

**Far Beyond the Oceans, O Sa Mga Ibayong Dagat:
Terraformations of National and Diasporic Belonging in Filipino Canada**

Nadjie Danielle Mediavilla Magsumbol

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Abstract

This dissertation develops the theory of terraformation, which I define as a contested and co-constituted process of change that occurs at the political-affective terrains of belonging experienced at the scales of the nation-state and the diaspora. As this research project's case study is the Filipino diaspora in Canada, I therefore examine the ways in which terraformation as a process occurs across three scales. Mirroring the journey of the Filipino migrant to Canada, I begin in the Philippines through a critical discourse analysis of the annual State of the Nation Addresses from 1965 to 2025, before the point at which Filipino citizens-migrants depart the homeland. I argue that the Philippine state has terraformed Filipino citizenship from a *belonging* into a *possessive* in its commodification of Filipinos in Overseas Filipino Workers. I then follow the migrants in their move to Canada and the Filipino diaspora as they become migrant-citizens; I contend that families and individuals experience legal terraformations of belonging not only in accessing permanent residency and citizenship to Canada, but also in how the migrant-citizen's legal-affective relationship with the new home nation is influenced by the ways in which they are received into its social and cultural fabric. Finally, I examine how the diaspora challenges the terrains of diasporic and national identity within Canada as its new home nation. Particularly, I argue that through fictive works, the Philippines as a minoritised and racialised diaspora resists and unsettles the sedimented mainstream Canadian notion of Filipino identity in Canada as labourer, but that in doing so, it terraforms not only the ways in which the diaspora sees itself, but also how Canada as the new home nation understands itself vis-à-vis the diaspora. I conclude that terraformation as a theory of change and as a heuristic, with its insistence on remembering what has been invisibilised, has allowed me to explore the experience of the diaspora as a group that exists in contestation with political and cultural hegemony across the long span of political time.

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Chapter One: Limning the Borders of the Filipino Diaspora in Canada

A Prologue: Dis/Embodied Belonging(s)

On a sunny Wednesday morning in September 2024, I finished teaching a lecture and hurried out of the room to find a quiet place on campus. Unfamiliar with the lay of the land as a first time instructor at this institution, I was in search of a corner tucked away from the enthusiastic hubbub of students at the beginning of term. With the campus abuzz with students, it was a few buildings over from where I was teaching that I found a spot with a comfortable chair and a small table, and settled in. It was with mixed feelings of excitement and an unexpectedly wistful homesickness for the Philippines that I logged into Zoom on my laptop and readied myself to attend my virtual Canadian citizenship ceremony. Weeks ago when I received the invitation to swear the oath of allegiance to this country not of my birth but that I strongly consider to be home, I had believed that I knew what to expect — how the rituals would feel, where my thoughts would take me, and what the sensation would be like, in the immediate legal sense, to no longer be Filipino and simultaneously, to become Canadian.

In some ways, I was right: the images and video clips that were shown at the beginning of the ceremony were instantly recognizable to me as Canadiana. The presentation included symbols of nationalism that ran the gamut from snow to sports, and there was a particular bent regarding Indigenous-settler relations that spoke at official tone and volume about Canada's relationship with the ideals of Truth and Reconciliation. For new citizens, this part of the video served as an introduction to the visual language of what constitutes Canada's "national-cultural imaginaries," what would become our common conceptions of the nation which "draw on shared notions and images that form our senses of a collective knowing, belonging, and place" (Cooke 2016, p. 238). Yet I was also wrong: the experience of swearing in as a Canadian citizen using a videoconferencing technology that saw prominent use during the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) lockdowns from 2020 to mid-2022 (Wiederhold 2020) was, to put it lightly, surreal. A shared physical space would have been filled with the breaths and languages and feelings of many other soon-to-be Canadian citizens. Sitting alone in my corner, the atmosphere of the shared virtual room felt muffled and distant. I had anticipated a feeling of embodied nationalism in the ritual of being enfolded into the body politic, but what I felt instead was a disembodiment from the proceedings.

The surreal nature of the moment had only amplified by the time we were asked to swear the oath and sing the anthem in both French and English; being unable to interact with

several screens' worth of people who were 'gazing' at me while I did the same was to experience Bentham's panopticon made (virtual) flesh. Towards the end of the ceremony, we were asked to turn off our cameras so that only the presiding judge would be onscreen. On Zoom, cameras were deactivated and windows were minimized, on and on, until only the judge was visible — a wall of black screens that disconcertingly reminded me of teaching in the early days of isolation. With that measure in place, we were told that we could now take selfies with him using our phone cameras, photographs to serve as keepsakes of this momentous occasion: of becoming new Canadians. This, too, was different from the convention of taking a photo with the judge after the proceedings: a digital substitution, an attempt at virtual equivalencies for the accustomed-to rituals that happen in-person. Before I knew it, the ceremony was over. Through the beating of my heart pounding in my ears, I heard the judge greet us with a warm, "Welcome home." Just like that, I had become legally Canadian: fifteen years after I arrived in 2009 as a permanent resident, my PR card was in pieces, and I was now a citizen with access to a passport and the "right and responsibility to vote" (*After the citizenship ceremony*, 2024).

This legal recognition of membership in the body politic is distinct from my ongoing participation as a member of the body social and the body cultural. I have, as other immigrants have done before and after me, engaged in participatory acts of becoming Canadian prior to seeking out and being granted the privileges of legal citizenship. Members of the Filipino diaspora in Canada participate, continuously, in practices that re/configure their diasporic and national identities; often, immigrants partake in such community-based integrative social and cultural processes before they are eligible to apply for permanent residence or for Canadian citizenship. In describing the incorporation of Filipino temporary foreign workers (TFWs) into their local communities in Alberta, Tungohan defines this sociocultural experience of being integrated into the community using the principle of *jus domicile*, that "[t]hey are effectively Canadian, except that they do not have formal Canadian citizenship" (2017, p. 242).

From that September day onwards, I have been living what I consider a legally hyphenated life, despite having strongly felt the presence of the hyphen between Filipino and Canadian socially and culturally for over a decade. In the end, my citizenship ceremony was not a day-long affair with my family, like I had imagined it might be when I started my application. Rather, it was swift, official, and online. The virtual nature of a shared ceremony, alongside being in the solitary corner that I occupied on campus, contributed to the feeling of disembodiment that, for me, defined the experience of a Zoom citizenship ceremony. Despite sharing the same space and the same ceremony with over a hundred people, the virtual nature

of Zoom as a place meant that there were no shared glances of joy, no happy tears together while being inducted into the body of Canadian citizenry. Tucked away alone in a corner on campus, there was nobody to make eye contact with and smile.

A Nation of ‘Canadians’

As a Filipino¹ immigrant to Canada, who is also an academic studying the Filipino diaspora in Canada, I know through my lived experience and through academic study that my now-home country’s collective imagination of the acceptable immigrant is historically malleable, and has been subject to countless changes across the country’s histories. The country’s political conception of its national identity, how it understands itself, is what shapes how it understands the citizens that it admits into the nation; in other words, national identity shapes the constitution of the national body.

The national identity that Canada holds “is often defined in terms of its role in the world” (Berdahl and Raney 2010, p. 999). Contemporary Canada is known for its standing on the world stage as a nation-state that is a liberal democracy (Wood 2017) with an official policy of federal multiculturalism (“Multiculturalism” 2024), and pathways towards permanent residency and eventual citizenship that have been made available for some of its migrants (“Immigrate to Canada” 2024), those that it considers worthy of a place in the national body politic. It is widely considered to be a model of managing its migration streams from state and employment perspectives, although this reputation is contested by migrants rights activists and academics (Hennebry and Preibisch 2009; Vosko 2009). Alongside these relatively positive domestic attributes, Canada is perceived as a peacekeeper on the global stage in times of conflict (Dorn and Libben 2018); most recently, through Prime Minister Mark Carney’s speech at the 2026 World Economic Forum in Davos, Canada embraced its status as a global middle power, and called attention to the supposed political possibilities of a new world order now that the old world order is no more (Boynton 2026). These reputational touchpoints contribute towards its renown as a nation of immigrants that at its worst tolerates and at its best embraces newcomers warmly into its storied tapestry. Canada therefore enjoys a beneficent image both

¹ Tension between the use of the words ‘Filipino’ and ‘Filipinx’ is a debate that is often presented as a conflict between the homeland and the diaspora, primarily with the Filipino diaspora in the United States. Barrett, Hanna, and Palomar, in their 2021 essay titled *In Defense of the X*, examine the historicities of both words and centre the experiences of LGBTQI+ folks in their analysis. My personal stance is that the word Filipino can be a gender-neutral designation, but I respect the decisions of those who identify otherwise, which are often steeped in personal histories and politics. Throughout this dissertation, while I use the word Filipino to refer to myself, my interviewees refer to themselves using a variety of identifiers: some examples of terms they have used include *Pilipino*, Filipinx, Filipina, Kapampangan, and Bisaya.

domestically and globally, particularly in comparison to the more assimilative, melting pot repute of its southern neighbour, the United States (Sandercock 2009, p. 111). This positive image of a stable democracy, of well-managed streams, and in particular, of what seems to be a functioning liberal multiculturalism, has “furthered popular perceptions of the nation having made a successful transition from a white settler colony to a multiracial, multi-ethnic, liberal-democratic society” (Thobani 2007, p. 144).

For migrants who have been able to access pathways of permanent residency and Canadian citizenship, this image of warmth is further established through the official study guide for the citizenship test. The guidebook begins with the line “Canada has welcomed generations of newcomers to our shores to help us build a free, law-abiding, and prosperous society” (Discover Canada 2012, p. 3). This version of Canada that would-be-citizens encounter as they prepare to join the body politic is as uncomplicated as it is welcoming. Yet as Kymlicka argues with regards to Canada’s mosaic of multi-ethnic cultures, the “connotation of respect for the integrity of immigrant cultures... simply meant that immigrants to Canada had a choice of two dominant cultures to assimilate to” (1995, p. 14). English Canada and French Canada are the uneven pillars upon which the country is founded — the two founding nations doctrine (Krikorian et al 2017) — and Indigenous nations have never been granted this same distinguished role as a foundational pillar in these histories of Canadian beginnings. Those peoples who did not conform to Anglo-Canadian imaginations of what constituted desirable citizens were historically not given a warm welcome into the nation; this includes, for example, Black folks who were referred to as “physiologically ‘unsuited’ for the harsh Canadian climate” (Nzindukiyimana 2017, p. 1142), and Asian migrants who were described as “part of the unassimilable other” (Price 2013, p. 630). In comparable ways, the Filipino body and the Filipino diaspora are encountered through the notion of “diasporic unassimilability,” which in itself questions the Canadian nation-state’s “gendered fantasies of Filipino presence through and within representations of domestic(ated) subjects (whether through labour or food)” (Diaz 2018, p. 121). In the multiculturalism of contemporary Canada, those who are Othered by processes of marginalisation can become sedimented into specific places in the national mosaic; to be ‘embraced’ in such marginality creates tiered experiences of membership and belonging within the Canadian nation.

The racist sentiment of keeping Canada “White” was often taken to a ferocious conclusion. The phrase White Canada Forever² was initially deployed as an anti-immigrant slogan throughout British Columbia, and referenced the fact that “for much of Canadian history immigration policy explicitly favoured white, particularly British-origin, Protestants, who were viewed as ‘model citizens’,” (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2008, p. 38). racialised groups who fell outside of these codified boundaries were not perceived to be potential Canadians, and as such, were treated with forceful exclusions and/or coerced assimilations. Canada, during this period, explicitly “saw itself as not only British but also white” (Mann 2014, p. 255-256). This national perception of Canada and of the Canadian person as white was embedded not only in the popular imagination of the nation, but also in state policies; as Thobani argues, “the state therefore organized and solidified white racial identity as *political* (citizen) identity” (2007, p. 75). The documented ways in which the state treated those whom it excluded from the constitution of the national body can be found in its myriad violent policies and actions.

The violent mistreatment of Indigenous peoples ranged from the theft of Indigenous children and the erasure of cultures and histories through the imposition of residential school systems (Murray 2017) to eugenics through forced sterilisation (Dyck and Lux 2021) as well as the ongoing theft of land and unceded territories (O’Bonsawin 2009). For Chinese labourers whose work was necessary but whose presence was otherwise unwanted, the Chinese Head Tax was applied (Winter 2008) through the *Chinese Immigration Act* of 1855. While the Tax was abolished in the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923, this updated act served to further narrow points of entry for people of Chinese origin wishing to enter Canada. The Komagata Maru incident prohibited the landing of South Asian migrants on Canadian shores (Almy 2018) through the continuous journey legislation enacted in 1908, despite the passengers of the ship also being subjects of the British Empire. During World War II, the government utilised the *War Measures Act* to place Japanese Canadians in internment camps as enemy aliens, and their properties were seized and sold (Moorcroft 1998; Oikawa 2018). In that same time period, the government placed active constraints on Jewish immigration to Canada during the Holocaust and World War II (Abella and Troper 2023). Within the membership of its national body, Canada also sought to find and expel queer servicemen and women, considering their identities to be a weakness that could be exploited by enemy forces (Kinsman 2024).

² According to Yu (2011), the phrase “White Canada Forever” originates from “the early twentieth century, when anti-Asian politics ruled British Columbia” (p. 305). See Ward (1978/2002) *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Towards Orientals in British Columbia* for a historical analysis of Whiteness in BC, Canada.

The warm institutional welcome that is provided in the citizenship guide and the resultant ceremony therefore elides the racialising complexities defining a nation that was founded on the logics of White supremacy and settler colonialism (Wolfe 2006). Settler colonialism is a force that aims to disappear Indigenous lives: to be conferred disappearance is to *be disappeared* as one's Indigenous, sovereign self, and to be granted membership into the nation-state is to correspondingly *re-appear* as a Canadian subject; from this perspective, indigeneity and Canadian identity are rendered incompatible. In 1920, Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs Duncan Campbell Scott said: "Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politics and there is no Indian question, and no Indian department" (qtd. in Miller 2004, p. 35), a sentiment which defined the relationship between the state and Indigenous peoples. While contemporary Canada prides itself on the multicultural ideology of a mosaic, a national metaphor "which signifies separate pieces, that when combined, form a distinguishable entity but never lose their individual distinctiveness" (Abu-Laban 2002, p. 268), to be *disappeared* in this assimilative sense is to lose the distinctiveness of ethnic, cultural, and political identities into the broader imagination of an uncomplicatedly multicultural Canada. Nonetheless, the histories of the imagined Canadian community that is presented through the presentation and guidebook is not one that acknowledges the extent of these harms. Under the section *Who We Are*, the guidebook begins with *Aboriginal Peoples*. The entry reads (Discover Canada, 2012),

"From the 1800s until the 1980s, the federal government placed many Aboriginal children in residential schools to educate and assimilate them into mainstream Canadian culture. The schools were poorly funded and inflicted hardships on the students; some were physically abused. Aboriginal languages and cultural practices were mostly prohibited. In 2008, Ottawa formally apologized to the former students."

The "imagined community" (Anderson 1991) that is created by such an ideology "sets the terms for its own cultural production and works to naturalize and normalize structures of domination in ways that attempt to cleverly cover its colonizing tracks" (Cooke 2016, p. 236): to end this small introductory paragraph with the apology from the 2008 Harper government takes the would-be Canadian citizen from the distant past of the 1800s to the modern-day moment, post-2008, a journey which collapses the histories of settler colonialism into three significant points of historical time, ending at the point where the reader interacts with the pamphlet. This is the eternal fatalism of Canadian settler colonialism against Indigenous peoples — an intention of disappearance, altogether, or else to be assimilated into the regulated histories and polity of a Canadian nation-state, to the erasure and exclusion of Indigenous

sovereignty. Particularly for Indigenous peoples, a disappearance *into* an uncomplicated Canadian life is a non-recognition of sovereignty in the re-emergence of a subject. Echoing in the national anthem's contested refrain of Canada as '*our home and native land*,' the modern nation is "haunted by its tenuous sense of place and uncertainty about the relationship between Canada and the claim to nativeness" (Kalant 2004, p. 5).

The racial rhetorics surrounding the kind of person that constitutes the Canadian nation — rhetorics which have been used discursively to define the Other — are therefore fluid, changing over time. Yet the implications of a national identity against which multiculturalism is defined has effects that continue to the present day. In my initial conversation with Hazel, an interviewee who came to Toronto in 2019, I asked if she felt an attachment to the idea of Canadian identity, particularly as a permanent resident who would soon be eligible to apply for Canadian citizenship; this question she facetiously answered with, "*Mukha ba akong Canadian? Do I look Canadian?*" Hazel's response, a sentiment which comes out of her experiences in Canada as a recent immigrant of Filipino descent — a member of a visible minority group who is racialised in particularly gendered and labour-oriented ways — indicates that she understands herself as being a person who is not immediately legible as 'Canadian.' In Hazel's answer, to be Canadian is not necessarily defined by holding legal citizenship or having affective attachments to the nation; rather, the social parameters of being Canadian excludes being Filipino. What a Canadian person looks like, Hazel implies, is not the same as what a *Filipino* person looks like. In whichever manner it is that she initially apprehends what Canadians look like, Hazel has an awareness that it is not *her*. Despite Canada's reputation as a federally multicultural nation, migrants like Hazel recognise the primacy of a Canadian person that is unmarked by racialised and minoritised identities.

The citizenship guidebook for new Canadians is therefore an ahistorical initial welcome, an introduction to a Canada that conforms to the beneficence that is projected by the contemporary discourses of a multiculturalism, one which serves to obscure "colonial and imperial legacies by constructing a cultural mosaic based on celebrations of superficial aspects of diverse cultures" (Brown 2008, p. 376). In its own mythologies Canada is "a just, diverse and benevolent nation that 'accommodates' the needs of ethnically and culturally diverse communities of people" (de Leon 2014, p. 144); these mythologies serve to culturalise a complex politics of difference and power that structures Canada as a nation-state. Even as Canada is known on the world stage for its political and social magnanimity, it engages in acts of settler colonialism, acts which "[involve] not only the territorial domination of one culture

by another, but also forms of discursive appropriation: other cultures become appropriated into the imaginary globality of the colonising nation” (Ahmed 2000, p. 11). The multiculturalism of its diaspora groups, many of whom are racialised and minoritised, are used to define a nation which has two primary cultures against which the ‘multi’ are then defined. This Canadian expression of multiculturalism, which includes such ‘discursive appropriation,’ has “enabled the nation-state to claim as part of its rightful property the cultural heritage and identity of every other nation in the world from which immigrants had arrived” (Thobani 2007, p. 153). The spectacle of multiculturalism therefore involves not only the embrace of racialised diaspora groups into the cultural mosaic of Canada, but also the commodification of heritage in cultural artefacts such as performance and culinaria.

Yet, while the unmarked Canadian body is primarily defined by a particular sort of Whiteness, to ‘be’ Canadian in the contemporary moment, at least in theory, is to be a *member* of a nation that warmly welcomes new migrants — including migrants of colour. Thus, the incorporation of the identity of multicultural immigrant nation into the lexicon of the national imaginary ensconces the notion of a warm and welcoming nation domestically and internationally.

A Familial History of Canadian Immigration

As an immigrant to this country, my life is shaped by how the Canadian nation imagines itself as a community — as a political multiculturalism which includes the distinct experiences of the Filipino diaspora — alongside my family’s collective and individual migration narratives. Stuart Hall observes about the “enunciation” of the self: “[w]e all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific” (1990/2021, p. 222). Inevitably, therefore, this dissertation is underpinned by the positionalities and social locations that I inhabit as a researcher and member of the Filipino diaspora in Canada,. For my specific cohort of Filipino migrant youth, the children of Filipina live-in caregivers, many of us were not born here, but arrived as children or youth and have stayed in our own adulthoods. How I understand the relationships that I have encountered in this dissertation between families, members of families, citizens, and nation-states is coloured not only by my academic training, but also by my experiences as a Canadian citizen who was able to gain permanent residency through my mother’s work in the Live-in Caregiver Program (1992-2014).

In a story that is textbook when it comes to the participation of Filipino women in labour outmigration in the 1990s, my mother left the Philippines in her early thirties to work abroad

as a domestic helper. In her physical absence, her side of the family became carers and legal guardians for my brother and me: my aunts, uncles, older cousins, and other members of our family more distant perhaps than these closer relations. To be cared for by members of the family outside the immediacy of parents in the way that my brother and I were raised is not an uncommon arrangement in transnational families in the Philippines.³

Educated at the University of Negros Occidental-Recoletos and graduating with a bachelor's degree in mass communications, my mother experienced deprofessionalisation early in her journey of being an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW). She made her way first to Hong Kong in 1995, and then migrated to Canada, landing in Ottawa in 2003 and moving to Toronto later; in both of these places, under differing migration regimes, she was a live-in care and domestic worker. My mother made the decision to undertake this process of step-migration to be able to send for my brother and I at a future date; China does not have the same pathways to permanent residency and citizenship that my mother was able to access through the now-defunct Live-in Caregiver Program (Bakan and Stasiulis 1997; Brickner and Straehle 2010). Making the decision to come to Canada through the LCP meant that she might have the opportunity to claim her children, and to live in a future where her family was finally together in the same country, and under one roof. After many years of separation, my mother successfully reunited our family in the summer of 2009, over a decade after she first left the Philippines: when she left for Hong Kong, my brother and I were 3 and 5, and at the time of our reunification in Toronto, we were 15 and 19. In a fiercely brave act, my single mother paid for our family's better future with the long years of our separation and the precarities of low-waged migrant domestic work. The domestic sphere of the home as a geography of international labour is one whose infrastructure "figuratively and literally conceals the exploitation of the labour of live-in care and domestic workers, perpetuating the invisibility of racialised bodies performing the work of social reproduction necessary to maintain Canada's middle class and affluent families" (Magsumbol 2018). Even as my mother was employed to care for other families' children, it would take many years of service before she was eligible for permanent residency and thus be able to care for her own children proximally, rather than from a distance and mediated by technologies of communication, remittances, and *balikbayan* boxes.⁴

³ See Francisco-Menchavez's *Labor of Care* for an extensive ethnography of transnational family relations in the Filipino-American context.

⁴ A box full of shelf-stable goods that OFWs send back to the Philippines from their states of employment, filled with goods like canned items (such as corned beef and Spam), clothing, and luxuries like chocolates, as well as

Through the LCP, my mother was granted permanent residency. She was also able to access this privilege for me and my brother. When we landed at Pearson Airport in 2009, it was as permanent residents. We were merely two of many young Filipinos who arrived to join our parents — mostly our mothers — in Canada. For those of us who are children and families of the Filipina labour diaspora, our histories of reunification, which include the aftereffects of the LCP, are complicated. Jennilee Austria-Bonifacio, begins her novel *Reuniting With Strangers*⁵ with a question: “Why do we call it ‘the motherland’ when it isn’t where our mothers are?” The traumas of our separations, reflected in the question that Austria-Bonifacio poses, are measured in distances of geography as well as emotionality, and the vexed reunifications that are experienced by transnational families have long been the subject of much concern and academic study (Pratt 2006; de Leon 2008; Tungohan et al 2015; Pratt, Zell, Johnston and Venzon 2020; Ticar 2025).

After my initial arrival in Toronto, I went back to the Philippines to finish the last semester of my nursing degree; I left home for good a month after my graduation from the University of St. La Salle-Bacolod in 2010. I situate myself as a child of the Filipina labour diaspora through my mother’s journey as an OFW,⁶ and simultaneously, as having been in training to join the labour diaspora separately as a nurse. I was one of many Filipinos in the ‘00s and the ‘10s who were expected to or had elected to train as nurses with the explicit goal of leaving the Philippines and working abroad (Choy 2003; Masselink and Lee 2010; Damasco in Sintos Coloma et al 2012). At the time of my nursing education, the boom in the Philippine nursing industry was such that there were medical doctors who were undergoing re-training as nurses in order to make labour outmigration easier (Choo 2003). Gardiner Barber describes

the iconic bars of Irish Spring soap and bundles of Colgate toothpaste in addition to their remittances. In Filipino culture, art, and academic analyses, balikbayan boxes (literally, ‘return home’ boxes) are physical manifestations of intangible care from the migrant to their family. Velasco notes that they “represent the affective and material relationships of Filipina/o expatriates to their country of origin, as well as the dependence of the Philippine economy on the remittances of Filipina/o migrant workers” (2020, p. 22). The box serves to emplace the migrant where she is not: through acts of consistent giving, “the migrant engages in performance that affectively situates her in the bounded, private and domestic (and therefore intimate) spaces of home” (Camposano 2012, p. 89). Camposano’s work on migrant women in Hong Kong gestures towards a gendered aspect to the boxes, as he notes that in his fieldwork, “there was general agreement that men very rarely, if ever, engage in sending balikbayan boxes” (2012, p. 94). In research done by McCallum about Filipinos in Japan, he notes that only one of his male interviewees sends boxes home (2022, p. 853).

⁵ A chapter of *Reuniting With Strangers* is explored in more detail in Chapter Seven, alongside Louie Leyson’s *Glossary for an Aswang* and Motzie Dapul’s *Hi, Nay*.

⁶ In a political choice made at this juncture, I specifically note that I am a child of the Filipina labour diaspora because OFWs like my mother were a part of the feminization of the global work force from the Philippines that began in the late 80s and 90s; much of the work that is performed by OFWs is bifurcated along gender lines, with jobs and careers such as seafaring, construction, and engineering populated by men, and entertainment, domestic work, and nursing populated by women.

this process of re-training as a way “for Filipino doctors to retool—put differently to deskill themselves,” (2009 p. 1279) an occupational trajectory which reflects the fact that Western labour markets accepted the training and expertise of Philippine-trained nurses, but not that of Philippine-trained doctors. The historical and ongoing processes of labour migration that the Philippine state participates in has meant that many Filipino citizens from the country’s working- and middle-class families were raised and educated to seek work abroad, to participate in the life cycle of leaving and returning as labour migrants, and to contribute to the now US\$39B strong remittance cycle (World Bank 2025, “Personal remittances, received [current US\$]”). In *Glossary for an Aswang*, Louie Leyson writes under the entry for ‘Excess’: “The Philippines is a place in which everyone is born already wanting to leave” (2023), a line which, while written in the 2020s, certainly rings true for the time of my university education and training in the Philippines from 2006 to 2010. Many of the folks who I attended university with are now working as nurses all over the world, including New Zealand, the UAE, the UK, the US, and Canada.

