UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
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COUNTER-PRODUCTIVITY AS RESISTANCE: CONTEMPORARY ART OF THE FILIPINO LABOR DIASPORA

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

VISUAL STUDIES

by

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June 2024

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Since 1974, the Philippine government has sought to uplift the nation's economy by institutionalizing an economic and immigration policy that capitalizes on the remittances of 10.2 million overseas Filipino workers of which 59.6% are women. To continue profiting from Filipino laborers, the Philippine government produces gendered representations of Filipinos as ideal laboring bodies that are circulated internationally to potential employers. My project illuminates the ways female contemporary artists respond to the production and circulation of these state representations. I argue that contemporary Filipina artists living in the diaspora – including Martha Atienza, Xyza Bacani, Lizza May David, Imelda Cajipe Endaya, and Jenifer Wofford – employ what I call "counter-production," an artistic practice that represents the fragmented and gendered experiences of labor displacement, critiques official nationalisms, and reconstructs worker subjectivities. By portraying laborers in non-capitalizable, non-laboring moments – such as instances of respite, boredom, and leisure – contemporary female artists counter representations of workers that secure the primacy of the Philippine nation-state to control Filipino laborers.

Studies on the globalization of Filipino labor have relied on ethnographic or sociological methods of analysis. "Counter-Productivity as Resistance" expands the fields of Filipino art history, diaspora studies, and Filipino labor studies by being the first to use visual culture methods and diaspora studies approaches to explore

contemporary art by women made after Martial Law, a period in which labor migration flourished in the Philippines. I seek to offer a new angle of vision by showing how artists depict the day-to-day minutiae of living in the diaspora through creative and representational modes of expression such as illustration, film, installation, painting, and photography. Artistic representations of the mundane are often overlooked by scholars of Filipino labor migration, yet such representations counter national narratives on overseas Filipino workers and forge new possibilities of living within global capitalism.

Acknowledgements

In the novel *Minor Feelings* by Cathy Park Hong, she calls for an alternative understanding of "indebtedness" that does not center imperialist notions of patriarchal debt. Instead, she discusses the idea of honoring connections, support networks, and our shared histories of oppression and resistance. Writing this dissertation has been an exercise of collaboration between many individuals to whom I am indebted.

First, thank you to my advisor and mentor Professor Boreth Ly. Your support throughout this journey has galvanized me to finish this dissertation and degree. You have taught me that pursuing an ethical career in academia is an equal balance of producing critical scholarship and trusting my moral compass. You have given me the tools to trust myself and my research. Thank you for the many conversations that have strengthened my thinking.

To the members of my committee including Professor Megan Thomas, Professor Yve Chavez, and Dr. Thea Quiray Tagle, thank you for the encouragement and support. Your enthusiasm for my research boosted me during days and weeks when writing felt difficult and taxing. Thank you for asking thought-provoking questions that have ultimately shaped this dissertation.

I am grateful to have been a part of a welcoming community of intellectuals at the History of Art and Visual Culture department. Thank you to the faculty, especially Professors Stacy Kamehiro, Elisabeth Cameron, Maria Evangelatou, and Albert Narath. I am thankful to all my classmates especially Evelyn Char, Katie Ligmond, Aaron Samuel Mulenga, Stacy Schwartz, Michelle Yee, and Connie Zheng. I am also

grateful for the financial support of HAVC, the Grad Division, and the Arts Division. I am particularly grateful to Ruby Lipsenthal who has ushered in many graduate students through this program with kindness and patience.

To my cohort who will forever be a part of my family. Thank you, Rachel Bonner, Maureen McGuire, Catherine Ries, and Zoe Weldon-Yochim for being there through the highest and lowest of times. Our intellectual sisterhood has made me a better scholar and curator. Thank you for the many Zoom meetings, dinners, and laughs.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the generosity of the artists Jenifer Wofford, Imelda Cajipe Endaya, Lizza May David, and Xyza Cruz Bacani. I am deeply inspired by your work, and I am grateful for the opportunity to learn from you.

I am also grateful for the curators and librarians who opened their institutions for research and inquiry. Thank you to the Ateneo Library of Women's Writing especially Madel and Kristine. Thank you to Ma'am Rica and the Visual Arts and Museum Division at CCP. To Con Cabrera and Lara Acuin, thank you for your generosity and kindness. Your deep knowledge and curatorial vision continue to inspire me.

To my Watsonville is in the Heart family and community. During the darkest of times, your trust in my vision and expertise turned me from a graduate student to a scholar. Thank you to Professors Kat Gutierrez and Steve McKay for showing me that academia can be so much more than the ivory tower. To my sister and best friend

Meleia Simon-Reynolds, you are an inspiration, and I could not be more grateful to have co-created with you. To the Watsonville community, especially Roy Recio, thank you for welcoming me into your home. All paths lead to Watsonville.

To my family between the United States and the Philippines, thank you for the unconditional support. This dissertation is dedicated to you, us, and our stories. To my mother and father, for believing in me despite not knowing what pursuing art history meant. To my siblings who remind me of the healing properties of food and laughter. I am so blessed to have grown into myself with the support of my three best friends.

Lastly, to my best friend and love of my life, Mitchell. Thank you for sharing my vision especially in times when I did not believe in it myself. You have taught me that loving and laughing are the strongest forces in the world. Thank you for being a wonderful dog dad to the greatest potato in the world. The smallest moments with you feel like the most magical adventures.

Introduction

In April 2020, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte announced the government's decision to ban the overseas deployment of Filipino healthcare professionals in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The rapid rise of infections in the Philippines made visible the nation's struggling healthcare system and an acute need for more resources. Hospitals across the nation faced personnel shortages and often surpassed the maximum capacity of patients. By taking away the rights of Filipino healthcare workers to pursue jobs abroad, Duterte's administration believed that they were prioritizing the health of Filipino citizens. Cagayan De Oro City Representative Rufus Rodriguez declared, "We need our healthcare personnel here at this time of public health emergency to attend to sick Filipinos, and not to foreigners."[1] Overseas healthcare workers were characterized as soldiers and were tasked to answer the call and fight a war against COVID-19.

Concurrently, foreign governments expressed the critical need for overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) as their nation struggled with the impact of the novel corona virus. British ambassador to the Philippines, Daniel Pruce, extolled the virtues of Filipino workers including their, "fantastic professionalism, skills and experience and incredible commitment and dedication." He expressed his gratitude for Filipino nurses working in the UK who are the third-largest nationality in the National Health

[1] Erwin Colcol, "DOLE Urged to Stop Sending Nurses Abroad amid Effort vs COVID-19," *GMA News Online*, March 30, 2020, https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/731887/dole-urged-to-stop-sending-nurses-abroad-amid-effort-vs-covid-19/story/.

Service.[2] This was later echoed by Prince Charles in 2021 who lauded Filipino healthcare workers as "wonderfully selfless people."[3]

In the U.S., Professor Catherine Ceniza Choy's research on the comingled histories of U.S. Empire in the Philippines and the immigration of Filipino healthcare workers to the U.S. received renewed public attention. Filipino nurses' integral role in the U.S. healthcare system became more visible as news of their disproportionately high COVID-19 mortality rates circulated. As of April 2021, the National Nurses United found that 24% of nurses they surveyed who died from COVID-19 were Filipino despite only making up 4% of total registered nurses in the country.[4] Although all essential workers were characterized as heroes, OFWs were especially recognized for their service in the face of the deadly coronavirus.

The accolades and recognition OFWs received did little to alleviate their material conditions. The COVID-19 outbreak intensified the physical, economic, and emotional burden they were already carrying while working in the diaspora. Amidst extended 12-hour work shifts, magnified physical strain, the fears of contraction, and caring for dying patients and their families, OFWs also balanced feelings of homesickness with anxieties over their family's health. The ban on overseas deployment angered many OFWs and non-governmental agencies (NGOs) because of

[2] Mari-An C. Santos, "Agony and Glory: Filipino Nurses in the UK Struggle to Adapt, Face Challenges," *RAPPLER*, April 14, 2023, https://www.rappler.com/nation/filipino-nurses-united-kingdom-adapt-face-challenges/.
[3] *Prince Charles Gives Tribute to Filipino Nurses*, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tsfE8D-nfKg.
[4] Paulina Cachero, "How Filipino Nurses Have Propped Up America's Medical System," *Time*, May 30, 2021, https://time.com/6051754/history-filipino-nurses-us/.

its economic effects on OFWs. Filipinos were drawn to positions abroad because of higher salaries in comparison to what healthcare professionals earn in the homeland.[5] Despite the economic opportunities overseas, OFWs still felt that their pay was incommensurate with the risks they were taking. Their economic instability was amplified as OFWs also experienced increased xenophobia and racism in the wake of the pandemic.[6] The frustration many OFWs felt is best represented in a statement made by Filipino American nurse KP Mendoza to the PBS Newshour, "So, I ask that you do not pity me, that you do not call me a hero. I do not wish to be made into a martyr."[7]

While the COVID-19 pandemic certainly had an extraordinary global impact, the representations of OFWs by domestic and foreign nation-states during this unique health emergency were not novel. Indeed, the deployment of the martyr and hero narrative to justify the migration of Filipino workers has been a fundamental part of the Philippine's migration policies since the 1970s. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the state's power to control the (im)mobility of Filipino

[5] Nurses in the U.S. can earn up to $5,000 USD per month. The Philippine Department of Health offers a starting salary of $650 per month. For more information see Karen Lema and Clare Baldwin, "Pandemic 'Hero' Filipino Nurses Struggle to Leave Home," *Reuters*, September 16, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-philippine-nurses-idINKBN26721D.
[6] Matthew Rozsa, "Anti-Asian Violence Is Nothing New: It Has a Long, Disturbing History in the United States," *Salon*, April 18, 2021, https://www.salon.com/2021/04/18/anti-asian-violence-is-nothing-new-it-has-a-long-disturbing-history-in-the-united-states/; Weiyi Cai, Audra D.S. Burch, and Jugal K. Patel, "Swelling Anti-Asian Violence: Who Is Being Attacked Where - The New York Times," *The New York Times*, April 3, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/04/03/us/anti-asian-attacks.html.
[7] Jason Kane, "'Do Not Call Me a Hero.' Listen to an ICU Nurse's Plea for Fighting the Coronavirus," *PBS NewsHour*, April 24, 2020, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/do-not-call-me-a-hero-read-an-icu-nurses-plea-for-fighting-the-coronavirus.

workers.[8] However, the novel corona virus did impact one significant factor in the migration of OFWs: the visibility of the incongruencies between representations of OFWs and their lived experiences. Mendoza's statement is emblematic of a strong desire by Filipinos across the diaspora to speak against such representations. Many visual artists also participated in these conversations.

Just as there was renewed interest in scholarship on Filipino nurse migration, the Filipina American artist Jenifer Wofford also experienced a resurgence of four different illustrated projects depicting Filipino nurses that she made between 2007 and 2009. The curator PJ Gubatina Policarpio included one of her nurse illustrations in an essay titled "Epicenter of the Epicenter."[9] The essay unpacks his intimate history with Filipino nurse migration and the heavy loss of nurses to COVID-19. As a part of their "Life During Quarantine" series, David Pinedo of *Medium* conducted an interview with Wofford in 2020 which featured one of her nurse illustrations.[10] On April 2, 2021, the Allen Memorial Art Museum featured Wofford's *MacArthur Nurses (Pushing)* on their Facebook page.

Wofford's artwork resonated with audiences as they sought to make sense of this unique historical moment, but she also received attention because of the way she chose to represent OFWs. Rather than depict Filipinos as heroic or victimized nurses,

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[8] Biao Xiang et al., "Shock Mobilities During Moments of Acute Uncertainty," *Geopolitics* 28, no. 4 (August 8, 2023): 1632–57, https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2022.2091314.
[9] PJ Gubatina Policarpio and Catherine Ceniza Choy, "Epicenter of the Epicenter - Independent Curators International," *Independent Curators International*, July 21, 2020, https://curatorsintl.org/journal/15412-epicenter-of-the-epicenter.
[10] David Pinedo, "Time & Flow During COVID-19," *Medium*, April 17, 2020, https://medium.com/@lifeduringquarantine/time-flow-during-covid-19-d377b476ff02.

Wofford illustrated Filipinos floating through abstract spaces, daydreaming in their kitchens, and walking down sidewalks. Wofford carves out, "a space where Filipina nurses and perpetual care workers who persist in the present have a time of their own."[11] Perhaps the interest in Wofford's work during the COVID-19 pandemic can be attributed to the ways she is able to imagine Filipinos otherwise. The fact that these works were created more than a decade prior to the outbreak also suggests that the problems OFWs faced during the pandemic have a longer history that compelled this artistic response. Wofford's interventions are emblematic of an art practice that proliferated after the 1970s in response to the globalization of Filipino laborers.

"Counter-Productivity as Resistance: Contemporary Art of the Filipino Labor Diaspora" analyzes contemporary works of art by Filipina diasporic artists and asks the question: how do contemporary artists challenge the globalization of Filipino labor migration? Beginning in 1974, the Philippine government delegated the task of uplifting the nation's economy to its citizens by sending Filipino workers abroad and capitalizing on their remittances. To continue profiting from OFWs, the Philippine government produces racialized and gendered representations of Filipinos as ideal laboring bodies.

The Global North, a quasi-geographic region comprised of countries with control over global resources, depends on developing countries, including the

[11] Jonathan Magat, "Looking after the Filipina Caregiver: Ambiguity and Unknowability across Jenifer K Wofford's Nurse Drawings," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 30, no. 1 (September 24, 2020): 19, https://doi.org/10.1080/0740770X.2020.1801004.

Philippines, to supply cheap laborers across different industries.[12] To remain competitive against other labor-sending nations, the Philippine nation-state creates and mediates representations of Filipino laborers. By marketing Filipinos as naturally subservient, caring, hard-working, and flexible to prospective employers, the nation-state creates bi-lateral agreements with labor-receiving nations that inform pathways of migration and rights overseas.[13] These "national representations of OFWs" are historically specific, racialized, and gendered representations that naturalize Filipinos as ideal laboring bodies and affirms the role of the Philippine nation-state as a broker of overseas workers.

As displaced subjects living outside of the Philippines, contemporary Filipina artists are uniquely "situated" to challenge nationalist narratives that justify globalized labor migration.[14] Through close looking at selected artists and their works, I argue that contemporary Filipina artists in the diaspora employ what I call "counter-production," an artistic practice that addresses the fragmented experiences of labor displacement, critiques official nationalisms, and reconstructs worker subjectivities. Contemporary artists of the Filipino diaspora – including Xyza Bacani, Imelda Cajipe Endaya, Jenifer Wofford, Lizza May David, and Martha Atienza – counter nationalist narratives by representing the day-to-day minutiae of labor

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[12] Saskia Sassen, *The Mobility of Labor and Capital: A Study in International Investment and Labor Flow*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
[13] Anna Romina Guevarra, *Marketing Dreams, Manufacturing Heroes: The Transnational Labor Brokering of Filipino Workers* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009).
[14] I take my understanding of "situated" from Donna Haraway when she refers to the ways all knowledge is partial and comes from the positions we occupy in society which she called "situated knowledge" For more information see Donna Haraway, "The Persistence of Vision," in *The Visual Culture Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 677–84.

displacement such as instances of respite, boredom, and leisure. By representing OFWs in these non-capitalizable, non-laboring moments, contemporary Filipina artists challenge national representations that maintain the Philippine nation-states primacy to regulate overseas workers.

Contemporary artists of the Filipino diaspora seek to intervene in this regime of visuality by offering alternative representations of labor that center the mundane and everyday. These artists do not seek to represent OFWs as heroes or victims, narratives that are often co-opted by the nation-state. By representing these workers' lived experiences, contemporary Filipina artists capture the poetics and politics of the dislocated and dispossessed.

U.S. Empire and Globalized Labor Migration

Migrant workers from the Philippines are central to the contemporary global economy. The Philippines's Commission on Filipinos Overseas estimates that 10.2 million Filipinos work abroad, nearly 10 percent of the Philippine population. Approximately 56% of overseas workers are women. OFWs work in more than two hundred countries and territories.[15] The four most popular destinations for Filipino laborers are the United States, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Hong Kong. OFWs are primarily employed in three sectors: service (57.2%), agriculture (24.5%), and industry (18.3%).[16] Within these sectors, Filipinos fill a variety of

[15] Commission on Filipinos Overseas, "Philippine Migration at a Glance," Statistic (Commission on Filipinos Overseas, n.d.), https://cfo.gov.ph/statistics-2/.
[16] These numbers reflect OFWs who have registered or sought gainful employment through government programs and often do not include rehires or undocumented workers. In other words, it is difficult to gather accurate data on OFWs.

occupations including healthcare, delivery services, cleaning services, construction, and manufacturing. According to the Philippine Statistic Authority, Filipino laborers remitted an estimated 211.9 billion Philippine pesos between April to September 2019 – a total sum that accounts for nearly 10 percent of the country's gross domestic product.[17]

Many scholars who study the globalization of Filipino laborers argue that the ubiquity of OFWs can be attributed to a continuation or "haunting" of colonial processes.[18] The scholars I discuss in this historiography of Filipino labor studies have greatly shaped the field including the discourses around representations of labor.[19] Filipino labor studies is an interdisciplinary field made of scholars trained in a wide range of disciplines including anthropology, sociology, and literature. As a result of the interdisciplinary nature of the scholars who have advanced its study, Filipino labor studies is a field that draws on a diverse range of theories, methods, and historical contexts. And yet, a small minority of scholars invested in studying the globalization of Filipino labor are not trained in art history or visual studies. In other words, this dissertation is indebted to the work of these diverse scholars and attempts to chart a new path to studying representations of OFW. One of the central threads of

[17] Republic of the Philippines Philippine Statistics Authority, "Press Release: Total Number of OFWs Estimated at 2.2 Million" (Philippine Statistics Authority, June 4, 2020), https://psa.gov.ph/sites/default/files/attachments/hsd/pressrelease/Press%20Release%202019%20SOF%20signed.pdf.
[18] Vicente L Rafael, *White Love: And Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 9.
[19] I would like to thank Megan Thomas who mentored me through an independent study where she introduced me to many of these readings. Many of these ideas were initially brainstormed in that class.

analysis across the field is the study of U.S. imperialism and its effects on contemporary migrants.

Although American forces had assisted Emilio Aguinaldo, the first president of the Philippines, to reclaim leadership from Spanish colonizers during the 1898 Spanish-American War, the U.S. did not recognize the legitimacy of Philippine independence.[20] The U.S. purchased the Philippines as a territory with the Treaty of Paris after they defeated Spanish forces. Beginning in 1899, Filipino revolutionaries pivoted their fight for independence against their new colonizers.

The Philippines fought a brutal war against U.S. forces who justified the colonization of the archipelago under the auspices of "benevolent assimilation." U.S. President William McKinley announced, "the American promise to train Filipinos in democratic governance until they were 'ready' to govern themselves. But the first order of business was to achieve control over the country."[21] Despite the tenacity and expertise of Filipino soldiers, they lost in 1902 when Aguinaldo, who was in captivity, surrendered. American governors of the Philippines continued to strengthen colonial rule established by the Spanish by consolidating power and land. Unlike the Spanish, U.S. colonizers sought to incorporate Filipinos into governance under "tutelage training."[22] Americans empowered the educated and established elites of Philippine society by offering them positions of power in the colonial system, thereby establishing a hierarchy of rule based on American paternalism.

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[20] Patricio N. Abinales and Donna J. Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), 113.
[21] Abinales and Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines,* 117.
[22] Abinales and Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines*, 126.

Filipino scholar and critical theorist Neferti Tadiar connects the contemporary migration of Filipinos to the stratified order forcibly implanted by American colonizers to control and capitalize Filipino bodies for labor. Neferti Tadiar's *Fantasy-Production* is an ambitious project that situates the Philippines within an interconnected global economy that produces what she calls "fantasy production." She defines fantasy production as the imaginative, gendered, and affective discourses that regulate and maintain an economy. This system was initially instituted by U.S. colonial powers to create a "new world order."[23] She states that fantasy production, "…denotes the imaginary of a regime of accumulation and representation of universal value, under the sway of which capitalist nations organize themselves individually and collectively in the 'system' of the Free World."[24] Capitalism relies on the production and circulation of representations that universalize desires and thus maintains demand for these commodities. Fantasy production is the process in which objects are made desirable and imbued with meanings that are made to seem natural. She notes that "Fantasy is the symbolic- material practices that organize what we take to be 'reality.' It is already this 'reality.' In other words, that which is profoundly imaginary, by which I mean suffused with subjectifying meanings and effects of dominant orders of signification."[25] According to Tadiar, this process also relies on

[23] The phrase "new world order" refers to the destruction of indigenous epistemologies to create colonial outposts that served the interests of colonial powers. For more information see Neferti Xina M. Tadiar, *Fantasy Production Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004).
[24] Tadiar, *Fantasy Production Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order,* 6.
[25] Tadiar, *Fantasy Production Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order*, 29.

the maintenance of a stratified global order of producers and consumers to continuously procure capital. Tadiar examines the racial, gendered, and sexualized dimensions of these structured desires by using the Philippines as a case study.

Through an analysis of literary representations, Tadiar shows that the Philippines participates in this global order through their institution of a "sexual economy." She argues that the Philippines has a sexual economy because of the ways the nation-state has historically fulfilled the fantasies, desires, and demands for a globalized cheap labor force. The creation of the Filipina as a commodity for consumption either as cheap labor or sex worker can be traced to the colonization of the Philippines in the early 19th century. She states, "…the principles of race, gender, and sexuality that constituted and were effected by imperialistic relations continue to operate in the material organization of the Free World."[26] The heteronormative relationship between masculine and feminine ideals that the United States and the Philippines embodies was instituted during the colonization of the Philippines.[27] The figure of the Filipino sex worker exemplifies these imbalanced gendered relations at a micro-level.

In order to show how fantasy production has always engendered desires for Filipinas, she compares the contemporary figure of the OFW to the colonial sex worker. She argues that the marketing of OFWs as caring, laboring bodies is similar

[26] Tadiar, *Fantasy Production Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order*, 31.
[27] For more information about the feminization of Filipinos see Nerissa Balce, *Body Parts of Empire: Visual Abjection, Filipino Images, and the American Archive* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016).

to the ways Filipina sex workers were represented as sexualized commodities at the service to Western men. She evokes the colonial history of sex workers living around U.S. military bases in the Philippines and the abundance of mail-order bride websites that market Filipinas to white men living in the West.[28] While the figure of the sex worker is an example of the way individual bodies are made to be desirable, the management of a national labor force exemplifies how the Philippines has been constructed as a "prostitute" for the United States.[29] In other words, the Philippines is engendered and genders itself as the feminine body to the masculine U.S.

Sociologist Rhacel Parreñas's analysis of transnational migratory experiences of Filipina healthcare workers in *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work* aligns well with Tadiar's conceptualization of neocolonial processes. Parreñas's analysis of overseas workers extends sociologist Evelyn Nakano Glenn's theorization of the "division of racialized labor" between white privileged women and poor women of color in the U.S. to consider the transnational circuits of labor. Glenn argues that a simultaneous analysis of race, class, and gender must be considered to understand why women of color are engendered into what she refers to as "reproductive labor," or the labor needed to maintain capitalist production. These formal and informal occupations include cultural, domestic, childcare, and cleaning services.

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[28] Neferti also discusses the history of Filipino sex workers in a later project. For more information see Neferti Tadiar, *Things Fall Away: Philippine Historical Experience and the Makings of Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).
[29] Tadiar, *Fantasy Production Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order*, 43.

Glenn states that reproductive labor and production of essential goods were typically both located in the household before the industrial revolution. The creation of technologies and institutionalization of commodity production relocated the production of goods outside of the household and into factories thereby physically separating the labor men and women were traditionally assigned. As employment opportunities outside of the household for middle-class women became more available, their reproductive duties needed to be filled. According to Glenn, the employment of particular women of color into reproductive labor is contingent on a regional history of racism. For example, the population of formally enslaved Black women in the south was deemed an apt labor source for domestic services. In the west, recently immigrated Japanese men (and I would add Filipino men) were feminized into service positions.[30] When restriction for the immigration of Asian women were lifted, these women filled their positions. Glenn argues that,

> As subordinate-race women within dual labor systems, African American, Mexican American, and Japanese American women were drawn into domestic service by a combination of economic need, restricted opportunities, and education and employment tracking mechanisms. Once they were in service, their association with 'degraded' labor affirmed their supposed natural inferiority. Although ideologies of 'race' and 'racial difference' justifying the dual labor system already were in place, specific ideas about racial-ethnic womanhood were invented and enacted in everyday interactions between mistresses and workers. Thus, ideologies of race and gender were created and verified in daily life.[31]

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[30] Linda España-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila: Working-Class Filipinos and Popular Culture, 1920s-1950s*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).
[31] Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 18, no. 1 (1992): 1–43, https://doi.org/10.1086/494777, 32.

Domesticity and reproductive labor were gendered, racialized, and classed as inferior and unskilled as white women were simultaneously ushered into jobs that were deemed a natural fit for them.

Parreñas expands Glenn's theory on the interlocking system of labor in the U.S. to consider the ways overseas workers are also implicated. She is primarily interested in analyzing Filipina OFWs in Italy and Los Angeles to demonstrate the gendered dimensions of labor migration. Filipino OFWs are employed for their domestic services, childcare services, cleaning services, and other household responsibilities. By overseeing these obligations, white women in developed countries can leave the home to pursue their career goals. Filipinas are employed to regenerate the current workforce while securing the next generation of future workers through their childcare services. Due to the preponderance of Filipina OFWs and the types of jobs available to them, she argues that the global labor market engenders Filipinas in an unequal relationship. She calls this global structure the "international division of reproductive labor."

She defines the international division of reproductive labor as, "…the three-tier transfer of reproductive labor among women in sending and receiving countries of migration."[32] These three tiers include white women in developed countries, women of color working in developed countries, and women of color working in the homeland. Parreñas argues that white women and Filipina OFWs use their race or

[32] Glenn, "From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor," 30.

class privilege to pass on their reproductive labor to less privileged women. Wealthy white women hire Filipina OFWs to support their family, whereas Filipina OFWs rely on female family members back in the Philippines to raise their children. Through this analysis of the unequal and transnational relationships between women in sending and receiving countries, she shows that "…global capitalism, patriarchy, and racial inequalities are structural forces that jointly determine the subject-positions of migrant Filipina domestic workers in globalization."[33] She shows how labor is concurrently transformed in the West and in the Philippines.

Similar to Neferti Tadiar's understanding of how colonial ideologies of race, gender, and sexuality continue to impact Filipinas in a globalized economy, Parreñas argues that the relationship between women in an international division of reproductive labor is structured through prevailing notions of race, class, and gender. As reproductive labor is transferred from one less privileged woman to the other, men are absolved from these responsibilities in both the homeland and hostlands. In other words, OFWs move from one patriarchal system to another. Although Parreñas does not explicitly state how colonial relationships instituted a racist and gendered economic system, she does argue that ideologies of a Western nuclear family effect the migration of OFWs.[34] While Filipina OFWs break traditional patriarchal gender roles by leaving the family to work abroad, they impose on their female family

[33] Glenn, "From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor," 30.
[34] For more information about the institution of gendered norms in the Philippines see Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

members the responsibility of rearing their children. On the other hand, while white women are allowed to enter the workforce, they prefer Filipina OFWs to care for their homes and family. Parreñas argues that,

> …patriarchal gender norms in the Filipino family, with its basic framework being the division of labor between fathers and mothers, fuel the emotional stress in the transnational families of migrant women. Although it is true that feelings of pain in transnational families are fostered by separation, they are undoubtedly intensified by children's unmet gender-based expectations for mothers (and not fathers) to nurture them, as well as mothers' self-imposed expectations to follow culturally and ideologically inscribed duties in the family.[35]

The tense relationship with family members in the Philippines is indicative of the way U.S. imperialism continues to determine notions of the family and migrant worker's experiences.

Indeed, acknowledging the prevailing imperialistic structures that inform the globalization of Filipino laborers is integral to understanding the flexibility of capitalism. Both Tadiar and Parreñas articulate how unequal colonial relationships are important to understanding the preconditions that laid the groundwork for globalized labor migration. Their focus on American imperialism in the Philippines, however, does not encompass the diversity of OFW experiences. By focusing on the experiences of overseas workers in the U.S., their analysis is limited to the gendering of Filipina OFWs and their reproductive labor.[36] The history of nurse migration to the

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[35] Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 110.

[36] Although Parreñas's *Servants of Globalization* has greatly impacted the field of Filipino migration and labor studies, Parreñas has also responded to the U.S.-centrism in the field by researching the experiences of overseas Filipinos in East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. For more information see Parreñas, Rhacel S., ed. *Asian Diasporas: New Formations, New Conceptions*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007; Rhacel Parreñas, *Illicit Flirtations: Labor, Migration, and*

U.S. has in part shaped the field to focus on Filipina experiences. However, recent statistics show that only six percent more women migrate than men. Their analyses do not consider the way Filipino men and queer Filipinos are also engendered into feminized roles or the ways Filipino workers across the gender spectrum strategically navigate within their roles.[37] Furthermore, while service jobs dominate the occupations available to OFWs, industry and agricultural jobs are also in high demand. Between 1975 and 1983, Saudi Arabia was the largest recruiter of OFWs, majority of whom were men who worked in construction.[38] In other words, the types of employment opportunities that are available for OFWs is also regionally specific. An analysis that narrowly focuses on drawing historical continuity to the advent of Filipino labor migration cannot encompass the multi-local dispersal and diversity of OFWs.

Creating a Labor Brokerage System

After forty-four years of colonization, the United States granted independence to the Philippines in 1946. Although official colonization ended in the Philippines, the United States continued to exert its influence over their economy with the support of

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Sex Trafficking in Tokyo, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Parreñas, Rhacel Salazar, and Rachel Silvey. "The Indentured Mobility of Migrant Domestic Workers: The Case of Dubai." In *Revisiting the Law and Governance of Trafficking, Forced Labor and Modern Slavery*, 503–23. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316675809.018; and Parreñas, Rhacel Salazar, Krittiya Kantachote, and Rachel Silvey. "Soft Violence: Migrant Domestic Worker Precarity and the Management of Unfree Labour in Singapore." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 47, no. 20 (December 16, 2021): 4671–87. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1732614.

[37] Martin Manalansan, "Queering the Chain of Care Paradigm." Border on Belonging: Gender and Immigration 6, no. 3 (2008).

[38] Jane A. Margold, "Narratives of Masculinity and Transnational Migration: Filipino Workers in the Middle East," in *Bewitching Women, Pious Men* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 233.

the Philippine elite. This included the institution of The Bell Trade Act of 1946, which, "…accorded American entrepreneurs 'parity' rights to land ownership, natural resource exploitation, and other business activities."[39] The U.S. government also pressured the newly established Philippine government to sign the Military Bases Agreement in 1947, which gave the U.S. military the right to maintain military bases on the archipelago. By signing these treaties, the U.S. agreed to release $620 million to the Philippine government for rehabilitation funds. This initiated the Philippine government's dependence on loans from international sources of money such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. In order for this money to be released, the Philippines was also expected to initiate economic policies that aligned with their beliefs in "free trade." This resulted in the depreciation of the Philippine pesos, economic stagnation, and high unemployment rates that forced Filipinos to seek employment outside of the Philippines.

Sociologist Saskia Sassen has analyzed the development of global institutions and processes including the World Trade Organization and IMF as a part of an expansion of U.S. economic policies or what she refers to as "globalization." She argues that the creation of these powerful institutions after World War II created a range of experiences through policies enacted by countries that produce relationships between and across countries. One condition that emerged from the outpour of foreign investments to developing nations was mass migration. Sassen shows that

[39] Patricio N. Abinales and Donna J. Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), 170.

foreign investments expanded and strengthened the ideologies of free trade thereby creating opportunities for the internationalization of production. As the global north moved manufacturing to foreign nations, local small-scale production including agriculture weakened and left many unemployed.

Simultaneously, cities in the global north or "global cities" transitioned to be centers where import and export could be regulated. As employment opportunities in the white-collar sector became more readily available, populations who were historically gendered and racialized as inadequate for employment were hired. This left many sectors in need of new and cheap laborers. In other words, "the same set of basic processes that has promoted emigration from several rapidly industrializing countries has also promoted immigration into several booming global cities."[40]

This was certainly the case for the Philippines after World War II. As previously discussed, one of the stipulations to receiving foreign loans was to create preferential tariffs for U.S. goods entering the Philippines. As a result, the demand for U.S. products increased even though it cost more to purchase these foreign goods. The effects to the Philippine economy were catastrophic including the depreciation of the Philippine peso and the weakening of the market for local products. This was further exacerbated by corrupt politicians who utilized the foreign reserves to make investments that largely benefitted their own interests. By 1949, the Philippine economy was on the brink of collapse and 15% of the population was unemployed.

[40] Saskia Sassen, *The Mobility of Labor and Capital: A Study in International Investment and Labor Flow* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 22.

To turn around the economy, export and import controls were instituted by Philippine President Elpidio Quirino with the support of U.S. president Harry S. Truman who sought to curb growing communist affiliation in the Philippines. The control of imports reduced the dependence on foreign goods and ushered a rise in manufacturing in the country. Although the economy was improving and the country was becoming more industrialized, development was uneven. An unbalanced taxation system left the middle and working class struggling. Furthermore, while the foreign demand for rice and sugar was high, small farmers could not produce enough to earn a sustainable living due to continued struggles over land ownership. With no other options in the homeland, Filipinos began to look abroad for better opportunities. As Philippine scholar Caroline Hau states,

> The crisis of the Philippine Left and the international labor migration of the Filipinos…are not simply the most visible manifestation of the Philippines' insertion into global capitalism and the new American-dominated, 'neoliberal' world order that is founded on the tenets of 'sound money,' 'self-regulating markets,' and 'individualism' that is opposed to 'big governments.' The revolutionary movement and the international labor migration of Filipinos represent two classical responses to social crisis: stay and struggle against the system or leave and seek opportunities elsewhere.[41]

It was through the confluence of these events that Filipino citizens sought out a leader who could pull them out of this economic and political turmoil.

On December 30, 1965, Ferdinand Marcos was elected as president of the Philippines. During his campaign, Marcos vowed to end corruption and revitalize the economy. He employed three strategies to modernize the Philippines: "increased

[41] Caroline Hau, *On the Subject of the Nation: Filipino Writings from the Margins, 1981 to 2004* (Quezon City: Ateneo De Manila Univ Press, 2007), 3.

public spending, executive agencies staffed with 'apolitical' technocrats, and use of the army to implement development programs."[42] Relying on foreign loans to support his rural and urban redevelopment, the government fell into a deficit and the export economy he had hoped to create was not earning enough revenue to make-up for the shortfall. This was exacerbated by unfettered spending by the Marcoses and their political allies. By the time of his reelection in 1970, the value of the Philippine peso dropped to six to the dollar and inflation rose. Growing unrest amongst student, peasant, and worker organizations was met with police and presidential security brutality. Marcos faced wide-spread and loud opposition from activists, politicians, and the media for his abuse of power and corruption. On September 23, 1972, Marcos declared martial law and arrested thousands of his opponents.

To curb the growing discontent and address the failing economy, Marcos sought to mobilize the nation's growing unemployed population. In 1974, Presidential Decree 442 was instituted thereby creating the Overseas Employment Development Board, the Bureau of Employment Services, and the National Seamen Board. These state agencies were established to pursue three main tasks: 1) to initiate relationships with nations in need of cheap laborers, 2) create pre-determined employment contracts, and 3) connect Filipino workers with prospective employers. At the time, Marcos referred to this new labor force as "overseas contract workers." In 1982, these organizations were consolidated into the Philippine Overseas Employment

[42] Abinales and Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines,* 194-195.

Administration (POEA). Through these agencies and later the POEA, the Philippine nation-state managed the deployment of overseas laborers.

In Robyn Rodriguez's *Migrants for Export*, she argues that the Philippine nation-state created a "labor brokerage system" that facilitated the displacement of OFWs to curb the nation's economic crisis. She investigates the state mechanisms that regulate the mass export of Filipino laborers. Due to the way the state manages and authorizes the education, job placement, remittances, and citizenship rights of OFWs, Rodriguez argues that the Philippines is a labor brokerage state. She defines a labor brokerage state as, "…a neoliberal strategy that is comprised of institutional and discursive practices through which the Philippine state mobilizes its citizens and send them abroad to work for employers throughout the world while generating a 'profit' from the remittances that migrants send back to their families and loved ones remaining in the Philippines."[43] Rodriguez reveals the state's role in managing a steady supply of Filipino laborers to generate profit.

Rodriguez articulates that the labor brokerage state developed in the Philippines in response to the growing economic inequality that resulted from President Ferdinand Marcos's policies. She notes that his exploitation of loans from the World Bank and IMF forced many Filipinos to seek opportunities abroad.

[43] Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, *Migrants for Export*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), x.

Rodriguez argues that the delegation of the nation's economy to Philippine citizens is an indication of a change in the historic bloc.[44] She notes that,

> There is something quintessentially neoliberal about labor brokerage as a technology of government. It requires the responsibilization of Philippine citizens who are to directly bear the costs of neoliberal restructuring as their remittances go to debt servicing. Moreover, as the Philippine state withdraws social supports and thereby passes on the costs of education, healthcare, and other expenses to its citizens, brokering labor absolves the state from having to provide services directly to its citizens. Ordinary people are forced to bear sole responsibility for the costs associated with newly privatized services with the wages they earn abroad.[45]

The advent of mass out-migration of Filipinos after the 1970s was ushered by a change in state policy. Since the 1970s, the Philippines has maintained their position as a labor brokerage state despite changes to their oversight. Although labor migration was state-operated during the Marcos and Aquino administrations, under President Fidel Ramos labor policy shifted to be state-sponsored to meet the demands of interested Filipinos and prospective employers. Despite these changes, the Philippine government maintains their primacy to control the flow of labor and capitalize on OFWs. The role of the state in globalized labor migration sets apart this type of movement from other waves of migration.

The historiography I offer is not an attempt to pit two camps within the field of Filipino labor and migration studies. Rather, it is to show how both frameworks are important to understanding the contemporary migration of Filipino workers. Analyzing U.S. imperialism offers an understanding of the hierarchical structures that

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[44] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings (1921-1926)With Additional Texts by Other Italian Communist Leaders.* (London: London, 1978), http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.32106014759721.
[45] Rodriguez, xix.

place the Philippines and Filipinos in subordinate positions. However, studying the expansion of capitalism after World War II and its effects on the policies enacted after the 1970s reveals the particularities of this type of migration. By historicizing contemporary labor migration to the creation of a labor brokerage state, I apprehend an expanded vision of the nation-state's policies while accounting for the diversity of overseas laborers. I investigate this scholarship to show how the visual is a part of these mechanisms of migration but also to show how conversations of the visual have been understudied amongst these influential scholars.

Discipline and the Overseas Worker

Unlike former waves of out-migration, this contemporary movement across borders is marked by the ways their journey across multiple nodes is structured by the state. Unlike the immigration of Filipinos in the early-twentieth century to the U.S., a wave of migrants that Filipinos scholars refer to as "manong" and "manang" generation, contemporary migrants are not limited to transpacific routes. Indeed, their migration is restricted, but to over 200 locations that have preordained pathways for employment. Another aspect of the increased control over migration is the regulation of citizenship. While some OFWs find opportunities for permanent settlement in their hostland, many OFWs have the intention of either moving for new employment opportunities or to return home.[46] This is due, in part, to limited citizenship pathways

[46] Rhacel Parreñas locates three different types of migration patterns: direct migration, serial migration, and stepwise migration. She states that stepwise and serial migrants move to their country of immigration as temporary migrants. For more information see Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work*, 4.

for OFWs in their hostlands. This differs from other forms of migration where Filipinos typically have easier access to settle abroad permanently.

These overseas Filipinos are referred to as "Fil-foreigners," or *balikbayans*, which translates to return to the country.[47] According to historian Filomeno Aguilar, these terms are used to describe overseas Filipinos who emigrated to the United States permanently because of the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act.[48] These Filipinos were typically green card holders who were employed as white-collar workers. Many of these Filipinos also managed to move to the U.S. through petitions made by the manong and manang generation through the family reunification program. On the other hand, Southeast Asian Literature scholar, Caroline Hau, loosely defines these overseas Filipinos as those who obtain residency or citizenship in their country of emigration.[49] Hau's description of Fil-foreigners does not distinguish these migrants based on their class or educational background and instead focuses on the structures of their migration.

While many scholars seek to differentiate OFWs and Fil-foreigners based on their affiliations to the homeland or the frequency in which they return to the Philippines, the difference I seek to draw here is the structure of their travels. Vicente

[47] For more information about the phrase *balikbayan,* see Vicente L Rafael, *White Love: And Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).
[48] Filomeno Aguilar uses a sociological approach to labor migration by analyzing the waves of migration in various stages. Filomeno Aguilar argues that there are four stages of Filipino migration: 'old' global labor migration in the 19th century, 'old' US-centered labor migration from 1905 to the 1920s, 'new' immigrations to the US after 1965, and 'new' global labor migration of the early 1970s. For more information see Filomeno V. Aguilar, "Is the Filipino Diaspora a Diaspora?," *Critical Asian Studies* 47, no. 3 (September 2015): 440–61, https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2015.1057392.
[49] Caroline Sy Hau, "Privileging Roots and Routes: Filipino Intellectuals and the Contest over Epistemic Power and Authority," *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 62, no. 1 (2014): 29–65, https://doi.org/10.1353/phs.2014.0000.

Rafael has commented on the disparaging representation of balikbayans perpetuated by scholars.[50] Often balikbayans are referred to as traitors to the nation because of their perceived privilege living in the United States. On the other hand, OFWs are essentialized as uneducated and poor but are praised for their sacrifices. While it is true that Filipinos living in the United States are afforded more opportunities in comparison to Filipinos in the Philippines, this analysis obfuscates the racialized and gendered experiences of Fil-foreigners living in the West. In addition, OFWs are homogenized as non-threatening individuals often obscuring the fact that they are typically from lower-middle-class families who can afford the expenses of working abroad.[51] In other words, scholars have demarcated overseas Filipinos through perceptions of authenticity.

Rather than differentiate overseas Filipinos through notions of Filipinoness, I analyze the way the nation-state produces different subjectivities through the structures of their migration. By focusing on state-mechanisms I apprehend how the visual is a central part of global labor migration. Sociologist Anna Guevarra refers to this as a kind of "disciplinary power" or the way state and employment agencies racialize and gender OFWs into types of labor.[52] OFWs experience more regulated forms of labor migration that are predetermined through agreements that are brokered between the Philippine nation-state and the hostland. The description I offer is an attempt to analyze the diversity of OFWs and their experiences. In addition, I

[50] Rafael, *White Love*.
[51] These expenses included the cost of education, visa papers, airfare, and allowances.
[52] Anna Romina Guevarra, *Marketing Dreams, Manufacturing Heroes: The Transnational Labor Brokering of Filipino Workers*, 5.

recognize the porosity of these borders and the ways OFWs sometimes become *balikbayans* because of their experiences abroad.[53] In other words, I do not define OFWs based on their socioeconomic background, level of education, occupation, national belonging, cultural authenticity, or the rate of their return. By focusing on the ways their migration is structured between the Philippine nation-state and labor-receiving countries, I analyze how representations on OFWs are historically and regionally specific and the various ways artists seek to respond to them. I use this approach to apprehend an expanded vision of globalized Filipino labor, but it is also in response to the essentializing images that maintain the exploitation of OFWs.

National Representations of OFWs and Counter-Production

The primacy of the nation-state to control the movement of laborers is maintained through the dissemination of ideal representations. The creation of a new contractual overseas workforce was described in Presidential Decree 442 as the "National Manpower Development Program." From its inception, state-operated (and later a state-sponsored) migration was meant to "ensure efficient allocation, development and utilization of the nation's manpower and thereby promote employment and accelerate economic and social growth."[54] Overseas Filipinos were expected to uplift the economy. However, it was only in April 1988 that OFWs were

[53] Parreñas notes that one way OFWs attain citizenship, especially if it is not permitted by receiving-countries, is through marriage. For more information see Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*.
[54] Ferdinand Marcos, "Presidential Decree No. 442," 442 § (1974), https://elibrary.judiciary.gov.ph/thebookshelf/showdocs/26/25306#:~:text=May%2001%2C%201974%20%5D-,A%20DECREE%20INSTITUTING%20A%20LABOR%20CODE%2C%20THEREBY%20REVISING%20AND%20CONSOLIDATING,PEACE%20BASED%20ON%20SOCIAL%20JUSTICE.

referred to as “bagong bayani” or “new hero.” President Corazon Cojuangco-Aquino spoke to foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong and praised them for the sacrifices they made for their families and the state. Despite the menial tasks and hard work, Aquino implored OFWs to take pride for their family and nation are grateful. By invoking this language, Aquino equated OFWs with esteemed national hero and martyr Jose Rizal, author of the revolutionary book *Noli Me Tangere*.[55]

According to Jean Encinas-Franco, the Aquino administration deployed this discourse to distinguish the labor-export policies of Marcos and Aquino. As a symbol of a new democratic nation, Aquino sought to market labor export as a choice rather than a final recourse for Philippine citizens.[56] OFWs were praised therefore for their freedom to choose a life of sacrifice for the benefit of their families. Indeed, the language extolls that neoliberalism can align with traditional Filipino family values.[57] Enfolded in this, however, is the state’s absolution of the national economy. Rodriguez notes,

> By characterizing out-migration as 'heroic' Aquino portrayed international migration as a voluntary act of self-sacrificing individuals living in a democratic society rather than a kind of forced conscription under a dictatorial regime. Overseas employment is represented as a sacrifice akin to these made by anticolonial nationalists: a sacrifice that requires some degree of suffering but ultimately advances the great national good.[58]

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[55] Rafael, *White Love*.
[56] Jean Encinas-Franco, “Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) as Heroes: Discursive Origins of the ‘Bagong Bayani’ in the Era of Labor Export,” *Humanities Diliman* 12, no. 2 (2015): 56–78.
[57] Anna Romina Guevarra, *Marketing Dreams, Manufacturing Heroes: The Transnational Labor Brokering of Filipino Workers*, 5.
[58] Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, *Migrants for Export*, 84.

