

**TOWSON UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH**

**TRANSNATIONAL CONNECTIONS AND PERSONAL TIES:
THEORIZING THE PHILIPPINE OVERSEAS FOREIGN WORKER
EXPERIENCE**

**by
Jennifer Hardy
A thesis
Presented to the faculty of
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in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
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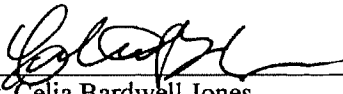
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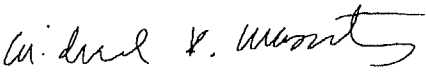
THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Jennifer Hardy entitled "Transnational Connections and Personal Ties: Theorizing the Philippine Overseas Foreign Worker Experience" has been approved by the thesis committee as satisfactorily completing the thesis requirements for the degree Master of Science.




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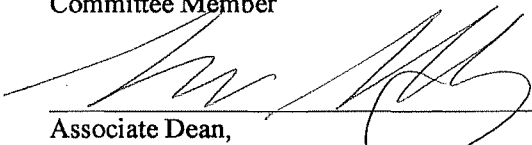
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ABSTRACT

Transnational Connections and Personal Ties: Theorizing the Philippine Overseas Foreign Worker Experience

Jennifer Hardy

This thesis examines the Philippine overseas foreign worker (OFW) experience through a lens of connection, a new framework. A platform of connection situates the individual OFW as the authority of her experience and explores the connections she identifies as significant values and/or attachments. The framework is rooted in theories of home, travel, and a politics of location, and is employed here to examine written cultural productions by and about OFWs. Source text includes fiction from the collection *Mga Hibla ng Pangarap* (“Strands of Dreams”) and non-fiction from bloggers who entered the Pinoy Expat Blog Awards (PEBA) competition from 2008-2011. These cultural productions detail connections that flow across miles and throughout life changes. These connections reveal a wider migration narrative that is individuated, complex, and emotional, yet is inextricably entwined with broad forces such as globalization and the Philippine government.

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Introduction and Method

Filipino overseas foreign workers (OFWs, alternatively shorthand for overseas Filipino workers) navigate a unique situation among global labor migrants. They are viewed by the Philippine government as a valuable source of economic input, and thus are encouraged to heroically make personal sacrifices for the good of both their family and country. Officially OFWs are encouraged to leave the Philippines but maintain loyalty to the motherland, to live separately from family to care for them. Many researchers have studied and theorized this migration phenomenon, orchestrated and marketed by a government trying to improve its own economy within the hierarchy of global capitalism. Government officials initiate this vast overseas employment endeavor, but it is not without cost: approximately 9 million Filipino children (27% of the youth population) are growing up with at least one parent absent due to migrant labor (Parreñas 2005b, 317).

Theoretical Framework: Theory of Connection

There are multiple theoretical locations from which to explore OFW experiences. This thesis introduces, defines, theorizes, and then utilizes a new approach to interpret the OFW experience: a framework of connection. The theory considers individual OFWs' connections to explore the migration experience. Connections encompass a diverse range of attachments and values, and can include objects, relationships, memories, affiliations, and other internal and external entities.

The term “connection” as defined in this thesis refers to the attachments and values that are important to OFWs, as expressed by OFWs and their close relational ties. A theory of connection involves discovering the connections (attachments and values) individual OFWs articulate as significant and glean insight into the migration experience through analysis of those connections. The theory can be used in conjunction with several research methods; this thesis employs a cultural studies methodology and examines written representations of connection authored by OFWs and OFW supporters.

A theory of connection, articulated and explored in this thesis, creates a framework for understanding the migration experience of OFWs. Such an approach is necessary in light of polarized depictions of OFWs, with the Philippine government touting OFWs as heroes and others, such as local non-profit organizations, highlighting the victimization that can accompany migration. Neither portrayal allows room for a multiplicity of experiences within and motives for migration. Additionally, other frameworks focus extensively on contrasts between uprootedness and belonging. A theory of connection allows for exploring those notions, but does not confine the OFW to nomadic identities constructed by migration status.

I propose that the OFW experience can be better understood by employing a framework of connection. The paradigm centers on what individual OFWs value – the relationships, entities, places, and beliefs that OFWs express as being meaningful within the migration context. This theory examines the connections that individual OFWs value as a lens through which to view migration. The connections that an individual values – people, places, ideas, and beliefs – reveal aspects of migration

decisions, time overseas, and the pull back toward the Philippines as a conceptualized and imagined home. Employing a theory of connection to examine migration experiences (and identity formation and autonomy within those experiences) creates an approachable point from which to begin conceptualizing the OFW.

A framework of connection is a project of belonging: how to understand inclusions, exclusions, emotional resiliency, and rootedness in distance. Examining the connections OFWs value lends insight into migration experiences as OFWs simultaneously exert agency and autonomy in a political location of neither here nor there. OFWs are located in an in-between space, maintaining ties to a homeland while developing a new life abroad. A framework of connection makes sense of this in-between space and the ties that create belonging when, under other interpretations, those considered in-between cannot ever fully belong.

A theory of connection is well suited for cultural studies analysis as employed in this thesis. The authors, bloggers, and photographers cited in chapters two and three occasionally articulate their opinions and experiences of migration directly, but more often, they write about the connections that flow across miles and throughout life changes. These connections reveal a wider migration narrative that is individuated, complex, and emotional, yet is inextricably entwined with broad forces such as globalization and the Philippine government. The way OFWs maintain their connections across borders and locations, especially via ever-evolving technology, also opens windows into the migration experience.

OFWs are not the sum of their connections, and ties do not convey the totality of an individual or group. However, connections reveal what is important to different

OFWs, and creates a theoretical web through which to explore the meaning and effect of migration for individuals. Further, examining the connections of individuals contributes to wider discussions of OFW migration as a cultural phenomenon within the context of globalization and global economic systems.

Academics have employed frameworks such as home, travel, a politics of location, and global care in relation to Filipino workers engaging in government-promoted labor emigration (Espiritu 2003, George 1996, Lugones 1987, Mohanty 2003). A theory of connection is a necessary addition to the existing epistemologies that attempt to make sense of OFW experience. A framework of connection can include the essence of other paradigms, but it locates the connections valued by individual migrant workers as a central location for conceptualizing experience. The framework provides a counter narrative to academic discourse that would negate individuated agency exerted under constraint. It is a way of conceptualizing what it means to negotiate identity as a migrant beyond stereotypes of hero and victim.

This thesis offers a rich, nuanced platform from which to better understand OFW experiences and identity. A theoretical lens of connection helps those outside the OFW experience understand notions of rootedness, home, and the significance of identity. It also allows room for those same notions to be challenged and reformulated. OFWs maintain multiple allegiances and negotiate varied levels of belonging, in contradiction to stringent rules of belonging and affiliation. Identities can include traditional roles such as wife and mother, but upend the way those roles take shape in lived experience. Some gendered and racialized stereotypes become reinforced in migration experiences, while other OFWs challenge assumptions.

Certain OFWs embrace the Philippine government's narrative of heroic laborers that always maintain loyalty to the homeland, while others see ulterior motives of neocapitalist progress behind the propaganda's veneer of fealty to family and country as inextricably entwined. Examining connections to national and global structures in juxtaposition with deeply personal relationships weaves a more complex story of migration, and migrants exercising agency under constraint.

A theory of connection is a necessary complement to existing lenses of imagining the OFW experience. A politics of location and a theory of home create tension within and challenge ideas of belonging, living in flux, and negotiation. A theoretical platform of travel is situated in a place of uprootedness and transit. All three locations imply agitation, movement, and struggle. While struggle exists within migration, it does not account for the whole of a migrant's experience. A theory of connection allows for that struggle within multiple locations and dislocations, but it also creates space for the OFW to frame her own identity and agency within simultaneous and seemingly contradictory locations: movement and rootedness, inclusion and exclusion, travel and home.

The Filipina OFW can articulate a diversity and multiplicity of connections. Some connections reinforce belonging in geographic locations, others locate identity in beliefs or family, and still others limit resiliency and restrict autonomy. All of those connections make up the OFW experience, and all of them foster different elements of a unique individual. While the migrant must always wrestle with identity and belonging, a theory of connection situates her as a whole individual exactly where she is. The theory reflects comfort and familiarity in the in-between places, because a

fluid strengthening of some connections and weakening of others still locates the subject at the center. Place, status, and belonging, while vital, are addressed in context with the centrality of the individual agent. The OFW agent is shaped by circumstances and movement, but is not limited to discussions of place and location. Theoretical frameworks of home, travel, and politics of location are helpful for positioning the OFW within geopolitical structures and making sense of the migration experience. The theory of connection, however, retrain the focus back toward the individual agent and affirms comfort and familiarity in the in-between. Home, travel, and politics of location help make sense of migration movements. A framework of connection furthers that theoretical construction by locating the individual and the connections she values at the center of transnational migration narratives.

Methodology

This thesis uses a lens of connection to explore the migrant experience. Chapter one situates the framework of connection with three prominent platforms for understanding migration and uprootedness: home, travel, and a politics of location. These paradigms all conceptualize the migrant as subject, but take different theoretical approaches to understanding how migration shapes the self. A framework of connection is both an additional approach to understanding migration and an encompassing lens, one that allows room to explore travel, home, and a politics of location as evidenced in individual migrant connections.

Chapters two and three employ a lens of connection to theorize and explore OFW experience. The research rests on a cultural studies methodology to critically interrogate blog posts, fiction, and photographs created by current and former OFWs

and OFW supporters. The OFW supporter source material is included here to lend insight into the wider migration context and the relational nature of connection.

Connections as valued by OFWs are the core of the theory, but the writing of OFW supporters provides a more complete picture of connections and relationships.

Chapter two explores the personal and intimate connections of individual OFWs, while chapter three delves into wider connections to the nation-state and globalization, augmented by communications technology and online interaction.

This thesis is not intended to capture a totality of OFW experiences and identity through a framework of connection. The source material, written in or translated to English and largely available online, skews toward those who have access to technology, are able to write in English, and have the time and inclination to express their experiences and connections to a wider audience. This source material is valid and valuable, but must be understood within the context of privilege, resources, and cultural fluidity.

The thesis also attempts to follow feminist principles of valuing the voice and experiences of individual agents. All original source material is authored or created by current and former OFWs, or by supporters who remain in the Philippines. The source material is largely authored and created by women, with the exception of some photographs taken by male OFWs when the subject of the photograph highlights a particular discussion point. Singling out women writers and photographers for this thesis does not negate the experiences of male OFWs; a theory of connection could easily be applied to men's experiences living abroad. Rather, focusing on women acknowledges the female face of Filipina's overseas migration, and allows for deeper

discussions of connections and identity in relationship roles typically gendered female, such as caregiver and nurturer.

A framework of connection, proposed and implemented in this thesis, creates opportunities to better understand the OFW experience, especially women's lived realities abroad. Imaginings of home, travel, a politics of location, and other theoretical positions have illuminated many aspects of migration, but there is room for additional study through a paradigm of connection. Examining the connections that shape OFW experience locates the subject as fundamentally central to research. It allows space for the subject to express agitation, longing, and uprootedness, but does not assume the OFW experience is limited to these difficult negotiations between "here" and "there." OFWs might be partially or fully connected to a multitude of people, places, ideas, and entities, and that mix of connections can reveal new insight about negotiated agency within migration. Individual elements of migration theory provide broad context of specific aspects of migration, such as notions of caregiving and home. A theory of connection allows space to explore those factors while adding the perspective of many influences on identity, experience, and the self.

Chapter One: Theoretical Frameworks of Transnational Migration

Paradigms of connection

Short story excerpt - The Promise

Luvee grew up vying for attention among her five sisters and three brothers. Like a shadow, she was born somewhere in the middle of nine children. Not as pampered with attention as the youngest. Not as special as the boys and not as trusted with responsibilities as the eldest. In fact she could be roaming the rice field the whole day, and no one would be missing her at home. Many times, her mother would call her by her other sisters' name, Eva, Ligaya, or Lucy. Like a broken record as Lucy the eldest would say, Luvee would remind her mother why she was named Luvee. Lu for Luzon, because Pampanga is in Luzon, their hometown and Vee for Visayas, because her father was from Negros and Negros is in the Visayas. But her mother would not remember and she grew tired of repeating herself. That was when she cultivated a reserved attitude and created a world of dreams, all her own. Someday, she promised herself, she would be different.

Schoolmates and nearest of kin described Luvee as beautiful but somewhat a snob; mysteriously charming but arrogant. Indeed, she carried an air of detachment. Her almond eyes reflected a contrasting emotion of sadness and anger. She heard the comments but did not bother to correct or affirm. She knew she would never be understood. No one cared to really know her except her father.

She spent most of her time with her father. She knew that a silent bond of love and understanding existed between them. She knew what her father meant when he touched her forehead every time she felt sad. And she looked forward to that simple gesture of concern. The warmth of his palm, callous but tender, drove away all her insecurities. Just as she understood his hardship tilling the soil from dawn to dusk. It was as if she had watched the veins in his hand thicken through the years of plowing, planting and harvesting without complaining. She learned the value of labor but she never understood why must other people, like them, be poor. Mendicancy is bad but poverty, his father said, is some sort of a God-given condition. A test of faith to insure salvation in heaven. She did not believe him but she esteemed his faith in God. He accepted everything as part of a grand design. And she was awed by his humility before the landlord, most particularly when the produce

fell short of what was expected. He would explain about the bad weather or the lack of farm implements but would not raise his voice. She could sense the anger but her father would be in control of his emotion. And for a longer time he would be silent. She would respect the silence. But there were happy moments. She cherished the time when her father would gift her with a bird, a maya, or a butterfly. To Luvee, her father was an icon of selfless devotion. His total surrender to a Supreme Being, his devotion in tending the field till (sic) it became a sea of gold. She carried the thought long after her father died of tuberculosis. Long after the land they had tilled was taken back by the landlord.

-From the short story "To Weave a Dream" by Nena Gajudo (1994)

Filipina Overseas Foreign Workers (OFWs), when viewed from the outside and at the surface, can be interpreted as interchangeable by the nations that rely on their labor. Their bodies are racialized and essentialized to the point where "Filipina" has become pejorative in some uses, with implied reference to lowly domestic help (Barber 2000). When a person in a labor-receiving country considers an individual OFW, he or she might acknowledge the subjecthood and uniqueness of that particular migrant. But often the interaction with the migrant subject begins and ends with assumptions built on the racialized and gendered hierarchical labor that the subject provides. This hierarchy is exacerbated by global capitalist value structures of people solely for the labor they can provide and their utility in producing profit. How then can subjects from host locations begin to understand the migrant subject experience, and by extension, gain insight into individual migrant identities? On what basis can such knowledge be initiated and constructed? And how far can discussion go beyond acknowledging subjecthood and experience? Can insights into the migrant subject experience lead to the development of strategies for personal and political resistance?

The above short story excerpt, although fictional, reveals the perspective that shapes one woman who will eventually move overseas. The piece allows a reader to see the realm of influence that might shape the person this character eventually becomes. By hearing a little about the connections that this character values, the people and memories that have influenced her in positive and negative ways, the outsider gains insight into factors influencing identity and values. In turn, those insights lend depth to the influences that continue to affect the migrant in her new homeland.

Attempts to understand the references and viewpoints that shape subjects outside the self are useful, but the jump to knowing another is contingent on trust, time, and accepting the fact that knowing other subjects will only ever be partial at best. There must be a starting point for this endeavor, a location that is accessible outside the realms of academia if theory is to have an influence on widespread resistance movements. This paper is an attempt to negotiate a place of beginning, a point of embarking on traveling experiences that can build empathy and understanding of the migrant subject, more specifically the female OFW.

OFWs are in-demand sources of labor that fill racialized and gendered labor roles around the world. The official government agency tasked with overseeing migration, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, estimates that there were over 8 million documented migrants working overseas in 2008 (2010). Seventy-five percent of these documented migrants from the Philippines are female (Uy-Tioco 2007). This globalized economic force remitted \$16.4 billion in 2008, despite the global economic downturn (Aguilar 2009). The size and economic force of this

majority-female group has been of great interest to researchers in the fields of economics, sociology, globalization, cross-cultural studies, and women's studies (Barber 2010). While some advocacy groups portray Filipina overseas foreign workers as victims of the processes of globalization, other researchers such as Parreñas, Barber, and Rodriguez capture the nuance of women exerting agency under choices shaped by global relations and economies.

