

# **'Transitional livelihoods: Timorese migrant workers in the UK'**

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## **1 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.

In Timor-Leste, it has been the minimal opportunities for work domestically that has driven Timorese to export their labour to wealthier nations. Thousands of Timorese workers have travel to the UK for work and stayed many years to contribute to the daily needs of their families, the education of extended family members, house construction and establishing family businesses. Based on interviews with 19 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.

## **2. Migration and Development**

Migrant workers typically work in low skilled work, work that nationals do not aspire to do. 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 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 (de Haan 2016).

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) 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 (ESCAP p10-11).

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. Positioning theory is about how people use words and discourse to locate themselves and others, which often has direct moral

implications in relation to how different communities relate to others (Moghaddam and Harre 2010). 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: 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.

### **3. Migration in 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 quintiles while 50% of the vulnerable poor are predominantly in the rural areas (McWilliam 2014). Both internal and international migration has 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 work opportunities. In addition, internal migration from the rural areas to urban centres has resulted from the conflicts of 1999 and 2006 resulted in huge population increase in Dili. Since 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 2016:11). But around 18,000 children 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 (SEPFPOPE). 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 Korea over the six years 2009 to 2015 (Wigglesworth and Fonseca 2015).

Another program is the Australian Seasonal Workers Program 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 593 workers since 2012 according to SEPFPOPE's records. These two programs have enabled Timor-Leste to benefit from about US\$3 million a year of remittances sent home (Soares 2014). Another study shows remittance flows through the major money sending agencies involved \$3.5m in remittances sent to Timor-Leste just in the first six months of 2016 (da Cruz et al 2016). Including remittances from the Timorese workers in UK, it is estimated that labour is Timor-Leste's third largest export after oil and coffee.

The Timorese government announced in 2016 that unemployment across the country had reached 11% and that the government is seeking further opportunities overseas for youth employment because work opportunities likely to arise in the private sector in Dili are limited<sup>1</sup>. 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 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 a significant proportion of Timorese families are supported by remittances. Further, the most frequent place of residence was England (42%), followed by Indonesia (24%), Korea (17%), Australia (9%), Portugal (8%) and Ireland (6) (IRI 2016). As some Timorese in Northern Ireland refer to being in 'Ireland' rather than 'UK' it is probably that the 6% in 'Ireland' are actually in Northern Ireland, not the Republic of Ireland and so 48% of the total migrants may be assumed to be 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. With it came 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. It is a result of a unique situation by which Timorese have the right to live and work in UK as Portuguese citizens, but one which faces considerable uncertainty following the vote in favour of Brexit.

In England, the linkages go back even further to the political resistance to 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, A. 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

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<sup>1</sup> Press release by General Director of SEFPOPE Jacinto Barros Gusmão on 1/8/2016.

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. Workers in UK are not part of a formal program of migration, and while the flow of remittances from UK to Timor-Leste vastly exceeds that from Korea and Australia, there has been greater interest in socio-economic research on the official programs to Korea and Australia compared to the Timorese workers in UK.

#### **4. Survey methodology and profile of respondents**

This migrant worker survey was carried out in July-August 2016 to better understand the hopes, aspirations and experiences of Timorese migrants in UK. 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 the UK, as well as a number living and working in Northern Ireland. A Timorese academic living in England who had undertaken some research in Northern Ireland was also an important contact in introducing several Timorese living there (Cabral and Martin-Jones 2016).

This research involved interviews with 19 migrant workers, including nine interviewed in Dili in July 2016 who had returned from the UK, and in August 2016, 10 interviews in Dungannon, Cookstown, Portadown and Craigavon in Northern Ireland an area that hosts the largest single community of Timorese in the UK. As the research sample is only 19, 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 19 migrant workers interviewed, 14 were male and 5 female. Eight respondents were in their 30s, another eight were in their 40s, one was under 30, and two over 50 years old. The majority had either some university education or had graduated (11 respondents) while five 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 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, seven from six to ten years and four for eleven or more years.

#### **5. Research Findings:**

##### **5.1 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. Almost all the Timorese workers lived and worked with other Timorese, thus reinforcing their positioning as a distinct migrant community.

Of the Timorese migrants in Northern Ireland some seven out of ten Timorese migrants interviewed worked in Moy Park chicken factory or another in Dungannon meat factory. In Moy Park, Dungannon chicken factory there are reportedly some 800 Timorese workers amongst a workforce of about 1,800 workers as well as 200 Timorese of 600 workers in Dungannon Meats and more in the Moy Park factory in Craigavon<sup>2</sup>. 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. In addition, one worker was a cleaner for an old-aged home and two worked as interpreters for social services in addition to a chicken factory job. As a result of their roles, these interpreters had a good ability to describe the challenges faced by Timorese workers.