The dualled hero and martyr discourse has since been used and modified by subsequent administrations to justify and maintain the export of Filipino laborers. As I discuss in the following chapters, the use of these archetypes has evolved depending on the political climate. For example, during Fidel Ramos's administration, the martyr narrative was utilized to celebrate the passing of the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act in 1995 which expanded protection for OFWs. Although OFWs received more social support, the state also affirmed the transition to a state-sponsored labor export program. As discussed above, Duterte's administration modified the hero narrative and described OFWs as soldiers who must respond to the call to defend the nation. Representations of OFWs are therefore promoted by state officials but also policy changes.

Anna Guevarra notes, representations on OFWs are also produced and circulated by government agencies that oversee the migration of laborers. In *Marketing Dreams, Manufacturing Heroes: The Transnational Labor Brokering of Filipino Workers*, Guevarra argues that the POEA and private employment agencies market Filipinos as ideal laboring bodies with exceptional and unique export value to generate more employment opportunities. This includes creating advertising campaigns that sell images of Filipinos depending on the needs of that nation. For example, Filipino domestic helpers and nurses are marketed as feminized, caring, attentive, and family oriented. As I discuss in chapter four, Filipino seafarers are advertised as flexible masculine workers. These campaigns also include social media advertisements including YouTube videos where prospective employers can watch an

interview with interested workers.[59] Guevarra also adds that required training programs and continuing education courses also contributes to the marketability of Filipinos. Guevarra argues,

> Ultimately, the labor-brokering process is not just about defining or providing employment opportunities but is fundamentally about image building, whereby the aspects of Filipino workers that give them the moniker of *high value* are accentuated when they are promoted to foreign employers and where the imperfections about overseas employment that defy the dreams of the very same workers are hidden or minimized.[60]

The production and circulation of images by government officials, state agencies, and private firms has certainly permeated the social and cultural imaginary of the Philippines. Films, television, and other forms of popular culture had adopted and adapted these ideal representations of Filipinos. As Arjay Arellano notes, the "mother as martyr" trope is a very popular storyline in films produced in the Philippines especially the critically acclaimed movie *Anak* featuring beloved actresses Vilma Santos and Claudine Barretto.[61] In labor-receiving nations, pop cultural references to Filipino workers often naturalizes them as workers.[62] These representations often live alongside representations of Filipinas as sex-workers and

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[59] Jimena Ortuzar, "Performing the 'Foreign Maid' in the Global Market," *TDR: The Drama Review* 62, no. 1 (2018): 98–112.
[60] Guevarra, *Marketing Dreams, Manufacturing Heroes,* 209.
[61] Arjay Arellano, "Mama, Home and Away: Philippine Cinema's Discourse on the Feminization of Labor Migration," in *Communicating for Social Change: Meaning, Power, and Resistance*, ed. Mohan Jyoti Dutta and Dazzelyn Baltazar Zapata (Singapore: Springer, 2019), 111–31, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-2005-7_6.
[62] For more information see Karl Ian Uy Cheng Chua and Benjamin A. San Jose, "Wife, Child, Illegal: Static Representations of Filipinos in Japanese Manga," in *Transnationalism in East and Southeast Asian Comics Art*, ed. John A. Lent, Wendy Siuyi Wong, and Benjamin Wai–ming Ng (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 213–30, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-95243-3_11; Nicole Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Migrant Workers;* Roland B. Tolentino, *Essays on Philippine Media Cultures and Neocolonialisms: Keywords* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2016).

mail-order brides, stereotypes that also conflate Filipinos with docility, servitude, and bodily services.[63]

I see these different representations that feature Filipinos as ideal working bodies as a part of a larger visual regime. Although these images are developed and circulated with different purposes and audiences in mind, they all participate in naturalizing the Philippines as a source of cheap labor and the nation's position as a brokerage state. I refer to these images as "national representations of OFWs" for the ways they affirm the state's power to control pathways of migration for Filipinos. These powerful, dynamic, and diverse representations simultaneously obfuscate the realities of living and working abroad thereby ensuring a steady flow of available workers and securing jobs with prospective employers eager for docile and cheap workers.

Visual artists are attuned to the power of representations to normalize state discourses. Thus, they also recognize the urgency to counter these images. Art historian Kobena Mercer explains that art holds the capacity to challenge visual regimes precisely because of the interruption in attendant visual norms. He states, "Art that intervenes to disrupt such embedded rules and norms within the symbolic order of culture has the potential to bring about a momentary crisis in our lived relation to reality, thereby cutting an opening into the imaginative realm in which

[63] Gina Velasco, "Performing the Filipina 'Mail-Order Bride': Queer Neoliberalism, Affective Labor, and Homonationalism," *W&P Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 23, no. 3 (2013): 350–72; Vernadette Gonzalez and Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, "Filipina.Com: Wives, Workers, and Whores on the Cyberfrontier," in *Asian American Net: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Cyperspace* (London: Routledge, 2003).

alternatives become thinkable."[64] I follow Mercer's understanding of the role of arts and analyze the way Filipino artists interrupt these images.

Filipino artists of the labor diaspora disrupt normalized discourses on OFWs by creating works of art that offer alternative visions of living abroad. As discussed above, national representations of OFWs contribute to state mechanisms that discipline Filipinos and the Philippines as subservient workers. In other words, images of hardworking OFWs affirm the globalization of Filipino laborers. Artists recognize the labor of these representations and seek to intervene in their production. I refer to this artistic praxis as "counter-production" or the creation of visual materials that counters the productivity of national representations of OFWs. Contemporary artists create alternative images of unproductive Filipinos during moments in-between work. Unlike official state images that homogenize Filipinos as flexible workers, these representations acknowledge the diversity of experiences across the diaspora. Artists incorporate specific socio-political events, motifs, and symbols that represent the time and place of displacement. Often these images represent day-to-day, mundane scenes that excavate the personal experiences of the subjects they represent who are often inspired by or depict the artists' family members. These works of art are intimate and private excavations and the symbols used can often be ambiguous or esoteric. I consider these different aspects of these works of art as an attempt to challenge national representations of OFWs.

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[64] Kobena Mercer. *Travel & See: Black Diaspora Art Practices since the 1980s*, (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2016), 4.

Methodology

To explore how contemporary artists counter national representations of overseas Filipino laborers, I focus on contemporary works of art made after 1973 from cis-gender women artists across the Filipino diaspora. The contemporary migration of Filipino laborers to over two-hundred countries to follow the "flow of capital" necessitates a historically specific and multi-local analysis.[65] Therefore, the artists I analyze are based in locations that are popular destinations for Filipino laborers including the United States, Germany, and Hong Kong. These artists include Jenifer Wofford, Lizza May David, and Xyza Cruz Bacani. I also have selected Imelda Cajipe Endaya and Martha Atienza who are currently based in the Philippines but previously lived abroad. Endaya moved to New York to be a caretaker for her mother in 2005 while Atienza lived part-time with her mother in the Netherlands when she was a child. I am interested in their perspective as artists who have returned to the "homeland" and how this impacts their practice.

I have chosen to analyze artists who identify as cisgender women for this dissertation to offer a reading of how gender operates within this regime of visuality. Although many scholars of globalized Filipino labor argue that the Filipino labor force is feminized and point to the higher population of overseas Filipinas, many Filipino men are also employed abroad as reproductive and productive laborers. For example, Filipino seafarers are often celebrated for fulfilling their role as the man of

[65] Ong refers to the migration of laborers to follow employment prospects abroad as the "flow of capital." For more information see Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1999).

the household and enduring dangerous conditions on the high seas. However, Filipino seafarers are often femininized into low-ranking positions such as the head cook onboard cargo ships. The ubiquity and diversity of OFWs requires a more nuanced understanding of how Filipinos are engendered into both masculine and feminine positions. However, I would be remiss to overlook the preponderance of visual materials that focus on the Filipina body. As feminist art historians have recognized, women artists are attuned to the nuanced ways men, women, and non-binary individuals are gendered and sexualized often in contradictory and overlapping manners.[66] My study focuses on artworks by Filipina artists and their worldviews to recognize the contributions of women artists and understand the gendered representations of OFWs across the diaspora.

Following art historian Alpesh Kantilal Patel's reworking of diasporic theories by scholars of the Black diaspora, my adoption of these theories is a "lateral move to another space bound by a different set of power dynamics."[67] Indeed, many art historians and curators of Asian American art and visual culture have turned to diasporic and transnational theories to analyze the works of Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Native Hawaiian artists. Margo Machida's *Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social Imaginary* provides a useful model to investigating the positionality of diasporic artists. She states Asian American art should be framed as, "contingent, shifting, and frequently ambivalent

[66] Guerrilla Girls, *The Guerrilla Girls' Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998).
[67] Alpesh Kantilal Patel, *Productive Failure: Writing Queer Transnational South Asian Art Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).

nature of social and personal identities in a multiply determined world, and to new ideas emerging from arenas of intellectual discourse."[68] Sarita See's *The Decolonized Eye: Filipino American Art and Performance* analyzes the ways Filipino American artists challenge colonial spatial logics of the "center" and "periphery." Instead, she proposes an analysis of art that attends to a more complex geography while acknowledging the specificity of Filipino American visual culture.[69] There is also the scholarship of Susette Min, Elaine Kim, and Joan Kee which questions the term "Asian American" to capture the complex, contradictory, and globalized art practice of many Asian American and diasporic artists.[70] The curatorial projects and scholarship of art historians based in the Philippines including Patrick Flores are also an important reminder of the U.S.-centrism of Asian American art scholarship, and the need to reference Asian and South East Asian modernities.[71] Indeed, these and many other art historians and curators have provided integral models to studying the globalization of Filipino labor.[72] I add to these conversations by being one of the first

[68] Margo Machida, *Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social Imaginary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 17.
[69] Sarita See, *The Decolonized Eye: Filipino American Art and Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009) xxix.
[70] For more information see Joan Kee, *The Geometries of Afro Asia: Art beyond Solidarity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2023); Elaine H. Kim, et. al, *Fresh Talk/Daring Gazes: Conversations on Asian American Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); and Susette Min, *Unnamable: The Ends of Asian American Art* (New York: NYU Press, 2018).
[71] Patrick D. Flores and Loredana Pazzini-Paracciani, eds. *Interlaced Journeys: Diaspora and the Contemporary in Southeast Asian Art*. Hong Kong: Osage Publications, 2020.
[72] Other noteworthy scholars of Asian American art that I have influenced my scholarship include Boreth Ly, Theodore Gonzalves, Laura Kina, and Thea Quiray Tagle.

scholars use diasporic models to study the visual culture of globalized Filipino labor after the 1970s.[73]

I draw on the work of Kobena Mercer whose methodological model was central to my approach to analyzing art of the Filipino labor diaspora.[74] In attending to the hybrid cultural formations of artists across the Atlantic, Mercer draws upon Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, and James Clifford. Using Paul Gilroy's theory of the "roots and routes" of the Black diaspora, Mercer approaches art making practices of Black artists as occurring "in the wake"[75] of the transatlantic slave trade.[76] Mercer attends to the dialogic relationship between homeland and diaspora in the art making practices of Black artists by drawing upon Stuart Hall who theorized that artists use semiotic references from multiple locations creating a hybridized culture and identity.[77] Through James Clifford's theorization, Mercer reads across artists from different locations in the diaspora as a part of a network of "decentered, lateral connections."[78] His methodological model to analyzing artists of the Black diaspora is useful to understanding the art making practices of Filipino contemporary artists who grapple with questions regarding labor and capital. I approach each artist as a case study from

[73] This dissertation is the first analyze art of the Filipino labor diaspora through diasporic methods and it is certainly the most comprehensive survey of art about OFWs. However, there have been other scholarly works and exhibitions that attempted to grapple with the scale of overseas laborers. For more information see Thelma B. Kintanar, ed. *Filipina Artists in Diaspora*. Manila: Anvil Publishing Inc., 2011 and Edna Zapanta Manlapaz, et. al. *Many Journeys, Many Voices.* Anvil Publishing, Inc., 2015.
[74] I would like to thank Boreth Ly who introduced me to Kobena Mercer's work.
[75] Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).
[76] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).
[77] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Commuity, Culture, Difference* (London: Laurence & Wishart, 1990), 222–37.
[78] James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3, (1994): 250.

the diaspora who offer embodied insight into the ways OFWs make sense of their position based on the specific socio-cultural milieu of their new homes. Reading across this network offers an opportunity to understand the specific social, political, and cultural conditions of a place, while also acknowledging similarities across the diaspora.

Although they occupy a relatively privileged position in comparison to post-1970s overseas workers, these artists are positioned alongside the racialized and gendered rhetoric that OFWs are measured and defined against. As Lizza May David said, "Claiming the space of the diaspora is intertwined with the story of the OFW."[79] Many of these artists have relatives who are OFWs and are intimately connected to the experiences of working overseas. David and Atienza have aunts and cousins who are OFWs that work as seamen and domestic workers. Although they are not considered OFWs, Wofford's parents moved their family to Hong Kong, Dubai, Malaysia, and the San Francisco Bay Area as a condition of their employment. Endaya's experience as a caretaker for her elderly mother mirrored many Filipino domestic workers living in New York. Lastly, Bacani initially moved to Hong Kong as an OFW to work as a domestic worker. These personal experiences impact their artistic practices and inform the critiques they raise. Due to their position in the diaspora, they serve as ideal subjects for a study on the visual culture of OFWs.

Indeed, it is precisely their proximity to globalized labor migration that inspired them to produce works of art about OFW experiences. For Lizza May David,

[79] Interview with the author September 2, 2021.

she initially created her films to reconnect with her aunt who lived as a domestic helper in Hong Kong. Imelda Cajipe Endaya created her genre and landscape paintings of the Hudson Valley as a form of personal diary. She turned to painting to make sense of her move to New York. Martha Atienza began her practice as a form of advocacy and activism. She endeavors to help the fisher folk communities on Bantayan Island as they grapple with urban redevelopment and dwindling fish populations. Lastly, Bacani started her photographic practice as a way to make amends with her mother who had left their family to work in Hong Kong when Bacani was young. She realized the importance of documenting migrant workers experiences and became a photojournalist to advocate for women's rights.

I outline the different intentions behind their art practice to show that the production of these visual materials differs from national representations of OFWs. However, I would be remiss to say that they work outside of a global market. They are all represented by art galleries and sell their work for a living. They exhibit in museums to gain more visibility and recognition. This negotiation between their praxis and the art market is a productive site of conflict. The way Filipino artists of the labor diaspora grapple with the art market is also a type of counter-production. For example, during my conversations with David she told me that she was highly cognizant of how the German art market values representations of impoverished OFWs. She intentionally transitioned her art practice to move away from representations of OFWs as martyrs. Furthermore, Atienza deliberately uses her visibility as an internationally acclaimed artist to bring attention to her community on

Bantayan Island. By pointing the spotlight on her community, she believes it pressures local officials to make policy changes. Although they would not be able to live completely outside of the influence of the art market, these artists exceed it by using its mechanisms to counter the productivity of national representations on OFWs. In other words, the artists I analyze wrestle with their visibility as Filipina artists to further their political agenda.

Just as they challenge the art market by producing works of art that exceeds its boundaries, they also counter the western art canon. As artist of color, they have been compared to or measured against an art canon that perceives the west as the epicenter of art making. Furthermore, except for Xyza Cruz Bacani, all the artists analyzed in this dissertation have received formal art training that often sidelines the art and aesthetics of artists of color. As artists they also cannot escape the prevailing legacies of imperialism and its dissemination of notions of art and art making, a practice that art historian Patrick Flores refers to as "global intimacies."[80] As an art historian of color, I recognize how artists of color are positioned and in doing so I analyze for the ways they challenge and expand on this history of art. For example, in chapter one, I analyze how Wofford is influenced by the Bay Area Figurative Movement and the ways she interrupts the salience of white bodies by artists most closely associated with it. Imelda Cajipe Endaya also uses the attendant philosophies of Hudson Valley artists to discuss notions of home and the nation for immigrants to the U.S. By

[80] Patrick Flores, *IMU UR2 Panel: Global Intimacies, 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0hiu6UrSk4.*

recognizing the important art historical interventions, I show the connection between globalized labor migration and the global art market.

Unlike scholarship that considers the contributions of contemporary artists as supplemental or secondary evidence that corroborates ethnographic or literary analyses, I turn to the ways artists draw on their personal experience and offer new visions of working in the diaspora. As Alpesh Kantilal Patel notes, cultural studies approaches to art and visual culture often "sidestep" art historical and visual culture methods.[81] My research seeks to upend this methodological paradigm by foregrounding the visual as the primary source of analysis.

Chapter Summary

This dissertation comprises of four chapters divided into three sections: diaspora, labor, and return. The structure of my dissertation mimics the cycle of migration experienced by both the artists in my dissertation and the overseas Filipino workers they represent.[82] The first section of my dissertation offers a definition and theory of diaspora rooted in the experiences of two contemporary Filipina artists: Jenifer Wofford and Imelda Cajipe Endaya. The section "labor" features the artist Lizza May David who offers alternative visions of domestic labor that decenter the body and nation. Lastly, "return" discusses film artist Martha Atienza who imagines a return to the homeland but shifts the focus away from a physical return to the nation.

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[81] Alpesh Kantilal Patel, *Productive Failure: Writing Queer Transnational South Asian Art Histories*.
[82] I am also inspired by T.J. Demos and Kobena Mercer who structured their books to mimic the process of displacement and return. For more information see T. J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2013); Mercer, *Travel & See*.

Lastly, I end my dissertation with an analysis of Xyza Bacani's documentary photographs in my conclusion.

Chapter one lays the theoretical foundations in which the rest of my dissertation builds upon. I analyze Jenifer Wofford's *Point of Departure* (2007), which I argue visualizes the Filipino labor diaspora. Through Wofford's artwork, I define the Filipino labor diaspora as a network of nodes connected to the Filipino nation-states' labor policies but differentiated across labor-receiving nations. The series is comprised of forty small acrylic paintings featuring a Filipina nurse in a variety of locations. She is portrayed engaging in everyday acts such as shopping in the market, walking on her morning commute to work, and daydreaming by her kitchen window. The various frames are arranged in a jigsaw like pattern that changes after each iteration and installation. I argue that her arrangement of these frames and their countless combinations visualizes the diverse network of OFWs. I compare this work to her poster series *Flor 1973-78* (2008) which I argue is not only a companion piece but is also an example of one of the many stories found within the frames of *Point of Departure*.

"Common-Place: A Turn to the Everyday in Imelda Cajipe Endaya's Hudson Valley Paintings" traces the artistic practice of Imelda Cajipe Endaya. I am interested in the way her practice changed when she moved from the Philippines to the United States in 2005 to be her mother's caretaker. I compare her work *Filipina: DH* (1995), an installation of found objects that she made early in her career in the Philippines, to a series of paintings she created in 2005 while living in New York. Unlike her early

work where she depicts domestic workers as victims of the state, the paintings she created while living in New York feature domestic scenes. She turns to representations of her home in New York as inspiration to discuss notions of belonging. I argue that her decision to move away from representations of OFWs as victims or martyrs to depicting their lived environments in the diaspora was impacted by her own experience as a displaced Filipina. Furthermore, I argue that her use of en plein air painting, which she adopted after she moved to the region, offers an alternative historiography of American landscape painting that centers the displaced.

For my third chapter I analyze Lizza May David's series of films and installations on OFWs that she made between 2006 to 2011. This includes *Two Years More* (2006), *Looking Inwards* (2008), *The Model Family Award* (2008), *Cycles of Care* (2011), and *Ludy's Painting* (2011). By analyzing these video works and photographs chronologically, I show the various filmic and photographic strategies she employs to counter the ethnographic imperative to represent the Filipino laboring body. David's discomfort with the history of the camera in the Philippines ultimately pushes her to transition her art practices from figuration to abstraction. It is through abstracting the laboring body that she can negotiate the colonial histories of the camera, the politics of representation, and the hypervisibility of the brown body.

In chapter four, I analyze Martha Atienza's films *Our Islands, 11°16`58.4" 123°45`07.0"E* (2017) and *Anito* (2012). Rather than depict Filipino laborers in the diaspora, Atienza shows the way labor changes back in the homeland because of this displacement. She centers the stories of fishermen on Bantayan Island and the

everyday difficulties they face as their neighbors or *kabayans* leave to be seafarers. By drawing a connection to the dwindling harvest that plagues the fishermen that are left behind and the ecological damage caused by the maritime trade, Atienza points to the unsustainability of migrant labor and the dialogic relationship between diaspora and homeland. The return to the homeland Atienza visualizes counters narratives of a heroic return. Instead of remittances, Filipinos in her videos receive and bear the brunt of the brutal environmental, social, and economic costs of global trade.

I conclude my dissertation with documentary photographer Xyza Bacani whose photographic series *We Are Like Air* summarizes the complications of representing Filipino labor that I discuss in the chapters prior. As a former domestic worker based in Hong Kong, Bacani's journey from OFW to global artist has often been co-opted as a testament Filipino success and excellence. In this chapter, I discuss the possibilities and limits of artistic critique and the role of the global art world in the production of national representations of OFWs.

Chapter One

Network of Departures: Visualizing the Filipino Labor Diaspora in Jenifer Wofford's Art[83]

With her back turned to the viewer, a Filipina dressed in a 1970s-style nurse uniform leans over and rests her elbows on a charcoal-blue parapet on a roof. Her head is lifted towards the horizon and between the supple curve of a dark brown mountain range, a lime green durian-shaped sun peeks through signaling the beginning of a new dawn or the fading light of day. In this quiet, nondescript scene, she contemplates this moment of transition and point of departure. This image is one of forty paintings that detail the private moments of rest, boredom, and daily musings of a Filipina nurse in Jenifer Wofford's 2007 installation *Point of Departure* (Fig. 1.1). These nine by twelve-inch, gouache, acrylic, and ink on paper paintings are arranged in an incomplete mosaic pattern that can be read both vertically and horizontally like a crossword puzzle. Although the frames of each painting follow the same nurse in various ordinary temperate and tropical spaces – including a wet market, hospital room, and a crosswalk leading to a grey building – these scenes are rendered as discreet and elusive vignettes. In other words, although these images can be loosely interpreted as an immigrant's journey outside of the Philippines, there is no legible narrative arc linking these paintings together. The disjointed arrangement of

[83] This chapter is adapted from the essay "Counter-Producing National Narratives: Filipina Diasporic Artists Challenge the Global Health Care System" published in *Social Transformations: Journal of the Global South.* All arguments are new and explore other aspects of Jenifer Wofford's art practice.

these frames implies that Wofford offers the viewer windows into this nurse's life in the diaspora.

Fig. 1.1 Jenifer Wofford, *Point of Departure*, 2007, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, California

This ambiguous story differs from the linear but brief narrative represented in *Flor 1973-1978* (2008) (Fig. 1.2). Just one year after she created *Point of Departure* Wofford illustrated a series of six posters. Viewed sequentially, the posters narrativize the first six years of a Filipina's experience immigrating to San Francisco. Unlike *Point of Departure*, *Flor* shows landmarks that are undeniably a part of San Francisco's skyline. The Transamerica Pyramid pierces through the thick fog that locals lovingly call "Karl." Wofford makes direct references to San Francisco neighborhoods including Excelsior and Manilatown in captions under each illustration. Although the narrative approach differs between the two series, the style and aesthetics match and Wofford even uses images from *Point of Departure* in *Flor*. These resonances suggest that the two artworks are not just related but must be read

together to cull an understanding of the history of contemporary Filipina migration to the United States.

Fig. 1.2 Jenifer Wofford, *Flor 1973-1978: Skylab*, 2008

In this chapter, I analyze Jenifer Wofford's *Point of Departure* and *Flor 1973-78* to argue that Wofford engages in a counter-productive practice by demonstrating the plurality of experiences in the Filipino labor diaspora. Wofford's artworks are counter-productive because they fracture the singularity of total or grand narrative. This differs from representations of OFWs that offer a single or monolithic narrative of the "immigrant experience." By showing a nonlinear journey in *Point of Departure*, Wofford challenges the status quo and official narrative. However, Wofford also suggests that an analysis of the Filipino labor diaspora must also attend to the site-specific and local perspectives of immigrants. By toggling between the global and local, Wofford's artworks align with what Paul Gilroy referred to as the

"roots and routes" of diasporas.[84] Through these two works of art, I arrive at a definition of the labor diaspora that attends to the vast multi-local dispersal of Filipinos to follow the flow of capital in response to the violence of globalization and Martial Law. By analyzing *Flor 1973-78* as a companion piece of *Point of Departure*, I show that Wofford highlights the interconnected global network of OFWs and the vast diversity across these nodes. While *Point of Departure* describes the labor diaspora through the installation's composition, I argue that *Flor 1973-78* is one of the many stories found within the frames of *Point of Departure* and depicts the site-specific experience of a nurse in San Francisco. Her attention to historicizing San Francisco in the 1970s manifests not just in her depiction of political events in the city, but also the aesthetic qualities of her work. Wofford's representation of this nurse in everyday locations in San Francisco is both an homage and expansion of the Bay Area Figurative Movement and its legacy. The artist's blend of abstract and figurative cityscapes is indicative of Wofford's desire to make visible the historical presence of Filipinos in San Francisco. The hyperlocal retelling of this story does not assume that these images are representative of a singular or authentic immigrant experience. Rather, Wofford shows that stories of the labor diaspora must toggle between the local and global.

A Diasporic Artist

[84] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

Jenifer K. Wofford is a San Francisco-based performance, illustration, and installation artist and educator. She is a part-time faculty member in Fine Arts and Philippine Studies at the University of San Francisco. She received her M.F.A. from UC Berkeley and B.F.A. from the San Francisco Art Institute where she worked closely with the renown Filipino American artist Carlos Villa.[85] She is also known as one of the three members of the camp-performance, video, photography, and installation artist group Mail Order Brides//M.O.B. alongside artists Reanne Estrada and Eliza Barrios.[86] In her solo and group artistic practice Wofford explores notions of authenticity, gender roles, and colonization in the Philippines. Her artworks destabilize Western notions of an authentic and monolithic Filipina identity.

Her interests in exploring notions of ethnic authenticity are influenced by her subject position as a mixed-race Filipina who grew up in several cities. As a self-described "third-culture kid," Wofford's art practice is "informed by hybridity, history, calamity and global culture: it's the intercultural creative logic of a Filipina-American raised in Hong Kong, the UAE, Malaysia, and California, as well as that of

[85] Carlos Villa was an artist, educator, and activist based in San Francisco. He was well-known for his art gatherings, including workshops and conferences, and mentorship of emerging artists including Jenifer Wofford. For more information on Carlos Villa see Theodore Gonzalves, *Carlos Villa and the Integrity of Spaces* (Meritage Press, 2012). In 2022, the Newark Museum in New Jersey and Asian Art Museum in San Francisco held the first retrospective on Carlos Villa.

[86] Since 1995 Reanne Estrada, Eliza Barrios, and Jenifer Wofford collaborated as an artist trio interested formally in camp aesthetics and politically in critiquing popular representations of Filipinas. They initially met through Carlos Villa who brought the artists together for an exhibition in the San Francisco Bay Area. For more information see Thea Quiray Tagle, "After the I-Hotel: Material, Cultural, and Affective Geographies of Filipino San Francisco" (UC San Diego, 2015), https://escholarship.org/uc/item/25b581sd; Gina Velasco, "Performing the Filipina 'Mail-Order Bride': Queer Neoliberalism, Affective Labor, and Homonationalism," *W&P Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 23, no. 3 (2013): 350–72.

a longtime educator in a diverse range of communities."[87] This understanding of culture and identity as influx has informed her artistic choices. She notes,

> Probably the richest source of material in my work of the past decade has been both Filipino culture as well as a hybridized sense of A/P/A [Asian Pacific American] culture. Perhaps more than my own specific ethnicity/culture, I think I've been far more influenced by the wide variety of experiences and cultures I've been participating in over the years. One's conception of one's 'culture' is such a construct, an amalgamation of many, many other things than blood.[88]

In this interview, Wofford states that her work explores the ways identities continually shift and evolve and thus pushes against notions of a monolithic culture and people.

Indeed, her most well-known artworks explore notions of Filipino identity and migration through the figure of the Filipina nurse. This includes *Nurse* (2007), *Point of Departure*, *Flor 1973-78*, and *MacArthur Nurses I* (2009). According to the performance studies scholar, Jonathan Magat, Wofford first explored these themes as an MFA student at UC Berkeley under the tutelage of historian Catherine Ceniza Choy who studies the connections between Filipino nurse migration and American imperialism in the Philippines.[89] This mentorship and friendship culminated in the

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[87] Jenifer Wofford, "Artist Statement," *WoffleHouse*, December 23, 2014, http://wofflehouse.com/about/statement/.
[88] Laura Kina and Wei Ming Dariotis, *War Baby / Love Child: Mixed Race Asian American Art* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 45.
[89] Jonathan Magat, "Looking after the Filipina Caregiver: Ambiguity and Unknowability across Jenifer K Wofford's Nurse Drawings," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 30, no. 1 (September 24, 2020): 1–23, https://doi.org/10.1080/0740770X.2020.1801004.

creation of *Point of Departure* for the 2007 MFA exhibition titled *Fermata: the 37th Annual UC Berkeley MFA Exhibition*.[90]

Filipina Nurse Migration and U.S. Empire

The subject of many of Wofford's artworks engages with the history of Filipino nurse migration. To understand the content of *Point of Departure* and *Flor 1973-78*, I will now discuss histories of Filipino nurse migration to and beyond the United States. As Choy explores in her book *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History*, American forces incorporated the Philippines into the U.S. empire by instituting an education system that championed sanitation, etiquette, and gendered labor. Choy argues that U.S. colonization of the archipelago laid four preconditions that paved the way for contemporary nurse migration to the United States: the establishment of Americanized nurse training programs, English-language fluency, Americanized work culture, and gendered notions of nursing as women's work. This resulted in a global healthcare system built on a gendered and racialized hierarchy between the Philippines and the United States or what Choy calls an "empire of care."[91] Indeed, the contemporary population of Filipino nurses working in the United States is indicative of the success of this transnational brokerage. The Bulosan Center for Filipino Studies found that over twenty percent of California's nurses are Filipino and almost a third of Filipinos work in healthcare-related jobs in

[90] *Point of Departure* was exhibited a second time in 2008 at the di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art in Napa, California.
[91] Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 3.

the United States.[92] Choy also notes that across metropolitan cities in the United States – including New York, New Jersey, Texas, and Florida – Filipino nurses supply a critical source of labor. For example, eighteen percent of registered nurses in New York City hospitals are Filipino.

While these statistics include both Filipino and Filipina nurses, it is important to note that gendered notions of care and nurturing, including the expected performance of emotional labor, result in a high population of Filipina nurses. Care work can be defined as labor that "entails face-to-face contact and refers to the provision of a service that develops the human capabilities of the recipient."[93] This includes professions such as nursing, domestic aid, elderly care, and child care. The combination of medical and customer services that constitutes care work informs the gendered perceptions of this type of labor and has certainly affected the pathways of migration for Filipinas and their ubiquity as care workers. As anthropologist Martin Manalansan notes, "Care uncritically becomes a mark not only of being 'human' but of *being* Filipino. It morphs from being a bodily skill and intensity into an essentialize notion of a nation and a people that is complicit with the workings of late capital."[94] As feminist studies scholar Grace Chang analyzes in *Disposable*

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[92] Bulosan Center for Filipinx Studies, "Filipino Home Care Workers: Unseen Frontliners & Essential Workers in the COVID-19 Fight," Policy Analysis (Davis: UC Davis, May 1, 2020), https://bulosancenter.ucdavis.edu/news/policy-analysis-filipino-home-care-workers-unseen-frontliners-essential-workers-covid-19-fight.
[93] Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 47.
[94] Martin F. IV Manalansan, "Feeling Filipinos: Unraveling Thoughts about the Emotional and the (Trans)National An Introduction to the Special Issue," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 19, no. 1 (2016), 3, https://doi.org/10.1353/jaas.2016.0004.

Domestics: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy institutions such as the U.S. government, corporations, private employers, and international finance organizations essentialize domestic labor as women's work by promoting immigration law and reform that funnels immigrant women into positions that allow white women to advance in the workforce. By "[extracting] the benefits of immigrants' labor while minimizing or eliminating any obligations or costs"[95] U.S. institutions create a disposable labor force and affirm white patriarchal divisions of labor.[96] Extending sociologist Saskia Sassen's argument that foreign investment and militaristic intervention by the global north after World War II was a deliberate maneuver to orchestrate the immigration of foreign laborers from the global south,[97] Chang shows how labor and immigration policies must be analyzed to dispel representational projects that aim to engender immigrant women into service positions that support capitalist economies and societies. Chang's analysis of domestic workers can also be extended to the production and representation of Filipinas as care workers, the colonial systems that instituted these processes, and how these practices are extended in a globalized economy.

Jenifer Wofford reveals the historic and contemporary connections between the United States and Philippines in *MacArthur Nurses I* (Fig. 1.3). The composition

[95] Grace Chang, *Disposable Domestics: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy.* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000), 11.
[96] Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 18, no. 1 (1992): 1–43, https://doi.org/10.1086/494777.
[97] Saskia Sassen, *The Mobility of Labor and Capital: A Study in International Investment and Labor Flow* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

of the illustration is modeled after the staged image of General Douglas MacArthur arriving at the shores of Leyte in the Philippines. The photograph refashioned notions of American exceptionalism and the white man's burden by representing MacArthur as a triumphant war hero who liberated the Philippines from Japanese forces at the end of the World War II.[98] The return of MacArthur to the shores of Leyte was a metaphor for the return of American colonial rule over the Philippines. In her rendition, Wofford reconstructs this image by replacing American soldiers with Filipina nurses thereby drawing a correlation between the arrival of U.S. forces and the out-migration of Filipina care workers. Her intervention on this infamous photograph of General MacArthur is also her desire to reveal the role of photography in the colonial project as I will discuss in the third chapter. The original photograph bolstered notions of an American masculinity that rests on conquest and expansion (Fig. 1.4). The mythos of the rugged American conqueror that was catalyzed by Theodore Roosevelt in the early twentieth century is transformed in this photograph to justify the continued occupation of the Philippines just as an overdetermined Philippine labor force was dispersed.[99] Sociologist Robyn Rodriguez arrives at a similar analysis on the ways marketing materials are used to "open up" markets for OFWs. She states,

> Marketing materials such as this demonstrate that racializations of Filipino migrants are not limited to the peculiar ways their host countries interpolate

[98] For more information on American exceptionalism after World War II see Vicente L Rafael, *White Love: And Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Renato Constantino, "The Mis-Education of the Filipino," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 1, no. 1 (1970): 20–36, https://doi.org/10.1080/00472337085390031.
[99] Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez, *Securing Paradise: Tourism and Militarism in Hawai'i and the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

> them into their specific (and in some cases emergent) racial orders or how firms draw on racialized and gendered understandings in their hiring practices. Here the labor brokerage state plays its own role in racializing and gendering Filipinos in particular ways.[100]

In other words, by replacing soldiers with nurses, Wofford shows the construction of a gendered Filipina labor force that both naturalized care and justified their exploitation. Furthermore, she shows an interest in intervening in visual regimes. Wofford continues her practice of troubling popular representations of nurses in her series *Point of Departure.*

Fig. 1.3 Jenifer Wofford, *Macarthur Nurses I,* 2009

Fig. 1.4 General MacArthur at Leyte, Philippines, October 20, 1944

Point of Departure

Point of Departure moves beyond a critique of American colonization towards a global understanding of Filipino labor and the diversity of Filipino identities. In one painting subtitled *Market*, the Filipina is seen standing in front of a market stall that sells tropical fruit such as durian, bananas, and mangosteen (Fig. 1.5). These items suggest that Wofford is representing a market somewhere in

[100] Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, *Migrants for Export*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 50.

Southeast Asia, maybe even the Philippines, but there are no other discernable visual markers or objects. A similar colloquial scene is rendered in *Classroom*, where the same Filipina is seen sitting in a wooden desk in a classroom. Unlike her peers who sit attentively, she is slumped over and staring intently at her desk. In *Bed Suitcase*, the viewer is transported to an empty and plain room with a twin-sized bed. Sitting at the foot of the bed is the Filipina now dressed in a nurse uniform and wearing a slight frown. A bright red suitcase leans against the foot of the bed. In these paintings, the viewer is given access to intimate and mundane moments of this nurse's life. By representing everyday scenes, Wofford highlights the ubiquity of these images. We cannot discern specifically where these moments take place.

Fig. 1.5 Jenifer Wofford, *Point of Departure: Market*, 2007

She also chooses to focus on the banal qualities of care work. In the painting subtitled *Patient*, the nurse's ward, whose head is wrapped in gauze, sits at the edge of a bed waiting for the nurse to enter the room. However, her demeanor is neither heroic nor proud. In fact, she is looming at the entrance and standing partially in the

doorway as if she is apprehensive to enter the room. In *Psychic Surgery*, she struggles to make the hospital bed. Her brows are bunched and furrowed as she pulls at a white cloud, an abstracted representation of bed sheets. In his analysis of Wofford's *Nurse* series, Magat argues that Wofford's representation of an aloof Filipina nurse contradicts expectations of a warm, loving, and gentle Filipina. Indeed, Wofford incites the viewer to, "imagine another way of caring for and *with* the care worker" by portraying the Filipina as tired, nervous, and awkward.[101] Images such as these disrupt the essentializing force that conflates care with Filipinas.

In Svetlana Alper's "Describe or Narrate? A Problem in Realistic Representation," she classifies two approaches to painting: an emphasis in description or narration.[102] Narration refers to the use of detail and action to offer a pictorial narrative which art historians typically ascribed positively to Renaissance painters. This differs from paintings that emphasize description which can be characterized by suspended action and a lack of expression. As Alpers discusses, baroque seventeenth-century paintings were judged negatively for their descriptive paintings. By comparing the representational qualities of 17th century baroque paintings to 19th century realism, Alpers argues against artistic theories that value narration and shows that baroque painters explored new ways of expression that emphasized the artifice of painting like 19th century realists. She says, "From representation as we have seen it in the seventeenth century, we finally reach the point where to represent is itself

[101] Magat, "Looking after the Filipina Caregiver," 16.
[102] I would like to thank Boreth Ly for calling my attention to this article by Svetlana Alpers.

acknowledged as the making of an artifice. Realism turns into artifice – and so goes the course of an art into modernism where paint, not man, is the reality represented."[103] She theorizes that perhaps this disengagement with narration is an acknowledgement of the failure of art to truly represent a subject.

My reading of Wofford's *Point of Departure* as snapshots of the banal follow's Alpers approach of analyzing the descriptive qualities of realism. Like her understanding of Baroque genre paintings, Wofford's work does not offer a complete narrative. Rather the scenes rendered in each discrete frame offer a fragmented description of labor, exhaustion, monotony, and alienation. By portraying the diaspora as an incomplete story, Wofford's paintings also reveal the artifice of grand narratives.

While these realistic daily scenes dominate the composition, Wofford also includes surreal and bizarre depictions of the nurse and her everyday environs (Fig. 1.5). For instance, in *Bigfoot*, two gargantuan feet wearing plain white sneakers and socks stand in front of a shrunken hospital building. In the background between the nurse's legs is a lone smokestack spewing gas. In *Tangle*, the roots of a tree entangle the body of the nurse as she gingerly caresses a billowy cloud that covers her face and head. In another painting simply titled *Big Durian,* Wofford renders a close-up image of a highly stylized durian that takes up most of the picture plane. This geometric durian appears throughout *Point of Departure* as both a looming figure and principal

[103] Svetlana Alpers, "Describe or Narrate? A Problem in Realistic Representation," *New Literary History* 8, no. 1 (1976): 37, https://doi.org/10.2307/468612.

subject. Other motifs featured in the installation include a manila file folder and images of trees. Although these symbols often appear in the more surrealistic paintings of *Point of Departure,* and therefore the meaning can be illegible or vague, together they can be read as a metaphor for the figure of the Filipino.

Fig. 1.6 Jenifer Wofford, Installation shot of *Point of Departure*, 2007, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, California

In her 2008 installation, *doubledurian*, Wofford repurposed her durian paintings for an installation at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. Initially, Wofford used four paintings from *Point of Departure* that featured the durian and displayed them in a corner of the gallery. However, a negative experience with another participating artist left her with the desire to "take up space."[104] She subsequently painted two enlarged mirror images of the same durian against a brightly colored pastel green, yellow, pink, and purple wall (Fig. 1.7). Unlike her original concept for the Yerba Buena installation, the final product was loud, vibrant, and encompassed

[104] Jenifer Wofford, Interview with the author, San Francisco, July 30, 2021.

the entire wall space. The other participating artists could not hide or shy away from the presence of the durian. In both *doubledurian* and *Point of Departure*, Wofford appropriates the durian as the ostensible other.

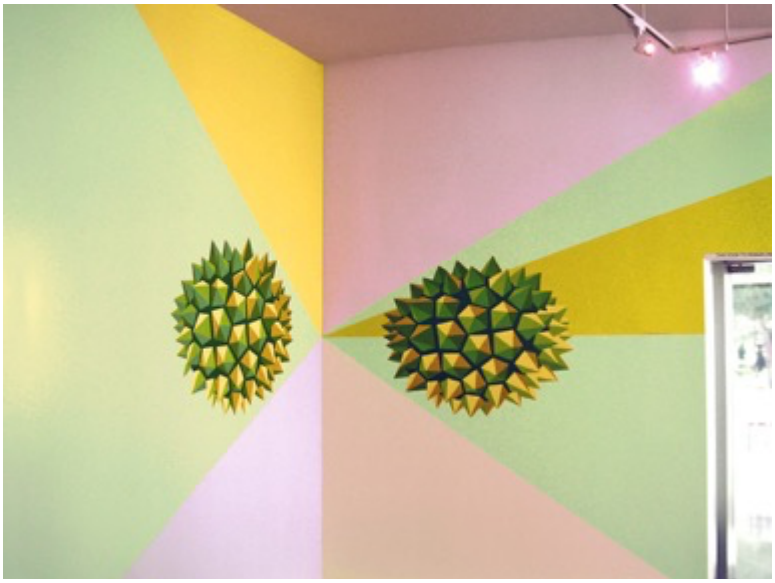

Fig. 1.7 Jenifer Wofford, Installation shot of *doubledurian*, 2008, Yerba Buena Center, San Francisco, CA

This Southeast Asian fruit that is known for its spikey exterior and pungent aroma is often vilified as grotesque, repulsive, foul, and unpalatable to Western audiences. In some countries, it is even illegal to carry or ingest this fruit in public. Videos of people gagging, wincing, and coughing while they are trying durian for the first time are incredibly popular on YouTube garnering millions of viewers.[105] Eating durian has turned into a parlor trick to showcase the reactions of an audience when confronted with something too exotic, foreign, and other. In these videos, the other is

[105] At the time of viewing this video in January 2022 it had garnered 3,484,782 views on YouTube. See Cut, *100 People Try Durian*, 2017, YouTube video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgzsUWPrf_s.

literally consumed.[106] However, despite the participants attempts, the fruit is too strong and potent. In other words, the Western audience does not reject the durian, rather it rejects them. By appropriating and claiming the durian as a figure for the Filipino immigrant, Wofford embraces the power of the other in the face of racism and xenophobia. She says, "The durian functions as a sort of vas hermeticum: a sealed form suggesting an overseas contract worker's tropical roots, his/her conspicuity in an institutionalized, homogenized environment, a vessel for containment and transference, and a sort of ominous self-protection."[107] Wofford's use of the durian in all her projects is indicative of her embrace of the grotesque and surreal as a device to discuss representations of Filipinas.[108]

By interspersing colloquial images with bizarre and surreal motifs, including the durian, Wofford seems to navigate between multiple spaces and realms. These surreal environs blur the boundaries between reality, dreams, hallucinations, and nightmares. In fact, the nurse is even rendered daydreaming throughout the composition (Fig. 1.6). In three images included in the installation, the nurse is seen looking off into the distance either through a window, on a roof, or towards the horizon. Her distant gaze can be interpreted as either melancholic, wistful, nostalgic, or hopeful. These scenes are ambiguous and refuse the viewer's desire for legibility and transparency. Wofford refers to these scenes as "immigration hallucinations" or

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[106] bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992).
[107] Jenifer Wofford, "Doubledurian," WoffleHouse, January 3, 2015, https://wofflehouse.com/portfolio/doubledurian/.
[108] I have previously written about the grotesque as it relates to the artistic practice of Mail Order Brides//M.O.B. See Christina Marie Ayson, "M.O.B. and Perform: An Analysis of Mail Order Brides/M.O.B.'s 'Divide/ Conquer'" (Master's Thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2017).

the opaque space in which the unexplained, irreducible, and illegible resides. Perhaps then *Point of Departure* is about the physical and imagined movement between spaces that make up the migrant worker experience.

This turn to abstraction or opacity gestures towards the larger project's goal: to represent the multiplicity of diasporic experiences. Drawing on Black and Latinx theorists such as Édouard Glissant, Fred Moten, and Christina A. León, visual culture and feminist studies scholar Thea Quiray Tagle argues that Asian American visual artists "use opacity not to become legible subjects or to stage an identity-centric critique but to lead viewers toward a joyful recognition of art's in/capacity at representing the full contradictions and multiplicities of our lives."[109] Similarly, Sarita See argues that Filipino American artists use abstraction to challenge the politics of representation that demands "authentic" depictions of their communities.[110] Following See and Quiray Tagle, I argue that Wofford's abstraction of time and space is a refusal to reduce the Filipino experience and visualize the fragmentation of the Filipino labor diaspora.

The display of these frames implies that Wofford is interested in representing a non-linear movement across time and space. When creating the installation, Wofford arranged the paintings according to similar aesthetic motifs. For example, the grey door in *Classroom* matches the window of the processing office featured on

[109] Thea Quiray Tagle, "Becoming Abstract Together: Opacity's Ethical Intervention," *American Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (2020): 993.
[110] Sarita See, "Hair Lines: Filipino American Art and the Uses of Abstraction," in *Filipino Studies: Palimpsests of Nation and Diaspora* (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 297, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt18040v1.

the adjacent painting (Fig. 1.8). Below that painting features a round object wrapped in gauze against a grey background that matches the colors in the office and classroom above. The angle of the greenish ceiling in the office painting matches the angle of the clouds that are featured in the tarmac on the painting on the right. The constellation of these paintings is organized around visual characteristics rather than a linear story. Additionally, the jigsaw-like pattern demands the viewer to read back and forth between images, moving both laterally and vertically. In other words, there is no beginning, middle, or end. Rather, these images should be read as a temporal mapping across a network of spaces both real and imagined thereby disrupting a progressivist and unidirectional narrative.