My brother and I both entered the Canadian education system upon our arrivals: grade ten for him and the pursuit of a second bachelor’s degree for me. Alongside the timing of the immigration process, what my mother’s serendipitous choice of Canada as her migration destination granted me, and the reason that this dissertation is now in your hands, was a chance to begin again. I was 19, turning 20 in a few months at the time of my arrival. In my mother’s words, “You’re still young. You have time.”

I continued my studies at the Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology (now Seneca Polytechnic), and through the Liberal Arts program, was able to transfer to the University of Toronto for my BA and eventually my MSc in Planning. I came to the realization that the educational system’s first point of encounter in the classroom with the Filipino immigrant experience — if at all (Sintos Coloma et al 2012; Mendoza in Sintos Coloma et al 2012) — was often through the traumas of separation as well as through the status of Filipinos as workers. Yet the Filipino experience of labour migration to Canada, I found, was rarely taught from the perspective of Filipino-Canadian voices and Filipino-Canadian scholars, and seldom with the acknowledgement that Canada’s importation of international care and domestic labour through temporary foreign workers was one which subsidized the social reproduction of the country “with no additional costs to the state” (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2014, p. 194). In other words, as Canada imported workers to care for the very young and the very elderly within the ostensible privacy of Canadian homes, exploitations of labour and traumas

of family separation occurred with the requirement of living-in alongside the lack of protections afforded to migrant workers. The social reproductive costs of the supposedly-cheap labour that was considered necessary for the continuation of care work were borne by migrant workers themselves and the families they were distant from. With the exception of scholarship by feminist scholars — such as Bakan and Stasiulis 1997; Stiell and England 1997; INTERCEDE 2001; Asis 2005; Mahon 2005; McKay 2005; Bezanson and Luxton 2006; Arat-Koç 2006; Pratt with PWC and FCYA 2006; Tungohan 2013; and England 2017 — migrant labour is often framed as a policy that answers an economic necessity for a rapidly-growing nation with labour needs it can not fill, yet which has little regard for the human costs of such subsidized and necessary labour.

Research Questions and Objectives

It is thus as a child of a Filipina labour migrant who is now studying labour, migration, and diaspora in Canada that I approach and frame this research project. The place that is Filipino Canada is limned with the negotiations of these displacements and emplacements; amongst these negotiations, for many members of the diaspora, Canada becomes home. In her book *Home Economics: Nationalism and the Making of 'Migrant Workers' in Canada*, Sharma describes home as “an idea that masquerades as a place” (2005, p. 8); reflecting upon the political-affective tensions that exist in the idea of home as it is used in the politics of global migrations, peoples on the move, and the contested geographies of territories, throughout this dissertation I refer to the Philippines as the ‘home of origin,’ and Canada as a ‘new home state’ rather than a ‘host state.’

In following the experiences of the Filipino diaspora — from the top-down politics and presidential rhetorics that have led to neoliberal changes in the expectations of citizens, to the multigenerational experiences of migrant families navigating their relationships with each other as well as with their diasporic and national identities, and finally, to fictive works created by members of the diaspora that unsettle the relationship between diaspora and nation/s — I examine the long, multigenerational process that is the *terraformation of belonging*. I use terraformation as a heuristic: in seeking to understand the changes in the way that diaspora populations experience and understand legal-affective modalities of belonging, terraformation allows me to situate the transformations of belonging not as a singular process that a nation-state imposes on its citizen-migrants, but rather, as contested processes that are characterised by negotiations, actions, and counter-actions. Briefly, my use of terraformation focuses on a characterisation of migration as a world-change; terraformation is an unsettling of what has

been buried, erased, or forgotten, as well as a disruption of what has been sedimented in terms of diasporic and national meanings regarding belonging and identity formation. These contestations — indeed, these terraformations — have changed not only the meanings of being Filipino, but also the meanings of Canada and being Canadian at the individual, diasporic, and national scales. I echo the question that Martini asks: “When devising terraforming, whose knowledge counts?” (2025, p. 6) — in this particular application, I elevate the knowledge and lived experiences of the Filipino diaspora in Canada. Theorising terraformation, including its colonial and imperial applications and my departure from this mode of thinking, is explored in detail in Chapter Two and throughout the dissertation.

This dissertation is animated by the following questions:

- (1) What are the processes by which states terraform the notion of belonging? Specifically, how has the Philippines terraformed its conceptualisation of belonging, specifically in the legal status of citizenship, through its neoliberal investment in its role as a labour broker in the global labour market? How have expectations surrounding citizenship changed in these investments?
- (2) How are internal modes of belonging terraformed when migrants leave the Philippines and settle in Canada? In what ways do families and members of families terraform notions of belonging, specifically in the form of cultural, legal-affective, and national identities, in the new home nation?
- (3) Finally, how do racialised and minoritised diaspora populations resist their sedimentation into specific places in the multicultural mosaic? How do fictive works contribute towards a terraformation of multicultural Canadian national identity that resists the invisibilisation of the ongoing effects of migration?

Research Context

I. The Philippines as a Sending Country

How did the Philippines come to occupy the labour export niche that it currently does? In 1974, Ferdinand Edralin Marcos Sr. signed Presidential Decree 422 into law: the Labor Code of the Philippines. This decree established the Overseas Employment Development Board under Article 17; one of this board’s stated goals is “[t]o promote the overseas employment of Filipino workers through a comprehensive market promotion and development program” (PD 442, Republic of the Philippines). McGovern-Lindio argues that this labour code is one example of the ways in which Philippine labour has been shaped by Marcos Sr.’s turn towards neoliberal governance (2023). In part, the constitution of Filipino citizens as desirable, hyperflexible, and extra-territorial migrant workers is linked to the global standing of the state

at the very early stages of the establishment of the national labour export policies: the Official Gazette of the Philippines states that: “[i]t is the policy of the State,” under Article 12, Statement of objectives (g), “[t]o insure careful selection of Filipino workers for overseas employment in order to protect the good name of the Philippines abroad” (1974). The reputation of the Philippines as a purveyor of market-ready migrant workers was to be protected through the supervision of migrant behaviour.

In 1995, two decades after the establishment of the labour export policies, the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act was signed into law by Fidel Valdez Ramos. This Act was a means by which the Philippine state could “[establish] that it would no longer develop programs for the promotion of migration and would only see to the protection of migrant workers” (Parreñas 2021, p. 1051), with claims that “it simply manages labor migration by supporting the desires, choices, and freedom of Filipinos to work overseas” (Guevarra 2010, p. 23). In 2021, Rodrigo Duterte founded the Department of Migrant Workers under Republic Act 11641, which aims to “protect the rights and promote the welfare of Overseas Filipino Workers and their families” (RA 11641, Republic of the Philippines); this is a continuation of the previously-established rhetoric that the state does not promote but rather “supports” and now “protects the rights” of Filipino migrant workers when they choose to engage in overseas work.

While labour outmigration was “an important measure to curb the political unrest likely to be exacerbated by un- and underemployment” of the 1970s (Rodriguez 2010, p. 12), the Philippines of today is well-established in its role as a labour brokerage state (Guevarra 2010; Rodriguez 2010). These labour export policies were intended to be a temporary measure at the time of their implementation, but subsequent administrations have “institutionalized the management and regulation of migrants for export” (Francisco-Menchavez 2019, p. 91). The People Power Revolution⁷ in 1986 that overthrew the Marcos dictatorship did not lead to policies that prioritised internal investment in labour opportunities; rather, labour outmigration has become part and parcel of the Philippine economy. With the inclusion of the current sitting president, there have now been seven administrations since the Philippine state began to actively send out its citizens as labourers worldwide in the 1970s: Corazon Aquino, Fidel V. Ramos, Joseph Estrada, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, Benigno Aquino III, Rodrigo Duterte, and Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr. With no exceptions, all seven presidents have continued to

⁷ Also known as the EDSA Revolution, discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

entrench the Philippines as a labour export broker in the global labour market: the Philippine Statistics Authority reported in 2021 that there “[a]pproximately more than 2,000,000 overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) leave the country annually, the majority of whom are women” (qtd. in Lindio-McGovern 2023, p. 226). Thus, the globalisation of Filipino labour cannot be disentangled from the feminisation of labour and the discourse surrounding the role of women as mothers in transnational families.

The Philippines, according to Rodriguez, “engages in diplomatic negotiations with labor-receiving countries to formalize transfers of labor” (2010, p. 53), adding that “[n]o privately owned labor recruitment agency has the capacity to map global labor market trends in the way the Philippine government can, equipped as it is with a global apparatus of embassy and consular offices” (p. 54). Despite the assertion of the Philippine state regarding its supposed turn towards support, management, and protection of rights rather than being an active promoter of labour outmigration, the Philippines has forged bilateral labour agreements between itself and various labour extractive countries. Agreements exist, for example, between the Philippines and Canada to cover professional labour shortages, and specifically to send Filipino nurses to the provinces of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta (Cabanda 2020, p. 413), itself a mirror of transnational hiring events that occurred in the 1960s when Canada was actively recruiting nurses from hospitals in the Philippines to work in Canada (Damasco in Sintos Coloma et al 2012; see also, Malek 2021).

Temporally connecting the large-scale migration of Filipino people to the Global North to the American colonial occupation of the islands, Rodriguez makes the argument that the cornerstone of contemporary infrastructures of departure that form the basis of the “labor brokerage system in the Philippines is in large part a result of the US colonial legacy,” (2010, p. 1) with the “colonial labor system under the United States, including the introduction of training programs for overseas employment and the labor recruitment industry” (p. 9) leading to the eventual establishment of large-scale state institutions that serve the training and pre-departure orientation needs of overseas workers. The labour diaspora itself, therefore, “is a product of colonial and neocolonial relations,” (Guevarra 2010, p. 31-32) with “global labor market dynamics and colonial legacies” having created conditions that “put the country into a trajectory of economic crisis” (p. 32) that has led to its citizens making the decision to leave in search of opportunities that they believe can be found elsewhere both for themselves and their children. The arguments that Rodriguez and Guevarra put forward in regarding the departure of Filipino citizens are reflected in the conversations that I had with my interlocutors for this

research project — explored in detail in Chapters Four, Five, and Six — over a decade after their analyses were published.

Variously extolled as highly-skilled, specially-trained, and fluent in the current global lingua franca of English, the vast employability of the Filipino citizen-as-migrant-worker can be witnessed in the “incredible occupational diversity” of this labour diaspora (Camroux 2008, p. 12) that spans from singers and dancers in Disneyland Hong Kong (Fortich 2013), to Filipino men who dominate the seafaring industry (Fajardo 2011), to live-in caregivers in Canada (Tungohan 2023), and nurses across the world from New Zealand (Jenkins and Huntington 2015) to the United Kingdom (Buchan 2006) to the United States (Choy 2003). Polanco’s analysis of Filipino labour migration asserts that “[h]aving a workforce that is ‘superior’ and in line with foreign demand is central to competing under saturated conditions” (2017, p. 66); not only are Filipino workers marketed as having a world-class reputation as workers, they also receive requisite culturally-sensitive training specific to the regions that they then enter. Through the Pre-Departure Orientation Sessions (PDOS),⁸ workers are trained to be perceptive to cultural differences and made aware of sociocultural practices in their new countries of employment — a sensitivity which, often, will not be extended to them, as evidenced by the abuse and labour exploitation that migrant workers experience as foreigners in their countries of employment. The lack of protections that are associated with the lack of status exacerbates the asymmetry of power that exists between citizen-employer and foreign-employee. The effects of such an imbalance was rendered visible as early as the 1990s: Filipina domestic worker Flor Contemplacion was executed in Singapore in 1995 after being sentenced to death in 1993 for the alleged 1991 murder of fellow domestic worker Della Marga and Contemplacion’s ward (Liow 2023). Then-president Fidel Valdez Ramos requested a stay of execution from Singaporean president Ong Teng Cheong, but this request was refused and Contemplacion was executed, an event which to widespread protests against Ramos and strained political relations between the Philippines and Singapore (Liow 2023, p. 159).

From this abbreviated historical view, it is apparent that “migration has evolved from a stopgap measure to the point where labor has simply become part of the export economy” (Dudwick 2011, p. 447); Filipino workers are being exported as commodities in the global political economy of labour. Bannerji puts forward the argument that “what we have come to call globalization is both an economic and cultural imperialism” (2000, p. 3): the machineries

⁸ The PDOS is required of all Filipinos emigrating outside of the country, not just workers but also those family members who have been petitioned to join their families in other countries, including children.

of labour import, in bringing in workers *and* commodities, also sees workers *as* commodities. Under global imperialistic regimes, nations and borders selectively open and close their borders to temporary labour/ers depending upon the demands that they need filled, although internally, borders are not as generous or as porous with regards to migrant workers seeking to transition towards permanent residency or citizenship. In Canada, for example, “precarious legal status” is considered to be “a defining feature of Canada’s immigration system” (Gardner et al 2021, p. 156).

Building on the work of Guevarra and Rodriguez regarding the commodification of the Filipino as migrant worker, I understand the ongoing commodification of the Filipino worker to be an effect not only on the worker themselves, but in the *citizenship* of the worker. As a legal status, citizenship is the means by which certain members of the Filipino body politic are made accessible to the state as export commodities for use in maintaining its role in the global labour market. In other words, the labour brokerage status that the Philippine state continues to invest in has terraformed the notion of belonging that is embedded in the framework of citizenship. Neoliberal labour policies have stretched what being a citizen entails: from the perspective that to be a good citizen is to be the citizen-as-worker, to its expansive demand of good citizenship that now stipulates that a good citizen must be the citizen-as-*migrant*-worker, one who is willing and able to labour not only within the borders, but also external to the country, according to global labour demands and its effects on the local economy.

II. Canada as a Receiving Country for the Filipino-Canadian Diaspora

The word ‘diaspora’ connotes a sense of motion, of movement *away* from a homeland and a corresponding movement *towards* the new home; Mavroudi describes diaspora formation as “the fixing and unfixing of boundaries of identity, community and the nation-state, and the ways in which people may be immobile, or caught within and between such borders” (2007, p. 473). The movement of migrants *away* from their places of origin — or even from places of temporary settlement or refuge — is therefore bookended by their movement *into* new spaces which are inhabited by both strangers and co-ethnics. Filipino migrants who decide to make their way to Canada in the contemporary moment are entering a country that is home to a total of 957,000 Filipinos living in Canada, a group which comprises around 2.6% of the country’s total population (Canadian Census 2022).

According to a Malek’s *Filipinos in Canada: A Historical and Demographic Overview*, Filipinos have been immigrating to Canada since at least the 1880s (2021, p. 8); more recent

waves of the diaspora include professionals such as nurses and accountants who were recruited from the Philippines in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the hyper-representation of Filipino live-in care and domestic workers in the 1990s through to the 2000s. A closer look at data that is offered by Statistics Canada presents a snapshot of the diaspora. A reported 161,495 Filipinos live in Toronto, with 133,340 in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), and 355,680 living in the rest of Ontario (City of Toronto 2022). Of this population, the gender breakdown is Men+ with 154,820, and Women+ with 200,8601 (2021 Census of Population). Within the Filipino community, 62% — about 6 out of 10 Filipinos — report participating in “at least one social or community group, association, or organization” (Statistics Canada 2022). In 2001, Lindsay reported that 78% of Canadians who were of “Filipino origin said that they had a strong sense of belonging to Canada” (Statistics Canada). This strong feeling of belonging that Lindsay reports is reflected twenty years later in the 2022 Census, which reported an even higher proportion of Filipinos feeling that they belong, with “over 9 in 10 (92.0%) report[ing] a somewhat strong or very strong sense of belonging to Canada” (Statistics Canada 2023).

Filipinos in Canada are often perceived in ways that emphasise the labour of their bodies, in part due to the hypervisibility of Filipinos in the now-defunct live-in caregiver program, as well as in other service-oriented roles across the country. Farrales argues that the prominence of understanding the Filipinx body as a labouring body creates “a political subject tied to forms of citizenship contained by the heteropatriarchal nation-state” (2025, p. 957), and that therefore, in their research, they “[look] for the ways that Filipinx peoples exceed how their bodies matter only if, when, and where they labour” (p. 958). Beyond the notion of the Filipino-as-migrant-worker is a reckoning with Canadian identity that reflects not only the work of belonging that the diaspora group engages in, but also a reminder to a liberal multiculturalism that the politics of diversity exists beyond the spectacle of food and performance. The Filipino diaspora in Canada, and the experiences that have been shared by my interviewees, is a mirror that reflects to the new home nation the invisibilised effects of what I have been referring to as a sedimentation in the national mosaic. Labour seems to be a sticky label that has been affixed to the Filipino diaspora in Canada in mainstream understandings of the community; the diaspora exists beyond this label, as evidenced in the conversations that I had with members of the diaspora, as well as in the fictive works that speak to the Canadian experience of Filipino migrants. The context of belonging to a community, whether the diaspora group or the nation, is itself defined against the presence and identity of the Other, a process which, as Sharma argues, “works to delimit home as that which stands in

contrast to all things defined as foreign or ‘unfamiliar’” (2005, p. 10). For the Filipino diaspora in Canada, who are themselves encountered as the “foreign” and the “unfamiliar,” in this dissertation, I interrogate the ways in which they have engaged with their identities as Canadians, and in the context of Canada as home.

Methodologies

Writing about the need to decolonise Western methodologies that are used to study Indigenous peoples, Tuhiwai Smith argues that conducting research, “is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions” (1999, p. 5). Therefore, what is at stake for me as a researcher is the necessity of creating and maintaining ethical relations with my community, even as I write about our lives in the Canadian diaspora and produce the rigorous work that is necessary for this dissertation. While they are writing from an Indigenous Māori perspective, I carry Tuhiwai Smith’s precaution with me in my studies of Filipino Canada. I am wary of reproducing research interactions with communities of interest that are singularly one-way relationships, benefiting the researcher or the institution but not offering meaningful ways of giving back to the community at hand. In crafting a research plan to study the experiences of a population that is minoritised and racialised in the context of Canadian multiculturalism, I anchored my research process in two specific methodological approaches that sought to mitigate the concerns that I had about the extractive nature of research and data gathering.

First, I began the interviews with an honest introduction of my positionality as a researcher who is also a recognised member of the community. Examining the phenomenon of insider research, Taylor proposed the idea of the “intimate insider” as a status wherein “the researcher is working, at the deepest level, within their own ‘backyard’ that is, a contemporary cultural space with which the researcher has regular and ongoing contact” (2011, p. 9). Taylor’s conceptualisation of ongoing contact as that which grants intimate knowledge is resonant with my own work, where — in addition to my own lived experience as a community member — the relationships I have cultivated with individuals and community groups have added nuance to the paths which my research has taken. In practice, my methodology of intimate insider status is not one that is solely defined by taking, but also of giving and participating.

Second, I turned towards interpretivist methodologies, which “see[s] individuals as unique, and human activities, actions, and social formations as unique historical expressions of human meaning and intention” (Halperin and Heath 2017, p. 49). Interpretivist knowledge “is

integrally linked to the participants and the context of the research,” which means that while the themes that emerge may not be considered “universally applicable,” they are considered to be “rich and contextually situated understandings” (McChesney and Aldridge 2019, p. 227) of the situation at hand. When my interviewees and I spoke about politics, about culture, and about experiences of immigration, our shared contexts through our circumstances as migrants provided a rich terrain upon which the conversations were grounded. To embrace the language used by Tadiar in *Fantasy Productions* when they write about being ‘there’ when the Marcos dictatorship was ended by the EDSA Revolution: “I too am both historical actor and historian. I am not far removed from what I describe” (2004, p. 189). As a scholar with established roots and recognized membership with the community that I study, my personal points of encounter with Filipino Canada means that I have firsthand and intimate knowledge of many of the experiences of im/migration that are points of common knowledge between myself and my interviewees.

Yet, I am cognizant that asking questions that pertain to a person’s lived experience “is not a straightforward matter of asking someone with that experience the ‘correct’ questions and thereby, being granted unmediated access to a readily understandable, static, and authentic ‘truth’ about the phenomena being studied” (Thompson 2022, p. 372). The research relationship between myself and my interlocutors are mediated by many aspects of our identities and engagements, not least my status as a doctoral researcher. The ways in which my interviewees and I encountered each other, whether in-person or on Zoom, were mediated by the similar or differing ways in which we were fellow members of the Filipino diaspora in Canada, as well as the conditions that we mutually believed were vital to record and to reflect upon about the community. While I consider myself to be an intimate insider, I have an awareness that there are experiences that I myself am not proximal to, and I have taken care to not impose my own meanings on participants narratives’ during the interviews.

Particularly at moments when emotions, positive or negative, were emerging in the conversations, I remembered Ahmed’s reminder that “[e]motions in their very intensity involve miscommunication, such that even when we feel we have the same feeling, we don’t necessarily have the same relationship to the feeling” (2015, p. 10). As a researcher, Ahmed’s theorisation was a cogent reminder to not presuppose the emotions that my interviewees felt regarding politics, family, or experiences that they had as migrants to Canada. My proximity to the subject matter does not mean that I know exactly how my interviewees interpret the contexts within which they find themselves; their truths and interpretations are theirs, as is the

emotion that have suffused their experiences. In the positivist tradition, Jaggar argues that “the influence of emotion is usually seen only as distorting or impeding observation or knowledge” (1989, p. 161), yet the emotions that are associated with migrants as people and migration as processes were inextricable from the political speeches, the multigenerational interviews, or the cultural production of fictive works that I interrogate in later chapters. I encountered my research participants’ emotionalities and met them with my own — in this dissertation, I highlight peoples’ knowledges of emotion as also being knowledges in emotion. Emotions are part and parcel of world-building (Jaggar 1989), and are especially visible in the context of how diasporas contribute towards the terraformation of belonging in their identities as diasporic peoples and as members of nations.

I consider these methodologies — of being an interpretivist scholar and an ‘intimate insider’ whose work prioritises being in a reciprocal relationship with the community I study — to be a modality of a “queer research praxis,” a reminder to position my research, my analysis, and the body of my work in such a way as to “continually interrogate the normative and the hegemonic” (Tungohan and Catungal 2022, p. 5). In queering hetero/normative research practices, I turn towards Fajardo’s notion of queerness as “geographically, socially, and epistemologically alternative or oppositional in the broader sense of nonconforming nonnormativity, that is, a site of alternative geographic, social, and epistemological formations that challenges or resists dominant paradigms” (2014, p. 119); that is, in researching the lives of the Filipino diaspora through familial interviews and an analysis of fictive works produced by the diaspora about the diaspora, I take a step towards prioritising the subaltern, and highlight not only how the diaspora defines itself, but how the diaspora understands its identities and its place vis-à-vis its new home nation, Canada.

These methodological approaches towards the community as a field of research inspires an ethics of care, one that I have sought to embed in this dissertation and in my broader research work. I emphasise de Leon and Tungohan’s calls as researchers in relation “with each other and with our community,” that such relations are “crucial in disrupting the violence of neoliberal state and academic institutions” (forthcoming, p. 73). I begin, therefore, from a place of care, where I endeavour to mitigate foreseeable harms during our interviews. This type of care, as Tronto defines it, is a “care that implicitly suggests that it will lead to some type of action” (1994, p. 102); it is a care that leads towards not only the creation but also the continued practice of an ethical reciprocity and participation.

Methods of Research

To answer the questions that I have raised, I utilised a multi-methods, interdisciplinary approach to data gathering and analysis. The data yielded by these methods weave together a tapestry of Filipino Canada that acknowledges its temporal and geographic rootings as a diaspora, and in turn, emplaces it in various social and political locations across the terrain of Canada. I use the term ‘emplace’ to denote the ways in which a diaspora situates itself in the new terrain of the new home nation, and how it contributes to the meaning-making and terraformation of such a place. In the field of ecolinguistics, a *place* is defined as “a process wherein emplaced relations contribute to how manifold human and nonhuman actions make worlds (and experiences),” and in this sense, meaning “arises through and by coordinative activity that binds place, bodies, languages, and mind” (Döring, Cowley, and Steffenson 2026, p. 10). Place, too, can be understood as “experienced and lived,” and therefore “are essential components of political and social relations” (Ethington and McDaniel 2007, p. 132); a politics of place, which I explore here through the theory of terraformation, is one which reflects the geographies and social contexts of migration. Below are the three methods which I utilised in this dissertation:

- (1) A thematic discourse analysis
- (2) Individual and paired focus group interviews
- (3) Critically reading fictive works through the lens of the Canadian Gothic.

First, I deploy a thematic discourse analysis of political speeches as text: the constitutionally-mandated annual State of the Nation Addresses (SONAs) delivered by the incumbent Philippine president from 1965 to 2025. Presented in Chapter Three, I trace how presidents as heads of state have enunciated their changing notions of who the ideal Filipino citizen is over past six decades through the SONAs, and how such transitions — alongside an investment in the neoliberal paradigms of participating in global labour through the provision of cheap workers — have terraformed a national understanding of belonging that manifests in the discourse of expectations, rewards, and the heroisation that surrounds good citizenship. I begin the arc of my dissertation with the office of the president and the annual SONAs. In this, my work follows the argumentation that forward by Rodriguez (2010) and Guevarra (2010), whose respective analyses regarding the commodification and heroization of Filipino citizens anchored the Philippines’ contemporary mode of being a labour brokerage state in the 1974 labour export policies of the Marcos Sr. administration; their work spurred me towards a

consideration of the role of the president within the context of political power and political time. While the SONAs, as speeches, are a reflection of each individual president and the choices that they have made for the country they lead, the SONAs make visible, as I explore in Chapter Three, the terraformation of Filipino citizenship in accordance with the market forces of global labour and the commodification of the citizen-as-worker.