Returning to the above fictional account of a Filipina migrant's connections, Gajudo reveals a woman who does not conform to stereotypes of an idyllic upbringing in a home country. The migrant's identity is entwined with the very geography of the Philippines and earlier generational experiences within migration. Her name is derived from physical spaces and her formative years are spent close to the earth as a farmer's daughter. And yet home is a negotiated place with both positive and negative associations. She is literally erased in her mother's eyes, as she is interchangeable with her sisters and her mother "would not remember" her name. Luvée grows weary of repeatedly asserting her subjecthood. Throughout the story, Luvée navigates a tension between the elements of her upbringing, the homeland that she cherishes, and the poverty she struggles to escape. But at a deeper level, by seeing the different types of connections that influence her ideas of self, her negotiated location extends beyond poverty and home. She struggles to be seen, to be known, to be safe, and to have consistency. Her notions of faith are shaped not only by the faith of her father, but by her father's and her own relationship to the land. By expanding a framework from a theory of self or home and beginning with a wider framework of understanding and theorizing connections, there is more space to play, to tease out

influences, and to allow a subject freedom to acknowledge connections that do not fit into a box of acceptability. The connections do not have to meet standards for a personality test or fit nicely into the narrative preferred by the Philippine government - a construction of the OFW as hero who leaves an idyllic land for positive opportunities and betterment of family and country.

In Luvee's story, life is not fair. There is little justice or rationale as to why some people are lucky and others struggle against poverty. But she asserts her own name, a claim of personal agency, even if she grows weary of expressing it externally to a mother who never remembers. This tension between oppressive circumstances and personal agency is made highly visible through a theoretical framework of valuing and examining Luvee's connections to the people, places, emotions, and memories that have contributed to her subjecthood.

On a wider stage, global capitalist systems, a history of colonization, and the racialized projections of idealized migrant bodies that pull Filipina OFWs overseas deserve and require studied interpretation through a framework that best positions both researchers and average citizens toward understanding the migration experience. An appropriate framework must be situated in relation to existing theoretical platforms and with a proper account of agency within the constraints of global migration. Agency, and its exercise within transnational labor circuits, presents a multifaceted line of inquiry and is central to interpretations of experience.

Agency in a globalized world

Researchers must address a core theoretical conundrum when conceptualizing the OFW experience and the place of agency as it relates to subjecthood, autonomy,

choice, perception, experience, and identity. Philippine government entities promote the heroic and independent choice for workers to live abroad and express love and fealty to family and country through remittances, while some globalization theorists and advocacy organizations bemoan the victimhood of migrants who are driven away from families and homes by the forces of global capitalism (Roces 2009, Tyner 1996). Both views of agency are problematic. A victimhood approach to migration yields power to those people and entities that already hold it, doing little to support resistance, while a blind reiteration of full agency does not acknowledge the constraints under which migrants exercise their agency.

Contrasting narratives of victimhood and heroic agents dominate non-academic constructions of OFW experience, although feminist and other researchers have countered these polarizing narratives with calls for nuance and complexity in analysis. Many of the non-profit organizations that construct Filipina OFWs as victims do so out of good intentions: to further the feminist agenda, help women, and counter the government's heroic imaginings of labor migrants (Roces 2009, 270). Roces explores the language three NGOs (non-governmental organizations) select to depict Filipinas who engage in sex work, and that the term "prostituted woman" is the preferred term because it serves to "to emphasise (sic) their victimisation (sic) and lack of choice" (2009, 274). These organizations situate sex workers as victims of men, poverty, the Philippine government, employment agencies, the Philippine culture, and their own naiveté (274).

The Philippine government, although it most often defaults to promoting a narrative of heroism and affiliation to the nation-state, also constructs the OFW as a

victim in special circumstances. James A. Tyner (1996) explores competing narratives in a Philippine government special report, where Filipina entertainers are depicted as “willing victims.” Acknowledging true victimhood would imperil the dominant depictions of heroic migrants, so the Senate states that OFWs freely choose to become victims. Philippine Senate Report 1681 faults women who engage in prostitution, both for “accepting” low pay rates and for taking the “easiest” way to make money:

To make ends meet, because she has accepted pay rates lower than that stipulated, and because of the pressure from her family at home, who are counting solely on her to deliver them from their economic hardships, she would in the extreme, turn to the easiest way of making money – prostitution. And hence, she herself becomes a willing victim (1991, 24).

In this statement, the government simultaneously absolves itself of responsibility for a lack of domestic economic opportunities and for some women becoming victims when they migrate. There is no acknowledgment that the factors leading to migration fall along a spectrum between free will (constructed by the government as heroism) and constrained choice (constructed by advocacy groups as victimization).

The place of the hero/victim dichotomy and the resultant displacement of agency can even be represented in the same OFW, turned into a token for preferred political lines. Barber (2000) recounts the experience of Sara Balibagan, a domestic worker convicted of killing her employer in the United Arab Emirates. Special interest groups project their own ideologies on her conviction, imprisonment, and return to the Philippines:

Her status as a contemporary heroine arises in part because, initially, she took desperate measures to defend her honour, and subsequently she must relive the experience with courage to provide an example of Filipino triumph against

adversity—but through suffering. In this, the Balibagan story can be read strategically by different actors to extract different sorts of meanings. For the state, it is a story about its caretaking role in assisting distressed migrants. For potential migrants, it provides a narrative of hope about fateful suffering, also of survival against great odds. For NGOs (non-governmental organizations) it becomes a cautionary tale about the pitfalls of migration and the need to address domestic and international policies (Barber 2000, 407).

These competing narratives not only construct the OFW experience from the outside, but victim/hero formulations turn individuals into caricatures and negate the place of agency within political, economic, and familial constraints. There is a need for existing and new frameworks to better understand the OFW experience and the negotiated agency that empowers women within particular social and political locations.

Groves and Chang's (1999) research project captures the tension of agency when the two researchers arrive at two different assessments of Filipina laborers in Hong Kong, one an envisioning of "empowerment" and the other of "submission." Their dual assessments of systems that shape power and empowerment land on opposite ends of the agency/victimhood continuum, with Groves seeing a "repressive, monolithic nature of power that bears down on individuals" and Chang finding "power as a resource that is everywhere. Its strings can be pulled by everyone, no matter how socially or economically disadvantaged" (261). A realistic theoretical location of agency falls between their views.

Agency is directly entwined with power, and power must be viewed through a multifaceted prism that accepts multiple contributors to power structures. Power cannot be wholly understood through combinations of gender, socio-economics, class, race, and other power analysis prisms. Power is shaped by these differences,

but it also supersedes them, becoming greater than a simple mixture of differentials (Groves and Chang 1999, 262). Agency can in turn be theorized in relation to the power structures that limit it, but only in part. Agency is more than resistance and should not solely be defined as opposition built under oppression. OFW agents may negotiate their agency under constraint, but their subjecthood, personhood, and agency remains intact even in the most oppressive circumstances. Acknowledgement and a theoretical position of maintaining agency under oppression should not reach the level of falsely elevating a subject to the position of fully liberated hero (263). False levels of agency can be just as dangerous as negating agency. Both downplay the human subjecthood of the OFW and create tokens out of real, lived experience.

It is important to reinforce concepts of agency of OFWs, especially through listening to a migrant's perceptions and conditions under which they exert agency. Barber's (2010) interviews with Filipina OFWs reveal that most "have assessed their work abroad, even with all its hardships, as relatively empowering on a personal level" (157). This agency is shaped by a location of ambivalence to Barber, as she captures stories of women desiring opportunity and even adventure, but who are torn by a longing for connections in the Philippines and in their new locations. This "ambivalent agency" encapsulates the simultaneous expressions of fatalism and empowerment expressed by the women Barber interviewed, and serves as a useful paradigm through which to view other theories that inform migrant frameworks (2010, 157-58).

Barber also notes that agency is a process as much as a state or something to be exercised. In her research, "all of the women I have met negotiate confining and

liberating tendencies in Philippine culture as they live it” (2000, 405). Some of that negotiation is between agency and the “Filipino cultural idiom of *bahala na*, which communicates not only a sense of fatalism but also an expression that fate is ‘in God’s hands’” (2000, 403). This negotiated location between fate and agency likely allows women to endure more difficult circumstances than if they believed solely in agency, but could also serve to keep women in situations that greatly limit their agency for a longer period of time. Although women take decisive actions as agents, “they act within a regime of power and discipline from global political economy and skewed development that manages to capture women’s hopes for their future despite its personal risks” (Barber 2000, 406).

The standpoint of negotiated agency, or Barber’s “ambivalent agency,” serves to ground further discussion of theoretical frameworks for understanding the migration experience. Women migrants must and do exercise agency as full subjects, but they do so under the constraints imposed by global capitalism and power differentials. While some academics portray Filipina OFWs as victims of the processes of globalization, many more researchers capture the nuance of women exerting agency under choices shaped by global relations and economies. There needs to be a better way to think about OFWs, to try to understand lived experience under restriction and opportunity. Without an impetus to understand, it is easy to ignore the difficulty that can come with the OFW experience or create false categorizations that do not honor or recognize the depth of OFW subjecthood. In the following chapters of this thesis, the place of agency and choice, of acting and being acted upon, will be explored as evidenced through individual cultural representations and expressions of

Filipina OFWs. Several theoretical platforms can and have been employed to make sense of the migrant subject, but with all platforms, theorists must keep the place of negotiated and embodied agency in the foreground.

Weaving a theoretical framework: Travel, politics of location, and home

Three categorical frameworks are especially influential in crafting a framework of connection as a theoretical platform from which to explore the migrant experience. These theories help situate the contextual basis of an additional lens through which to view migration. Detailing these existing theories establishes a baseline of current theoretical positioning of OFW migration experiences and reveals a space for an additional framework of connection. When considered together the frameworks of travel, location, and home create a nuanced lens into the personal and political motivations behind migration. These intersecting frameworks both situate and help to develop tenets of a theory of connection. Exploring location, home, and travel also positions the OFW within the migration experience and at different points of longing, belonging, exclusion, and inclusion. Taken together, these three frameworks situate and support a more complex theorization of connectionism. This section provides an overview of the politics of travel, location, and home and the contributions each framework makes to a working knowledge of the migrant experience, and how the addition of a theory of connection can enhance theorizations of migration.

Travel

This theory is rooted in María Lugones' work on "world" travel and loving perception (1987). For Lugones, seeing another as a subject requires empathy, that

the traveler “see with her eyes,” and that “I see both of us as we are constructed in her world, that I witness her own sense of herself from within her world [...] because only then could I cease to ignore her” (8). Lugones observes that people outside the dominant culture are forced to travel between “worlds” in a way that those already inside dominant power structures do not need to consider (10-11). The theory presented in this thesis—one of “world” travel through exploring the migrant subject’s connections—resituates the responsibility for traveling to the subject more comfortably situated within dominant culture.

In tangent with the concept of “world” traveling, Lugones also presents the concept of “loving perception” by framing it in opposition to arrogant perception (4-5). Because migration is often theorized with a focus on belonging and insider versus outsider status, it is easy for those within the “world” sanctioned by dominant culture to slip into arrogant perception of the migrant subject. The theory of connection proposed here helps to mitigate nativist tendencies of arrogant perception because the theoretical platform is positioned in a location of learning and exploration, with minimal value judgments during the traveling experience. All travel and loving perception must account for vulnerabilities and, conversely, exploitations relative to “insider” status. Loving perception and travel must be based on openness and willingness to experience discomfort with an emphasis on the “love” within travel interactions.

Mohanty (2003) seeks a balance between agency/individualism and group identity/collectivity. Western ideas of the individual can actually put greater distance between women in “world” travel. Attempting to world travel to a subject through a

cultural and ahistorical vacuum places restrictions on depths of understanding and exploration. Mohanty observes, “This notion of the individual needs to be self-consciously historicized if as feminists we wish to go beyond the limited bourgeois ideology of individualism, especially as we attempt to understand what cross-cultural sisterhood might be made to mean” (115). The theory of connection is shaped through a framework of world travel between individuals, but it should be employed in an accurate cultural context with attention to histories, globalization, and politics. Theorists must use caution to avoid falling into the trap of over-emphasizing individualism that takes away a group’s political power for resistance, group obligations, and the group’s place in history. At the same time, individual connections do inform perception and energy for resistive actions. A framework of connection creates a space for authentic world travel that allows for meeting “The real challenge [that] arises in being able to craft a notion of political unity without relying on the logic of appropriation and incorporation and, just as significantly, a denial of agency” (116).

At the most basic level, the subjects from a host location can “world” travel toward a migrant subject by exploring the connections that shape and influence the migrant. The connections that shape the self/subject are less exposed to rapid-fire judgment and lead to easier discussion by a wider range of individuals than attempting to tease out the nuance of psychological traits. Such academic discussion is best left to persons with expertise in different academic fields, such as psychologists and anthropologists. However, limiting “world travel” to those with

academic expertise greatly decreases the potential political resistance that can flow from world traveling to and with the migrant.

The premise of “world” travel shifts the burden of initiating the labor of “knowing” and connecting from the migrant subject and newcomer to a more equitable and dialogic exchange. It is not a matter of “welcoming” the migrant, as welcome can be withheld at a whim or given and retracted based on perceived attitudes and behaviors of the migrant subject. Rather than determining where a particular migrant subject falls on the welcome/rejection spectrum, the theory of connection asks for a shift. This exploration can serve as a tangible step to create empathy and break stereotypes of monolithic migrant groups. When extended in the form of what migrant connections can communicate about possible values and identity, the world traveler can gain insight into what might contribute to the migrant perception of self and subjecthood. According to Lowe (1996), “every social formation includes a multiplicity of social contradictions” (147). A theoretical platform that places value on a spectrum of connections is positioned to also entertain contradiction within the migrant subject.

Politics of Location

A theoretical framework for a politics of location is essential for contextualizing a framework of connection. Chandra Talpade Mohanty provides a rhetorical position for a politics of location by describing “the historical, geographical, cultural, psychic, and imaginative boundaries that provide the ground for political definition and self-definition” (2003, 106). Yen Le Espiritu in turn perceives a politics of location to be “how immigrants use literal or symbolic ties to

the homeland as a form of resistance to places and practices in the host country that are patently ‘not home’” (2003, 158).

This politics of location is rooted in history and culture. Any exploration of migrant connection, or what those connections imply about migrant identity, must be viewed within the context of history (Mohanty 2003, 113). Women migrants, even if they have made migration journeys under oppressive circumstances, still exercise agency and affect the very power structures that oppress them. A tension between the individual and the group partially comprises the unique political location of both the colonized and the migrant. Such rootedness in history and culture has temporal, spatial, and gendered aspects that connect to space and location. Physical space and the interactions that occur in those locations shape and inform the experiences of migrants and their supporters.

Another challenge arises if theorists carelessly approach identifying political location through experience. Mohanty (2003) observes that it is easy to presume a location where, “experience is seen as being immediately accessible, understood, and named. The complex relationships between behavior and its representation are either ignored or made irrelevant; experience is collapsed into discourse and vice versa” (119). Yen Le Espiritu, however, finds that discourse itself is a creation and expression of power in that “the production of discourses of immigration, both popular and intellectual, is important because modes of representation are themselves forms of power rather than mere reflections of power” (2003, 207). Feminist theorists must continually ask “to what end?” in the world travel experience. Even if the purpose of travel is to gain insight, it must go beyond interaction for the sake of

creating a point of contact with the other. “Experience collapsed into discourse” is a caution that informs the framework of connection. Under this theory, world travel situated within a framework of connections will lead to additional points of connection, which can in turn motivate political action. The aim of a theory of connection is not limited to conversation; it is to “world” travel, which by definition means that the traveler will have a new experience, too. And that traveling experience can shape politics and inform resistance to systems that perpetuate injustice.

Resistance might focus on systems that racialize migrants for certain types of jobs, insufficient legal structure to protect migrants while abroad, or corruption of authorities (among many possible resistance movements). It is not certain that travel will inform resistance in every person, but it creates the space for a spirit of resistance to grow and take root. It will not lead to perfect resistance at first, but will inform and cultivate discussions and action.

Exploration of experience can help to bridge gaps in understanding a politics of location when employed appropriately because “The transnational or cross-cultural is forged on the basis of memories and counter narratives, not on an ahistorical universalism” (Mohanty 2003, 119). Finding ways to authentically world travel across bridges built on a theoretical framework of connection establishes “cross-cultural, old-age perspectives founded on humility, the gradual chipping away of our assumed, often ethnocentric centers of self/other definitions” (119). Politics of location and experience are not shaped in one direction or the other. They shape each other with mutuality and congruence (118).