Fig. 1.8 Jenifer Wofford, Installation shot of *Point of Departure*, 2007

Furthermore, during the initial exhibition of this installation, Wofford created a now defunct interactive website that generated randomized pairs of paintings from the installation. Visitors of the website could also manually drag and drop paintings together to create endless combinations. This element of play is characteristic of

Wofford's solo and group artistic practice.[111] In this instance, play is utilized to access the non-linear and in-between. Wofford notes in the description of *Point of Departure* found on her website, "The paintings have been shown in multiple venues in a variety of combinations, each suggesting different narrative arcs. Static images aren't really all that static: the same story can be told multiple ways."[112] I want to extend Wofford's desire to complicate representations and notions of an authentic Filipina nurse and propose that the different iterations of *Point of Departure* across multiple times and spaces is an invocation of a different story. Perhaps multiple stories can be evoked through the different assembly and juxtaposition of frames. Afterall, there are no discernable markers in these images that imply a specific place. Perhaps each time the installation is raised, a different nurse is rendered. Thus, *Point of Departure* makes visible a network of care workers across the diaspora who share a history of navigating colonialism and global capitalism but make sense of their own unique experiences at their place of occupation. I turn to another work of art, *Flor 1973-78,* by Jenifer Wofford to reinforce the multiplicity evoked in *Point of Departure.*

Flor 1973-78

[111] This element of play in Wofford's practice has been analyzed by many scholars. For more information see Burns, Lucy Mae San Pablo. "Your Terno's Draggin': Fashioning Filipino American Performance." *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 21, no. 2 (2011): 199–217; Jonathan Magat, "Looking after the Filipina Caregiver: Ambiguity and Unknowability across Jenifer K Wofford's Nurse Drawings"; Quiray Tagle, Thea. "To Organize the World, To Make It Universally Accessible and Useful: Silicon Valley Monsters in M.O.B.'s Mananggoogle Project." *Center for Art and Thought*, 2014. https://centerforartandthought.org/work/item/organize-world-make-it-universally-accessible-and-useful-silicon-valley-monsters-mob_s/; and Gina Velasco, "Performing the Filipina 'Mail-Order Bride': Queer Neoliberalism, Affective Labor, and Homonationalism,"

[112] Jenifer Wofford, "Point of Departure," WoffleHouse, January 2, 2015, http://wofflehouse.com/point-of-departure/.

A year after Wofford completed *Point of Departure*, she created *Flor 1973-78* for the San Francisco Arts Commission's Market Street Program where an artist is invited to create posters publicly mounted on bus kiosks along Market Street in San Francisco, CA. For Wofford's contribution, she created six posters that feature illustrations that were hand-drawn in ink, colored, and laid out using Photoshop. Following the annual theme "Narratives," the project tracks the life of a fictional character named Flor Villanueva for six years between 1973 and 1978 as she becomes accultured to the United States after immigrating from the Philippines. For each year, Wofford created a poster that was displayed sequentially along Market Street. As pedestrians walked along Market Street, they could trace Flor's steps as a new immigrant in San Francisco. These site-specific moments are rendered in the same style as *Point of Departure*.

Flor 1973-78 is also known as *Flor de Manila y San Francisco*, or "flower of Manila and San Francisco." The project and main protagonist are named after the national flower of the Philippines, the sampaguita, and the Filipina domestic worker, Flor Ramos Contemplacion. It is not surprising for Wofford to draw upon these references as they have both been used to generate notions of Filipinaness. In 1879, Dolores Paterno Y Ignacio created the musical composition "Flor de Manila," where she uses the sampaguita as a metaphor for ideal femininity and an emerging Philippine nation. As historian Kathleen Gutierrez notes, the sampaguita has since

been attributed to a romanticized and gendered vision of the nation and Filipinas.[113] On the other hand, the story of Flor Ramos Contemplacion (which is discussed at more length in later chapters) sparked protest amongst Filipinos globally over the plight of Filipina domestic workers. Contemplacion was executed in 1995 for the murder of her colleague Delia Maga and her ward, Nicholas Huang. Filipino news outlets reporting the tragedy represented Contemplacion as a victim who experienced loss and sacrifice.[114] Both references seek to construct an overdetermined authentic Filipina identity. Like *Point of Departure*, *Flor 1973-78* counters these narratives but instead does so by focusing on one narrative in the diaspora.

Similar to *Point of Departure*, each poster in *Flor* is comprised of discreet scenes and images. The posters feature seven illustrations that are arranged as comic book panels.[115] Not only are there compositional similarities, Wofford also repurposes paintings from *Point of Departure* for Flor's story. For example, in *Flor 1973: Skylab,* Wofford uses the image of the nurse fixing her nursing cap (Fig. 1.2). Additionally, in *Flor 1974: Work/Life* Flor is also depicted wistfully daydreaming. In

[113] Kathleen Gutierrez, "The Region of Imperial Strategy: Regino García, Sebastián Vidal, Mary Clemens, and the Consolidation of International Botany in the Philippines, 1858-1936" (PhD dissertation, UC Berkeley, 2020), https://escholarship.org/uc/item/93j1z7bd.
[114] Anne-Marie Hilsdon, "What the Papers Say: Representing Violence Against Overseas Contract Workers," *Violence Against Women* 9, no. 6 (2003): 698–722, https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801203009006005.
[115] In an interview with Jenifer Wofford and the author, she noted the importance of comic books to her artistic practice. The composition of *Flor 1973-78* is reminiscent of the gutter, or the space between two panels within a comic strip. She noted that this feature is important because it is within this liminal space that the reader must imagine what is transpiring in the scene. This imaginative space is important to considering the non-representational and opaque. For more information on the importance of comic books to Wofford's practice see Catherine Ceniza Choy, "The Awesome and Mundane Adventures of Flor de Manila y San Francisco," in *Drawing New Color Lines: Transnational Asian American Graphic Narratives* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2014), 209-24. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13x0mh1.

this poster, Flor is gazing deeply into the thick San Francisco fog through a window above her kitchen sink. These similarities suggest that *Flor 1973-78* and *Point of Departure* are not just related project but also *Flor 1973-78* could be one of the narrative arcs found in *Point of Departure.* Wofford has even referred to *Flor 1973-78* as a more "refined," "explicit" and "historical" rendition of *Point of Departure*.[116] Extending Wofford's own analysis of her work, *Flor 1973-78* is not just a specific story found in the installation but shows Wofford's desire to place stories of labor, migration, and displacement in specific historical and spatial contexts.

Across the six posters, San Francisco is ever-present. In *Flor 1974: Work/Life,* the cramped and hilly streets of the Excelsior District are represented with the caption reading "I've been living with relatives out in the Excelsior. Ay naku. In Manila, no one walks, let alone walks uphill!" (Fig. 1.9). The three peg-legged Sutro Tower stands tall in the background of *Flor 1976: Bicentennial.* In *Flor 1978: Return*, Wofford illustrates San Francisco's skyline with the Transamerica Pyramid piercing the foggy night sky. In many of these images Flor is seen traversing across these iconic spaces, not as a foreigner or tourist, but as a local engaged in mundane activities such as waiting for the bus, window shopping, or walking down Kearny Street. The depiction of figures set within the California landscape is reminiscent of the Bay Area Figurative Movement, a mid-20th century art movement comprised of artists in the San Francisco Bay Area who sought to challenge prevailing styles of Abstract Expressionism by incorporating figures.

[116] Jenifer Wofford, Interview with the author, San Francisco, July 30, 2021.

Fig. 1.9 Jenifer Wofford, *Flor 1973-78: Work/Life*, 2008

Many of the artists who are classified as a part of this movement never subscribed to that label including David Park and Richard Diebenkorn. Nevertheless, their work has been canonized as being a part of this major post-World War II art movement that sought to deviate from non-objective, abstract painting. These artists were organized based on their subscription to two general characteristics of Bay Area Figurative art. The first was the union of figurative subject matter and the formal concerns of Abstract Expressionism, a movement that emerged in New York in the 1940s that emphasized non-perspectival space, non-figurative subject matter, and the artistic process. The second characteristic of Bay Area Figurative art was the portrayal of California's physical characteristics.[117] These artworks included representations of rural, suburban, and urban landscapes. Many art historians including Caroline A. Jones demarcate the movement as beginning in 1950 with

[117] Caroline A. Jones, *Bay Area Figurative Art, 1950-1965* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1990).

David Park's departure from abstraction and ending in the late 1960s as artists such as Elmer Bischoff returned to it.[118] One artist who defies these art historical imperatives to categorize is Wayne Thiebaud.[119]

Most typically categorized as a Pop artist for his use of bright colors and wry humor to represent desserts, delicatessens, and gumball machines, Wayne Thiebaud's oeuvre spans beyond these well-known still life paintings.[120] Beginning in the mid-1960s, Thiebaud turned to figurative representations and created a series of portraits including *Betty Jean Thiebaud and Book* (1965–1969) and *Two Seated Figures* (1965). At the same time Thiebaud was also experimenting with bucolic landscapes of Sacramento. He later drew on this work to create abstracted cityscapes of San Francisco and Los Angeles including *Ripley Ridge* (1977). His experimentation with subject matter reflects his commitments to harmonize abstraction and figuration. Thiebaud characterized his practice as a "pursuit of the kind of painting in which I am most interested – painting that is representational and abstract simultaneously."[121] This can be seen in his still life paintings by the way he simplifies food into perfect

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[118] Jones, *Bay Area Figurative Art, 1950-1965*.
[119] Thiebaud has also made remarks disassociating himself with the Pop Art movement. For more information see John Coplans, *Wayne Thiebaud* (Pasadena: Pasadena Art Museum, 1968).
[120] For more information on Thiebaud's still life paintings see John Yau, "Wayne Thiebaud's Incongruities" in *Wayne Thiebaud* (New York: Rizzoli, 2015), 26–33; John Rabe and Marc Haefele, "Pop-art Icon Wayne Thiebaud," http://scpr.org/programs/offramp/2014/03/05/36332/pop-art (accessed March 16, 2022); Andrew Russeth, "Welcome to the Good Life: Learning from Wayne Thiebaud," *Art News* 113, no. 10, http://www.artnews.com/2014/10/07 welcome-to-the-good-life (accessed March 16, 2022); Alexandra Wolfe, "Wayne Thiebaud and the Art of Longevity" *The Wall Street Journal*, October 2, 2014, http://www.wsj.com/articles/wayne-thiebauds-art-of-longevity (accessed March 16, 2022).
[121] Andrée Maréchal-Workman, "Wayne Thiebaud: Beyond the Cityscapes," in *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 1, no. 2 (Autumn 1987): 41

geometric forms.[122] In his landscapes, Thiebaud combines multiple perspectival planes onto one canvas. The harmony between representation and abstraction and his affinity with representing California is reminiscent of many of the Bay Area Figurative artists.[123] Thiebaud's adaptation of the Bay Area Figurative Movement's formal concerns illustrates the difficulties of strictly demarcating artists to art historical movements.[124]

Fig. 1.10 Wayne Thiebaud, *Ripley Ridge*, 1977

[122] Margaretta M. Lovell, "City, River, Mountain: Wayne Thiebaud's California," *Panorama* 3, no. 2 (2017): 3, https://doi.org/10.24926/24716839.1602.

[123] It should also be noted that Thiebaud was close friends and colleagues with many of the artists who are labeled as being a part of the Bay Area Figurative Movement. Most notably, Thiebaud was friends with Richard Diebenkorn who inspired him to paint landscapes. This relationship is explored in John Yau, *California Landscapes: Richard Diebenkorn/Wayne Thiebaud* (New York: Acquavella Galleries, 2018).

[124] Other art historians and critics have argued against demarcating Thiebaud as a Pop artist. For more information see Andrée Maréchal-Workman, "Wayne Thiebaud: Beyond the Cityscapes," *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 1, no. 2 (1987): 35–51, https://doi.org/10.1086/smitstudamerart.1.2.3108943; Susan Stowens, "Wayne Thiebaud: Beyond Pop Art," *American Artist* 44, no. 458 (1980): 46–51, 102–4; Cathleen McGuigan, "Wayne Thiebaud Is Not a Pop Artist," *Smithsonian* 41, no. 10 (2011): 66–72.

Another thread across all his works was a desire to uplift the mundane and everyday.[125] His idealized still life paintings of cakes such as his *Boston Cremes* (1962) elevate this classic American dessert by creating perfectly triangular cake slices using a thick impasto to mimic the depth and body of frosting. His use of halation highlights the cakes and creates a photographic illusion that is seemingly more realistic than reality. He heightens the drama of an inner-city intersection by exaggerating the steepness of a hill in *Street and Shadow* (1982-1983). As American art historian Margaretta M. Lovell analyzes, this attention to the everyday was a desire to celebrate human craft. She says,

> Like the bakers whose craft we are invited to admire in his portraits of cakes and pies, and the roadmakers who have blasted freeways and macadamized seemingly-vertical urban hills, the farmers – equipped with purposeful, knowledgeable labor, shrewd acumen, and aesthetic sense – are the protagonists of the tales the artist tells in these vignettes of a buoyant Delta landscape.[126]

Across his work, Thiebaud celebrates overlooked human innovation.

It is not surprising that Jenifer Wofford has taken inspiration from Thiebaud's works when considering his artistic practice and concerns; both artists are attentive to placemaking and the everyday. Although Thiebaud's use of thick impasto differs from the smooth flatness of Wofford's paint application, both are concerned with rendering commonplace people. While Wofford renders subjects within three-dimensional spaces in *Flor 1973-78* and *Point of Departure*, Wofford's *Nurse* series

[125] Scott A. Shields, "Wayne Thiebaud 100: Paintings, Prints, and Drawings," Crocker Art Museum, accessed March 10, 2022, https://www.crockerart.org/oculus/wayne-thiebaud-100-paintings-prints-and-drawings.
[126] Lovell, "City, River, Mountain," 12.

featuring nurses in flattened abstract planes is reminiscent of Thiebaud's portraits which often feature sitters in minimalistic white spaces. Despite these differences, it is clear that Wofford's artworks are an inspired departure from Thiebaud's figurative works.

Wofford created a diptych titled *Memento, 992020 (after Thiebaud),* (2021) that references the September 9, 2020 wildfires in Northern California that turned the sky bright orange. The two paintings take inspiration from Thiebaud's *Supine Woman* (1963) which represents a White woman wearing a white dress and black slingback heels who lays flat on her back with her gaze fixed upwards (Fig. 1.11). For Wofford, Thiebaud's painting reminded her of the intense distress and burnout that Northern Californians were grappling with as they managed the turbulence of the COVID-19 pandemic, Black Lives Matters protests, and California wildfires that coalesced in the summer of 2020. In January 2017, Wofford was scheduled to deliver a 50 Artists gallery talk, a series organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art that invited local creatives to share the impact of a modern and contemporary art icon in their collection.[127] Although she opted to withdraw her presentation in light of the J20 Art Strike, a protest led by artists against the inauguration of President Donald Trump, she chose to discuss Thiebaud's *Student* (1968) in a short reflection where she expressed that she had been a "lifelong fan of his work."

[127] Jenifer Wofford, "50 Artists: Jenifer Wofford on Wayne Thiebaud," SFMOMA, January 2017, https://www.sfmoma.org/read/50-artists-jenifer-wofford-wayne-thiebaud/.

Fig. 1.11 Wayne Thiebaud, *Supine Woman*, 1963

This detour into the Bay Area Figurative Movement is not just to place Wofford in conversation with these artists or to reframe its legacies, but also to emphasize the importance of place to Wofford. As an artist who honed her artistic practice in the San Francisco Bay Area, it is not surprising that the legacies of the Bay Area Figurative Movement have left an impact on the artist. Indeed, she was steeped in this discourse while attending SFAI where notable Bay Area Figurative artists such as David Park, Elmer Bischoff, and Richard Diebenkorn taught. While *Point of Departure* and *Flor 1973-78* gestures to the formal concerns of these behemoths of Bay Area art history, Wofford notably inserts something that many of these artists overlooked: the Filipino body. At the time many of these artists were forging new pathways in American art and taking inspiration from the land, the Filipino community in California was large and thriving.[128] By including the Filipino body into the landscape of California, Wofford corrects an omission by these artists and

[128] For more information on Filipino communities in California from 1950-1960 see Rick Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Empire and Migration in Filipino America, 1898-1946*, (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Dawn Bohulano Mabalon, *Little Manila Is in the Heart: The Making of the Filipina/o American Community in Stockton, California* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

comments on the historic presence of Filipinos in California. Furthermore, she also corrects a notable exclusion in American art history of seminal abstract expressionist Asian American artists including her mentor, Carlos Villa.[129]

Wofford upends Thiebaud's settler colonial vision of land, by illustrating an alternative relationship to space. Unlike Thiebaud's bucolic landscapes which praises the human transformation of land into usable and arable fields for consumption,[130] Wofford visualizes these sites with an immigrant community. Wofford shows in *Flor 1973-78* that California is not just an aesthetic backdrop of human accomplishments, but also actively informs the ways diasporic subjects negotiate their displacement and the hybrid subjectivities they develop.[131]

Between the Global and Local

The period Wofford depicts in *Flor* were transformative years for Asian American communities in San Francisco. The greater San Francisco Bay Area was experiencing a racial reckoning inspired and prompted by Black activists, students, and radical intellectuals who sought to move beyond the inclusionary politics of the Civil Rights Movement. Black Power activists in the late 1960s rallied around a platform of self-determination that many Asian American, Chicano, and Indigenous communities found inspiring and relatable.[132] Activists of different racial,

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[129] Mark Dean Johnson and Trisha Lagaso Goldberg, eds. *Carlos Villa: Worlds in Collision,* 2022.
[130] Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London: Cassell, 1999).
[131] Paul Gilroy describes the development of this multi-spatial identity formation for displaced subjects as the "roots and routes" of diaspora. For more information see Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*.
[132] V. Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretative History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

educational, and class backgrounds joined together on the premise that there was a shared experience with racism, colonization, and poverty. One of the most important sites of this ethnic unity were the protests for the institution of Ethnic Studies departments on college campuses in the San Francisco Bay Area. Known as the Third World Liberation Front, Asian American activists participated in conversations around systemic racism, orientalism, and exclusion to make sense of their place and experience in America.[133] This sparked what is known as the Asian American Movement which lasted from 1965 to 1977. Asian American communities of different ethnic backgrounds, including Filipino Americans, came together to form a new political identity that recognized the presence, vitality, and power of Asians living in America. One of the central moments of the Third World Liberation Front was the activism surrounding the I-Hotel, which I discuss in more length later in this chapter.[134] The Filipino American activists who participated in these protests sought to show the historic presence of Filipinos in America, but also that the fabric of American society wrested on their labor.

It is not a surprise that Jenifer Wofford chose to illustrate this period in San Francisco in her work. However, it is important to note that Wofford's series does not represent a long-time Filipino resident of San Francisco or a second-generation

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[133] Karen Ishizuka and Jeff Chang, *Serve the People: Making Asian America in the Long Sixties* (London: Verso, 2016).
[134] For more information on the I-Hotel see Estella Habal, *San Francisco's International Hotel: Mobilizing the Filipino American Community in the Anti-Eviction Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007); and Quiray Tagle, Thea, "After the I-Hotel : Material, Cultural, and Affective Geographies of Filipino San Francisco," UC San Diego, 2015. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/25b581sd.

Filipino American, but a newly arrived immigrant in the 1970s. Just as she offers a site-specific analysis of immigration, so too does she emphasize the importance of time. For Wofford, it is important to distinguish the experiences of immigrants not to emphasize or subscribe to sociological demarcations of immigration waves, but to show that the hybridized identities of Filipino immigrants are contingent on the historical moment.

Wofford acutely begins the illustrated series in 1973 to mark the beginning of a different type of Filipino diaspora, one shaped by an expansion of global capitalism. As discussed in the introduction, in 1974 Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos sought to alleviate the economic failures that resulted from incurring large sums of IMF loans after World War II. A stipulation of receiving these loans was the implementation of free trade agreements that depreciated the Philippine peso. In the hopes of curtailing economic disaster, Ferdinand Marcos announced Presidential Decree 442 in 1974 that created the Overseas Employment Development Board, the Bureau of Employment Services, and the National Seamen Board. These agencies were developed to administer overseas laborers including their training and placement. In other words, the nation-state determined the conditions of their migration including the remittances they were required to send back.

In 1973, the year of Flor's arrival in San Francisco, the Philippine government also rolled out the figure of the *balikbayan,* a new glorified way to refer to Filipino

migrants living abroad.[135] In an attempt to challenge the prevailing sentiment that overseas Filipinos were betrayers of the nation, balikbayans were given incentives to return "home."[136] Institutionalizing travel back to the Philippines ensured that overseas Filipinos remain connected to their families, and thus emotionally and fiscally responsible for their well-being. Just as Marcos was asking for long-term overseas Filipinos to return home and spend money, he was also pushing out care workers to work for the nation and weaponizing political allies against his critics.

The creation of bureaucratic procedures to mediate Filipino labor migration resulted in a new labor force that was highly surveilled and regulated. In other words, unlike previous forms of Filipino labor migration, the OFW experience in the 1970s is shaped by heightened state control. By brokering labor contracts with receiving nations, the Filipino nation state structures their migration thus diversifying and globalizing Filipino labor. For those OFWs who left because of this economic and political instability and were displaced to San Francisco, they arrived just as a cultural shift was occurring. *Flor* shows how the experiences of OFWs are connected to the Philippine nation-state, but also deviate based on their place and time of displacement.

This mediation between roots and routes is rendered across the six posters. For example, in *Flor 1973: Skylab*, Wofford uses the image of a raging storm as a metaphor for the violence of Martial Law that inevitably drove Filipinos to pursue

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[135] For more information on *balikbayans* see Filomeno V. Aguilar, *Migration Revolution: Philippine Nationhood and Class Relations in a Globalized Age* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2014); Rafael, *White Love*; Rodriguez, *Migrants for Export*.
[136] Rafael, *White Love*.

jobs outside of the Philippines. Below the illustration of a palm tree bending and buckling to the force of heavy rain and wind, Wofford writes, "Some people think martial law is a good thing. Tell that to my brother, who's been missing for six months. We know he's alive, but he's in hiding. For good reason." In the same poster, Wofford further comments on how Flor's migration is directly connected to her brother's activism. Associated with the image of Flor donning her nurses cap, the caption reads "With Totoy gone, someone had to help the family. Turned out to be me."[137] Flor's outmigration was driven by the institutionalization of labor migration, dire economy of the Philippines, and human rights violations by the Marcos regime.

In subsequent posters the specter of martial law reappears across the Pacific and in San Francisco. In *Flor 1977: Redevelopment,* Flor can be seen traversing the streets of historic Manilatown in San Francisco (Fig. 1.12). Notably, we see her interacting with the manong, a phrase that is used to denote the first major wave of Filipino immigrants who settled in the United States in the early twentieth century to work as migrant farm laborers across Hawai'i, Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and California.[138] Due to exclusionary immigration laws barring Filipino women from traveling and anti-miscegenation laws, many of this generation of Filipino immigrants remained single bachelors. Flor can be seen volunteering at a local food pantry or soup kitchen serving food to a manong. She can also be seen fighting against their

[137] Jenifer Wofford, *Flor 1973-78*, 2008, Art kiosk posters, 2008.
[138] For more information on the manong experience see Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion*; Mabalon, *Little Manila Is in the Heart*; Estella Habal, *San Francisco's International Hotel: Mobilizing the Filipino American Community in the Anti-Eviction Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007); Dorothy B. Fujita-Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific West, 1919-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

eviction during the seminal fight for the International Hotel, a low-income single-occupancy hotel that housed the aging *manong* community in historic Manilatown.[139] In this panel, Flor is depicted standing on a street with her arms raised holding a sign that reads "Stop the evictions." Below this painting, the caption reads, "But Totoy's activism in Manila runs in the family, I guess," referencing both the personal and political history of her homeland and departure.[140] In these scenes, the viewer sees Flor develop a specific Filipino American subjectivity under the Marcos regime.[141] The site-specificity of this work is further reinforced considering the placement of these posters on Market Street, which is just a few blocks away from Historic Manilatown in San Francisco where the I-Hotel was located.

Fig. 1.12 Jenifer Wofford, *Flor 1973-78: Redevelopment*, 2008

[139] The International Hotel was the site of an activist struggle that propelled the Asian American Movement. San Francisco activists rallied together in support of elderly Filipino bachelors, also known as *manongs*, who were being evicted from the International Hotel. For more information see the 1983 documentary *The Fall of the I-Hotel.*
[140] Wofford, *Flor 1973-78*.
[141] Josen Masangkay Diaz, *Postcolonial Configurations: Dictatorship, the Racial Cold War, and Filipino America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2023).

Wofford shows that Flor's interest in participating in local issues is a result of witnessing her brother's persecution. Unlike Bay Area Figurative artists, Wofford shows a dialectical relationship to space and personhood especially for displaced subjects. It is through her embodied experiences in San Francisco that Flor comes to make sense of her displacement. Ultimately, Flor is connected to a vast network of OFWs who left because of martial law, however, the particularity of her migration is shaped by her new home and the time she arrives there. Viewing *Flor* and *Point of Departure* as companion pieces opens the network of OFWs while escaping universalizing tropes that render Filipino care workers as a faceless workforce.

Conclusion

Through an analysis of Jenifer Wofford's *Point of Departure* and *Flor 1973-1978,* we can differentiate the experiences of contemporary Filipino migrants who left the Philippines after 1974 from prior forms of Filipino labor migration. This labor diaspora is characterized by the globalization of Filipino labor instituted by the Marcos presidency in response to the rapid growth of capitalism after World War II. Wofford's artwork both describes and narrates how the OFW experience is structured by the Philippine nation-state but also diverges according to the specific place and moment of emigration. In other words, while the contemporary Filipino labor diaspora is more controlled and surveilled, their experiences are more divergent and diverse.

Just as Wofford demands that we question the visual regimes that render Filipinas as caring bodies by representing nurses in their non-laboring moments, she

also calls for us to move beyond notions of an authentic OFW experience. By rendering the vast network of departures that comprise the Filipino labor diaspora, Wofford turns our attention away from what marks an authentic OFW to the structures that attempt to mediate their production but nevertheless fail to totally control their experiences. Ultimately, she shows that identifying OFWs based on their conformity to sociological types reinforces the representational tools that essentialize Filipinas. Wofford offers us a new way of visualizing the labor diaspora that attends to this web of difference.

Chapter Two

Common-Place: A Turn to the Everyday in Imelda Cajipe Endaya's Hudson Valley Paintings

"Yes, my life as an immigrant has been a constant battle against loneliness, a constant search for local relevance, and belonging. Shall I stay? Shall I go? I've continually consoled myself, I say it's always good to keep options open; it's a global world now. Nation is not bound to geography. I am part of a nation at home and in diaspora."[142]

- Imelda Cajipe Endaya

On Saturday, September 3, 2022, friends, family, students, artists, curators, and other guests gathered at the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) in Manila to celebrate the illustrious career of printmaker, painter, sculptor, and installation artist Imelda Cajipe Endaya. They attended the highly anticipated opening event for her first retrospective exhibition titled *Imelda Cajipe Endaya: Pagtutol at Pag-Asa (Imelda Cajipe Endaya: Refusal and Hope).* Over 200 artworks were displayed to represent her artistic commitments over the course of her prolific career, which began in the 1960s during the height of Martial Law. Co-curators Con Cabrera and Lara Acuin argue through the exhibition that Ma'am Meps (as she is affectionately and respectfully called) was influential throughout her career because of her dedication to revealing the diverse experiences of Filipinas as activists, mothers, artists, *babaylans* (shamans), or sisters. Her artworks reveal the various ways Filipinas collectively navigate "empire and its regenerations, unending wars on peoples and the planet, and sophisticated attacks to historical and verifiable truths."[143] The subtitle of the show

[142] Imelda Cajipe Endaya, "Diaspora: Relevance, Longing and Belonging," in *Filipina Artists in Diaspora* (Manila: Anvil Publishing Inc., 2011), 70.
[143] Cultural Center of the Philippines, "Imelda Cajipe Endaya: Pagtutol at Pag-Asa Isang Retrospective" (Cultural Center of the Philippines, 2022).

"pagtutol at pag-asa" typifies her commitment to the feminist acts of refusal and hope in the face of these on-going legacies of violence.[144] Her ability to read the pulse of Filipinas, visualize their most urgent concerns, and offer alternative realities made her relevant across the decades. As art historian and critic Alice Guillermo states, "The authenticity of her art comes from the fact that it is firmly situated within the coordinates of Philippine society and history."[145]

Today, her work continues to resonate with audiences. The retrospective exhibition felt even more profound, provocative, and potent because the struggles over human rights that she depicted decades ago continue to shape the experiences of Filipinas today. An air of tragedy and irony colored the opening event as guests gingerly circumambulated the exhibition galleries of the cultural complex, a behemoth structure built in 1966 by Imelda Marcos, the wife of former president and dictator Ferdinand Marcos.[146] Guests gazed upon Ma'am Mep's critiques of human rights violations by the Marcoses the same year their son, Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, was elected for presidency thirty-six years after his father was overthrown. Similarly, the same stories that provoked her to create the internationally exhibited

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[144] The title of the exhibition was inspired by feminist scholar Dolores S. Feria who defined refusal as a feminist act. Ma'am Meps used this definition to situate her artwork. For more information see Dolores S. Feria, *The Third World: The Literature of Refusal* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1978).

[145] Flaudette May V Datuin, *Alter/(n)Ations: The Art of Imelda Cajipe Endaya* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2010) 17.

[146] For more information about the history of the Cultural Center of the Philippines Complex see Bobby Benedicto, "Queer Space in the Ruins of Dictatorship Architecture," *Social Text* 31, no. 4 (2013): 25–47, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-2348977; Bobby Benedicto, "The Queer Afterlife of the Postcolonial City: (Trans)Gender Performance and the War of Beautification," *Antipode* 47, no. 3 (June 1, 2015): 580–97, https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12101; and Josen Masangkay Diaz, *Postcolonial Configurations: Dictatorship, the Racial Cold War, and Filipino Americ*a, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2023).

installation *Filipina: DH* (1995) continue to shape the discourse around Filipina OFWs (Fig. 2.1).

Fig. 2.1 Imelda Cajipe Endaya, *Filipina: DH,* 1995, The Grey Art Museum in New York

At the time of the exhibition opening, President Bongbong Marcos visited Indonesia and, to the ire of the Filipino public, did not raise concern over Mary Jane Veloso, an OFW arrested and sentenced to death in Indonesia for allegedly smuggling drugs. Veloso has been on death row in Indonesia since 2010. She has been compared to Flor Contemplacion, a Filipina OFW executed in Singapore in 1995 for the alleged murder of a fellow OFW and their ward. Contemplacion's story revealed the inhumane treatment of OFWs, sparked widespread protest for government intervention on the safety of OFWs, and served as inspiration for Ma'am Meps's *Filipina: DH.* News of Contemplacion's experience caught the attention of international journals including *The New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune* forcing then Philippine president Fidel Ramos to submit a personal plea of clemency to the Singaporean government. His request was denied and on March 17, 1995,

Contemplacion was hanged. Shortly after, on June 7, 1995, the Republic Act 8042, otherwise known as The Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act, was instituted and expanded state protection of OFWs.

Filipina: DH featured over 100 household objects such as suitcases, an ironing board, brooms, mittens, and lace fabric that were petrified through a plaster bonding process and painted black. These casted fabrics were hung on a wall and used as screens where images of historical female figures were projected and eulogized. Household tools were used to create anthropomorphic assemblages. A trail of blackened suitcases snaked across the gallery as if they were waiting in a queue, evoking the haunting presence of OFWs. The somber installation visualized the helpless tragedy and pain of Filipinas living in the labor diaspora. While *Filipina: DH* is arguably her most visible work of art due to its inclusion in the 1996 international art exhibition *Traditions/Tensions: Contemporary Art in Asia* which opened in New York and traveled to Vancouver, Perth, and Taipei, it was an aesthetic departure from her earlier work including her two-dimensional art historiographic prints and large-scale, vibrantly colored paintings of representational figures set within abstract spaces.[147] Interestingly, when she revisited the topic of Filipinas in the diaspora a decade later, her aesthetic approach deviated again.

In 2005, Ma'am Meps relocated with her husband to Newburgh, New York to be a caregiver for her aging mother. At fifty-six years old, she moved to her aunt and

[147] The first iteration of *Traditions/Tensions* was presented in New York City. The exhibition included seventy works by twenty-seven artists staged in three separate venues in New York including The Grey Art Gallery, Queens Museum of Art, and the Asia Society Galleries.

uncle's house overlooking the Hudson River and entered a new stage of her life and career in a foreign place. Balancing the emotional and physical toll of caring for her mother while navigating a new country and artworld, Ma'am Meps was given a new perspective on the experiences of OFWs that she did not have access to when she first created *Filipina: DH.* The embodied experience of learning to live and work abroad changed not only her outlook on OFWs but also the ways she rendered the labor diaspora in her paintings. Unlike the anthropomorphic assemblages and static projected images in *Filipina: DH,* she created realistic and highly detailed landscape and interior paintings of her new home with very few, if any, figures within the picture plane. These vibrant and colorful paintings captured everyday fleeting moments or the changing seasons. What influenced these aesthetic changes found in her work in the late 1990s and early 2000s? What can these changes reveal about the experiences of Filipina OFWs? Furthermore, what does this uncover about the politics of representing OFWs?

In the previous chapter, I considered the artist Jenifer Wofford and came to a definition of the Filipino labor diaspora. Building on her description of laboring abroad, I will investigate the work of Imelda Cajipe Endaya. In this chapter, I will compare *Filipina: DH* with her Hudson Valley landscape paintings to show her shift away from national representations of working overseas to more nuanced and robust images of the diaspora. Although Ma'am Meps created *Filipina: DH* to visualize the horrors of working abroad, impassion the Filipino public, and spark change, *Filipina: DH* perpetuated tropes of the abject and degraded Filipino worker that affirmed the

Philippines as a brokerage state. In this chapter, I refer to these visual tropes as "national representations of OFWs." Working and living overseas complicated her understanding of OFWs as victims and showed her the politics and poetics of globalized labor. Amid feelings of exhaustion, homesickness, unrest, and fear, Ma'am Meps also experienced the unexpected joys of self and artistic discovery that marked her everyday existence in upstate New York. I argue that these tender moments of pleasure bled into her artistic practice and altered the ways she visualized globalized labor migration. Ma'am Meps's visual language of the everyday not only challenges national representations on OFWs but also reorients the gaze to consider the lived experience.

A Nationalist and Feminist

Imelda Cajipe Endaya was born on September 16, 1949, in Manila, Philippines. Her parents, Felipe Baisas and Pedro M. Cajipe, were healthcare workers from Paete, Philippines, a town southeast of Manila on the island of Luzon. As a child she had a natural proclivity for the arts which she pursued after high school in 1966 at the College of Fine Arts at the University of the Philippines. Although she pursued advertising and marketing out of necessity, she took the opportunity to explore a vast array of art mediums including painting and ceramics. It was during these formative years that she also received training in printmaking. Alongside artists, Adiel Arevalo, Brenda Fajardo, and Ofelia Gelvezon-Tequi, Ma'am Meps was trained under Manuel Rodriguez Sr. and joined the Printmakers Association of the Philippines. When she graduated with her degree in 1970, she emerged as a printmaker. Although

printmaking was a gendered and underappreciated art practice in the Philippines in the late-1960s, she utilized the medium to create works that sought to excavate the meaning of Filipino nationalism at a time of extreme political and social turbulence.[148]

Although she entered her college career as a "moderate artist," the violence of Martial Law and President Ferdinand Marcos's dictatorship forced Ma'am Meps to reconsider her understanding of Philippine society.[149] Unregulated government spending, the use of military force against protesters, rumors of bribery, and growing poverty and social unrest led to her disillusionment over the viability of the Marcos administration to lead the Philippines. Witnessing this unfettered government corruption led her to consider the role of a nationalist in this crucial juncture in Philippine history. This resulted in the creation of a series of prints including *Dahil Sa Iyo, Marcos* (1970), an etching sardonically titled after the 1938 song *Dahil Sayo* which Imelda Marcos often sang on their 1965 campaign trail.

Between 1976-1979, she also created *Ninuno* (*Ancestors),* a series of etchings which used representations of Filipinos sourced from 16th century archival materials including the *Boxer Codex*, *Doctrina Christiana en Lengua Española y Tagala* (*The Christian Doctrine in the Spanish and Tagalog Languages*), Damian Domingo's *tipos del pais*, and historic photographs. In these etchings, Ma'am Meps repositioned, cropped, mirrored, or silhouetted figures from these varied sources into collages. The

[148] Conversation between author and artist June 28, 2021.
[149] Conversation between author and artist June 28, 2021.

conversation and play with differing historical figurations illicit discussions on representation and authority in Filipino visual culture as it relates to Spanish colonization. The series shows Ma'am Meps's attempt to find a Filipino culture and people from within the colonial archive.

Her nationalist art historiography is best captured in her investigations of Juan Luna's *The Spoliarium* (1884). The large-scale oil painting became a national symbol when Luna submitted the painting to the 1884 Exposición Nacional de Bellas Artes in Madrid, Spain (Fig. 2.2). To the surprise of Luna's Spanish contemporaries and competitors, *The Spoliarium* won the first gold medal of the competition.[150] Luna showed the Spanish elite that Filipinos were modern, enlightened, and superior from within the colonial metropole. In addition to Luna's mastery of western art aesthetics, the painting was also a searing critique against Spanish colonization. It depicts dead gladiators being dragged off a Roman circus arena as scavengers poach the dead men's possessions and a woman mourns the unfettered display of violence. The painting allegorizes the horrors of Spanish colonization and treatment of Filipinos.

[150] In addition to Juan Luna's first gold medal win, the Filipino artist and contemporary of Luna, Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo, also won second place. For more information on Juan Luna and Felix Hidalgo see Metropolitan Museum of Manila, *The First National Juan Luna and Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo Commemorative Exhibition* (Manila: Metropolitan Museum of Manila, Philippines, 1988), https://artbooks.ph/products/the-first-national-juan-luna-and-felix-resurreccion-hidalgo-commemorative-exhibition.

Fig. 2.2 Juan Luna, *Spoliarium,* 1884

Considering *The Spoliarium*'s importance to catalyzing a sense of Filipino nationalism at the dawn of the Spanish revolution, it makes sense that Ma'am Meps was interested in this painting but also the famed painter. In 1976 she made *Juan Luna,* a photo-serigraph utilizing the central scene in *The Spoliarium* set against a red-brown background (Fig. 2.3).[151] Using a monochromatic reproduction of the painting, she crops and focuses on the colosseum's deadly aftermath and the onlookers. However, she also inserts another audience into the field. To the left of the composition, she places images from other paintings by Luna including *Mi Novia* (1885) and a portrait of Governor General of the Philippines, Ramôn Blanco Y Erenas. At the top, she also includes two figures from Luna's *España y Filipinas*

[151] Conversation between author and artist on December 19, 2022. During this conversation Ma'am Meps also stated that she was inspired to create this print during her time as a volunteer at the Lopez Memorial Museum. She was working on a catalog of Juan Luna's artworks. She was also working closely with their collection which includes paintings from which she sourced to create the serigraph.

(1888).[152] The two women, who were depicted as allegories of Spain and the Philippines in the original artwork, are placed at the upper left register of Ma'am Meps's print. However, instead of gazing towards a point in the horizon where the stairs ascend to meet the heavenly sky, in Ma'am Mep's rendition, they look towards an elaborate picture frame where the name "Luna" is framed. In the company of his masterpieces, an illustrated portrait of Luna is placed at the lower right.

Fig. 2.3 Imelda Cajipe Endaya, *Juan Luna*, 1976

Her juxtaposition of Luna's paintings against the agitated red background imparts a different message than Luna's original *Spoliarium*. Instead, her focus is on the way Luna's legacy has been historicized. Indeed, Luna has made significant contributions to Filipino art history, but what is forgotten when scholars valorize a historical figure? Historian Raquel A.G. Reyes also asks this question in her study of gender, sexuality, and the *ilustrado* elite. Through a reading of Luna's representations

[152] Juan Luna created at least six versions of this painting. The one referenced here is the third version which is in the Museo del Prado collection in Madrid, Spain.

of women in relation to his artistic ambitions, Spanish colonization in the archipelago, and the artist's private life, she shows that sexuality and gender were central to Luna's notions of Filipino modernity and progress. She argues that the modern and sexually liberated European woman he encountered between 1875-1893 conjured both feelings of desire and rage that he believed endangered male control and power.[153] It makes sense that the women he chose to represent Spain and the Philippines in his painting *España y Filipinas* are genteel, graceful, and proper women. In other words, the ideal woman, according to Luna, were those who did not challenge male authority. Ma'am Mep's use of these two figures gestures to critiques against patriarchal ideals in art history. She uses these two women to show how Luna's namesake has become canonized despite the ways he represents women in his paintings and his treatment of women. Art historians have overlooked how Luna murdered his wife and mother-in-law. His contributions to art and art history overshadow the violence he committed against women.

This is a common theme in Ma'am Meps's oeuvre. Her desire to speak to Luna's canonization, violence against women, and historical erasure can be seen in her March 2005 solo exhibition *Conversations on Juan Luna and Walong Filipina* which was held at the Gateway Mall in Quezon City. For this exhibition, she created eight collages using works by eight female artists including Agnes Arellano, Ida Bugayong, Araceli Dans, Anna Fer, Gilda Cordero Fernando, Julie Lluch, Alma

[153] Raquel A. G. Reyes, *Love, Passion and Patriotism: Sexuality and the Philippine Propaganda Movement, 1882-1892* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), 43.

Quinto, and Brenda V. Fajardo. In each piece, Ma'am Meps selected a body of work by one of these artists and juxtaposed it against Juan Luna's paintings to highlight female artists and critique their lack of representation.[154] These eight female artists were then asked to respond to Ma'am Meps's collages by bringing in their works of art into the exhibition space. For Ma'am Meps, destabilizing structural hierarchies in the arts is not just a critique but a practice. As art historian Ruben D.F. Defeo states, "The questioning of patriarchal hierarchies and conceptions of aesthetic value goes alongside the process of conversing and communing as women through images and forms."[155] In other words, as art critic and journalist Nicole Soriano succinctly captures, "Imelda Cajipe Endaya leaves no woman behind."[156]

This artistic conversation between her female peers is indicative of her politics of creating a "herstory": a study of art that not only includes women but one that offers a new vision of a world that combats social, political, and cultural injustices.[157] This was precisely the goal of Kababaihan sa Sining at Bagong Sibol na Kamalayan (Women in the Arts in an Emerging Consciousness) otherwise known as KASIBULAN, a feminist arts collective whose goal was to uplift women artists and world views. Ma'am Meps co-founded the group with Brenda Fajardo, Anna Fer, Julie Lluch, and Ida Bugayong in 1987 after attending the conference Women in

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[154] Datuin, *Alter/(n)Ations,* 48.
[155] Imelda Cajipe Endaya, ed., *Imelda Cajipe Endaya: Stitching Paint Into Collage* (New York: Lenore RS Lim Foundation for the Arts, 2009), 40.
[156] Nicole Soriano, "Imelda Cajipe-Endaya Leaves No Woman Behind," Plural Art Magazine, December 3, 2022, https://pluralartmag.com/2022/12/03/imelda-cajipe-endaya-leaves-no-woman-behind/.
[157] Imelda Cajipe Endaya, "Towards a Herstory of Filipino Women's Visual Arts" (Women in History and History of Women, Philippines, June 27, 2015).

Development hosted by then executive director of the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, Remmie Rikken.[158] The 35-year-old organization continues to support the careers of Filipina artists by hosting workshops, exhibitions, and gatherings. Ma'am Meps states:

> Our vision is to change the nature of art itself: constantly transforming culture in effective and new ways where the previously suppressed perspective of women in these largely masculine histories of republics, factors of production, and unfinished revolutions, will be made visible. For example, understanding that gender is a social construct rather than a natural given is one triumph of feminism. The extensive validation today of craft as art, and the invalidation of the cult of genius, originality, and greatness in world art are another. All these gains have contributed to the postmodern awareness that behind the hegemonic hold of universality lie various shared knowledge and wisdoms of peculiar viewpoints and particular biases. And these we have arrived at because feminists have established a new leverage of thinking, looking, critiquing, and creating the female experience.[159]

This feminist ethos shaped the conceptual and material aspects of her work in the 1980s. This manifested in her first public foray into painting in 1981 at the exhibition *Paintings* at the City Gallery in Manila's Luneta Park. She exhibited a series of oil and collage on canvas paintings titled *Buhay Ay.* Unlike her previous work, these paintings prominently feature women. For example, in *Buhay ay Hiwaga Komiks* (*Life is a Mystery Comic*) (1981), a woman wearing a *baro't saya*, a traditional skirt and shirt ensemble popular in the Philippines in the 18th and 19th centuries, is depicted standing in a flat, colorful, and minimalistic room (Fig. 2.4).

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[158] KASIBULAN was officially registered as a non-profit organization in 1989. For more information on the history of KASIBULAN see KASIBULAN, "Pamumulaklak: A Gathering of Women Citizens" (Cultural Center of the Philippines, October 22, 2022), https://www.facebook.com/ccpvamd/videos/435821885346567.

[159] Imelda Cajipe Endaya, "Locus: Art and Society" (Locus: Interventions in Art Practice, Lopez Memorial Museum: National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 2003).

The figure receives a small indiscernible object from a person hidden behind a capiz shell room divider. In addition to this piece of furniture, the room also has two windows that are opened to reveal a dangerous red background. The surreal and unnerving painting also features two ghostly apparitions including a white spectral cloud shaped with the body of a lounging woman. The second is located at the upper left corner of the painting. Wearing a hooded robe, this figure appears into the scene on a white cloud that also carries a plane or train.