In the Philippines, SONAs are constitutionally-mandated as an annual speech in Article VII Section 23 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution. Through these speeches, the president announces his successes, goals, and ambitions directly to a public which includes not only the Philippine nation as an immediate spectator and assumed audience, but also the diasporas that now exist worldwide, alongside interested foreign entities. The narratives that the presidents pronounce regarding the Filipino citizen “frame communities in a specific way and sustain the idea of their existence” (van Rensburg and Feinauer 2014, p. 104); these narratives are not merely formulated by each individual president, but also build upon past SONAs across the spectrum of political time. The SONAs are a means of expressing affectively and politically-charged narratives or calls to action, and have been used to rally public support, reproach the opposition and citizen dissidents, and respond directly to ongoing criticism. SONAs in the Philippines have been “made public through broadcast in various communication platforms” (Abejero 2023, p. 82) from radio to television, and, most recently, the speeches have been broadcast through live streams on freely and easily-accessible social media platforms such as Facebook Live and YouTube through desktop computers, laptops, or smartphones. Official YouTube channels hosting the SONAs include RTVMalacanang (Radio Television Malacanang Presidential Broadcast Staff – Philippines); ABS-CBN News and GMA News⁹; and Rappler, among others, and official as well as unofficial clips circulate on the social internet across sites like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube Shorts, and Tiktok.¹⁰

The president has the privilege of speaking freely and uninterruptedly while giving the speech itself, but the SONAs are not politically uncontested: left-wing activist organisations

⁹ ABS-CBN and GMA News are two major news outlets in the Philippines [that are free to access and watch](#).

¹⁰ While it is true that “advances in cellphone and other digital technologies, including free internet access through Facebook on smartphones” has opened up the social internet to Filipino people (Osborne 2020, p. 2), the Filipino citizen’s access to the internet is also stratified by class, and dictated not only by the availability of hardware but also how an individual is able to access the internet as a service. In 2015, Facebook and two Philippine telecommunications companies introduced a service called “Free Basics,” which allowed “users with data-capable mobile phones [to] have free access to an array of websites and apps opening up possibilities for low-income Filipinos to experience the internet, Facebook, and Facebook Messenger” (Uy-Tioco 2019, p. 162); yet, Free Basics as a means of access does not provide access to the full scope of the internet, as it gives “only limited, subpar ‘good enough’ access to the poor” (2019, p. 162).

such as BAYAN and Anakbayan¹¹ respond with reportbacks called *SONA ng Bayan* (The People's SONAs), and critical news organisations like Rappler perform fact-checks during the speech. As Ojala et al argue, “[i]t is certainly not the case, however, that audiences readily adopt the emotional positions advanced by political elites” (2019 p. 167); while their analysis focuses on the ways in which immigration is discussed in Finnish and Estonian public discourse regarding migration, I agree with their contention that “[t]he interpretation of messages, including their emotional cues, is dependent on the personal experiences of audience members” (2019 p. 167). Public analyses, interpretation, and commenting on the SONAs have become popular alongside the rise of long-form video platforming sites such as YouTube have also seen a corresponding increase in the number of post-SONA analysis videos from Filipino political commentators. The flow of information, responses, and emotions with regards to the SONAs are therefore not merely unidirectional from the president to the citizenry and the diasporas, but are multidirectional in nature. I engage with the SONAs, as Sikanku does, as “not just a policy speech,” but also in its role as “a communication event” (2022, p. 177); as the SONAs are political discourse that is intended to inform the public and other interested parties, I utilised the method of a critical thematic discourse analysis.

Here, I note Aydin’s definition of a critical discourse analysis as a method which “focuses on analyzing how power relations are reflected, reproduced, and potentially challenged through language use” (2024, p. 68); in Chapter Three, I therefore utilise a thematic approach that reads the SONAs for its discussions regarding citizenship and national identities, and conduct a critical discourse analysis that “investigates how social power is misused and how text and talk represent, procreate, and resist dominance and inequality in the social and political context” (Rahimi 2015, p. 343). I focused my analysis on the text of the speech itself, rather than, for example, how each particular president *performed* the speech in question. The texts were scraped from the website of the National Gazette of the Philippines, the official website where transcripts for presidential speeches are made publicly available online. Most of the SONAs were delivered in English, but for the excerpts that were included in Tagalog or other Philippine languages, I have provided the accompanying English translation. I sorted the speeches into each president’s corpus, and for Marcos Sr., whose tenure spanned two decades,

¹¹ BAYAN stands for *Bagong Alyansang Makabayan* (New Patriotic Alliance); the organisation was established in 1985 “at the height of the struggle against the US-Marcos dictatorship” (bayan.ph/site/about), while Anakbayan was founded in 1998 and is “is a comprehensive National Democratic mass organization of the Filipino youth that aims to arouse, organize and mobilize youth for national democracy with a socialist perspective” (anakbayancanada.wordpress.com/about).

the corpus was further divided into each representative decade. In the manual analysis, I individually read each SONA alongside the other speeches that constituted the corpus of texts. I read individual SONAs in their entirety three to five times each, with a concentration on seeking out how each president spoke about the theme of citizen/ship. Finally, I collectively read each president's corpus of texts to comparatively determine the leitmotifs that echoed across their tenures.

Second, I conducted individual interviews and paired focus groups with families in the Filipino diaspora, utilising the approach of *kuwentuhan* or talk-story. In Chapters Four, Five, and Six, I explore the ways in which the Filipino diaspora in Canada navigates their relationship of belonging with/to nation-states, both the Philippines and Canada; I engaged with these modalities of belonging as they manifest socioculturally, individually, within families, and through legal-affective expressions as understood by my interviewees. Interviews as a method of research allow researchers the opportunity not only to analyse the data itself as gleaned from the conversations, but also the metadata, which includes, for example, "how the respondent behaved during the interview" (Mosley 2013, p. 9). Fujii argues that "talking and silence may also be a false binary" (2010, p. 239); silence is not necessarily a failure of interaction, but can in itself be understood as a mode of engagement with the questions or with the interviewer. Thus, whenever possible, I have chosen to textually indicate the quiet moments, to note the laughter, and to observe the overlap of sometimes-contradictory answers between participants.

I began the recruitment for interviews on 17 August 2023, and completed the cycle of interviews on 9 February 2025. In order to ensure that as many different facets as possible of the Filipino community in Canada were represented in this dissertation, I sought the help of my personal and professional networks. On my accounts on Facebook and Instagram, instead of only using convenience sampling, I posted a carousel of images calling for interviewees for this project.¹² Amongst the people who shared the posts were: my family members; friends and acquaintances who were members of Filipino organisations or who had followings within the community; and in some cases, total strangers. Many asked their own family members on my behalf if they would be interested in sharing their stories. As I aimed to trace the multigenerational movements of a diaspora in motion, I was thus aided by a transnational network of people whose locations ranged from the Philippines to the United Arab Emirates to Japan to Canada. It was, and remains, incredibly affirming to see the community rally around

¹² This carousel of posts can be seen in Appendix 04.

this project, and witness their belief that the research I am conducting is valuable for the Filipino diaspora.

From this momentum of support, I was able to interview 12 family units across Canada, for a total of 33 interviews that are specific to multigenerational experiences of familial migration, integration, and assimilation. In this research project, I focus my attention on the migration experiences of nine of those family units, comprised of 24 interviews in total. The nine family units were chosen because the themes that emerged in their individual and focus group interviews were resonant with each other, and brought to the foreground aspects of migrant experiences that are less-commonly discussed in the literature about Filipino Canada. A non-exhaustive list of these themes include: the experiences of now-adult youth migrants who came with their families; the conflicts that can exist between first generation immigrant parents and their 1.5 or second generation children regarding gender and gender identities; and the ways in which Filipino *and* Canadian identities are in constant negotiation throughout the lives of the diaspora.

I principally used a primary-pair-secondary structure for the interviews. Ideally, I began the sessions through a conversation with the primary interviewee (PI), a person who was sometimes an acquaintance, but more often was a stranger who had answered my call-out or who had been referred to me by a friend or family member. Speaking initially to the PI in a one-on-one setting created an opportunity to build a rapport with them. In turn, having had the chance to assess not only the project, but also myself, the PI could then make an informed decision regarding whether or not to proceed with the second step of the interview process, which was to introduce me to the person that they chose as a secondary interviewee (SI). SIs are a family member of their choosing either living with them in Canada or living in the Philippines, who would be willing to be interviewed in a one-one-one setting as well as in an intergenerational, familial focus group interview; family, here, was broadly understood to encompass the modalities of immediate, extended, and chosen. If the PI and the SI decide to proceed with the interview, we would then schedule a pair or group conversation that included both the participants. As I made space for the PI to get to know me as an interviewer, I worked to ensure that the SI had the same opportunity to become comfortable with me. The concluding step of the interview process was a one-on-one conversation with the SI.

A majority of the interviews that are presented in Chapters Four, Five, and Six proceeded in the primary-pair-secondary format, except for two outliers.¹³ The first outlier is a parent-child pair: the adult daughter in Sussex, New Brunswick and the mother in Manila, Philippines, both of whom I was able to interview separately through Zoom, but not together as a pair. The second is a group comprised of three individuals rather than two: a chosen family unit of a middle-aged married couple and an elderly lady whom they dearly considered to be their *tita*. That interview was conducted in a single conversation of around two hours at a Chinese restaurant in the suburbs of Ottawa.

The data that I examine in this research project has a focus on the experiences of women and members of the queer community¹⁴ in the diaspora due to an unintentional gender composition of the group of interviewees who answered the recruitment calls. Some observations regarding this include:

- (1) The migration experiences of *ates* or the older sisters are prominent, but not necessarily that of the *kuyas* or older brothers. Seven interviewees identified as *ates*; only one PI identifies as a *kuya*, but is a young trans man who used to be an *ate*. When *kuyas* are mentioned, it is often in the context of an interviewee who is discussing a member of their family who is not themselves an interviewee. The significant exception is an interviewee who is a trans man — while they are now a *kuya*, their experience of being an older brother is influenced by their prior experience as an *ate*.
- (2) Two PIs chose their mothers to be their SIs, but no PIs chose their fathers;
- (3) With regards to the gender make-up of the nineteen participants, six are cisgender male. Three of them are younger brothers who were asked to participate in the research project by their older siblings. An additional two are a gay couple in a long-term romantic relationship, and one is a father who is a part of the previously mentioned triad.
- (4) While there were four interviewees who were mothers, only one was a father.

I share these demographics regarding the gender composition of my interviewees as a reflection on how my positionality as a cisgender woman may have served to influence my professional and personal networks, and therefore also affected the gender composition of the people who

¹³ I believe that the inclusion of these two outliers is important to the research project. The first outlier, the mother/daughter pair, allowed me to examine the decision-making processes in a family that had two generations of members who had left the Philippines for opportunities elsewhere. The second outlier, comprised of three individuals, offered life experiences which allowed me to more complexly analyse notions of parenting within the diaspora.

¹⁴ I use the term ‘queer community’ throughout this dissertation as an umbrella term for the various gender expressions of my interviewees who self-identified as members of the LGBTQ2IS+ community.

volunteered to take part in this research project and share their experiences with me regarding their experiences of migration.

I found Francisco-Menchavez's notion of *kuwentuhan* vital during the interviews. As a relational practice, "it reflect[s] the social and collective nature of how transnational families exchanged advice and shared stories about their family lives on a daily basis" (Francisco-Menchavez 2018, p. 23). *Pakikipagkwentuhan*, or the exchange of stories, is "an informal conversation between two or more people before starting a formal and structured dialogic conversation" (Claravall and Isidro 2026, p. 480). This "Philippine cultural practice of storytelling" (Francisco-Menchavez 2024 p. 22) is "grounded in the oral traditions of the Philippines" (de Leon and Blower-Nassiri 2024, p. 3068), and created moments of relation between myself and my interviewees during our conversations. As a method that is indigenous to Filipino culture, it is a process that Jocson defines as "both a noun (story) and a verb (telling/listening to/participating in a story)," further explaining that, "*kuwento* is not simply about sharing stories but also about the nature in which the stories take place" (2008, p. 242). *Kuwentuhan* is the situating of the participants as well as the story that will be more formally shared. Relational interviewing understands that data "do[es] not exist in free-standing form prior to the engagement between researcher and participant; rather, they are jointly produced through back and forth exchange" (Fujii 2018, p. 3). The reflexivity necessary in the interviews conducted for this research project manifested in the ways in which as individuals with shared membership in the Filipino diaspora, how we came together to have conversations about our lives as immigrants and Canadians of immigrant descent shaped not only the research process but also how we understood the stories or the data that was being circulated between us.

In addition to one-on-one conversations, I also organised focus group interviews, which is a method where "the analytical focus centres on the co-production of perspectives in the group context, rather than on the perceptions of specific individuals" (Sim and Waterfield 2019, p. 3006); the relationality of the shared context which existed between myself and the individual interviewee was expanded into a shared context between three people, two of them from the same family unit. The decision to interview both the PI and SI together was invaluable: in answering the questions that I posed, they would also ask and answer each other's follow-up questions. In this instance, "a focus group approach can illuminate contextual, cohort-specific influences by highlighting the nature of discussions, shared assumptions and issues of contention" (Ayudhya et al 2014, p. 169). Several times, the PIs and SIs noted during the interviews that they had met in the time between the individual and familial interviews to talk

about the feelings that the conversations had brought up. The shared conversations surfaced agreements and disagreements about culture, about identity, about what moments were considered important in the fabric of a shared familial migration story. These cohort-specific themes put forward experiences such as the considerable difference that the age of migrant youth can have in questions of integration. An interviewee, Nina, who was only five when she arrived, believed she had a far better outcome in the Winnipeg educational system than her older brothers because, like other five year olds, she was just beginning to learn English and was therefore well-suited to entering the system. Her older brothers, who were aged 8 and 10 respectively at their family's arrival, did not have the same ease that she experienced.

I specified in my call-outs for research participants that I would be able to conduct the interviews in either Tagalog/Filipino,¹⁵ Hiligaynon,¹⁶ English, or a mix of all three of these languages. Often, when reaching out to possible interlocutors, I would incorporate Filipino into the initial recruitment email to indicate that I spoke a heritage language; I would begin with *kamusta* (how are you?), and I would say *salamat* (thank you) as I signed off. I wanted to offer these choices from the beginning of the recruitment process, especially as I possess a firsthand knowledge of the difficulties of translating thoughts between one language to the next. Rafael, in his book *Motherless Tongues: The Insurgency of Language Amid Wars of Translation*, writes about living across multiple languages as such: "...to inhabit multiple mother tongues means that speaking any one language entails translating not only across different languages but also within the same language insofar as they are spoken different ways in different contexts" (2016, p. 5). There is no dearth of jokes across the multilinguality of the Philippine islands — for example, humorously taking the same word with different meanings across languages such as *pating* in Tagalog meaning shark, while the same word in Bisaya and Hiligaynon means dove in the classic Philippine joke that a *pating* swims in Luzon but flies in Visayas and Mindanao — but here, I offer Rafael's comment as speaking to the ways in which emotions and narratives are already difficult to verbalise, to be moved from the heart to the tongue in regular conversation, and much more so in an interview environment even with a

¹⁵ According to the 1987 Philippine Constitution, Article IX Section 7, the national languages of the Philippines are Filipino and English. 'Filipino' is the term used for the language that is based upon Tagalog, with the inclusion of terms from other Philippine languages. Linguistically, Filipino is "the Tagalog-based national language of the Philippines, belongs to the Western Malayo-Polynesian branch of the Austronesian language family," and within the country, it "is a variety — and is mutually intelligible with all dialects — of Tagalog" (Zamar 2023, p. 1). However, the word 'Tagalog' is more often used colloquially; this was the case during the interviews. For this reason, I switch between Tagalog/Filipino in the body of this text.

¹⁶ Hiligaynon is a West Visayan Philippine language that is spoken in my home region of Negros Occidental, as well as other parts of Visayas and Mindanao.

shared context of history and social locations. To use different languages, and even the same one in differing contexts, is an act of intimate translation.

During the individual and familial focus group interviews, I observed that interviewees who were older than me or who were around my age — early to mid-thirties and onwards — were more inclined to having our conversations in Tagalog if they themselves spoke the language. As soon as they heard the Tagalog in my accent when I spoke English, the conversation would proceed in Tagalog or in Taglish (Tagalog and English); this will be visually evident in the direct quotes that I use in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. Meanwhile, interviewees who were younger — including, curiously, those who spoke Tagalog natively but have resided in Canada for a little while — chose to speak to me in English, even if they heard my Tagalog accent. Many of the jokes made by the Tagalog speakers were in Tagalog, with assumptions that I would understand the humour, and once or twice I received a Bisaya meme¹⁷ from a Bisaya-speaking respondent. There were a handful of Bisaya words and phrases sprinkled throughout the conversation with some of my Bisaya interviewees. Although I am not entirely fluent in Bisaya, there is some overlap with my own heritage language of Hiligaynon, and I am able to understand what certain words and phrases mean, particularly in joke form. My embodiment as a 1.5 generation Filipina woman who is culturally and linguistically fluent influences the ways in which my interviewees responded to me — in terms of language choice and humour, particularly — and is a reminder that research is a relational practice. The shared context that my interlocutors and I established about ourselves as well as about the Filipino diaspora in Canada produced conversations that were grounded in “dialogue between researcher and interviewee,” wherein the data is “jointly produced through back and forth exchange” (Fujii 2018, p. 3); that is, the jokes (or the data) being conveyed were humorous precisely because they were linguistically and culturally responding to the conversation that we had or were having.

All of the interviewees consented to the audio recording of our conversations. Nine of the interviews analysed in this research project were conducted in Tagalog and Taglish,¹⁸ the rest were primarily in English with a handful of Bisaya phrases for one interviewee. To aid with the

¹⁷ Internet memes, according to Davison, are “a piece of culture, technically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission” (2012, p. 122).

¹⁸ Taglish is a portmanteau of Tagalog and English, and is itself a form of switching between the two languages throughout the entirety of a conversation. Taglish has seen a transition from being perceived as illegitimate by the Philippine elite, to, during the Marcos Sr. administration, becoming the “preferred idiom of middle-class dissent” (Rafael 1996, p. 113).

process of transcriptions — particularly with the multi-person aspect of the focus group conversations — I utilised Otter.AI. I had anticipated that the software would aid sufficiently in transcribing the English portions of the interviews. The English-language transcriptions were close to accurate, requiring only minimal reworking, but as I had expected, the application was unable to transcribe satisfactorily in non-English languages.¹⁹

The third and final method that I use in this research project is a critical reading of fictive works using the framework of the Canadian Gothic. I have included a chapter on fictive works in this dissertation because of what I have observed is a deeply-rooted relationship between national cultural production and national politics. In particular, Allan Punzalan Isaac's *Filipino Time: Affective Worlds and Contracted Labour*, Bliss Cua Lim's *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique*, and José B. Capino's *Martial Law Melodrama: Lino Brocka's Cinema Politics* contain close examinations of literature, theatre, and film that illustrate how cultural artefacts are not only a response to a political phenomenon, but are also a critique of the power asymmetries that have engulfed the Philippines and its diasporas, and serve to unsettle mainstream political and cultural narratives about current events in the narratives that they tell. Recognising the relationship between the political and the cultural as demonstrated by these scholars, in Chapter Seven, I therefore closely and critically read works that have been created in the Filipino diaspora in Canada and examine how they are able to powerfully destabilise not only how the Filipino diaspora sees itself, but also how the Canadian nation-state perceives its Filipino diaspora. Through these fictive works, I examine the relationship between liberal multiculturalism and settler colonialism; the role of a diasporic-

¹⁹ When transcribing Tagalog or Bisaya, Otter.AI did not perform well: entire minutes of conversations were omitted, speakers were interchanged, and accents confused the software to the point of hallucinating words. To ensure that the words, sentiments, and meanings of the interviews did not slip through such wide digital cracks, I manually listened to and re-transcribed all of the non-English interviews, paying particularly close attention to those that were in a group or pair configuration, and those that were of a heavier mix of two languages

Some common mistakes that were made by the software included the following:

(1) When an interviewee spoke English with a Manila accent, the application would drop the “not” from contractions like “didn’t,” moving negative experiences into the positive.

(2) The word “didn’t” was often transcribed as “don’t.” For example, while an interviewee was recounting how her now-adult children asked her, “Why *didn’t* you teach us Tagalog,” the transcript would report it as, “Why *don’t* you teach us Tagalog?” The changing of the tenses deeply alters the implications and the tones of the stories.

(3) In a separate, differently-accented conversation, “the dignity of labour” was repeatedly transcribed as “the dignity of war.”

(4) Non-English names and place names were illegible to the software. Some examples:

- a. Butuan was transcribed as Brooklyn.
- b. The name Motzie Dapul, the author of *Hi, Nay*, one of the works examined in Chapter Seven, was repeatedly transcribed as “Monty Dafeo”
- c. The name “Bonifacio” was transcribed as body posture.

national fictive is not only to contribute towards a national narrative of identity, but to complicate it through a remembering of what has been buried.

I define the framework of the Canadian Gothic not only through its associations to the genre of the Gothic and horror, but primarily by its insistence on remembering the effects of settler colonialism that have previously been invisibilised with regards to the terrain of Canadian identity; that is, I explore the terraformation of diasporic and national identity that occurs through fictive works created by a nation's diaspora. I pay attention to the fact that “[t]he idea of Canada is constantly shifting, and these changes are negotiated in — among other places — literature” (Halford 2025, p. 5). The curation of texts chosen are indicative of the contemporary narrative of the Filipino diaspora in Canada; that is, all three works speak to a life in Canada that is post-migration, in a variety of ways. I am using the Canadian Gothic as a lens to read these works — a collection of works which individually do not fit neatly into a broadly-understood genre of horror, but which I argue can be generatively-read within the genre — to leave room for a capacious exploration of the relationship between the factual and the fictive, what is sedimented and what therefore must be unsettled. The Canadian Gothic as a lens of analysis insists on remembering what continues to be made invisible in contemporary conversations regarding multiculturalism: the effects and aftereffects of migration on the diaspora as it seeks to acculturate into the Canadian context. The *mise-en-scènes* that the texts conjure regarding the Filipino diaspora is therefore no less forthcoming about the terraformations of political membership and belonging than the SONAs given by Filipino presidents, or the interviews that I conducted with members of the diaspora.

In closing, I reflect on the work that I have performed as a translator throughout the chapters of this this dissertation. I have translated linguistically from Tagalog/Filipino and Bisaya into English, and in so doing, I have translated between cultures, as well. The skills that I drew on as a translator are rooted in having been raised in the homeland for almost twenty years, and having come to my early and late adulthood in the new home nation. My fluencies can be considered bicultural in the sense that I am able to understand both the Philippines and Canada as places that are/can be Filipino; my fluencies are also multicultural in the sense that both of these places which I call home are themselves multicultural, in differing ways. I understand my work in translation to include not only literal linguistic translations from Filipino or Bisaya to English, but also cultural translations that occurred during the interviews. In taking on the role of translator, I am “inevitably affected by the rules, values, and beliefs of [my] native country” (Mahdiyan, Rahbar, and Hosseini-Maasoum 2013, p. 40), and as a

member of the diaspora in Canada, I am affected by the ‘rules, values, and beliefs’ of my adopted home. Translation is, as van Rensburg and Feinauer argue, “a mode of transporting knowledge across cultures and language barriers” (2014, p. 104). Translating between my languages — indeed, between my two homes and the multiplicity of cultures within which I am enmeshed — has served as an exercise in path-seeking, in asking myself whether, for example, the word *ligaya* in the Philippine national anthem was better translated as ‘joy’ or as ‘pleasure.’ The answer, of course, is dependent upon the analysis that is being made, and the truths that I aim to re/present in this academic project.

Throughout the different chapters of this dissertation — from the SONAs, to the intergenerational interviews, and to the fictive works — the translations that I present on the page are themselves a contention with power and with location. As I translate SONAs from Filipino to English, I move the content and sentiment of the speeches from a place where Filipino is a national language into a place where Filipino is a minority language. For the intergenerational interviews, the interviews and acts of translation are themselves conducted in a place where the national languages are English and French, and Filipino is spoken by a minoritised and racialised group. In the fictive works, while I do minimal linguistic translation, I translate cultural values from the Philippines into the space of diaspora hosted within a new home nation: titles like *ate* or older sister and *bunso* or youngest sibling, creatures such as the *aswang*, and pre-colonial Filipino roles such as the *babaylan*. These cultural artefacts are translated into a cultural milieu that primarily sees Filipinos in Canada as workers, or labourers, and as I conducted the work of translating these artefacts into the borders of Canada, I am reminded of the roles of language and discourse in the (de)construction of identities.

Ethics and Ethical Considerations: Reciprocity and Participation

In my implementation of an ethics of care throughout the active research process, and in the time afterwards as I maintain what I believe to be an ethical relationship with my community, I heed bell hooks’ call towards prioritising the communal rather than the individual, and to deliberately break the cycle of an “ethics of Western society informed by imperialism and capitalism [that] are personal rather than social” (2014, p. 30). I embarked on this dissertation work with the awareness that performing qualitative research work “require[s] an ethic of care that is reflexive and deliberate about the power inequalities inherent in research” (Reich 2021, p. 578); rather than the prioritisation of individual success, my relationship with my community is defined by principles of reciprocity and participation. To extend Francisco-Menchavez’s arguments that the flow of care between Filipino migrant

workers is not solely unidirectional, but is rather, more generatively understood to be multidirectional (2018), the ethics of care that circulates in my community (which also encompassed me as a researcher and required my participation) is also multidirectional. I am not making the claim that the Filipino diaspora — as a diaspora primarily understood to be givers of care — is immediately one that dispenses care to its members. My goal is to “humanize but not romanticize or idealize” (Ghannam 2013, p. 26) the experiences of diaspora or the process of research. Here, I highlight how the ‘care-ful’ relations that I participated in, that I activated, and that continue to exist, have been framed in reciprocity and in participation; as de Leon and Tungohan write, “[d]oing the work is a lifelong commitment. It entails a before, during, and beyond. It is bigger than just a single research project, because our reality is that our survival — the survival of our community and of the generations to come — is at stake” (forthcoming, p. 83-84). To prioritise such principles, as espoused here by de Leon and Tungohan, and as I explored during my research, means an ongoing and active engagement with the community.