Geographic and cultural locations that were occupied by colonizers have their own particular location. Mohanty finds that “Movement among cultures, languages, and complex configurations of meaning and power have always been the territory of the colonized” (122). The location of the colonized is positioned in uprootedness and appropriation – movement *is* the location. And it is reasonable to extend that location of movement to Third World cultures that were not “officially” colonized by Western powers, but must now participate in the exchange of people and goods required by the machinations of global capitalism. A theory of connection helps to address this political location of displacement.

Although the politics of location is rooted in history and physical space, “By not insisting on a history or a geography but focusing on a temporality or struggle,” Mohanty creates “the historical ground from which I can define myself in the United States of the twenty-first century, a place from which I can speak to the future – not the end of an era but the promise of many” (120-21). Because Mohanty’s vision of location is one of temporality and struggle, it works well to help theorize the migrant experience. It is in this, a

Reterritorialization through struggle, that allows me a paradoxical continuity of self, mapping and transforming my political location. It suggests a particular notion of political agency, since my location forces and enables specific modes of reading and knowing the dominant. The struggles I choose to engage in are then an intensification of these modes of knowing – an engagement on a different level of knowledge (122).

The act of struggle both increases understanding of individual and group political locations, and also establishes new layers of knowledge about power structures (which can in turn be used to resist unjust systems).

Mohanty cautions that any concept that hopes to interpret a politics of location must acknowledge that, “truth (as well as the ‘real’) is always mediated and dependent on the interpretive framework” (113). The theoretical lenses through which the politics of location are assessed are never value-neutral. Theorists at all levels must be aware that “feminist frameworks are predicated on self-conscious political choices and interpretive frames of the world” (113). Such cautions apply especially to the framework of connection presented in this thesis; by design it is intended to facilitate political resistance through heightened and studied “world” travel experience to and with the migrant subject. Anyone employing a framework of connection must understand personal politics, biases, history, and experiences that could shape world travel. Such caution does not undercut the efficacy of the framework, however. It simply must be employed with caution and awareness of personal politics, not attempting to be rid of personal locations altogether. The loving perception required in world travel, as described above, can help balance personal locations with authentic “world” travel.

Home

Rosemary Marangoly George and Yen Le Espiritu offer compelling theoretical contributions to the concept of home within the migration context. Other academics also write about home when discussing migration, but George and Espiritu are 1) intimately familiar with the OFW migration experience and 2) structure their theoretical exploration in a manner that is suited to pairing with ideas of travel and a politics of location.

George's 1996 work *The Politics of Home* assesses the concept of home in relation to global English literature. She challenges the stability and rootedness of typical constructions of home and sees the ongoing practices of inclusion and exclusion inherent in Western interpretations of home (2). Home becomes a place of categorization, rootedness, and conditional and hierarchical welcome when explored through a Western colonial/post-colonial paradigm. George theorizes:

The basic organizing principle around which the notion of the 'home' is built is a pattern of select inclusions and exclusions. Home is a way of establishing difference. Homes and home-countries are exclusive. Home [...] along with gender/sexuality, race, and class, acts as an ideological determinant of the subject. The term 'home country' in itself expresses a complex yoking of ideological apparatuses considered necessary for the existence of subjects: the notion of belonging, of having a home, and a place of one's own. And yet, in the very reference to a 'home-country' lies the indication that the speaker is away from home. This distance from the very location that one strives to define, is, I believe intrinsic to the definition that is reached (2).

As "home" is generated in distance, the principle of home as an avenue to theorize migration may not capture the lived experience of migrant subjects at a sufficiently close location. *Theorizing* home, ironically, becomes a practice of arms-length discussion and constant negotiation between insider/outsider status, while the *perception* of home is one of intimacy and belonging. Shifting the theoretical paradigm from exclusions of defining home to the inclusive perspective of connection can reduce these divisions and distinctions. Through its intentionally inclusive nature, connection is less about categorization and determination, and focuses more fully on exploration.

Throughout her book, George expertly navigates creating definitions for discussions of home, but then brings those definitions and categorizations back to a

simultaneity of locations, attachments, and subjects. At its core, though, the concept of home will always fall back to questions of where “home” really is and who really belongs in that home. When focused too closely on definitions and interpretations of individual and collective imagined homes, “Homes and nations are defined in the instances of confrontation with what is considered ‘not-home,’ with the foreign, with distance. Ultimately then, distance in itself becomes difference” (4). Who then is privileged to delineate who is home and “not-home?” And whose definition of home is considered most valid in different locations? As George explains,

What all this indicates is that homes are not neutral places. Imagining a home is as political an act as is imagining a nation. Establishing either is a display of hegemonic power. Similarly, having all these markers laid out for one to step into as part of a naturalized socialization process is an indication of the power wielded by class, community and race (6).

When theorizing the migrant home in relation to or in opposition to “home” as constructed by those who hold greater power, reproducing inequality and a lower hierarchical subjecthood for the migrant is likely to follow. Feminist research goals should and do aim to resist reproduction of established power structures, so another paradigm must compliment these imaginings of home to destabilizing hierarchies and patriarchal ways of knowing. As “distance becomes difference,” it is crucial to find a theoretical bridge between the difference established by interpretations of home and the relationship between migrant subject and host location subject. The paradigm of connection can create space to “world” travel across this distance.

In any discussion of home, it is important not to limit concepts of home to the domestic realm or a physical location (George 2003, 3) because “home-country and home resonate differently from different locations for different subjects and often

even for the same subject at different locations” (17). As personal and group interpretations of “home” and affiliation are constantly in flux, the framework of connection allows for world travel without initiating the conversation in a place of establishing difference.

Much of the theoretical positioning of the migrant subject to date has rested in notions of belonging, displacement, temporality, and “home.” As the remainder of this thesis employs a theoretical platform of connection to explore the Filipina migrant experience, Yen Le Espiritu’s work in *Homebound: Filipino American Lives across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (2003) is especially informative. Espiritu observes that much of the academic and popular culture discussion of immigration,

Tends to begin with the premise that immigrants are a ‘problem.’ It is striking how this literature locates the problem *not* in the political and economic oppression or violence that produces massive displacements and movements of people, but within the bodies and minds of the migrants themselves (6-7).

The theoretical paradigm of migrant connections resituates discussions from a social issue to a platform that begins with the subject, which can then be extended to inform policy and theoretical discussions in turn. The theory shifts the immigrant face or body from evidence of a “problem” that needs fixing to a source of knowledge and partnership in the “world” traveling experience.

Espiritu explores the concept of home throughout the text of *Home Bound*, and “home” is a useful construct for theorizing the Asian migrant experience. The practice of conceptualizing and theorizing “home,” however, can be problematic when used as the sole theoretical platform for “world” traveling because, as Espiritu observes, “home making is most often a way of establishing difference and a means

of jostling for power, homes are as much about inclusions and open doors as they are about exclusions and closed borders” (Espiritu 2003, 2). At its essence, “home making is really border making; it is about deciding who is in as well as who is out” (205). So while “home” is theoretically important to any discussion of subjecthood, it is also a place where subjects are included, excluded, and delineated. Espiritu also suggests that by framing the Filipina migrant in the West in language and structures of “home,” it excludes a full world traveling experience because “in a country that defines its nationalism in terms of whiteness and patriarchy, Filipino immigrant women in particular are clearly ‘not home,’ because they are not white and male” (14). Rather, when the migrant subject can share connections that have shaped the self, regardless of labels and categorization, it could possibly be easier to engage in “loving perception” beyond the bounds of patriarchy.

Ideas of belonging and concern with fitting in a place – here, there, or somewhere in between – are legitimate concerns for an OFW to consider as the subject works through individual concepts of identity and place. Outsiders, however, must use caution as they address issues of belonging as tied to migration. Lisa Lowe (1996) suggests that marginalization and stereotyping exist on either end of the nativism-assimilation spectrum, and she encourages scholars to avoid either extreme when theorizing the migration experience (75-81). The theoretical platform of valuing the migrant subject’s connections leaves space to account for multiplicity in feelings of belonging and affiliation, and for conflicting feelings toward those multiplicities. In addition, as a conceptual construct, focusing on the migrant’s connections to many different entities resists essentializing the migration experience.

Migrant workers do not have a choice about wrestling with issues such as travel, the politics of location, and home. If a researcher, located on the outside of migrant culture and experience, chooses to engage in these questions, she needs a structural framework through which to attempt to understand the migrant. The theory of connection emerges in concepts of travel, politics of location, and home, yet it also encompasses all of these ideas. A framework of connection can embrace those OFWs who may not fit traditional conceptualizations of home and labor. Connection can most importantly provide a more accurate and nuanced insight into the migrant account of agency. Connectionism is a component in each of the three theories, yet it also stands apart as a theoretical location. Connections are important in situating travel, home, and location, but these theories are not premised in exploration of what the subject reports as meaningful.

Uniting theoretical paradigms in a framework of connection

The theoretical platform proposed in this thesis is one of approaching a “world” traveling experience to and with a migrant subject from a starting point of connection. The goal is to comprehend the connections (defined as values and attachments) that the OFW herself highlights in her own experience. A theoretical paradigm that values migrant subject connections opens the possibility that the people, experiences, entities, and locations a migrant subject values can be different than prevailing cultural norms would typically permit. Instead of idealized views of the subject being shaped by “home” and “family” (with the potential for misunderstanding of those terms on the part of the world traveling participant), the migrant subject is allowed to express connections that fall outside concepts defined

by others. These connections might be expected, such as to family, friends, or beliefs, or they might be more surprising, such as to negative memories, pets, or untraditional interpretations of identity. Focusing on connections frees the world travel experience to go beyond classical delineations of “home.” Beginning the world travel experience with the framework of exploring the connections of the migrant subject allows the subject discretion in what she wishes to share.

Feminist research methods call for the researcher to understand what she brings into a research scenario and the presuppositions she carries into interactions with other subjects and representations of other selves (Reinharz 1992). I am not a Filipina migrant, and therefore come to the research experience as an outsider on many levels. The theory of connection is appealing in that it positions the researcher as true learner at the beginning of the cultural studies analysis, and it helps to reframe personal notions of home, belonging, welcome, and inside/outside status. When the researcher merely examines connections, she is more open to a range of what those connections might be. The world traveling experience is therefore not burdened with personal ideas of what “home” is; the researcher is free to hear about the individual people, objects, sensory experiences and memories that are important and/or helped shape a particular person’s perspective, worldview, and valued relations. The idea of home, while still vitally important, becomes a location for the migrant to define, because the researcher is beginning at a place of exploring connection.

The theoretical framework of the migrant subject’s connections cannot achieve a complete and authentic understanding of the whole of the OFW self or experience. No theoretical framework can make such a lofty claim when a subject

from a host location attempts to world travel and understand the OFW and migrant experience. This framework helps to both situate the migrant subject and create points of reference and touchstones of conversation to facilitate understanding the migrant experience to the extent that it is possible.

Additionally, connection can create a location for political engagement and potential for resistance among non-academic groups. While frameworks of home, location, travel, and connection are vital for understanding migrant experience, feminist research principles call for using theory and the understanding gained from theory as a springboard to inform resistance (Reinharz 1992, 251-52). The benefit of using connection as a theoretical touchstone is that it is accessible to academics and non-academics alike. People at all levels of academic achievement can begin to dialogue with individual OFWs and learn about the connections that have shaped the subject. Part of this dialogue can also include mutual world travel with both parties exploring the connections valued by the other subject. It is impossible to fully know another subject, but valuing and learning about the connections that have helped to shape the subject can create points of empathy and commonality, build additional connections, and break down boundaries between the researched and the traditionally-privileged position of the researcher. For a general population, any commonality or empathy with the migrant subject is a success that, with appropriate outlets and grassroots organizing, can have a tangible effect on progressive coalition building. Placing value on and learning about the connections of a migrant subject – the forces, people and experiences that have shaped individual identity – creates space to understand the migrant as more than “other” and more than a country of

origin. Valuing, discussing, and synthesizing the connections that shape migrant identity is accessible, scalable, practical, and generates a space for resistance to popular narratives that group migrants into monolithic collectives.

“World” travel to learn about the connections that shape a migrant subject can only be undertaken with the migrant’s expressed consent and participation. Exploring connections should not be undertaken to obtain knowledge for knowledge’s sake or for voyeuristic insight, but to build empathy and understanding that can lead to participation in many levels of resistance. It is vital that any world traveling be closely coupled with “loving perception,” in that the goal is not to exploit knowledge, but to have a practicable theory with which to approach the migrant subject’s experience and identity. The intent of the theory is to couple “loving perception” with action, whether through progressive resistance to unjust treatment of migrants or through greater theoretical insight into what is truly important to specific migrant subjects.

Finally, exploring the OFW and migrant experience via a theoretical framework of connection and world travel resituates the standard means of understanding the immigrant subject and migration movements. Espiritu finds that proponents and opponents of immigration both fixate on migration as a “problem” in need of solutions. For even the most outspoken activist on either extreme of the immigration debate,

Even as they disagree on the relative costs and benefits of immigration, both sides nevertheless approach immigration as a problem to be solved, focusing their research on the immigrants’ social, economic, and cultural integration into the United States. This approach to immigration uncritically accepts U.S. white middle-class culture, viewpoints, and practices as the norm. Instead of questioning the ideological and material power of these normative standards,

immigration advocates have at times sought to ‘prove’ that immigrants belong (2003, 208).

Resituating an understanding of the immigrant subject through a framework of connection shifts the discussion away from one of inclusion or exclusion based on notions of gatekeeping and belonging. Connection creates space and potential for “world” travel and authentic engagement at the nexus of loving perception and exchange of experience. Connection is more encompassing and less value-laden than other theoretical platforms of understanding, and allows for exploring at the level of the autonomous subject, rather than as a mere embodiment of a problem needing to be solved.

A further significance of this theory of connection is that it lends insight not only into immigrant experiences and values; it can clarify and delineate identity formation. Identity under a framework of connection is complex, layered, multi-located, and shaped by absence, presence, loss, and togetherness. Identity is shifting and porous, formed by the connections of an immigrant that go beyond ideations of home, belief, or location. Mohanty describes how “reconceptualizations of identity” are essential in achieving goals of decolonization, and “history, memory, emotion, and affectional ties are significant cognitive elements” of constructing and situating those identities (2003, 8). Theorizing and exploring connections of the migrant subject is a practical way to investigate the meaning behind individual histories, memories, emotions, and affectional ties, in turn opening avenues to resist colonial and oppressive power systems.

Identity and transformative connections are constantly in flux, even more so during times of transnational migration. By examining the myriad of connections the

migrant subject values during the transnational experience, the fluidity of migrant identity can come into sharp relief. Connections help contextualize and illuminate the rootedness and significance of identity, but connections, in their variability, reveal how a sense of rootedness can be challenged.

Conclusion: Employing a Framework of Connection to Theorize the Transnational Migrant Experience

The following two chapters put the framework of connection into practice, exploring the connections of individual OFWs from the Philippines. While the theoretical framework of connection can apply to many different research methods, these chapters specifically utilize a cultural studies approach to examine texts authorized by current and former transnational migrants and other OFW supporters. The first piece of source material is a collection of literature authored by OFW women and supporters about their lives within and outside the migration context. The second source of OFW resources is the PEBA blog award competition. These sources were selected to offer two fields in which the framework of connection could be explored. Literary expressions, such as those contained in the book *Mga Hibla ng Pangarap* (which can be translated to English as *Strands of Dreams*), give authors freedom to explore themes of migration with creativity and imagination. Narratives recounted on blogging platforms, such as entries to the PEBA blog awards explored here, are indicative of the future of migrant expression, where technology facilitates ongoing connections across space and time. Neither source is wholly representative of the OFW experience (given constraints such as time to write, command of written English, access to technology, and other considerations), but both sources can offer insight into the OFW experience when viewed through the lens of connection. This

world traveling experience is made richer when insights into home and the politics of location as articulated by Espiritu, George and Mohanty compliment the prime theoretical framework.

Luvee, from the excerpt at the opening of this chapter, describes herself as “like a shadow” to her family. The following chapters of this thesis are an exercise in world travel with and to various migrant subjects, a joint effort to lighten that shadow, even a little, through the theoretical framework of connection.

Chapter Two: “When we bend, it hurts” – personal connections of the OFW

A friend who lives in Manila reports that he has often heard people say Filipinos are “great overseas workers because they are like bamboo. No matter what happens they can flex and they will not break.” At a conference, a man from the West reiterated this assertion. A social worker stood up and said to the man, “We may be like bamboo, but every time we bend, it hurts.”