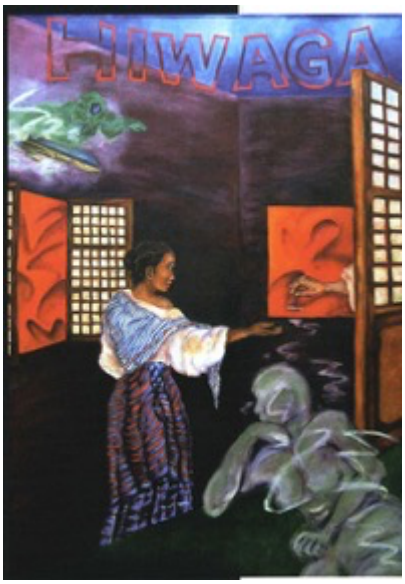

Fig. 2.4 Imelda Cajipe Endaya, *Buhay ay Hiwaga Komiks* (*Life is a Mystery Comic*), 1981

Art historian Alice Guillermo explains that the surreal series depicts a "psychological field where a host of images of emotional value drift in and out or appear in a flash in the mindscape without gravity."[160] Art historian Flaudette May Datuin also adds that the emotional turmoil of Ma'am Meps's domestic spaces are

[160] Datuin, *Alter/(n)Ations,* 7.

representations of a woman's struggle with confinement and a desire for freedom.[161] The motif of the open window and door, which is featured prominently in *Buhay Ay* and in other works, is indicative of Ma'am Meps's desire to image the female psyche. She states, "*Malapanaginnip ang pagkahugis (ng babae) sa mga pader na langit or kapaligiran, bukas ang mga bintana upang ihayag ang mithing kasarinlan ko, at marahil ng bawat babae* (Women are constructed surreally on walls of skies or landscapes, windows are flung wide open to signify my own, and perhaps every woman's desire for latitude)."[162] The turmoil that can be seen in the painting was reflective of her own inner anguish as a Filipina and nationalist in the 1980s.

The assassination of Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino, Jr., leader of the opposition against President Ferdinand Marcos, in 1983 intensified the resistance against the dictator and ignited a new period of art making for Ma'am Meps. As she states it was a period that, "…made us women artists go beyond our windows, to get out of our doors."[163] As the nation rallied together to oust President Marcos, she was creating her most political works of art up to date. Combining her nationalist and feminist sensibilities, she made her most revered work of art, *Pasyong Bayan* (*A People's Passion*) (1983) (Fig. 2.5). Known as her version of the "agony and ecstasy," this oil on canvas and collage on sawali triptych depicts the human-rights violations

[161] Flaudette May V Datuin, "Piecing Together a World in Which We Can Dwell Again: The Art of Imelda Cajipe Endaya," *Feminist Studies* 40, no. 3 (2014): 604.
[162] Translation was provided by the artist for the exhibition *Imelda Cajipe Endaya: Pagtutol at Pagasa*.
[163] Imelda Cajipe Endaya, "Women Imaging Women Keynote" (Women Imaging Women, Manila, Philippines, March 11, 1999).

committed under the Marcos regime and its effects on women and children.[164] Seven figures emerge from the darkness of a nipa hut, a stilt house often made of natural materials, and peek through woven mats known as sawali and plaster-bonded fabrics. Their faces are contorted in fear and despair, often looking directly at the viewer as if forcing them to confront their devastation. Flaudette May Datuin argues that the composition is a critique on the disappearances of dissenters and activists against martial law.[165] Through the painting, Ma'am Meps centers women as actors of history.

Fig. 2.5 Imelda Cajipe Endaya, *Pasyong Bayan*, 1983

The large-scale paintings she made between Ninoy Aquino's assassination in 1983 and the end of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986 – including *Pasyong Bayan, Sa Lupang Golgata (In the Land of Golgatha)* (1984); *Taghoy, Piglas* (1984); *Inay, Ineng, Kalayaan ay Inyo Rin (Mother, Daughter, Freedom is For You)* (1985), and *Bigkis ng Pagkakaisa* (1985) – have been categorized as "social realism."[166] In

[164] Serina Aidasani, "Presents from the Past," *Positively Filipino*, March 1, 2016, http://www.positivelyfilipino.com/magazine/presents-from-the-past.
[165] Datuin, "Piecing Together a World in Which We Can Dwell Again: The Art of Imelda Cajipe Endaya." 604.
[166] "Social realism" is an art historical term and movement that has different regional definitions. For example, in the European context, social realism is used to categorize art produced between World War I and World War II and explored the economic, social, and political conflict associated with the

Filipino art history, social realism was first coined by art critic and historian Alice Guillermo to categorize the work of the 1970s art collective Kaisahan.[167] It has since been used widely to describe works of art that, "are critical of the system, unveiling in compelling ways the inhuman aspects of social and political structures while at the same time denouncing the very basis of such inhumanity."[168] Like many of the Filipino artists who have since been attributed to this term such as Antipas Delotavo and Ben Cabrera, Ma'am Meps's work seeks to make visible and expose the most ardent conditions and concerns of Philippine society.

What separates her from other social realists is her feminist approach to social issues both in form and content. Her use of everyday and indigenous materials including *sawali*, fabric, *nipa*, and *taka* (a type of papier-mâché) gestures to her desire to dignify craft arts. She understood distinctions between "high" and "low" art as vestiges of a patriarchal and imperialistic society that undermined Indigenous and women artists. Ma'am Meps believed that these cultural or everyday objects offered a different lens to view society outside of "art for art's sake" discourses. She wrote, "Women artists work with paint, words, images, embroidery, weaving, clay and crafts, and often have no illusion that they are creating masterpieces."[169] The work she made between 1983 and 1986 was the beginning of her use of these materials.

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rise of fascist regimes. In Indonesia, social realism refers to art produced in response to Suharto's dictatorship. For this chapter, I am specifically referring to social realism in the Philippines and the artworks produced during the Marcos dictatorship.

[167] Alice Guillermo, *Social Realism in the Philippines* (Manila: Asphodel, 1987), 1.

[168] Patrick D. Flores, "Social Realism: The Turns of a Term in the Philippines," *Afterall* 48, no. 1 (2019): 86, https://doi.org/10.1086/706129.

[169] Wall text, *Imelda Cajipe Endaya: Pagtutol at Pagasa*, Cultural Center of the Philippines, Manila, Philippines.

It is not a coincidence that her work after 1986 focused on the experiences of women in the diaspora. As I discussed in chapter one, labor and migration policies instituted during the Marcos presidency created a new form of globalized migration that flourished after he was overthrown. Ma'am Meps created works of art about the phenomenon of mail order brides and family separation. This included *Diaspora Filipino* (1989), *Brides against the Macho* (1989), and *Signed, Sealed, and Delivered* (1989), three installations featuring an arrangement of brightly painted taka dolls. This foray into installation art was not an attempt to be in vogue with mainstream Euro-American aesthetics, but to reconceptualize spatial relationships to the "white-cube" gallery. She drew upon Indigenous practices and relationships to objects as her artistic lineage. For a summer workshop on installation using found materials through Samba Likhaan, she wrote that,

> …installation as ritual practice in indigenous communities antedates installation art of the west. Perhaps the difference is that while in the western idiom an artist engages in a conscious act of resistance, revulsion or shock, often in the spirit of destructiveness, traditional installations done by ordinary folks seek to symbolize a communal belief, a collective aspiration or a celebration of life such as in Tagbanua altar of séance or in the popular Pahiyas of Lucban. Contemporary Asian painters and sculptors who wish to go beyond the limits of canvas or stone, use installation to be able to relate more to an audience with a participatory element not quite possible with pure painting form. Installation goes beyond the visual. It re-creates or re-invents an environment.[170]

[170] Imelda Cajipe Endaya, "Studio Work: Installation Using Found Materials" (Samba Likhaan First Summer Workshop on the Visual Arts, Manila, Philippines, April 18, 1995).

Considering Ma'am Meps's understanding of installation as a practice of communal devotion, these three installations are not just critiques against a failed society but altars for women.

This foray into her artistic practice leading up to *Filipina: DH* is not just to situate her work within art historical discourses and movements but also shows the development of a politicized practice that centered Filipino women and their world views. By investigating her work prior to *Filipina: DH,* I show the evolution of her aesthetic practice. Except for her paintings between 1983-1986, her work primarily featured bright, colorful, and abstract compositions with figures. It took a major political event to shift her practice into a darker period and we see this occur again in 1995.

Filipina: DH

In September 1992, Ma'am Meps attended the First Asian Women Christian Artists Consultation Conference in Hong Kong. The conference was organized by the Christian Conference of Asia, an ecumenical organization founded in March 1959 with the goal to bring together churches and Christian organizations in Asia. This community of Christians sought to build relationships across nations, respond to social challenges and human rights violations, and promote the study of the Christian faith.[171] Ma'am Meps was one of 38 international participants hailing from Aotearoa/New Zealand, Bangladesh, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Korea, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and Thailand.

[171] "Christian Conference of Asia Pamphlet" (Christian Conference of Asia, September 1992).

She was invited along with the artist Brenda Fajardo, a friend and frequent collaborator. The theme of the 1992 conference was "Creation and Spirituality: Asian Women Expressing Christian Faith Through Art." The four-day conference included presentations, workshops, and site visits that illuminated the most pressing concerns for women living in Hong Kong including high rates of unemployment, democratic rights, and the plight of migrant workers.[172]

During the conference, Ma'am Meps participated in a visit to the Asian Migrant Worker Centre where she met several OFWs working in Hong Kong. As I will discuss in more length in chapter three, the shift from a manufacturing economy to a service economy in the early 1990s in Hong Kong created more job opportunities for middle-class women. As women joined the workforce, many Filipino migrants traveled to fill their domestic duties. Serving as a resource center and shelter, many OFWs took refuge at the Asian Migrant Worker Centre. During the event, they regaled stories of long work hours, abusive employers, and strenuous work conditions. Ma'am Meps noticed how these itinerant women carried their belongings in black suitcases.[173] This proved to be an impactful experience because it was a source of inspiration for many works of art including *Filipina: DH.*

Galvanized to reveal the conditions of OFWs, Ma'am Meps sought to create an installation based on the stories shared by the women she met in Hong Kong. She first explored this idea for the 1993 KASIBULAN group exhibition *Filipina*

[172] First Asian Women Christian Artists Consultation, "Statement of the First Asian Women Christian Artists Consultation" (Christian Conference of Asia, September 1992).
[173] Conversation between author and artist June 28, 2021.

Migranteng Manggagawa: A Visual Arts Exhibition on Filipina Migrant Workers hosted at the CCP.[174] Working alongside the exhibition curator, Ana P. Labrador, KASIBULAN developed the scope and objectives of the exhibition. In their exhibition proposal, they named two objectives or performance targets including to put together an exhibition that demonstrated support for OFWs and raise awareness of their conditions. KASIBULAN also conceptualized this exhibition as advocacy because they hoped "To draw attention to the plight of Filipino Migrant Workers and be able to gain support from legislators and lobby groups for the creation of Bilateral Labor Agreements soon after the end of the exhibition on 4 January 1994."[175] In total, twenty artists including Ma'am Meps were selected by a panel of KASIBULAN organizers and arts practitioners.

For *Filipina Migranteng Manggagawa* she exhibited the first iteration of what would be *Filipina: DH.* This installation was called *Foreign Domestic Helper* (1993) and featured household implements including an ironing board with a long black cloth trailed over the edge and onto the floor. Written on the cloth with white ink was text that listed the various problems migrant workers experienced. Next to the ironing board on the floor she placed a pail and floor mop.[176] After the exhibition, she created

[174] The group exhibition *Filipina Migranteng Manggagawa: A Visual Arts Exhibition on Filipina Migrant Workers* was hosted at the Cultural Center of the Philippines from November 4, 1993 to January 4, 1994.
[175] Ana P. Labrador and KASIBULAN, "Filipina: Migranteng Manggagawa Exhibition Proposal" (KASIBULAN, 1993).
[176] *Foreign Domestic Helper* was also exhibited at the University of California, Irvine for the exhibition *Memories of Overdevelopment: Philippine Diaspora in Contemporary Art* in 1996. For more information on the exhibition see the exhibit catalog Wayne Baerwaldt, ed., *Memories of Overdevelopment - Philippine Diaspora in Contemporary Art*, (Irvine: Plug in ICA, 1997).

the sculpture *The Wife is a Domestic Helper* (1995), an assemblage of found materials (Fig. 2.6). Similar to *Foreign Domestic Helper,* she incorporated household materials including a kitchen spoon, flatiron, luggage and broom. She arranged these items in the form of a human body. An open suitcase was used as the torso with its hinge suggesting a human waist. Plaster casted limbs were attached to the luggage along with a dustpan as a foot and the flatiron as a knee. Inside the luggage were other accoutrements including a Santo Niño, books, and spoon. As with many of her works of art, Ma'am Meps evolved her installation from *Migranteng Manggagawa* and *The Wife is a Domestic Helper* to create a much more robust display in content and concept.

Fig. 2.6 Imelda Cajipe Endaya, *The Wife is a Domestic Helper,* 1995

Over the course of her career, *Filipina: DH* was exhibited at least seven times in different venues across the world.[177] For each iteration, Ma'am Meps modified the

[177] Although Ma'am Meps has kept copious records, it is unclear how many times *Filipina: DH* has been installed because she modified the installation for each iteration. According to Ma'am Meps, she

installation according to space and shipping constraints. In addition, she would often take apart the installation and use these objects for other works of art. Overtime and with each exhibition, many of these objects also decayed and had to be disposed. For the purposes of this chapter, I discuss the original and most complete version of the installation which was first displayed in May 1995 at the CCP and shortly after displayed again in October 1995 at the National Commission of Culture and the Arts (NCCA). I also discuss the 1996 version of the installation which was a reduced version for the exhibition *Tensions/Traditions* in New York City.

Ma'am Meps described *Filipina: DH* as, "…a visual/participatory diary culled from true narratives. Intent is to contrast the expanse of hope and dreams for a better life, with the actual isolation, desolation, and helplessness experienced by these women migrant workers."[178] Her work would visualize issues that plagued OFWs or what she called "social costs" including "familial separation, harassment, maltreatment, rape, violence, helplessness and insanity."[179] Similar to her work with KASIBULAN, she also wished for the installation to create tangible legislative changes on the conditions of OFWs. With this intent, Ma'am Meps set out to create various sculptural elements using found objects.

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also gets confused between the different installations and the venues they were exhibited. Based on conversations between her and Apinan Poshyananda for the exhibition *Traditions/Tensions*, *Filipina: DH* was installed at the CCP from May 1-15, 1995. It was later exhibited at the National Commission for Culture and the Arts from October 10, 1995 to January 5, 1996. It later traveled to the Queens Museum of Art in New York, NY to be exhibited between October 4, 1996 to January 5, 1997. It then traveled to Vancouver Art Gallery, Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, and the Art Gallery of Western Australia as a part of *Traditions/Tensions* international traveling schedule. In 2022, the installation was displayed yet again for her retrospective at the CCP.

[178] Imelda Cajipe Endaya to Apinan Poshynanda, November 14, 1994.

[179] Imelda Cajipe Endaya, "Filipina: DH Exhibition Flyer" (National Commission for Culture and the Arts, October 10, 1995).

All the objects featured in the original installation were sourced from Filipina OFWs, friends, and colleagues or were objects that she found around her house. This included a diverse array of items such a *walis* (grass broom), dustpan, suitcases, oven mittens, mop, bucket, trolley, photographs, religious mementos, shoes, stereo, ironing board, iron, curtains, and various clothes. In addition to these everyday objects, Ma'am Meps also asked OFWs to write notes and wishes onto tags which she attached to luggage that were on display in the installation. By sourcing these household implements, she transports the viewer into the domestic space – a conflicting space where OFWs both live and work. This distortion of the home is represented in her treatment of these objects.

Many of the objects included in the installation underwent a process of "fossilization" where fabrics were covered in plaster and arranged in various compositions to harden.[180] She also used these plastered fabrics to cover objects in a process similar to papier-mâché. In the plaster mixture she incorporated dust and dirt that she found around her house. She even used her own rags and old living room curtains to create the sculptures. After the fabrics dried and stiffened, she painted them black. This process of petrifying objects changes them from useful household implements to items frozen in time. It is as if they are trapped in a constant loop of endless work. There are other household objects included in the installation that were not fossilized but were painted black including a vacuum and broom. These items are devoid of color and life. She transformed these household items into haunting

[180] Imelda Cajipa Endaya to Apinan Poshyananda, November 14, 1993.

specters of their former lives by casting them in plaster and painting them black. For the installation, she hung many of these objects on the wall as stand-alone pieces. She also combined many of them to create evocative anthropomorphic assemblages.

This can be seen in the ironing board assemblage which was hung on a wall for the 1995 versions of the installation (Fig. 2.7). The plaster covered and painted ironing board was hung just above eye-level on the wall vertically with the tapered end at the bottom. Tied to the bottom of the ironing board was a blackened iron, suspended in mid-air. Just below the ironing board on the floor were a pair of black shoes that were gingerly placed to lean against the wall. Affixed to the ironing board at the upper register was a golden pronged halo. Referring to the halo as the holy rays of Mater Dolorosa or Our Lady of Sorrows, Ma'am Meps calls upon the mourning Virgin Mary as a prayer to OFWs. However, the empty halo is also suggestive of a head especially in relation to the empty shoes that accompany the assemblage. Together these elements are suggestive of a body, and particularly the body of a sorrowful Filipina OFW.

Fig. 2.7 Imelda Cajipe Endaya, *Filipina: DH,* 1995, NCCA

Ma'am Meps also used clothes to suggest an anthropomorphic figure in the configuration known as *Blouse of Dignity*. For this sculpture, she hung a shirt from a hanger and plaster bonded them together creating a very stiff assemblage that was hung on the wall at eye-level. The curved hook of the hanger acts as the head of the figure. For the 1996 version of the installation, she attached the shirt to a pair of shorts or skirt that is also plaster bonded and rigid. In the pocket of the bottom garment are photographs collected from an OFW participant. Attached to the shirt is a ribbon that connects to a fossilized vacuum that sits on the floor and leans against the wall. It is as if the trailing ribbon is a hand and arm that cannot be severed from this household instrument. Draped on the shoulder, is a white lace fabric. Affixed on the breast of the shirt is a gold picture frame and inside the frame is the word "dignidad" or "dignity" written in white cursive.

There are other objects in the installation that are not arranged to suggest the human form but evoke a spectral presence. For example, in the 1996 version of the

exhibition, Ma'am Meps used the luggage she collected from OFWs and painted them black. For the installation she displayed them on the floor in a single-file line. The display is reminiscent of an airline queue, as if they are waiting in line to check-in and receive their boarding passes or are just about to board the plane. However, this type of departure is not marked by the excitement of adventure and exploration, but by sadness for leaving family and friends behind. These ghostly figures join an endless queue of women who have no choice but to leave and find a better future for their families.

In addition to visually representing the "social costs" of globalized labor, she was also interested in evoking these feelings in viewers so they could inhabit the shoes of the OFW. For the 1995 version of the installation, she created a "cubicle," a hanging isolation chamber that guests could enter (Fig. 2.8).[181] Titled *Cubicle of Isolation,* the box hung from a wooden frame which guests could enter using black stairs that had a chain snaking down the three steps. Leading up to the black stairs was a black fabric runway with a poem written in cursive using white ink. At the foot of the runaway were a pair of black shoes. The poem reads:

> Turn house to home
> Filipina's place is home
> Ocean away from home
> First to get up
> Last to eat
> Last to sleep
> Filipina: DH
> turns houses to homes
> Tears apart her own
> No advance airfare

[181] Imelda Cajipe Endaya, "Installation Sketch of Filipina: DH," November 11, 1994.

Filipina direct hire
No day off arranged
Speaks good English
Babysit/elderly care
Guaranteed $399
Turn house to home[182]

The poem primes visitors to feel a sense of isolation, imprisonment, despair, fear, and precarity as they stand inside the pitch-black box as it sways slightly. The immersive experience forces guests to embody the OFW.

Fig. 2.8 Imelda Cajipe Endaya, *Filipina: DH,* 1995, NCCA

In another display, Ma'am Meps uses image projectors to memorialize former domestic workers. For the 1995 version of *Filipina: DH*, Ma'am Meps used domestic maid uniforms she collected from OFWs to create a screen where photographs were projected. During the installation, the projector would rotate through images representing "historic" domestic workers including a colonial image of a Filipina nanny holding her white ward. Her use of the projector also suggests a ghostly

[182] Imelda Cajipe Endaya, *Filipina: DH*, 1995, Mixed-media Installation, 1995.

presence. Indeed, the projector's use of light and shadow creates an intangible image that can only be made present through the screen. It is as if these women can only be rendered physical and present through their uniforms. One of the images included in Ma'am Meps's slide deck is a photograph of Flor Contemplacion. Indeed, Contemplacion was ever-present in the mind of Ma'am Meps when she was creating the installation.

Although the 1992 First Asian Women Christian Artists Consultation Conference inspired the creation of the project, the events surrounding Contemplacion propelled the project to its completion. As a part of the curation of the 1996 exhibition *Tensions/Traditions*, Apinan Poshyananda, the curator of the exhibition, requested that Ma'am Meps stage the installation. She approached the CCP who agreed to privately display the installation in early May 1995 for photographer Manit Sriwanichpoom to document. Contemplacion's execution two months before the installation in March 1995 compelled Ma'am Meps to change plans. In a letter to Poshyananda in April 1995, she states:

> Besides the issue of labor export has been a seething one here since March 17 when a Filipina maid convicted for a double murder (but now proven innocent by our NBI's autopsy reports) was hanged in Singapore. Ong Teng Cheong and his cabinet snubbed President Ramos's last minute plea to stay the execution in view of new evidences found. These events triggered a nationwide popular protest the biggest yet after the 1983 Aquino association against both our own government for its inefficiency in protecting migrant workers' rights and against Singapore for being blatantly heartless…With all these happening I feel even greater urgency to do the actual installation for public viewing, on my part to help sustain the advocacy for migrant workers' rights. I have asked the CCP to allow me to do so, an amended request since earlier they agreed to give me space only for documentation purpose. I am

> quite sure you don't mind my showing this first locally since it is indeed most timely and I just can't wait for 1997 to do this.[183]

Comparing the social unrest after Contemplacion's execution to the assassination of Ninoy Aquino, Ma'am Meps felt the urgency to make visible the experiences of Contemplacion and other OFWs.

After the display at the CCP, she publicly exhibited *Filipina: DH* at the NCCA in a solo exhibition with the same name. Ma'am Meps's intent behind this last-minute exhibition was to offer a space for the Filipino public to process the sense of loss and anger they felt regarding Contemplacion's unfair trial and execution. Indeed, Ma'am Meps's reading of the public's needs was accurate; the exhibition was well-attended and inspirational. Myra Beltran, Filipino choreographer, performance artist, and dancer, visited the exhibition and was moved to choreograph a dance that utilized the luggage that was displayed.[184] The performance titled *Birdwoman* (1995) was performed at the NCCA during the duration of the exhibition.

Even more astounding was the exhibition's purported impact to migration and labor policy. Amelita Ramos, the wife of then president of the Philippines, Fidel Ramos, viewed the CCP installation with other government officials and delegates. She was so moved by the exhibition that she spoke to her husband about the plight of OFWs. Days later the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act was enacted thereby expanding government protection over OFWs. Indeed, it seems as if

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[183] Imelda Cajipe Endaya to Apinan Poshyananda, April 5, 1995.
[184] For more information on the choreographer Myra Beltran see Rina Angela P. Corpus, "Myra Beltran and the Aesthetics of an Independent Filipina Woman Dancing," *Research in Dance Education* 9, no. 1 (2008): 21–37, https://doi.org/10.1080/14647890801924196.

KASIBULAN's dreams to impact policy change was fulfilled by one of their stalwart leaders. During a conversation with Ma'am Meps she regaled this story to me with pride.[185] A few days later the story was corroborated by fellow artists and curators in the Philippines.[186] Although the veracity of this story cannot be verified, the fact that the installation is directly associated with the expansion of government oversight speaks volumes about the way the installation is understood and valued by the Filipino art public. Furthermore, it was certainly Ma'am Meps's intent to create the installation as advocacy for OFWs from its nascent iteration in *Migranteng Manggagawa* to its most realized version two years later at the NCCA. The installation is heralded for enacting change to the everyday conditions of OFWs but in doing so affirmed a vision of OFWs as downtrodden and in need of government intervention.

Between Heroes and Martyrs: National Representations of OFWs

Contemplacion's execution led to a change in labor and migration policy that further affirmed the state's role as a labor broker. In 1992, Fidel V. Ramos, a career military officer, won the Philippine election and became the nation's twelfth president. Ramos ran his campaign on a "market-centered" platform that vowed to strengthen the economy through government deregulation.[187] He referred to his vision to shift the Philippines to a neoliberal economy as "Philippines 2000" which included

[185] Conversation between artist and author on September 3, 2022.
[186] Conversation between Lara Acuin, Con Cabrera, and author on September 6, 2022.
[187] Jorge V. Tigno, "Governance and Public Policy Making in the Philippines: RA 8042 and Deregulating the Overseas Employment Sector," *Philippine Political Science Journal* 25, no. 48 (December 2004): 4, https://doi.org/10.1080/01154451.2004.9754255.

the privatization of labor export. The labor-export policy instituted by President Ferdinand Marcos and maintained by President Corozan Aquino was incredibly successful and profitable. However, the demand for Filipino workers was so high in the 1980s that the state-operated structure instituted by Marcos became unrealistic. Ramos saw the opportunity to privatize this sector of the government, further support non-governmental agencies, and transform labor migration into a state-sponsored program.[188]

This promise was challenged early in his presidency when Contemplacion was charged for murder in 1991. President Ramos submitted a stay of execution to the Singaporean government, however, on March 17, 1995, Contemplacion was hanged. The case rattled Filipinos who protested for the protection of overseas workers from inhumane treatment and exploitive working conditions. In response to this public ire, plummeting approval ratings, and looming mid-term elections, Ramos called for a special session of Congress from May 22 to May 27, 1995, to draft the Magna Carta of Migrant Workers. A mere eleven days later, on June 7, 1995, the Republic Act 8042, otherwise known as the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act, was signed into law shifting the labor policy in the Philippines to promote "a higher standard of protection and welfare."[189]

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[188] For more information of Philippines 2000 see Kale Bantigue Fajardo, *Filipino Crosscurrents: Oceanographies of Seafaring, Masculinities, and Globalization*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

[189] Joaquin L. Gonzalez III and Ronald D. Holmes, "The Philippine Labour Diaspora: Trends, Issues and Policies," *Southeast Asian Affairs* 1996, no. 1 (1996): 315, https://doi.org/10.1355/SEAA96P.

Indeed, the liberalization of labor export and heightened protection of OFWs are antithetical goals and, according to political science scholar, Jorge V. Tigno, reveals the "inherent structural dilemma" of Philippine overseas employment.[190] Despite humanistic language imbued in the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act including insuring labor-receiving nations have laws protecting workers' rights, signing bilateral agreements, and enforcing adherence to international protocols, "the whole provision ultimately becomes one based on the 'best efforts' of states in receiving areas."[191] However, political science scholars Anna Romina Guevarra and Jean Encinas-Franco argue that the language used in Republic Act 8042 is consistent with the real goals of the state: to recast labor migration as the natural outcome of globalization.[192] By positioning the nation-state's role as "protector" or "manager" of OFWs, government intervention begins and ends with protective measures.[193]

Under the Republic Act 8042, the state can act in a managerial role, while private non-government organizations oversee the daily mechanisms of overseas labor. The nation-state was able to respond to the demand for more Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong by turning to private organizations and addressing nascent concerns over safety. These changes can be summarized in President Ramos's

[190] Jorge V. Tigno, "At the Mercy of the Market?: State-Enabled, Market-Oriented Labor Migration and Women Migrants from the Philippines," *Philippine Political Science Journal* 35, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 33, https://doi.org/10.1080/01154451.2014.914999.
[191] Tigno, 30.
[192] Anna Romina Guevarra, *Marketing Dreams, Manufacturing Heroes: The Transnational Labor Brokering of Filipino Workers* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 39.
[193] Encinas-Franco, "The Language of Labor Export in Political Discourse," 105.

decision to rebrand "overseas contract workers" into "overseas Filipino workers," a phrase that emphasizes the humanity of globalized labor.

The way Contemplacion and other OFWs were represented in Philippine and international media contributed to the institution of a state-sponsored labor export program. In her analysis of newspaper articles published during Contemplacion's trial and execution including the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, the *Manila Times*, and the *Manila Chronicle*, anthropologist Anne-Marie Hilsdon shows that the media characterized Contemplacion as a hero and martyr who embodied the experiences of Filipina OFWs.[194] The *Manila Chronicle* referred to her as a "national martyr" for succumbing to the maltreatment of the Singaporean government, employers, and home country.[195] Philip Shenon of *The New York Times* described the Singaporean government's actions as an insult to the diplomatic harmony of the region.[196] Even more inflammatory was reports of neglect from the Philippine government which was twofold. Many Philippine and international newspaper outlets blamed the Philippine government for not responding to Contemplacion's trial with urgency.[197] Even more incendiary were critiques against the Philippine nation-state for its failure to support

[194] Anne-Marie Hilsdon, "What the Papers Say: Representing Violence Against Overseas Contract Workers," *Violence Against Women* 9, no. 6 (2003): 706.
[195] Hilsdon quotes the Manila Chronicle in her article "What the Papers Say."
[196] Philip Shenon, "Singapore, the Rope and Frayed Relations," *The New York Times*, 1995, https://search.proquest.com/docview/430070059?pq-origsite=primo.
[197] Rigoberto Tiglao in Manila, "Anger of a Nation," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 30, 1995, sec. REGIONAL.

its citizens. The Washington Post characterized high unemployment rates and the poor economy as "a badge of national shame."[198]

Although this characterization of the Philippines as an impoverished and failing third-world country certainly places the blame on the nation-state, it simultaneously positions OFWs as exceptional and resilient. The nation is depicted at failing to support enterprising OFWs who are attempting to overcome these systemic deficiencies and rescue the nation. Just as Contemplacion was marked as a victim, she was also seen as a hero for sacrificing herself for the sake of her family and nation. The OFW as hero archetype precedes the execution of Contemplacion and was first invoked by President Corazon Aquino in April 1988 during a speech made to OFWs at Saint Margaret's Church in Hong Kong.[199] President Fidel Ramos used the same language to describe Contemplacion thereby reaffirming OFWs as the "bagong bayani" or "new heroes" for supporting the recovering nation.[200]

As both heroes of the home and home nation, the discourse around Filipina domestic workers posits that OFWs act upon their motherly instinct to support and nurture. As John Encinas-Franco analyzes in Senate transcripts and newspaper articles written by *Abante* and the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Contemplacion was frequently described as a "mother."[201] Although these women are critiqued for

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[198] Keith B. Richburg, "Filipino Diaspora Led by Its Maids: Migrant Workers Are Called Heroes or National Shame," *The Washington Post*, 1995, https://search.proquest.com/docview/307905807?pq-origsite=primo.
[199] Vicente L Rafael, *White Love: And Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 211.
[200] Jean Encinas-Franco, "Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) as Heroes: Discursive Origins of the 'Bagong Bayani' in the Era of Labor Export," *Humanities Diliman* 12, no. 2 (2015): 56–78.
[201] Encinas-Franco, "The Language of Labor Export in Political Discourse," 106.

leaving their families behind to take care of other children, a phenomenon known as family separation, sociologist Rhacel Parreñas argues that they are perceived to be acting on their natural instincts.[202] In other words, OFWs are simply following their intuitions by going abroad and working. Indeed, gendered perceptions of familial roles and responsibilities are mobilized to construct globalized labor as an innate act for women.[203] What is left out of this conversation is the notion that OFWs are engendered or disciplined into these roles by the nation-state.

Despite the seemingly divergent narratives on OFWs produced by the media and Philippine government on the Contemplacion case, the gendered and racialized rhetoric that was produced affirmed the state's neoliberal policies. In other words, media and national discourses are "inextricably interwoven and felt politically in the lives of Contemplacion, Maga, their family and friends, other overseas domestic contract workers in Singapore and their employers, and media audiences."[204] The victim and hero archetype that circulated in the 1990s are examples of what I call "national representations of OFWs" which I define as historically-specific racialized and gendered representations of OFWs that naturalize Filipinos as ideal laboring

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[202] Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 109.
[203] For more information on the gendering of family roles in overseas Filipino workers families see Filomeno V. Aguilar, *Maalwang Buhay: Family, Overseas Migration, and Cultures of Relatedness in Barangay Paraiso* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2009); Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Nicole Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Migrant Workers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); Guevarra, *Marketing Dreams, Manufacturing Heroes*; Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*; James A. Tyner, "Migrant Labour and the Politics of Scale: Gendering the Philippine State," *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 41, no. 2 (2000): 131–54, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8373.00112.
[204]Hilsdon, "What the Papers Say," 699.

bodies and affirms the role of the Philippine nation-state as a broker of overseas workers. Indeed, the Philippine nation-state is acutely aware of the necessity to manage images of their most precious commodity. Anna Romina Guevarra argues that the nation-state itself is also in the business of promoting visions of Filipino workers. The Marketing Division of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration produces promotional materials such as pamphlets and brochures to prospective foreign employers that espouse the expertise, experience, and quality of Filipino workers. Neferti Tadiar describes this process of image-making and exploitation as a "prostitute economy."[205] Whether produced by the media or the nation, there is a desire to manage representations of Filipino workers to ensure profitability.

By analyzing the representations that were produced and circulated in the 1990s, we can apprehend a specific image of the OFW that was productive for the nation-state at that time. To meet the growing market, the Philippine government sought to privatize labor export and move into a managerial role. The "hero" and "victim" are two archetypes that mediated the fears of globalization, its impact on human rights violations, and the sanctity of the Filipino family. As the hero of the nation, OFWs are depicted as dutiful mothers who are eager to catalyze their own success for the sake of the nation. The victim discourse, while pointing to the failures of the state, also represents globalized labor as a natural outcome that must be

[205] Neferti Xina M. Tadiar, *Fantasy Production Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004).

managed. It is also important to note that these representations circulated during a time when the population of overseas laborers shifted from predominantly men to women due to heightened global demand for domestic helpers and care workers.[206] The proliferation of gendered representations of laborers alleviated fears of family separation and the dissolution of gendered ideals.

This dualled national representation of OFWs figures prominently in Imelda Cajipe Endaya's installation *Filipina: DH.* Her representation of OFWs, specifically domestic workers, highlights their plight and sorrow. Her choice of color and the objects she selects is meant to critique the dehumanization of OFWs. They are no longer humans, but the tools of their labor. As Neferti Tadiar analyzes, "The found objects do not fill her life, they are her life, or I should say, they are her."[207] In her work, Ma'am Meps shows the ways OFWs are viewed as objects to own, abuse, and manipulate by their employers and the state. Her representations are devoid of life outside of their labor.

Just as her work registers the abject suffering of OFWs, she also shows the ways OFWs persevere through this pain. The installation incorporates mementos of hope through religious and family artifacts. Tucked into the pockets and folds of the fossilized fabrics or laid out as an offering or memorial are prayer cards, rosary beads, family photos, and garlic bulbs. Although the installation is dominated by the abject horror of labor, there are glimmers of hope that can be found. Despite the despair they

[206] Fajardo, *Filipino Crosscurrents*.
[207] Tadiar, *Fantasy Production Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order,* 134.

experience, they persevere by turning inwards to their faith and family. These "artifacts of coping" illustrate the notion that OFWs find ways to rise above this experience for the sake of their families.[208]

Flor Contemplacion's trial and execution provoked a visual response from Ma'am Meps that called for a departure from her past work. Although this installation was more akin to her mixed-media paintings that she made after the murder of Ninoy Aquino, her use of installation and assemblage differed from her representation of mourning activists. Instead, *Filipina: DH* spoke to the dehumanization of OFWs by representing their bodies as non-human tools thereby affirming nationalist representations. This analysis of Ma'am Meps's work is not to disparage or critique her art. I also do not wish to suggest that her work and the work of state officials were ingenuine – I believe the concerns that emerged out of Contemplacion's trial and execution were deeply felt and the policies enacted were meant to protect OFWs. Furthermore, I do not mean to reduce the pain and suffering OFWs experience. What I am analyzing is the relationship between images and the nation-state. In other words, I am not interested in discerning whether an image or visual object is "good" or "bad," rather I point to the politics of representing globalized labor migration. A decade later, Ma'am Meps revisited these visual regimes and transformed her art practice yet again to produce a more robust account of the labor diaspora.

A View from the Diaspora

[208] Imelda Cajipe Endaya to Apinan Poshyananda November 14, 1994.

Before Ma'am Meps and her husband moved to the United States in the summer of 2005, she did not want to leave the Philippines. Growing up she never understood the desire to chase the "Land of Opportunity" and had a difficult time witnessing friends and family leave their troubled but nevertheless promising nation.[209] She remembered the pang of sadness she felt when her parents moved to Texas in pursuit of better job opportunities when she was seven years old. In an essay authored by Ma'am Meps titled "Diaspora: Relevance, Longing and Belonging" she states, "I would not have any part in it. I knew I had the calling to serve family and country right here in my homeland. I always asked myself, why do Filipinos always have to search for greener pastures abroad?"[210] Despite these feelings and with the encouragement of her children, Ma'am Meps moved to the U.S. at fifty-five to care for her aging mother.

Ma'am Meps describes this period of her life as a moment of personal and professional reinvention.[211] For the four years her and her husband lived in the United States, she stayed in her aunt and uncle's home that overlooked the Hudson River in Newburgh, New York. She also lived with her cousin, Roxanne, and her mother and father. Located sixty miles north of New York City, this small city in upstate New York was vastly different compared to her home in Parañaque, Philippines. This majority conservative and sleepy city had very few Asian or Asian American residents. Another change was the weather and acclimating to the seasonal shifts.

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[209] Conversation between author and artist June 28, 2021.
[210] Endaya, "Diaspora: Relevance, Longing and Belonging," 49.
[211] Endaya, "Diaspora: Relevance, Longing and Belonging."

Unlike her life in the Philippines, she also had to balance caring for her mother's health and finances.

As a new emigrant to the United States, Ma'am Meps experienced first-hand the difficulties of adjusting to her new financial and social status. She split her time between being a caretaker for her mother, working part-time jobs, and pursuing her art career. To supplement their income, Ma'am Meps took on various jobs including as a stock clerk and domestic helper. This was a humbling experience not only because she had to quickly learn new skills and cultural codes, but also because had no choice but to pursue entry-level jobs. She states, "Immigrants don't land jobs through the high quality of one's past work and resumes, but from whatever is available, whatever one is willing to do or train for, so one can pay the bills and hopefully be able to create, too."[212] Her qualifications as an established and well-respected artist in the Philippines were not transferrable in the U.S. She was pushed into service jobs because she did not have any local recommendations or job history. Like many of the OFWs she represented in her 1995 installations, these xenophobic forces outside of her control shaped her experience in the United States.

Despite these uncomfortable conditions, she was surprised to find the pursuit and mastery of new skills fulfilling. She found a sense of dignity and pride in her part-time work particularly when she worked as a domestic helper for Esperanza, an elderly Filipino woman.[213] For this job she maintained the house and attended to the

[212] Endaya, "Diaspora: Relevance, Longing and Belonging," 60.
[213] Conversation between author and artist June 28, 2021.

wellbeing of her employer. Indeed, her job was physically exhausting and the hours were long, but what she did not expect was the relationship she would develop with her employer. Their friendship was genuine and her concern over her health was authentic. To commemorate their companionship, Ma'am Meps painted *Esperanza and Michelle* (2006) which is inspired by Edouard Manet's *Olympia* (1863). In Ma'am Meps's painting Esperanza is seen lounging on a bed dressed in an elegant white dress, pearls, and stilettos. She smirks directly at the viewer, exuding confidence and class. At the foot of her bed stands her assistant, Michelle, who is holding an empty tray and a bouquet of red flowers. Ma'am Meps wanted to showcase Esperanza as a respectable and sophisticated woman.

The additional income she was able to earn also supported her foray into the New York City art world. Unlike the Philippines, she found New York to be more fast paced, commercial, and vast. She knew she had to acclimate to the culture if she wanted to be recognized as a successful artist in the U.S. She states, "I had to struggle against alienation in very concrete steps, not only in exhibiting my art but also in my organizing work. I had to balance myself both as an old hand and a stranger emigrant."[214] Many of her high school friends and colleagues had settled in the New York metropolitan area and pursued art careers. Her friends Lenore L.S. Lim and Athena Magcase-Lopez joined the Society of Philippine-American Artists (SPAA) to uplift Filipino art and professionalize Filipino American artists.[215] When Ma'am

[214] Endaya, "Diaspora: Relevance, Longing and Belonging," 62.
[215] Athena Santos Magcase Lopez, "SPAA Goals," *Society of Philippine American Artists*, December 2009.

Meps joined the society opportunities to exhibit her work became available. Through SPAA she also curated the exhibition *Pamana: Mondernong Sining, A Heritage of Philippine Modern Art* (2007) and published the book *Manuel Rodriguez, Sr.: Into the Threshold* (2009).

Although she readily found an arts community in New York City, she experienced more difficulties finding a place in Newburgh. In particular, Ma'am Meps's aesthetic preferences towards figuration and abstraction did not align with what was popular in upstate New York. The visible social justice concerns of her local community centered around issues related to farming and local business. In addition, she found that many of her peers practiced *en plein air* painting and produced landscapes of local environments. In form and content, Ma'am Meps felt alienated from the upstate New York arts community.

Ma'am Meps also entered a politicized U.S. art world that was contending with identity politics and post-Black discourse of the 1990s.[216] Indeed, many U.S. based arts practitioners of the time still struggled to identify critiques of systemic racism and imperialism in artworks produced by artists of color and instead relegated these contributions as displays of personal experiences.[217] In other words, works of art by artists of color were critiqued as nonuniversal. Ma'am Meps recalls, "Being in

[216] Derek Conrad Murray, *Queering Post-Black Art: Artists Transforming African-American Identity After Civil Rights* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2016).
[217] In the early 2000s, Asian American artists and curators challenged popular critiques against artists of color by raising exhibitions. Two exhibitions that sought to provide a new lens to view critiques of systemic racism in artworks include *One Way or Another* (2007) and *Asian/American/Modern Art: Shifting Currents* (2008). For more information on these exhibitions and Asian American art in the 2000s see Susette Min, *Unnamable: The Ends of Asian American Art* (New York: NYU Press, 2018).

a developing country where there is so much poverty, there is great urgency and intensity of meaning in one's art-making. One is inevitably 'others-oriented.'"[218] To combat her work from being "others-oriented," Ma'am Meps quickly adapted her practice to the art economy, market forces, and cultural politics of upstate New York. In order to make her critiques of imperialism and patriarchal structures legible to Newburgh audiences, she transformed her art practice by incorporating local aesthetics and concerns.

When Ma'am Meps entered New York in 2005, the state was still reeling from the tragic events of September 11, 2001. Images of a battered and mourning New York City propelled the nation into war in the Middle East under the guise of retribution and freedom. Referred to as "Operation Enduring Freedom," the War in Afghanistan and the Global War on Terrorism was largely popular after 9/11.[219] Four years after, that support was beginning to shake and wane. Ma'am Meps spoke with many concerned neighbors who had children enlisted in the army. This fear for the youth of America was a way to connect with her new neighbors while discussing themes that interested her. This resulted in a series of three paintings called *Pax Americana.*

Pax Americana features colloquial scenes of the Hudson Valley. In these paintings, she blurs the boundaries of indoor and outdoor spaces as an act to bring

[218] Endaya, "Diaspora: Relevance, Longing and Belonging," 60.
[219] TNS Intersearch of Horsham, P, "Post-ABC Poll: Terrorist Attacks," The Washington Post, September 13, 2001, https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/polls/vault/stories/data091401.htm.

soldiers home.[220] For example, in *Pax Americana II,* Ma'am Meps depicts a kitchen with blue, red, and green tiled floor and a yellow counter in the middle (Fig. 2.9). Hanging on a rod affixed to the side of the counter are a row of blue cooking utensils including spatulas and slotted spoons. On top of the counter is a red bowl filled with vegetables, two knives, and a mortar and pestle. Next to the red bowl is a utensil holder filled with wooden kitchen tools. Hanging above the counter is a brown light fixture. This everyday scene is unassuming except that the kitchen wall is transparent and looks out to a view of the Hudson River. The outlines of a wall clock and window are painted in a white paint that blends into the cloudy sky that hangs above the calm Hudson River. Along the horizon are the lush green hills of the Taconic Mountains. Painted in the frame of the white window is the silhouette of a solider wearing a gas mask and holding on a gun. He simultaneously hovers above the kitchen and landscape just as the war in the Middle East persistently occupies the minds of everyday American citizens. Ma'am Meps describes this series as, "ordinary local scenery juxtaposed with daily evidence of America's permanent state of exported war, in the past as imperialist policy, and today as policy of securing the homeland against terrorism."[221] These paintings depict how life continues despite the persistence of war. *Pax Americana* marked an aesthetic departure from her past works.

[220] Endaya, "Diaspora: Relevance, Longing and Belonging," 67.
[221] Endaya, "Diaspora: Relevance, Longing and Belonging," 67.

Fig. 2.9 Imelda Cajipe Endaya, *Pax Americana II,* 2005

Common-Places and the Politics of the Everyday

Pax Americana is a convincing depiction of a typical American kitchen because she painted "*en plein air*" in her Newburgh home. The placement and color of the counter, utensils, and fixtures are replicated from her aunt and uncle's home. The view of the Hudson River she represents is also the scene she saw everyday through their kitchen window. The incorporation of this mode of painting was certainly influenced by her local peers. It was a way for her to fit in and be legible to the Hudson River community. However, unlike her peers who ascribed to a more traditional understanding of the genre, she chose to blend indoor and outdoor spaces. The manipulation of local art styles is not just an art historical critique of American landscape painting, but also her way making sense of histories of labor displacement. Ma'am Meps utilized the techniques she tested in *Pax Americana* on paintings that describe her experience as an overseas Filipina working to support her family. This turn to colloquial scenes differs drastically from her representation of OFWs in the

1990s and shows how her understanding of globalized labor shifted once she was in the diaspora.