I tended to my already-existing relationships with care, and created and maintained new relationships with my research participants with similar attention. I reciprocated the support that I received through my sustained participation in a circular economy of sorts, with ongoing contributions to a commons of skills and time that is intended for the greater good of the community itself that exists outside of the research project; to care, after all, “is to carry the burden for another human or another species” (Farsakoglu and Djampour 2022, p. 138). Even after the active interview and data collection stage, I continue to be involved to the extent of my capacities, as I did before embarking on this research project, as I will continue to do so when it concludes. I participate in community events, provide support in my fields of expertise to individuals and organisations, and enthusiastically seek out spaces of connection and mentorship. These ethics of participation continue *outside* of the academic research process. I believe that to gather data through the process of *pakikipagkuwentuhan*, or exchanging stories, is a type of relation that can only exist ethically when it is anchored in reciprocity. My practice of being a researcher who continuously aims to do ethically grounded work is therefore one that purposefully rejects the individualistic and extractive colonial tendencies of research as an institutional practice, and seeks to anchor it in community.

Field Observations: Interviews

In my active research phase, which began when the Covid-19 lockdown measures in Canada were beginning to ease, I faced a research landscape that opened possibilities allowing for both in-person and virtual interviews. I was able to offer interviewees the choice of meeting in-person or over Zoom; of the 24 interviews that I focus on in this dissertation, half were conducted face-to-face, and half were virtual meetings. The use of Zoom as a technology of connection allowed me to experience firsthand that conducting research virtually can “open up space for new forms of support and community, new modes of participation, and more extensive approaches to knowledge sharing, compared to in-person focus groups or interviews” (Tungohan and Catungal 2022, p. 7). The opportunity to suggest virtual options to possible interlocutors allowed me to reach individuals who: were unable to or did not want to meet in person; as well as those who dwelt in different time zones, cities, or different countries entirely. For example, an interviewee who lived in New Brunswick heavily dissuaded me from making the trip when I offered to interview her in person, especially when she learned that I was based out of Toronto. Ultimately, she made the call to meet on Zoom. This same interviewee then chose their mother — who lives in the Philippines — as their secondary interviewee, and we were also able to meet through Zoom to have our conversation.

In a separate instance, a participant logged into the meeting while they were on the GO Train on their way back to Mississauga from work in Toronto; fitting the interview into their schedule meant that there were only specific windows of time when we could meet, and that we had to do so virtually. Yet as we were having our conversation over Zoom — myself on a laptop at home, with headphones on, and my interviewee on their phone in the GO Train, wearing wired earbuds — the situation we had found ourselves in highlighted that the concept and practice of privacy changes with the turn towards virtual interviews that can happen in a public space. This is an example of what Oliffe et al have describes as a concession for Zoom interviews: that “Zoom has meant *being there differently*” (emphasis in the original), an experience which they describe as “somewhat disorientating” as they “were no longer able to fully plan, let alone influence exactly where the interviewee would be when they spoke with us” (2021, p. 4). Knowing that he was in a public space, even if he was in a train car that did not have many passengers, I found myself feeling constrained as an interviewer. I did not want him to have to divulge personal stories that he might not have wanted to hear, although we did end up having the conversations.

As a researcher, I experienced how my sense of belonging — to the Philippines and Canada, and to Filipino Canada — “need[ed] to be negotiated” (Adu Ampong and Adams 2020, p. 588). While I am confident in my own identities, I found myself adapting my manner, my language, and even my accent depending on the age, generation and other identity markers of the particular interviewee that I was engaging with at a given moment. Throughout the research process, I navigated my interactions with the knowledge that “cultural and linguistic identities are not fixed but continuously negotiated within colonial and diasporic contexts. This reflexive awareness “shapes the way we think about terms, labels, and categories used to describe Filipino identities” (Claravall and Isidro 2020, p. 474). This reflexivity, these negotiations of belonging that I was performing, were not just a personal adjustment to the ways in which I believed I would be perceived by my interlocutors; in my interactions with them, my own belief systems were also being challenged and enriched, and this, too, led to moments of internal negotiations. On one memorable day, an interviewee invited me to a lunch party that she was hosting at a different venue, the afternoon after our interview. I accepted, and at the party she introduced me to her church friends as a researcher of the Filipino community; as I was being introduced, and as I was in conversation with the other attendees, it was then that I realised that one assumption that had been made about me was that I was of faith. No assumptions were voiced about which specific branch of organised religion I could be a member of, but conversations with me would proceed as though I was a person who belonged to a church and believed in a deity. As an agnostic person, in respect of the practices around me, I bowed my head in deference during the prayers.

Another, perhaps more material moment of negotiation and reflexivity is that of my person, this body that I inhabit. Both of my forearms are tattooed, composed almost entirely floral and botanical themes extending down to my wrists, with a skull just below my right elbow. While I do not hide my tattoos in my personal life, I am aware that many older generations of Filipinos both in the homeland and the diaspora tend to be conservative, and that there was a possibility that their negative feelings about tattoos may impact unfavourably on our interactions and therefore on the interviews. To mitigate this possible risk, I made the choice to wear long sleeves to my first meetings with PIs who were of my parents’ or grandparents’ generation in order to gauge how they responded to the flowers that were visible at the edges of my wrists. Ultimately, no positive or negative observations were verbally made by older interviewees about my tattoos. In contrast, when I was speaking to interviewees who were of my generation or younger, I did not hide my tattoos; they were often well-received and

positively-commented upon at the beginning of our conversations. The tattoos were especially met with enthusiasm when I mentioned that one of my tattoo artists, Kiki, was Filipino, and that she had designed one of the more conspicuous pieces on my right arm: three *kalachuchi*, commonly named in English as frangipani or plumeria. As a means to segue into discussions about the Philippines and homeland culture, I would share the *kuwento* of the significance of the *kalachuchi* as a tree and a flower that is grown in cemeteries in my home city of Bacolod as well as across the Philippines more broadly (Manese 2025), and how the tattoos have become a symbolic way for me to carry family members who passed into the next life while I was away from home. My tattoos therefore created a moment to cultivate a rapport, to engage in *kuwentuhan* that then led into the first few questions of the interviews.

These various points of encounter between myself and my interviewees were thus tempered by: our modes of meeting, whether in-person or over Zoom, as well as the time zones within which we found ourselves residing; our ages or our generations vis-à-vis each other, which are always mediated by Filipino cultural norms regarding age and hierarchy, such as calling each other by our appropriate honourifics; memberships in organized faith or lack thereof; our shared languages, if any; and in no small part, our shared expectations of recognisable behaviour and cultural fluencies when it comes to the Filipino diaspora in Canada.

The Structure of the Dissertation

I have organised this research project in such a way that it approximates a timeline of departures, arrivals, and acculturations: beginning with the political time before immigration, following the migrant families with their departure from the home of origin and arrival into the new home nation, and culminating with acculturation as a phenomenon not only of integration but also contestation. In doing so, my goal is to illustrate the different scales at which terraformation occurs in the context of migration as a phenomenon of movement and terrain change. I seek to highlight the relationships that exist between politics and everyday life, and how these global and domestic forces come together in the lives of the Filipino diaspora in Canada and the ways in which they engender these various terraformations of belonging. The use of terraformation as a heuristic allows me to situate these changes not as a singular process that a nation-state imposes on its citizen-migrants, but rather, as contested processes that are filled with negotiations, actions, and counter-actions; these contestations terraform not only what it means to be Filipino and Filipino-Canadian, but also what it means to be Canadian.

I outline the frameworks and foundations of this dissertation in Chapter Two, which is divided into two main parts. In this first part, I outline and develop my theorisation of terraformation, and survey the literature surrounding emotion. The second part explores the literatures that are foundational to my understanding of the topics of migration and diasporas that this work engages with: citizenship, its commodification, and its operationalisation; migration in the Philippine context, with particular attention towards the family and to temporality; and finally, immigration and multiculturalism in Canada, and the creation of the migrant-citizen.

Chapter Three is politically anchored in the Philippines. I begin with a broad survey of the literatures surrounding SONAs as a political speech and as a means of direct communication between the president and the constituents, and I explore the ways in which scholars in the Philippines have been engaging with the SONA and its various political ramifications. I then conduct a thematic discourse analysis of the SONAs, moving chronologically from 1965 to 2025 over the course of seven presidencies. I trace how each president enunciates their expectations of Philippine citizens, and eventually of migrant workers, across the corpus of their speeches, situating each president in the vital moments of Philippine political history that occurred during their tenures, when applicable. Finally, I investigate how terraformations of belonging manifest through the neoliberalisation of citizenship as a legal status in the state's continued investment in maintaining its role as a labour brokerage state.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six are a triptych of chapters that follow the Filipino diaspora in Canada through their migration journey to the multigenerational processes of settlement in Canada. In these chapters, I investigate the terraformations of belonging that occur in the context of migration — for family members, for families, as well for the diaspora more broadly — particularly in the various political and sociocultural reconfigurations that complicate the collectively-imagined definitions not only of being Filipino, but also of being Canadian. These terraformations occur not only internally, for individual migrants, but also within and across families, capaciously understood, and these processes straddle geographies of distance as well as the temporalities of migration and transnational families.

In Chapter Four, I examine aspects of the homeland that influence migrant families, or that they carry with them to their new lives in Canada. I begin with politics, particularly inquiring into how national politics can spur a citizen's departure for a different country.

Second, I investigate the tensions which exist around conversations of gender and gender identity. This includes a notable lack of protection with regards to LGBTQI2S+ rights in the Philippines, as well as conflicts between first generation and second generation migrants regarding personal expressions of identity. Third, I focus my attention on the ways in which Philippine Heritage Languages (PHL) can emerge as a source of identity and conflict within the space of the migrant family immediately after migration, as well as later on in the lives of the children of migrant parents. Finally, I explore how food as culinary object and cultural artefact serves as a means for diaspora-raised Filipinos to access their heritage, as well as the role that food culture plays in the households of first-generation migrants. Through paying close attention to the ways in which homeland culture persist within Filipino families in the diaspora, I am able to explore how individuals and families locate themselves within the social, cultural, and political milieu of Canada that they now inhabit.

In Chapter Five, I investigate the role of the family in the diaspora. I begin with the immediate family, specifically focusing on the narratives of migrants who are parents, and those who are siblings. I then move from the immediate towards the extended family, specifically observing the ways in which extended families interact with migrant youth, or relatively younger members of the family. Finally, I end with an exploration of the role of the broader community and of chosen family in the Filipino diaspora. Taking this scalar approach allows me to illustrate how the family that co-inhabits the ‘privacy’ of the domestic sphere creates effects which ripple outwards, beyond the illusory binary of the private and public.

In Chapter Six, which is the last of the three chapters I devote towards the interviews, I examine the processes of contestation that *make* diaspora and nation, or the contestations that surround legal-affective identity formation at the diasporic and national scales. I investigate the long process of migration and acculturation as seen in the language of generational proximity, in the geographies of migrant households, and how the diaspora makes claims on national identities. In highlighting the relationship that migrants have with both their diaspora and homeland identities, I am able to establish that the connections established between the migrant and the nation are influenced by both the homeland and the new home nation.

In Chapter Seven, I engage with three fictive works about the Filipino diaspora in Canada that were written by female and queer authors. Situated in the literary geographies of Canada, the three works by Dapul, Leyson, and Austria-Bonifacio offer to its readers and listeners a version of the Filipino diaspora in Canada that is not sedimented in labour, but rather,

fictively imagines the multidirectional flows of care, relationship-building, and diaspora-nation relations. Read within the genre and analytical lens of the Canadian Gothic, the fictive is deployed in this chapter as a way to disturb sedimented terrain, a terraformation of both diasporic and national identities.

In Chapter Eight, I conclude the journey of the Filipino diaspora which I have followed in this dissertation. I re-examine terraformation as a heuristic by which I have closely examined the changing idea of belonging in the diaspora-nation relation. I reflect on the various limitations of this work, and finally, I look towards the future for what comes next.

Chapter Two: Frameworks and Foundations

Introduction

This chapter is divided into two major parts. In this initial section, I present a survey of the histories of terraformation, which started as a literary term and in its subsequent use as a research framework: I begin from its roots in science fiction and speculative fiction, and move towards its more contemporary applications in the fields of geography, environmental studies, and philosophy. Finally, I discuss my use of terraformation in the context of a dissertation that is grounded in the field of political science, as research project which focuses on exploring the changing notions of diasporic and national belonging as experienced by the Filipino diaspora in Canada. Specifically, I outline the ways in which I use terraformation as an analytic, and its usefulness in understanding the mediated relationships between citizen-migrants, migrant-citizens, and nation/states. The theory of terraformation is what drives the analysis of the data presented in this research project, from the SONAs of Philippine presidents, to the intergenerational interviews of migrant families in the diaspora, and finally, to the fictive works written by queer and female members of the Filipino diaspora. It is followed by a review of the literature on emotions, a theme that emerged consistently in the research which I conducted; I review how emotions serve as a way for communities to cohere decision-making processes, alongside reason, as well as to make sense of their individual and collective experiences and offer them as forms of knowledge. Additionally, emotions blur the binary between the function of state and national power on the private person and in the public sphere.

In the second part of this chapter, I trace the literatures upon which I have constructed my approach towards understanding diaspora as an object of study. I begin with the literatures of citizenship, establishing the normative relations between citizen and state which gives shape to the relationship between the non-status migrant and the state of employment. Building upon these foundational understandings of citizenship, I explore the processes of commodification of citizens and citizenship, particularly that which is occurring in the Philippine setting, and examine the ways in which the state operationalizes not only the individual citizen in the processes of labour outmigration, but also their families and kin networks. From these literatures of citizenship, I then move towards a survey of Filipino labour migration, paying close attention to the operationalisation of family units in the globalisation of Filipino labour, and the phenomenon and effects of the feminisation of the Filipino global labour force.

In the latter part of the literature section, I turn towards Canada as the place which anchors this dissertation; the Filipino diaspora in Canada is embedded in a Canadian setting

that is defined, in large part, by the concept of multiculturalism, particularly vis-à-vis theorisations of the Other. I pay close attention to the relationships that Canada as a nation-state has cultivated with its racialised and minoritised groups, and the creation of the perpetual Other in the “multi”-cultural context. I conclude this section by turning back towards the Canadian state and Canadian citizenship, and how this legal status is used to delineate between un/deserving and un/desired would-be citizens.

Frameworks

I. Theorising Terraformation

The term terraformation derives from the field of science fiction (sf), tracing back to the short story *Collision Orbit* (1942) by Jack Williamson. Markley, a scholar of science fiction literature, describes terraformation in Kim Stanley Robinson’s seminal *The Martian* trilogy as “a science that exists only as a thought experiment, as the uncertain and arbitrary simulations designed to engineer a biosphere (sufficient at least for plant life) on Mars” (1997, p. 775). More contemporarily, Sámelová defines the developing science of terraformation as “any human activity targeted at adapting the surface and atmosphere of a non-Earth cosmic body for the purposes of mass human inhabitation” (2023, p. 264); thus, terraformation as broadly understood is a reworking of terrain on both planetary and non-planetary bodies not only for exploration, but for long-term human occupation and habitation. It is a concept that has made its way from fictional/imagined worlds to actual/re-imagined worlds. The process of terraformation, as it is being conceived here, is the transformation of already-existing terrain into an imagined ideal: to be ‘more similar to earth,’ that is, the Earth as humanity imagines in its most ideal form.

Woods, writing about climate change and its impacts on the environment, argues that the concept of terraformation has undergone a boomerang effect, that it is “a fantasy that first projects outwards as science fiction then returns to earth as ‘science’ — as a figure of the artificial earth under global warming” (2019, p. 8); as a concept, as a means of understanding the initial contacts between humanity and alien or hostile environments, terraformation has become a useful heuristic by which to approach a multiplicity of problems and solutions on *terra*, on Earth. Indeed, as a theory for a process that departs the known Earth for the purpose of exploring strange new worlds, terraformation has traversed science fiction and speculative fiction into such fields as agriculture, planetary biology, geography and environmental studies, and philosophy. Terraformation — initially understood to be extra-planetary science fiction, and then shifting towards becoming extra-planetary science — has spawned a vast and

continually-changing research landscape. Parry, writing about Deleuze and Guattari's calls for a "new earth" as both a philosophical and design challenge, observes that terraformation "typically refers to the practice of transforming other planets to make them more similar to earth — and thus habitable for human beings" (2019, p. 109); it is concerned "with forming planets (Earth or others) in the image of terrestrial life" (Egholm Lund 2022, p. 179). Terraformation as a field of research often maintains its core of *terra* as an idealised Earth, and the proposed inhabitants, therefore, as idealised humans.

The planet Mars as the nearest and most probable site of future terraformation has captured the imagination not only of writers of science fiction, but also, of scientists.²⁰ Lee observes that the process of terraformation, particularly with the goal to "turn Mars into an earth-like planet" is one which can be defined as "the process of consciously and deliberately transforming a planet which does not possess the conditions — chemical, physical, geological — necessary for life to become one which can support not only plant but also animal, including human, life" (2001, p. 494). To terraform Mars is to see it as empty and devoid, allowing those who perceive it as such to envision a planet which can then be shaped in the image of the ideal. Terraformation in this sense is the approaching of an unknown environment and perceiving it as empty, as awaiting discovery, as a geography of empty possibilities that while hostile, is convertible. Hart describes it as the "ultimate expression of a Doctrine of Discovery and thereby of Earth imperialism," (2019, p. 359), and further, that the terraformation of Mars "would subject all that is on this world to human imperial invaders—by extinguishing all existing Mars life" (p. 363). To speak of terraformation — indeed, to use it as a framework of analysis — is therefore to acknowledge the colonial and imperial notions that would reshape physical geographies and terrains perceived to be hostile to those who would inhabit it. To this end, Schwarz discusses it as a process that "emerges from a colonial mindset that pushes the frontier first westward then upward and outward, always looking for new land and bodies — both racialized and celestial — on the horizon to profit from and colonize" (2025, p. 7). Initially

²⁰ A brief list of scientific research that discusses the concept of terraformation on Mars includes: DeBenedictis et al on the importance of Mars research, and how seeking to terraform the red planet could lead to knowledge vital to the maintenance of "oasis Earth" (2025, p. 637); Averner et al on planetary ecosynthesis (1976); Palaia et al on Martian energy (2009); Badescu et al on the transportation of liquid water on Mars (2009); and Palka et al on the terraformation of the Martian atmosphere (2022). With the continuing speed at which scientific development occurs, Sleator and Smith write about the possibility that synthetic biology can be utilised to advance space exploration; that "it is now faster, cheaper and more technologically practicable to genetically engineer planetary colonists (bioforming) than to physically engineer the planet itself (terraforming)" (2019 p. 857).

used to imagine space, then to conduct research on Earth and space, terraformation is endless colonial expansion that sees the idealised human as the arbiter of civilisation/

As Bashford and Galka argue, terraformation as this broadening term “demonstrates the rich feedback loops that conjoin scientific and cultural discourse” (2022, p. 389), serving as a theoretical and discursive bridge, Schwarz observes, for “the temporal and spatial gap between settlements on Turtle Island and on Mars, between the colonial ‘age of discovery’ and techno-utopian futures in outer space” (2025, p. 6). To encounter or to seek out land — extra-planetarily, in this instance — to perceive it as empty, and understand it to be hostile to colonisers and therefore must be civilised is a philosophy that is deeply rooted in imperialism. It is “also aligned with which knowledges are possible in the settler state, who counts as human, and who is allowed to exist — in the past, present, and future” (Schwarz 2025, p. 7); to take on this aspect of colonial and imperial terraformation is to forcefully take power not only to subdue an environment perceived to be antagonistic towards its would-be settlers, it is also to define temporality and humanity. Colonial and imperial terraformation is not merely the categorisation of land into “hostile” and “changeable,” it is also the categorisation of the occupants of the land as “human” or “less-than-human,” and shift the experience of time into “before” and “after.”

Oasis Earth

Chris Pak, citing the work of Jeffrey Prucher, traces the broad strokes of how the term terraformation has changed across the decades within sf literature:

“Prucher’s three definitions are useful guides to tracking how terraforming is imagined in 1942 as part of a human colonisation of space, before it becomes established by 1969 as inclusive of any civilisation... By 1997, the imaginative spaces offered to environmental speculation by sf narratives of terraforming are reconnected to Earth” (2016, p. 3).

In this boomerang effect, as Woods observes (2019), terraformation has made its way back home, to “oasis Earth” (DeBenedictis et al 2025). Schwarz argues that, “the world that has been created on planet Earth is the modern world, which through its forceful expansion has destroyed others” (2025, p. 6); the creation of the modern world is here characterised by Schwarz to be a terraformation in itself — Earth’s geographies and ecologies have been damaged by the political economies of imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism, and thus, these effects “suggest that in the decades to come, we will need to terraform Earth if it is to remain a viable host for its own life” (Bratton and Boyadjiev 2022, p. 25). As Hart so succinctly says, “[w]hile scientists are discussing *terraforming*, *terra* itself is an endangered planet” (2019, p. 363). Even as the terraformation of other planets are spoken of as the changing of the

terrain to reflect *terra*, it is in service of specific classes of humans, while the subaltern live in effectively already-terraformed places on the planet. For the subaltern — those who live at sites of mining, factory production, pollution, drought, fire, and other intolerable effects of human-wrought climate change — the *terra* they inhabit has been terraformed for the benefit of capital.

Writing about processes of terraformation as deployed in China, Sigley describes a process of change that is made visible through the effects of the politics of mobility and transportation on the landscapes of the country: he notes that the “physical reshaping of the environment (natural and cultural, rural and urban) to suit the conditions of the ‘socialist market economy’,” (2020, p. 106) is a terraformation of the landscape, one that makes it habitable not necessarily for humans, but for economic purposes. Similarly, Bashford and Galka use the term “terraforming” to “synthesise two material instantiations of this Chinese sociotechnical imaginary — island-building in the South China Sea and biosphere habitat construction on the moon — which we show to be linked as representational, political and bio-geophysical performances of state building” (2022, p. 389). Terraformation in this instance is a tool that is used in the processes of state- and nation-building, to the benefit of economics, and is a process of land transformation that deprioritizes the human for the benefit of systems.

On more urban terrain, Garfield-Abrams et al write about urban cultural terraforming, a process which makes visible how “exogenous actors manipulate urban atmospheres, geographies and ecosystems to make cities hospitable for new, affluent residents and visitors” (2023, p. 57); this perspective highlights the colonial, and in this case gentrifying, powers of reshaping what exists, when “outside actors” terraform a neighbourhood so that it “can be more habitable for new elites” (2023, p. 57). These modes of creation, specifically that of creating new terrain for “elite” actors can be directly linked to what Pak describes as a “legacy of colonial history” in narratives of terraformation (p. 12). After all, referencing Potawatomi scholar Kyle P. White, Schwarz argues that “the settler state was not built on what was discursively constructed as *terra nullius* but on the ruins of Indigenous lifeworlds” (2025, p. 6). What is an idealised *terra* for a colonising population is the ruination of an existing *terra* for those who have been colonised and displaced. Terraformation as an analytic can therefore be powerfully deployed to discuss the environment in examinations of violent conflict. Observing the impacts of the Israeli military campaign in Gaza, Bagheri and Kemp write about “terraforming warfare,” a process they describe as “the intentional destruction of the environment to achieve war aims, paving the way for long-term changes to the natural and human environment, including demographic change through forced displacement, destruction

of long-term agricultural prospects, or even the annexation of land” (2025, p. 430). Terraformation, in this wartime application of the term, is concerned with the violent deaths and displacements and/or removal of previous inhabitants, and of the erasure of peoples, urbanity, agriculture, and the human environment.

Martini, writing about the various responses to the 2011 disaster in Tohoku, Japan — a disaster of triple proportions that involved an earthquake, a tsunami, and core meltdowns at a nuclear power plant — argues that as a “cultural and political project,” the terraformation of *terra*, of Earth, “needs to ‘forget’ its planetary scale, as the authority to decide on a planetary level is but another Eurocentric, colonial aspiration” (2025, p. 8). In such modes, terraformation is deeply anchored to notions of change that prioritise the colonial-aspirational. As Schwarz argues, “[r]ather than reckoning with the violence and devastating effects that colonial modernity and its practices of extraction and dispossession have brought forth, terraforming is conceptualized as *deus ex machina* for a planet that is moving towards climate apocalypse” (2025, p. 5). In using terraformation as an answer that is *elsewhere* for a problem that is situated *here*, it deprioritises a solution that would lead to reckonings with the planet’s hypercapitalism and hyperconsumption, the effects of which are disproportionately visited upon economically-disadvantaged and racialised communities and countries: sweatshops, factories, mines, and most recently, data centres.

I understand this modality of terraformation that I have discussed as an imperial and colonial approach, one that is defined by “a mostly Western imaginary” (Martini 2025, p. 1) which seeks to change a terrain into a romanticised landscape according to its own ideals, and in doing so, aims to disappear or civilize existing peoples into an accordingly-idealised version of humanity. This notion of colonial terraformation, as a world-changing process, “not only alters a territory to create fitting conditions for certain lifeforms to flourish, but it also, as an onto-epistemological practice, shapes certain genres of the human” (Schwarz 2025, p. 7). This colonially-bound notion of terraformations is attuned towards the prioritisation of the elite, and therefore contains an accompanying equivalence that the elite are what *human* is. It intends to shape *terra* in the way which will benefit the elite human who will inhabit this terraformed Earth. In this conception of terraformation, I hear the echoes of racialised and gendered borderings that have previously occurred in historical and recent Canadian history.