Interpersonal relationships are mediated, negotiated, and layered. Employing a framework of connection allows those outside the migrant community to examine these relationships and the influence and meaning they have for the OFW experience. The writings of Filipina OFWs serve as cultural indicators of the types of connections that influence their experience and the value they place on those connections. The connections range from those easily recognized, such as to children, spouses, and parents, to more diverse and subtle threads, such as to faith, pets, buildings, memories, and employers. A framework of connection is flexible and does not place inherent value on certain personal connections over others – one OFW’s attachment to her diary may be highly significant, and it is no less authentic than another OFW’s attachment to a close family member. This lens of connection allows the outsider to see beyond stereotypes of the OFW, such as the assumption that overseas workers are like bamboo, and that they will bend and never break. A lens of connection allows those outside the OFW experience to better understand one woman’s response to the bamboo stereotype: “When we bend, it hurts.”

For the purposes of discussion, exploring different types of connections is useful. The categories detailed here are by no means exhaustive, but they are those most evident in the sample collection of OFW writing and photographs available through selected source material. This chapter details a subsection of OFWs' personal connections, such as to family, friends, community, and faith. Insights into the personal connections OFWs value in turn lend insight into the migration experience, the constraints of migration, and the emotional journeys that transpire as migrants maintain connections while their physical location is in flux.

This thesis relies on a framework of connection (incorporating the complimentary lenses of home, travel, and location) to contextualize and process the OFW experience. Source material includes short stories in the book *Mga Hibla ng Pangarap* ("Strands of Dreams"), blog posts by bloggers who entered the PEBA blogging competition from 2008-2011, and as a supplemental and illustrative source, the 2011 PEBA photo competition "Where the Heart Is."

Mga Hibla ng Pangarap, a project of the Kanlungan Center Foundation, is "a collection of poems, essays, dramas, and short stories about the experiences of migrant women" (Alunan 4). The migrant center asked female current and former OFWs to contribute because

These experiences need to be seen through the eyes of the women because they are the ones who experience double oppression - as migrant workers and as women. Every page is a challenge to hear and look at the status of women, especially the migrant, inside and outside of Philippine society (Alunan 4).

The PEBA blogging competition is rooted in a similar location of desiring to illuminate the experiences of OFWs through their own expressions. The Pinoy Expat Blog Awards were founded July 1, 2008, in response to the growing popularity of

blogs as a conduit of OFW communication and expression. The organization has since grown into a new media conglomeration through the Kablogs portal, an online journal, and the PEBA Help initiative, which seeks to illuminate injustices faced by individual OFWs and direct OFWs and families to appropriate resources (PEBA “About Us”). Both the stories in *Mga Hibla ng Pangarap* and the blogs from entrants to various PEBA competitions help illuminate the personal connections of specific OFWs.

Children

The transnational relationships between mothers and children is a focal point of existing academic research on Filipina OFWs, yet examining these relationships through a lens of connection yields insight that extends beyond role fulfillment. Focusing on the connection between mothers and children, rather than on the mothering role and how it is carried out across borders, is another approach to understanding the experience of migration. The role and responsibility of motherhood is part of the connection between mothers and children, but not the whole of the connection. Elements of love, a sense of home, and negotiated location all shape the connections between mothers and children, whether living separately or together.

There is extensive existing research on Filipina OFWs and transnational motherhood, especially on the yearning that exists within both mother and child. These connections have been well documented, particularly by writers such as Rhacel Parreñas. A framework of connection is useful not only for assessing these studied components of longing and attempts at maintaining relationship across distance, but also for less obvious ideations of the OFW mother’s experience. Longing,

homesickness, and absence are part of the existing narrative, but the paradigm of connection creates a platform for understanding nuanced and ambivalent relationship components. Ideations of connection exemplified in first-person PEBA blog competition writers and authors in *Mga Hibla ng Pangarap* include mothers who had been apart from children but are now reunited, and surrogate motherhood of children who remain in the Philippines (Francesca “OFWs, It Pays to be Honest” 2009; Sarmiento “Weekend with Family” 2011; Enjoy “Embracing Motherhood 2009).

Several authors at one time were separated from their children, but found resources to bring children to live with them abroad. Blogger Ana Sarmiento celebrates her reunification with her husband and daughter, who had just joined her in Dubai in 2011. She balances her “5/6 days a week of hard work” with trips on the weekend. She describes that “I’m always excited to be with my family during this time since my daughter and hubby just came here last month. I see to it that we have quality time together after 3 years of being separated from them” (“Weekend with Family” 2011). Sarmiento’s narrative of reunification is one of relief, joy, and a belief that mothers and children simply belong together.

Other situations of mother/child reunification are more nuanced. Francesca (“OFWs, It Pays to be Honest” 2009) postponed formalizing her relationship with her fiancée in France until an annulment in the Philippines would allow her marriage to be legally recognized in both countries. In addition to a personal commitment to honesty, formalizing the marriage in both locations allowed her to legally bring her underage children to France. If she had presented herself as single in France before her annulment in the Philippines was official,

I would pay dearly. I cannot petition my children to live with me in France. Presenting my self as single to French govt, (sic) is a form of lying, on top, denying to them my three minor children in Philippines. How can I petition them if they don't exists (sic) in my future French residency records?

Being reunited with her children and ensuring that they are recognized by the French government was more important than quickly solidifying her connection to her French fiancée.

Other women, when fulfilling the role of mother, have more ambiguous feelings toward their children joining them overseas. Typical notions of home and the role of motherhood dictate that mothers should want to be reunited with their children at all costs, and that children most naturally “belong” with their biological mothers. An OFW mother in Singapore, who goes by the screen name “Enjoy,” upends those notions in a 2009 post entitled “Embracing Motherhood” on her blog *A Piece of Keyk*. She recounts her feelings immediately after her two daughters joined her overseas in Singapore:

Honestly, me too are (sic) having mixed emotions about our migration. This is going to be a major adjustment for both Gard and I. We're happy that kids have finally joined us but personally, I also have this sort of discomfort in assuming motherhood single-handedly. Back in Pinas, my mother in-law used to assist me in looking after them. I could go to work without worrying about my kids. I could stay late in the office and still have peace of mind knowing they're safe. But now, I'm worrying about how our everyday life would be like once they go to school and I get a job.

Examining “Enjoy's” ambiguous feelings toward hands-on motherhood is most effective when using a lens of connection. The blog audience is then allowed to view the relationship between mother and daughters from a perspective that places the mother at the center, rather than being weighted with feelings that the day-to-day

presence of children will allow the author to be more at “home” while abroad. A framework of connection creates space for understanding that motherhood and mothering relationships are negotiated. Instead of essentializing and romanticizing mothers, a framework of connection allows those outside the OFW community to understand transnational motherhood as unique experiences with common threads.

De-romanticizing notions of home and motherhood also creates space to process the OFW mother’s experience when she cuts ties to children in the Philippines. Although her story is told through her cousin’s blog (Niña Simon’s *Pinaywriter’s Oral Diarrhea*), Clemen eventually discontinues sending support to her two children after her husband in the Philippines passes away. The children are in Simon’s mother’s care, and “She didn’t want to look like the enemy, but there was a time that she had to tell the boys the awful truth. Their mother, my aunt, had found someone new, she didn’t have a job and there was no money coming in” (“My Mom’s Quasi-Orphanage” 2011). Through the lens of connection, there are small glimpses of the OFW who loses a spouse and subsequently fails to send support to her sons. The reasoning behind this move is not clear from Niña’s perspective, but the location and role of surrogate mothering and love is obvious. There appears to even be a small spark of resentment on Niña’s part for the care work that her mother bestowed on her nieces and nephews: “My mother has never been out of the country. She has never been on an airplane. But she has been a surrogate mother to so many children of OFWs that it seems her burden has been heavier than those who have left their kids” (“Quasi-Orphanage” 2011).

Instead of moving to quick conclusions about an unfeeling mother or someone who lacks culturally accepted norms of mothering bonds, rooting this narrative of detachment in a theory of connection allows for further engagement with the OFW mother who cuts off ties to her children. Relying on stereotyped ideas of caregiving and motherhood might otherwise make villains out of mothers trying to negotiate the OFW experience while maintaining connection to their children, especially if they are perceived to “fail” when held up to a culturally-constructed mandate of acceptable mothering. The framework of connection allows outsiders to see these mothers as individuals first, and their connections lend insight into the experience and identity of each woman based on her own story.

Spouse/Partner/Significant Other

Intimate partnerships are another subject that those outside the OFW experience shape projections around and fetishize based on cultural and heteronormative interpretations of intimacy and commitment. Either in presence, where partners reside in the same location, or across distance necessitated by migration, traditional couplings and the heartache that accompanies living at minimum cross-culturally (or across borders) is seen as an obstacle to overcome or by which to be overcome. Many of the individual pieces of source material for this thesis centered on portraying uncomplicated love stories, focusing on absence or togetherness as the driving element of conflict or sadness in romantic attachments. On closer inspection, interesting variations on the sanctioned tale of romantic love across borders begin to emerge. Responsibility for a relationship surviving the migration experience is portrayed to rest on the shoulders of the migrant. And the stereotyped

idea of romantic love, and the place that it holds in the official OFW narrative endorsed by the Philippine government, can be turned on its head.

In the PEBA/Nokia Facebook photo contest “Where the Heart Is,” many entries focused on heteronormative intimate partner relationships.



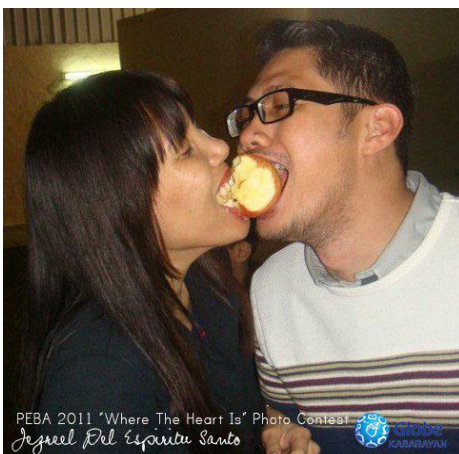
Where My Heart Is

Not in the left side of my chest but the right, with my wife!

Submitted by Raymund Llanda

SAUDI ARABIA

Although this photo is submitted by a male OFW, it captures the sweet and romantic sentiments that were sparked by the competition prompt “Where the Heart Is.”



Love You To The Core

I love this man! In him is where my heart lies first.

Submitted by Jezreel Del Espiritu Santo

SAUDI ARABIA

These images of longing and connection capture both the importance partners can play in a successful OFW experience, and also the types of love that can be celebrated publically in a popular photo competition.

The blogger Kayni of *Kayni's Corner Café* describes how her sister became a domestic helper in Hong Kong and traveled without her husband or children¹ (“Outside Looking In” 2010). After a labor dispute and returning to the Philippines, the marriage fell apart. Kayni recognizes that “my sister’s story is not new, but it cuts deep through the heart of every OFW who has to endure time away from family and friends.” From Kayni’s perspective, writing as someone who remains in the Philippines, the responsibility for keeping homes in tact seems to rest with the OFW who departs. She reminds OFWs and their families that,

It is important to remain true to God and your vows, imbibe (sic) in your children the importance of faith, good values, and loyalty to family. Most of all, you must demand from your individual self to be a good example to your family, your community, and your country at all times. Lead by becoming a good example (“Outside Looking In” 2010).

Her language of fealty, faith, and maintaining social order and matrimonial continuity includes the following advice:

So before anyone decides to work abroad, one must take into consideration EVERYTHING. Sit down with your whole family and decide what is best. Ask for everyone's cooperation to keep the communication open and to maintain the family bond strong. Make them understand that when someone decides to work abroad, there are things at stake, but emphasize to yourself and your family that the family always comes first. Before you board that plane to somewhere, keep your family and love ones in your heart and never let them go (“Outside Looking In” 2010).

¹ Although this thesis centers primarily on written expressions from OFWs, it is illustrative to assess examples of blogs by OFW supporters. Such pieces lend depth to discussions of connection and reveal how connection between people involves perceptions and values of both parties.

Kayni's blog entry, with its focus on family remaining intact and coaching OFWs on maintaining appropriate ties, was a top-three finisher in the 2010 PEBA blogging competition. And yet, it is prescriptive and relies on clichés about abandonment to pressure the OFW into behavior acceptable to the family and community. According to this line of reasoning, a broken marriage not only fails the immediate family, it fails the community and the nation. This outside view on maintaining marriage across borders is one-dimensional and fails to accurately capture the entirety of the OFW experience. It is a reflection of the effect of migration as observed by a sister.

These assumptions are rooted in the lived experience of many OFWs, but they do not create a framework that allows for exploring the experience of those who fall outside stereotyped intimate partnerships. A lens of connection allows an outsider to begin to glimpse nuanced interpersonal relationships and weave in frameworks of home, travel, and a politics of location, especially when exploring a retelling of intimate partnerships that do not fit within societal expectations. There are many alternative partnership decisions an OFW may experience, such as same-sex partnerships, multiple simultaneous partners, asexual companionship, and other arrangements chosen by individual OFWs.

Employing a framework of connection to discover the place of intimate partnerships in the OFW experience allows for exploring beyond the partnerships typically included in definitions "home." In the selection of literature and blog postings assessed for this thesis, the short story "Dusk of a Love Affair" by Ruth Elynia S. Mabanglo (1994) stands out for capturing nuance in ideations of love across borders. Mabanglo upends notions of fealty to a partner across distance, the idyllic

nuclear family negotiating the hurdle of separation, and even loyalty to the Philippine nation-state. In Mabanglo's short story, the disintegration of a marriage mirrors a simultaneous rebellion against the idyllic OFW narrative of heroic sacrifice and loyalty to "home."

Mabanglo opens her story with Lydia, an OFW living in Hawaii, attending the trial of her husband who murdered her parents, mistakenly killed her lover's brother's family, and wounded Lydia and their son, Jun-jun. Although such a dramatic scenario threatens to overwhelm the narrative with camp and cliché, Mabanglo uses the elaborate murder as a mirror to critique romanticized notions of love, distance, and fidelity propagated by Philippine government rhetoric.

Lydia's husband, Mariano, is portrayed as leaching off the remittances system, rather than using those remittances to be productive and benefit his family. Lydia wryly observes, "The guy was not interested in his studies. He was contented with the remittances being sent by his sister from Canada. To him, it was sufficient" (Mabanglo 1994, 115). Although their relationship had good moments, it was caught in an unhealthy cycle of violence, suspicion, and jealousy. Part of Lydia's move overseas was not for idealistic visions of benefitting a strong family at "home;" it was to escape her husband:

And although she had told him that she would be sad when she leaves, deep within her, it would be a new dawn for her. That was the only means she could get away from her husband. She could not divorce Mariano in the Philippines. She was married to him. And to a Catholic, marriage was like death that must be accepted, for better or worse, in sadness and in sadness (122).

The “new dawn” of living and working abroad allowed Lydia to soon begin processing paperwork for her son to join her. When she was finally established in Hawaii, “It was only Jun-jun that she petitioned for,” yet Mariano appeared at the airport alongside him (118). Mabanglo writes Lydia’s response as being a wave of disappointment and sadness:

Heaven seemed to have collapsed when she saw Mariano’s face at the arrival area. Like a scheming dog. She could not say a word. He embraced her and an unexplained rancor welled up within her. She had forgotten his touch. The man had become a stranger. She held her son to get away from him. She longed for that small body. It was the boy’s face she had wanted to see (118-19).

The political location of Mariano and Lydia’s marriage, supposedly one that represents the strength of ties to the Filipino homeland, dissolve into distance and discord. Lydia has even “forgotten his touch,” a symbolic indicator of marital union and connection. Reassessing Lydia’s shift in level and type of connection to her husband constructs a nuanced image of her experience, allowing space to assess “inclusion and exclusion” within the home as articulated by Espiritu.

Mabanglo contrasts Lydia’s marriage to Mariano with her new relationship with Bill, a “real Caucasian. Blond hair. Even the eyelashes are blond. And smooth-skinned” (119). The relationship with Mariano stands in sharp relief to Lydia’s connection to the pale, all-American Bill:

Bill’s way of loving was different. Her being blossomed even as she loved and was loved. Now, she had her own mind. Even her thoughts could speak. She could echo what she heard without fear. Now she had a name of her own. She didn’t need to pretend to feel her own strength (119).

The freedom afforded by her relationship with Bill in the new land of Hawaii contrasts with the life she left behind with Mariano, where she “was suffocated by his

love” (121). When analyzed through the lens of connection, Lydia’s relationships echo her migration experience. Her connections to two men at two different times show her movement from limited opportunities and constant questioning by others of her role and identity to a location in a new country, where she “had a name of her own” (119).