The prominence of en plein air painting in the Hudson River Valley during Ma'am Meps's tenure can be ascribed to the preeminence of the "Hudson River School" in American art history. The Hudson River School refers to a group of American landscape painters who were active between 1825 to 1875.[222] The attribution of this moniker to the Northeastern United States, specifically the regions that stretch alongside the Hudson River in New York, is due to the painter Thomas Cole who many regard as the "father" of the Hudson River School.[223] An English immigrant, Cole settled in Catskill, New York in 1836 during the beginning of an expanded period of tourism across the United States (Fig. 2.10). In New York, steamboats would travel up and down the Hudson River filled with tourists eager to take in the natural wonders of the valley. Cole was also enamored with the beauty of the Catskill's wilderness which he first visited in 1825. Cole's vision of a romantic, sublime, and bucolic American landscape impacted students and other artists associated with revered arts institutions in New York including the National Academy of Design.

[222] Linda S. Ferber and New-York Historical Society, *The Hudson River School: Nature and the American Vision* (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2009), 13.
[223] Metropolitan Museum of Art et al., *American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987).

Fig. 2.10 Thomas Cole, *View on the Catskill – Early Autumn*, 1836-37

Although many of the artists associated with the Hudson River School produced landscapes that signified a range of political and cultural beliefs, as art historian Angela Miller argues, these artists were bounded by a practice of, "embedding historical meaning in the very structure of natural space itself."[224] The landscape became the site in which expressions and debates over the future of the nation took place. Depictions of vast vistas, soaring peaks, and untamed wilderness intersected with the discourse of Manifest Destiny. Although artists like Cole expressed his critiques on unfettered Jacksonian expansion, these aesthetic motifs also perpetuated the erasure of histories of Indigenous habitation and validated the modernist project to civilize "virgin" land.[225] Furthermore, many Hudson River School artists imagined the American landscape as spiritual spaces where morality

[224] Angela L. Miller, *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825-1875* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 5.
[225] Karl Kusserow and Alan C. Braddock, *Nature's Nation: American Art and Environment* (Princeton: Princeton University Art Museum, 2018).

and piety persevered despite calamity – motifs that were interpreted as allegories for antebellum America.[226] Across these debates, this group of American painters sought to cohere an image of a nationalist landscape that could be read and understood by the literate and white middle class.

However, many art historians have also expanded on these interpretations of American landscape painting. For example, Nancy Siegel's research on women artists in the Hudson River School expands on the experience of travel and training for women.[227] Her research critiques the dominance of male artists in American art historical research. Furthermore, British art historian and Black studies scholar, Kobena Mercer, offers an alternative epistemology to American landscape painting in his reading of the artist Robert Scott Duncanson.[228] By reading "below the threshold of the visual," Mercer analyzes how Black artists, "were initiating a call-and-response dialogue with representations of black life produced by white American and European artists."[229] Similarly, Ma'am Meps utilized the "prevailing codes of romantic landscape, neoclassical sculpture, and painterly realism" to represent her daily life living through globalized labor migration.[230] Ma'am Meps's use of

[226] Jerome Tharaud, *Apocalyptic Geographies: Religion, Media, and the American Landscape* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/267/monograph/book/77417.
[227] Nancy Siegel, "'We the Petticoated Ones': Women of the Hudson River School," in *The Cultured Canvas: New Perspectives on American Landscape Painting* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2011), 151–84.
[228] Kobena Mercer, "Erase and Rewind: When Does Art History in the Black Diaspora Actually Begin?," in *The Migrant's Time: Rethinking Art History and Diaspora* (Williamstown: Clark Art Institute, 2011), 17–31.
[229] Mercer, "Erase and Rewind: When Does Art History in the Black Diaspora Actually Begin?," 23.
[230] Mercer, "Erase and Rewind: When Does Art History in the Black Diaspora Actually Begin?," 22.

American landscape motifs gestures towards a politics of the everyday that rendered the highs and lows of building a new home away from home.

Considering Ma'am Meps's interest in the discourses and visual cultures of Filipino nationalism, it makes sense that she would turn to landscape painting to unpack her experience living in the diaspora. Similar to Hudson River School artists, she imbues the American landscape with meanings related to her national identity. Unlike American landscape artists, she does not attempt to signify a collective identity but her personal journey as someone who lives betwixt and between. In her landscapes, she asks: what does it mean for a Filipino nationalist to build a home in a place like the United States? She attempts to answer this question through her paintings where the American landscape acts as the backdrop of her new home in Newburgh. It is on that land laden with histories of violence, similar acts that were perpetuated onto her home country, that she must begin anew. To her surprise she found that this journey was filled with both pain and pleasure. The work she makes during her stay in Newburgh showcase the complexity of building a home abroad.

In the colorful painting *Into a Home Far from Home* (2006) Ma'am Meps depicts the wintery Hudson River Valley from the open door of an entryway. The viewer is given a partial view of a field of bare trees that stand tall amidst soft powdery mounds of snow. Blocking the scenic view is an anthropomorphic purple *bulul*, a carved representation of an Ifugao rice diety, cradling a baby. In its other hand is a yellow luggage that it drags through the doorway. To the right of the door is an elaborately carved light blue desk with a tall hutch. Displayed on the desk is a

statue of the Buddha and a framed portrait of the Virgin Mary. In front of the desk is a stool with a small vase that holds a single long-leafed plant. On the floor in front of the desk and door is a pink rug with a yellow-flowered border. Strewn on the rug in front of the right side of the desk is a single yellow knee-length boot. Hanging on the wall to the right of the desk is a portrait of a smiling woman wearing pearl earrings in front of a floral backdrop. The woman in the painting is Ma'am Meps's aunt and the boot on the floor belongs to her cousin, Roxanne.

Aside from the bulul, who represents Ma'am Meps just as she enters her Newburgh home for the first time, and her choice of color the scene is quite ordinary. The bulul, represented with a vagina and breasts, stands awkwardly in the door.[231] The winter scene behind her further emphasizes this contradictory imagery. She transforms into the ostensible other in Newburgh, coming into a foreign place that is supposed to represent warmth, safety, and familiarity. This discrepancy is tempered by the casual nature of the scene.

She also imbues the humdrum of life in the painting *My Mother and Me* (2006). In this painting, she details her mother's favorite place in their Newburgh home. It was common for Ma'am Meps's mom to sit on the couch located next to the sliding door in the living room. She would sit watching boats drift along the Hudson River and the leaves sway from the tall tree in their backyard. Sometimes her mother would sit on that couch and knit quietly. Every day for the five years she lived abroad

[231] This painting was banned from her exhibition *Digiwata* by the exhibiting institution because of the *bulul* figure. The directors of the gallery said to Ma'am Meps that the imaging of female sex organs was inappropriate and demanded that the painting be taken down.

she watched her mother at that same spot. She evidences this in the painting *My Mother and Me* where the Hudson Valley is represented as a winter wonderland through the large sliding window which contrasts with the warmth and color of their Newburgh living room. Like *Into a Home Far from Home,* she embellishes the living room with vibrant color and ornate patterns merging the surreal in her highly realistic rendering of the space and furniture. A stripped purple and green knitted blanket is casually thrown on the couch marking the absence of a person. Hanging above the couch on the wall designed with a green tinted floral pattern is a portrait of Ma'am Meps as a child and her middle-aged mom. This colloquial scene is a reflection on different passages of time. In many ways, the painting is a meditation on both her changing relationship with her aging mother and the U.S.. Ma'am Meps's slow acclimation to the U.S. was the perpetual background to her journey as her mother's caregiver.

We see similar motifs and aesthetics in the painting *But She's Not White* (2006) which depicts another moment in-between time (Fig. 2.11). Facing the built-in corner display unit of their dining room, Ma'am Meps paints her cousin Roxanne in a mad dash to catch an appointment. In this painting, only Roxanne's legs are depicted at the lower left register of the painting. Her left leg is raised and the coat tails of her jacket flutter as if Ma'am Meps captured a candid photo while Roxanne was running. On the right side of the China cabinet is their dining room window with a partial view of their large tree and the corner of their neighbor's house. Just below the window is a cart filled with a random assortment of items including their mail, pottery, rags, and a

set of bongos. Ma'am Meps captures the moment where a large stack of envelopes spills onto the floor from the cart's bottom shelf. These fleeting moments all register a mundane and vernacular scene in a typical American home except for her representation of their dining room walls.

2.11 Imelda Cajipe Endaya, *But She's Not White*, 2006

The walls are made using small pieces of found paper and stained using a transparent mustard yellow paint. The various clippings found on the walls are representations of American popular culture that she found in newspapers, classified advertisements, and magazines. For example, above the window is the cover of Reba McEntire's 2005 compilation album *Reba's Number 1's.* To the left of the album cover is an upside-down image of SpongeBob SquarePants and Patrick Star from the hit animated comedy television series *SpongeBob SquarePants* which first aired in 1999. To the left of that image is the album cover of Jack Johnson's *In Between Dreams* which was released in 2005. Other images include comic strips taken from newspapers and movie posters made in the early 2000s.

The walls of the home are an archive of American popular culture and index what Ma'am Meps saw when she arrived in the U.S.. Included in this archive is an additional piece of visual culture. Adjacent to images of movie posters and album covers are the brochures made for *Digiwata*, Ma'am Meps's first solo exhibition in the U.S. Her inclusion of her work as a part of this archive of American culture shows that she was beginning to receive recognition from the arts community but also that she was recognizing herself as an American artist. In this painting, the home becomes the space in which she can express the evolution of her art practice and identity. Unlike the evocation of home as a prison for OFWs in her 1995 installation of *Filipina: DH,* her representation of the home abroad is hopeful and earnest. However, the title of the painting complicates this assimilationist narrative. The painting's title refers to her cousin, Roxanne, who is rushing to an audition for a play in New York City. Despite her talent Roxanne was told that she did not get the job because she was Filipino. Yet again, Ma'am Meps represents the constant duality that exists for displaced individuals.

Ma'am Meps's representation of her New York home uses what I refer to as an aesthetics of the everyday. Not only does she capture fleeting moments of day-to-day life, but these scenes do not cohere as a complete narrative that can be subsumed into nationalist discourse. Instead, these images are personal excavations of belonging, labor, and displacement. She conceived of these paintings to be primarily exercises or meditations that helped her make sense of living in the diaspora.

Her Hudson Valley landscape paintings disavow the nationalist rhetoric she inadvertently supported during the 1990s. Her representation of life abroad does not seek to change policy or offer grand narratives of OFWs as either heroes or victims. Her representation of home is neither safe nor alienating, but both at the same time. In addition, she appropriates local aesthetics to raise subtle political messages while evading the orientalist gaze typically fixed on Asian artists. She offers unassuming, non-descript scenes that represent how OFWs negotiate every day. She utilizes symbols and iconography that does not critique or support nationalist discourse, but only make sense within the specific context of her experience. In other words, she shifts the locus or the eye to the subtle but profound daily acts of survival that marked her time in upstate New York. Indeed, her paintings offer a critical departure from the national representations of OFWs that posit loud political messages of victimhood and success.

Conclusion

By contrasting *Filipina: DH* and her Hudson Valley landscapes, two distinct time periods of artistic production in Ma'am Mep's career, we can analyze the different ways she navigated the politics of representing globalized labor migration. Although *Filipina: DH* was responding to the immediate concerns of a nation mourning the loss of an OFW, this installation ultimately replicated nationalist representations of OFWs, visions of overseas labor that support the nation-state's role as a broker of OFWs. The installation visualized OFWs as both victims and martyrs of the state to raise concerns for the plight of overseas laborers and expand state

protections. By constructing domestic workers as dehumanized anthropomorphic assemblages of household tools, she successfully increased attention towards their working conditions which nevertheless manifested in heightened state control.

When she revisited themes surrounding displacement and labor ten years later, her representation of the diaspora changed. By appropriating local aesthetics, Ma'am Meps created a series of paintings that helped her make sense of the dissonant moments living abroad. Unlike her prior work, these paintings do not offer a legible narrative of victims or heroes but turn to non-descript quiet moments in her home. By shifting the locus to the mundane, she displaces value from the nation-state to everyday moments living in the diaspora. In the next chapter I will continue to explore how Filipina diasporic artists utilize an aesthetics of the everyday to challenge national representations of OFWs through the work of photographer and filmmaker Lizza May David. In addition to contesting the politics of representing OFWs in the 2010s, David also considers the colonial history of photography.

Chapter Three

Abstracting Labor: The Politics of the Camera in Lizza May David's Artwork[232]

Writhing curvilinear lines and shapes fill the pictorial plane in a dizzying array of colors and patterns. Seafoam green tubes dance across blue and white ribbons that weave between brown disks and hollow square prisms of different sizes. A fuchsia pink background peeks through the sparse negative space between the cacophony of shapes. If the painting was displayed outside the context of Berlin-based artist Lizza May David's contribution to the 2011 exhibition, *Beyond Re/Production: MOTHERING Dimensions of Social Reproduction in Neoliberalism* at the Kunstraum Kreuzberg in Berlin, it would be an unassuming painting and decent homage to non-objective painting. What is curious about the inclusion of this conventional painting is how it is displayed adjacent to a television monitor showing an image of a living room wall with the same painting (Fig. 3.1).

[232] This chapter is adapted from an essay previously written for the *Social Transformations: Journal of the Global South*, however all arguments made are new and explore other aspects of Lizza May David's artwork. For more information see Christina Ayson Plank, "Counter-Producing National Narratives Filipina Diasporic Artists Challenge the Global Health Care System," *Social Transformations: Journal of the Global South* 9, no. 2 (2021): 15–39, https://doi.org/10.13185/STJGS2021.09203.

Fig. 3.1 Lizza May David, *Ludy's Painting*, 2011, Kunstraum Kreuzberg

The juxtaposition of these two objects, the digital image and painting, comprise David's installation titled *Ludy's Painting* (2011). The painting is a reproduction of the artwork featured in the still-image displayed on the monitor. The digital image is taken from a documentary she made with anthropologist Claudia Liebelt titled *Cycles of Care* (2011). The movie features David and Liebelt interviewing five Filipinas after their return to Manila from working in Israel as domestic workers for between six to twenty years. One of the women they interviewed, Ludy, showed the documentarians a painting that was gifted to her by her employer. Upon her return to the Philippines after years of working abroad, Ludy prominently displayed the artwork in her living room in Manila. The painting became a souvenir of her time in Israel and a memento commemorating her deceased employer. In other words, the painting is a repository of conflicting and complex memories and emotions. On one hand, it is a reminder of the long work hours, physical exhaustion, homesickness, and the lack of privacy that she experienced

while working abroad. On the other hand, it is a testament to the deep relationship she developed with her employer.

As a symbol for the conflicting experiences of working abroad, it makes sense why David and Liebelt featured the painting in their documentary. However, it is a curious choice for David to build an installation around the object. When recreating the painting, David purposefully used the film footage from *Cycles of Care* to make the work of art. The painting was repainted using the RGB video image, the video signal used to differentiate and distinguish colors for the human eye. The painting David made is a reproduction of a digital facsimile.

Between the recreated painting and still-image, the viewer is only able to access reproductions of the real painting. As the viewer, we are asked to trust the video's ability to represent the painting honestly, or, as Walter Benjamin asks, whether the mechanical reproduction devalues the "aura" of an object.[233] Furthermore, we are forced to contend with whether David can accurately render the painting from the analog version. These questions on authenticity that the installation elicits is a metaphor for the politics of representation. David says, "…the painting opens up issues about authenticity/illusion and reproduction, based on questioning the representation of migrating bodies."[234] I argue that *Ludy's Painting* is the result of David's desire to abstract labor and is indicative of a counter-productive art practice that seeks to provide resolution to the politics of representation.

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[233] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Visual Culture: The Reader* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1999).
[234] Lian Ladia, "Migrant Tales: Lizza May David," *Contemporary Art Philippines*, April 2011, 28.

These questions on translatability and representations of labor surround David's oeuvre on OFWs which spanned from 2006 to 2011. By the time David created *Ludy's Painting*, she developed a substantial series of photographs and films on the experiences of OFWs. This includes *Two Years More* (2006), *Looking Inwards* (2008), *Looking Outwards* (2008), *The Model Family Awards* (2008), and *Cycles of Care*. Across her body of artwork, David attempts to grapple with accurate and ethical representations of Filipinos working abroad. This negotiation can be tracked by examining the different filmic and photographic strategies she employs to capture OFW experiences. For example, in *Looking Inwards*, she turns the gaze by having her aunt, an OFW who works in Hong Kong, document her life living abroad. In the movie *The Model Family Awards*, she turns away from representations of OFWs and their labor by focusing on an annual award ceremony for the Model Overseas Filipino Workers Family of the Year Award which is administered by the Filipino organization Overseas Workers Welfare Administration. After years of developing photographs and films, it is curious that David turns away from these mediums and instead chooses to produce an abstract painting as her last body of work on overseas Filipinos.

In this chapter, I will analyze David's artworks on OFWs and show that she intentionally sought to move away from representations of labor to address the way the Philippine nation-state relies on image making practices to continue profiting from OFWs or what I refer to as national representations of OFWs (which I discuss in chapter two). Across her body of work, David turned the lens away from images (still

and moving) of labor to capture a more holistic understanding of living overseas. Despite these attempts to confront the spectacle of the laboring body by employing alternative photographic and filmic methods, David cannot resolve the quandary that all representations are mediated and thus representations are translations of experiences that continue to operate within the nation-state's regime of visuality.

A Personal History of Photography

Lizza May David's preoccupation with visibility and the Filipino body can be traced back to her own family's history with photography. David is a photographer, documentarian, painter, and installation artist based in Berlin, Germany. She received training as a painter in 2000 at the Academy of Fine Arts in Nuremberg, Germany. Her interest in alternative mediums was cultivated when she received her degree in Video Art, Visual Communications at Berlin University of the Arts. In 2008, David received her Meisterschüler degree at the Berlin University of the Arts.[235] From 2008 through 2015 David was a member of the arts collective, Global Alien.[236]

Born on 1975 in Quezon City, Philippines, David's family is intimately familiar with the complex feelings of working abroad. When she was young, David's mother moved to Nigeria to work as an English teacher while she stayed in the

[235] The U.S. equivalent to the Meisterschüler degree is a Master of Fine Arts.

[236] This is Global Alien's group statement taken from their website in 2022: "The artist group Global Alien is spread over the globe with a junction point of members in Berlin. Their projects are concerned with the fragmentary nature and acts of globalization, power relations and cultural identities. Working with aesthetical visibilities of social and urban realities, Global Aliens' approach is to invent ways of communication, where the audience is invited to participate in play and game-like performances. The aim of each action is to create a fluid space of performativity, which leads to a permanent exchange with local conditions to overcome borders and meet each other where we are." For more information please see Global Alien, "About – Global Alien," Blog, 2015, https://globalalien.net/about/.

Philippines with relatives. In 1981 while living in Nigeria, her mother met her future stepfather, a German photographer named Günter Eckart. Eckart moved to Nigeria after leaving his family's photography business, Photo Eckart. Upon their marriage, David relocated to Germany to live with her mother and new stepfather.

Prior to his relocation to Nigeria, Eckart traveled to Asia in 1977 as a part of a diplomacy program by the Japanese camera company, Osawa. In an effort to stoke better economic relationships, Osawa invited German camera sellers and photographers to travel to Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines. During his travels, Eckart captured many photographs which he displayed in an exhibition titled *Fernöstliche Streiflichter (Far East Highlights)* that he mounted in Germany upon his return. One of the most popular images from his exhibition was a candid photograph of an unknown Filipina (Fig. 3.2). When he moved to Nigeria, he displayed this photograph in his living room, which caught the attention of David's mother when she was attending a gathering at his place.

Fig. 3.2 Gunter Eckart, *Unknown Filipina,* 1977

The photograph captures the moment of recognition between the photographer and the subject. From across the street, Eckart spotted an unknown Filipina and positioned his camera to take her photo. Just as his finger clicked the shutter, this woman turned her head to look over her shoulder directly as Eckart. She is captured with her head tilted slightly downward so that she looks through her eyelashes in a coy manner. The photograph captured more than just a romantic and opportune moment between two strangers. For David, the photograph is a case study in power and positionality. Her stepfather, a white male tourist selected to document and catalyze "East and West" relations that were emblematic of the Cold War, captures a photograph of an unassuming Filipina. The woman remains nameless and unaware of how her visage propelled the career of Eckart and now David.

David came across this photograph in 2007 when looking through her stepfather's archives, an experience that resulted in the photographic installation *The Unknown Filipina* (2010). With Eckart's permission, David took his photograph and displayed it under the auspices of excavating the intersections between the personal and political. Between 2011 and 2022, *The Unknown Filipina* has been exhibited in different formats. For example, the *The Unknown Filipina* was displayed alongside a speculative essay written by David regarding her mother and stepfather's meeting in a 2011 exhibition in Blanc Compound, a gallery located in the Philippines. In other instances, the photograph was displayed alongside additional materials from Eckart's archive including other photographs, newspaper clippings, and travel logs.

In all iterations of this work, David mines and repurposes her stepfather's photographs to make sense of her conflicting feelings. For David, the unknown Filipina became a surrogate of herself. When she re-discovered the photograph, she could not help but feel like she was looking at herself but through her stepfather's eyes. For the 2011 iteration of *The Unknown Filipina* at Blanc Compound in the Philippines for the exhibition *Nothing to Declare*, David included an essay titled "The Apparatus" that states, "While looking through them one photograph caught my attention – a reflexion of myself? I made my way through the Apparatus, the hallucinatory world of representation, through time and space, mirroring your own desire."[237] This cognitive dissonance is what W.E.B. DuBois theorized as "double consciousness" or the internal conflict one experiences when viewing and measuring yourself through the racialized lens of systemic white supremacy.[238] The experience of coming across these photographs forced David to come to terms with her stepfather's positionality as a white man and the racialized and gendered lens in which he viewed the Philippines and other Filipinos during his tour. Furthermore, the experience triggered the involuntary realization that this could also be the lens in which he viewed herself and her mother. David's anxieties of her stepfather's use of the camera as a tool to exoticize and sexualize mirrors the intimacy of violence emblematic of U.S. imperialism in the Philippines.

Photography in Colonial Philippines[239]

[237] Lizza May David, "The Apparatus" (Blanc Compound, 2011).
[238] W.E.B. Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," in *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903.
[239] To de-center colonial imagery, I have chosen not to reproduce images by Dean Conan Worcester, Daniel Folkmar, and other colonial photographers mentioned in this chapter. These images circulate

The use of photography as a technology of U.S. empire in the Philippines has long been documented by historians, feminist studies scholars, Filipino studies scholars, and anthropologists. As they have shown, the camera was diversely deployed to legitimate U.S. colonial rule by controlling the many ways Filipinos were racialized and engendered. Looking at the history of photography in the Philippines reveals how the camera became a mechanism of racialization in both the colony and the metropole. Understanding the history of photography in the Philippines offers insight into David's art practice that seeks to navigate around the politics of representation.

In the essay, "Unlearning the Origins of Photography" visual culture and photography scholar Ariella Azoulay argues that the origins of photography can be traced to the conquest of the Americas in 1492. She says, "My proposition, however, is that photography did not initiate a new world; yet, it was built upon and benefitted from imperial looting, divisions, and rights that were operative in the colonization of the world in which photography was assigned the role of documenting, recording, or contemplating what-is-already-there."[240] In other words, the camera became an instrument to assist in the manufacturing of a new world order that sought to categorize, divide, and extract resources by colonial powers. In his groundbreaking book, *Orientalism,* post-colonial scholar Edward Said also discussed the use of the

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widely in publications and on the internet. As I argue in this chapter, the wide availability and visibility of Filipino bodies during the colonial era have disciplined Filipinos into subservient roles. The omission of these images from my dissertation is inspired by Lizza May David.

[240] Ariella Azoulay, "Unlearning the Origins of Photography," *Foto (In)Stability Museum*, June 8, 2018, http://www.fotomuseum.ch/en/explore/still-searching/articles/155239_unlearning_the_origins_of_photography.

visual in colonial projects. In discussing the portrayal of the Middle East, Said notes that the tendency to differentiate the East and West through literary and visual representations was a part of systems of thought, discourses of power, and ideological fictions that supported extractive policies. He notes,

> And far from this being exclusively an intellectual or theoretical feature, it made Orientalism fatally tend towards the systematic accumulation of human beings and territories. To construct dead or lost Oriental languages meant ultimately to reconstruct a dead or neglected Orient; it also meant that reconstructive precision, science, and even imagination could prepare the way for what armies, administrations, and bureaucracies would later do on the ground, in the Orient.[241]

Indeed, many of the American photographers active during the U.S. colonial period in the Philippines sought to create a variety of representations that supported and were useful to U.S. administrators on the archipelago. The success of these photographs in reinforcing U.S. colonization in the Philippines lies in the belief that the camera is an objective tool that reproduces reality. As Roland Barthes writes, "The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here…".[242] Unlike painting, sculpture, or other forms of representation, photography is perceived to be objective because of the mechanistic qualities of the camera – that the hand of the artist does not interrupt, modify, or translate reality.[243] This was particularly impactful

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[241] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).
[242] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 80. Susan Sontag also makes this observation when she refers to the photograph as "a trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask." For more information see Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Anchor Books, 1977), 154.
[243] Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992), 29.

for an American audience that had very little knowledge of the Philippines during the turn of the twentieth century.

When the U.S. acquired the Philippines from Spain under the Treaty of Paris in 1898, the Philippine archipelago was largely unknown. Many questioned why the U.S. was intervening in an island nation thousands of miles away including Samuel Langhorne Clemens, otherwise known as novelist Mark Twain. In an essay published in the *New York Herald* on October 15, 1900, Twain loudly pronounced his opposition to the war and wrote, "It should, it seems to me, be our pleasure and duty to make those people free, and let them deal with their own domestic questions in their own way. And so I am an anti-imperialist. I am opposed to having the eagle put its talons on any other land."[244] In order to challenge these criticisms, the success of the war depended on "bringing the Philippines into the kodak zone."[245] In other words, producing images of the Philippines could raise support for the war. As historian Benito Vergara points out, the photographs produced between 1898 to 1913 were highly visible documents that reinforced and shaped both policy and public perception of the Philippines. American photographers in the Philippines, therefore, wielded powerful tools that created, "standardized representation of Filipinos, predicated on inferiority, an unmanageable heterogeneity of people, and the presumed

[244] "Mark Twain - The World of 1898: The Spanish-American War," Library of Congress, accessed June 6, 2022, https://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/1898/twain.html.
[245] Benito M. Vergara, *Displaying Filipinos: Photography and Colonialism in Early 20th-Century Philippines* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1995).

incapacity for self-rule, [which] contributed to the legitimation of the American colonial occupation of the Philippines."[246]

One of the most well-known photographers and public officials active in the Philippines was zoologist Dean Conant Worcester who was summoned by President William McKinley to join the first Philippine Commission (also known as the Schurman Commission) in 1899 and was later reinstated to join the second Philippine Commission (also known as the Taft Commission) in 1900. These two government bodies were tasked to make recommendation on how to proceed with the acquisition of the archipelago after a series of fact-finding missions. It was during these expeditions that Worcester turned to the camera to document the different Filipino ethnic groups. As Mark Rice documents in *Dean Worcester's Fantasy Islands: Photography, Film, and the Colonial Philippines*, the types of ethnographic photographs Worcester took varied during his time in the Philippines from 1899 to 1913.[247] Additionally, the ways he categorized, arranged, and disseminated his photographs changed throughout his career. He also sold and donated his photographs as both commodities and scientific research to a diverse range of institutions.[248] The varied methods of representation and circulation that he deployed were all attempts to

[246] Vergara, *Displaying Filipinos: Photography and Colonialism in Early 20th-Century Philippines,* 4.
[247] Rice notes that Worcester experimented with standards of anthropological documentation throughout his time in the Philippines. For example, standards for using a white background or scales for measurement were indiscriminately used. In addition, the ways he photographed cultural objects often changed. Filipino subjects were either tasked to pose with objects, or they were photographed separately. For more information see Mark M. Rice, *Dean Worcesters Fantasy Islands: Photography, Film, and the Colonial Philippines* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014).
[248] Rice also shows that Worcester arranged and selected photographs based on the purchasing institution. This includes the University of Michigan. Worcester also sold his photographs to be used in non-anthropological journals for a public viewing audience. This was in addition to his numerous publications featuring his photographs including in National Geographic Magazine.

reach the widest audience for his photographs and spread his vision of the Philippines as a nation in need of U.S. intervention. He was an avid supporter of McKinley's policy of "benevolent assimilation" and believed that Filipinos were, "utterly unfit for self-government."[249] The photographs Worcester produced supported this mission by manipulating and staging his subjects and photographs to represent Filipinos as savage and uncivilized.

Another popular photographer active during the American colonial era was Daniel Folkmar, a physical anthropologist employed by the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes and Ethnological Survey of the Philippines in 1903. According to literary and cultural studies scholar Oscar V. Campomanes, Folkmar was assigned to Bilibid Prison to take craniometric and physiognomic measurements of inmates in preparation for the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair where a Philippine Village would be displayed.[250] His scientific research would be supplemented with photographic evidence. Bilibid Prison was a premier penitentiary that held inmates prosecuted during Spanish and American colonial rule for acts of "insurgency." By measuring and isolating the physical features of Filipinos, Folkmar, "instantiates the general attempt of imperial power to break down the body politic of the colonized, to redraw

[249] Rice, *Dean Worcesters Fantasy Islands,* 194 footnote 14.
[250] For more information on the St. Louis World's Fair and other world's fairs please see Michael M. Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992); Evan M. Maurer, "Presenting the American Indian: From Europe to America," in *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian: Museums and Native Culture* (Washington D.C.: National Museum of the American Indian, 2000), 15–28; Anne Maxwell, "The White City and the Midway," in *Colonial Photography and Exhibitions: Representations of the "Native" and the Making of European Identities* (London: Leicester University Press, 1999), 73–95.

it as an operable field of control and surveillance."[251] By rescripting revolutionary leaders as insurgents and transforming Filipinos into abstracted scientific data, Folkmar attempted to render Filipinos as unruly and uncivilized in need of U.S. intervention. His collection became evidence for the Filipinos' transformation to a placated population under U.S. control and surveillance.[252]

One of the most popular ways Filipinos were staged by photographers was in various levels of nudity. Asian American and cultural studies scholar Nerissa Balce argues that the abundance of nude photographs in the U.S. colonial archive are constitutive of the "erotics of the American empire" which she defines as the "discursive and material processes that created the sexual and racialized representations of the Filipina colonial subject in American popular culture."[253] While both men and women were photographed in the nude, Balce pays particular attention to the gendered dynamics of female nudity. Balce shows how the Filipina breast became to signify Filipino savagery and was used as proof for the necessity to discipline and control the Filipino population. These representations also fed the imagination of the American public who fetishized Filipinas as unruly sexual

[251] Oscar Campomanes, "Images of Filipino Racialization in the Anthropological Laboratories of the American Empire: The Case of Daniel Folkmar," *PMLA. Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 123, no. 5 (2008): 1692–99, https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2008.123.5.1692, 1694.
[252] Vicente L Rafael, *White Love: And Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 81.
[253] Nerissa S Balce, "The Filipina's Breast: Savagery, Docility, and the Erotics of the American Empire," *Social Text* 24, no. 2 (2006): 89.

deviants.[254] Such intimate desires fueled support to conquer and tame the Philippines and its inhabitants.

The proliferation of ethnographic photographs of Filipinos contrasted with the "domestic visions" consistent in images of young American soldiers during the Filipino American War.[255] As visual culture and feminist studies scholar Laura Wexler notes in her book *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism*, American female photographers were also actively creating propaganda that supported the war effort in the Pacific. Photographers such as Frances Benjamin Johnston, who was aboard General George Dewey's Olympia, created photographs that promulgated a cult of white domesticity that simultaneously made invisible the acts of torture, pillaging, and murder consistent with U.S. war policies in the Philippines. Rather than image soldiers in war, white female photographers uplifted U.S. war soldiers as models of wholesome manliness.[256] Images of American soldiers lounging, dancing, and reading aboard the ship circulated popularly and provided a useful mask for colonial conquest and violence.

The history of photography parallels the emergence of film technologies. Just as photographs were mobilized as evidence of American exceptionalism, films also served as a technology of empire building at the intersection of news and

[254] Neferti Xina M. Tadiar, *Fantasy Production Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004).
[255] Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
[256] Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism*, 31.

entertainment.[257] In 1899, Edison Manufacturing Company, the American film studio and company owned and operated by Thomas Alva Edison, produced a series of films or "newsreels" that depicted the Philippine American War for the American public. From the comfort and safety of their neighborhood movie theater, Americans could stay informed about the latest news in the Pacific. Many of the newsreels depicted battles won by American troops, which elicited feelings of patriotism and pride within moviegoers. In actuality, many of these newsreels depicted reenactments of battles filmed in backlots located in America including the popular movie *Battle of Manila Bay*. Through the fabrication of scenes and manipulation of factual events, these films and their producers inoculated the American public with palatable visions of American excellence and Filipino incivility. As filmmaker and film historian Nick Deocampo notes, "Anything to support the imperialist war was reified onscreen. Abstract notions such as racial discrimination, colonialism, bigotry, and 'other-ness' appear in no uncertain terms as they take material form in the narrative construction, point of view, spatial composition, screen action and direction, and other visual codes."[258] In other words, despite this fabrication, the tales of racialized Filipinos turned into reality for the American viewing public. As Philippine cinema scholar

[257] For more information on the centrality of cinema in the creation of a new world order see Jonathan Beller, *Acquiring Eyes: Philippine Visuality, Nationalist Struggle, and the World-Media System*. (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2006); Jonathan Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle*, (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2006); Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2009); and Nick Deocampo, "Cinema and Colonization: American Colonization and the Rise of Cinema in the Philippines," *Comparative American Studies* 5, no. 2 (2007): 147–71. https://doi.org/10.1179/147757007X204420..

[258] Nick Deocampo, "Imperialist Fictions: The Filipino in the Imperialist Imaginary," in *Vestiges of War: The Philippine-American War and the Aftermath of an Imperial Dream 1899-1999* (New York: NYU Press, 2002), 229.

Rolando Tolentino analyzes, the invisibility of geopolitical relations through cinematic hypervisibility extended after World War II.[259]

The power of the camera's gaze to transform and reduce the complexities of a society into a one-dimensional fiction is a history that contemporary filmmakers and photographers must confront. As Vietnamese American filmmaker, writer, and literary theorist, Trinh T. Minh-ha argues, documentarians must be especially critical of the ways they position their films as projections of reality. As Minh-ha posits us to consider, "Rather than catering to it, striving to capture and discover its truth as conceal or lost object, it is therefore important also to keep asking: how is truth being ruled?"[260] As I have detailed above, the colonial history of photography and filmmaking in the Philippines is predicated on this "optical imperative" or the act of making visible.[261] Through the hypervisibility of the Filipino body, U.S. colonizers were able to cohere an image of the Philippines that justified the colonization of the archipelago.

Despite the productivity of these visual regimes, U.S. colonial forces would never realize the totalizing power the photographs and films represented. Many of the colonial photographers and filmmakers active in the Philippines changed their practices or created undeveloped taxonomies. In addition, while they attempted to stage their subjects as premodern or uncivilized, many of the sitters in their

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[259] Roland Tolentino, *Geopolitics of the Visible: Essays on Philippine Film Cultures*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000).
[260] Trinh T. Minh-ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 38.
[261] Trinh T. Minh-ha, "The Image and the Void," *Journal of Visual Culture* 15, no. 1 (2015): 131–40.

photographs held varying degrees of knowledge in Western culture and practices. Even during their studio sessions, Filipinos were acutely aware of the exchange between photographer and sitter. American studies scholar Adrian De Leon reframes colonial photography as a part of a visual economy in which sitters were active participants in the exchange of value through their role as laborers. In his essay "Working the Kodak Zone: The Labor Relations of Race and Photography in the Philippine Cordilleras, 1887-1914," De Leon speculates on the conversations and agreements that transpired and facilitated the inclusion of Filipino subjects in the production of these visual materials. By positioning Filipinos as participants in the visual economy of colonial photography, De Leon shows that Filipinos, "recognized photography not just as a production of knowledge about them but also as a set of labor relations that could be negotiated, contested, and protested from employee to employer."[262] The traces of these activities in the archive reveal the falsity of the colonial imagination.

In addition to the unruly nature of the archives and colonial photography, it is important to point out that many Filipinos also turned to the camera to combat nascent stereotypes about Filipino culture and identity. As Vicente Rafael notes, middle- and upper-class Filipinos turned to the camera to take control of the means of representation by proliferating their own images of themselves. Studio portraiture was

[262] Adrian De Leon, "Working the Kodak Zone: The Labor Relations of Race and Photography in the Philippine Cordilleras, 1887–1914," *Radical History Review*, no. 132 (2018): 69, https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-6942403.

a method to showcase Filipino cosmopolitanism and modernity. By appropriating the camera, Filipino elites created their own counter visual language.

Many contemporary artists of the Filipino diaspora navigate these persisting colonial histories by also appropriating the camera to speak to the complexities of representation. Indeed, the visibility of contemporary Filipino laborers (as discussed in the second chapter) is similarly mobilized to uphold global capitalism. As an artist attuned to the contemporary and historical representations on Filipinos, it makes sense that Lizza May David's photographic and filmic art practice aspires to confront contemporary issues of visibility for Filipinos. The feminist art historian Oona Lochner described how, "Lizza not only reflects on how the perceptions of self and others interact in forming identity. She also raises the question of who, in fact, has the power to decide what is to be seen and what remains untold, and how regimes of knowledge production correlate with economic power relations in the globalized world."[263] David's work negotiates how the image of the Filipino worker operates within the Filipino nation-state's regime of visuality.

Two Years More

It is fitting that David's first project on OFWs begins with footage of her opening an envelope she received in the mail, revealing a cassette tape and letter. Over the course of the twenty-six-minute movie, the audience realizes that the package is from David's aunt, Nerissa "Nerry" Hernandez, an OFW living in Hong

[263] Oona Lochner, "Holding the Blanks in Place - Knowledge and Its Loss in the Works of Lizza May David," in *Lizza May David: The Canvas and the Monkey* (Germany: Kerber Verlag, 2016).

Kong and the subject of the documentary film. Six months prior to the film's release in 2005, David began conversations with her aunt around the idea of visiting her in Hong Kong days before she was scheduled to go back home to Ogod, Philippines. The film documents Hernandez's life abroad and her experience visiting her family after two years of separation. The film jumps between scenes filmed in Hong Kong and Ogod in anticipation for her return home at the end of the movie. However, this is a homecoming for both Hernandez and David. David's return to the Philippines to visit her distant relatives becomes a part of the film. Throughout the film, the intimacy between Hernandez and David is captured thereby troubling the distance between who is behind and in front of the camera. It is precisely David's subjective position that allows her to offer new ways of visualizing OFW experiences.

In 1992, fourteen years prior to *Two Years More* and at the young age of seventeen, David met her mother's sister-in-law, Nerry Hernandez. At the time of their meeting, Hernandez just started her career as an OFW in Hong Kong. From the beginning, Hernandez and her husband, Severin, agreed that she would work abroad while he stayed in the Philippines to take care of their house, investments, and three sons. One of Severin's most important tasks was to ensure that their sons finished school. Hernandez initially left the Philippines to pay for their son's education through the remittance she sends home. They believed that the path to ending the cycle of poverty in their family was through education. This story is a familiar one for many Filipinos who leave home to work in Hong Kong.

At the time Hernandez arrived in the early 1990s, Hong Kong was a popular destination for Filipino workers with a population of more than 100,000 Filipinos. In 2006, this number increased to 120,000 alongside the rise of Indonesian and Thai migrants.[264] Southeast Asian foreigners living in Hong Kong primarily work as live-in domestic workers for middle class Hong Kong families. As anthropologist Nicole Constable shows in *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Migrant Workers,* the large population of Filipinos in the 1990s is due to an economic shift in Hong Kong. In the early 1970s, the economy began to gradually shift from a manufacturing to a service economy. As Constable notes, "Hong Kong maintained its primary role as a trade center, and the renewed emphasis on trade and export fueled the demand for people to work in the service sector."[265] Chinese women who were traditionally hired as *amahs* (paid domestic workers) suddenly had access to other employment avenues that were more profitable. As extended family units became increasingly difficult to maintain on the fast-developing island and congested city, two-income families had to replace family members with hired help. Despite the economic dip in the late 1990s and early 2000s as a result of Hong Kong's reunification with the People's Republic of China as a Special Administrative Region and the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak, demand for foreign domestic workers remained high.

Despite their integral role in Hong Kong, Filipinos are perceived to be biologically inferior and naturally predisposed to domestic work. As Constable notes,

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[264] Nicole Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Migrant Workers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 4.
[265] Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Migrant Workers,* 26.

by the 1990s the word referring to Filipino girls, *banmui*, was used interchangeably with the word for "maid."[266] The status of Filipinos in Hong Kong is best represented in the struggle over public space. In 1992, Hongkong Land, a prominent landlord of Hong Kong's Central District, suggested the government reopen Charter Road to vehicular traffic on Sundays. Ten years prior, Hongkong Land petitioned to close the street to encourage pedestrian shopping. Both landowners and government officials did not anticipate how Filipino domestic workers would congregate in this area during their days off. For the Filipino population in Hong Kong, Sunday gatherings in the Central District is a much-needed reprieve from work and a chance to socialize with other Filipinos. Their weekly gatherings transformed the space into what they called "Little Manila."[267] Hongkong Land spokespersons argued that these gatherings were a public and environmental nuisance and suggested that Filipinos relocate to underground car parks. Supporters of Hongkong Land believed that OFWs should remain out-of-sight within their role as domestic workers.

Considering the stereotypes and policies on Filipinos that attempt to relegate them as a monolithic and essentialized workforce, it is significant that David focuses her lens on the intimate experience of her aunt touring her around Hong Kong. In the movie, her aunt Hernandez acts as a guide who can easily navigate around Hong Kong's sights and sounds. This change in power dynamics pushes against the notion that Filipinos are transient migrants who are only welcomed in Hong Kong if they

[266] Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Migrant Workers,* 44.
[267] Evelyn Kwok, "Little Manila: An Unlikely Crowd of Resistance in Hong Kong," *Architectural Theory Review* 23, no. 2 (May 4, 2019): 287–314, https://doi.org/10.1080/13264826.2019.1656264.

stay within their accepted workplace boundaries. Hernandez is the informed specialist or authority figure on Hong Kong while David acts as the ignorant tourist. This shift in power is best captured when Hernandez takes David to the Central District on Sunday where they attend Mass and hang out with Hernandez's friends. In these scenes, Hernandez and her friends gossip, laugh, and eat their Sunday meal outside amongst a crowd of hundreds of Filipinos also enjoying their time off in Central District (Fig. 3.3). In one scene, a group of seven Filipinas line dance to music in the middle of a crowd of Filipinos sitting on the floor. Not only do these images contrast with the rhetoric created by Hong Kong businesses and government officials, but they illustrate a sense of belonging and cultural fluency.[268] In these scenes, images of Filipinos picnicking are not aberrant scenes, but a local phenomenon. Hernandez's ability to navigate these spaces shows a sense of familiarity and belonging to Hong Kong.

[268] Lisa Law, "Home Cooking: Filipino Women and Geographies of the Senses in Hong Kong," *Ecumene (Sevenoaks, England)* 8, no. 3 (2001): 264–83, https://doi.org/10.1177/096746080100800302.

Fig. 3.3 Lizza May David, *Two Years More*, 2006, 11:15

Throughout these scenes, the viewer is given access to the relationship between Hernandez and David. In their exchanges, Hernandez looks relaxed and laughs openly suggesting a familiarity and intimacy with each other. As a result, Hernandez's friends comfortably invite David into their space during their Sunday picnicking. Unlike traditional documentaries, Hernandez and David are not strangers separated by the camera, but they are relatives invested in each other's lives beyond the confines of the film. Due to this, David does not edit or remove scenes where participants refer to her. For example, when Hernandez sees her sons for the first time, Hernandez playfully sticks her tongue out at David. David's artistic hand is never hidden, and her point of view is always known.

Even when David follows standard documentary form, she pushes against these conventions. David includes short clips of documentary interviews, a style otherwise known as a "talking head." Typically, the people chosen to be interviewed are scholars or authority figures who are meant to provide contextual information or

facts to support the documentarian's point of view. David includes Edwina Antonio-Santoyo, Director of Bethune House, a shelter for migrant workers living in Hong Kong. In addition, she interviews Eman Villaneuva, secretary general of the United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFIL-HK), an alliance of non-government organizations based in Hong Kong. Alongside these specialists, David also includes her mother, Myriam. During her interview, Myriam offers insight into the complex feelings of living abroad, which are informed by her family's experiences and the stories they share with her. She says,

> Europeans and Americans would say she is a martyr. Filipinos or Asians would say, this is an honor that she goes abroad. And this is a pleasure for her, having this good chance. That she has to grab this chance. So you cannot say that these are martyrs. Perhaps though because you cannot survive – they can only survive abroad if there is something positive in it.[269]

David uses Myriam's insight into her sister-in-law's experiences to make sense of the conflicting narratives on overseas labor and the necessity of finding pleasure to survive.

David's filmic strategies allow her to show that globalized labor migration is an intimate affair involving everyday people. As an artist living in the diaspora with family members working as OFWs, she shows that it is precisely her subjective point of view that offers new insight into the experiences of domestic workers in Hong Kong beyond the normalized narratives of labor. By accepting her subjective perspective, David instead turns the camera to show OFWs during moments of rest and relaxation rather than their experience as workers. It is during these scenes that

[269] *Two Years More*, 2005, [4:46].

the viewer gains an understanding of how OFWs manage to find a sense of belonging.

Despite her subjective approach to her aunt's experience, David still struggles to negotiate the hypervisibility of the Filipino body. The film culminates with Hernandez's anticipated return to the Philippines. Even as the film troubles the audiences' assumptions of an objective filmmaker, the movie still spectacularizes the pain and discomfort of globalized labor. The scene where Hernandez sees her sons for the first time in two years is a painful reminder of the toll of globalized labor on the relationships between parents and their children. The audience watches the awkward body language of Hernandez's sons as they hug their mom, the ire Hernandez expresses that her sons have not completed the education she worked so hard to finance, and the feelings of disappointment over her family's continued poverty. Before these feelings can be reconciled, the movie ends with Hernandez returning to Hong Kong for another two years of working abroad.