The returned migrant workers interviewed in Dili 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 and London, 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 worked in meat or chicken factories in Northern Ireland for part or all of the time. Most workers changed their work during their stay in UK. 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.

In Northern Ireland where the opportunities were concentrated in a few factories they were more likely to upgrade their position from casual to full time in the same factory. Two large Moy Park chicken factories operated 24 hours a day operating 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.

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 an Eastern European worker having 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 their annual leave dates<sup>3</sup>. 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.

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<sup>2</sup> Interview 2, Northern Ireland, August 2016

<sup>3</sup> 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. The workers lived exclusively with other Timorese (with one exception), 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. Moy Park offered English classes for its workers for \$100 a year which some participated in but 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 almost entirely within the Timorese community, 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, most 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, one played football on weekends with a British friend, and another deliberately chose to rent a room in a house with a British family and to widen his experience by travelling in Europe<sup>4</sup>. 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 services<sup>5</sup>. 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 factory<sup>6</sup>.

Workers who just wanted to save money to send home, minimised expenditure on going out and entertainment, most only meeting up with other Timorese for community celebrations or events. However, quite a number of Timorese workers were reportedly involved in gambling through the local betting shops, one respondent estimating this at 40% of Timorese workers betted regularly, although none of the participants would admit to it themselves.

For these 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 positioned far more fortunately than their friends and family at home in Timor. It is perhaps it is this repositioning that is the greatest attraction of working in the UK for Timorese. That is, in the eyes of their family they become providers of security and a source of income that gives a sense of satisfaction. It is also the reason they might feel trapped, unable to return home until economic obligations have been achieved.

## **5.2 Perceptions of the local community: Conflict and challenges**

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

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<sup>4</sup> Interview 18, Dili, July 2016

<sup>5</sup> Interview 9, Northern Ireland, August 2016

<sup>6</sup> Interviews 3 & 9, Northern Ireland, August 2016

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 responsibility<sup>7</sup>. They were examples of where Timorese have engaged with the host culture to improve the community positioning 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 discrimination by the Protestant community, a problem that fortunately is no longer an issue. Some compared 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 homes in Portadown 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 left (The Guardian 16/7/2011). This response reveals the continuing trauma that is legacy of the many years of conflict in Timor-Leste.

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 Lithuanian and East Timorese workers outside the Moy Park plant in Dungannon (BBC 9/12/2005), and another reported that there had been an increased racist attacks against migrant workers (in general) in Dungannon (Guardian 3/2/2007).

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 other (Irish Times, 2/8/2013). 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 other (Belfast Telegraph, 3/8/2016). 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 that<sup>8</sup>. 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.

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 £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 they 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

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<sup>7</sup> interviews 2, 3, & 9, Northern Ireland, August 2016

<sup>8</sup> Interview 2, Northern Ireland, August 2016

home to their families<sup>9</sup>. This has been a particularly sore point, not only in Northern Ireland but amongst other Timorese communities in the UK<sup>10</sup>. 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 passports.

Without cultural awareness of the expectations from an EC 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 community<sup>11</sup>.

### **5.3 Remuneration, benefits and remittances**

Most workers received an income between £1,000-2,000 a month, often 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. Several respondents said that in Timor-Leste they would receive less for a month's work than they receive for a week in UK.

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.

The money that was sent in remittances was principally used for daily living expenses (16 of 19) and for student fees (9 of 19). Four workers did not send any money home in the past year. Most workers with spouse and children in Timor-Leste sent money every month, generally between USD 250-600 a month. A number of workers sent money separately to a brother or other family member for student fees, typically USD 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 fiancé's student fees. Others send money only as requested but one 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.

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<sup>9</sup> Interview 2, Northern Ireland, August 2016

<sup>10</sup> Personal communication with Andrew McWilliam 21/4/2017

<sup>11</sup> Interview 3, Northern Ireland, August 2016



## 6. 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. Five 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 nine 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 existence<sup>12</sup>. 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.

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. In addition, the parent's links with home are weakened as the focus of their hard earned money is on their children in the UK. 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. 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

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<sup>12</sup> Interview 1, Northern Ireland, August 2016

Dili where the official Tetun<sup>13</sup> language is spoken. While they speak Tetun with their parent, English is their main language of communication as they were educated in English and have English speaking friends<sup>14</sup>.

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 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 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. It is suggested here that demarcation of positioning is clearly different between these four groups of the same family.