Bill can be interpreted through many lenses – emblematic of Lydia turning away from her culture and heritage, redemptive icon, a true partner, or a barrier to Lydia’s reunification with her former connections and family. When viewed through the framework of connection, however, Bill’s value is based on the importance that Lydia places on her relationship with him. And her new relationship is complicated as Bill not only represents a new life and egalitarian partnership; to Lydia, he is part of a spiritual and physical salvation from everything she has left in the Philippines and that tried to follow her abroad. According to Lydia’s narrative,

She felt an amount of peace when she embraced Bill. The embrace carried a certain promise. As if it was assuring her that everything would be fine, though she knew the impossibility. You will transcend the well of criticism, defeat and pain that Mariano has placed you into. I am your Christ. I will save you (124).

Lydia’s interpretation of her connection to Bill, however legitimate or illegitimate to outside observers, shows a sense of safety and rootedness in Hawaii that she never achieved in the Philippines. She maintained connections to her loved ones in the Philippines, but was able to better do so through the strength she gained from her connection to Bill and her best friend in Hawaii, Ebby. Lydia describes that

It was the warmth of that [Bill’s] caress that sustained and strengthened her to face all odds, to economize, to send remittances to the Philippines, to write and promise that one day, all her loved ones will be with her, strolling along

the coast of Hawaii, watching the setting of the sun as if they were just in Luneta (125).

To Lydia, the physical space of either Hawaii or the Philippines is interchangeable, as her sense of rootedness and place is contained in her loved ones. Bill becomes the spark that inspires her to keep working for reunification, even if a reunification with her original homeland is no longer desirable. Location does matter, and the politics of location have implications as Lydia is cowed into staying married to Mariano as long as it takes for him to get a green card. Simultaneously, however, Lydia is also free of ties to location as she values the *people* in specific places, not the places themselves. She is a global citizen in that her actual location and ties to a nation state are less important than finding rootedness in connection and relationship, even as her pivotal relationship with Bill orients her away from her homeland and toward Westernized global affiliations.

When examined through a framework of connections, intimate partnerships move beyond representations of romantic ideals, both to a partner and to concepts of “home” in the Philippines. Spouses, boyfriends, girlfriends, and other intimate partnership arrangements can simultaneously generate and challenge notions of rootedness and permanency. Examining the OFW’s connections, without beginning with preconceived ideas about idealized romantic attachment, allows for a more complete and accurate picture of the migration experience.

Extended Family

The extended family also holds a place of heightened attention to loyalty and fealty by OFWs, at least as detailed by assumptions of ties and responsibilities to parents, siblings, grandparents, and other relatives. Many OFWs cite feelings of

responsibility and attachment to their families, but unexamined assumptions of these connections leave the OFW a one-sided heroine sacrificing presence and belonging for her loved ones. When these connections to additional family members are examined, however, a more nuanced image of the OFW as daughter, sister, granddaughter, cousin, and niece emerges. Two themes emerge in the short stories and PEBA entrants' blogs used as source material here: 1) connection through, in spite of, or thwarted by a void/gap and 2) connection interwoven or weighted down with feelings of expectation and responsibility for assisting family in the Philippines.

When viewed through the eyes of a younger sister who remains in the Philippines, the older OFW sister is a source of both inspiration to do better and intense longing for relationship. The blogger Tin (2011) describes both her longing for her sisters and a desire to show them that their financial support is worthwhile.² She describes that

Being left behind is not easy. I've been experiencing hard times when my two sisters decided to go abroad. Then my agony started, I don't have any idea to where I confide with (sic), when my two sisters have left me. Whenever they make a call and talk to us I felt a little bit of aching (Tin "Uneasy Step" 2011).

Tin describes a sense of displacement over the absence of her sisters and mother. Although she remains tied to the same home and community, she observes that, "I'm still in the place where I can call a house but not a home" ("The Moment" 2009). Her connection to her OFW sisters is linked directly to her identity, security, and a lack of attachment to place. This relationship is formed by absence, and even the phone calls

² Again, this example is from someone outside – but still linked to – the OFW experience. Tin's words illuminate aspects of connection between the OFW and her family, but should not displace the primacy of the OFW's own expressions of her experience and the connections that matter to her.

that would seem to build attachment and fortify connection serve to reinforce the pain of separation. In this way, connection can both enhance personal conceptions of identity and also strip away coping mechanisms. Tin focuses on her responsibilities to make her sisters' absence meaningful because,

They used to talk to me and reminding (sic) me to study hard and their sacrifice is for us, for me, for my studies. The thing that came to my mind is that, I have to study hard for them, for my family and myself in return for what they have done. Every time I tell them about my achievements I felt their happiness ("Uneasy Step" 2011).

Tin feels both a void created by her sisters' absence and an impetus to make the pain of that absence matter. Tin's feelings are genuine and meaningful while simultaneously supporting the narrative constructed by the Philippine government, where shared sacrifice gives purpose to both the OFWs who prop up the economy and to the family members who feel pain and longing. Painful emotions are given purpose under the official OFW government narrative and through natural coping mechanisms of loss.

Niña Simon also struggles with living in a place of loss and absence, describing how "In the beginning, poverty was the reason why people left the country. Now, they can't seem to find a reason to come back. I fear that some of them have forgotten why they left in the first place" ("My Mom's Quasi-Orphanage" 2010). She is especially resentful of her aunts and uncle who left their children in her mother's care, although she focuses on the heroic work of her mother and not on the circumstances that separated families in the first place. The theme of a "void" created by overseas migration appears again as Simon observes that "People like my mother bridge the gap between those who are left behind and those who are in another land"

(“Quasi-Orphanage” 2010). She concludes her post with another allusion to a gap: “But let's not forget that there are those who decided that they can work here, care for the young here and fill in the gaps here in the Philippines” (2010). She believes that family problems will be solved when this gap is filled by returning OFWs, but does not critically assess that gaps and voids might be comprised of more than just physical absence. She addresses OFWs and calls them to return:

So to all the moms, dads, titos, and titas who helped their kids, nieces, and nephews, we are your legacy. Come back home and tell us the stories of how home is never that far away if you keep it in your heart and that no job is too little for a man who knows in his heart that he is doing it to lift up his life and the lives of so many others. Show us the face of someone who, although he or she has seen and marveled in the great architecture and riches of other lands finds that the true fortune they have acquired is the love of their family and the respect of their peers. Ignore those who ask for *pasalubong*³ and just please, come back to us (“Come Home and Guide Us” 2011).

She hints that perhaps OFWs will not be satisfied on their return since they have seen the “riches of other lands,” which in turn threatens to perpetuate the void that Simon so desperately wants to see filled. She desires this void to be filled so much that she urges OFWs to forego the typical gifts a Filipino brings after traveling (the *pasalubong*) and to focus on eliminating absence.

Language of a “gap” or a “void” in familial connection also accompanies ideas of responsibility and complicated notions of care for family members back in the Philippines. Niña Simon writes of the pressure she feels from her mother to go overseas like her aunts and uncle:

My mom keeps telling me that her shaman told her that if I go abroad she would get a lot of gain from that endeavor. *Of course she would! I would be single and

³ Gifts a Filipino brings to friends and family after travel or upon the end of a long separation.

my dream is to give her loads of money.* But I am too much of a scardy (sic) cat to do that (“Heading Kuya Ronnie’s Advice” 2011).

From her other posts, Simon’s love for her mother is obvious, but she also feels responsibility for her mother’s debt and future comfort. That connection coupled with responsibility is also present in Maris’ 2009 PEBA contest entry. She describes her decision about going overseas, even though she did not want to leave the Philippines, with the observation that “After all, it’s not just about making money, everyone else who relies on my fate would benefit from this opportunity” (“And I Thought I Wouldn’t be an OFW” 2009). That heavy responsibility falls on many people from her community in the Philippines, although the price for absence is almost too high for her to pay:

In every five houses from where I live, it’s very likely that a member of their family is an OFW. When you work abroad and you are away from your family, your only consolation is that you are giving them a bright future. However, have you given much thought that you might be missing a bit more? Not knowing what is going on with your family is something to be expected, however, it always takes us by surprise when we see how far apart we have grown. As if, it never crossed our minds that change is inevitable. OFWs sacrifice their own happiness to be away from their loved ones (Maris “And I Thought I Wouldn’t be an OFW” 2009).

Such references to feelings of loss (and perhaps even guilt) over absence and responsibility for an extended family’s well-being shows the ambivalent nature of family connections throughout the OFW experience. Absence is coupled with expectation and responsibility, longing linked to the knowledge that the family must be cared for regardless of personal hardship. And sometimes, in some families, the expectations of the benefits of having a family member overseas supersede the original relationship. In Nanette Matilac’s short screenplay “Married to a Japanese,”

the main character Olivia flees her unhappy marriage and returns to her rural hometown. Her father criticizes her decision to flee abuse from her mother-in-law, saying, “If you are really that arrogant, you can not really go abroad. You should not have gone abroad in the first place. You should not have kept us hoping. And I thought I’d be able to buy a jeep and get some income” (Matilac 195, 1994).

Although such disregard for an OFW’s welfare is not routinely depicted in the source literature for this thesis, it is a risk when a family’s hope for a better future rests on the success or failure of the OFW abroad. It is a heavy weight for the OFW to carry, whether it is undertaken with excitement or dread, and can dramatically affect connections for the long-term. The scope of the source material studied here is not of sufficient breadth to suggest ramifications on connections as they apply to the OFW group as a whole, but it does speak to the need to consider how such expectations, even if they are met to the satisfaction of all family members, influences the OFW’s perception of familial connections over time.

Faith

Many of the OFW bloggers and authors in the source material selected for this discussion reference their faith in God, typically alluding to Catholic or other Christian faith traditions.⁴ This faith sometimes is cited as a casual exhortation in calling OFWs and families to stay strong, but there are also deeper explorations of what faith really means to an OFW. In the PEBA 2011 “Where the Heart Is” photo competition, there are a few obvious religious symbols that signify the importance of faith to the entrants. For Raymond Ramos, faith is emphasized in a rosary.

⁴ Islam is a dominant faith in some areas of the Philippines, but the particular sources examined for this thesis focus on Christian and traditional religious beliefs.



Living in God's Heart

A place where i can find PEACE , LOVE , and HAPPINESS, where i feel SAFE and SECURE. Where i can grow and develop with encouragement and without fear of intimidation and criticism. And most importantly, HOME where i am WELCOME and ACCEPTED in spite of my flaws and failures. Through God is where my heart truly lies.⁵

Submitted by Raymond Ramos

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

For Mandrake Palabay, the rosary takes a decidedly simple turn, with a basic cross and colorful beads in the shape of a heart.



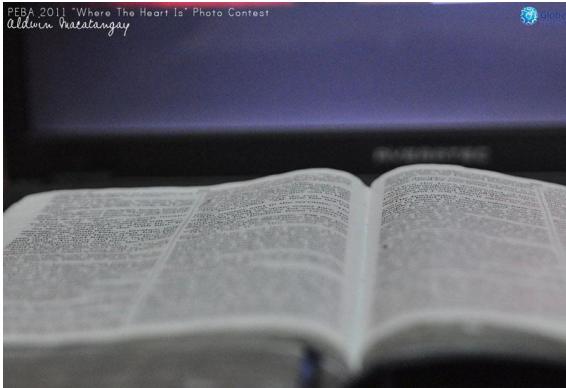
Faith.Love.Home

My faith in God, my love for photography as I think "Life is a moment" and through my photos I remember those moments and the rosary reminds me that there are people waiting for me back home. It keeps me safe every time I travel.

Submitted by Mandrake Palabay MYANMAR

⁵ All capitalization and punctuation copied from the photographer's original caption.

And Aldwin Macatangay relies on a picture of the Bible to relay its importance to his OFW experience.



Bible

I can have peace of mind whenever I read this bible and through this bible, I overcome many difficulties in my life as an OFW.

Submitted by Aldwin Macatangay

SOUTH KOREA

All of these images depicting aspects of faith attempt to visually portray a deeply personal religious experience and connection to an invisible deity. In some ways, it is much more difficult to capture the essence of faith with a camera than connections to people and objects. The writings of OFW bloggers and authors used as the textual source material of this thesis also struggle to capture the depth of faith that sustains them through trials abroad and in the midst of heartache in the Philippines.

Some OFWs are able to practice their faith freely in their host countries, and connection to faith transcends definitions of home as a nation-state or physical location. Maris of *Style Shanghai* finds solace and comfort when visiting Dongjiadu Church, “popularly known as St. Francis Xavier Church, this is the only church I’ve been to ever since I got here in Shanghai” (“Dongjiadu Church” 2009). Her attendance at the church is bittersweet, providing solace in her faith while reminding her of homesickness. She reports that,

The people here are nice, they smile at you even though you don't know them. It's fun seeing families together, don't worry you won't feel sad, you're in the house of the Lord anyway, who could be more family than Him right? I was a bit sad and alone when I got here, but after going to this church, I've become more grateful and I couldn't ask for more (Maris "Dongjiadu Church" 2009).

The church, in its familiarity, welcome, and symbol of Maris' personal faith, becomes a touchstone of connection that remains consistent throughout her migration experience. It is a solace and a priority for Maris, and helps to fulfill her desire for communal faith expression in addition to her personal connection to Christianity. OFWs in more restrictive host communities must practice their faith in private, however, which can lead to negotiations between personal safety and loyalty to religious beliefs.

The bloggers at "The Pink Tarha" (screen names Eyecandy, Sampaguita Pride, Shoegarfreeruby, and Sundrenched) acknowledge the struggles OFWs face in Saudi Arabia, including not being able to publically express faith outside of Islam. Their suggestions, built around concern for fellow OFWs working in Saudi Arabia, reinforces the idea that faith can still be a sincere and meaningful connection even if public expression is not an option:

We know most Filipinos are devout Catholics and we practice our faith by going to mass, making the sign of the cross, praying the rosary, celebrating sacraments and holidays, etc. but we cannot freely do these here. First and foremost, there are no churches and priests around. There are other ways of showing our devotion. After all, worshipping and praying can be done within ourselves. It just takes the heart and the soul to do it. *He* will understand ("The Basic Don't's" 2009).

Turning faith inward is just one way OFWs can fulfill their desire for connection with God, Allah, or other deities in host countries that do not allow for free faith

expression. This religious constraint may create feelings of disconnect for individual OFWs, especially as some Filipinos express their Christian faith in very public ways.

Other OFWs find solace in maintaining connection to traditional beliefs, sometimes in tandem with Christianity, Islam, or other non-native religions, and sometimes as a stand-alone faith system. Beverly, blogging at *Gremliness*, details an unexplainable occurrence on one of her visits with her family:

One morning, the rice cooked the previous day got spoiled sort of starting fermentation. This amazed me too since it never happened to leftover rice the previous days. So my mom supposed I have an unseen visitor just too glad I'm home. She surmised it's my Lola Kullulan, my paternal grandmother whom I've been staying with every vacation when I was younger. In answer, I went to visit her grave the same day. I'll tell you that while I've grown in an urban setting with Christian upbringing, there's just un-explainable instances that I leave it to my Igorot beliefs to explain ("Igorot Faith" 2011).

Even though Beverly self-identifies and connects with her Christian beliefs, she also maintains a connection to her traditional tribal faith. This connection appears to remain in the background while she is working overseas in the cosmopolitan United Arab Emirates, but it emerges when she travels back to her homeland. She describes navigating this tension, observing that when "Going home in Baguio, I switched gears to adapt to certain practices attached to my Igorot 'ethnic' beliefs. I'm not well rounded on these beliefs but the basic is listen and do what elders say" ("Igorot Faith" 2011). Beverly engages in religious "world" travel such as Lugones describes, and she maintains authentic connections to her understanding of faith and self as she experiences these different expressions of religious practice and connection. Her religious expression is fluid, allowing her to move between political locations with a religious foundation. She is clear that her primary faith tradition is Christianity, yet

her rootedness in religious expression would be incomplete without connection to traditional belief.

Finally, some Christian OFWs find solace in couching the migration experience in religious language, finding commonalities between Christ's life and suffering on earth and their own sojourns overseas. The umbrella organization *Kablogs*, covering more than 300 OFW bloggers and partner of the PEBA blogging competition, posted a prayer in February of 2011, as migrant workers were in the news in relation to the "Arab Spring" uprisings throughout the Middle East. This prayer echoes some of the commonality with the Biblical narrative of Christ's life on earth and the OFW experience:

Dear God,
 You crossed every border between divinity and humanity to make your home with us. Bless our fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters who have travelled to foreign lands with faith in their heart leaving their families behind as they break through the barriers of people, cultures, and languages to escape oppression and poverty. There are many things going on that are beyond us even with our collective power. We come to thee in supplication and heartfelt pleadings as we are mindful of the ordeals of others (Kablogs 2011).