Although David centers moments of rest and relaxation, this was a decision she made partially based on circumstances outside of her influence. Early in the movie, David narrates that she was accompanying Hernandez to see her place of employment during a scene where they are driving through a parking lot. However, before entering the building, Hernandez regretfully informs David that she cannot go into her home because of her employer's discomfort with being filmed. Instead of filming Hernandez's home, David captures the façade of her apartment complex. To compensate for this missing footage, Hernandez took it upon herself to purchase a

mini DV-camera and film her place of residence after David's departure. The opening scenes of David revealing a cassette tape and letter is a reenactment of David receiving Hernandez's home video in the mail. The scenes of Hernandez's place of employment that are sprinkled throughout the film are therefore clips taken by Hernandez. It is this film footage that sparks David's next project and another attempt at reconciling the quandary of the visible laboring body.

Looking Inwards

After completing *Two Years More*, David revisited Hernandez's 2005 film footage.[270] Although David successfully troubles the distance between subject and creator in *Two Years More*, as the artist and film director, she nevertheless controls the means of representation. In an effort to relinquish this authorial voice, David transformed Hernandez's original footage into a documentary movie. *Looking Inwards* is David's attempt at giving Hernandez the platform to speak for herself.[271] By employing self-documentation, she offers a strategy to navigate around the politics of representation.

Over the course of the seventeen-minute and seventeen-second movie, Hernandez gives viewers a tour of her employer's modest Hong Kong apartment.

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[270] *Looking Inwards* was displayed in 2008 exhibition *Congress of Culture* at the Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien in Berlin, Germany. For the exhibition, the video was played on a small square monitor mounted at eye level. Directly beside the monitor, David also displayed the mailing materials Nerry used to ship the cassette including the envelope and letter addressed to David. These objects were mounted in a frame that was the same dimensions of the monitor. Global Alien, "Congress of Culture," accessed July 18, 2022, https://globalalien.net/projects/congress-of-culture/.

[271] During my conversations with the artist, she mentioned how Spivak's theory of the subaltern impacted the conception of her work. In particular she cited Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

Starting at the entry way and moving casually through the living room, employer's bedrooms, kitchen, washroom, and workers' quarters, the viewer is given a detailed and personal view of her everyday environs. In each room, Hernandez narrates over specific traits and objects of each room. Banal sights and items that would typically be overlooked, such as a teddy bear on a child's bed or toy soldiers in an armoire, are given special attention. She zooms into these objects for an inordinate amount of time, forcing the viewer to consume each detail. As the viewer, you are given access to the things that she treasures.

As the director and tour guide, Hernandez's point of view of her living and working conditions is the only perspective gleaned from the film. The movie, for the most part, is unaltered except for the few scenes that are removed and replaced with a black screen. At Hernandez's request, David altered the film when her employer's faces are seen on family photographs that are displayed throughout the apartment. In other words, the camera's gaze is Hernandez's. Her presence as the creator and voice of the film is further corroborated by the occasional moments her camera catches her reflection on the glass door of an armoire or a bathroom mirror (Fig. 3.4). David refers to this approach as "looking inwards," or "…an intimate approach about body and space, ethics of image-making and turning gazes." Hernandez's embodied experience becomes the central thrust of the film and motivates the choice in subject matter, style, and approach.

Fig. 3.4 Lizza May David, *Looking Inwards*, 2007, 3:43

Filmmaker and film and media studies scholar Fatimah Tobing Rony theorizes that methods of filmmaking that utilize a "turning" or "returning the gaze" are examples of modes of resistance against the anthropological gaze. In her analysis of participant interaction with performers at 19th century world's fair exhibitions she says moments of discomfort elicited by unscripted or unexpected responses by performers distorted the racialized staging of Indigenous, Black, and Brown bodies. She says, "Visitors to the fair were meant to 'see anthropology' but what they were seeing was not often comfortable: the gaze returned. Perhaps with a third eye, the performers at the fair were aware of being viewed as objects of ethnographic spectacle, and resisted this status by subverting the illusion of scientific voyeurism."[272] Filmmakers today utilize similar methods that resist, recontextualize,

[272] Fatimah Tobing Rony, *Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 41 https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822398721.

parody, and refute the hypervisibility of ethnographic representations, which she refers to as "the third eye." She says,

> The third eye turns on a recognition: the Other perceives the veil, the process of being visualized as an object, but returns the glance. The gesture of being frozen into a picturesque is deflected. In a circulating economy of seeing and representation, there are moments in early ethnographic cinema which halt the flow of the evolutionary narrative: the Historical collapses into the Ethnographic, the Savage parodies the Civilized.[273]

Indeed, David's *Looking Inwards* recontextualizes the experience of OFWs by putting the camera in Hernandez's hands. Through Hernandez's eyes, the viewer is forced to witness a part of the OFW experience that neither official narratives nor David can capture including how she interprets the facets of her environment. She becomes an anthropologist enacting a form of autoethnography.

Although David can reconcile these issues over authority through acts of self-representation, the movie still adheres to tropes on OFWs from which the nation state's visual economy benefits. In particular, the structure of the movie reifies the Filipina as impoverished victim. The first half of the movie is dedicated to representing spaces that are cleaned and maintained for the employer's enjoyment. However, the labor that is entailed to maintain this order can be overlooked by the intimacy in which Hernandez navigates these spaces – you almost forget that this is not her home. This shifts in the second half of the movie, when the viewer is given access to the working quarters of the house including the kitchen, laundry room, and her bedroom. It is within these rooms that Hernandez carries out her tasks and chores

[273] Rony, *Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle*, 213.

to maintain her employer's household. The façade of naturalized order dissolves, and we are reminded that it is precisely her job to maintain this quaint appearance. In other words, whilst this is a house it is not entirely her home.

This distinction is made clear when she shows us her bedroom, a small closet-like room that she shares with another domestic worker. The room is large enough to only fit a bunkbed, ceiling cabinets, an armoire, and a small dresser. She shows the viewer how she creatively resolved the lack of space by Gerry-rigging a hanging system for her clothes on the wall space above her portion of the bunkbed. She shows us the overfilled shelves that barely fit her possessions. The room is so cramped that the camera cannot capture any wide shots of the room, forcing the camera to take uncomfortable close-up scenes of stacked shoe boxes, neatly folded piles of clothing, and the steps of the bunkbed's ladder. As she sits in her room, she tells the viewers her work schedule:

> We usually finish our job at night around 10:00 pm and it is time for us to go to our room. And sometimes if we have – if we are not sleepy yet we can listen to the music. And if it is school days, we can get up around 5:30 am because the girls are packing lunch because they are whole day in school. But if they are not going to pack their lunch, we will get up at 6:00 am. And if it is weekend, we can get up until 7:30 am.[274]

The viewer cannot help but feel a sense of despair and pity knowing that after a long day of work attending to her employers' requests, the space she can retreat to is not her own.

[274] *Looking Inwards*, One-channel video, 2008.12:13.

The claustrophobic space starkly contrasts with the openness of her employer's living room and bedrooms. Furthermore, the everyday items she covets in the first half of the movie become sad reminders of what she does not have. Even though the apartment is modest and typical of a middle-class family in Hong Kong, we are shown that they are more affluent than Hernandez. Although we do not see Hernandez working for most of the film, the viewer is reminded of her status as a worker and laborer through the contrast of spaces and her segregation.

David's attempt to empower Hernandez are undermined by this disparity that repositions Hernandez as an object at the behest of the viewers' voyeuristic eye. As art historian and curator Eva Bentcheva notes, "Her uncertainty whether to present herself as the object of the film is, however, rooted in much more than her personal dilemma. It stems from a broader 'economy of representation' surrounding OFWs, which has anchored individuals such as Nery within notions of home, family, religion, culture, and, in the case of women, duty, care and womanhood."[275] I want to extend Bentcheva's analysis and note that the deficiencies of this revisioning also reside in the ways labor and work become reinscribed and made synonymous with Filipino bodies. The last four minutes and thirty-five seconds of the film embody this as the viewer is left watching Hernandez perform her job washing and hanging her employer's laundry.

Looking Outwards

[275] Lizza May David, *Bahala Ka* (Hildesheim: Universitätsverlag Hildesheim, 2021), 52.

Through the turning of the gaze, David relinquishes control over Hernandez's representation thereby troubling colonial power dynamics between photographer and subject. However, the film fails to consider the contemporary visual economy on OFWs. Cognizant of this and with the desire to focus the lens away from labor, David pursued a new work of art that resolved the hypervisibility of Filipino tragedy in *Two Years More* and the reinforcement of labor in *Looking Inwards. Looking Outwards (Perspectives on Filipino diaspora)* places the power of representation into the hands of an OFW and showcases the moments in-between work, while not relying on images of the Filipino body or spectacularizing the conditions of labor.

Looking Outwards is a photographic slide made the same year as *Looking Inwards* and was displayed alongside the film in the 2008 exhibition *Congress of Culture* organized by Global Alien at the Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien. The photograph was projected on a wall below eye-level near *Looking Inwards*. In name and display, *Looking Outwards* and *Looking Inwards* act as opposing pairs. If *Looking Inwards* provides an introspective look at the OFW experience, *Looking Outwards* offers a distanced and abstract perspective on labor.

Looking Outwards is inspired by interactions with another member of David's family. During a trip to the Philippines, David met her cousin Voltaire Hernandez, a seafarer. During their conversation, David learned that he documented his annual 7-month long voyage where he worked on a cargo ship. Voltaire showed David his photographs, one of which was transformed into a slide for the exhibition. David selected this image because it, "captures an atmosphere of longing. It catches a

glimpse of his personal point of view, settled between the monotony of work and the rough beauty of the sea."[276] Voltaire captured the conflicting feelings of working on the seas.

Standing from what seems to be the bridge of a cargo ship, Voltaire took a picture of the ship's expansive deck. From his perspective, the ship seems endless. It extends beyond the horizon line; he is unable to catch the entire length of the vessel. In addition, the starboard side (or right side) of the ship is not captured. Instead, he positions the camera slightly off center so that he can document the awesome rolling waves of the rough sea that can be seen on the left. The view is also partially obstructed by the drops of water that blur the lens of his camera. The shiny sheen of the deck leads the viewer to think that the metal floor is slick and wet. Considering these conditions, the ship looks dangerous. And yet, despite the feelings of peril, instability, and risk that is evoked, it is not extraordinary. In fact, the image is quite banal. Afterall, it is just another cargo ship on its way to another port city. The duality that is evoked is a testament to the everyday work conditions for a seaman, which I discuss in chapter four.

By situating the everyday, David evokes the embodied experience of working without relying on images of toiling Filipino bodies. *Looking Outwards* offers an interesting departure from David's other works on the OFW experience, one that seeks to abstract labor in an effort to revisualize it. David continues to negotiate the problematics of representation by turning to other forms of abstraction.

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[276] Lizza May David, *The Canvas and the Monkey* (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2016).

The Model Family Award

The same year David made *Looking Inwards* and *Looking Outwards*, she made *The Model Family Award (MOFYA)* (Fig. 3.5). First exhibited in 2008 at the Galerie Metro in Berlin,[277] *MOFYA* is an eleven minute and twenty-four second documentary film. It features footage of the 2007 Model Overseas Filipino Workers Family of the Year Award (MOFWFYA) which is administered by the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA). The film pays particular attention Vice President Noli De Castro's speech during the ceremony. Posing as a journalist, David attended the award ceremony with her cousin, Voltaire.[278] *MOFYA* is yet another departure from her previous documentaries because she chooses to focus on an institution that facilitates Filipino labor migration. As a result, she critiques the mechanisms that mediate labor migration. By cutting and interrupting footage of the ceremony with the selection criteria used to measure OFWs, *MOFYA* critiques the ways the Philippine nation-state actively constructs representations of the ideal laboring body.

[277] For the exhibition at Galerie Metro, David chose to project the film on balikbayan boxes that were stacked in two columns of four. These boxes were pushed against the wall of a gallery, creating a makeshift wall. On the adjacent wall, David displayed two framed letters and a diagram by Philippe Mairesse titled *Money-double belonging cycle.*

[278] This was not the first time David posed as a journalist. During a conversation with the author, she mentioned that she posed as a journalist early in her career to gain access to the contemporary art scene in Germany. It was as a journalist that David learned how to navigate the art world by observing conversations with gallerist, curators, and other contemporary artists.

Fig. 3.5 Lizza May David, *The Model Family Award*, 2008, Galerie Metro, Berlin

The documentary begins with a black scene and the sounds of a choir singing the Philippine national anthem, *Lupang Hinirang* (*Chosen Land*). The title of the documentary appears briefly before the screen turns to video footage of a group of Filipino singers dressed in traditional garments on a stage surrounded by microphones. This initial performance sets the tone for the movie: the viewer will be analyzing displays of nationalism. The performance was organized by the OWWA, an agency of the Department of Labor and Employment. Formerly known as Welfare and Training Fund for Overseas Workers, it was first established in 1977 under President Ferdinand Marcos. Their vision statement listed on their website reads, "The Overseas Workers Welfare Administration is a national government agency vested with the special function of developing and implementing welfare programs

and services that respond to the needs of its member-OFWs and their families. It is endowed with powers to administer a trust fund to be called the OWWA Fund."[279]

This is a lofty mission since it is widely known that labor migration has put a strain on Filipino families. As documentarian Ajay Arellano shows, many popular Filipino movies have taken the phenomenon of family separation as inspiration including *Anak* (2000), *Caregiver* (2008), *A Mother's Story* (2011), and *Transit* (2013).[280] These movies question whether the sacrifice to labor abroad is worth the psychological and emotional trauma that Filipino families experience as a result of family separation. As Rhacel Salazar Parreñas notes, globalized migrant labor has put a strain on Filipino families, especially for Filipina mothers who bear the brunt of condemnation from their children and Filipino society for "abandoning" their children.[281] Despite these popular constructions of family separation, Parreñas argues that "transnational households" strengthen the family unit due to the reliance on extended family bonds and members. Similarly, Valerie Francisco-Menchavez argues that Filipino families continue to adapt and transform especially in the digital age as access to social media widens.[282] Both Francisco-Menchavez and Parreñas critically argue that families are continuously changing shape and content especially in the face

[279] "About – Overseas Workers Welfare Administration," accessed July 18, 2022, https://owwa.gov.ph/?page_id=115.
[280] Arjay Arellano, "Mama, Home and Away: Philippine Cinema's Discourse on the Feminization of Labor Migration," in *Communicating for Social Change: Meaning, Power, and Resistance*, ed. Mohan Jyoti Dutta and Dazzelyn Baltazar Zapata (Singapore: Springer, 2019), 111–31, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-2005-7_6.
[281] Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 75.
[282] Valerie Francisco-Menchavez, *The Labor of Care: Filipina Migrants and Transnational Families in the Digital Age* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018).

of global capitalism. Nevertheless, public sentiment surrounding the dissolution of the Filipino family weighs heavily on Filipinas.

To correct negative publicity surrounding the dissolution of Filipino families, OWWA created the MOFWFYA in 2005. The award celebrates OFWs and their families along four selection criteria: wholesome OFW family, civic/community involvement, success in children's or family member/s' education, and success in managing family finances. These traits align with then president of the Philippines, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's vision to professionalize the global work force.[283] Under her administration, she rebranded migrant workers as Overseas Foreign Investors, emphasizing laborers' entrepreneurial nature and independence rather than their necessary sacrifice.

Three national winners are selected from a pool of nominees named by local agencies, non-governmental organizations, and other intuitions. These national winners represent the three regions of the Philippines: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. In the 2007 award ceremony that David covers, seventeen contestants competed for the grand prize. Alongside bragging rights and a trophy, the 2007 winners were awarded several prizes from different sponsors including: a car, cell phone, and credit from Globe Telecom; two roundtrip airline tickets from Cebu Pacific; $2,000 USD to invest in life insurance through the company Philam Life; and $25,000 PHP through Western Union. The significance of their accomplishments is

[283] For more information on Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's neoliberal policies see Oscar Tantoco Serquiña, "'The Greatest Workers of the World': Philippine Labor out-Migration and the Politics of Labeling in Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's Presidential Rhetoric," *Philippine Political Science Journal* 37, no. 3 (September 2016): 207–27, https://doi.org/10.1080/01154451.2016.1253822.

further corroborated by the participation of Philippine Vice President Noli de Castro. During the ceremony, he offers a speech touching on their merits and distributes the awards to each of the winners. Through the pomp and circumstance of the award ceremony, Filipino families are recognized for exhibiting these four traits articulated by the government. It is also through these characteristics that Filipinos are measured and disciplined.

It is precisely this staging of nationalism, excellence, and gratitude that David is interested in critiquing. Not only is this competition widely heralded, but it is publicly televised. By visibly praising Filipinos for exhibiting these supposedly natural traits, OWWA can reframe OFWs as partners of national development. OFWs are represented as enacting their civic duty; it becomes their responsibility to support the nation's economy through their remittances and business ventures. Furthermore, by showing exemplary examples of OFWs who have managed to maintain the ideal family structure, they show that critiques centered around family separation are faulty. As Galerie Metro owner Katharina Garrelt noted, "[the award ceremony] serves as effective and profit-oriented advertising campaign. Successful family relations with a return to traditional and entrepreneurial development are being honored."[284] In other words, the neoliberal global capitalist economy of the Philippines is reified through the framing of OFWs and their labor.

David critiques this image making mechanism of the state by showing how narratives of success, filial piety, and service become constructed and commodified.

[284] David, *The Canvas and the Monkey*.

She points to its artifice by reminding the viewer that these awards, selection criteria, and ceremonies are scripted. The majority of the film focuses on Vice President Noli De Castro's speech during the ceremony.[285] What was an emotional, captivating, and inspiring speech is reduced, broken down, and analyzed by the way it is cut and interrupted in David's footage. David dissects the different components of Castro's speech and shows how it aligns with the selection criteria. In doing so, David offers a space for the viewer to closely read his speech and shows how he diverts responsibility away from the government.

For example, about a third of the way through the movie, David captures Castro saying, "Important in a relationship is trust and respect. This is something which should not be lost in a family: respect. Just like those who are in the government or in an institution, that is like what we call: 'good governance.'"[286] Shortly after, a black screen interrupts his speech and David shows us the second selection criteria: civic/community involvement. David lists the different activities that marks favorably towards this criterion including: "a) advocacies, b) membership in civic organization/Filipino association, c) successful community projects, and d) special commendation of children/family member/s."[287] The screen cuts back to Castro's speech where he says, "As regional awardees you are already being looked up to by your community as being model families. There are many who admire

[285] Vice President Noli De Castro's speech was presented in Filipino. The quotes provided of the speech below are translations offered by David in the movie's closed captions.
[286] *The Model Family Award*, One-channel video, 2008, 3:41.
[287] *The Model Family Award,* 4:03.

you."[288] David cuts the interview again to show a close-up image of the trophy before shortly cutting back to his speech. He concludes, "So dear friends, you OFWs are being emulated as the new heroes of our country. Where you always fight and are always our helpers in the development of our country. Your hard work and competence abroad have earned you the respect of your employers."[289]

By cutting the speech into short intervals, David allows the viewer to critically analyze the information disseminated by Castro alongside the various activities that are deemed favorable for an OFW. Through the way she cuts his speech, the viewer can elucidate how the government appropriates the good will of OFWs as examples of government involvement. In this speech, Castro casts OFWs as agents of the government. By framing OFWs as government officers, he rescripts informal acts of service as examples of good governance. As a result, the privatization of social welfare programs and services is validated by praising OFWs who take on these responsibilities. By invoking the phrase "bagong bayani" he legitimates the transfer of government obligation to laborers.

Halfway through the movie, David records Castro acknowledging the lack of jobs available in the Philippines. He says, "The sad reality is that you have to leave the country because we do not have enough opportunities yet to keep you gainfully employed. One day we should be able to reverse this trend."[290] David cuts his speech and inserts a black screen with the fourth criteria: success in managing family

[288] *The Model Family Award,* 4:16.
[289] *The Model Family Award,* 4:27.
[290] *The Model Family Award,* 5:34.

finances. David lists two ways OFWs can accomplish this: "a) successful business enterprise and b) savings and investments"[291] Rather than discuss how the government will increase job opportunities in the Philippines, he diverts attention away from government responsibility by naturalizing the course of globalized labor. He says, "And for the next year until 2010 they will need up to 20,000 workers."[292] David then cuts to footage of a flower arrangement before going back to his speech where he says, "There were 500 female were welders. Women, yes, women. Well because women they say have beautiful hands, cool, not rheumatic, unlike men."[293] She cuts again to an image of the award ceremony banner before continuing with Castro's speech where he says, "Yes 500, I saw one who is 21 years old, single, who is now a welder there in Hanjin. Just imagine around 20,000 skilled workers will be employed there!"[294]

In this portion of the movie, David shows how globalized labor is reframed as being a natural phenomenon and point of pride for Filipinos. Castro invokes this by noting the demand for laborers and how Filipinos successfully fill this market. The physical beauty and traits of Filipinas are even used to celebrate this workforce. The images of flowers that David inserts into the movie testify to the way Filipinas are viewed as natural workers. By slowing the film footage and allowing the viewer to critically examine the way Castro frames labor, David critiques the way the nation-state disciplines Filipinos to be the nation's labor force. By turning the camera away

[291] *The Model Family Award,* 5:47.
[292] *The Model Family Award,* 5:55.
[293] *The Model Family Award,* 6:08.
[294] *The Model Family Award,* 6:29.

from the laboring body, David offers a systemic critique of the nation-state. She continued to turn the gaze away from labor in her next film.

Cycles of Care

The discord of bustling traffic, car horns, and street chatter meld together to form the white noise of city life. The sound plays over a quick succession of clips featuring sweeping footage of a city skyline. The pictorial plane is filled with tall buildings, construction cranes, telephone lines, and jeepneys picking up passengers. The viewer is immediately situated in the sights and sounds of Metro Manila. The scene transitions to a different perspective of the city. With the camera positioned at eye-level, the viewer is shown the bustling cityscape through the window of a train. As the train slows and reaches its stop, the name of a woman appears on the screen alongside the length of her tenure working as a domestic worker in Israel. This scene of departure and arrival reoccurs four other times, mirroring the cyclical nature of globalized labor migration.

As with her other works of art on OFWs, David's next project is in many ways a continuation of previous works of art. Activated by the way the nation-state attempts to correct the narrative on broken families and galvanized to continue revealing the artifice of their narrativization, David ventured into a new documentary film project that sought to reveal the reality of how families are impacted by globalized labor. *Cycles of Care* is a fifty-two-minute movie made in collaboration with social anthropologist Claudia Liebelt. For the movie, Liebelt and David interviewed five women – Linda, Beebee, Amy, Lena, and Ludy – who returned to

Manila after working in Israel for between six to twenty years as domestic workers for elderly patients. Similar to *MOFYA*, David and Liebelt sought to critique the nation-state by moving away from representations of labor and instead interviewing OFWs after they return back to the Philippines. By interviewing OFWs in their retirement, David and Liebelt capture their participants' reflections on how their time abroad affect their current conditions. While many of their participants discuss the investments their remittances afforded, working abroad did not end their cycle of poverty. By offering differing accounts of laboring in Israel, David and Liebelt show that the promises of wealth were not fulfilled for these women or their families. In fact, they often initiated a cycle of labor and care for the next generation.

Liebelt and David were fitting collaborators for this project. Liebelt is an Assistant Professor in Social Anthropology at the University of Bayreuth. She completed her Ph.D. in Social Anthropology in Halle. David met Liebelt through a mutual friend and learned about her research on domestic workers in Israel which prompted their collaboration. For her book *Caring for the "Holy Land": Filipina Domestic Workers in Israel* (2011), Liebelt conducted research trips to Israel to interview Filipinos. As Lieblet argues in her book, state-sanctioned migration of Filipinos to Israel is fraught, contradictory, and complex. In-migration of Filipinos to Israel is tied to the formation of the settler state and violent removal of Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip beginning in the late 1960s. Overseas workers poured into Israel to fill jobs that were previously occupied by Palestinians. As immigrants began to settle into the state, Israelis worried that overseas workers

were changing the Zionist vision and goal of Israel. As an attempt to control access to citizenship, the Israeli government institutionalized labor migration in the 1990s by regulating and restricting recruitment into six sectors: care work, agriculture, construction, industrial professions, hospitality and hotel work, and the food industry. In doing so, the Israeli government essentialized Filipinos as workers:

> Within the public discourse, foreign workers in Israel appeared as victims (that is, of labour exploitation, the 'dirty business' of recruiters and stage agencies), perpetrators (being cheaper and more 'willing' than the local labour force and therefore undermining local workers' rights), and subsequently as a 'problem' for and a threat to the Jewish character of the state. Their labelling as foreign workers' essentialized persons as cultural Others and functionalized them as workers.[295]

At the time they initiated their collaboration, Liebelt was still connected to many of the women she interviewed for her publication. As a result of Liebelt's prior work, the interviews they captured were intimate and familiar conversations in the homes of their interlocutors.

The interviews are structured around the memories they had of their time abroad. Many of the women affectionately remembered their employers and the time they spent working with them. For example, Linda showed David and Liebelt photos of her posing with her employer's children, recollecting fond memories of time spent with them. Lena also refers to her employer with deep respect and love. She notes that she learned a lot from her because of their shared experience with poverty and their faith in God. Despite the annoyance she occasionally harbored against her boss,

[295] Claudia Liebelt, *Caring for the "Holy Land": Filipina Domestic Workers in Israel*, 1st edition (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 38.

Ludy also expresses that she loved them like a child. Indeed, many of the women interviewed by David and Liebelt affirm the narrative that Filipinos are naturally caring people who are perfectly positioned to take on this type of labor. Lena says in the interview,

> Most of the employers want Filipinos because we have, you know, compassion. Even the old ladies are like that still we, you know, we endure what they tell us. We love them like our family. Even the employers say, 'Filipinos want big salary. They like this, they like that.' When they see our service to their mother [and] their parents, they love us because they see how we take good care of their family.[296]

In this documentary, David comments on the representation of a good Filipino who asserts the primacy of family. Even though these women are separated from their own families, they return to the family structure and develop strong bonds with their employers' families to find a sense of belonging. By rescripting their service as acts of filial piety, they find a way to make their work meaningful. Although David and Liebelt show that many OFWs find positive work environments, this narrative does not foreclose the Filipino experience.

Many of the women they interview also disclose the discomfort and pain they experienced while laboring abroad. For example, Beebee says that her experience was negative due to difficulties communicating with her boss who did not speak English. This communication barrier often frustrated her boss who would physically retaliate against Beebee. Although Linda views herself as a part of her employer's family, David and Liebelt reveal that Linda's employer reported her undocumented status to

[296] *Cycles of Care* (Vimeo, 2011), http://lizzamaydavid.com/index.php/videos/cycles-of-care/, 38:57.

the police after she dutifully worked for them for nineteen years. These two accounts trouble salient representations of Filipinos as family oriented and resilient workers.[297]

Despite the pain and discomfort, all the OFWs interviewed mention that they have no regrets working abroad. Beebee, who disclosed the physical punishment she received, states adamantly that she has no regrets working in Israel because she gave her children opportunity. Amy, Lena, and Ludy jokingly mention that if they could go back to Israel they would continue working. Much of their opinion is informed by the wealth, status, and opportunity they garnered as a result of their employment. For Lena, the remittances she sent home paid her family's house and car loans. This car is now used for her husband's car service business.

David and Liebelt diverge again from standard narratives of wealth and success by showing the impermanence of their upward mobility. In their interview with Linda, Liebelt asks her if she has any savings from Israel to which she laughs and with mild discomfort answers no. Although Beebee confidently says she was able to support her children's education, David and Liebelt write in a caption "Beebee's three children were unable to finish their education in spite of her remittances from Israel. Much money went to her husband's gambling. Currently, all eight of them

[297] In Martin Manalansan's "Queering the Chain of Care Paradigm," he analyzes the ways in which OFWs performed a "disaffection" from their work by engaging in alternative forms of pleasure beyond the "care paradigm." Moments in David and Liebelt's documentary align with Manalansan's queer and feminist reading of contradictory relationships between employee and employer. However, I would also suggest that David and Liebelt also perpetuate the naturalization of domesticity and care on gendered Filipino bodies. Although time and space does not permit me to explore this in my analysis, I would like to analyze the dimensions of this in my book. For more information see Martin Manalansan, "Queering the Chain of Care Paradigm." Border on Belonging: Gender and Immigration 6, no. 3 (2008).

(including the grandchildren) live in the same household" (Fig. 3.6).[298] Amy also mentions that she no longer has money from her time abroad, and instead relies on family members to support her livelihood. The reliance on remittances from relatives is a pervasive pattern across all the subjects in the documentary. Their cycle of poverty continues, and as a result, other family members must pursue work abroad to fill the lacunae of jobs in the Philippines. During her interview, Amy notes that she relies on her children to send remittances from Canada. This is also the case with Linda and Beebee. David and Liebelt's desire to show how the cycle of work continues for Filipinos is best articulated in the last interview of the movie.

Fig. 3.6 Lizza May David and Claudia Liebelt, *Cycles of Care*, 2011, 15:54

The title of the documentary refers to the different cycles of labor that OFWs experience. This includes the migration of workers between the Philippines to their new hostlands or the cycle between job contracts. But it also refers to the cyclical

[298] *Cycles of Care,* 15:54.

nature of labor displacement between generations of family members. Sociologist Valerie Francisco-Menchavez refers to this as "multidirectional care" or, "…the ways in which transnational family members activate multiple resources, people, and networks to redefine care work in the family."[299] This is certainly the case for the subjects interviewed by David and Liebelt. This can be seen in the last interview of the movie where Ludy brings Liebelt and David to meet her mother-in-law and daughter, Chona. As three generations of women gather around the camera, they discuss how they are willing to sacrifice whether as OFWs or caregivers to support the family. Chona even says how she changed her college major so that she can pursue overseas work. By showing the cyclical nature of work and care, David and Liebelt destabilize static representations of economic and familial success that the nation-state promulgates.

Alongside their discussion on labor, many of the OFWs bring up an altogether different topic that structured their understanding of working abroad: tourism. Across all interviews, the OFWs discuss happy memories of touring Israel.[300] They showed Liebelt and David souvenirs of their time abroad and pictures commemorating their excursions to various holy sites around Israel. And yet, representations of OFWs as tourists are frequently overlooked in narratives of OFWs. Although *Cycles of Care* captured both a critique of the nation-state and acts of pilgrimage, this brings up a

[299] Valerie Francisco-Menchavez, *The Labor of Care: Filipina Migrants and Transnational Families in the Digital Age* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018).
[300] Ayson Plank, "Counter-Producing National Narratives Filipina Diasporic Artists Challenge the Global Health Care System."

vital question related to the politics of visibility: how can a representation capture the complexity and contradiction of Filipino experiences? It is precisely this conundrum that inspired David to create *Ludy's Painting*.

Conclusion

It is from this documentary that David pursued her last artwork on OFW experiences. In many ways, the abstract painting is a culmination of her varied attempts at negotiating the politics of representation. Across her body of work, David grapples with the colonial vestiges of the camera and the hypervisibility of Filipino bodies. Through this investigation of her oeuvre, I show that David employs multiple practices and aesthetic choices that attempt to contradict the notion that Filipinos are naturally predisposed to being disciplined, resilient, loyal, and successful, narratives that the nation-state relies on to validate globalized labor. Despite these various attempts, however, her work never neatly or completely reconciles with the historical and contemporary regimes of visuality. My discussion of her work is not to critique David or her artworks, but rather to show the great challenges of representation because ultimately representations are mediated. This dilemma is the reason why David turns to abstraction in her last work of art.

The original painting that inspired David to create *Ludy's Painting* is an ideal device to discuss representation. Indeed, non-objective painting, or the depiction of geometric forms, was popularly used by early-twentieth century Russian painters, like Wassily Kandinsky, who desired to challenge established art traditions and hierarchies by breaking down art into simple or "pure" configurations. It was believed

that geometry could be a meditative and spiritual visual experience that could be enjoyed widely. In other words, pleasure was derived not because of the artist's ability to perfectly capture reality, but through the psychological state that was induced. Perhaps it is this emphasis on the theoretical and conceptual that drew David to this artwork. The abstract painting is a metaphor for the conceptual dimensions of the installation.

Unlike her other work on OFWs, *Ludy's Painting* pivots away from critiques of representations to reveal the politics of representation. In many ways the last body of work answers Trinh T. Minh-ha's call to question how truth is determined. By creating a digital facsimile of a copy, she shows that the image itself, despite its near perfect replication, can never stand in for the original. In other words, representations that purport to be emblematic of all experiences can expertly mislead viewers. In fact, she shows that all representations are merely concepts or perhaps they are even artificial, carefully constructed abstractions of reality. Just as the painting cannot fully encapsulate Ludy's experience working abroad in Israel, neither can a picture accurately nor holistically detail the complexities of the OFW experience. Her turn to abstraction, therefore, visualizes the mechanisms of representation that attempt to mark Filipinos as laborers. Although *Ludy's Painting* is a non-figurative expression of the OFW experience, perhaps it more cogently revisualizes laboring in the diaspora.

Chapter Four

A Submerged View of Home: An Analysis of Martha Atienza's *Our Islands 11°16'58.4"N 123°45'07.0"E*[301]

On February 9, 2018, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte publicly demanded the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to shut down tourism on the island of Boracay. In his infamous curt and brusque tone, Duterte proclaimed, "I will close Boracay. Boracay is a cesspool. What are you going to do in the water, it smells like shit."[302] The DENR was tasked with "rehabilitating" the island including cleaning up beaches and renovating sewage infrastructure. Located in the Western Visayas off the northern tip of the island of Panay, Boracay is a major destination for domestic and international tourists. In 2017, approximately 2 million tourists visited the island generating more than 50 billion PHP. [303] It is known for its 2.5-mile-long white sand beach, ocean-front resorts, and crystal-clear waters. However, the state of paradise was in danger. After years of overtourism, unregulated development, and poor infrastructure, the island – including its human and non-human inhabitants – faced ecological disaster.

Initially slated to shut down for only six months, the COVID-19 pandemic and government shutdown afforded a rare opportunity to continue the clean-up. The

[301] My understanding of Atienza's practice is drawn from recorded interviews and conversations with the artist. I also participated in a Zoom event that featured the artist and was organized by Brooklyn Rail in 2022. I have not spoken directly to the artist.
[302] Pia Ranada, "Duterte: 'I Will Close Boracay,'" *RAPPLER*, February 10, 2018, https://www.rappler.com/nation/195703-duterte-warning-close-boracay/.
[303] In 2017, the Malay-Boracay Tourism Office reported that two million tourists visited the island. For more information see Nestor P. Burgos Jr, "Tourists Calling off Boracay Trips amid Closure Plans," INQUIRER.net, March 23, 2018, https://business.inquirer.net/248145/tourists-calling-off-boracay-trips-amid-closure-plans.

island re-opened in October 2020 with tourist restrictions including a cap on visitors. The rehabilitation was hailed as a success by local and international journalists who praised Duterte for his swift and firm decision.[304] The Secretary of Tourism, Bernadette Romulo-Puyat, stated that Boracay will be a case study and model for sustainable tourism in the Philippines and beyond. Indeed, Boracay was rebranded as a space where tourists – including balikbayans or overseas Filipinos returning to the homeland – could ethically and proudly visit.

The representation of the Visayan islands as a paradise for tourism and environmentalism contrasts with the images created by video and installation artist, Martha Atienza. Unlike images of picturesque sunsets, clean beaches, and thriving local businesses that occupy the Department of Tourism's website and the imagination of Filipino and non-Filipino tourists, Atienza's representations are much more forlorn, pensive, and blue (Fig. 4.1). Instead of a beach bathed in the prismatic orange and red rays of the sun, Atienza submerges us into the murky and mystical waters of the Pacific Ocean. Under the surface of the water, a procession of characters dressed in costumes and compressor diving gear trudge against the force of the ocean. With a slow dexterity, a figure dressed in an orange jumpsuit resembling the uniforms worn by seafarers working on cargo ships wades through the ocean. Following soon after is a figure wearing a floral dress who holds a suitcase that they drag alongside

[304] Euan McKirdy, "Philippines Closes 'cesspool' Tourist Island of Boracay," CNN, April 5, 2018, https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/04/asia/philippines-duterte-boracay-shutdown-intl/index.html; Jennifer Rendon, "Was 6-Month Boracay Closure Worth It? Stakeholders Weigh In," Philstar.com, accessed July 18, 2023, https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2018/10/28/1863784/was-6-month-boracay-closure-worth-it-stakeholders-weigh-in.

them through the water. They are followed by an individual only wearing grey undergarments. They hold a sign that reads, “Drug lord ako. Wag tularan. (I am a drug lord. Don’t imitate.)” Tailing this figure are a pair of darkly dressed individuals pointing semi-automatic guns at the “drug lord.” They swim together with phytoplankton and other organic matter that speckle the ocean. What brings together seafarer, traveler, prisoner, and police officers? Furthermore, what can their intersecting stories tell us about overseas workers, globalization, and ecology?

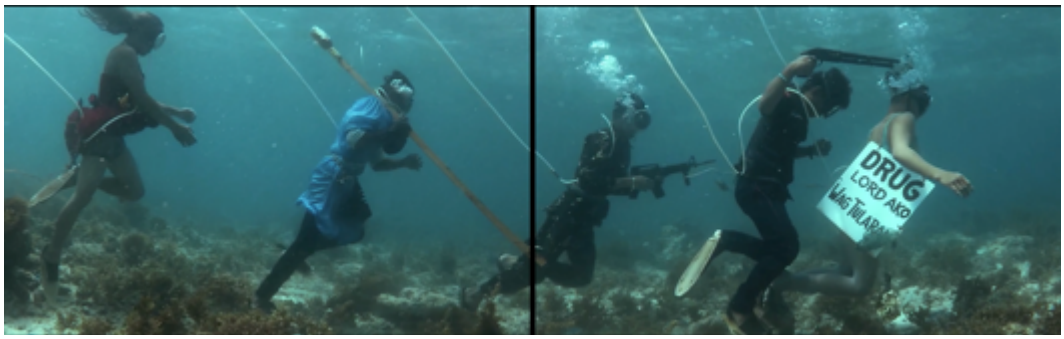

Fig. 4.1 Martha Atienza, *Our Islands 11°16’58.4”N 123°45’07.0”E,* 2017

These underwater characters are featured in Atienza’s one hour and twelve minute looped single-channel video titled *Our Islands 11°16’58.4”N 123°45’07.0”E* (2017). It is from this “submerged perspective” that Atienza offers a more complex view of the Visayas.[305] Instead of a bucolic tropical paradise littered with happy tourists, we see a cacophony of interconnected actors as they journey across the craggily coral reefs. As sea creatures that traverse this underwater world, they are a part of the sociopolitical ecology of the Visayas and its oceans. Indeed, Atienza asks

[305] My use of “submerged” is based on Gómez-Barris’s articulation as it pertains to Indigenous artists and extractive practices. For more information see Macarena Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822372561.

us to look beyond the surface – the water and the commodified tourist image – to apprehend a more intricate and interconnected Visasyan ecosystem during a time of heightened political violence.

In this chapter, I argue that Atienza reveals the nuanced ecology of the Visayan islands during Duterte's "War on Drugs" and how it affected those that call this place home. *Our Islands* reminds overseas Filipinos that home is not just an imagined destination to return to, but an environment reduced, constrained, and disciplined by neoliberal capitalism and governmentality – forces that also mediate the contemporary migration of OFWs. Atienza visualizes the ways narratives of overseas workers are created in contrast to representations of victims of Duterte's drug war. The ocean is not just the stage to visualize these entanglements, but a lifeforce also impacted by globalized labor and Duterte's policies. In *Our Islands,* the Pacific Ocean forces these characters to slowdown and unlearn the ways they move and breathe. It also shows viewers the other lifeforms that call the ocean their home including the barely visible particulate that is so often overlooked. Atienza reminds viewers that the ocean and its non-human inhabitants are also actors in this matrix of power. In other words, Atienza shows the different humans and non-humans that call the Visayas "our islands" to rebuild connection, a sense of belonging, and indebtedness between these actors. Atienza charts a return home that is not premised on capitalist or extractive valuations of land, but one built on affiliations and alliances. By visualizing connections between seafarers and fisherfolk, Atienza charts a way to study globalized labor and its effects on the environment.

I will begin this chapter by discussing Atienza's artistic practice and her relationship to Bantayan Island, an island located in the Visayas and the focus of many of her works of art. For decades the communities that live on Bantayan Island have relied on fishing as their primary source of income and sustenance. Beginning in the 1970s, this changed as fish became scarce due to overfishing and environmental degradation. As Atienza shows, many former fisherfolk have pursued work abroad as seafarers in response to job scarcity and growing poverty. In this chapter I discuss seafarers who work in global commercial shipping; however, it should be noted that Filipinos were also hired en masse in customer service positions onboard cruise ships at the same time.[306] I also continue a discussion of gendered labor, however I analyze the ways in which representations of Filipino men figure into national representations of OFWs and engender male workers into specific roles. This chapter serves as a departure from previous chapters that have focused on Filipina OFWs and care work but is also a continuation of my discussion on visual regimes, labor, and globalization through the lens of a female artist.

A divide between those who choose to stay and pursue work overseas has grown in the community and intensified in the wake of Duterte's war on drugs. I analyze how Duterte's necropolitical policies are reliant on the distinctions between neoliberal citizens and the poor dissidents that have become victims of his extrajudicial killings. This includes Indigenous communities and environmental

[306] For more information on OFWs and the cruise industry see William C. Terry, "The Perfect Worker: Discursive Makings of Filipinos in the Workplace Hierarchy of the Globalized Cruise Industry," *Social & Cultural Geography* 15, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 73–93, https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2013.864781.

activists who oppose his land grabbing policies. I utilize theories of visuality discussed by ecocritical scholars, art historians, and scholars of Filipino labor migration to unpack this matrix of power and the ways Atienza visualizes it in *Our Islands.* Lastly, I show how Atienza visualizes a complex web of relationality that offers a distinct form of return to the homeland that exceeds an extractive vision of human and non-human life as capital.

Artist from the Sea

Martha Atienza has a deep connection with the ocean as an artist of the Filipino labor diaspora and daughter of seafarers. She was born in 1981 in Manila, Philippines to a Filipino father and Dutch mother. Growing up, Atienza and her family lived between the Netherlands and Philippines. For extended periods, they stayed on Madridejos, one of the three municipalities on Bantayan Island, where her father was born and raised. Her mother worked for Holland American Line, a passenger and cruise line, where she met Atienza's father who was working as a sea captain. Atienza's paternal grandfather was also deeply connected to the ocean and was a lighthouse keeper. Many of her relatives, including her brother, also work as seafarers in the global shipping industry.

She began exploring these oceanic crosscurrents when she pursued secondary education in the arts. Her mother encouraged her to attain an International Baccalaureate diploma which exposed her to extracurricular activities including the arts. She decided to pursue a career as an artist and worked multiple jobs to fund her degree program. With the money she earned she moved to the Netherlands to pursue

a BFA in Mixed Media and Media Art from the AKI Academy of Art and Design in Exchede, Netherlands. It was during her time abroad that she began to develop her social art practice. She was exposed to new mediums and an ethos of art making that centered process rather than the art market.[307] This environment nurtured Atienza's desire to expand the role of the arts for disenfranchised communities.

At the end of each school year, Atienza would return home to Bantayan Island. She was inspired to make a body of work on Filipino communities especially those who lived alongside "riles" or railroads. From 2003-2006, she documented the moments of displacement experienced by families and individuals who built their homes alongside the tracks. Over the course of three years, she noticed that every twenty minutes when a train would pass, individuals would move their children, laundry, and make-shift living rooms to make way for the train.[308] This eventually led to a video titled *Riles* (2006). In the video, she documents how families structure their lives based on the train schedule. Sitting on top of a moving handcar, she passes families as they play, eat, and live along the tracks. By showing how these individuals live despite these conditions, she pushes against racialized and classed rhetoric that mark these spaces as slums or blighted communities.

After she graduated in 2006, she continued this practice of visualizing her community and their most ardent concerns. In 2008, she created another video this

[307] Don Jaucian, "Why the International Art World Is Paying Attention to Martha Atienza's Video Art," CNN, accessed July 18, 2023, https://www.cnnphilippines.com/life/culture/arts/2016/11/25/martha-atienza-cover-story.html.
[308] Ren Aguila, "Martha Atienza's Three-Screen Story of the Sea," GMA News Online, August 13, 2012, https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/lifestyle/content/269529/martha-atienza-s-three-screen-story-of-the-sea/story/.

time focusing on labor. In this work titled *Suited Man* (2008) Atienza dispels notions of skilled and unskilled labor (Fig. 4.2). The 38 minute and 33 second looped video featured ten men in black suits working. All the men are physical laborers and work as a baker, cement block maker, farmer, fisherman, and trolley pusher. We see each man at their work site tending to their everyday tasks.[309] By wearing the suits, the viewer is forced to recognize the skill, dedication, and expertise of each worker.

Fig. 4.2 Martha Atienza, *Man in Suit*, 2008

Although she had predilections to focus on her hometown communities in her early work, it was not until a fateful discovery that she turned to the seas. After she made *Suited Man,* she came across footage of her parents as seafarers. She discovered 8 mm film-clips taken in the 1970s of her parents traveling on container ships and lounging at docks. Interspersed is footage of the open water, the horizon on the seas,

[309] Nigel Paolo Grageda, "'Man in Suit' - Self-Appropriation and Tailoring Perception towards Lifelong Efforts," arcadescribe, April 19, 2020, https://arcadescribe.wixsite.com/arcadescribe/post/man-in-suit-lifelong-efforts-grageda.

and scenic coastal vistas. For Atienza, these home movies became evidence of her parents' transient lives at sea. She states, "What was once a story in my mind became real and my thoughts wandered to solve the mystery of understanding my parents, and specifically my father whom I do not know so well."[310] This family archive prompted questions for Atienza surrounding her father's departure from the island and his career as a sea captain. This discovery marks a turning point in her career and the beginning of her exploration of the oceans.

