the sacred transcended traditional ideas of religious affiliation. The sacred was also found in mundane associations related to food, music, and art. In a similar vein, the au pairs in this section find sacredness in housework. In summary, the stay in Denmark becomes an opportunity for personal growth – either in terms of a more privatized and personal faith or as the possibility to become more active in religious congregations and as global representatives of their faith.

12 Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that understanding religious youth on a global stage requires both a comparative macro perspective and a qualitative, interpretative approach to grasp the subtleties of the expressive consumerism young people are embedded in today in the Global-Market era. The first part of the article's comparative framework based on generations revealed that Filipino youth embrace the established religious structures of the older cohorts. In questions of belief, Filipino young people are like other age groups. The lack of age difference also reminds us that many of the established generational theories need to be redrawn to better accommodate the local, national, and global reality of today. Yet, the macro perspective only tells us a fragment of the young people's lived religiosity. When analysing interview material from the young Filipino au pairs in Denmark, we also see how the notions of ambivalence, fluidity, negotiation, authenticity, and agency are brought into reflections on religious identity in a secular country far away from home. As in the case of Josie, she will return to the Philippines with a strengthened faith in the Catholic moral codes that she has been brought up with. Her experiences of trying out morally ambiguous behavior in the Netherlands, has convinced her that the secular laxness towards drugs and prostitution is not for her. Josie is very typical for many of the religious au pairs as well as other Filipino age cohorts in Denmark. For them, Denmark and many other Euro-

pean countries are secular territories with dubious moral values. In response to the surrounding secular society, many au pairs internalize their religious commitment to grow as individuals. They thereby embody the Global-Market regime's credo of expressive consumerism that is largely aimed at the individual. However, the global market simultaneously frames the young au pairs as sexualized migrants from the global South, invoking new layers of moral ambiguity. Nonetheless, for the individual au pair, the temporary migration to Europe makes it possible to gain more independence with a new social status as breadwinner of the family. Although their sojourn may not change the au pairs' religiosity over time, the two-year stay reflects a liminal period where they have the space to either opt out of religious practice or intensify their relationship with God. For many, the individual growth is also reflected in a more outspoken religious advocacy upon returning home because they have taken the time to cultivate their religious selves during the years of global migration.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the editors of this special issue, Charles Mercier, Jean-Philippe Warren, and Hillary Kaell, for very helpful comments on the first draft of this article.

Bibliography

Beyer, Peter. (2016), Sensing Religion, Observing Religion, Reconstructing Religion:


La Cour, Peter and Heidi Frølund Pedersen. (2021), Helbred og Trivsel. Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift 72, pp. 89–98.