A Co-Constituted Terraformation

This colonial and imperial mode of thinking which I have described is not the type of terraformation that I use in this dissertation. As I examine the lives of migrant families who

have left the Philippines and settled in Canada, I offer a modality of terraformation that moves away from these roots and is instead attentive towards complex processes of co-creation, co-imagination, and co-constitution of terrains of belonging on the scales of the nation and of the diaspora. I focus my attention not on change that is enacted or occurring upon physical landscapes or built geographies, but on the political-affective terrains of belonging at the scale of the diaspora and the nation. In making this choice, of moving towards a co-constituted process rather than on the impositions of hegemonic power, I hearken towards Karpinski's definition of critical terraforming, one which "is not a refusal, erasure, or overwriting of the histories and ongoing manifestations of settler colonialism and racial violence" (2022, p. 87), but rather is an articulation of power asymmetries and injustice that can exist in political-affective relations between the citizen and the nation-state, which does not render the migrants and the migrant families helpless or abject. I anchor my definition of terraformation in Martini's call for "the recognition of profoundly unequal power relations implicit in planetary scale transformations, both amongst humans belonging to groups with asymmetrical sociopolitical and economic relations" (2025, p. 3); that is, I understand migration to be a "planetary scale transformation" which is itself mired in "asymmetrical sociopolitical and economic relations" both in the home of origin and in the new home nation, as well as within the family units and the diaspora communities, broadly understood.

Terraformation as I use it in this research project is a framework that acknowledges contestation as a primary characteristic of change in the context of global migration and processes of integration; I therefore use the term 'terraformation' to refer to the processes of (un)becoming that I explore in the chapters that follow, and I further use 'terraforming' as a verb to note that it is an active process. These contestations are visible in the ways in which migrants and migrant families, as agentic human beings, respond to choices made by governing nation-states through their own instigation of changes.

In this dissertation, I anchor my analysis on the idea that the Filipino diaspora in Canada is undergoing a terraformation of *belonging*; while my focus is on this particular diaspora, I note that such terraformations are happening in other locations where Filipino diasporas have settled and acculturated. I trace this terraformation of belonging across two scales, the diaspora and the nation, and across three locations: in the Philippines' political-affective landscape through the SONAs; in the Filipino-Canadian diaspora's family units through multigenerational interviews; and finally, in a changing terrain of national identity in the fictive

works that are written by the diaspora about the experiences of the diaspora in Canada.. I elaborate upon these terraformations below.

First, I argue that for the Philippines as a nation-state, it is the investment in and continuation of the labour brokerage system that has initiated a terraformation of belonging that is made visible through the changing expectations embedded in Philippine citizenship. Building on Rodriguez (2010) and Guevarra's (2010) argument of the commodification of Filipino citizens, I offer that what is being commodified is *citizenship* as a status. In other words, as the state continues to engage in the commodification of its citizens into working-class objects of labour, transforming them into commodities that are then marketed and sold in the global labour market, the rights, responsibilities, and even the expectation of territorialities that are associated with Filipino citizenship as a legal status, and the various social accoutrements that surround national identifications, are visibly, multi-directionally challenged by the state's continued investment in the labour brokerage system. The terraformation of belonging through the commodification of citizenship, in this instance, has led to the creation of a citizen-as-migrant-worker. This is an individual who is simultaneously a self-sufficient person and a brokered commodity, is a citizen and is a migrant worker, is 'here' and is 'there' — a citizen who is temporally anchored through kin relationships and affective connections, but is territorially *hyper*-flexible to accommodate the demands of labour. Expanding the notion of neoliberal citizen from citizen-as-worker to citizen-as-migrant-worker, the Philippine state has terraformed what it means to belong to a nation-state.

Second, I argue that diaspora groups — in migrating from their homes of origin towards a new home country, and raising their children in entirely different cultural, social, and legal milieus — experience an *internal* terraformation of *national* belonging. These internal terraformations are made visible in the negotiations that families and individuals make with both their Filipino and Canadian identities; what has emerged in the interviews I conducted are that these terraformations are contested and negotiated reworkings of how national affiliation is understood, felt, and expressed. Throughout the three chapters that focus on the interviews, I encountered different ways in which homeland politics, changing value systems, and notions of personhood were entangled in relationally complex systems of politics and cultural identities, illustrating that terraformation is a process that is as emotional as much as it is political.

Third, and finally, I posit that through fictive works — as I explore in the three that I have curated as an ‘archive of haunting,’ to borrow Ann Cvetkovich’s turn of phrase — the diaspora is a co-participant in the contested *public* terraformations of the stories and histories that constitute Canadian national identity. Terraformation as a process that is instigated by migration is not just world-changing, but is also world building. The place that is Canada, and therefore its identity/ies, is comprised of settler colonial histories, the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples, the conflicts between Anglo- and Franco- Canadian nationalisms, and the arrival of migrant populations whose ethnic makeup have changed across many generations. National identity is therefore contested along many different avenues: culturally within the nation; legally through migration policies; and socially through the ways in which Canada as a nation seeks to define itself through its role on the world stage and its internal domestic politics. The Filipino diaspora in Canada has been identified with ‘sticky’ labels such as ‘labourer,’ ‘migrant,’ and ‘invisible,’ in a process which I have referred to as sedimentation: that the place for the Filipino diaspora is influenced by mainstream beliefs regarding how they have arrived in Canada. Through these fictive works, I examine how the diaspora terraforms not only identities which have been imposed upon it and sedimented into the landscape of Canadian national identity, but in doing so, how these same processes also terraform what ‘Canada’ means as an experience of multicultural nationalism. As the diaspora terraforms how the nation-state perceives it, it also terraforms how the nation-state perceives itself.

II. Emotions and Emotionality

Throughout this research project, emotions prominently arose as key themes: from the political emotions that presidents strategically deploy during the SONAs, to the intergenerational and interfamilial relations that my interlocutors shared in our interviews, and finally, woven into and emerging from the fictive works that I examine as diasporic Canadian cultural artefacts.

Emotions are therefore a way of constructing the world (Jaggar 1989); a means of understanding power (Beattie et al 2019); and a space of incongruent relationships to feelings (Ahmed 2014). Rather than an adherence to a strict, false binary between reason and emotion, I align my analyses with Palmberger, who writes that “emotions here are not understood as the antithesis of reason but as central to it and so are crucial in any decision-making process” (2019, p. 76); these include, of course, the decisions that are made by migrants to migrate, as well as the decisions that are then made regarding assimilation and integration into their new home countries. Pratt writes that “[e]motions are resources around which communities can organize,

to make claims in a public domain. Experiences of trauma and loss need not shrivel from political engagement; rather, they can provide deep—and enduringly painful—reservoirs for political mobilizing” (2012, p. xxx). I therefore contend with emotions in this research as those aspects of relation which “provide insight into hegemonic emotional knowledge, revealing dynamics of power shaping everyday micro and macro interactions” (Beattie et al, 2019, p. 137); the relationality of emotions stretch across scales from political to familial to diasporic.

In paying keen attention to emotions as a recurring motif, I determined the importance of continuing to follow the thread of relationality: for example, examining the terraformation of belonging between the citizen/state offered a way into understanding citizenship and national belonging as an emotionally-charged relation. Pratt argues that “[w]e think through our senses, and the conceptual break between rationality and affect is a spurious and ideological one, long a target of feminist criticism because of the ways it has been used to exclude and dominate those deemed ‘too emotional’ for rational critical debate” (Pratt 2012, p. xxx). How the diaspora *feels* leads to how it *acts*: civic participation, political decision-making processes, cultural actions, and inter-ethnic as well as integrative social activities, among others, begin with emotion. Emotions feature in the way that migrants tell their stories, and their families’ stories, in how they remember, and in what they forget. Emotions, in this work, are active and conflicted, and themselves powerful and entangled with the nation, the market, and political expectations.

Yet, as a feminist scholar, I am also wary of analyses that ascribe emotionality to the feminised and rationality to the masculinised; the masculine/feminine binary is one that has long-been refuted by critical feminist scholarship. Enloe posits that feminist work offers how “seemingly ‘private’ sites were causally connected to the forms of power created, wielded and legitimized in the national and inter-state public spheres—and, moreover, that state and economic elites each knew it, even if they rarely openly admitted it” (2011, p. 447): the boundaries between public and private, and indeed between nations, are defined by a selective porosity influenced by modes of governance as well as the labour market. However, I acknowledge that the hyper-visibility of Filipinos in industries such as domestic and care work — types of labour which are coded feminine — create a perception of the Filipino diaspora in Canada as a racialised and feminised migrant population. Bannerjee et al argue, this “predominance” that is visible in the industry “also means that it is not just their work that is stigmatized and devalued but also they themselves are seen as racialized and gendered performers of that work” (2018, p. 928); the bodies that perform such work can be similarly

“stigmatised and devalued” not only within the industries which utilise their labour, but in the broader communities where they are employed as migrant workers. As the work of domestic labour, and care and social reproduction, as such, is “[p]erformed by women and migrants from economically disadvantaged parts of the world, the devaluation of labor begins with the devaluation of gendered and racialized geographic locations and its inhabitants” (Isaac 2022, p. 14). I am careful to note at this juncture that I am not *ascribing* emotionality the Filipino diaspora in Canada; rather, I am engaging with the emotions that *emerged* during the process of data collection, and understand them to be pivotal to understanding the experience of a diaspora group.

III. Literatures

III. A. Citizenship

The citizenship that a person holds determines how the world at large encounters them as individuals and as members of a group. Within national borders, the laws that surround citizenship and legal status governs the relationship between the individual and the state to which they claim or to which they have staked belonging in. Outside national borders, citizenship and legal status influence the way that native-born citizens perceive themselves in apposition to non-citizens. Questions of externality and race, therefore, cannot be excised from analyses of citizenship. Classically understood as the arbiter in the relationship between the citizen and their state (Brubaker 1989; Anderson 1983/1991/2006), according to Stasiulis and Bakan, citizenship is also “a politically and socially constructed expression of the development of the advanced capitalist nation-state” (1997, p. 115). To be a citizen is not only to be able to make claims, but also to have the capitalist nation-state make claims upon one’s legal personhood.

The theoretical roots of citizenship in the European and North American traditions descend from “associating ownership of property with full citizenship (as in the original restriction of the franchise to men of property), and equally of excluding the poor and the indigent from the rights of citizenship” (Abele 2005, p. 219); citizenship is inextricable from class, as well as from conceptions of the alien and correspondingly, of racial inclusions and exclusions. Along with the physical geography of a state’s boundary lines — which are often contested, as in the case of Palestine/Israel and the Philippines/China— it is state citizenship and national identity that determine a person’s encountered self, and which crucially shapes the make-up of the persons with whom the citizen shares an “imagined community” (Anderson 1983/1991/2006). Walker puts forward the argument that “it is the link to territory that...

supplies the citizen with her primary political identity” (in Shachar et al 2017, p. 556). This territoriality, or the geographical boundedness that is formed by competing geopolitics, is what shapes the borders of the nation-state and makes them defensible; in turn, recognised or even contested territorialities are what anchor discourses of internal cohesion and national identity. The physical as well as discursive defense of territories are deeply tied to contested manifestations of loyalty that are expected of citizens in times of national duress.

While those who have successfully sought out or were granted the status of citizen in the global North are situated in the modernity of the present, securitized actions relegates non-citizens to an anachronistic and insecure past. The securitized citizen and the insecure migrant face each other across a border that not only inscribes a line between boundaries that dictate life, death, and imprisonment for many, it also delineates between the modernity of the present and the assignation of a migrant into a ‘primitive’ or ‘uncivilised’ past. Bosniak argues that there are “twin citizenship regimes — one committed to the inclusion of persons, the other to the exclusion of strangers” (2006, p. 9). Securitised boundaries are drawn not only over land, sea, and air as terrain, as territory, and as resource, but also over certain bodies that are encouraged or discouraged from entering, or else are barred from integrating. Because labour migrants are not citizens or permanent residents in their states of employment, and are outside of the spheres of jurisdiction of their home states, they “are vulnerable to both state-sanctioned and extralegal practices of violence, enforcement, terror, exclusion, and removal” (Beltran 2020, p. 23); the exploitation and abuse that they are subject to exist within the labour institutions as well as in the employee/employer relationship. As a group that exists outside of citizenship protections, migrant workers are subject to modes of internal bordering that include, as Bendixsen and Näre argue, welfare state bordering, or the “practices of controlling and managing access to social rights based on residence, migrancy and/or citizenship in a given socio-political order” (2024, p. 2693), practices that Ratzmann and Sahraoui further describe as those that “restrict migrants’ ability to satisfy their basic needs through limited access to essential social services,” which in turn limits “migrants’ meaningful participation in society” (2021, p. 441). The status of migrants as non-citizens is a contributing factor to the continued exploitation of their labour and the abuse of their personhood.

Aguilar describes citizenship “[a]s the hinge connecting the fictive nation to the empirical state,” arguing that it “links the symbolic community of the nation with the apparatus of state institutions and the contractual rights and obligations of citizenship” (2018, p. 836). The distinction that Aguilar makes between a “fictive” nation and an “empirical” state speaks

to how legal citizenship and national identity are shaped in conjunction with but are rendered distinct from each other; the 'fictive' nature of the nation highlights a collective imagination that, for example, creates a 'nation' that is imagined differently in the diaspora/s than it is in the homeland. Yet, as Yuval-Davis argues, "[t]his 'holy trinity' of people, territory and state was always more fiction than fact," (2011, p. 29) as attested to by the contestations between citizen-state as well as across national borders that populate the historical timeline. Still, there is an association of identity with citizenship that Kim describes as "political and cultural production(s) based on a particular imaginary of us with its constitutive cultural mythology in each provincial/national community" (2023, p. 485). The concept of national identity, Raney argues, "holds both a collective and individual meaning: it can describe the shared myths, values, and aspirations of a national group, and it can describe an individual's attachment to his/her nation" (2009, p. 7). Citizens and states, in these various and contested ways, co-constitute the meanings of national identity.

In Aguilar's assertion that citizenship is the link between the immaterial and the material, between affective engagement and quantifiable responsibility, the specificity of labour brokerage and the cultural normalisation of outmigration in terms of how it shapes citizenship emerges through the process of deterritorialisation, in the "decreasing salience of the very idea of fixed membership of a single political community" (Walker in Shachar et al 2017, p. 571). After all, the legal citizenship that a migrant holds may change over their lifetime, but this shift in legal status does not preclude their ongoing sociocultural or political identification with their birth communities or with their transnational families. Without the 'hinge,' the fictive nation still exists, and in some ways is conflated with the 'empirical' state; the deterritorialisation of national identity from state membership has no impact on the responsibilities that an individual has to their families. For a labour migrant, for instance, to become a citizen of their country of employment does not lessen the material urgency of continuing to send personal remittances homewards to their families, nor does a change in legal status necessarily thin their attachment to the Philippines as an anchor of their identity. Manifesting as it does at the juncture where immense changes regarding expectations of citizens and citizenship occur, I argue that the case study of the Philippines as a labour brokerage state gestures towards a terraformation of belonging that is manifesting in the changing expectations of citizenship that are in accordance with the will of the labour market, as refracted through the lens of neoliberal governance goals from both the sending and the receiving states.

The Filipino citizen is the object and the commodity that is sold to the global market for their labour and their time; as they join the labour diasporas, their relationship to the Philippines as a nation-state becomes abstracted into an affective attachment to the national home with an emphasis on kinship and cultural identities, rather than with an emphasis on their citizenship as a legal relation to the state. Two strands of engagement between the individual and the state emerge at this juncture: (1) the embodied, affective relationship to the nation and national identity, and (2) a type of exclusive loyalty that is the normative expectation of a citizen. National identity – examined in this work as a strand of relation to the nation that is distinct from citizenship as the legal relationship to the state, and one which Yuval-Davis describes as a type of membership that “is more ephemeral than that of citizenship” (2011, p. 2) – is actively imagined by the state’s representatives as a ‘purer’ basis for allegiance, grounded in an emotional and affective relationship to the nation, in contrast to the link that is explicitly being drawn between economic ‘expediency’ and legal status in the state of employment.

III. B. The Commodification of Citizens and Citizenship

Under previous Philippine law — specifically under Commonwealth Act 63, passed in 1936 — Philippine citizenship as a legal status was lost upon the naturalization of a former citizen in a different country, following the doctrines of exclusive citizenship and loyalty to one nation-state (Aguilar 2018, p. 841). In 2003, under the tenure of then-Pres. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, the Philippines passed Republic Act 9225, *An Act Making the Citizenship of Philippine Citizens Who Acquire Foreign Citizenship Permanent* (Aguilar 2018, p. 833), which provides for the reacquisition of Philippine citizenship for those who undergo naturalization in other states, although this privilege is restricted to those who are natural-born Filipinos. It bears noting that President Macapagal-Arroyo is the same president who “met with G8 leaders and introduced herself as ‘the CEO of the Philippines’,” (Ignacio 2016, p. 376), describing the nation as “a global Philippine enterprise of 8 million Filipinos who live and work abroad and generate billions of dollars a year in revenue for our country” (Rodriguez 2010, p. ix) in an economistic nod to the role of the Philippines as a broker for labouring bodies in the global labour market and calling OFWs “our greatest export” (Paddock 2006). A nation-state whose dire economic straits necessitated the exodus of its citizens becomes marketed as a business that is led by a CEO in the form of a president who is a US-trained economist, whose purpose is to market and export a subset of Filipino citizens as ideal/ised Filipino worker to serve the needs of the nation and the world. By the time a Filipino labour migrant exits the

national borders for foreign employment, Guevarra argues that they have effectively become “commodified objects of the state that are offered to the globe” (2010, p. 49); they are the objects which the nation-state uses to fulfil its participation in the labour market as a labour broker.

Serquiña argues that under the Macapagal-Arroyo administration, “Filipino workers were seen as objects to be exported or as a means to uphold the state’s international engagements and national interests” (2016, p. 214). I therefore follow Rodriguez in her contention that citizenship in the Philippines can be “defined as sets of obligations with remittance sending perhaps one of the most important duties of an overseas Philippine citizen” (2010, p. 92), rather than solely being a recourse by which “citizens lay claim to care and financial security vis-à-vis their government,” (van Walsum and Alpes 2014, p. 151). The responsibilities of citizenship now extend beyond the domestic productivity of the worker and the accountability of the taxpayer, to include the responsibility of becoming the overseas commodity that is needed by the state to fulfil its role as a labour broker. As the logic of the market, as Mavelli argues, includes “the principle of competition” (2018, p. 483), the Filipino citizen is marketed to the world as having the strategic advantages of good training and English fluency — and at various times, of having high moral standards, in the Ramos presidency, and having a caring nature and being able to work tirelessly, as in the Macapagal-Arroyo presidency.

Distant acts of affective participation were asserted as conscious enactments of citizenship in the supporting arguments for Filipino dual citizenship in the House of Representatives in 2003: “natural born Philippine citizens who had been naturalized in their destination continue to perform acts of affective citizenship in the form of sending remittances, making frequent visits, and desiring to retire in the homeland” (Aguilar 2018, p. 840). These ties, or acts of affective citizenship are considered distinct from legal or state attachments; to perform such acts are seen as “an avowal of ‘continuous allegiance’,” specifically to the home country (Aguilar 2018, p. 841) even if the individual in question now holds legal citizenship elsewhere. Amongst other abstractions, the Philippine state has made possessive claims on those it sent out as objects and as commodities: those who are still its own citizens, as well as those who are no longer citizens but are considered to be members of the nation. Despite a percentage of Filipino immigrants seeking citizenship in their states of employment, with regards to civic-economic participation in the home nation they are perceived as Filipino first by the Philippine state and its governing rules, categorised as ‘natural’ Filipinos who make

rational economic decisions that are unencumbered by legal allegiances or nationalist affections to other states. Even as the decoupling of legal citizenship from affective identity is visible in the diaspora, the state seeks to restitch those experiences together in its conflation of affective identities as constituting the behaviour of a “natural” Filipino.

For the Filipino politicians who approved Republic Act 9225, or the Citizenship Retention and Re-Acquisition Act of 2003, they “dismissed the immigrants’ act of swearing allegiance to another country as a matter of expediency, merely to obtain citizenship status as a way to safeguard the fruits of their economic labor” (Aguilar 2018, p. 844). Yet while “[a] fundamental reason for objecting to dual citizenship ‘in the world of nation-states’ was the shared conception to require undivided loyalty from the citizens towards their state” (Ronkainen 2011, p. 247), in the case of Filipino labour migrants and questions of dual citizenship arrangements, Aguilar proposes that for matters of legislation contesting political belonging, “identity and territory did not have to coincide” (2018, p. 848). This decoupling of national identity from the fixity of territory has contributed towards strong expectations that the state has of its diasporas continuing to identify as being of Filipino heritage, and with that identification, specific means of participation.

In 2014, a little over a decade after RA 9225 was passed, Aguilar contended that the 2003 Act “mark[s] a turning point in the globalization of Philippine nationhood and social life, for they legally abolished the spatial fixity of Filipino belonging and political enfranchisement” (p. 20). I make this connection to highlight the fluidity of the use of citizenship as a tool of legitimating state claims over those it perceives as citizens that it *possesses*, particularly in light of the establishment of Filipino diasporas in countries of the global north, many of whom now have the resources to invest capital in the Philippines, generations after their departure. I argue that the loss of this spatial fixity is a contributing factor to the decoupling of national identity from legal citizenship. The embrace of the diasporas by the state can itself be a cooptation of national identities and relations; “[i]ncorporating its citizens by developing policies and embracing the language of diaspora,” Quinsaat notes, “allows the state to jettison responsibility for its adoption of pernicious economic programs that pushed its citizens to go abroad” (2024, p. 41). The contemporary question of Filipino identity in the political and in the affective is therefore one that emerges from these political and market factors: how is national identity stretched or strained when citizenship can now also mean belonging to the state — as an export commodity — rather than just belonging *with* the state — as a member of the nation.

The terraformation of belonging, seen in the ways in which Philippine citizenship is stretched in accommodation of global labour brokerage, has created conditions wherein citizenship is now a belonging *to* (a possessive), as opposed to belonging *with* (a membership). Countries like the Philippines depend on “the exportation of ‘ideal subjects’ to generate remittances that can be leveraged to alleviate a failing economy” (Polanco 2017, p. 67). With the continued individualisation of welfare responsibilities, and the offloading of social reproduction from the state to the family, the expanded modality and expectations of the good citizen that has expanded to be inclusive of the citizen-as-migrant-worker is a way by which the relationship between the state and the individual is terraformed synchronously to the global demands of labour brokerage.

Concurrent to its entrenchment in the global labour market as a brokerage state, the Philippine state’s expectation of good citizenship seems to have shifted from a territorially-bound civic and market participation to a participation that involves territorial hypermobility via labour outmigration. As Manalansan observes, “[t]he deployment of ‘flexibility’ hides tensions in both material and affective environments and disregards the various forms of violence, dislocation, and death that permeate the lived experiences of these workers” (2010, p. 215). This deployment of the idea of national belonging encompasses not only an emotional affinity that flows from the individual towards the nation, but is also a manifestation of the ideology that the citizen belongs to the state as an asset or as a commodity to be utilised in fulfilment of the state’s role on the world stage — regardless of whether, as Manalansan is arguing, such hyperflexibility can lead to the ‘violence, dislocation, and death’ of the individual citizen.

What I refer to in this research project as the imposed life course of the labour citizenry is a phenomenon that is made visible by ongoing waves of Filipino *labour* outmigration: the life course is the bookended imperative of leaving and the necessity of return that the Philippine nation-state has charted for its global working class for the commoditised citizenry. The imperative to leave and seek out employment and better opportunities outside the national borders is ongoing: the genesis of the institutionalization of Filipino overseas employment dates to the administration of then-president and eventual dictator of two decades Ferdinand Edralin Marcos and the creation of the Overseas Employment Development Board through Presidential Decree no. 422, s.1974 (Asis 2005, 2006) “which enunciated labour export as state policy of the authoritarian regime” (Aguilar 2015, p. 449) and “which was initially intended as a temporary solution to address the country’s macroeconomic instability” (Cabanda et al 2024, p. 7). The necessity of return is grounded in the temporary nature of many employment

contacts, the maintenance of affective relationships with the family and kin networks who have been left behind, and the yearning for home that is characteristic of the experience of many OFWs. Such acts of return are broadly understood to include not only a physical return or homecoming to the Philippines, but also a continuous affective or obligatory participation in the remittance cycle, as well as partaking in transnational civic action such as absentee voting in Philippine elections or engaging in protests against political regimes (Quinsa 2024).

The imposition of this life course furthers the “myth of return,” the long-held notion that “migrants still dream that they will eventually return to their homeland” (Teo 2011, p. 806). Jung describes the “desire for return” as one that “manifests in a debt to the real and/or imagined homeland in question, whose very inaccessibility fixes physical and psychological displacement as a diasporic cultural heritage” (2013, p. 55). The assumed outcome of the life course for those who physically leave the country either for temporary labour contracts or for more permanent settlement elsewhere is that the distance from family and nation ensures a continuing “desire to return to and eventually retire in the Philippines,” a presupposition which has been interpreted as “enacting performative citizenship” (Aguilar 2018, p. 840). That is, the distance between the migrant and the home of origin — which is itself sustained and necessitated as a condition for the Philippine state to continue marketing OFWs as untethered labouring bodies to the global labour market — leads to various modes of ‘affective’ participation, from the remittance cycle, to financial investments in property, and to many temporary or permanent homecomings.