In 2010, Atienza began her study of fisherfolk, seafarers, and climate change. She started by turning to her family's experiences and boarded the cargo ship where her brother worked. During her time onboard she observed her brother and his crew live and work. His coworkers were also from Bantayan Island and spoke openly about their experiences. Atienza captured interviews of these men discussing their decisions to leave, the dwindling fish population, the economic scarcity of their hometown, the loneliness of working overseas, and the ways they passed the time. Many of these men were descendants of families who for generations were fisherfolk. They regaled tall tales of their grandfather's bountiful fish harvest and how drastically different the fish population was just two generations ago. These stories were familiar to Atienza since her grandfather also questioned her father's decision to leave the island. She said, "My grandfather used to tell my father, 'Why leave the island? There are plenty of fish.' Imagine, before it would take a few hours to catch 40 kilos. Now it takes a whole night to catch a few kilos. And the fish caught are actually too small

[310] Aguila, "Martha Atienza's Three-Screen Story of the Sea."

-- they haven't spawned yet."[311] She also documented the environs of their temporary home on the ship including their living quarters, the various machines they used on the job, and the view from a porthole.

Hearing about the connection between fishing and seafaring from her brother's crew pushed her to also document the experiences of their families back on Bantayan Island. Returning to her hometown, she showed these families the footage of their brothers, fathers, and uncles on the ship. She revealed the conditions under which they live and work abroad. Many members of these families remained in the fishing business. She listened to the concerns they had regarding the scarcity of resources, concerns for the future, and dangerous work conditions as compressor divers. They admitted that these socioeconomic and environmental pressures push individuals to engage in dangerous and illegal activities. For these reasons, many families discouraged their children from pursuing fishing as a business and looked towards more profitable opportunities such as working overseas. The specter of concern for many of her interviewees was climate change on Bantayan Island. Similar to her documentation on her brother's cargo ships, she also accompanied fisherfolk out at sea. She took footage of fisherfolk donning their gear, traveling to their fishing grounds, and fishing.

[311] Jaucian, "Why the International Art World Is Paying Attention to Martha Atienza's Video Art."

Fig. 4.3 Martha Atienza, *Gilubong Ang Akong Pusod Sa Dagat (My Navel is Buried in the Sea),* 2011

The video footage and conversations captured were compiled for a 33 minute three-channel video titled *Gilubong Ang Akong Pusod Sa Dagat (My Navel is Buried in the Sea)* (2011). The images and footage document details of life connected to the sea, similar to *Fish Story* (1995), photographer and filmmaker Allan Sekula's expansive survey of photography, labor history, globalization, and maritime trade. Unlike Sekula's broad study, however, *My Navel* is an intimate and hyperlocal project. Described as a "portrait of a people,"[312] *My Navel* shows the experiences of a coastal community but also a "people from the sea."[313] The title of the artwork is derived from a popular saying on Bantayan Island and shows the community's relationship to the Visayan Sea (Fig. 4.3). As people born from the sea, their worldview, culture, livelihood, and sense of belonging is tied to the ocean and its

[312] Martha Atienza, *Gilubong Ang Akong Pusod Sa Dagat* (Manila, Philippines, 2011).
[313] Martha Atienza, *Gilubong Ang Akong Pusod Sa Dagat (My Navel Is Buried in the Sea)*, 2011, Video, 2011.

well-being. Whether they are overseas on a cargo ship or fisherfolk living on the island, Atienza shows how her community at home and in the diaspora make sense of the political, cultural, economic, and ecological disaster they are facing. The video oscillates between footage of seafarers, fisherfolk, and the ocean across the three adjacent screens to capture this relationship and dialogue (Fig. 4.4).

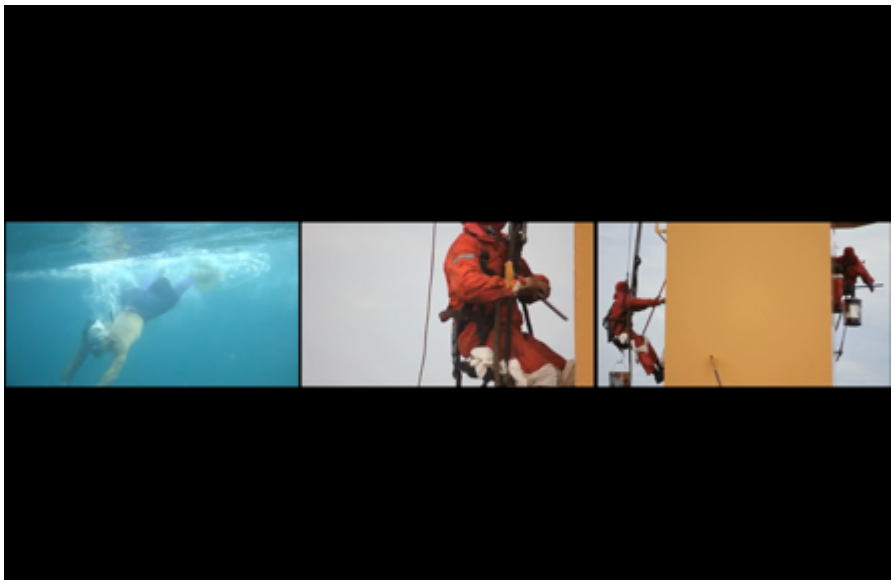

Fig. 4.4 Martha Atienza, *Gilubong Ang Akong Pusod Sa Dagat (My Navel is Buried in the Sea),* 2011

Although many of the individuals who were featured in *My Navel* were neighbors and friends, it became clear that many of them had not openly discussed their fears and concerns prior to the movie. She states,

> A lot of their families had no idea that fishermen and international seafarers have such dangerous work. For example, I remember a father of one of the international seafarers. He saw how big these ships [are] and he just started crying. Because the boats here aren't big. He had no idea about even just the size and what this means. It was overwhelming. The guys, when they send images home, it's when they get out of port for two hours and they [take] really nice touristy of photos [where] they're so happy. Then they [those back home] [see] images like [those] hanging from cranes or hanging from ropes. Also even the compressor divers here, I remember one of the wives saying,

> ‘Oh, is that what the plastic hose is for? For breathing?’ Can you imagine? You didn’t even know that. That’s your husband.[314]

For Atienza, it was not enough to visualize these connections in the movie. She wanted to ensure that material changes to the conditions of seafarers, fisherfolk, and the ocean could arise from her artmaking.

When the video was completed, she hosted screenings for the families who participated in the movie in the hopes of mediating honest conversations about their work conditions. The final public installation of *My Navel* included a public forum between seafarers, fisherfolk, their families, and the Madridejos community where they discussed “the gap in income creating dislocations within the community, the link with the sea which they are losing, the consequences to the families with the absence of men, migration, the environmental damage to their seas and the loss of their culture.”[315] The community’s willingness to dialogue about uncomfortable, difficult, and heavy issues revealed to Atienza the need for continued collaboration.

Between 2010 and 2020, she continued working with members of her community on her art projects. Atienza created more videos featuring members of the Madridejos community and their experiences including *Anito* (2012), *Para Sa Aton* (2013), *Study in Reality No. 3* (2015), and *Our Islands*. This continued engagement showed her the vulnerabilities of seafarers and fisherfolk. However, she also saw the resiliency and creativity of her community. She states,

> We need to consider, acknowledge and look at the knowledge that these people [living in coastal communities] already have and utilize. When we

[314] Jaucian, “Why the International Art World Is Paying Attention to Martha Atienza’s Video Art.”
[315] Atienza, *Gilubong Ang Akong Pusod Sa Dagat (My Navel Is Buried in the Sea)*.

> speak of rising sea levels and coastal communities living in the front lines, it may seem like a scary dramatic thing coming from a different place that's so far removed from the reality of actually living it every day. For them, it's just their reality; they understand the sea, they can navigate, they have knowledge of the currents and they have this natural connection with the sea. It's important to understand how people who are living this reality every day are able to adapt and to stay resilient, how their food and income is directly related to the sea and they are understandably more concerned at the moment with feeding their families and getting their kids to school. Yet they do survive and I've learned so much from them.[316]

The videos she created are an opportunity to showcase her community's knowledge, educate the public on the dire economic and environmental conditions on Bantayan Island, and open dialogue. Furthermore, she knew that as an artist with an international audience she could bring visibility to Bantayan Island.

After *My Navel* and *Our Islands,* Atienza received increased international attention and recognition for her social practice. In 2012 she was awarded the Ateneo Art Awards in Manila. In 2013, she participated in the Sharjah Biennale in the United Arab Emirates. For the 2016 Singapore Biennale she was shortlisted for the Benesse Prize at the Singapore Art Museum. Not only was she invited to participate in Art Basel in Basel, Switzerland in 2017 but she also was awarded the Baloise Art Prize. Furthermore, she is represented by Silverlens Gallery, a prominent gallery representing the most exciting and innovative contemporary Filipino and Southeast Asian artists. Utilizing her platform, art practice, and status as a cosmopolitan artist, she sought to uplift and create tangible change in her community.

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[316] Chiara de Castro, "Art: Martha Atienza's Equation of State — Using Island Technology and Video to Illuminate the Effects of Climate Change in Bantayan's Communities," *Adobo Magazine Online*, January 28, 2020, https://www.adobomagazine.com/the-magazine/martha-atienzas-equation-of-state-using-video-art-and-island-technology-to-illuminate-the-effects-of-climate-change-in-bantayan-islands-coastal-communities-and-the-importan/.

In 2020 she formalized her collaboration with her friends and neighbors when she cofounded GOODLand Association, an organization that, "works in preserving the marine and terrestrial protected areas, resolving waste management issues, and preventing the removal of the Bantayan Island Wilderness Area." Together with Ramon Alontaga, an artist who works in mechanical and DIY island technology, and John Ortega, community organizer and leader, GOODLand was founded to utilize art to strengthen community relations, collaborate with local government units and non-government organizations, and brainstorm creative solutions.

For example, on June 27, 2022, GOODLand organized and celebrated the first FisherFolks Day on Bantayan Island. There were five main objectives for Fisherfolks Day: 1) highlight fishfolk and their concerns with food security, marine conservation and preservation, 2) create better connections between organizations and fisherfolk, 3) educate fisherfolk on their rights based on fishery ordinances and laws, 4) celebrate fishing culture, and 5) create a resolution that Fisherfolks Day will be an annual event.[317] Coastal people's organizations across the island's three municipalities, local government units, non-government organizations, and GOODLand organizers gathered to learn and celebrate with each other. Throughout the day, Atienza documented the festivities which included a parade of bangkas, or small boats, decorated by attendees. The footage was used to create promotional material for GOODLand, but also the video *Adlaw sa mga Mananagat (Fisherfolks Day)* (2022), a

[317] GOODLand, "Adlaw Sa Mananagat," GOODLAND, accessed July 18, 2023, https://www.goodland.ph/mananagat.html.

44-minute video by Atienza that shows the procession of boats in slow-motion. It visualizes the slow-moving processes of government bureaucracy, the "slow violence" of climate change, and the gradual erasure of a culture and community.[318] The FisherFolk Day actions are emblematic of Atienza's social practice and how she addresses the urgent concerns of her community. These issues have grown especially dire as neoliberal practices related to the privatization of land for commerce and tourism displaces already strained fisherfolk communities.

Fisherfolk

To understand why Martha Atienza chooses the various characters that are featured in *Our Islands*, it is important to explore the interrelated historical context behind the dwindling fish population in the Visayan Ocean, globalization of seafaring, and urban development in the Philippines. The Philippine archipelago is known as one of the most diverse marine environments and is recognized as a priority for conservation. [319] In particular, the Visayan seas are the most productive fishing grounds in the country and a major source for sardines, mackerel, and herring.[320] The Philippine nation relies on these marine resources. Fisheries accounts for 3.9 percent

[318] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor:* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).
[319] Kent E. Carpenter and Victor G. Springer, "The Center of the Center of Marine Shore Fish Biodiversity: The Philippine Islands," *Environmental Biology of Fishes* 72, no. 4 (2005): 467–80, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10641-004-3154-4.
[320] Pepito R. Fernandez, "The Sea Around the Philippines: Governance and Management for a Complex Coastal Ecosystem," *Environment : Science and Policy for Sustainable Development* 51, no. 3 (2009): 36–51, https://doi.org/10.3200/ENVT.51.3.36-51.

of the nation's gross domestic product[321] and employs about 1.21 million Filipinos.[322] The majority of those employed are small-scale fishers. Also known as "subsistence fishers," they primarily fish for home consumption and sell in small quantities at local markets and nearby households. In other words, those most reliant on the seas for a sustainable livelihood and thus most impacted by climate change are small-scale fisherfolk.[323] Bantayan Island is just one example of the many coastal communities experiencing dire economic and environmental conditions because of anthropogenic climate change.

A series of technological innovations, new fishing governance, and international events accelerated the commercialization of fishing in the Philippines and the environmental degradation of Bantayan Island. Although explosives were used by fishers before World War II, their use by small-scale and commercial fishers accelerated in the postwar period since these technologies were cheap and effective. In their ethnographic study of the fishing community of Estancia on the island of Panay in the Visayas, David L. Szanton and Jimmy G. Palmaira found that fisherfolk would drop charges in deep-water fishing grounds to momentarily stun fish long enough for nets to be raised.[324] The *palapók* (to explode), was another more

[321] World Bank, Philippines Environment Monitor: Coastal and Marine Resource Management (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2005), 17.
[322] Edo Andriesse et al., "Can Fishing Communities Escape Marginalisation? Comparing Overfishing, Environmental Pressures and Adaptation in Thailand and the Philippines," *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 62, no. 1 (2021): 72–85, https://doi.org/10.1111/apv.12270.
[323] Marie-Caroline Badjeck et al., "Impacts of Climate Variability and Change on Fishery-Based Livelihoods," *Marine Policy*, Marine Policy, 34, no. 3 (2010): 375–83, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2009.08.007.
[324] David L. Szanton and Jimmy G. Palmaira, *Estancia, Iloilo: The First One Hundred Years* (Manila: Institute of Philippine Culture, 2018).

destructive technique used by small-scale fisherfolk on small boats or *bangkas*. Fisherfolk would locate large groups of bottom-dwelling fish and deploy explosives or quart oil cans with a fuse. The blast range would reach 40 to 50 yards and kill mature and immature fish, billions of fish eggs, plants, and other microscopic forms of life. These immediate and visible effects do not capture the long-term effects and toxicity of these technologies.

By the 1950s, fishers began to use different types of netting to reel in bigger catches.[325] For example, small boats that were not outfitted with motors would use large nylon nets designed to trap fish by their gills. Known as a gill net, these large light weight nets would be deployed like a wall and trap any fish that would try to pass through it. Unfortunately, the net would also yield a large amount of bycatch.[326] Another net that gained popularity was the purse seiner, a large net that would be released like a wall around a large school of fish.[327] Another boat would pull the opposite end of the net so that it would encircle and enclose around the fish. As the net formed a purse it would drag along the ocean floor destroying coral reefs, sea grass, and entire oceanic ecosystems.[328]

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[325] Szanton and Palmaira. *Estancia, Iloilo: The First One Hundred Years*.
[326] National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, "Fishing Gear: Gillnets," NOAA, February 22, 2021, National, https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/bycatch/fishing-gear-gillnets.
[327] National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, "Fishing Gear: Purse Seines."
[328] Johanna Michelle Lim, "In the Wake of the Storm — Bantayan Island and the Search for Fish," *Grid Magazine*, May 2017, https://gridmagazine.ph//story/in-the-wake-of-the-storm.

This increase in fishing can be attributed to the growth in national and international demand for fish and other seafood products in the 1960s.[329] Immigration to the Visayas increased as fishing profits rose.[330] However, the expansion of the fishing communities in the Visayas is not the only contributing factor to overfishing. Rather, overfishing is a complex process mediated by national and international drivers outside of the control of small-scale fisherfolk.[331] In particular, the oil crisis of the 1970s strained fisherfolk reliant on motorized boats from continuing their trade. Unable to meet global demand and feed their families, major fishing outfit operators complained to Philippine president Ferdinand Marcos to respond to the crisis. He pressed banks to provide fishers with large loans for larger and more efficient boats. Unfortunately, many of those ships were outfitted with *hulbot-hulbot* or fine-mesh nets anchored by heavy weights that would drag across the seabed thereby destroying coral reef communities. These technological and political changes further exacerbated the conditions of the Visayan seas prompting fisherfolk to demand new regulations.

In 1975, President Marcos issued the Presidential Decree on Fisheries with the purpose to "accelerate and promote the integrated development of the fishery resources of the country in optimum productive condition through proper conservation and protection."[332] The decree implemented policies meant to protect

[329] Elena M. Finkbeiner et al., "Reconstructing Overfishing: Moving beyond Malthus for Effective and Equitable Solutions," *Fish and Fisheries (Oxford, England)* 18, no. 6 (2017): 1180–91, https://doi.org/10.1111/faf.12245.
[330] Szanton and Palmaira, *Estancia, Iloilo: The First One Hundred Years*.
[331] Finkbeiner et al., "Reconstructing Overfishing."
[332] Ferdinand Marcos, "Presidential Decree on Fisheries 1975," Pub. L. No. No. 704 (1976), https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC002064.

marine life including bans on the *hulbot-hulbot* and explosives. Furthermore, the government sought to protect small-scale fishers by instituting municipal, commercial, and deep-sea fishing zones.[333] Fishers would need to apply for licenses to fish in these areas based on the size and weight of their vessels. Despite these regulations, however, the purpose of the 1975 decree was also to accelerate production. The decree initiated the creation of the Fisheries Loan and Guarantee Fund to finance the development of the fishery industry. The Philippine National Bank, Philippine Veterans Bank, and other government owned or controlled banks were stipulated to distribute the loans. With little government oversight on how these loans were distributed, monies were allocated at the discretion of local leaders. Furthermore, local governments were not given additional support to oversee and enforce these new protective measures. Despite the zoning laws meant to protect subsistence fishers, commercial boats continued to fish in municipal waters. Alone in the vast Visayan seas, fishers also continued to use explosive technologies. The new decree promoted the preservation of aquatic life, but only on paper.

Further governance was enacted to combat the growing environmental degradation of the Visayan Seas. For example, in 1981, President Ferdinand Marcos signed Proclamation No. 2151 designating parts of the Philippines as protected Wilderness Areas. Declared as one of the sites to be protected, Bantayan Island was now "…subject to future delineation and survey for foreshore protection,

[333] Municipal fishing is 15 kilometers from the coastline with the use of boats of three gross tons or less.

maintenance of estuarine and marine life, including special forests for the exclusive habitats of rare and endangered Philippine flora and fauna…".[334] Additionally in 1998 the Philippine Fisheries Code reappealed the 1975 decree and implemented further regulation that centered the needs of small-scale fisheries.[335] However, the implementation and regulation of these laws remains an issue.[336] Proclamation No. 2151 and the Philippine Fisheries Code did little to prevent the deterioration of this coastal environment or reverse the damage that was already inflicted. As Atienza details in her video works, fisherfolk on Bantayan Island were forced to find other means to support their livelihood and families.

Seafaring

Global trade increased after World War II resulting in the growth of oceanic shipping.[337] The postwar boom did not last, however, and the 1973 oil crash left global shipping in disarray. As sociologist Steve McKay analyzes in his study of Filipino masculinities and seafarers, decreased global production affected shipping

[334] Ferdinand Marcos, "Proclamation No. 2151," Pub. L. No. 2151 (1981), https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1981/12/29/proclamation-no-2151-s-1981/.
[335] Ferdinand Marcos, "Philippine Fisheries Code of 1998," Pub. L. No. Republic Act No. 8550 (1998), https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC016098/.
[336] Fernandez, "The Sea Around the Philippines."
[337] Anthropologist Kale Fajardo argues that Filipinos have a long tradition of seafaring that can be dated to Spanish colonialism. Filipinos who worked on the Spanish galleons and traveled along the Manila-Acapulco trade route were known as Manilamen. Filomeno Aguilar further argues that seafaring can also be attributed outside of Spanish colonialism and analyzes how Filipinos participated in the Pacific whaling industry in the 19th century. Historian James Francis Warren displaces Luzon-centric narratives and shows how the Sulu Sultanate in southern Philippines were trading between China, India, and Southeast Asia beginning in the mid-18th century. These former models of seafaring are vastly different compared to the unregulated and multinational globalized shipping market after the 1970s.

orders and left many maritime vessels unused.[338] The mounting pressure to cut costs demanded a restructuring of shipping companies' labor policies. Before the 1970s, most vessel operators registered, or flagged, their ships where they lived. Operators are subject to the regulations and tax laws where they are registered. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, shipowners in the United States, Japan, and Greece began to register their vessels in nations with more relaxed customs, unorganized labor unions, and lower taxes.[339] This practice is also known as open registries, flags of convenience, flags of necessity, and runaways. By the 1980s, half of all U.S. international commerce used vessels with open registries and dominated bulk operations like petroleum shipping.

Another reason why vessel owners increasingly used open registries in the late 1970s was the cost of labor.[340] Vessels that were traditionally registered were subject to labor laws of the operator's home nation which often meant higher minimum wages. This differed from vessels with flags of convenience which allowed crews to be hired from wherever. In other words, crews did not have to share the same nationality as the owner or the registered nation. For shipowners who were looking to cut costs, this was an opportunity to hire a cheap labor force from nations with aligned labor laws including the Philippines.

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[338] Steven C. McKay, "Filipino Sea Men: Constructing Masculinities in an Ethnic Labour Niche," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33, no. 4 (May 1, 2007): 617–33, https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830701265461, 620.
[339] Paul K. Chapman, *Trouble on Board: The Plight of International Seafarers* (Ithaca, N.Y: ILR Press, 1992), xxiv.
[340] Chapman, *Trouble on Board: The Plight of International Seafarers*, XXIV.

The Philippine nation-state and Filipinos were well positioned to address the global demand for cheap seafarers. American colonization in the archipelago primed the nation in English language training, the lingua franca of shipping. Additionally, the Philippine Nautical School (later renamed the Philippine Merchant Maritime Academy in 1963), which was instituted by the American colonial government in 1899, trained Filipinos in maritime codes and conduct. Beginning in the 1970s, strategic campaigns marketed Filipino seafarers as ideal laborers specifically for lower-level positions. The National Seaman's Board and Philippine Overseas Employment Administration market Filipinos as highly trained, hardworking, disciplined, and pliable workers to prospective employers.[341] As McKay analyzes, this emphasis on feminine traits not only engenders Filipinos into subordinate positions, but casts them as willing and subservient workers. To counter prospective workers fears of being feminized in their workplace, government agencies simultaneously market these positions to Filipinos by emphasizing the masculinity of seafarers. The state also accentuates the traditional male role as the provider of the family in materials targeted to potential employees. As discussed previously, the overseas Filipino as new hero discourse, though mobilized to naturalize Filipinas as care workers, is also utilized to encourage men to pursue labor abroad for the sake of their family. In other words, forms of "Filipino-ness" are marketed to both external employers and internal members of the nation. McKay states,

> In addressing seafarers, the state and the manning agencies combine enforceable state policies with more subtle discourses on Filipino-ness and

[341] McKay, "Filipino Sea Men: Constructing Masculinities in an Ethnic Labour Niche," 624.

> masculinity that emphasize traditional Filipino 'family values' and male sex roles. At the same time, in order to play down a more aggressive masculinity that might lead to collective complains or organization, the state sanctifies a kind of subordinated 'new heroism' that stresses sacrifice, delayed gratification, and the ability to get along without complaint.[342]

As a result of these national representations on OFWs and recommendations from vessel owners who previously hired Filipino crews, the Philippines became the largest supplier of seafarers. In 2011, 20% of the global shipping labor force were Filipinos.[343] OFWs are integral to the worldwide maritime trade which ships 90 percent of the world's goods and commodities.[344]

When fisherfolk living on Bantayan Island first heard of the wealth and opportunity that was available abroad, many made the decision to leave their careers and work as seafarers. Bantayanons witnessed family members and neighbors return to the island at the end of their contracts with money and *pasalubong* (gifts purchased abroad). They believed that working abroad could resolve the issues they experienced at home. However, as Martha Atienza details in her artwork, the wealth they earned was temporary and at an expense.

Many scholars have detailed the poor work conditions on shipping vessels and how Filipinos are positioned in precarious and subordinate positions.[345] The gendered and racialized social dynamics onboard structure the experience of Filipinos as low-wage, feminized laborers especially in comparison to their majority White

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[342] McKay, "Filipino Sea Men: Constructing Masculinities in an Ethnic Labour Niche," 626.
[343] Fajardo, *Filipino Crosscurrents,* 4.
[344] Fajardo, *Filipino Crosscurrents,* 4.
[345] For more information see McKay, "Filipino Sea Men;" Chapman, *Trouble on Board*; Fajardo, *Filipino Crosscurrents*.

supervisors.[346] This is in addition to the dangerous working conditions manning shipping equipment and enduring rough seas. Their experiences with loneliness and isolation also have a psychological toll on seafarers and their families who are left behind.[347] Although they are certainly paid more than their fisherfolk neighbors, seafarers must remit 80% of their wages to the Philippine government. As I discuss previously, these social, psychological, physical, and emotional costs are often justified through the rhetoric of heroism deployed by the nation-state. Also overlooked are the environmental costs of seafaring and its impact on seafarers and the homeland.

The International Maritime Organization states on their website that maritime shipping is, "statistically, the least environmentally damaging mode of transport, when its productive value is taken into consideration."[348] However, a 2009 study conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development found that these statistics are unreliable due to uneven documentation and reporting.[349] It is estimated that reports of fuel use by marine vessels have a 25% error between fuel sales and fuel requirements based on manifest activity. Furthermore, as international maritime transport activities rise in tandem with the increased demand for oil, coal,

[346] McKay, "Filipino Sea Men."
[347] Sanley Salvacion Abila and Iris Lavalle Acejo, "Mental Health of Filipino Seafarers and Its Implications for Seafarers' Education," *International Maritime Health* 72, no. 3 (2021): 183–92, https://doi.org/10.5603/IMH.2021.0035.
[348] International Maritime Organization, "Marine Environment," accessed July 20, 2023, https://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Environment/Pages/Default.aspx.
[349] Philippe Crist, "Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Potential from International Shipping," in *Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Potential from International Shipping*, OECD/ITF Joint Transport Research Centre Discussion Papers, No.2009/11 (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2009), 6.

and steel, greenhouse gas emissions from marine vessels are expected to increase by up to 250% by 2050.[350] It is difficult to estimate the exact impact of international maritime shipping on the environment. It is clear, however, that shipping activities are contributing to global warming, rising sea levels, and marine pollution.

Although working overseas temporarily alleviates economic pressures, for fishing communities like those on Bantayan Island, it is not a long-term solution. The cultural, social, and environmental effects of the global maritime trade further marginalize coastal communities who continue to rely on the seas for their livelihood. In other words, seafaring is not just a profession that occurs abroad but is directly tied to the experiences of communities back home. To view the hardships of both seafarers and fisherfolk as discrete or unrelated overlooks the way market forces engender different forms of marginalization simultaneously. It is precisely this global interconnected perspective that Martha Atienza seeks to make visible in her works of art. Visualizing the relationship between shipping and seafaring was especially dire during Duterte's War on Drugs.

War Lords and Good Citizens

On June 30, 2016, Rodrigo Duterte became the Philippine's sixteenth president. Despite the everyday man persona he performed during his presidential campaign, his parents were successful and influential politicians. His father, Vicente Duterte was mayor of Danao in Cebu before he moved to Mindanao and became the

[350] Zheng Wan et al., "Decarbonizing the International Shipping Industry: Solutions and Policy Recommendations," *Marine Pollution Bulletin* 126, no. January (2018): 428–35, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpolbul.2017.11.064.

governor of Davao. Although Vicente Duterte was appointed to be Secretary of the Department of General Services by President Ferdinand Marcos, Rodrigo Duterte's mother, Soledad Roa was a staunch opponent of the dictator. After Marcos was ousted and President Corazon Aquino came into office, Roa was recommended to be vice mayor of Davao City for her role in supporting the People's Power Revolution. However, Roa declined and instead offered for her son to be appointed. He became office-in-charge vice mayor and later successfully ran for mayor in 1988. It was during his term as mayor of Davao City when Duterte cultivated a "culture of death."[351] Vowing to "clean up" Davao City, Duterte initiated the Davao Death Squad, which killed 1,424 people from 1998 to 2015 including those suspected of drug related crimes.[352] He was hailed and critiqued for his violent tactics but dismissed opponents by falsely accusing them of being involved in drug trafficking. For his presidential campaign, he vowed to widen the scope of his war on drugs to the entire nation.

On August 28, 2016, Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte announced that the Presidential Communications Office would work with Brillante Ma Mendoza, an internationally recognized Filipino director, to produce two 150-second-long public service announcements on drug abuse in the Philippines.[353] Vicente Rafael analyzes

[351] William Holden, "Climate Change, Neoauthoritarianism, Necropolitics, and State Failure: The Duterte Regime in the Philippines," *Asian Geographer* 40, no. 2 (2023): 145–67, https://doi.org/10.1080/10225706.2022.2029506, 159.
[352] Holden, "Climate Change, Neoauthoritarianism, Necropolitics, and State Failure: The Duterte Regime in the Philippines,"154.
[353] *Philippines Anti-Drugs TV Ad - Mother*, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYTNCxZCbF0.

one of these advertisements in *The Sovereign Trickster: Death and Laughter* in the age of Duterte.[354] The short movie begins with a woman cleaning a bathroom when she receives a call from her son who is asking for more money (Fig. 4.5). He tells her that the remittances she earned as an overseas worker and subsequently sent to the Philippines were not enough to cover his expenses. He then asks for an additional 5,000 PHP. However, her son does not use the extra money for his daily expenses or tuition, instead we see him use the money to buy drugs and party at a club. While his mother washes her employer's dog, buys the household groceries, and cares for her wards, he lives an illicit life. The advertisement ends with him committing murder. He refuses his distressed mother's persistent calls. In the movie, his father or a paternal figure is notably absent. As the public service announcement suggests, perhaps this lacuna could be filled with the strong rule of President Duterte?

Fig. 4.5 Brillante Ma Mendoza, *Philippines Anti-Drugs TV Ad – Mother*, 2017

[354] Vicente L. Rafael, *The Sovereign Trickster: Death and Laughter in the Age of Duterte* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022).6/5/24 3:32:00 PM

As previously discussed, the construction of the OFW, especially the overseas Filipina mother, as martyr and hero has been mobilized by the nation-state before Duterte's presidency. Additionally, the lower-class has historically been blamed for the nation's failures due to their supposed laziness and negligence.[355] However, the use of the OFW as a foil to the drug lord during Duterte's presidency is emblematic of the changing deployment of representational tropes on OFWs. In this video, OFWs are positioned as worthy citizens not just for their hard work ethic, but because of their morality. Filipinos who embody so-called core values of industry, perseverance, and patriotism utilize their time to financially uplift their families but also the nation.[356] This is in contradistinction to drug users who are represented as irresponsible, lazy, and a blight to society.[357] In fact, they are blamed for the social, cultural, and economic plight of Filipinos, an argument that Duterte waged as justification for his indiscriminate killing spree. The "drug lord" figure in *Our Islands* can be attributed to the criminalization of the poor.

Positioned as the anti-thesis to the urban poor are OFWs. As discussed in chapters two and three, Presidents Fidel Ramos and Gloria Macapagal Arroyos's neoliberal restructuring of the Philippine economy entailed rebranding OFWs as entrepreneurs of the nation-state. OFWs became the prime example of how entrepreneurship was the ideal path for personal development and poverty reduction.

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[355] Arnisson Andre Ortega, *Neoliberalizing Spaces in the Philippines: Suburbanization, Transnational Migration, and Dispossession* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), 53.
[356] Ortega, *Neoliberalizing Spaces in the Philippines: Suburbanization, Transnational Migration, and Dispossession*.
[357] Rafael, *The Sovereign Trickster*.

Although marketing campaigns attributed the success of overseas Filipinos to inherent core values, OFWs are disciplined to divest their remittances to entrepreneurial projects. For example, as geographer Arnisson Andre Ortega shows, Senate Bill 635 (otherwise known as the Overseas Filipinos Investors Bill) passed in 2004 as a part of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's campaign to build a "Strong Republic." The bill provided benefits to overseas Filipinos who wanted to establish businesses in the nation.[358] OFWs were also encouraged to invest in real estate.

Overseas Filipinos were directed to purchase real estate through marketing campaigns that called upon this pioneering spirit and dreams of a middle-class lifestyle. Although the income generated overseas afforded temporary and contingent wealth, many families with OFWs were able to move into the middle class. Referred to as the "Filipino dream," many OFWs seek employment abroad to attain this new comfortable lifestyle for their immediate and extended families back in the homeland.[359] Enfolded in the belief that working overseas can bring financial stability is the desire to own a modern home. Overseas Filipinos were sold the notion that they can reap the benefits of their hard work from the comforts of home. As Ortega argues "This 'reverse telos' idealizes the Philippines as the 'promised land' where the diasporic journey ends…promoting the Philippines not just to returning OFs [overseas Filipinos] but also to foreign retirees who were looking for a utopic tropical paradise where they could build dream homes at 'realistic prices.'"[360] Harkening back

[358] Manuel B. Villar, "Overseas Filipinos Investors Bill," Pub. L. No. Senate No. 635 (2004), https://legacy.senate.gov.ph/lisdata/18211196!.pdf.
[359] Ortega, *Neoliberalizing Spaces in the Philippines*, 4.
[360] Ortega, *Neoliberalizing Spaces in the Philippines*, 102.

to President Ferdinand Marcos's 1973 Balikbayan Program, the nation could generate foreign exchange through the return of overseas Filipinos.

To fill the demand for more housing, landed elites built gated communities in the 1980s on land deemed "misused." Landless peasants, informal settlers, urban poor, and indigenous populations were displaced to make way for new development. Pushed further into the margins of society, these subaltern subjects are spatially reorganized simultaneously as a new middle class was created. However, this housing boom received many critiques for overlooking the needs of the poor. By the late-1990s, developers increased production of "socialized housing" for the displaced. These new housing units encompass the neoliberal landscape of the real estate company. Ortega states,

> From a business mindset, a socialized housing project provides a homeostatic balance. It legitimizes the 'noble' task of doing real estate, primarily between philanthropic service and profit-oriented ventures. In fact, socialized housing serves as the poster child for neoliberal 'inclusive growth' since it enables the industry to show that a market-system actually works, if and only if everyone, including the state, cooperates. Accounts of 'successful' socialized housing projects paint a picture of a triumphant Philippine real estate, one that is able to provide jobs, alleviate poverty, and address homelessness. But underneath these euphoric narratives is a less jubilant story: dubious transactions, alleged corrupt negotiations, land grabbing, and inferior construction.[361]

Redevelopment and Ecological Disaster

The production of free or reduced housing units increased after super typhoon Yolanda. Known internationally as Typhoon Haiyan it made landfall in the

[361] Ortega, *Neoliberalizing Spaces in the Philippines*, 110.

Philippines in 2013. The Philippines is considered a "disaster-prone"[362] region due to its location along the Pacific ring of fire and genesis region for Northwest Pacific tropical cyclones. However, climate change has intensified the strength of typhoons and thus amplified the effects on communities in the Philippines.[363] The category 5 storm devastated the Visayan islands, notably the provinces of Samar which is the eastern most islands in the Visayas. Although the effects of the typhoon are still being analyzed, studies show that 6,300 people perished, 4.1 million families were displaced, and 1.1 million houses were damaged or destroyed.[364] On Bantayan Island, the communities most affected by the natural disaster were coastal fishing communities who lost their homes, family members, and fishing equipment. Initially local governments were tasked with mediating recovery including the construction of housing projects to aid victims of the typhoon, but the destruction was overwhelming and progress was slow.[365]

Three years after the typhoon, the newly appointed President Rodrigo Duterte declared that a key concern for his administration was to speed up post-Yolanda rehabilitation. In 2017, Administrative Order No. 5 was signed by Duterte to create an inter-agency task force to coordinate recovery projects across the nation including the

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[362] Maria Carinnes P. Alejandria-Gonzalez, Will Smith, and Zbigniew Piepiora, *Disaster Archipelago: Locating Vulnerability and Resilience in the Philippines* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020).
[363] William N. Holden, "Typhoons, Climate Change, and Climate Injustice in the Philippines," *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies / Österreichische Zeitschrift Für Südostasienwissenschaften* 11, no. 1 (January 2018): 117–39.
[364] United States Agency for International Development, "Philippines - Typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan" (Washington D.C., 2014), https://2012-2017.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/philippines_ty_fs22_04-21-2014.pdf.
[365] Michael Bueza, "IN NUMBERS: 3 Years after Super Typhoon Yolanda," *RAPPLER*, November 7, 2016, https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/151549-in-numbers-3-years-after-super-typhoon-yolanda-haiyan/.

Yolanda Permanent Housing Program.[366] The National Housing Authority oversaw the program and managed the development of 205,128 permanent housing units across 6 regions, 14 provinces, and 116 cities and municipalities.[367] Bantayan Island was included as an area of development. As of November 2021, 592 homes were built and turned over to residents of Bantayan Island.

Duterte's response to typhoon recovery addressed the urgent need for housing, however it was also an opportunity to turn a profit on prime real estate. Many of the housing units that were built for Yolanda survivors on Bantayan Island were built inland and away from their source of income. For families who relocated, they found that these government units were poorly and cheaply built in areas prone to flooding.[368] The decision to build inland was because coastal areas were marked as a "hazard area" or "danger zone." However, once families were displaced away from their homes, their beachside properties were cordoned for commercial use. A 30-meter easement was proposed to develop walkways, retail kiosks, view decks, activity areas, and cliff diving sites.[369]

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[366] Rodrigo Duterte, "Administrative Order No. 5" (2017), https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/downloads/2017/08aug/20170808-AO-5-RRD.pdf.
[367] Patricia Ruth Cailao, "Feature: Yolanda Permanent Housing Underway despite Challenges - Philippines | ReliefWeb," November 13, 2015, https://reliefweb.int/report/philippines/feature-yolanda-permanent-housing-underway-despite-challenges.
[368] Ronald O. Reyes, "Yolanda Reconstruction Still in Shambles after 6 Years," *SUNSTAR*, November 8, 2019, https://www.sunstar.com.ph/article/1831107/tacloban/local-news/yolanda-reconstruction-still-in-shambles-after-6-years.
[369] Office of the Presidential Assistant for the Visayas, "Newly-Created Tourism Master Plans for Bantayan, Camotes Islands Set for Rollout," Philippine Information Agency, June 6, 2022, https://pia.gov.ph/press-releases/2022/06/06/newly-created-tourism-master-plans-for-bantayan-camotes-islands-set-for-rollout.

These plans align with President Duterte's National Tourism Development Plan 2016-2022. The Duterte administration proposed, "The vision of developing a highly competitive and environmentally sustainable tourism industry that is focused on creating inclusive growth." These plans were initially outlined in the Tourism Act of 2009 or Republic Act 9593, which resulted in a period of increased international and domestic tourism.[370] Duterte sought to continue the momentum of Republic Act 9593 by bolstering specific types of tourism. This includes nature-based, cultural, and marine sports travels which were seen as the "highest priority due to their strong attractiveness to a wide range of country markets."[371] Although conservation was considered a goal of the DENR, the main motivation to developing ecotourism was to provide a unique and diverse set of experiences for a new engaged and conscious tourist.[372]

This market-centered approach can be seen in the decision to clean up Boracay and establish Bantayan Island as a site for ecotourism. Relying on the already flourishing tourist economy on the island, government officials sought to capitalize on the rich maritime tradition, heritage sites, and environmental diversity of the island. To prepare the island for yachting, golf tournaments, beach resorts, and

[370] Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, "The Tourism Act of 2009," Pub. L. No. 9593 (2009), https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2009/05/12/republic-act-no-9593-s-2009/.
[371] Philippine's Department of Tourism, "National Tourism Development Plan 2016-2022" (Manila: Department of Tourism, 2016), https://visitcentralluzon.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/NTDP-2016-2022_Executive-Summary.pdf, 6.
[372] National Ecotourism Steering Committee and Ecotourism Technical Working Group, "National Ecotourism Strategy & Action Plan" (2014), https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC179040/#:~:text=The%20overall%20goal%20of%20the,will%20contribute%20to%20inclusive%20growth.

festivals the land needed to be reconstructed as an economic zone of development.[373] In 2019 Bantayan Island's designation as a protected wilderness area was removed. Furthermore, in 2021 the Senate Bill No. 2193 passed thereby establishing a Special Economic Zone in Cebu with the purpose attracting private investment.[374] Long-time residents were relocated to execute these destructive plans.

For communities living on Bantayan Island, this displacement directly affects their ability to continue their fishing practices. Returning OFWs relocate from their coastal homes to new properties located inland that are marketed as testaments to their success and upward mobility. This coincides with the socialized housing units that were built after Yolanda that were targeted at disenfranchised fishing communities affected by the typhoon. In tandem, these forms of displacement further marginalize fishing communities and contributes to the erasure of local forms of knowledge. The fate of fisherfolk and seafarers are intertwined in this new neoliberal landscape. As previously discussed, ecological damage drives fisherfolk to pursue professions overseas that further erodes their aquatic home environs. They are also connected vis-à-vis tourism development. Many residents of Bantayan Island disagreed with the changes in their community. Many fisherfolk refused to move to government housing and instead informally settled in fabricated housing units along the shore. Others were more vocal and protested this land grabbing and development.

[373] Office of the Presidential Assistant for the Visayas, "Newly-Created Tourism Master Plans for Bantayan, Camotes Islands Set for Rollout."
[374] Imee R. Marcos, "Cebu 4th District Special Economic Zone Act," Pub. L. No. Senate Bill 2193 (2021), https://legacy.senate.gov.ph/lisdata/3501231839!.pdf.

The most staunch critics of these policies experienced the most violent and deadly consequences for their activism.

Under the guise of protecting the nation, Duterte silenced those who opposed him and his policies. In addition to the extrajudicial killing of suspected drug sellers and users, Duterte also passed the Philippines Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 (Republic Act No. 11479) and expanded the definition of who constitutes as a terrorist.[375] Arrests on suspected terrorists could be issued without warrants and individuals could be detained without due process. Anyone perceived to be a threat to the nation could be incarcerated. In other words, Duterte criminalized the media, urban poor, drug users, Indigenous communities, subsistence fishers and farmers, and activists.[376]

Marked as either drug users or terrorists, environmental activists were targeted to ensure that land development and the interests of the wealthy were maintained. Environmentalists who protested the expansion of dams, mines, and plantations were silenced through fearmongering and state-sanctioned violence. In Wolfram Dressler's analysis of environmental and land defenders in Palawan, he says, "While political and environmental activists have long been harassed and murdered under previous administrations, President Duterte's brutish populism has reinforced earlier political economies of violence to further embolden the military, police, and hitmen to unleash

[375] Anna Romina Guevarra and Maya Arcilla, "The Source of Actual Terror: The Philippine Macho-Fascist Duterte," *Feminist Studies* 46, no. 2 (2020): 489–94, https://doi.org/10.1353/fem.2020.0007.
[376] For example, Senator Leila de Lima, who was investigating the murder of children in Mindanao during Duterte's time as a vice mayor of Davao, was jailed due to false allegations of drug trafficking. Maria Ressa, Rappler CEO, was convicted of cyber-libel after loudly decrying Duterte's policies. Environmental activists, especially Indigenous leaders, were also targeted for their activism against extractive practices. Holden, "Climate Change, Neoauthoritarianism, Necropolitics, and State Failure."

violence across the countryside."[377] The non-governmental organization Karapatan documented that 126 environmentalists were murdered in the Philippines.[378] According to Global Witness, 30 environmental and land defenders were murdered in 2018 in the Philippines excluding supposed drug-related killings. These acts stand in contrast to Duterte's claims to preservation.

This winding exploration of national representations, the real estate market, and Duterte's war on drugs shows the entanglements between overseas workers, drug users, and the environment. The representation of OFWs as ideal neoliberal citizens was deployed against subaltern subjects – including the urban poor, drug users, environmental activists, and subsistence fishers and farmers – who were deemed fit for death. By marking these individuals as a danger to society, Duterte's administration justified their deaths. Through the relocation of OFWs to new housing developments, the displacement of fisherfolk to socialized housing units, and the violent erasure of those who contest these disciplinary boundaries, the nation-state continued to pursue its extraction of the land. Although these policies were initiated by his predecessors,[379] Duterte's form of governance is unique in that he administers social, political, and physical death. As Vicente Rafael states, "Declaring a state of emergency by launching 'a war on drugs,' he sets rights aside, pursuing death as a

[377] Wolfram Dressler, "Defending Lands and Forests: NGO Histories, Everyday Struggles, and Extraordinary Violence in the Philippines," *Critical Asian Studies* 53, no. 3 (2021): 380–411, https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2021.1899834, 382.
[378] Dressler, "Defending Lands and Forests: NGO Histories, Everyday Struggles, and Extraordinary Violence in the Philippines," 381.
[379] Imelda Deinla and Bjorn Dressel, eds., *From Aquino II to Duterte (2010-2018): Change, Continuity--and Rupture* (Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814843294.

means of securing life. In doing so, he makes explicit what otherwise tends to remain implicit or disavowed in all modern states: that social life requires the administration of social death."[380] Considering the grave circumstances faced by her neighbors and friends, it makes sense that Atienza was compelled to create a work of art that revealed the connections between people. However, she does not just show the relationships between seafarers, fisherfolk, and the criminalized. In *Our Islands,* she also forces them to move with, between, and through the water.

Our Islands 11°16'58.4"N 123°45'07.0"E

Martha Atienza visualized Bantayan Island's complex sociopolitical web through the motley crew of characters that parade below the ocean's surface in the video *Our Islands*. In addition to the seafarer, tourist, drug lord, and policemen, the video also includes a boxer, queen or Virgin Mary figure, Spanish royalty, Jesus Christ, an angel, a man carrying a Santo Niño statue, Typhoon Yolanda survivor, nurse, and fisher (Fig. 4.6). As discussed previously, this is not a random assortment of individuals but a selection of actors who are co-constituted through neoliberal governance. They are also not just an artistic choice but were predetermined by the community on Bantayan Island.

[380] Rafael, *The Sovereign Trickster,* 34.