In this introduction to the rest of the prayer that goes into detail of specific OFW host countries, the Christian OFW is reminded not only of her faith as a source of strength and connection, but that her very migrant experience is similar to Christ who "crossed every border." She is also reminded of the strength that comes from being a part of a wider collective of OFW Christians, although their power as a group is finite and they must continue to pray for positive outcomes.

The OFW's connection to faith, whether she is a Catholic hailing from Manila, a Muslim from Mindanao, a follower of traditional beliefs, or a practitioner

of one of multiple other faiths, reveals that religion can be an important touchstone for experience and identity. Sometimes that faith will be hidden or only emerge in specific contexts, but for those who value religious connection, it can be a source of strength and comfort. Religious standards for morality can also shape the behavior of OFWs to favorable social norms, a factor that did not appear in the selected source literature but likely plays a role in the experience of OFWs who more narrowly follow the mandates of Christianity or Islam.

Self

The OFW's connection to herself is a final lens through which to discuss the personal connections that shape the migration experience. Although connection to the self is not as obvious as connections to other people, self-awareness, resiliency, and inner peace are common themes expressed by many of the writers studied for this thesis. Some of the photographers who entered the PEBA photo competition even touched on this theme. Rootedness in the self and connection to the inner person allow the OFW to move between worlds, more readily attain a cosmopolitan citizenship, and negotiate the politics of location that shapes their migration experience. This section begins with images representing connection to the self from the "Where the Heart Is" photo competition, and then addresses the written expressions of inner-connectedness.

Photographers selected several different representations of connectedness to the self. The caption to Ramos' photo below notes that the diary is a source of comfort, companionship and generates a feeling of belonging.

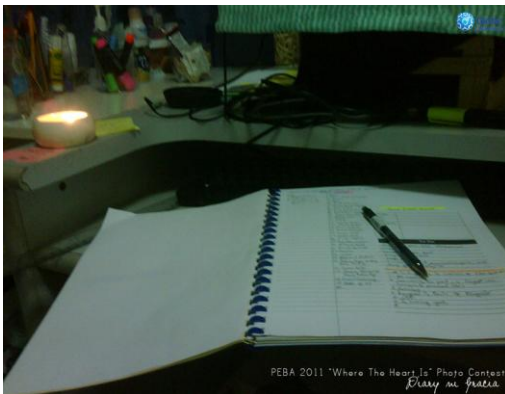


This diary is where my heart is. It's a place where I can freely express myself. A place for happiness and solitude. Every time I write in my diary, I feel comfortable... like someone is always there to listen and offer a sense of belonging.

Submitted by Raymond Ramos

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Gracia also relies on her diary to capture her connection to innermost thoughts and awareness, noting that the diary provides a place to call home and a place where her dreams can wait to be revisited.



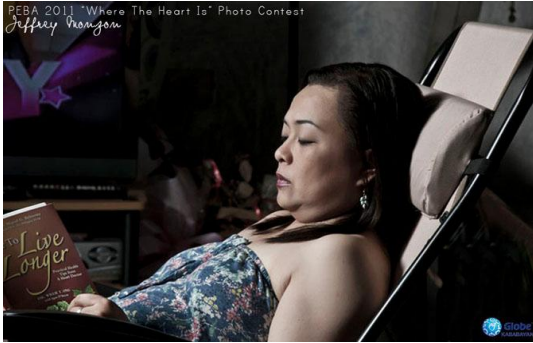
Diary ni Gracia

Wherever I go, this will be my only home... where good memories stay forever and dreams come into reality.

Submitted by Diary ni Grasya

KUWAIT

The following image turns to a portrait of a woman lost in a self-help book, and the caption also mentions finding a home with the self as place of solace and connection.



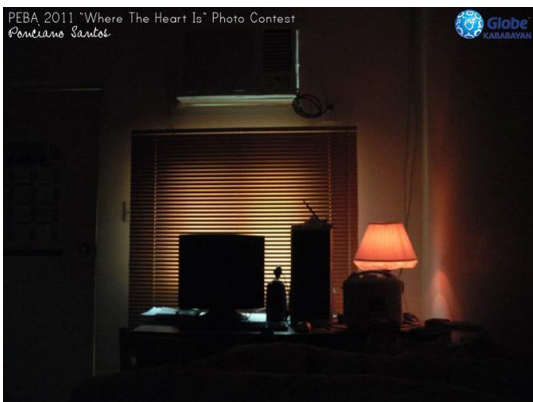
Solitude

I chose this photo because it is the best opportunity to spend quality time with one's self. Realizing the freedom to be deep in your own thoughts and you are at home with your self.

Submitted by Jeffrey Monzon

SAUDI ARABIA

A room can also indicate connection to the self and time away, including the necessary self-care practice of sleep.



Home Sweet Room

This is my room where I long to sleep in.

Submitted by Ponciano Santos

SAUDI ARABIA

Although the self can be a source of strength and solace, a rooted connection in the upheaval of OFW life, it can also be a place of pain for some OFWs as depicted in the photo below. Migrants walk a tenuous line between finding their inner selves as a source of strength and in too much time alone becoming a cause for loneliness or despair.



A Silent Friend

For most of us, this bottle is our only friend in times of problems. It never talks but it will make you happy, relieved, cry, dance, sing, etc.

Submitted by Lourdes Manuzon-Torrefiel

QATAR

To truly explore the importance of connection to the self in shaping the OFW experience, it must be contextualized within the theoretical positioning of home and a politics of location. First, the dominant narratives of OFW migration assume family connection, either back in the Philippines or in the host country. Such a formulation of home and assumption of family does not capture the OFW experience of those without close family or those who choose not to be in contact with their families. The inclusion and exclusions necessitated by defining “home” and a place of belonging can both shape connection to the self and increase reliance on self-resiliency. Even OFWs with the most robust support networks of family, friends, and faith are still likely to call on reserves of personal strength and personal connection through times of separation and work in a foreign land.

Gracia, an OFW working in Kuwait, describes her personal journey toward acceptance of the OFW life. She finds that her inner life is limited, although she works a professional job:

In my solitary confinement of years living here my life is circumscribed by within (sic) this four closed walled room, between the highway and silent street. I live my life. From here I discovered the word SERENDIPITOUS. It was a strange, radiating experience for me but I just smile then for a moment, and write it down, wondering and feeling the new word (“I Will Return” 2011).

Gracia references the limitations she feels in her room in Kuwait, but also that her time in her room allows her space to learn and gain personal insight. Her sojourn in Kuwait leads to “a process of letting go of my old identity and embracing a new one but doesn’t happen overnight because I need to establish myself alone” (“I Will Return” 2011). The time in Kuwait was filled with loss for the first six months, when she was “really feeling restless, like I feel I didn’t quite fit in.” Gracia eventually finds solace her own identity, when she manages to “come to terms with the loss of power, freedom, routine, and support. It’s only when we stop thinking about what we have lost or left behind in our own country that we can enjoy the benefits of what we actually have now.” As she is writing in English and holds a professional job, Gracia has access to more resources than some OFWs. Yet she struggled with finding her place overseas until she found it in herself, in her connection to her room, learning, and openness to serendipity. Gracia describes the journey toward finding a location of equilibrium as “jumping in with both feet,” and realizing she has strength and connection to the self, which allows her to eventually feel more at ease in Kuwait. She hopes to carry that connection to the self forward, toward whatever definition of “home” awaits in the future, because “only my diary can told (sic) the journey I’ve had.” Even though she maintains different connections with people in the Philippines

and abroad, she is the only one who can really know the extent of her personal transformation and journey.

Tin, although she is an OFW supporter and not an OFW herself, also communicates that connection with the self is essential to her own peace and other successful connections. Her connection to herself is even more important given the loss she feels at her sisters' absence throughout her blog posts. She states that,

In order for me to be truly happy with other people, I have to learn first how to be contented and being (sic) happy alone. It is only when I become in touch with myself that I realize how important it is to be a whole person before sharing my life with someone else ("My Cogito" 2009).

But connection to the self and finding a home in oneself is more feasible for some OFWs than others. The blogger Enjoy acknowledges her connection to herself and her inner emotional space, but it is not always a safe location or a nurturing center. As Enjoy processes her emotions, she is clearly connected to the self, but in pain:

I've my own series of ups and downs – energetic and cheerful at one point, gloomy and lethargic the next. I'm losing weight for no apparent reason. I remember when I was young, whenever I feel terribly sad or depressed I'd get a blade to cut my arms to relieve me from the overwhelming emotions. The pain caused by these small cuts would somehow give me a temporary satisfaction and made me feel alive again. The sight of blood gushing out from the wounds would give me comfort from the emotional pain that was [more] intolerable than the cuts. The scars are still visible until now. No cream or ointment can ever erase or hide them. These scars will always be a reminder of how impulsive I was as a teenager. Am I bipolar? I often wonder (Enjoy "Manic Moment" 2011).

For Enjoy, the connection to the self can at times be confusing and hurtful. She describes later in the blog post that she overcame this period of painful emotions, and some of her other posts indicate optimism and joy. But her words are an important counter-narrative to many of the other writings that focus exclusively on the benefits

of connection to the self and nurturing that connection as a coping strategy while living overseas. Enjoy's pain reveals that connection to the self is not simply an idealized place exemplified by attachments to a diary. The scars of past struggle come to the forefront in self-reflection, allowing the OFW to decide how to address and possibly resolve those hurts. Such self-reflection with the potential for movement toward a more healthy inner life can be read as an act of exerting agency under extreme limitations.

Part of connecting with the self reflects back to the level of control an OFW feels she has over her decision to migrate and her future choices. Roanne (2011) discusses the low level of autonomy OFWs have in their life choices, and the way that poverty limits the choices of many migrants. Maris, on the other hand, sees her OFW decisions as highly autonomous, a way to think of her future. When reflecting back on her decision to move abroad, she recalls thinking "Maybe it's about time I really think of my future. Probably, it's high time I make something of myself. Maybe instead of wishing for my dreams to come true, I should do something about them" ("And I Thought I Wouldn't Be an OFW" 2009). Perceptions of autonomy do not dictate whether or not a particular OFW will value a connection with the self, but those perceptions will shape whatever connection does exist with the self.

A connection to the self can be thoughtful and intentional, as depicted by Mabanglo, whose main character Lydia undergoes a transformation of personal connection "because she was now confident of her self, she could very well see herself" (1994, 126). The connection to the self can also be natural and innate, such as the personal serenity depicted in Glecy C. Atienza's short story "Song for Ligaya."

The narrating character, Elsa, describes her companionship with naïve Gaying during their time of forced labor at a Chinese garment factory. The story, written as an educational piece for future OFWs, depicts Elsa being frustrated with young Gaying, who represents the under-informed OFWs who might become trapped in exploitative labor situations. Nestled in the subtext of the story, however, are hints that some of the naiveté Elsa sees in Gaying might partially be a connection to the self even in bad circumstances. Gaying likes to put lipstick on before bed every night, a practice Elsa sees as frivolous and illogical. But Gaying explains, “I just want to put on lipstick. At least I’ll look beautiful in my dreams” (Atienza 1994, 80). Gaying focuses on nurturing the self, perhaps as a coping mechanism or out of ignorance. Either way, she finds inner strength under difficult circumstances. Elsa questions later, “who is luckier between the two of us—Gaying, who, amid the hardships of our work, can afford to be happy despite of her lack of understanding over our condition, or I, who’s having difficulties understanding” (82). Gaying and Elsa are both connected to the self in different ways, Elsa by fully recognizing the terrible conditions and injustice at the factory, and Gaying by being resilient and choosing ignorance of the details of her situation. Neither approach is morally superior, evidenced at the end of the story when both women escape and “walk away with arms around each other’s shoulders” (94).

Conclusion: Toward a Holistic Interpretation of OFW Personal Connections

There are several other types of personal connections maintained and referenced by writers and photographers in the sources studied here. Friends of OFWs, neighbors, religious leaders, fellow OFWs, and employers: there are

numerous other possible human connections that influence the OFW experience. The connections cited in this chapter – children, partners, extended family, religious affiliation, and the self – are the most prominent in the source literature and images. Any OFW might maintain all of these connections, a select few, or foster connections that are not represented in this source material. Using a framework of connection allows the outsider to ascertain some of the influences on the OFW, and simultaneously learn about how those priority connections help to shape the OFW experience. Some connections bring strength, such as a supportive aunt caring for her nieces and nephews (Simon “Quasi-Orphanage” 2010), and some connections are detrimental to the OFW, such as when responsibility for a whole family is demandingly placed on the OFW’s shoulders (Matilac 1994). The connections explored in this chapter, the most intimate and personal relationships an OFW fosters, exemplify the multiplicity and diversity of migrants, and that both positive and negative connections are part of the OFW experience.

Chapter 3: Connections to Technology as a Means of Understanding Connections to the Nation-State and Globalization

Chapter two focuses on the OFW's personal connections to gain insight into the migration experience. The intimate relationships, faith, and connections to the self that offer perspective on the migration experience also illuminate the importance of these connections to the migrant herself. Personal connections loom large in conceptualizations of what shapes the migrant experience, but connections outside the inner circle lead to additional, important insights into factors shaping agency, travel, a politics of location, and home.

The forces outside personal connection that shape migration create tensions the OFW must navigate, engendering partial autonomy in the migration experience. OFWs may "choose" to migrate, but those choices are made within the constraints and context of globalization, global economies, and the rise of corporate capitalism. OFW connections are navigated through and with the external forces of nation-states and globalization, and are facilitated through rapid advances in communications technology, digital spaces, and social media. Therefore, while OFWs utilize connections to technology and communications devices, it is useful to consider how OFWs use these tools, not only to maintain relationships with people, but also to uphold and challenge notions of fealty to the nation-state.

Connection to and through Technology

It is difficult to fully convey the importance of communications technology to the OFW and her connections in the Philippines and the rest of the world. The OFW experience in maintaining relationships among a diasporic population has shifted dramatically since the Philippine government first began to urge its citizens outward for economic opportunity. Maintaining ties across distance was sporadic and costly, conveyed through landline telephone calls (usually scheduled well in advance), *balikbayan* boxes of gifts shipped for special occasions, letters, and visits. Points of connection were highlights, and much transpired between those contacts. Now, text messages, cell phones, social media, smartphones, email, and free internet video call services permit contact more frequently and at a lower cost. While there are barriers to universal access, such as relatives living in rural areas or initial purchase price for devices, the OFW is likely to make sure she has the means to freely communicate with those who are important to her. As Beverly facetiously asks when expressing her gratitude for, “ever evolving communication technology,” among those connected to or working as OFWs, “Who doesn’t know Facebook and Chikka? Or Yahoo Messenger and Skype?” (“Redefining the OFW” 2010).

These technologies can put stress on some OFWs and families as the ability to maintain high levels of communication creates pressure to do so, even with long hours of OFW labor. Other OFWs express relief at being able to maintain contact and connection throughout their time overseas. Cecelia Uy-Tioco (2007) notes that text messages (or Short Message Service/SMS), given the ease of use, timeliness, and the possibility of frequent connection, “presents a counter-discourse to the dominant one

of separation and alienation from the family” (262). People in the Philippines sent more text messages in 2002 than any country in the world, and it rose to prominence due to a low price point and its ability to break down hierarchical barriers (257). On the practical side, text messages can facilitate global money transfers, allow for informal agenda setting for more expensive and sporadic telephone conversations, and enable women to oversee small details in their families (259-260).

Most notably, text messages facilitate a state of “absent present” for OFWs, especially transnational mothers. Communicating with children several times per day, even in the condensed format of SMS messages, renders the physically absent mother/sister/wife/daughter/friend closer to mind and heart than rarer phone calls, letters, emails, and care packages. Cell phones not only allow connection, but also “mediate and shape relationships” (Uy-Tioco 2007, 259).

The downside of greater frequency of connection via new and better technology is that it helps entrench existing labor stratifications by making separation more bearable. A global labor system that already privileges the wealthy is reproduced with each advance that makes transnational work a little more bearable. Cell phones empower individuals yet entrench the marginalization of transnational mothers as a group and helps reinforce traditional gender roles under patriarchy (Uy-Tioco 2007, 263-264). Easy access to communication, although it is beneficial for individual families, does little to challenge legal and economic structures that necessitate family separation.