The expectation of participation in the life course is thus one that is not imposed on every single Filipino citizen. Rather, a citizen’s class standing creates the conditions under which this life course is experienced, made particularly evident in a citizen’s proximity towards the *idea* of overseas labour prior to embarking upon the process itself. Importantly for the state in its role as a global broker of labour, the naturalization of this life course — alongside the perceived and real lack of opportunities within the borders of the home state — creates a steady flow of Filipino labourers slated for export to countries and industries that are facing labour shortages all over the world. After now five decades of the Philippines continuing to see a steady stream of citizens flowing outwards (Rother 2022), the life course of necessary departure and necessary return has become naturalised in Filipino culture and society both for the temporary nature of many employment contracts as well as for the maintenance of relationships with those who have been left behind. For Filipino migrants who leave the country and carry with them the obligation of being either the sole or one of the family’s breadwinner/s,

the life course originates with a sense of urgency that is socioeconomic in nature. These are experiences that are as visceral and embodied as they are fantastical and world-making for the Filipinos who engage in migration as a speculation for the possibility of a better future, what Tadiar refers to in *Fantasy Production* as the journey of *pakikipagsapalaran* or gambling upon/for a better future (2004).

III. B. The Operationalisation of Citizens' Roles

Serquiña contends that OFWs are thus far “the most strategic embodiment of the Philippine nation-state’s rhetoric of modernity and nationalism” (2016, p. 208); I understand the figure of the OFW to be a visible manifestation of how belonging is being terraformed for a nation-building project that, through the imposition of the life course and the state’s investment in labour brokerage, has expanded the expectations of citizenship to encompass citizens-as-migrant-workers in order to fulfil its global role as labour broker. Quinsaat notes the role of the state in “fusing culture, economy, and identity” through the ways that it “invokes and politicizes roles and social identities in official discourses, defining a worker, a father, or a Filipino based on their ability to contribute to the national development of the country” (2024, p. 44). The decisions that are made to leave are *relational*, in that they are made by the migrant to answer a call of responsibility for the betterment of the family as a unit as well as for themselves, and an *expectation*, in that through the long decades of upholding the labour export policies, the Philippine government has established outmigration as accepted routes towards upwards social mobility. It is the family unit, “both biological and fictive, in the homeland and the hostland, [that] are putting in tremendous amounts of work to keep the transnational family arrangement a viable one” (Francisco-Menchavez 2018, p. 4). The responsibilities that are taken on by the global Filipino working class — commoditised members of the citizenry — are “profoundly shaped by familial ideology and class, race, and gender differences” (Bezanson and Luxton 2006, p. 9-10). Rodriguez suggests that the infrastructures producing labour migration ensure that migrants, “especially if they have responsibilities or other close ties to family members or other kin in other homelands, are bound to return” (2010, p. 79); affective and sociocultural ties to the Philippines through the categories of citizen-state relation and familial relations must be strong enough to transcend competing loyalties.

Intimately within the sphere of the home, “[r]emittances translate social capital, futurity, and distance into a representation of value” (Isaac 2022, p. 10) — that the sacrifice of overseas labour was, ultimately, worth it. It is through these familial acts of care that are performed by migrant workers for the family that the state is able to access capital — the flows

of capital that are sent back for reinvestment into the local economy necessary to support the Philippine economy. Rodriguez argues that the Philippines' labour export policies have "require[d] the responsabilization of Philippine citizens who are to directly bear the costs of neoliberal restructuring as their remittances go to debt servicing" (2010, p. xix). Thus, it is not only the participation in the life course of departure and return that is imperative for citizens-as-migrant-workers; the expectation of the behaviour of the 'good' citizen-as-migrant is inclusive of a continued participation in financial-affective gestures throughout their tenure abroad as labour migrants. Yet these waves of global and local movements outwards are not uncomplicatedly tolerated within Filipino homeland and diaspora politics. Popular feelings regarding labour outmigration have popularly involved apprehensions over what is considered to be a nationally-detrimental brain drain as professionally-trained citizens — including "nurses, doctors, and teachers" (de los Reyes 2013, p. 551) as well as "domestic workers and seafarers" (Choy 2022, p. 25) — seek out better pay and work environments in other countries. Filipino migrant workers, particularly those migrants who are trapped in the cycle of low-waged employment, have also been subject to deprofessionalisation: the non-recognition of Filipino ('foreign') credentials and labour experience in the context of their new home country or in their states of employment.

IV. Filipino Migration

IV. A. Migrant Family Units

The internal and external assessments that would-be migrants make regarding training programs, educational opportunities, and even, ultimately, which member of the family engages in the act of leaving are complex interplays of individual and familial decision-making processes that are made in response to perceived better opportunities abroad. Many of the Filipinos who engage in the act of labour migration are women; this feminisation of the Filipino global labour work force began in the 1980s (Encinas-Franco 2016). The decision taken on by women to leave on such migration journeys have spurred criticism from a traditionally-conservative Philippines, where men are expected to labour for a wage, and women are expected to keep the home and raise children. The gendered critiques that are aimed at Filipino mothers who have undertaken the decision to work abroad must therefore be contextualised against this backdrop of traditional family culture and heteropatriarchal nationalism, and the anxieties that are provoked by the perceived breakdown of traditional gender roles through women who are not only labouring for a wage, but are labouring for a wage abroad.

The feminisation of the Filipino labour diaspora has effects that reverberate not only within the private spheres of transnational families, but also in the public sphere of Philippine society; the departure of mothers has led to (inter)national discourse regarding what is perceived to be the deterioration of the Filipino family unit. Velasco argues that “[n]ationalist anxieties about the maintenance of the heteronormative family unit persist within Philippine popular culture precisely because transnational labor migration destabilizes the gendered and sexual politics of the nation” (2020, p. 6), making the connection between the disconcerted feelings of traditionally patriarchal Filipino nationalism with regards to the labour outmigration of women and the symbolic as well as financial freedom that this decision holds. The contrast between the necessity of female migrant labour and the critique of women who engage in this necessary cycle result in a relationship between a patriarchal home country and its independent female migrants defined by tension; labour outmigration becomes a way to express female agency as well, shifting the roles between wage provider and home-worker. Gardiner Barber situates women’s outmigration “within a regime of power and discipline from global political economy and skewed development that manages to capture women’s hopes for their future despite its personal risks” (2006, p. 406). That is, migrant women workers are caught in the nets of global economies, while attempting to further their own and their families’ futures outside of the perceived or real lack of opportunities within the borders of the Philippines.

Tadiar argues that women are “[s]old off by their own nation-states as commodified national natural resources” (2022, p. 11), in service of the global care industry and the crisis of social reproduction. In fact, despite these tensions surrounding the departure, specifically, of Filipino women, the Philippine government has deployed this feminisation of labour migration to establish a “brand” for the commodification of Filipino women, specifically: Macapagal-Arroyo’s launch of the Supermaid program, Guevarra argues, is “a form of ‘racial branding,’ that aims to position Filipinos as the ideal global care labour” (2014, p. 131). The Philippines continues to “[capitalize] on Filipina womanhood and domesticity,” strategically strengthening sociocultural “heteronormative and patriarchal logic” (Francisco-Menchavez 2019, p. 94) that scaffolds the supposed role of women in the nation as mothers and as homemakers.

The resultant financial empowerment of women and the subsequent shift in familial roles are reflected in the experiences of transnational families, where the role of provider becomes enfolded into the maternal, and the role of carer into the paternal, simultaneous to the operationalising of the extended family in the provision of familial care. Roces defines the transnational family unit as “a family in which one or more parent is working overseas while

their children remained in the Philippines” (2021, p. 27). Criticisms of parenting that are levelled mostly at mothers and female overseas workers who leave for labour outmigration but not towards fathers and men who engage in the same processes reflects traditional societal beliefs: that women are the providers of the work of social reproduction, while men are providers of a wage. Indeed, while the prevailing perception of the transnational family unit is that it is less functional and less ‘whole’ in the absence of the maternal figure, with the subsequent shift of the responsibilities of social reproduction onto the shoulders of the father or often, onto other female members of the extended family.²¹ Francisco-Menchavez has noted the ways in which Filipino migrant mothers have queered the role of Filipino motherhood to *include* practices of labour migration (2019), an active contestation of gendered expectations of good *female* citizenship that is entangled with the participation of women-as-migrant-citizens. While Filipino women are expected to be good mothers, they are also expected to be objects of labour export that deliver what has been promised to those who purchase the ‘product’ that is the Overseas Filipino Worker. Yet the simultaneity of the expected proximal care that mothers provide, and its irreconcilability with the nature of migrant work, speaks to a gendered terraformation of belonging: how Filipino citizens who are women are supposed to fit into the way that the heteropatriarchal nation-state imagines the role of women.

Tropes of domesticity are used to characterize women in the discourse of labour migration, particularly in the necessity of roles such as nannies, domestic helpers, caregivers and nurses; in this way, labour discourse “mark[s] women's desirability as workers at the same time that they serve to devalue and legitimize their disposability as labor commodities” (Guevarra 2010, p. 9). Female migrants, particularly those who are working within the domestic sphere, find themselves working in industries and countries where they have little protection either legally or culturally; Agathangelou writes that “this notion of the free exchange of wages for labor power is fraudulent and obfuscates the exploitative racialized and gendered relation between the domestic worker and her employer” (2004, p. 47). In the Canadian context, *Caregivers Break the Silence* by INTERCEDE (2001) is a study that documents the phenomenon of abuse that happened to live-in caregivers under the Live-in Caregiver Program; the insertion of a live-in foreign migrant into a ‘private’ Canadian domestic environment to provide care and domestic work created a labour situation rife for abuse,

²¹ While it is often the case that female members of the family step in to care for children who are left-behind, Francisco-Menchavez’s ethnographies of transnational families show that this is not the case entirely, that there are fathers who take on the work of social reproduction when their wives become migrant workers (2018).

particularly as the migrant is *required* to reside with their family of employment, changing the nature of privacy in a shared space to only encompass the employing family, to the exclusion of the migrant worker (Magsumbol 2025).

Migrant women workers therefore queer the Filipino landscape of labour through their participation in such work. One way in which these experiences of queering the mainstream have been made visible in popular media is through the documentary *Sunday Beauty Queen* by Baby Ruth Villarama. In it, the documentarian shows the lives of Filipina women who work as domestic helpers in Hong Kong, showing the ways in which pageants as agentic and public spectacle create a way for women to contest the way they are legible *only* as workers. Migrant beauty pageants, as Piosos III argues, stage and spectacularize Filipina bodies through heteronormative scripts of femininity that orients migrant women's maternal role towards the development of one's home and homeland through their participation in the feminized global care chains" (2022, p. 1730). Pageants, as spaces of agentic participation and performance in the public sphere, center its participants, quite literally, in spaces which are distant from their everyday working environments. Thus, while migrant pageants can be perceived as 'heteronormative scripts,' they are also, according to Tungohan a place which can "present migrant care work in a more empowering light" (2023, p. 187).

Attempts to locate Filipino migrant youth in the literature regarding migration often finds them in the left-behind discourse, or else hypervisible in the traumas of separation and reintegration. In Canada, youth of colour have been perceived as "violent threats to order," a reputation that is shaped through "processes of racialization that render Filipino and other immigrant youth 'other' in relation to the white settler nation" (Catungal 2012, p. 331). As youth migrants to Canada, their integration into a society embedded in settler colonial notions that have Othered non-Anglo migrants include being stratified along spectrums of race, class, ability, and gender, and even intra-group modalities of exclusion. de Leon's work examining colourism in the Filipino communities in Scarborough and Markham marks these stratifications not only along skin colour, but spatial boundaries; she argues that examining this particularity in the Filipino community in Canada aims to "dispel any notion of a presumed racial and ethnic homogeneity among these communities" (de Leon 2012, p. 383). Communities such as the Filipino diaspora in Canada are not monolithic groups devoid of complicated inter-group dynamics that can pit members of the community against each other; to presume such heterogeneity is to refuse the fullness of their human experience.

Other moments of conflict in the diaspora also develop within the family units; in this dissertation, as I explore in Chapters Four, Five, and Six, this can be seen particularly in the differences between how first generation parents and 1.5 or second generation children navigate their settlement into Canadian society. Kirmayer et al write that, “[a]s youth acculturate, many come into conflict with parents and relatives who hold ideals and values different from those being adopted by their children” (2011, p. E962). These moments of tension between what is considered to be right or wrong, or even acceptable and unacceptable behaviours, are influenced not only by the family’s own sets of ideals and expectations, but also by a resistance against what might be perceived as diaspora-born and -raised generations move towards more Canadian or Western orientations of values. Tension between children and parents can become therefore become aggravated, particularly as traditional Filipino parental expectations can include specific displays of respect. For example, de Guzman et al highlight an expectation of Filipino parents raising children in the American diaspora, specifically “how important it was for their children to heed their exhortations and to behave in ways that parents deemed appropriate. Compliance was not just expected as an eventual outcome but ideally as an immediate response to requests” (2024, p. 7). Here, the authors emphasise that ‘respect’ is not just the performance of the action, but also in the *immediacy* of performing the action; a delay would be considered disrespectful, even if the action was still completed. Yet, parent-child relationships in the diaspora has also been defined by the honouring of parental sacrifice through actions that lead to individual success; Mendoza writes, “[b]y relating their academic performance to a sense of obligation in return for their parents’ sacrifices, post-memories serve as homages to the youth’s desire to fulfil the legacies their parents intended for them upon migration” (2012, p. 375). The inter-familial relations within the immediate family in the diasporic context are thus made complicated by cultural expectations carried over from the homeland as well as sets of actions that are implicated in being members of a diaspora; these, of course, are in addition to the usual complications that can occur between parents and children.

Cabalquinto argues that “the Filipino family has been constantly reconfigured by the demands of an expansive and neoliberal global economy” (2022, p. 43). These reconfigurations, including the “emotional dynamics associated with migration at a social and political level” in the service of the machineries of labour migration, affect not only the migrants themselves but also of what Boccagni and Baldassar refer to as their “sedentary” fellows, the “non-migrants in home communities, and native residents in host societies” (2015,

p. 74). Once transnational families have settled in Canada, the emotions surrounding migration and its associated choices continue to be felt far beyond the dates of arrival, including generations later. There are material-affective projects that are ongoing, which include the continued participation of distant family members in the family unit in the Philippines, or the families left behind, the “nonmigrant family members that live in the Philippines” (Francisco-Menchavez 2018, p. 23). There are also longer-term generational choices, including the choice of having children learn or maintain a heritage language, that continue to echo generations later. The diasporic family thus occupy places and relations that stretch across time and temporality: from the home of origin, to the new home country, from being Filipino to being Canadian.

To be able to make sense of all of these connections in a family unit, my approach towards ideas of the Filipino family in this work therefore hearkens towards how Aguilar describes it as “a culture of relatedness,” of “understanding social relationships in terms of their embedment in the larger structures of kinship” (2013, p. 351). I understand families to be social institutions — which can include both kin and non-kin relations — that provide care for each other in manner which is multidirectional (Francisco-Menchavez 2025). In this research project, I consider the diasporic family to be a site where imaginations of self, identity, and of home meet, troubled borders where family members exist in relation with each other, with the home of origin, and with the new home state. Families are, as Awi argues, “an affective space of intimacy in which experiences are constituted by a socio-cultural context” (2023, p. 47). Yet the lives and experiences of my interviewees are reflective of the many configurations of family that exist outside of the Western cis-heterodox expectations of the nuclear family.

IV. B. Living Out of Time and Out of Place

The temporal and geographic distance between overseas workers and their families are key components in the preferential appeal of hiring Filipinos: not only are Filipino migrant workers marketed as fluent in English, effectively-trained, and ready to work, they are also not at the urgency of proximally providing socially reproductive labour to their families, who will be in a different country. The labour citizenry of the Philippines is continually regulated against distance and time; labour, when commodified and abstracted in this manner, is “effectively disembodied, detached from persons who perform it” (McNally 2011, p. 14). They are marketed as untethered from their families. In leaving the Philippines to work abroad and fulfil the requirements of employment, “the worker contracts her time and, more particularly, her body in time” (Isaac 2022, p. 13). The Filipino worker is engaged with as a self-sufficient and individualised unit of labour in their countries of employment, one who does not have to give

care, nor, indeed, needing to receive care for themselves. The migrant worker lives out of time, and out of place, from their families. Diasporas straddle place and time in their everyday lives, through living disparate geographies and temporalities that are brought together by technology and desire.

However, Acedera et al, in their work on Filipino transnational families, offer an alternative reading of familial time in transnational families, one which draws on families' collective habitation of virtual rather than of physical spaces. Proposing the theory of "family time," they speak towards the "temporalities lived by migrant women and left-behind family members" (Acedera et al 2018, p. 154); despite the distance between family members who are caught in the matrix of labour migration, they note that "this period of being apart is not considered... to be akin to stasis or the lack of movement and progress" (p. 169). Rather, they offer the argument that the family continues to move forward together as a cohered unit despite the distance that stretches affective relationships across time and space. The emotional lives of transnational families — constellations, as they are called by Francisco-Menchavez (2018) — "are no longer conducted solely in proximity, but are increasingly performed, practiced and displayed in a variety of situated and simultaneous interactions, including across distance and space over time" (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015, p. 74). For transnational families, present time can be experienced and lived as speculation for a possible better future together rather than as a co-habited now, a time of protracted conjecture and of a collective imagination looking towards a future together.

Yet, in discussions of labouring clock-time, the Philippines has not only contracted out its citizens to work abroad, it has also established industries within the nation that would allow citizens, if they so choose, to physically stay in the country whilst working and living on Western time. The effects of the strains of standard/clock time are visible in the emergence of the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry (Padios 2018), as well as the currently-rising and as-of-yet unregulated Virtual Assistant (VA) industry (France-Presse and Brown 2025) in the Philippines. Both have notably similar characteristics: the service of clients that reside primarily in the Western hemisphere; workers who are geographically anchored in the Philippines while temporally labouring in Western time; and the necessity of being fluent in the languages of English, customer service, emotional labour, technology, and administration. While still taking into consideration the fact that these newer industries are ones where the working Filipino ostensibly does not have to leave the borders of the country, their lives are still inexorably caught up in the 'standard' time of global — that is, Western — employment.

“Ready-made, standard time,” Cua Lim argues, “allows disparate events to become equivalent and comparable by synchronizing them in accordance with the “universal” time of clock and calendar” (2009, p. 71); the assumed universality of standard time belies lived notions of asynchronicity and the affective ruptures that occur within such gaps of time and distance.

V. Canada and Its Immigrants

V. A. Multiculturalism in Canada

Within the Canadian context, Nath argues that “the dominant work tends to focus on multiculturalism as a liberal philosophical ideal of cultural pluralism that is integral to Canadian ‘identity’ itself” (2011, p. 169). Canada’s national identity is intertwined with concepts of diversity, not only internally but also as a comparative with regards to the United States. Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau’s Liberal government codified the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982), which “provided a platform for a pan-Canadian identity that could appeal to every Canadian regardless of birthplace, race, or religion” (Raney 2009, p. 9-10). The *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* was passed in 1988; this policy, according to Pennesi, was “aimed to enhance cultural awareness and understanding, to assist ethnic minorities in fully participating in society, and to foster cultural identities” (2016, p. 47). Yet under the auspices of the implied ‘us’ in Canadian multiculturalism, the insider that is the ‘we’ needs a perpetual Other, the ‘they’ by which the ‘we’ can continue to define itself. The status of migrant and that of citizen is often presented as being in static opposition to each other, with Martins arguing that “political discourse about immigration often works to homogenize the ‘migrant’ as a symbolic figure in opposition to the ‘citizen’” (2025, p. 131). These oppositional modes of discourse have meant that “[t]he project of multiculturalism has come to define and name those bodies who do not cleanly fit into the colonial project” (Mecija 2018, p. 123). In other words, the nation-building project that is inherent in multiculturalism is one which necessitates a continuous Othering of racialised and minoritised groups.

The concept of ethnic identity is, as Nath argues, “profoundly racialized and it encodes binary understandings of ‘us versus them’,” (2011, p. 170), and these boundaries are established in a form of multiculturalism which “conceal[s] the colonial and imperial legacies by constructing a cultural mosaic based on celebrations of superficial aspects of diverse cultures” (Brown 2008, p. 376). For minoritised and racialised diasporas in Canada — including the Filipino diaspora — the pre-existent histories in the new home state embed them in a multicultural mosaic that has treated Indigenous peoples, settlers, and migrants in categorically different ways with regards to rights and responsibilities, creating a Canada where

interactions between these groups are based around historical notions of power and dominance that are made invisible behind the label of “multiculturalism.” Dhamoon argues that “regardless of whether or not individuals or groups deliberately enact forms of domination, because different representations of subjectivity and subjection are constituted in relational ways, there is no process of subject formation that is void of power” (2010, p. 148). The transitions of certain groups of people from disallowed to embraced are indicative of an observation Sharma makes, that “Native and Migrant are not natural, timeless categories, even if states and people act as if they are. They are political categories” (2020, p. 21) and therefore, subject to political change.

To theorisations of the Other, Ahmed offers the concept of the ‘alien,’ that “[t]o be an alien in a particular nation, is to hesitate at a different border: the alien here is the one who does not belong in a nation space, and who is already defined as such by the Law” (2000, p. 3). Beyond the delineations that are put in place by law — particularly as defined by the legal bureaucracies of working visas, permanent residencies, and citizenship — Canada has an often unreckoned-with ‘we’ that “does not reside in language, religion or other aspects of culture, but rather in the European/North American physical origin — in the body and the colour of skin” (Bannerji 2000, p. 42). Canada’s internal Others have, at certain points in its histories, included Indigenous nations as well as migrants who did not fit under specific categories of whiteness.

Canada’s migrants, and would-be migrants, are enveloped in what Teo calls the “neoliberal multiculturalism” of the nation-state (2011), one which seeks to entrench the notion of benevolent multicultural nation as having been nascent in the country’s origin mythologies. Multiculturalism becomes an “epistemological device for occluding the organization of the social” (Bannerji 2000, p. 6); that is, it is utilised as a tool that delegates migrants to a status as cultured and cultural subjects rather than a robust apprehension of immigration and multiculturalism as infra/structures of power and politics (Dhamoon 2010). Multiculturalism can be “construed in a way that makes it simply an extension of a ‘difference-blind’ liberal approach to political inclusion and belonging” (Singh 2004, p. 446).

Multiculturalism as the federal and cultural fabric of the nation experiences historical moments of a seeming inability to stretch in accommodation of non-white bodies that are often perceived to be the source of conflict or an undesired redefinition of Canadian national identity — “Canada’s policy of multiculturalism has not altered these relations of white settler racial power” (Walia 2021, p. 160). Dhamoon notes that identity, here, “is thereby a symbol of

difference rather than a synonym for a person. To put it simply, identity is difference” (2009, p. 11). I place Dhamoon’s notions of difference in conversation with Sharma, who argues that, “[w]e must understand that the very practices that purportedly affirm Our belonging in the nation are the same ones that allow the Canadian nation state to legitimately mark some Others who live there to be socially and legally inscribed as foreign bodies” (2006, p. 30). This complication highlights the simultaneous exclusivity and inclusivity of citizenship as a marker of belonging, and particularly in nations that have high populations of foreign-born residents and citizens. Barrett, writing about Black Canadians and the relationship between literature and multiculturalism, writes that “this language of Canadian multiculturalism sets out the imaginative terrain from which Canadians narrate their nation from both the centre and the margin” (2015, p. 3). Such as a narrative fabric of national identity “relies on the construction of an exalted, compassionate self, which inevitably results in a contrasting figure of the Other” (Halford 2025, p. 14).

Ahmed proposes that aliens are “encountered” both “at the border of the human” as well as through “establishing relations of proximity and distance within the home(land)” (2000, p. 3); for migrant diasporas in foreign lands, their bodies are perceived as visual borders anchored in geopolitics and phenotypes, demarcations which visibly illustrate who is and who is not perceived to be a citizen. As Sharma rightly argues, “[w]ith the overlaying of the idea of *home* onto that of *nation*, migrant workers are easily understood as foreigners labouring within a ‘foreign labour market’ instead of being an integral component of Canadian society” (2006, p. 7) — migrant workers are excluded from full citizenship rights, even as they are necessary to the function of nations. Yet within the boundaries of liberal democracies, it is that status of citizenship which continues to be, as Andrew argues, the primary way by which a citizen “incorporates the demands for inclusion and very particularly for belonging: it says we are you or you are us” (2005, p. 324). Within a functional democracy, to be a citizen is to be able to make *recognised* claims upon the government. Yet citizenship itself, as I will explore in the next section, is not a neutral or uncontested legal status; as Singh argues, “[l]iberal procedures are produced by, and serve to reproduce, liberal identities because they are based in, and serve to propagate, a particular liberal language-game. Clearly, these procedures are, therefore, not neutral” (2004, p. 449).

V. B. Multicultural Canada and the Migrant/Citizen

Canada’s migrant populations exist against the limits of liberal multiculturalism and settler-colonialism: nationalist and nativist perspectives seek to solidify differentiations

between those they consider to be ‘true’ Canadians and migrants-who-became-citizens, as well as making distinctions between migrants who are judged to be deserving and non-deserving of the status of citizenship. These delineations, while they endure in political time, are not rigid by any means: they fluctuate over time and across generations, and are impacted by political and economic contexts.

Thobani argues that citizenship as a category within settler-colonial Canada was “born from the genocidal violence of colonization, exists in a dialectical relation with its Other, the Indian, for whom the emergence of this citizenship was deadly, not emancipatory” (2007, p. 74). Thus, citizenship serves to form the political shape of a nation through how it is deployed in the legal constitution of the body politic. Thus, within the ranks of Canadian migrants, and even within the body of the citizenry, there are those who are considered to be and are engaged with as outsiders, who experience being Othered explicitly or implicitly (Bannerji 2000; Dhamoon and Abu-Laban 2009; Dhamoon 2010). These categorisations begin at the point of encounter between the individual and the nation-state: the programmes that they used to enter Canadian borders. One is therefore considered a “good” candidate for citizenship if one’s behaviour can be “characterized by adherence to national values” (Larios 2023, p. 22), or if one is able to meet the requirements for naturalisation, “such as lack of a criminal record, knowledge of the state’s history, commitment to certain values, use of the language and ethnicity” (Anderson et al 2011, p. 554).