Fig. 4.6 Martha Atienza, *Our Islands 11°16'58.4"N 123°45'07.0"E,* 2017

As with her previous artworks, her neighbors and friends participated and starred in *Our Islands*. The success of the complex video was due to their knowledge of the ocean. Before filming, Atienza and her crew of neighbors prepared and practiced for months. This included finding a location that captured the dire state of the sea. They also needed to keep track of the tides, wind conditions, and currents. A three-meter bamboo stand was constructed for Atienza to monitor and coordinate the divers above water while a camera crew captured footage underwater. The choreography and costumes were predetermined and created because of the community's participation in a local annual fiesta called the Ati-Atihan Festival.

The Ati-Atihan Festival (also referred to as Sinulog) is held annually in January throughout the Visayas. Each city and province have their own version of the celebration.[381] One of the commonalities across these various traditions is that the

[381] Nedy Coldovero and Augusto Antonio Aguila, "Signs and Symbols in the Ati-Atihan Festival of Kalibo, Aklan, Philippines," *JPAIR* 41, no. 1 (2020): 116–41, https://doi.org/10.7719/jpair.v41i1.792.

event is a ritual to celebrate the Aetas, the Indigenous peoples of the Visayas, and the Santo Niño. It is a gathering to honor ancestors, pray for a bountiful harvest, and receive blessings from God. The festival showcases the syncretism of Indigenous folk practices and Catholicism.[382] This syncretic tradition illuminates the embeddedness of Spanish colonialism in Filipino culture.[383] However, as director George Villanueva briefly alludes to in his documentary *Making Belief Visible: The Cultural and Civic Work behind the Annual Santo Niño Ati-Atihan Festival in the Philippines,* some Indigenous communities in the Visayas view the festival as appropriation. Many believe that the fiesta celebrates a commodified version of Indigenous culture that hides the current struggles of Indigenous peoples. Enrique G. Oracion states that the celebration is a commemoration of Catholic conversion, a fundamentally violent and deadly historical practice during Spanish colonialism.[384] Nevertheless, the festival has become a popular and important event for many Filipinos locally, nationally, and internationally. I briefly discuss this festival not to condone acts of Indigenous appropriation but to make sense of why Atienza chooses to study it and how she makes sense of its spiritual power. I should also note that an in-depth analysis of the function of religion in Filipino culture and society, especially as it relates to the

[382] Carolyn Dean and Dana Leibsohn, "Hybridity and Its Discontents: Considering Visual Culture in Colonial Spanish America," *Colonial Latin American Review* 12, no. 1 (2003): 5-35.
[383] George Villanueva, *Making Belief Visible: The Cultural and Civic Work behind the Annual Santo Niño Ati-Atihan Festival in the Philippines* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 2014).
[384] Enrique G. Oracion, "The Sinulog Festival of Overseas Filipino Workers in Hong Kong: Meanings and Contexts," *Asian Anthropology* 11, no. 1 (2012): 107–27, https://doi.org/10.1080/1683478X.2012.10600859.

experiences of overseas workers is an important discussion, but one that is out-of-scope of this dissertation.[385]

The hallmark of the week-long festivity is a grand parade through the town where participants don costumes, play instruments, and dance. During the procession, individuals act bombastically as an annual release and cleansing. On Bantayan Island, it is common for participants to dress up in fantastical costumes to imitate the Aetas. Some wear makeshift costumes made from empty rice sacks. Many also cover their bodies with black paint to mimic the Aetas.[386] Inspired by the sea, many are seen wearing costumes covered in shells, dress up as mermaids, or wrap themselves with fish netting. However, over the years the procession has turned campier.[387] Ghouls, goblins, and witches are popular costumes amongst participants.[388] Many satirize popular figures and cultural events through imitation. Men cross dress as mermaids and pregnant women.

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[385] I would like to thank Yve Chavez for pointing this out to me and encouraging me to explore it in the final book project. An analysis of Catholicism and Christianity as it relates to OFWs is an area of investigation that will be pursued in the book manuscript. For more information, please see Deidre de la Cruz, *Mother Figured: Marian Apparitions and the Making of a Filipino Universal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[386] The use of black face in the Ati-Atihan Festival is a highly debated aspect of the ceremony. Festival organizers and participants often condone the use of blackface as a cultural practice that celebrates Indigenous communities. However, many Indigenous peoples in the Philippines find the practice to be racist and a form of minstrelsy. Similar conversations have arisen surrounding the use of blackface in European festivals such as Belgium and the Netherlands.

[387] Scholars such as William Peterson have drawn connections between the Ati-Atihan Festival and the European tradition of carnival. Indeed, the high camp performance and communal nature of the Ati-Atihan Festival are key traits of the carnivalesque. For more information see William Peterson, "The Ati-Atihan Festival: Dancing with the Santo Niño at the 'Filipino Mardi Gras,'" *Asian Theatre Journal* 28, no. 2 (2011): 505–28, https://doi.org/10.1353/atj.2011.0042.

[388] For more information on horror and witches in Filipino visual culture see Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique*, (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2009).

Martha Atienza studies the changes to the celebration on Bantayan Island since 2011 in an evolving eight-minute single-channel video titled *Anito* (2012-ongoing). She speculates that the festival has become a socio-political commentary over the years as resources become scarcer. She states,

> Through all influences throughout it's history, the Philippines is at another turning point of using the influences of ancestral belief, with their Catholic religion together with their strive for survival, search for identity and need for creativity. People take a day to step out of themselves and get connected to whatever they wish to be. Inspired by their ancestors they become powerful, god-like and mad.[389]

Just as her previous work tracks her community's responses to displacement, environmental damage, and overseas work, *Anito* shows how her community turns to their faith to make sense of this social, cultural, and political upheaval (Fig. 4.7). By turning to the streets dressed as drug lords, fisherfolk, seafarers, sea creatures, Indigenous people, and everyday citizens, perhaps they are trying to find a spiritual solution to their collective suffering. After all, the heart of the festival is the act of communal prayer and healing. [390] What does it mean then for Atienza to place this spiritual procession under water?

[389] Martha Atienza, "Martha Atienza Vimeo," Vimeo, accessed July 25, 2023, https://vimeo.com/marthaatienza.
[390] Coldovero and Aguila, "Signs and Symbols in the Ati-Atihan Festival of Kalibo, Aklan, Philippines," 128.

Fig. 4.7 Martha Atienza, *Anito*, 2012

Our Islands is not just a continuation of her studies on the Ati-Atihan Festival, but it is a culmination of her research and work with communities on Bantayan Island since 2010.[391] Beginning with *My Navel*, Atienza has engaged in a video-based practice that investigates the unique experiences of this island community. Across these works of art, the resounding message that her community seeks to express is the fear of losing connections to the sea. For this pivotal juncture in her art practice, it makes sense that Atienza sought to return to the sea as the nexus for these relationships; it is where the community is born and where they are rooted. Thus, it is only from this "submerged" view that Atienza can visualize the connections across this embattled ecosystem.

Atienza is not the first artist to stage performances underwater. Indeed, *Our Islands* can be analyzed amidst other works of art and artists that seek to challenge

[391] Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, *APT9/ Artist Stories: Martha Atienza Video "Our Islands,"* 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UynIJMl9Of0.

capitalist ways of seeing by turning their cameras (in)to the seas.[392] In *Land of Friends/Tierra de los Amigos* (2014) Carolina Caycedo dives into the murky waters of the Magdalena River to highlight a Huila community as they navigate the conversion of the river into hydroelectric power. Like Caycedo, Atienza is also concerned with extractive capitalism and both of their works can be read alongside ecocritical theories of visuality. In *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives*, interdisciplinary scholar of environmental media and decolonial theory, Macarena Gómez-Barris analyzes the artistic responses to extractive practices in five locations across South America. Gómez-Barris argues that artists who work within Indigenous lands, including filmmaker Francisco Huichaqueo Perez and Carolina Caycedo, display a countervisuality to the organizational strategies of extractive capitalism. Artists offer a "submerged perspective" or way of seeing that reveals buried knowledges, maps connections between living beings, and visualizes ever-present ways of living that are repressed or invisibilized. She states,

> …submerged perspectives pierce through the entanglements of power to differently organize the meanings of social and political life. In other words, the possibility of decolonization moves within the landscape of mulitiplicity that is submerged perspectives. Extractive zones contain within them the submerged perspectives that challenge obliteration. I describe these transitional and intangible spaces as geographies that cannot be fully contained by the ethnocentrisim of speciesism, scientific objectification, or by extractive technocracies that advance oil fields, construct pipelines, divert and diminish rivers, or cave-in mountains through mining. Seeing and listening to

[392] For example, Isaac Julien's large-scale video installation, *Western Union: Small Boats* (2007) explores the imperial history of international migration by abruptly editing clips of Black bodies dancing in the water, mimicking the breath of drowning bodies. Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba also turns to the ocean in his single-channel video *Towards the Complex - For the Courageous, the Curious, and the Cowards* (2001). In this short video shot underwater, Nguyen-Hatsushiba explores the globalized economy of Vietnam after the Vietnam War and its effect on cyclo drivers.

> these worlds present nonpath dependent alternatives to capitalist and extractive valuation.[393]

By sinking her camera into the Visayan Sea, Atienza exposes the complex web of actors that mediate neoliberal governance on Bantayan Island. However, this network does not just include human actors. In *Our Islands,* the characters do not elegantly swim or glide through the water. They trudge, wade, and stumble across the sea floor. As they hold onto their various accessories, they push and pull the waters as they move against the eb and flow of the tide. Atienza chose to play the video in slow motion so that their movements are exaggerated and elongated which exemplifies their exertion. Despite the absence of fish, the camera captures phytoplankton, zooplankton, and other organic matter that swim alongside plastic particles. Although the seabed is noticeably damaged, it is not barren. Sea grass and seaweed elegantly sway and dance with the tide. This is in addition to the microscopic organisms that the human eye cannot conceive. The Visayan Sea is alive and the human individuals captured in the video are only one component to this vast ecosystem. Bringing the Ati-Atihan Festival into the ocean is not just a change of environment, but it is a way to include the ocean into a communal prayer. The Visayan Sea does not act as a stage but an integral part in this web of relationality.

She emphasizes her expanded vision by displaying the footage as a panorama. However, Atienza's panorama differs from the pictorial representations of "maritime space" that photographer Allan Sekula discusses in *Fish Story*. In his study of 17th

[393] Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone,* 12.

century Dutch maritime painting, Sekula notes that the panorama was used to apprehend a complete and coherent topography. However, this romantic attitude towards a sublime and unexplored ocean changed following the emergence of steam-driven ships. Panoramas of European ports and coastal lines captured an industrialized city until eventually, "modernity dissolves the edifying unit of the classical maritime panorama."[394] Both types of panoramas were emblematic of a romantic and extractive gaze. According to ecocritical scholar Timothy Morton, both forms of visuality reaffirm capitalist ideologies.[395]

However, Atienza's panorama neither romanticizes the Visayan Seas nor newly built industrialized ports. In *Our Islands*, Atienza does not depict the ocean as a surface for humans to manipulate or a stage for human growth. Instead, the viewer is shown the expansive power and will of the ocean and its non-human inhabitants to live despite extractive capitalism. In the video, humans are visualized changing their habits to move and live with the ocean. Unlike these static panoramas, Atienza's is moving and cyclical thereby embracing change and reciprocity. In his review of *Our Islands*, art critic Marv Recinto also likened this panoramic view to a large aquarium.[396] Just like an aquarium, the video captures a unique ecological community filled with organisms that interact and rely on each other to build a successful

[394] Allan Sekula, *Fish Story* (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 1995), 106.
[395] Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).
[396] Marv Recinto, "Artist Martha Atienza and the Fight for Environmental Justice in the Philippines," ArtReview, September 17, 2020, https://artreview.com/artist-martha-atienza-environmental-justice-philippines/.

environment. *Our Islands* opens the ocean not for extraction but for human and non-human connection.

By expanding the field of vision, Atienza shows how the ocean is the nexus of regional and global relationships between seafarers, fisherfolk, returnees, fish, and microbiomes. This network therefore connects lives between land and sea, locally and in the diaspora. In other words, this submerged perspective visualizes what Kale Bantigue Fajardo refers to as an "aquapelagic imaginary," or "forms of solidarities and social and environmental movements that stress contemporary *regional and global* concerns, and which desire a different kind of future for humans and the more-than-human."[397] For Atienza, *Our Islands* is more than viewing the ways organisms cohabitate, it is a call to action. This charge for radical solidarity is especially potent for overseas Filipinos who are sold extractive visions of the homeland.

Other Routes Home

As discussed above, images of new housing developments and dreams of a middle class return to the homeland are sold to OFWs, representations that I refer to as national representations of OFWs. Although these real estate images do not depict laboring bodies, they do affirm the nation-states role as broker of labor and hides the conditions of global labor migration. In these images, OFWs are sold the promise of a triumphant return home but only for those who embody the ideal disciplined citizen. Indeed, this type of migration back to the homeland matches the cycle early diasporic scholars theorized.

[397] Fajardo, *Filipino Crosscurrents,* 143.

In diaspora studies, scholars posit that migrant communities are driven by desires to return home.[398] Political scientist William Safran argued that the concept of diaspora should be expanded beyond Jewish communities and include displaced populations who share the following characteristics:

1) They, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral," or foreign, regions.
2) They retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland – its physical location, history, and achievements.
3) They believe that they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it.
4) They regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return – when conditions are appropriate.
5) They believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity.
6) They continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship.[399]

According to Safran, migrants have a strong desire to return to the homeland because they perceive it to be their true or ideal homes. Based on these feelings, migrants seek to restore prosperity and will return only when they are fiscally secure. Underlying this concept of return is an entrepreneurial nationalism and emphasis on securing the legitimacy of the nation-state.

Scholars today have complicated these over generalizations and refer to this trope as "the myth of return." Anthropologist Martin Manalansan argues that, "Diasporic homecoming or return to homeland is often portrayed as a romanticized

[398] Mustafa Cakmak, "'Take Me Back to My Homeland Dead or Alive!': The Myth of Return Among London's Turkish-Speaking Community," *Frontiers in Sociology* 6 (2021), https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fsoc.2021.630558.
[399] William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora* 1, no. 1 (1991): 83–99, https://doi.org/10.1353/dsp.1991.0004.

endpoint, a moment characterized either as a sentimental discovery or nostalgic recovery of authenticity, a heroic and redemptive closure or an idealized destination of all diasporic odysseys and linear migratory movements."[400] He states that returnees are a complex group who negotiate often ambivalent and contradictory notions of home. In "Homeward Bound: The Circular Migration of Entertainers Between Japan and the Philippines" Rhacel Salazar Parrenñas analyzes circular migration and argues against dominant narratives of a linear pathway.[401] Despite the Philippine nation-state's desires to cohere a romantic vision of the Philippines, overseas Filipinos have different motivations to return to the homeland.

Atienza's *Our Islands* is a proposition to have a different relationship to the Philippines. Tourist images and marketing campaigns that sell dreams of homeownership attempt to distinguish OFWs as ideal neoliberal citizens from activists and urban poor who are castigated for being lazy miscreants. As model subjects, OFWs can fulfill their diasporic journeys, reap the benefits of their hard work and investments, and live in a paradisal Philippines. These national representations are not only imagined but they are used to justify human rights violations against the most marginalized in Philippine society. It is precisely this relationship that Atienza wishes to showcase. By showing how OFWs are integrated into a system of abuse and extraction, perhaps they will feel the need to challenge the

[400] Martin IV Manalansan, "Performing Elusive Homecomings: Mobility, Embodiment, and Diasporic Filipino Youth," *Kritika Kultura* 0, no. 23 (August 31, 2014): 62, https://doi.org/10.13185/1881.
[401] Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, "Homeward Bound: The Circular Migration of Entertainers between Japan and the Philippines," *Global Networks* 10, no. 3 (2010): 301–23, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0374.2010.00288.x.

images that seek to incorporate them. Perhaps their return to the Philippines can be premised on rebuilding connections between neighbors both human and non-human.

Conclusion

It was around 11:00 am in a heavily air-conditioned hotel lobby near the Mall of Asia in Manila, Philippines. I was eagerly waiting for the arrival of my cousin, Ate Sophia. My return to the homeland was a long-time coming. I was a part of a cohort of scholars who delayed their sojourns because of travel restrictions instituted by governments around the world to curb the spread of the deadly 2019 novel coronavirus. But like many scholars who trace their roots to histories of displacement, this trip meant more than just an opportunity to advance my scholarship. It had been nearly ten years since last I visited the Philippines and my family.

When Ate Sophia arrived, we broke into squeals of joy and eagerly hugged each other. We returned to my hotel room and immediately engaged in the ritual of *pasalubong*, or the passing of gifts purchased abroad. After this explosion of excitement, we settled in and reacquainted with each other. Almost immediately she reported the status of our cousins who had left the Philippines to work abroad. My Kuya Borik moved to Dubai, married, and had a daughter. His sister, Ate Kathy, moved to Aotearoa/New Zealand with her family. Meanwhile, Ate Tangtangan returned to the Philippines after living and working in the Middle East for several years. Ate Sophia had also worked abroad for a very brief stint. I asked Ate Sophia why she thought there was a large market for Filipino workers abroad and she replied, "*Siyempre* (Of course), because Filipinos are naturally hardworking and caring." I had traveled almost 7,000 miles to conduct research on the representation of OFWs

and I only had to inquire with my family to see the proliferation of national narratives (Fig. 5.1).

Fig. 5.1 Christina Ayson-Plank and Ate Sophia in Manila, Philippines, 2022

The proximity between my research project and personal life is generative for an analysis of migration and labor. As a Filipina American, I recognize the gap between myself and these histories – a gap that has helped me develop an understanding of the lateral connections that comprise diasporic experiences and how artists attempt to visualize these divergences. Visual studies scholars such as Trinh T. Minh-ha have theorized that this method of analysis does not objectify subjects but is a form of reflection from up close or what she refers to as "speaking nearby."[402] As a member of the Filipino diaspora, I can understand the journey of alienation and belonging, but I also recognize that my specific experience differs vastly from those who travel to work. Analyzing and recognizing this difference has opened my field of

[402] Nancy N. Chen, "'Speaking Nearby:' A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-Ha," *Visual Anthropology Review* 8, no. 1 (1992): 82–91, https://doi.org/10.1525/var.1992.8.1.82.

vision and motivated the structure of this dissertation. By writing each chapter as a case study in the diaspora, I seek to draw connections and identify divergences. It is precisely this recognition of multivocality that I believe can counter narratives that homogenize OFWs.

Considering the ubiquity of Filipinos living and working in the diaspora this personal connection to globalized labor is not unique. Indeed, as I have pointed out in previous chapters, it is precisely this subject position that compels artists of the Filipino labor diaspora to create open-ended and multi-layered counter-productions. Jenifer Wofford, Imelda Cajipe Endaya, and Martha Atienza prioritize the everyday in the face of nationalist discourse. But what about the perspective of the OFW turned artist? I turn to the photographer Xyza Cruz Bacani to conclude my dissertation. Bacani's photographs and her experience as an artist exemplify themes that I explore throughout this dissertation including the roots and routes of diaspora, the difficulties of representing OFWs, the politics of the everyday, and the crafting of new homes.

In 2015 Bacani rose to prominence when she was awarded the 2015 Photography and Social Justice Fellowship from Magnum Foundation. Since then, she has exhibited internationally at the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago, Museum of the City of New York, Museo Nacional De Antropologia in Madrid, and Hong Kong Arts Center. Her work has been featured in National Geographic and the New York Times. She has been recognized as one of the BBC's 100 Women of the World in 2015, 30 Under 30 Women Photographers in 2016, Forbes 30 Under 30 Asia in 2016, and is a Fujifilm ambassador. Her photographic

series *We Are Like Air*, which shows the everyday lives of OFWs living and working in Hong Kong, has been heralded for exposing the plight of migrant workers.

In addition to her photographs, she has drawn interest because of her position as a former domestic worker. At the age of 19, Bacani moved to Hong Kong as an OFW. She labored alongside her mother, Georgia, who had been working as a domestic worker for several decades. With the help of their employer, Kathryn Louey, Bacani acquired a camera and began taking photos of her environs. Her rise as an acclaimed artist was cemented when she graduated in 2023 from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts with an MFA in Art and Politics. This is a momentous feat considering that she does not have a bachelor's degree. As a self-taught artist, Bacani has been hailed as a model for success and excellence. As Manila-based media company ABS-CBN reported in 2019 on her photographic series *We Are Like Air*, "This is the great Filipino story and it's being told by a master storyteller."[403] Indeed, her success story aligns well with the Filipino nation-state's narrative of the "bagong bayani." As an enterprising artist, she has lifted herself despite her station in Hong Kong.

Bacani's photographs and her success evidences the difficulties of representing globalized labor migration. In the Philippines, she is celebrated for reporting on the conditions of migrant workers at large. In the global arts market, she is fetishized for her status as a self-taught artist and former OFW. And yet, to view

[403] Mookie Katigbak-Lacuesta, "Xyza Cruz Bacani Is Telling the Great Filipino Story Not in Words but in Photos," ABS-CBN News, accessed August 1, 2023, https://news.abs-cbn.com/ancx/culture/books/01/19/19/xyza-cruz-bacani-is-telling-the-great-filipino-story-not-in-words-but-in-photos.

her work as purely national co-optation does a disservice to the intimate stories she tells through her photographs. By analyzing *We Are Like Air*, I show the ways contemporary artists navigate their place in the art world.

As an artist and former OFW, Bacani is acutely attuned to the way Filipinos are essentialized as victims and heroes. She navigates these visual regimes by simultaneously participating in the circulation of national representations of OFWs, but also offering subversive narratives that center her perspective. Whilst her work can be read as an exploration of an essentialized Filipino subject, Bacani's point of view is persistently acknowledged and made present. In other words, a close reading of her work shows that she resists claims to universality. Yet, she must also navigate the way she is perceived as a Filipina artist and former OFW. She is both acclaimed for her entrepreneurial spirit and lionized as the raw talent of an "outsider" artist. She utilizes her platform as a desirable artist both in the international art market and in the Philippines to disseminate her photographs or what Gayatri Spivak calls "strategic essentialism."[404] Bacani shows us that Filipina artists who create counter-productive artworks navigate multiple representational fields. To view their art in binaristic terms overlooks their labor and the ways they navigate these complex visual regimes.

An OFW and Artist

Bacani was born in 1987 in Nueva Vizcaya, a province in the island of Luzon, to Georgia and Villamor Bacani. She is the eldest of three children. Georgia and

[404] Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Villamor grew up in poverty and sought to provide their family a life that was different. In 1994, Villamor traveled to Saudi Arabia and worked as a construction worker. For two years he labored abroad, but quickly returned after experiencing hard work conditions. With Villamor returning and no source of steady income, Bacani's mother made the difficult decision to try her hand at working overseas. Shortly after he arrived home, Georgia left her family, including an eight-year-old Bacani, to work in Singapore.

Georgia was initially drawn to Singapore by a recruiter who promised her a job, but with a stipulation. They required Georgia to circumvent official policies and protocols by traveling using a tourist visa.[405] Upon her arrival she discovered that she was illegally trafficked along with ten other Filipinas. They were locked in a room until the fourth day when an employer chose Georgia to be their domestic helper. For two years, her employer treated her terribly and controlled her every movement. She was able to flee her employer and briefly returned to the Philippines. Shortly after, Georgia went on the job market and found employment in Hong Kong with Kathryn Louey in 1999.

Unlike her employer in Singapore, Mrs. Louey, as she is affectionately referred to by members of the Bacani family, is kind and respectful of her employees. Since moving to Hong Kong, Georgia has continuously worked for Mrs. Louey and refers to her as family. Over the course of her tenure, Mrs. Louey has given bonuses

[405] Georgia's experience in Singapore has been recounted by Bacani in various interviews. For more information see James Estrin, "Once 'Invisible,' She Now Photographs Other Domestic Workers," *New York Times* (New York: New York Times Company, January 12, 2017), https://www.proquest.com/docview/1857577781/abstract/1170482FE2A3468DPQ/1.

to her employers to congratulate and thank them for their hard work. She has even opened her doors to Villamor to celebrate Christmas with her and Georgia. Despite their relationship, Georgia insists on working long hours for seven days a week. She must weigh her fears of losing a good employer with taking time off. In addition, rising costs in the Philippines and her family's persisting economic struggles push her to continue working despite decades apart from her family.

The human rights violations she experienced in Singapore are a well-known consequence and outcome of globalized labor migration as discussed in previous chapters. The strenuous and persisting nature of her employment in Hong Kong is also a common experience for many OFWs. For Georgia's family, however, her experiences were kept hidden. Bacani and her siblings never heard about their mother's violent employer nor was her absence really discussed. Their only insight into their mother's life abroad were the correspondences and photographs she mailed. As with many OFWs, the photographs Georgia sent were staged to only reveal a part of her life abroad. Photos of material goods, celebrations with her ward, and tourist images portrayed a comfortable and exciting life – a life that deeply contrasted with her childrens' experiences back in the Philippines. Bacani and her siblings grew to resent their mother because they believed she abandoned them. They felt resigned to a life of poverty, loneliness, and struggle.

Bacani's perceptions of her mother changed in 2006 when she decided to drop out of her nursing program and join her mother abroad. She initially chose to work as an OFW in Singapore, but with her mother's insistence moved to Hong Kong to work

for Mrs. Louey. At first, Bacani and Georgia's relationship was strained; after a decade of living apart they were forced to live in proximity. Over time this changed as Bacani experienced the trials of working overseas. For the first time Bacani also spoke directly to her mom about the burden that was placed on her as the eldest daughter to take care of her young siblings while both of her parents worked. They were able to have honest conversations with each other about their experiences as an OFW and child of an OFW.

For Bacani the miscommunication between her and her mother became a source of inspiration. It was only until they could have open dialogue that they were able to reconcile some of the trauma they experienced. This desire for honest discussion with members of her family motivated her to create a series of photographs that were eventually compiled into a book. *We Are Like Air*, the title of the series and book, was created first and foremost as a tool for her family to heal from the wounds of globalized labor.

We Are Like Air

Although Bacani was drawn to the arts since she was a child, she believed that it was not a sustainable career path considering their family's economic status.[406] When Mrs. Louey loaned Bacani enough money to purchase a camera in 2009, Bacani's motivation was to capture Hong Kong for her mother's enjoyment and to try her hand at a new but accessible hobby. She learned how to use her camera by

[406] Howie Severino, "Xyza Cruz Bacani on Her Inspiring Journey," *The Howie Severino Podcast*, accessed August 15, 2023, https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/thehowieseverinopodcast/episodes/Xyza-Cruz-Bacani-on-her-inspiring-journey-e1jc1n9.

watching YouTube videos and through a process of trial and error. At first, she took photographs of Hong Kong's cityscape, and overtime she turned her lens to a personal subject matter. She began photographing fellow OFWs lounging on the streets of Hong Kong on their days off. She also visited the Bethune House, a shelter for foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong. Whether in the streets or at the shelter, fellow OFWs would confide in Bacani giving her access to their most private memories living abroad.

She posted these early photographs on her Facebook page where acclaimed American-based Filipino documentary photographer Rick Rocamora "discovered" her in 2014.[407] He likened her to a contemporary Vivian Maier, a nanny and photographer who received acclaim posthumously for her street photography in New York and Chicago.[408] Rocamora contacted Bacani thereby initiating a mentor-mentee relationship that continues to this day. He also pitched her story to the *New York Times* "Lens Blog" and was successfully picked up.[409] Rocamora encouraged her to continue taking photographs of overseas workers, a series that would later be compiled into a book.

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[407] Rocamora is well known for his street photographs of impoverished Filipino communities. This includes his project on the slums of Quiapo, a historic district in the Philippines where merchants sell a variety of goods and services including herbal products, religious artifacts, and illegally copied media. It is a place where impoverished communities congregate to get their fortunes read or to sell these services to tourists.

[408] It should be noted that Bacani denies the comparison between herself and Maier. For more information see James Estrin, "A Mother and Daughter's Unlikely Journey as Migrant Workers," *The New York Times*, December 27, 2018, sec. Lens, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/27/lens/xyza-bacani-migrant-workers.html.

[409] Amanda Lingao, "The Art of Xyza Bacani," *RAPPLER*, February 18, 2015, https://www.rappler.com/moveph/84217-xyza-bacani-photos/.

The book *We Are Like Air* is the most complete display of Bacani's photographs she captured while living in Hong Kong from 2014-2018. The book was published in 2018 by WE Press Company, a Hong Kong based publisher. The book includes not just her photographs, but also correspondences, official documents, personal items, screenshots of online advertisements, and even a recipe for abalone stew. In addition, nearly all the photographs include captions written by Bacani. The book is arranged roughly topically, and each section is introduced by a short anecdote also written by Bacani. For example, she includes a segment on human rights violations and follows Filipinas who come through the doors of the Bethune House. Another briefly follows Josefa, an OFW who was so devoted to her employer that she came out of retirement to care for her former ward's newborn. Elvie, the domestic worker that works for Mrs. Louey's daughter, Felicia, is the focus of another part of the book. Although the internal portions do not include images of her or her family, *We Are Like Air* is bookended with photos and stories of the Bacanis. In other words, while *We Are Like Air* discusses the OFW experience at large, her family's story serves as the book's focal point.

The overarching narrative of the series focuses on her family as they attempt to reconcile their decades long separation. Many pages of the book are laid out as pairs featuring a photograph of Georgia in Hong Kong and the Bacani family in the Philippines. The composition and subject matter of the paired photos often mirror in aesthetic and composition thereby showing the proximity and distance between the family. For example, the first section focuses on the romance and longing between

Georgia and Villamor. On page eighteen is a photo of Villamor walking down a cement path of his rural home in the Philippines (Fig. 5.2). He is flanked by a rice paddy to his left, houses on his right, and a tropical mountain range behind him. On the following page is a photo of Georgia who also walks down a cement path. Instead of the pastoral vista of the Philippines, she is seen in a cramped urban market in Hong Kong. These juxtapositions, like Jenifer Wofford's work, index the connections between the homeland and diaspora. Bacani writes, "I hope to illustrate the 'parallel lives; between domestic workers and the people with whom they are closely connected…Foreign domestic workers may be thousands of miles away from their loved ones, but they are connected in one way or another."[410]

Fig. 5.2 Xyza Cruz Bacani, *We Are Like Air,* 2014-2018, pages eighteen and nineteen

Indeed, the theme of familial connection permeates throughout the book. On page 47, Bacani opens a section that juxtaposes images of Georgia playing with Mrs. Louey's grandchildren in Hong Kong and the Bacani grandchildren in the Philippines. For example, on the left page is a photo of a smiling Villamor as he props

[410] Xyza Cruz Bacani, *We Are Like Air* (Hong Kong: WE Press Company Limited, 2018) 47.

up his grandchild who grasps onto the gate of their home in the Philippines (Fig. 5.3). On the right page is Georgia popping out of Mrs. Louey's front door to scare Mrs. Louey's grandchild whose back faces the viewer. Despite the joy portrayed in the photos, the juxtaposition is a reminder of the longing persistently felt in the diaspora. Although Georgia finds pleasure in playing with her wards, they could never fully replace her grandchildren. For Villamor, the delight he feels when caretaking for his grandchildren is tempered by the absence of his wife. By portraying these everyday moments, Bacani offers us a complex vision of the diaspora. Similar to Imelda Cajipe Endaya's paintings of the Hudson Valley, Bacani's everyday photographs image non-laboring moments that contrast with images of ideal laboring bodies.

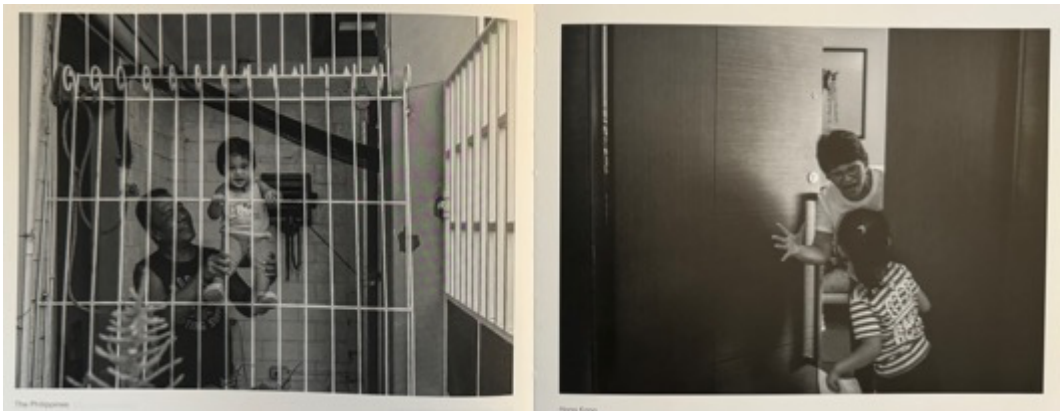

Fig. 5.3 Xyza Cruz Bacani, *We Are Like Air,* 2014-2018, pages 52 and 53

For Bacani, laying out to bare the multiplicity of the overseas experience is a part of a process of healing. She writes, "Personally, this book has provided a closure, an opportunity to forgive and a second chance for me and my family. We have grown closer as a result, and I hope that it will work wonders for other migrant families

too."[411] This is echoed in a later page in the book during a section predominantly documenting Georgia's brief return to the Philippines. In this photo, Sharila, Bacani's sister, hugs their mother goodbye before Georgia leaves for Hong Kong. In the caption, Bacani writes, "The feeling of abandonment is something we will never get used to no matter how old we are. Sharila was just a toddler when our mother left us…We do not want our next generation to go through the trauma and pain of family separation. I hope that this book will bring about forgiveness and healing to my sister."[412] Considering the layout and photographs included, this book was created first and foremost for her family. Like Atienza, her artistic practice lies in-between the art market and personal production. Indeed, she is creating photographs to be sold and exhibited, however, it is more than just garnering acclaim as a documentarian and artist.

Despite Bacani's motivations, however, she is still producing images within a visual regime. Like Endaya and David, Bacani cannot escape the complexities of representing OFWs. Just as her family's journey is foregrounded, she also makes claims that essentialize the OFW experience in ways that mirror national representations of OFWs. As previously discussed, the book begins with her mother. Although she establishes the personal dimensions of the book, she also makes claims that her family's experience is representative of all OFWs. She says, "This is my story, as well as the story of my mother and millions of women who have become

[411] Bacani, *We Are Like Air*, 47.
[412] Bacani, *We Are Like Air*, 199.

foreign domestic workers, leaving behind their children in their home countries. Our stories have been told countless times, but more often than not they only scratch the surface of our experience. This time, we will tell our own story."[413] Rather than invoke a multiplicity of voices and accounts, she becomes the arbiter of an essentialized narrative.

In some of the photographs she includes Bacani also highlights stories that adhere to the victim/hero dichotomy. On page 108 is a spread that features the burned nape of Shirley Dalisay, a migrant worker who sought shelter at the Bethune House. Dalisay's employer spilled boiling soup on her, denied her sick leave for hospitalization, and terminated her employment contract. She sought treatment and recovery at the Bethune House for nine-months where Bacani met her. One of the photos included is of Dalisay whose back faces the camera. Her camisole shirt is lifted above her breasts as she lowers the back of her shorts to reveal the scar tissue on the small of her back. Her upper back is heavily bandaged. With her other hand, she covers her exposed breast. Although this photo reveals an aspect of globalized labor migration, the viewer is only privy to a victimized Dalisay.

We Are Like Air seeks to recognize the most inhumane treatment of Filipinos while they are working abroad. Indeed, human rights violations are a condition of globalized labor migration. In an interview, Bacani also asserts that the people she photographs consent to the dissemination of their stories. She states, "The people I photograph are collaborating with me, they are telling me their stories. It's not like

[413] Bacani, *We Are Like Air*, 8.

I'm there forcing them to tell me their stories, they did so with all their heart and, for me, that is collaborating, they're sharing their life with me."[414] Her commitment to reporting has also pushed her to distribute photographs without attribution in order to keep her safe while continuing her work.[415] Her desire to honestly represent these accounts, however, also aligns with national representations on OFWs that assert the role of the nation-state to regulate the export of Filipinos. This is precisely the conundrum that Endaya also faced when she endeavored to address the most urgent concerns of OFWs in the 1990s.

To read across *We Are Like Air* is to analyze the nuance that comes with representing OFWs. That these works can simultaneously counter and participate in global capitalism's visual regimes. Although these photographs replicate the victim archetype, this was also an opportunity for her collaborators to tell their stories. Furthermore, the access that Bacani has to these women is a testament of her ability to connect with them. Her position as a former OFW and her willingness to tell her mother's story helped to forge deep connections with women. For Bacani, this proximity is a responsibility to share the stories that have been entrusted to her. In an interview with *Art Asia Pacific*, she was asked why she centered stories of those in the margins to which she answered, "Because I'm one of them. I'm always drawn to my own people and I've been given the chance to be a vessel of their stories, so why not? Even with all the attention I've gotten because of the shift in my life, I will

[414] Nicole M. Nepomuceno, "A Vessel of Stories: In Conversation with Xyza Cruz Bacani," *Art Asia Pacific*, July 13, 2022, https://artasiapacific.com/people/a-vessel-of-stories-in-conversation-with-xyza-cruz-bacani.
[415] Howie Severino, "Xyza Cruz Bacani on Her Inspiring Journey."

always be one of them."[416] The visibility she's received is a means by which she can continue fulfilling her responsibility to her community.

In 2014, Kerry MacDonald of *The New York Times* wrote the article "Taking Care of People and Pictures in Hong Kong," Bacani's first feature in an international journal. In the article MacDonald describes Bacani's practice as a street photographer. She says, "With camera in hand, the 'glorified nanny' transforms into a 'lone wolf' or 'stray cat,' prowling the street. When she's using her phone to shoot under-the-radar, she's a ninja, capturing scenes that emphasize light slicing through towering buildings before it hits the streets, shifting by the minute."[417] The metaphorical language she uses describes Bacani as an animal who can easily navigate the underbelly of society. Just as she attributes OFWs to the sordid outskirts of Hong Kong, she also represents Bacani as exceptional and exotic. Someone who can both blend in and stand apart from this side of society. The racialized language by which she describes Bacani is the most egregious example of how she is orientalized.

Bacani is fully aware of the way she is viewed by Western audiences. During a casual lunch meeting with the artist, her partner, and friend, Bacani opined to me about colleagues who marginalized her and her work. Nevertheless, she continues to exhibit in the U.S., host workshops on photography, and give talks about her work. She is an incredibly visible and active artist. Indeed, it seems as though she mobilizes her visibility as a political strategy to continue her work as a "vessel of stories."

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[416] Nepomuceno, "A Vessel of Stories: In Conversation with Xyza Cruz Bacani."
[417] Kerri MacDonald, "Taking Care of People and Pictures in Hong Kong," *Lens*, 1403082024, https://archive.nytimes.com/lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/06/18/taking-care-of-people-and-pictures-in-hong-kong/.

Gayatri Spivak referred to this tactic as "strategic essentialism," or the "strategic use of a positive essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest."[418] Spivak argues that the mobilization of specific signifiers of marginalized identities could be used to disrupt the very mechanisms of exclusion. In other words, as Asian American studies scholar Lisa Lowe interprets Spivak's theory, "such essentialisms will not be reproduced and proliferated by the very apparatuses we seek to disempower."[419] Bacani asserts her status as a former OFW in many interviews to establish authority on the OFW experience. By self-essentializing her identity, Bacani can bring more visibility to the plight of OFWs to an audience eager to include diverse artists.

Artists, curators, and arts practitioners, including Bacani, use strategic essentialism to combat what art historian Amelia Jones calls, "ethnic envy" or, "the drive to incorporate works of art by artists of color in order to raise the status of the institution as culturally aware and politically on point."[420] Bacani navigates a "contemporary global art complex" that celebrates a "tick-box inclusion" of diverse artists.[421] Bacani asserts her status as a sought after Southeast Asian artist to make visible a global market that relies on the exploitation of Filipinos. Just as she makes visible the multi-dimensionality of OFWs and therefore counters the essentializing forces that construct Filipinos as ideal laboring bodies, she also questions the very

[418] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 205.
[419] Lisa Lowe, "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (1991): 24–44, https://doi.org/10.1353/dsp.1991.0014, 548.
[420] Amelia Jones, "Ethnic Envy and Other Aggressions in the Contemporary 'Global' Art Complex," *NKA,* 2021, no. 48 (2021): 96–110, https://doi.org/10.1215/10757163-8971328, 101.
[421] Jones, "Ethnic Envy and Other Aggressions in the Contemporary 'Global' Art Complex," 101.

mechanisms of valuation. That indeed, the same logics, protocols, and systems that value Filipinos as less than human are the same systems that center Western art. In other words, Bacani is not only navigating national representations of OFWs, but she is also negotiating a contemporary art market.

Speaking Nearby

It is when Bacani works with Asian American, Filipinx, and Filipino curators and scholars that the complexities of her work can be fully appreciated. Although I have discussed the presentation and reception of her book up until this point, I would like to discuss the way her work is received when curated in an exhibition. As I have explored in chapter three of this dissertation, representations of OFWs are mediated and thus they cannot fully capture the complexities of living and working abroad. As David concludes, perhaps it is this recognition that we can begin to understand and counter national representations of OFWs. In this last section, I analyze the ways in which curators who endeavor to "speak nearby" present Bacani's work and grapple with its intricacies.[422]

In 2022, curators Sean Corcoran and Dr. Thea Quiray Tagle included Bacani's work in *New York Now: Home – A Photography Triennial* at the Museum of the City of New York. *New York Now: Home* is the first exhibition for the institution's new photography triennial. This iteration explored notions of home for New Yorkers across works of art by thirty-three artists. For the exhibition, Bacani created new

[422] Thank you to Thea Quiray Tagle for encouraging me to investigate how Bacani's work is received when displayed in an exhibition. I would also like to thank Yve Chavez for encouraging me to include my curatorial experience in this dissertation.

photographs depicting the experiences of Farah, a Filipina who survived human trafficking, married a Bengali immigrant family, and lived in Queens, NY. Like her previous images of OFWs, her photos of Farah and her New York family recorded everything between the mundane and extraordinary. Through these photographs, the viewer witnessed the ways in which Farah made New York her home.

The opportunity to exhibit in *New York Now: Home* was equally a recognition Bacani's artistic abilities and her place as a New Yorker. Exhibited alongside artists such as Elias Williams and Maureen Drennan, the curators of *New York Now: Home* framed Bacani's work as a part of a dynamic group of emerging and mid-career photographers all speaking to the unique and diverse qualities of living in New York at that moment. This site-specific presentation frames the photographers and their subjects as a part of a collaborative and intimate community that embraces difference and multivocality.

The extension of *New York Now: Home* at JFK Airport's Terminal 4 exemplifies the curators' efforts to frame the exhibition and by extension Bacani's work as an act of homemaking.[423] Quiray Tagle and Cocoran worked collaboratively with T4 Arts & Culture to bring the exhibition to the airport. This installation included a display in the form of a living room in the middle of the terminal's retail hall. Mounted on a moveable wall was a television screen that included fifteen images of Xyza Cruz Bacani, Elias Williams, and Maureen Drennan's photographs. Travelers

[423] AIPAD Talks: Museum of the City of New York's First Photography Triennial, New York Now: Home, 2023. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-VQkzqnKP8.

were invited to sit on a couch in front of the screen flanked by two houseplants. In the space traditionally defined by indeterminacy and transience, the curators created a home.

The location of this display was important to Bacani who landed in JFK when she made her transition to live in New York. Indeed, JFK is an important site for the large OFW community of New York. For the many Filipinos who make their first strides in the U.S. in this hall, it must have been comforting to see Filipino faces on this screen. The framing and display of Bacani's photographs in the airport amplified Bacani's desires to create images that gave OFWs a sense of recognition, pride, and belonging. I offer this brief analysis of Bacani's work in *New York Now: Home* to show that the placement of artwork in different sites is important to consider. I also endeavor to show that the positionality of a curator or art historian does affect the relationship and reception of a work of art. Speaking nearby offers an intimate point of view that can amplify the visual cultures of globalized labor.

Counter-Production

An analysis of Bacani's *We Are Like Air* reveals an artistic practice that challenges the creation and circulation of "productive" images – representations that ensure the continued productivity of OFWs and the nation-state's role to mediate their migration – but also one that grapples with essentialized notions of art making that conforms to the market. The artists analyzed in this dissertation create works of art that exceed capitalist valuation. Martha Atienza's socially engaged filmic art practice advocates for policies that protect coastal communities. Imelda Cajipe Endaya's

paintings were first and foremost personal ruminations of belonging and exclusion in the diaspora. As a documentarian and journalist, Xyza Cruz Bacani prioritizes reporting the conditions of OFWs and often distributes unattributed photographs. Lastly, although many of these works of art are not directly representing the artists' experiences or identity, they have all drawn on their family's histories to reveal a condition to which they are closely connected. Nevertheless, as artists their livelihoods are tied to the art market. In other words, for these artists making art is both personal and political, an economic necessity and theoretical exploration.

As these artists reveal globalized labor migration is not just a mediation of capital flow but the dislocation of human lives. The stories told by artists of the Filipino labor diaspora confronts the politics and poetics of displacement. By highlighting the mundane, they remind viewers that we are only given access to glimpses of their lives in the diaspora. These momentary windows reveal a full life negotiating the in-between state of leaving and creating homelands. By centering the humanity of globalized Filipino labor, the artists discussed in this dissertation assert that even a partial understanding of OFW experiences necessitates an acceptance of the subjective.

As art historians and visual culture scholars we should not be afraid to bring ourselves into the research. Acknowledging my subject position as a scholar is not just an act of transparency but is a critical site of inquiry. By speaking nearby, I am drawn to researching the conflicting emotions I watched my family negotiate. And yet, their experiences are not a model, but one of the many different stories found in

the labor diaspora. By accepting my personal stakes in this research, I gave myself space to confront and analyze the intimate dimensions of this work for the artists in this dissertation. This practice has made visible the diverse and powerful assertions of living in this expanded network. These artists and their works of art offer a new vision to understand the diasporic experience, one that moves away from the nation and its discourses. Instead, these artists center the emancipatory acts of the mundane and colloquial – moments of rest that are precious in this late stage of capitalism. Despite the overwhelming systems of governance that attempt to manage their lives, OFWs have always resisted conforming to the productive images made in their stead.

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