Several PEBA photo competition entries also acknowledged the central role of communication technology in connecting them to their loved ones, such as this image by Nikki Ferrer:



Mobile Access

Happy that we have a connection with our loved ones

Submitted by Nikki Ferrer

SAUDI ARABIA

OFWs support each other in utilizing technology to its full capacity, sharing tips with future and fellow overseas workers on how to stay connected to family at home consistently, conveniently, and in the most cost-effective manner. From Mimi at *Sleepless in KL*, who shares information on prepaid local phone cards (2011), to Niña Simon's advice on how to break bad news over a text or call ("Nokia Family" 2011), OFWs are eager to share their knowledge of technology to support their fellow sojourners.

Nokia, a cell phone manufacturer, even sponsors a subset of the PEBA blogging competition, calling for OFWs to submit entries that reflect on how advances in telecommunication have affected their relationships and experience

overseas. The corporation finds space to correlate Nokia ownership with family connection in the contest description: “Share to us (sic) a creative essay on how you use your Nokia phones to connect to your love ones and/or your most memorable experiences/moments with your Nokia phones” (Pinoy Expat Blog Awards, Nokia contest, 2011). This collaboration between an organization that highlights the writing of OFWs (PEBA) and a transnational corporation that profits from OFW communication (Nokia) presents an interesting tension of the migrant as both a consumer and a cultural producer. The blog posts entered in this subcategory are shaped by transnational capital as the very impetus that motivated these particular pieces. The bloggers are writing about technological communication devices in hopes of winning a new device. These tensions do not negate the validity of the OFWs’ writing, but should spark additional consideration of the role of an outside, faceless corporation influencing personal reflections by the individual.

In this contest, some bloggers chose to focus on the connections that technology can foster, such as blogger Ghill at *Ghill Corner*. He discusses the minutia that technology allows him to share with his sister. As he says,

Most of the time, we talk about the little things. What did you do today? How is school? Are father & mother well? In over 16 years of phone calls, certain themes have emerged. “Go outside and look at the moon, manong (brother),” she’ll say over the phone at least a few times a year. “I’ve never seen it brighter.” “I went to the bookstore this morning; my favorite book is available.” “I’m so proud of you.” “I love you manong (brother)” (2011).

The decreasing cost and increasing access to technology has shifted dialogue between OFWs and loved ones from rushed discussions to conversations that can delve more deeply into emotional terrain. Frequent communication facilitated by technology eases the burden of distance for many, but can remind others of absence more acutely.

While many entrants to the Nokia blogging competition appreciate the connectivity enabled by Nokia technology, a few OFW writers express a tangible connection to their mobile phones, using words that connote a more emotional and personal connection than is usually allocated to a device.

Niña Simon of *Pinaywriter* describes her connection to her cell phones, giving each one a name and recalling special events that occurred while she had each phone. Her original Nokia, which she named Keiron and later handed down through several siblings, had “more memories shared with us than any other phone combined” (“Nokia Family” 2011). She assigns a future phone another name and a gender, describing the way that the phone allowed her to connect in times of crisis:

Yankumi [the phone] has helped more people than I would have ever imagined. She was my partner in crime for so many of my college affairs and boo-boos that I actually feel like putting her *yes she is still with me* in (a) glass case and displaying her in my future house (“Nokia Family”).

The blogger BlogEoz also gave his phone a gender and spoke of it like a friend:

My Nokia 3210 phone was a witness of my ups and downs during college days. He was part of the sleepless nights working to finish my plates and group projects. We have also shared those fun moments I had with my classmates and friends. And even had a glimpse of how happy I am when I had my very first girl friend and until I reached my final college years my Nokia 3210 was still there for me. He then remind me of my best buddy; always there thru (sic) thick and thin (“Nokia Inheritance” 2011).

Anthropomorphizing and personifying digital communication devices is not universal, but it does hint at the importance of maintaining relationships via technology and the view of some that the tool itself is a valuable connection. It is likely that the competition’s prizes and incentives influenced the Nokia-positive tones of these posts, but not the details of personal connection enabled by cell technology.

To some extent, the researcher and Nokia both commodify the discourse of OFWs for specific purposes. Here Nokia has branded the idea of connection and communication within OFWs' cultural productions, co-opting emotions and experiences for capitalist purposes. The researcher runs the risk of any academic project that seeks "knowledge" for the "researcher" – in attempting to attain something from those who produce cultural products, there is potential exploitation, the opposite of genuine "world" travel. Again, insights gained from cultural productions created at the behest of a capitalist corporation, or mitigated through research processes, is still valid and valuable. Careful assessment requires attention to the context under which such cultural productions were constructed, the lens through which they are interpreted, and the motivations of those interpreting the productions.

Access to technology continues to improve throughout the Philippines and in OFW host countries, but OFW families who live in rural areas still struggle to connect through phones and the internet. Beverly describes her husband and son's visit with her husband's grandmother, and the extreme difficulty of using a cell phone:

Lola's house sits in one of the mountains where her nearest and only neighbor is 200 meters away. No electricity has reached her home, and she lives alone. She has no proper bathroom. Fresh water springs out from the ground nearby providing her drinking and washing needs. She was given a mobile phone, but she has to seek higher ground or somewhere to grab a signal. When its battery gets low, she said she's gonna (sic) ask her neighbors to bring it to Diboong, an electrified distant community ("Esepe in Bokod" 2011).

Beverly also posted a Facebook photo taken by her husband of Lola receiving the phone, although no caption is provided.



(2011 “Ambuklao Lake and Esepe in Bakod” Facebook album)

Notions of home and location matter in this vignette of Lola receiving a phone from a caring family. Her location in an underserved, rural area makes connecting through technology difficult, if not impossible at times. Yet her sense of home is closely tied to her geographic location; connection with family through the new cell phone is a welcome bonus. OFWs who travel abroad, however, center certain notions of home on communication facilitated by technology. Lola’s feelings of home are rooted in residing in a physical place; her family’s connections to the part of home she embodies must transpire through technology in between visits.

Social media is an emerging and increasingly important way for OFWs to maintain existing connections and to build new relationships based on shared experience. Most personal social network profiles are private, but the extent of their reach among the source blogs studied here is extensive. Bloggers repeatedly mention Facebook, Twitter, and other services, and even use Facebook as a way to host additional photos that would bog down their blogging platforms. Social media is also a means for OFWs to share resources and support with each other.

Facebook, for example, has numerous groups dedicated to OFW information, promotion of OFW work from the government of the Philippines, and specialized

networking opportunities for categories of OFWs. In September 2011, the Facebook fan page “Filipino Nurses” had nearly 250,000 “likes,” and other groups oriented specifically to OFW workers boasted “likes” in the tens of thousands. These pages offer a way to share information and news in real time as evidenced by information about current events affecting OFWs, such as political unrest in the Middle East in early 2011. Social media bridges personal and wider connections as OFWs can keep in touch with close family and friends and receive information about the greater OFW community, all in one location. The specific social media platforms embraced by OFWs is likely to shift over time, but the concept of connecting to others via social media will continue to be a way of negotiating concepts of home, absence, and travel.

One challenge with social media arises from rapidly shifting and more pervasive connections facilitated by technology. Sometimes the “absent present” facilitated by technology reinforces the disrupted nature of connection in the OFW experience. Ana Sarmiento (2010) describes one morning when she was especially missing her daughter, and a message on social media intensified her longing. She recalls, “Just recently my heart broke when I saw her FB [Facebook] status. What makes me sad this morning was... I just learn[ed] from my bro.[ther] that my daughter don’t (sic) want to attend family day in her school today. I almost cried if only I have wings to fly” (“Lonely Mom” 2010). Sarmiento even includes a screenshot of the post on her blog.



This frank excerpt from the *Anabanana* blog illustrates a delicate reimagining of OFW relationships transpiring with the adoption of social media by OFWs and their families. Not only does Sarmiento feel guilt and longing with her daughter's post, the message is no longer limited to mother and daughter. Anyone else who is connected to Katherine on Facebook can also see the message. Therefore Sarmiento must cope not only with feelings of distance and an "absent present" within herself, she also knows that others outside the immediate mother-daughter relationship have insight into that strain. Sarmiento does not describe outright how her daughter's expression of loss on Facebook makes her feel. In light of the deep connections to extended family members described elsewhere on Sarmiento's blog, however, her extended family likely has a mutual insight into Katherine's struggles through shared Facebook profiles.

Communication technologies are creating new realms of connection and OFWs must negotiate an ever-shifting landscape with the rapid succession of improved devices and better communication infrastructure. Technology primarily *facilitates* connections, increasing the number of contacts in a given timeframe, while lower costs for telephone and internet calls and video conferencing allow

conversations to be longer and less regimented. For most OFWs, technology is a means to build and maintain connection across distance. Some OFWs so appreciate these connections that they anthropomorphize their digital devices and actually build connections to the technology itself. Although some writers were motivated to blog by the potential for prizes from Nokia, the presence of anthropomorphic descriptions across multiple entries is unlikely to be solely the product of Nokia's influence on the bloggers. Overall, OFWs who are able to purchase a device that can be used for communication (a mobile phone, laptop, tablet, smartphone, or other device) indicate that they would feel lost without that piece of technology, or that they have felt lost in the past during a time when their previous device failed/was missing and before it could be replaced.

The concept of feeling "lost" without a device that enables communication and connection enhances an understanding of a politics of location and home in a globalized world. The OFW's location in a constant "absent present" generates impetus to find and utilize ways to be more fully present in distant physical and emotional spaces. OFWs have not expressed that a communications device *is* a home, but it is a vital means of connecting to spaces and people that are markers of personal notions of home. And as most OFWs only travel with the amount of luggage allowed by an airline, it is difficult to replicate "home" through objects carried to the host country. The communication device opens connections to home that far outweigh the physical space and weight it occupies. It is an expansive doorway to feelings of home, ideations of rootedness, and a support system for an OFW in the political location of an "absent present."

Communication technology establishes and enhances connections between OFWs and the people and places that signify “home,” rootedness, and belonging. These same technologies facilitate greater connection to and, conversely, resistance of the nation-state and globalization. Since the first wave of emigration sanctioned by the Philippine state, OFWs have expressed both national affinity and resistance to national loyalty. Technology simply facilitates and expedites the connection to the nation-state and sharing information about living as a migrant in a global labor market. It is impossible to discuss the connections that shape the OFW experience without exploring the place of the nation-state and globalization, two forces that influence migration, yet remain in the background of the OFW’s daily experience. Technology increases the potential positive touch points between OFW and national entity / global capitalism, and it simultaneously allows for rapid dissemination of information and complaint when the OFW wishes to resist these forces.

Connection to the Philippines and the Nation-State

The Philippine government expends vast resources and attention to cultivate connections between OFWs and the home country. Many OFW writers studied here display a keen loyalty and connection to the nation-state of the Philippines, partially due to strong campaigning by the government, but also as a form of romantic attachment to ideas of home, culture, social norms, and rootedness in a political location. In many of the writers’ work, notions of belonging are tied to the imagined location of the nation-state. Some women express longing for the political location of connectedness as represented by the nation-state, and others symbolically disconnect from the nation-state as an extension of new affiliations and priorities. Regardless of

the type of connection Filipina OFWs have to their original nation-state, the fact that it figures prominently in a study of connection locates the entity of the nation-state (and, by extension, its representative: the Philippine government) as a central connection through which to explore the OFW experience.

Robyn Rodriguez (2002) studies the expectations of the Philippine government for OFWs, which permeates both official communication and promotional materials to encourage overseas work as a form of heroism. She highlights a phrase in the *Handbook for Filipinos Overseas* that stipulates “Filipino migrants and their families are ... expected to continue to identify with the country” (Commission on Filipinos Overseas, 1999). Rodriguez notes that the government is not merely reacting to demand for these laborers. Various OFW agencies and services seek “not only to address but also to create worldwide demand for Philippine labor” (Rodriguez 2008, 796). She notes the deliberate shift in the identity of foreign workers, re-naming and re-classifying a group to strengthen ties to the real and simultaneously imagined political location of the nation-state. In reference to the shorthand description for Filipinos laboring abroad, Rodriguez observes that,

While overseas workers have been known popularly as OCWs (overseas contract workers), the state has changed the language around migrants identifying them instead as overseas Filipino workers or OFWs. Purportedly a transition designed to capture the populations of Filipinos that are abroad but not necessarily working on short-term contracts, it is significant that the state emphasizes the Filipino-ness, or the nationality of workers in the diaspora with this term (2002, 247).

This re-imagining of the OFW identity to coincide with national political interests reinforces a politics of location with the nation-state as a nucleus to the travel experience. No matter how far the migrant travels or how long she is away, in the

Philippine government's interpretation, her travel always transpires in an orbit around the state.

Due to the focused attention of the nation-state on the behavior and loyalty of Filipina OFWs, interpretations of agency, belonging, and affinity are nuanced and negotiated. Some of the writing and photography studied for this thesis express hints of fatalism and destiny regarding decisions to go abroad, while other pieces show pride and pleasure with the role as a national hero. An image by Mark Brian Caidic in the 2011 PEBA "Where the Heart Is" photo competition portrays an unidentifiable Filipino OFW draped in the national flag, and the setting captures the push of national pride with the pull of mitigated and negotiated agency based on its setting.



The Light Is What Guides You Home
A place of shelter, warmth and confidence...
Home is the place where hearts are sure of each other...
Submitted by Mark Brian Caidic, SAUDI ARABIA

The brightly colored flag draws attention to the large role the nation-state has in the OFW experience, and the caption indicates that the photographer is somewhat comfortable with finding rootedness and belonging within an expression of loyalty to the Philippines. But the anonymity of the subject, and the discarded, unwanted tires on which he sits, hints of a faceless contributor to the machinations of the Philippine government. While the nation-state shines brightest in the image, it can be read as

either comforting or obscuring the individual Filipino migrant. In the lived experience and connections of OFWs, it is likely – and simultaneously – both.

Maris of *Style Shanghai* focuses on the nationalistic and heroic language that helps her continue to justify her overseas residency. Early in her post she lingers on notions of choice and bettering herself as underlying motivations behind her decision to migrate and continue to live overseas. But the connection to the nation-state and its influence on her migration experience emerges when she says, “I am proud to be an OFW. I owe it to my country to be the best that I could be, for I am a FILIPINO (author’s emphasis)” (“And I thought I wouldn’t be an OFW” 2009). Claiming strong, all-caps affiliation with a Filipino identity indicates connection to a representation of home and culture, but also to the nation-state. Plain language that she “owes” her country success and good behavior reveals that her personal politics of location and travel are intertwined with national narratives.

A sense of duty to the nation-state of the Philippines emerges in a post by the bloggers at *Pink Tarha*. As they recount being second generation OFWs, three of the four women describe the benefits of growing up in the Philippines. They feel rooted and connected because,

We knew our culture, history and geography. We were never left without our national identity. We've been parts of historic events and we've experienced how it is to become a Filipino. Of course, too much freedom and exposure have also given us reasons to take them for granted and abuse them in various ways. We were never the perfect OFW children and citizens. We committed mistakes and caused problems but in our hearts we knew that we have become half of what our fathers and motherland have envisioned their children to be (“Ang Tunay” 2009).

The *Pink Tarha* bloggers acknowledge the expectations of and desire to please both their absent fathers and the conceptualized motherland, the nation-state. They appreciate that they “were never left without our national identity.” There is a sense of regret at not living up to the nation-state’s standard for “perfect OFW children and citizens,” but their appropriate, sanctioned behavior now in Saudi Arabia allows them to fit the narrative of a noble and heroic citizen abroad.

Conversely, in the same post, Eyecandy regrets certain aspects of spending her childhood in Saudi Arabia with OFW parents. She communicates a strong longing for connection to her “true” nation-state as a,

[...] kind of absence that I endured, that of a deeper sense of what it means to be a Filipino. It is the nurturing that only a nation can yield. I lived on my own in the Philippines for more than four years and despite it not being the ‘better’ kind of life that I was used to, I believe that despite of that, I became a better person and even a better citizen of my own country (“Ang Tunay” 2009).

Eyecandy’s description of a “nurturing” nation and the way she aligns self-improvement with greater loyalty to the nation-state echoes language typically reserved for familial connections. The fact that she expresses such connection to the entity of the nation-state reveals how disconnect from the Philippines during her childhood shifted to high levels of connection in adulthood. All four bloggers are clear to note that national affinity is not what motivated their fathers to migrate; love for their families and a desire to provide for them led the previous generation overseas. Yet the bloggers conclude by returning to the idea of the nation, an exhortation to other children of OFWs raised abroad not to “forget your Filipino identity. After all, being born and raised in another country doesn’t limit your capacity to love your nationality” (“Ang Tunay” 2009). And love of nationality, of the

narrative created by government entities and repeated into a national consciousness of many touched by the OFW experience, becomes a connection through which to begin making sense of coping skills, love for a motherland, and negotiating agency through constraint.