Yet, to attempt to seek membership in the Canadian body politic through pathways that are perceived to be back doors to Canadian immigration is to be entangled in notions of propriety; in defining “good” as the knowledge of how to approach the expected behavioural interplay between the state’s systems of entry and the nation’s expectations of acceptable behaviour, Daisy highlights how Canada perceives some would-be immigrants to be more “good” than others, and therefore are more “deserving” of a space in the Canadian national body. Daisy’s example of international students is reflective of contemporary political mores; the industry of international education is intended to be used “to advance Canada’s economic interests in specific ways” (Brunner 2022, p. 234), not for international students to necessarily then gain entry into Canada as workers and then as permanent residents, and eventual citizens. In the Canadian context, the policies that surround immigration have “historically entailed a complex balancing act between the utilitarian considerations underlying the economic imperative of immigration and communitarian concerns over the demographic composition of the immigrant intake” (Trebilcock 2018, p. 836). That is, while streams of intake can be defined

by a “utilitarian” necessity, such as the country’s labour needs, they are also tempered by considerations of who gets allowed into the border.

The terraformations of belonging regarding both Filipino and Canadian identities that the diaspora experiences is a process that unfolds over a lifetime, perhaps even over generations. Kristeva asserts that “....the multicultural fantasy works as a form of conditional love, in which the conditions of love work to associate ‘others’ with the failure to return to the national ideal...” (1993, p. 139); that is, the role of national ‘love’ in the processes of multicultural integration is conditional, and is therefore dependent on an individual’s performance of what constitutes a good citizen or a good migrant. One of my interviewees, Daisy, who is the child of a former live-in caregiver, proposed the idea that the good immigrant is one who is able to make the transition into a good citizen — to be a good Filipino immigrant, in her words, is “being able to play the system well,” to be able to perform actions that, at given political moments, correspond to the idea of what “good” entails. Larios describes these actions as a performance, and that “a willingness to play one’s assigned role and act within the dictates of one’s status is treated as an indicator of good future citizenship” (2023, p. 21). If a person comes to Canada in the “right” way — not just in the legal sense, but also through what is perceived by popular political opinion to be acceptable — then that migrant can become a good citizen because they themselves will follow not only what is legally correct, but also behaviourally expected of them. Thus, assimilability and goodness are not only embedded in the legal sense, but also in the social sense.

Daisy further illustrates her analysis of the good migrant/good citizen dynamic through two programs which previously had pathways to permanent residency: the Live-In Caregiver Program, which now no longer exists, and arriving as an international student, a migration pathway which has become increasingly more difficult to navigate (Bozheva 2023; Brunner 2022). Daisy observes that while both international students and LCP migrants arrive/d in Canada through legitimate means, migrants who arrive on student visas and decide to apply for permanent residency are seen as “having cheated the system.” She references popular discourse that international students who come to Canada should leave after their programs, because they are using international student programs as a back door means to illegitimately gain access to citizenship. Daisy explains:

“If you're a Filipino international student, technically, you're an immigrant in some sort of capacity. You will be ostracised, and people will look at you differently, (they'll) be like, ‘You're a Filipina international student, but you did not go the right way of immigration,

especially nowadays, you cheated the system.’ I feel like, for me and for my family — we went through the Live-in Caregiver Program — in a way, we were told, ‘You played the system well because you followed the right steps’.”

This exclusion from the Canadian body begins, for some, at their points of entry into Canada. Canada has been “a major player in the recruitment of international students,” and the industry of international education was “woven into Canada’s policy fabric, institutionalised by the publication of government international education strategies and the involvement of an ever-widening range of government and education policy factors” (Harden-Wolfson et al 2025, p. 115); that is, Canadian international students are, as Bozheva argues, “embodied intersections of education and migration domains” (2024, p. 1447). International students seeking to apply for post-graduate work permits (PGWP) before applying for permanent residency have been caught in the middle as migration policies regarding international students change while they are still in the program (Bozheva 2024). However, Vosko argues that individuals who hold PGWPs are made to pass through various ‘doors’ with regards to their migration to Canada, saying (2023, p. 4),

“Nevertheless, PGWP-holders must pass through multiple doors of entry and meet considerable qualifying criteria to settle permanently. As students migrating for a non-work purpose who may engage in limited work for remuneration, PGWP-holders enter initially through the back door. Upon completing their programs of study, and enrolling in the PGWP, notionally, these former international students transition to a front-door program. Qualitatively, however, certain parameters of the PGWPP are associated with side-door entry. These conditions include channelling permit-holders into particular occupations to obtain greater security of presence (e.g., via the requirement that they hold and retain jobs deemed to be high-skilled in order to apply for permanent residency). Subsequently, if they meet qualifying requirements to apply for permanent residency and are invited to apply, PGWP-holders gain genuine front-door access.”

Thus, despite Daisy making a distinction between her family’s experience with the LCP and Filipinos who arrive through educational pathways — as ‘good’/‘bad’ or correspondingly, ‘front door’/‘side door’ access to permanent residency — what characterises whether or not an entry falls into one side or the other is both the program itself as well as how an individual migrant has been racialised or minoritised at a given point in political time. In fact, the LCP as a programme was itself subject to discourse of bad migrant/back door entry; then-Minister of Employment Jason Kenney made the controversial claim that “the program had become ‘out of control’ and had transformed into a pathway for family reunification,” and more specifically, that “Filipino domestic workers were entering Canada to work for family members,” a claim that was proven untrue by SSHRC-funded research (Malek 2021, p. 16). Yet, Daisy’s analysis also gestures towards the fluctuating nature of migrant acceptability politics within Canada; as

Filipinos continue to come to Canada through the various means of immigration available to them, the currents of politics and social relations animating the nation still renders some racialised and minoritised folks ‘good,’ while others are ‘bad.’

There is, Capurri argues, “an emphasis on material and economic utility” (2019, p. 14) associated with an idealised “good” citizen, such that it excludes those considered abject, such as bodies that the state considers to be physically or mentally disabled. In the history of migration and disability in Canada, the use and eventual disuse of words such as “lunatic” and “insane” reveal “Canadian society’s changing perception of those who fall outside the normative ideal of the white, able-bodied citizen” (Capurri 2019, p. 14). Canada’s ideal immigrant, as contextualised within its regime of neoliberal capitalist democracy, is therefore an individual who is “economically productive and can contribute to Canada’s national and global competitiveness” (Abu Laban et al, 2022, p. 175). The individualisation of expectations surrounding the “good” citizen and the “good” migrant, according to Martins, allows for a perpetuation of “individualizing discourses of ‘success’ and ‘failure’ that do not take into account structural constraints” (2025, p. 138). To be perceived as a “bad” migrant, as an *individually* bad migrant, erases the state’s function of il/legalisation through ongoing changes in migration policies. If inclusion in the body politic through the granting of citizenship is one method by which a good migrant is rewarded and becomes a good citizen, the refusal of naturalisation and a person’s expulsion from the borders is the punishment. To be deported is to be rhetorically presented as an “unwanted individual,” an example that illustrates “the political community’s idealised view of what membership should (or should not) mean” (Anderson et al 2011, p. 548).

Conclusion

In the first half of this chapter, I established that the theory of terraformation that I seek to develop throughout this research project is an *anticolonial* terraformation, an application that rejects the singularity of changing a terrain for the sole benefit of economic regimes or for the sole benefit of a narrowly-imagined new inhabitant. Rather, as an applied heuristic, I offer that terraformation is a negotiation; while still inevitably marked by the uneven flows of power and the tension that exists between citizen-migrants, migrant-citizens, nations, and states, my use of terraformation throughout the research project that follows emphasises contestations as much as it does co-creations. I therefore approach the notion of diaspora from a perspective that foregrounds generational time: while the Filipino diaspora may have specific dates of departure from the Philippines, and specific dates of arrival in Canada, alongside dates of work

visas, permanent residency, and citizenship, it is important to establish that migration can be a generations-long process. As modes of national belonging — fluctuating across legal citizenship and affective membership — are terraformed by the processes of migration, labour and otherwise, both the context of why they departed and what they have arrived into are vital to inform questions of acculturation.

Having established the heuristic of terraformation, and the literatures upon which I build my understandings of belonging through citizenship, migration, and multiculturalism in the overlapping contexts of the Philippines and Canada, in the next chapter I shift back towards the Philippines in a political, geographic sense. I examine the State of the Nation Addresses of Philippine presidents through a thematic discourse analysis, and begin the first of my three applications of terraformation in looking towards the changing modes of belonging: Filipino citizenship under the context of the neoliberal, market-oriented investment that the Philippine state has made in its role as labour broker in the global market.

Chapter Three: The President, The Nation, and the Citizen

Introduction

As of 2026, it is now over five decades since the Philippine state began its export of citizens as objects of labour into the global labour market through the implementation of the 1974 Labour Code. Critical scholars like Anna Romina Guevarra (2010) and Robyn Magalit Rodriguez (2010) have written about the commodification of Filipino workers into commodities for global circulation, and the Philippines' role as a global labour brokerage state. Building on their scholarship, I propose that the changes that are collectively experienced by the Filipino labour citizenry in this process of commodification can more aptly be referred to as a terraformation — that the Philippine state's continued investment in the machineries of global labour brokerage has changed the terrain of Philippine belonging. The terraformation of these legal-affective notions of belonging are met with a variety of citizen responses, which my interviewees speak to in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. These changes in Philippine citizenship that have occurred in alignment with the demands of the neoliberal market is a process of world-change that has affected not only the Philippine economy, but also led to the transformation of Filipino values such as *bayanihan* through the reordering of the space of families and communities from being within the same national territories, to expanding beyond. In this chapter, I apply the theory of terraformation in my thematic discourse analysis of the Philippine State of the Nation Addresses from 1965 to 2025.

I have chosen to begin my analyses in the geographic and political location of the Philippines. In following the journey of the Filipino diaspora in Canada, I believe it is important to contextualise the departure of citizens from their homes of origin through the politics of the homeland. The SONAs, as a direct means of communication between president and citizen, are important markers to consider because they are direct announcements of how the highest executive office expects particular behaviours of their citizens, both internal and external to the country.

First, I begin with a survey of the literature surrounding SONAs as *presidential* communication. As a means of speaking to the citizens that is constitutionally-mandated, uninterrupted, and widely broadcasted in a variety of ways, the SONAs have a scope that includes not only local politics, but also diaspora politics and interested foreign observers. Contemporary SONAs are intended to reach not only those Filipinos who are in the homeland, but also those who are working abroad as OFWs, or who have settled in any of the various

diasporas. In the second part of this chapter, I shift towards an analysis of the texts of the SONAs across seven presidencies, from Marcos Sr. to Marcos Jr. Using a thematic discourse analysis of the corpus of SONAs that each president has produced from 1965 to 2025, I critically read the speeches for themes that pertain to how each president enunciates their expectations of Filipino citizens, and how these expectations have changed along the chronology of political time. I juxtapose these enunciations against milestone political contexts in the timeline of Philippine politics. Finally, following the threads of how presidential discourse through the SONAs articulate their changing expectations of Filipino citizens across the decades in service of market-oriented policies, I examine how the state's pivot towards and continued investment in global labour export has led to a terraformation of notions of national belonging, specifically through the avenues of citizenship and affective national identities.

Addressing the State of the Nation

State of the Nation Addresses are direct avenues of communication between the president and his constituents; it is a speech that Adu-Ampong describes “as an agenda setting and prioritising address as it points to the areas of government commitment” (2017, p. 136), a way by which a sitting president articulates not only their goals, accomplishments, and promises, but also moments of criticism aimed towards the opposition, and sometimes, their own citizens. SONAs, specifically, are “expected to be nationalistic rather than partisan” (Sikanku 2022, p. 178), communicating the president's “vision of the future of these communities and the nation as a whole” (van Rensburg and Feinauer 2014, p. 105) in a manner that has “the potential to bring the country together, deepen national values, inspire citizens toward a national cause and engender patriotism” (Sikanku 2022, p. 177). Political emotions, expressions of nationalism, and appeals to citizen support — while visible in political speeches in general — find a particularly nationalistic venue of expression in SONAs.

On one hand, such speeches are a way to bridge perceived gaps between the wider scope of national and international politics, and the everyday lives of regular citizens. van Rensburg and Feinauer argue that through the SONAs “[p]ublic narratives become personal narratives when they directly affect the personal narratives that constitute each individual's life,” (2014, p. 109). SONAs are therefore a way for a president to create more support for proposed policies, if they can be presented in ways that are received as nationally and personally beneficial. On the other hand, political connections that are traced between the inter/national and the personal can also be used to create enemies in the name of nationalist sentiment. Cabrejas-Peñuelas describes this political manoeuvre as the “Us vs. Them ideological polarization,” a method

which is deployed in political speeches as “an attempt to persuade the electorate and ensure support for their political agendas” (2023, p. 129). Whether the speech convinces constituents that such enemies exist as the foreigners within the border, or adversaries outside of the border, the creation of a political outgroup by a president can harness already-existing negative political sentiment against certain groups, an action which “advances the feeling of belonging to the in-group, as the out-group is clearly defined” (Szalay and Rakovics 2025, p. 168).

Due to its role as an emotional call to action, scholars have examined how presidents speak, as well as what lie behind the languages that they choose to deploy. Linguistics scholar Salas conducted an analysis of the choice of languages that are used in the SONAs, and puts forward the argument that a president’s choice to deploy English or Filipino is revelatory of “underlying shifts in political communication, the influence of multilingualism, and the balancing act between formal institutional language and relatable speech for the masses” (2025, p. 1320). In a country whose linguistic tapestry is comprised of over 180 recognised languages (Borlongan 2023), a president’s choice to give a speech in English or Tagalog/Filipino, or a combination of both, is political. More recently, SONA broadcasts have begun to use insets featuring Filipino Sign Language, which was declared the official sign language through Republic Act 11106 in 2018. The first TV inset for FSL occurred in 2010, with the GMA network using it for then-Pres. Benigno Aquino III’s first SONA and for all SONAs since. In an article published in 2023, Espineda writes about the importance of the use of Filipino Sign Language as an inset during TV coverage of the SONAs, saying that “subtitles and sign language insets in newscasts and special programs are encouraged under RA 7277 or the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)” (p. 832).

On the Philippine national stage, the SONAs exhibit a variety of ways in which Philippine presidents have taken this public stage and direct line of communication to their citizens, and expressed their emotions towards the audience. Long the subject of academic research and debate,²² political emotions are “the ways in which emotional reactions, feelings, and affective dynamics shape international political processes and outcomes” (Gustafsson and Hall 2021, p. 974); as emotions are feelings that lead to action, its linkages to politics and

²² Some important work regarding these include: the relationship between representations of trauma and political emotions (Holland and Solomon 2014); how anger influences people’s support of policies (Huddy, Feldman, and Cassese 2007); the deployment of hateful nationalist rhetoric against immigrants (Brux 2025); the distributive politics of emotions in IR (Gustafsson and Hall 2021); and how emotions impact voting decisions (Marcus, Valentino, Vasilopoulos, and Foucault 2019).

political decision-making processes are necessary to examine. Åhall defines the politics of emotions as “capturing the political effects of emotional practice” (2018, p. 38). As a direct avenue to the citizens, particularly in the current moment of widespread access to televisions as well as to various types of social media, a presidential speech which deploys emotion has the potential to amplify political power through public support, which “endows presidents with a ‘political resource’,” (Erisen and Villalobos 2014, p. 471) and can be used to further political agendas. Yet the success or failure of a political agenda relies heavily on how presidential messages are received; Ojala et al argue that “the interpretation of messages, including their emotional cues, is dependent on the personal experiences of audience members, as well as their pre-existing beliefs and attitudes about immigration as a phenomenon” (2019, p. 167).

It is through the SONAs that the expectations surrounding legal citizenship are communicated through the affective politics of political speechmaking; Breeze notes that “[a]ffect/emotion is a cultural-material hybrid, which cannot be understood without its discursive productions” (2019, p. 26). While the SONAs themselves are not dialogic in nature, the spectators at the venue are often integrated in official record of the speech through the inclusion of notes such as “applause” or “standing ovation” in the texts of the official transcripts. SONAs also face criticism from activist groups both in the Philippines and abroad; Anakbayan, for example, hosts a *SONA ng Bayan* or People’s SONA, which offers important context regarding the points that have been raised in the speeches. Emotions that are roused in the SONAs are, as Dornboos and Dragojlovic offer, “spatial,” or something that “reside[s] in both bodies and places” (2022, p. 1142): that is, emotions travel from to president to the citizen, from the Philippines to its diasporas abroad.

Key Filipino scholars writing about the SONAS include Miranda and Bringula, who propose that SONAs are important as “a venue to assert the political and economic policies of the government and to reassure the people on the accomplishment of the commitments presented during the campaign period” (2021, p. 1). Using the NLTK sentiment analyzer model, the authors posited that incoming presidents’ first speeches tend towards lower sentiments in comparison to the sentiments of outgoing presidents, which “can be attributed to the fact that an incoming president informs the citizens of the problems that will be passed on to the new administration—a result of the failure of the previous administration to address these problems” (Miranda and Bringula 2021, p. 6). The SONAs are therefore used as a platform wherein the current president is able to position themselves in a positive manner, often by highlighting problems that previous administrations were unable to solve, and in doing so,

position themselves as the better politician and the better president. The political historian Abejero describes the speeches as a sociopolitical stage “where the head of state delivers reports on the country’s status, reveals yearly agenda of the nation, and proposes relevant legislative measures to the Congress” (2023, p. 82), and similarly, Capistrano and Notorio characterise them as a space that allows the president to report on the “nation’s economy and socio-political landscape” (2021, p. 133). Petalcorin, Ibarra, and Aperochio suggest that the SONAs are as “a starting point for developing a deeper understanding of political events and national progress” (2024, p.74), recommending that a president’s corpus of SONAs are vital in an analysis of political choices that a president makes across his tenure.

Finally, previous scholarship that have conducted thematic analyses of Philippine SONAs have focused on themes such as questions regarding the importance of the Philippine tourism industry, and the use of the metaphor of the ‘war on terror.’ Capistrano and Notorio analysed the SONAs of six presidents between 1987 to 2019 to see how presidents discussed the tourism industry; they noted that despite the importance of the industry to the economic health of the nation, many important milestones were “not mentioned” in the speeches, leading them to the conclusion that “[i]f the SONA outlines the most important achievements of an administration, one can assume that tourism is not among those that come into mind from the nation’s leaders” (2021, p. 136). In a separate thematic analysis study, Navera writes about Macapagal-Arroyo’s consistent use of the metaphor of the ‘war on terror’ in the early 2000s. In his work, Navera argues that the SONAs were “instrumental in juggling the President’s acts of justifying the Philippines’ involvement in the global war on terror and of saving face in the midst of political crises” (2011, p. 340-341); Macapagal-Arroyo’s metaphor contextualised the Philippines as a nation that needed healing from such terrorism, and that this could only be accomplished by an eradication of those who cause such terrors. Thus, examining SONAs thematically across presidencies can be revelatory of what aspects of the nation the president considers a priority at a given political moment, particularly with regards to the state’s investment in the global labour market and its resultant effects on how the citizen is imagined.

A Thematic Discourse Analysis of the SONAs

The examination of the SONA that I conduct in this chapter seeks to trace the expectations that presidents politically enunciate regarding their citizens changed through six decades of Philippine politics, and how these expectations have changed. I anchor this change as beginning with in the commodification of citizens that occurred with the labour export politics, and continue into the present day with the Philippines as a labour brokerage state. I

therefore critically engage with the body of speeches that are attributed to each president, and consider how each president has contributed towards the terraformation of belonging in the case of the Philippines. The work in this chapter is aligned with van Dijk's notion of political discourse analysis (PDA), wherein "to conduct a critical analysis of political discourse such as political speeches, the analyst has to take into consideration three main components: (1) political actors or authors, (2) the assumed recipients of the political speech, and (3) political speech itself" (in Carreon and Svetanant, 2017, p. 640). Alongside an analysis of the SONA, I contextualise the relevant political actor (the president) in the Philippine political timeline, and note that the assumed recipients are not only homeland Filipinos, but also OFWs and the diasporas; this is inclusive not just of legal citizens, but also those who hold the identity of Filipino in the diasporic sense.

The thematic discourse analysis used below is performed, as Aydin offers, "by examining the way in which the text represents different social groups (e.g., men and women) or different cultures" (2024, p. 67). I examine how the corpus of the speeches aims to create the image of an idealised Filipino citizen both within the borders (communicating such expectations to the internal citizenry) and outside of the borders (speaking to migrant workers who are Filipino citizens, to non-status Filipinos, and to interested "buyers" in the global marketplace). Horton emphasises that a thematic discourse analysis "aims to uncover not only a set of themes within data, but also how these themes reflect the *discursive construction* of a particular topic, paying close attention to the relationships between discourse, social construction, and power" (2023, p. 2, emphasis in original); thus, the topic of belonging is viewed not only from the perspective of the president as enunciated through the SONA, but also through the ways in which each president responds to local politics as well as the global labour market. Because "[d]iscourse analysis is always a movement from context to language and from language to context" (Gee 2011, p. 14), important historical and political moments ground the analysis of the SONAs themselves. I use the term discourse here, in particular, in its definition as "meaning-making as an element of the social process" (Fairclough 2013, p. 11), one that "mediates ideology as well as facilitates the circulation of power in a variety of social institutions" (Carreon and Svetanant 2017, p. 638).

The neoliberalisation of citizenship in the Philippine context is situated against twinned political and economic crises in the 1970s: the crisis of unemployment and underemployment in the country, and the rising need for cheap labour on the global market. Quinsaat asserts that

neoliberalism “assumes an ascendant position in the administration of its citizens’ cross-border movement to address the problems created by the implementation of neoliberal orthodoxy” (2024, p. 37); the global crisis of labour is met with an influx of labouring bodies who supposedly fulfil the promise of cheap, trained, and docile labour. I therefore understand neoliberalism in government as Ong does, as “a profoundly active way of rationalizing governing and self-governing in order to ‘optimize’,” (2006, p. 3) and “results from the infiltration of market-driven truths and calculations into the domain of politics” (p. 4). The neoliberalised individual, or what Randles and Woodward describe as the “preferred neoliberal self” is “a self-reliant economic actor who fulfils her civic duty through hard (ideally entrepreneurial) work and tax-paying” (2018, p. 42), referencing an image of self-sufficiency that is characteristic of the “archetypal neoliberal subject” who is “the entrepreneurial individual whose only relationship to other people is competitive self-enhancement” (The Care Collective 2020, p. 4). This idealised neoliberal worker is a labouring body whose purpose is to labour and to produce, with little need for care or for social reproduction — a market orientation of identity that I argue can be traced in the SONAs below.

I specifically read the SONAs thematically for references to citizens and to citizenship. I interpret what is being enunciated as the president’s, and therefore the nation-state’s, expectations of good citizenship; I understand ‘good’ citizenship to be the idealised, participatory figure of the Filipino citizen who performs as they are being expected to, aligned with the neoliberal worker as described earlier. Specifically, I engage with the SONAs of the seven Philippine presidents who have governed from 1965 to 2025:

- Ferdinand Edralin Marcos Sr. (1965 to 1986)
- Corazon Cojuangco Aquino (1986 to 1992)
- Fidel Valdez Ramos (1992 to 1998)
- Joseph Ejercito Estrada (1998 to 2001)
- Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (2001 to 2010)
- Benigno Simeon Aquino III (2010 to 2016)
- Rodrigo Roa Duterte (2016 to 2022)
- And the current sitting president, Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr. (2022 to present)

Presidents, Emotions, and Ghosts of the Philippines Past

Throughout this dissertation — from the SONAs, to the interviews, and even in the fictive works — Ferdinand Marcos Sr. has continued to emerge as a ghost that haunts Philippine history, and the lives of many Filipinos in the diasporas: “the ghost of martial law still haunts contemporary politics” (Dulay et al 2022, p. 494). Due to the effects of his regime and of Martial Law, the economic devastation of the country, and the launching of the labour export

policies, his tenure is the landmark upon which many aspects of Philippine history, politics, culture, and even labour outmigration can be traced back to. Pangalangan et al report that:

“[T]ens of thousands of Filipinos were stripped of their fundamental rights as violence was used as a medium to enforce civil control. As of 1977, about 70,000 Filipinos were political detainees. A reported 34,000 were victims of torture that included an array of methods such as confinement, isolation, rape, and molestation. About 3240 were victims of enforced disappearances. As it stands, a total of 75,730 persons have filed claims before the Human Rights Victims Claims Board (HRVCB) as victims of human rights violations by the Marcos regime.” (2018, p. 142)

The time of Martial Law, and the presidency of Ferdinand Marcos Sr., is therefore a fixed point in Philippine history. His death did not end the political mythology that he began to establish in his youth (Coronel 2022), and the Marcos family continues to enjoy a supportive base in the Philippines, support which continues even with historical knowledge of the losses suffered during Martial Law. Dulay et al report that “large numbers of Filipinos have ambiguous feelings about martial law” (2022, p. 500), noting that “attempts to educate the general public about martial law and its negative effects have not been effective, especially considering that positive sentiment towards martial law is positively correlated with education” (p. 500). According to whistleblower Brittany Kaiser, the current sitting president, Marcos Jr., was reported to have approached Cambridge Analytica “before the 2016 elections to ‘rebrand’ the Marcos family’s image on social media” (Espiritu and Cristobal 2022, p. 411). It was ultimately the UniTeam “of Duterte Populism combined with Marcosian Restoration” (Espiritu and Cristobal 2022, p. 411) that won the Philippine presidential election in 2022, a testament to the ways in which support for Duterte’s strongman, macho politics and the echo of the supposed “Golden Age” of the Philippines under Marcos Sr. that propelled Marcos Jr. and Sara Duterte into the presidency and vice presidency, respectively.