The implementation of Brexit has led to uncertainty about the future for Timorese residents, but recent reports indicate that the protection of British residents in Europe will require a reciprocal arrangement concerning the future of EU migrants in UK. It has been suggested that while new migrants may be curbed, current residents are likely to be allowed to stay, particularly as, even since the Brexit vote, there has been reported a drop in inward migration resulting in a shortage of low-skilled workers.

## **7. The impact of migration on life at 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 build or renovate their house with the money they earned. One worker had returned from UK after four years, then renovated his house and then built a house to rent out to foreigners for income. In addition he used the money to renovate the small family shop and buy more stock .... 'Now life is good' he said<sup>15</sup>.

Women who leave their husbands and children at home to go and work in UK are proud to have contributed to the family wellbeing. One worker who was in UK for just a year, sent money to her husband and children every month. She also had savings which she used to start a new restaurant on a main street in Dili. She now earns extra cash by helping others to process documents to go to UK. She is happy about her experience: 'Having money from UK changed my life' she said<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Tetun is one of two official languages, the other being Portuguese. Tetun is the most widely spoken language in Timor-Leste.

<sup>14</sup> Interview 6, Northern Ireland, August 2016

<sup>15</sup> Interview 12, Dili, July 2016

<sup>16</sup> Interview 13, Dili, July 2016.

Another who worked in UK from 2003-5 returned home to build a house and he bought a vehicle for a family business, but both these were burnt in the 2006 violence and so all the benefit from his work was destroyed. He did not go back to the UK because he wanted to stay with his young children<sup>17</sup>.

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, her husband has gone to UK and sends back \$500 a month for her and their two children. When her husband returns they plan to buy some land and build a house<sup>18</sup>.

One single worker sent money for his brother's education and his parent's daily support also was able to save and use the money for his wedding. Another was away for seven years but came home because his fiancé wanted him to return, and they used the money to build a house when he returned. Two of the workers had arrived in Northern Ireland single but met and married a Timorese partner where they continue to live.

Albeit 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, and position themselves in such a way that their status was raised due to the superior income they earned overseas compared to those that stayed at home.

## **8. 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 in spite of many of them having tertiary qualifications. Many live and work in a largely Timorese social context isolated from the broader community and speak minimal English. Once in work they may feel obliged to continue working to send remittances to their families at home over many years in spite of wanting to return home.

A major source of employment is the Moy Park chicken factories in Northern Ireland and other meat works. Few have learned English nor have they been upgraded to supervisory roles, and they accept their positioning as temporary migrant workers on the factory production lines in spite of some workers having been there for up to 8-14 years. On the other hand, the Eastern Europeans who have caused them some distress have engaged in repositioning themselves as supervisors, even though they are more recent arrivals. No workers spoke of direct discrimination by British people but it was these eastern Europeans that Timorese accused of unfair or corrupt practises in the workplace.

The lack of knowledge of cultural mores and local laws resulted in some conflicts arising for Timorese workers. Others have worked hard to resolve problems that reflect badly on the Timorese community, and actively engage in repositioning themselves and the others of the Timor-Leste community to reduce negative perceptions of them in the host community.

Others 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

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<sup>17</sup> Interview 17, Dili July 2016

<sup>18</sup> Interview 14, Dili, July 2016.

others to understand the society in which they live, and engaging with social services on their behalf. As a consequence of the work skills that they acquired in the UK, some of these workers position themselves with valuable work skills to bring back to Timor-Leste, particularly the western work culture, keeping to time and meeting targets, and importantly the social skills to mediate relationships with other people from different social contexts. One worker was interested in helping to establish social services in Timor-Leste such that exist in UK.

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 more understanding of western workplace culture have an advantage in obtaining 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, many of them never having visited Timor-Leste. Their parents' decision about their own future is to achieve the best outcome for their children, positioning themselves as permanent migrants without prospects of improving their own status. Children of migrant workers who were born and partially educated in East Timor retain a Timorese identity but benefit from the greater educational and work opportunities in UK. Those born in Timor-Leste and fully educated in UK continue to position themselves as Timorese but become fluent in English and are more comfortable with the idea of a future in the UK where their friends are than in Timor-Leste which is a distant memory. Those born, raised and educated 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 this option, 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 to engage in anti-social or illegal behaviour. However the majority are content to continue work as low-skilled workers with their aspirations firmly based on supporting their family at home.

In Timor-Leste there are few employment opportunities to use their new skills, so despite their improved position as a consequence of their experience and new attributes, many are not able to transition that into jobs at home. However most workers believed that their lives has 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 their lives. A challenge for Timor-Leste and the development community is to create an environment where people bringing back new attributes can apply these such as to contribute to the development of this young nation.

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