The blogger Kayni also encourages behavior that meets expectations of the nation-state. In her post “Outside Looking In,” where she focuses primarily on the OFW’s responsibility to maintain appropriate connection to family, she also addresses the importance of good behavior for the benefit of the country. She tells OFWs that, “Most of all, you must demand from your individual self to be a good example to your family, your community, and your country at all times. **Lead by becoming a good example** (author’s emphasis)” (Kayni 2010). This implicit and explicit expectation of “model” OFWs pervades literature from the Philippine government (Rodriguez 2002), and is echoed by other OFWs as they socially reinforce behavior norms to their fellow expatriates.

Kayni reiterates the government’s desired attitudes and behavior among OFWs, but she also sees that the nation-state does not always have the best interests of its citizens at heart. Kayni urges activism for additional rights and support from the government, and communicates the power of a united OFW movement:

As more people join the OFWs’ community, it is a powerful entity that can demand and advocate for more rights, protection and security from the Philippine government and host governments. As a united community, you own a powerful voice; use it. The results may be slow, but as trickling water slowly carves a rock, your advocacy will make way to friendlier policies for OFWs. Change may not be visible now, but it will pave way for improved rights and policies for future generations. **Advocate change now! Inspire the community! Inspire the country! Inspire the world!** (author’s emphasis) (“Outside Looking In” 2010).

Kayni does not delve into the failures and successes of past calls to agitate for better OFW policies and protections, but her demand for continued advocacy hints that she believes better situations are possible within the Philippine nation-state bureaucracy. Niña Simon also picks up on “hero” rhetoric, but she wants to extend the concept to include those who hold together families and shoulder responsibilities in the Philippines, allowing OFWs to move abroad. Both travelers and families at home play a part in maintaining ideal Filipino citizenship. Simon explains that, “I am an advocate that they are heroes in their own right. But let's not forget that there are those who decided that they can work here, care for the young here and fill in the gaps here in the Philippines. I believe both deserve our gratitude” (“Quasi-Orphanage” 2010). Even though the Philippine government gives less focus to those who remain at home, it does invoke similar hero language to describe the caregiving and supportive labor that enables migration. Simon reiterates this concept, and calls for hero labels for everyone touched by the migration experience. Such convictions, while authentic, also help further government messages of sacrifice, greater good, and genuine love for family that fuel continued labor migration.

Many writers focus on loyalty to the nation-state of the Philippines and toeing norms of behavior and rhetoric, but Lilia Quindoza Santiago takes a distinctly antagonistic view of the failings of the nation state in her poem “To My Beloved People (The Last Song of Lorna Laraquel, Migrant Worker)” (1994). Inspired by the true story of Laraquel’s mistreatment by her employer in Kuwait and the murder she subsequently commits, Santiago constructs a poem that calls into question the Philippine government’s actions and inaction with the case. Written from Laraquel’s

perspective, Santiago decries the Philippine government's desire to maintain good OFW relations with Kuwait throughout the scandal, and she asks,

What is more significant
Lost jobs and lost wages?
Or my breath soon to be extinguished
Here, here in this arid land? (24).

Although Laraquel was released seven years after the incident (well after this poem was written), the fear of execution Santiago hints here was legitimate and even probable at the time. Santiago continues, creating questions that might have naturally emerged in this context, although not directly quoted from Laraquel:

What dignity can the Philippines speak of
When domestics like me
Straddle the world?
Is there really a wholesome picture
Better than what you see of me in prison?
Go on, spread the words:
Dignity, justice
And don't forget about image and nationhood.
Picture us the 'new heroes' of the Philippines
As my soul rots in a life of despair.
No, there will never be a better life
If there is no nurturing and caring native land (24).

In this piece, Santiago decries a lack of nurturing on the part of the Philippine nation-state, in direct contradiction to the nurture "Eyecandy" describes for *Pink Tarha* ("Ang Tunay" 2009). Santiago highlights the juxtaposition between heroic imagery and the lived reality of some OFWs, and finds the gap too wide to navigate. Santiago is connected to the nation-state, but the connection is tenuous and strained as she calls for a re-imagining of OFW narrative and construction. Laraquel's autonomy is strongly mitigated and controlled, shaping her OFW experience in horrific ways. In

this instance, Santiago uses an incident of constrained autonomy to depict the government's complicity in shaping both narratives and experience.

Although many of the depictions of connection to the Philippines include elements of influence from the nation-state, some writers center their connection to their homeland on representations of culture and tradition. A blogger with the screen name "Enjoy" describes her longing for the traditions of Christmas in the Philippines, and she correlates genuine celebration of the holiday with the country that has "the longest and merriest Christmas celebration in the world" ("Homesick" 2009). Her interpretations of belonging and connection coalesce around the cultural location of the Philippines, not the political location framed and endorsed by the Philippine government. Many of the other writers who express pride, duty, loyalty, and fealty are more closely tied to the nation-state. Enjoy, whose imagined experience of Christmas is grounded in memory and personal connection, is less tied to heroic narratives and instead focuses on ideas of belonging and absence.

Maris (*Style Shanghai*) and Beverly (*Gremliness*) also steer away from accounts of national pride and affinity when they refer to the Philippines in some of their posts. To them, an important signifier of their home country is the food. For Maris, it is finally finding an authentic Filipino restaurant in Shanghai ("Dinner at Luneta" 2009). Beverly measures her time overseas as being relative to how much meals cost at Jollibee, a fast food chain from the Philippines with outlets in her host city of Dubai ("Jollibee Chicken Joy" 2011). For both women, connections to a national cuisine create ties that supersede notions of belonging for reasons valued by the nation-state. Response to food is rooted in memory, culture, and tradition, and has

very little to do with feelings of responsibility for patriotic sacrifice or national loyalty.

The Philippine nation-state's narratives of heroic citizenship expressed through leaving – while simultaneously maintaining ties to – the country fosters unique connections between OFW and the imagined nation. All nation-states want to encourage loyalty and patriotism among its citizenry, but the Philippine government's promotion of a transnational labor force creates tensions when viewed through lenses of home, political location, travel, and connection. The OFW's political location is always in flux, depending on relationships between host and sending nation-states, and on wider capitalist economics. The OFW is encouraged to feel close affinity to the nation that encourages their departure, complicating notions of home and belonging. And concepts of travel become cluttered during sojourns that are part of a country's official economic development scheme, rather than at a more local and individual level. These considerations make the OFW's connection to the nation-state an insightful lens through which to view the migration experience. The experience is both shaped by and mirrored in the OFW's connection to the nation.

Connection to Globalization and Global Citizenship

A simplistic look at global citizenship in the OFW context reveals many of the markers of global capital markets. Several of the bloggers in the PEBA competition express their emotional and consumer connections to global brands. From many of the bloggers' love of all things Disney to Ana Sarmiento's celebration of Western movies and Ikea ("Weekend with Family" 2011), corporate cultural markers can indicate a type of global citizenship based on capitalism and exchange. But

globalization and global citizenship is much deeper than the flow of consumer goods. Globalization and global citizenship is navigated through the legal and political entities of nation-states. While OFWs can cross borders for employment with varying degrees of ease, they still live under the governing institutions of nation-states. Thus, discussions of OFW as global citizen cannot neglect that global citizenship is lived in specific contexts dictated by nation-states. And, global citizenship for the OFW continues to be shaped by information attainable without restriction by time or space, thanks to ever-increasing access to advances in telecommunications and technology. Global citizenship experienced through lived interactions under specific nation-states forms unique sites for connections between and among people, cultures, and states.

In a retelling of life in Saudi Arabia, Filipino national affiliation is cause for derision from a resident in the royal household. In a non-fiction essay filled with letters and quotes from former OFWs in the Middle East, Ma. Ceres P. Doyo recalls an interview with Crispina (Pina) Cailipan, a beautician for a royal princess:

Someone once made the snide remark that if Filipinos were so intelligent why were they so poor? Pina did not let it pass. 'I told her off – *If you had no oil, you'd be nothing*. They think so low of us. You have to show them you can't be put down, that you're smart' (1994, 28).

Elements of racism, privilege, and socio-economic differentiation shadow this exchange, but it illuminates Pina's coping strategy for living under a racist and classist labor system. She knows how the world works, that oil production has a strong affect on global economies and politics. She also understands that she must contradict the stereotype of a meek Filipina if she is to maintain a strong position in the household and within herself. Her strategy to negotiate globalization by showing

her intelligence is a way to exert agency under the restrictive setting of a Saudi royal household.

The situation is less optimistic with fewer opportunities for asserting agency in the short story “Song for Ligaya.” Global demand for inexpensive goods throws together garment workers from different countries in a Chinese factory, and although the demand for products is global, national tensions come to the forefront between workers. Nation-state affiliation pits workers against each other, although they are all being exploited by illegal labor practices. Elsa, the narrator, disdains the “Malaysian and Taiwanese workers whose blood churns against Filipinos” (Atienza 1994, 80). She cannot understand the attitude of Gaying, her young friend who does not focus on nation-state differentiation among her co-workers. Elsa is incredulous that “While I’m seething here in anger over what our Malaysian and Taiwanese co-workers do to us, Gaying seems to take all these lightly. I say to myself, ‘Maybe the blood of a slave in her runs strong’” (80). Despite the demand for globalized production systems and global markets in which to sell finished goods, Gaying and Elsa operate with limited autonomy due to lax enforcement of labor regulations in China. The two women make a dramatic claim to agency when they physically escape the factory. In this case, there is opportunity for constrained agency in even the most oppressive representation of globalization: human trafficking in a sweatshop. Not all foreign workers who become victims of trafficking have that opportunity.

The case of Elenita (1994) further illustrates constrained agency under several nation-states that left her in limbo during conflict in Lebanon. Her testimony reveals numerous attempts to flee violence in Lebanon and either join her sister in

Amsterdam or return to the Philippines, but restrictions by nation-states including Germany, the Netherlands, Lebanon, and the Philippines thwart her efforts. Falsified papers could be obtained for a price, and “anything could be bought. Visa for Canada. Residence Permit. Working Permit. Marriage contract and others just to go out of the country” (Elenita 1994, 59). But Elenita’s agency is constrained during this time due to her lack of financial resources, even though the means of escaping the war are available for the wealthy. Her political location is one of a no-man’s land, trapped between a Lebanese government caught up with its own turmoil on one side and an ineffective Philippine government response on the other. Elenita does the only thing she can in the situation – when her connections to globalization and nation-states failed, she turns to her local resources and personal connections to survive. She recalls that, “We, the foreigners, helped one another. There were times when we had to say that we were husbands and wives to survive, just so the Lebanese will not kill us” (59). Elenita ekes out a living during the conflict and relies on her sister to finally pay fines and fees to flee the country. Her life in Lebanon is filled with limits to her agency, movement, and rights, yet she still makes choices about survival, her friends, and her living situation. Her choices at the time are mitigated and unfair, but she navigates her tenuous political location for an improved, although not ideal, outcome of resettlement in the Netherlands.

The bloggers at *Pink Tarha* also negotiate the terrain of global labor movements balanced with strict laws established by the nation-state of Saudi Arabia. The *Pink Tarha* bloggers tell new and future OFWs in Saudi Arabia that,

Living in the most conservative country in the world will put you through a culture shock that will literally shock you to make a 180 degree turn -

clockwise, counter-clockwise, repeat 3x! Your patience and understanding will be tried and your sanity questioned. However, we Filipinos are known for being chameleons. Having gone under influences of different cultures since time immemorial, we learned to adapt to changes and to turn challenges into stepping stones for progress (“Abaya Special” 2009).

The comparison of Filipinos to chameleons is indicative of the four *Pink Tarha* bloggers’ approach to exerting autonomy under restrictions of the nation-state. Their travel is made possible through a globalized labor market, but they live under strict Saudi laws. The bloggers see themselves as blending in on the outside but maintaining their identity, personal values, and connections within Saudi constraints. Just like a chameleon, they can camouflage their more liberal standards of dress and behavior, but those preferences still exist under the surface. They even offer advice for women on how to fashionably cover up in an *abaya* and *hijab/tarha* (“Abaya Special” 2009). The *Pink Tarha* bloggers negotiate a difficult political location with humor and certainty they are maintaining their Filipino identity and connections. Although they operate under restrictions, they find strength in each other, ties to home, and excitement at engaging in travel and juggling connections to their own and a different culture.

Globalization, as negotiated through connections to and interactions with different nation-states, creates complicated systems that the OFW must navigate to exert her agency and truly “world” travel. By examining the OFW’s connections to other nation-states and the relationships between them, globalization becomes a useful subject through which to understand the migration experience. Advances in communication technology will continue to shape OFW connections to and within a

global economy, empowering workers to share information but also creating potential for the spread of misinformation and capitalist, corporate propaganda.

Conclusion: Connections in a Global Context

Examining the OFW's external connections offers new and additional insight into the OFW experience and her agency within migration. The external factors of the Philippine nation-state and globalization shape the range of choices available to OFWs, while technology facilitates personal and wider connections, and in some instances, becomes a valuable connection itself. These external connections are not as readily discussed as internal connections such as to children and partners, but they are important as they affect so much of the daily OFW experience. Longing for children is powerful, but so are the demands of the Philippine nation-state for an influx of resources. Being apart from a parent shapes the emotional terrain an OFW navigates each day, but so do the laws and restrictions of host nation states. Attempting to gain insight into the OFW experience requires a focus on the personal and the political, on intimate connections and the peripheral ties to forces that move and connect people around the world.

Conclusion

A theory of connection (centered on values and attachments) establishes the OFW and what she values as central to an understanding of the migration experience. Other theories such as home, travel, and a politics of location capture much of the nuance of migration, yet these theories are based in a premise that attempts to determine and delineate belonging. Examining individual OFWs' connections permits discussions of belonging while allowing identity to be constructed in the in-between places. The OFW is neither "here" nor "there" with her connections split between the Philippines and her overseas worksite, but she can act as an agent and find rootedness in her very location of dislocation. Connections cross borders in ways that add richness to theories of travel, home, and a politics of location. Rather than centering on absence and chasms, a theory of connection negotiates space to both consider and locate identity within those chasms. As OFWs continually form identities and exert agency within the migration context, they navigate structures that challenge their belonging and maintain connections as a site of rootedness across borders.

The authors, bloggers, and photographers cited in this thesis reveal connections to a wide array of people, places, ideas, beliefs, entities, and objects. Some root their identity in fealty to the Philippines, others in their connections to people and maintaining relationships, and still others in ideology and faith. Connections are so important to identity and the migration experience, some OFWs

anthropomorphize their telecommunications devices and other technology, the very objects that help them maintain connection across distance.

In the source material, certain OFWs wrestle with wider ideologies and consider their place in global capitalist schemes. Others focus on intimate relationships and the self and limit resistance to simply maintaining the connections they deeply value. The diversity of the connections OFWs maintain and prioritize reflects a spectrum of identity and experience. The OFW is neither solely victim nor hero; she negotiates her agency within the constraints of global capitalism and relationships between nation-states. And even more than an imposed or assumed title of victim or hero, the OFW values her connections and the way they shape her experiences.

A statement in the preface to *Mga Hibla Ng Pangarap* (“*Strands of Dreams*”) captures the constraints OFWs face as they carve out their best possible options within the migration experience. Mary Lou L. Alcid observes that “Tunay na mahirap ang maging mahirap. Ang maging babae. At ang maging migrante (“Indeed it is difficult to be poor. To be a woman. And to be a migrant”)” (7, 1994). A theory of connection never denies the hardships OFWs face abroad, but does not require individual subjects to be defined solely by difficulty. Rather, identity can be expressed in values, relationships, beliefs, and touchstones. Any given OFW might define herself as a victim or a hero, or both together, or avoid such categorizations entirely. But the fact that all OFWs maintain connections throughout the migration experience offers a location from which to begin to explore what it means to live in the in-between places. There is room within a framework of connection to defy easy

categorization based on loss, exclusion, and levels of belonging. It creates opportunities for discussions of home, location, and travel, but goes beyond those theories to begin conversations at a point of inclusion: we all maintain some sort of connection. It is my hope that the commonality of connection can help frame theoretical conversations in kindness and while remaining rooted in agency, cultural sensitivity, and Lugones' (1987) "loving perception."

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