Ferdinand Edralin Marcos, Sr.: 1965 to 1985

The institutionalisation of Philippine labour migration began in the 1970s, under Marcos Sr. I have chosen to begin this analysis in 1965, nine years before the labour export laws were enacted, so that I can situate his expectations of Filipino citizens within the context of his entire tenure. The two decades that Marcos Sr. retained political power at the national level must be understood from the milieu of the political power that he held at the provincial level: prior to his presidency, he was a three-term representative of the second district of his

home province of Ilocos Norte. The Marcos family, to this day, still enjoys strong support in the region.²³

Of note is that while Filipino citizens did leave the country at during his presidency to seek employment abroad, many also did so in active protest of his regime. His presidency saw waves of working- and middle-class labour migrants exit the country, as well as activists, political figures, and other citizens for whom migration was a form of protest (Zarsadiaz 2017; see also: Fuentecilla 2013).

I. 1965 to 1969

In 1965, the first SONA of his presidency, Marcos Sr. uses the Philippine revolution against colonial Spain as an anchor for his references to heroism and new beginnings. He specifically does so through the use of José Rizal²⁴ as a figure of martyrdom: “out of the martyr’s blood that flowed copiously there sprung a new nation.” Yet while he uses Rizal’s death for the Filipino people as a foundation for the “new” nation of the Philippines under his leadership, he puts forward an unfavourable comparison between the hero and the contemporary Filipino citizen, saying that, “For today, the Filipino, it seems, has lost his soul, his dignity, and his courage.” In this unflattering comparison, Marcos Sr. indicates that while the Filipino citizen has a figure to emulate in Rizal’s sacrifice of his life for the national cause, the citizen has fallen short of his own revolutionary and heroic heritage.

Marcos Sr. frames the story of the nation as a grand narrative and an epic of greatness, but he moves the onus of action from the government to the citizens: in 1966, he describes the achievement of “greatness” as a “demand” that has been made by the citizens, and in 1967, he turns this “demand” *towards* the citizenry as a “challenge.” Here, Marcos Sr. is placing the responsibility of national success and achievement from a goal which is led by the government, to a challenge that the citizens must meet. The individualisation of greatness and its movement from a demand *by* into a challenge *towards* — is significant. In this formulation of what makes

²³ The Marcos political dynasty begins with his father, Mariano Marcos, who previously held the seat of representative, and continues with his immediate family members who have held political office. These include his wife, Imelda Romualdez Marcos; his daughter, Imee Marcos-Manotoc; and his son, Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr.

²⁴ José Rizal’s legacy as a cornerstone of national heroism is geographically witnessed by the establishment of Rizal Park, in Metro Manila. Under the United States Philippine Commission’s Act No. 243 in 1901, the park is intended to honour Rizal’s legacy. It was inaugurated in 1913 and stands to this day. Rizal’s anti-colonial novels *Noli Me Tangere* and its sequel *El Filibusterismo* are required reading in Philippine secondary school education through Republic Act 1425, which was approved on 12 June 1956 (Tremlett 2002, p. 224). Rizal’s death was utilised in the nation-building project “as a means to help build and sustain—through reference to a death framed as a ‘sacrifice’ to freedom and independence— a ‘national consciousness’ of ‘service’ to ‘the nation’.” (Tremlett 2002, p. 224)”

a nation “great,” the demands that citizens make towards the president and their political criticism of his actions regarding national improvement can now be (il)legitimised by their own behaviours — as judged by the president, the head of the government.

In 1968, Marcos Sr. refers to citizens as “human resources,” as he implements a new department called the Manpower Development Council. This language can be read as a corporatisation of labour, made official in the creation of a specific department to oversee such development. Alternatively, it can also be read as the initiation of the move towards developing Filipino citizens into market-ready commodities in the global labour market — where humans, as it were, are the resources.²⁵ In this same year, the president issues a provocation of action towards the body politic: “The challenge of nation-building is first of all a call to character building.” The strong nation, the ideal nation, is one that toils in order to build character. To be a good citizen, in this SONA, includes a willingness to become a resource that can be utilised by the state.

In 1969, Marcos Sr. discusses the worker not only as a resource, but as a hero whose actions are conducted in relation to the family and to the nation, saying, “[w]e stressed the protection and promotion of the quiet hero of our development—the Filipino worker. In 1968, we multiplied our efforts in his behalf and for the welfare of his family.” This is an early instance of public gratitude for the Filipino worker. Five years before the implementation of the labour export policies, his SONAs speak to labour agreements with the United States in the Southeast Asia and Pacific military installations, as well as the implementation of a Dollar Repatriation Program which allows not only “convenience” for the migrant workers with regards to remittances, but will also “boost our foreign exchange reserve by some \$100 million annually.” The good Filipino worker, in this instance — both abroad and in the country — is not only one who works, but one who does not complain, but does the work involved as a “quiet hero.” The act of working is what makes the citizen good: the *male* citizen-as-worker, a father working for his family.

Thus, the way that Marcos Sr. describes the Filipino citizen in the SONAs of the 1960s is a citizen who has fallen short of the country’s revolutionary histories, but is being asked to improve his character for the benefit of the nation in a challenge to move from cowardice to

²⁵ Marcos Sr.’s characterisation of human beings as resources here is reminiscent of how Wendy Brown describes citizenship under neoliberalism: “active citizenship is slimmed to tending oneself as responsibilized human capital, while sacrificing citizenship expands to include anything related to the health of a firm or nation, or again, the health of the nation as firm” (2016, p. 9). The demands of the Filipino citizen is one which prioritizes the supposed benefit of the nation over benefiting that of the regular person.

“self-made success,” and further, willingly answers the call for humans to become a resource that can be used in the name of national improvement, one who, as “the quiet hero of our development” (1969), does not elevate his own status but rather waits for recognition from the nation — or from the president.

II. 1970s

In 1970, Marcos Sr. suggests that the needs of the citizen must be subservient to the needs of the state, in place of the normative ideal that the government is in service to the needs of the citizenry. Specifically, he says that, “we have to subordinate our personal desires to the needs and aspirations of the nation.” That the president uses the word ‘we’ in this demand that he is making of his citizens implies that he is including himself as a member of the citizen body, who will also be subordinating his personal desires to national aspirations. In this call to action, what the president is asking for is patriotic sacrifice.

In 1971, Marcos Sr. uses the language of deservingness to express what he believes the citizens want: “for survival is no longer enough for our people. They want — and they deserve — more.” He moves from making a call for sacrifice in the form of a “subordination of personal desires” (1970), to making the claim that “our people” deserve better than what they currently have. Yet, in 1972, the year following this speech, Ferdinand Marcos Sr. enacts Martial Law in the Philippines.²⁶ This is an action that instigates a political era defined by: state-backed violence; media repression; the disappearance and deaths of student-activists, activists, and dissenters; and high numbers of under- and unemployment — the effects of which continue to haunt the Philippines to the present day (Reyes 2018; see also: Broner 1987, and Coronel 2022). It also instigates a wave in labour outmigration: in 1972, there was “a 671% increase in applicants wanting to work abroad” (Gardiner Barber 2009 p. 1270). In the 1972 SONA, Marcos Sr. makes the claim that the pinnacle of his government would be to “achieve the ultimate purpose of all economic undertakings, namely, the dignity of the human person.” The connection that he continues to make here is the relationship between the country’s economic undertaking as a contribution specifically to the betterment of the individual Filipino citizen.

A year into Martial Law in 1973, Marcos Sr. expounds upon an image of the ideal Filipino citizenry as a population whose actions are characterised by obedience, and once more, in service to a better future: “Here at last is a people who will obey the law not because they

²⁶ Marcos Sr. breaks the previous tradition of giving the SONA on every fourth Monday of January, and begins to give the SONA on the anniversary of Martial Law (21 September 1972), visibly making known that he considers Martial Law to be a new beginning for the Philippines.

fear punishment but rather because they know that by supporting order and government, they are building with their own hands the future that they want. It makes one proud to be one of them, and to see what they have become.” In this expressed sentiment, and particularly with the use of ‘at last,’ Marcos Sr. offers that there has been a progressive transition from the disappointing citizen of the 1960s, to the wiser and more learned citizen of the 1970s. To describe the body of citizens as “supporting order and government,” who are good citizens that are self-sufficient and obedient, is to therefore question the political legitimacy of his dissenters both as citizens and as active participants in the political body.

In the 1974 SONA, Marcos Sr. uses the “conspiratorial we,” a post-event entanglement of the citizen into the decision that he as president made to enact Martial Law: “it was on this day that you and I, by compact, agreed to create a new nation, strengthen the Republic, and meet the threat that would have destroyed the work of centuries.” After expressing in 1973 that “here at last” is a citizenry who are for the rule of law, Marcos Sr. references Martial Law as a “compact,” the “you and I” forcefully inclusive of the citizen in the rhetoric of the implementation and continuation of Martial Law. This serves, too, to exclude from the body politic those citizens who did not support Martial Law. In the 1973 SONA the good citizen is one who not only complies, but supports the rule of law, and a year later in 1974 the good citizen is one who has *agreed* with the president to enact Martial Law.

In 1976 Marcos Sr. continues to endorse an ethics of self-reliance among the citizens, and once more links the “development” of Filipino citizens to economic benefits to the nation: “to answer the manpower needs of development, and the employment opportunities of our manpower, we have invested heavily in vocational and technical schools.” The citizen, thus, is educated and trained in service of the demands of “development,” both internally and externally. In 1977, Marcos Sr.’s ‘temporary’ labour export policies have been in place for three years: “labor exports which have been temporarily allowed to ease underemployment will increasingly be restrained as productive domestic employment opportunities are created.” Attention is turned away from what is classified as “temporary” global opportunities and instead towards the domestic market, with the promise of investment in local employment.

In 1978, Marcos Sr. continues to explicitly emphasise the framing of humans as resources: “Progressively, as greater production and economic efficiency will allow, we should direct more and more of our resources to this essential aspect of national development: our human resources.” The dissonance of describing a body of citizens who are both resources, and

yet who themselves own the resource in question can perhaps be understood from Marcos' individualised perspective: that a citizen's own body is theirs, but that the class of the (citizen) body of resources can themselves be deployed in service of national development. In contrast to his first SONA in 1965 where he denigrates the citizen, in this year he compliments citizen responses to various crises points: "Proud of his past, aware of his heritage, the Filipino has turned crisis into opportunity and has willingly rectified past errors to retrieve a lost society from disintegration." Marcos Sr.'s Filipino citizen in 1978 is a person who is in progress, a participatory member of his New Society that exists as a corrective to the old, and is a resource for the development of the nation.

In 1979, Marcos Sr. frames the less-than-ideal conditions that are being experienced by the Global South as a benefit in a worldwide economic crisis, an advantage to be utilised rather than as a problem that the government must solve: "We (the Filipino) have faced many crises in the past and we have always come out a better and stronger breed of people.... We in the developing world, particularly the Filipinos, perhaps, are better equipped to weather this crisis, for we have long been used to deprivation and impoverishment." In these statements, Marcos Sr. exhibits his expectations of citizens as resilient, and as self-sufficient individuals who are better able to weather the "crisis" due to previous histories of lack. He frames this expectation through the naturalisation of the trait of resilience in the face of "deprivation and impoverishment."

In the latter part of the 1960s, in the early years of his term, Marcos Sr. imagined the good Filipino citizen to be a person who takes on aspects of character-building and personal improvement in order to be a "quiet hero" for the nation. In the 1970s, this expectation has transitioned towards individuals who see sacrifice as patriotic actions performed willingly. This, I would argue, is a visible progression of the terraformation of national belonging. Throughout the 1970s, the good citizen is expected to subordinate their needs to the needs of the nation (1970), to be supportive of the "rule of law" (1973) and "by compact" have agreed to Martial Law (1974); all of these, in addition to being a willing resource for the labour market. Citizens are now presented in the SONAs as "ours," as a collectively-owned resource that both populates and develops the nation. Marcos Sr. has created a political terrain where the demand made of the citizen as a sacrifice of the personal — a transformation of the body-individual and body civic into a nationally available resource for national survival — becomes a patriotic call for the development of the nation.

III. 1980s

In 1980, Marcos Sr describes labour outmigration as a means that is used to combat the lack of opportunities that are domestically available to Filipino citizens: “[t]o fight unemployment, we have encouraged the development of skilled and semiskilled labor, and have allowed these workers to work overseas.” Contextually situated alongside the 1977 SONA, which alludes to domestic investment for employment opportunities, the use of the word “allow” is a deliberate choice to position the national government as *aiding* Filipinos who choose to work abroad by providing them with training. This rhetoric implies a choice: that the citizen has *requested* to be allowed to work abroad, and that this request has in turn been granted by the government through the provision of means for skills development.

In 1982, Marcos Sr. deploys the “conspiratorial we,” saying, “We also share, I believe, this common faith that we have weathered the storms before, and so will we again. And when I say ‘we,’ I mean all of us, whether we belong to the majority or the opposition.” The “we” that collectively weathers the storm is the “we” that is the entirety of the body politic; Marcos Sr. here is implicitly shaming those who are in opposition to him. His use of “we” in this instance draws him closer to the citizens, rather than maintaining a distance between himself as president and himself as citizen. The 1982 SONA echoes his 1979 SONA, wherein he references the resilience of the Filipino people in the face of “deprivation and impoverishment.” In 1983, in the face of stringent political opposition both from politicians and from the masses, Marcos positions himself as a protector, saying, in Tagalog, that his political opponents should aim their anger at him as the president rather than at “mga pangkaraniwang mamamayan,” or the regular citizens. It is significant that in this year he holds the SONA on the ten-year anniversary of the ratification of the 1973 Philippine Constitution, a reminder of one of his many “new beginnings.”

In 1985, which is Marcos Sr.’s final SONA as president of the Philippines before his ouster, he continues the now-established narrative that the Filipino citizen is a resource: “We have always stressed the important role of our most valued resource, the Filipino people, in the successful implementation of our recovery program.” Not just a resource but now presented as “our most valued resource,” the Filipino citizen is enunciated as persons that are individually valuable to the economic recovery of the nation, a signifier that their *role* as a resource is vital to the economic recovery of the nation.

Marcos Sr.'s idealised Filipino citizen in the 1980s is one who, despite having experienced the economic and political tempest of global recessions, high levels of local unemployment, and significant political unrest throughout the country, is defined by their resilience. They also continue to be, as Marcos Sr. has referenced throughout the 1970s, a “most valued resource.” A resource in this manner is not only valuable as an individual body who is able and willing to provide labour, but as a body of resources who are able and willing to aid the nation in its economic recovery; there is a paradox of the citizenry owning the resource while also being the resources in question.

There is no SONA in 1986 because of the People Power Revolution, which ousts Ferdinand Marcos Sr. and propels the next president, Corazon Cojuangco Aquino, into the presidency. Under the dictatorship, Marcos Sr. “imprisoned over 70,000 people, tortured around 43,000 men and women, and killed a recorded 3240 people between 1972 and 1981” (Gavilan qtd in Martin 2019, p. 424). One of the most prominent political deaths was of anti-Marcos critic Benigno Simeon Aquino Jr, who was assassinated on the tarmac of the Manila International Airport, and died on the ramp before he could touch Philippine soil after his political exile in the United States. Curaming and Claudio argue that the image of Aquino’s death was particularly potent, that “[t]o a people reared in Catholic and nationalist imageries, Aquino’s martyrdom resonated as Rizal- and Christ-like and this ensured that Aquino would be immortalised” (2010, p. 7). It was Aquino’s death that served as one of the major events that catalysed the People Power Revolution. Also known as the EDSA Revolution — so-called because the primary location of the protests was the Epifanio Delos Santos Avenue — the Philippines’ bloodless revolution was hailed as an example of the strength of democracy in Asia. It was the politically visible unification of heretofore disparate segments of Filipino society: the elite middle class, the Catholic Church, and the masses. The Revolution lasted for three days from 22 to 25 February 1986, and led to the political exile of Marcos Sr. and his immediate family to Hawai’i (Abinales and Amoroso 2017, p. 224; Capino 2020, p. 161).

While the People Power Revolution was celebrated globally as a moment of democratic triumph, Walden Bello observes that it was a failed revolution, that the “deadly combination of elite monopoly of the electoral system, the continuing concentration of wealth, and neoliberal economic policies and the priority placed on foreign debt repayment imposed by Washington” (2017). These systemic national problems have led to what Capino describes as the “surprising resurgence of authoritarianism” that emerges decades later, which he attributes

in part to “the failings of the liberal democratic regimes that followed the dictatorship” (2020, p. xxiv-xxv). Yet the exile of this politically powerful family was not one that lasted for long: “the Marcos family was allowed repatriation by 1991, which led to their reappearance in the Philippine political landscape (most notably in Ilocos Norte, FM’s home province in the north)” (Tigno et al 2024, p. 431). Members of the Marcos family currently hold political office in the Philippines, most prominently, Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos, Jr, the current president.

Corazon Cojuangco Aquino: 1987 to 1991

Aquino is elected to the presidency in a surge of national popular support after the first People Power Revolution, in part as the visibly grieving widow of the late Benigno Aquino Jr. She is often presented in contrast to the political persona deployed by Marcos Sr., as a particular type of pious femininity versus the aggressive masculinity of the Martial Law era, as a democratically elected leader as opposed to a dictator. Tadiar observes that “Cory managed, as no other oppositional leader had, to become the other half of Marcos, personifying the blockage of his identity, the absolute limits of his embodiment of the Republic of the Philippines” (2004, p. 191) — in particular, highlighting the “polar antagonism between the ‘feminine’ figure of Corazon Aquino and the ‘strongman’ figure of Ferdinand Marcos” (p. 33).

In her 1987 SONA, Aquino does not seem to be speaking *to* the Filipino people as much as she is speaking *about* them: “All the assaults on our government have fallen flat and harmless because the people believe in our government, in its honesty and sincere desire to work for the common good.” The good Filipino citizen, in this post-Marcos world, acknowledges that the achievement of a national common good and progress from an undemocratic past is one which entails supporting an Aquino presidency. In 1988, Aquino reflects on how it is the masses who will adjudicate her success or failure as a president, saying “it is in the fields and the barrios, in the slums of our cities, that we will ultimately be judged,” creating a distinction between the working class and those who are more privileged. She continues, “it is our duty as elected leaders of this nation to describe a vision of the future that lifts up the lives of this, the great mass of Filipinos: those whose voices are not raised in business councils, social happenings, and in the opinion pages of the newspapers.” While Marcos Sr.’s new beginnings came from Rizal’s heroic sacrifice of his life to the Spanish colonisers, Aquino’s new beginning is anchored in the end of Marcos Sr.’s dictatorship. Therefore, the temporality of the nation that she describes is not in the past, not in the heroism of revolutionary heroes, but in the present that is currently being lived, where the masses coexist uneasily with the businessmen. Later on in this SONA, Aquino references Filipino citizens who currently “live in intolerable uncertainty

about the safety of their families and their properties.” The citizens that Aquino imagines, the Filipinos who populate this present-day nation, are separated by a class divide: the great masses, alongside property-owners.

In the 1989 SONA, Aquino makes an explicit connection between the grace of the divine and resilience; what Marcos Sr. has previously described as being able to survive moments of global crisis because of being used to “deprivation” and “impoverishment” (1979), Aquino phrases as the “fortitude and ingenuity” of the Filipino people. She says, “I marvel at the kindness of God and the strength of our people — at the fortitude and ingenuity of a race that did so much with so little, and in so short a time.” The Filipino citizen, Aquino believes, transcends challenges with the grace of God and their innate fortitude. Aquino also describes education as an investment, that “[o]ur greatest investment in enhancing national productive capacity is in education — in developing the intelligence and the sinews of our people,” but she does not outright refer to citizens as resources in the same way that the previous president has done.

In 1990, Aquino continues to reference both divinity and democracy in her SONA: “By the grace of God and the unshakeable faith of the Filipino people, I am confident we will pull through,” and in intertwining the facts of faith with the actions of democracy, she creates an image of a presidency that is asking its citizens to believe in herself and the office of the presidency as democratic strongholds. She uses the “we” in reference to the nation as a whole. Aquino’s SONAs reflect the belief that the Filipino citizen is one who has faith in God, as well as in the president that has been divinely chosen to lead the Filipino people. In the 1991 SONA, Aquino takes the moment to speak to the citizenry regarding the future that they will be facing with a different president: “The active participation of the people in government will lend proper direction and continuity to policy. This is what I wish for the most. That after me, the continuity of our work is not broken. So that things well done shall be completed, and the same mistakes avoided by succeeding administrations.” In this, Aquino alludes to the People Power Revolution that catapulted her to the seat of the presidency — a reminder to the citizens she governed that ultimately, they hold the power to remove and install politicians. Yet, it is also a couching of the responsibilities of good governance on the shoulders of the citizenry, rather than directly on the succeeding administration.

Aquino’s ideal Filipino citizen — in a presidency that crossed the ‘80s to the early ‘90s, that took the country from a dictatorship to a celebrated democracy in Asia — is one whose

belief in democracy is anchored in a faith in God, and therefore is in support of Aquino as president. In her SONAs, Aquino does not speak about the Filipino citizen in as much detail as Marcos Sr. did, nor did she promote the ‘humans as resources’ or ‘citizens as commons’ thesis in the same way that that her predecessor did. It must be noted, however, that her tenure as president saw a rise in the number of Filipino women who left the country to work abroad (Encinas-Franco 2016), and the labour export policies continued to be deployed throughout the 1990s. Additionally, Aquino is the president to have introduced the phrase “*mga bagong bayani*” into the political and sociocultural lexicon in 1988 to describe OFWs (Roces 2021, p. 174), a phrase which continues to be used to the present day. Kares cites Vicente Rafael as having “specifically traced the bagong bayani concept to Christian traditions and nineteenth-century narratives of Philippine national hero Jose Rizal’s execution” (2014, p. 187); that the rhetoric of heroism in the migrant worker was and continues to be resonant in public discourse not only because of its links to revolution, but also to Christian notions of sacrifice and the image of Rizal as a Christ figure.²⁷

Fidel Valdez Ramos: 1992 to 1997

Fidel Valdez Ramos was endorsed by Corazon Aquino towards the end of her own term; as Marcos Sr.’s former armed forces deputy chief, Ramos had “declared for Mrs. Aquino” alongside the former defense minister Juan Ponce Enrile (Hernandez 1986, p. 176) in the immediate political moment before EDSA. Winning the election on “a slim majority” (Abinales and Amoroso 2016, p. 244) at “a little less than 24 percent of the vote” (Fontaine 1992, p. 179), Ramos governed from a position of ‘strong state’ leadership, which he described as such: “By a Strong State, I mean one that can assert our country’s strategic interests because it has relative autonomy over the influence of oligarchic groups” (qtd. in Abinales and Amoroso 2016, p. 245).

Ramos grounds his understanding of the nation and his role as president the revolutionary heroes of the Philippines in a manner similar to Marcos Sr.’s rhetoric. In his first SONA in 1992, he says, “It is time to view our nation afresh — to see it the way our revolutionary heroes must have seen it at its birth — as a nation in which the common good is attainable,” echoing Marcos Sr.’s call that the Philippines’ birth as a nation began with the death of Rizal and other revolutionary heroes. In 1993, Ramos’ version of a Philippine

²⁷ The image of José Rizal as a Christ figure is evoked across the SONAs, especially during the Marcos Sr. administration. However, Rizal as a deity in local theology also exists, as in the case of the Ciudad Mistica de Dios (Mystical City of God) in the 1950s (Tremlett 2002).

nationalism, and therefore the way that he imagines who the Filipino citizen is, is quite moralistic: “Filipinos have always accepted that people with more are obliged to help people with less — in the name of a common, compassionate humanity. This traditional moral code we shall make a principle of public policy.” What Aquino anchors in divinity, Ramos anchors in morality. While he makes claims that this moral code will become embedded in policy, it is also a politicisation of cultural values: the individualisation of notions of mutual aid places the responsibility of caring for each other primarily on the community, rather than onto the government.

Speaking about Filipino workers, in 1993 Ramos makes the claim that “[w]henver foreign observers look at our country, their principal wonder is how we have managed to languish in underdevelopment in spite of our tremendous human resources,” specifically naming “their literacy, their competence, their resourcefulness, their high sense of moral values.” While these descriptors can be considered praise for the citizens, it is also a turn towards describing Filipinos in market-oriented terms; significant here is Ramos’ description of the Filipino worker as having a “high sense of moral values,” indicating to the listening citizen that morality is equally as valuable as literacy, competence, and resourcefulness for a people who are considered “tremendous human resources.” Ramos is marketing the idea both to would-be foreign employers as well as to the citizens themselves that this list of attributes is what the president expects of good Filipino citizens, and therefore this is the manner in which good Filipino workers would be expected to behave.

In 1994, Ramos uses the a conspiratorial tone similar to what Marcos Sr. has previously used: “You and I know there is no free lunch in the world out there — just as there is no freedom for the weak,” echoing the idea of a self-sufficient citizen that resides within a self-sufficient nation, similar to Marcos Sr’s individualisation of citizens’ responsibilities. Despite his assertion in 1993 that the “traditional moral code” of Filipinos is to help each other, Ramos’ moralism and therefore his idealised Filipino citizen is deeply tied to individual notions of accountability and self-responsibility, as well as community-oriented moments of aid. In 1995, he describes what he calls Philippine-style democracy as “our competitive edge today, because democracy — by awakening and mobilizing ordinary people to the possibilities of their lives — enlarges tremendously our talent pool of enterprise, knowledge, and productivity.” Here, Ramos as the president draws clearly defined links between democratic governance and the participation of citizens to economic success, that “ordinary people” must be converted into

people who can be utilised as a resource within the boundaries of what he refers to as a “talent pool” for the nation to draw upon. Rather than continue Marcos Sr.’s use of the word “resources” to describe Filipino citizens, Ramos has transitioned into the more marketable and equitable “talent pool.”

In 1996, Ramos begins by speaking about the previous years of his presidency, and he observes that “[t]he correctness of our reforms so far has been validated by the growth of the economy and a new tempo of nation-wide self-reliance, even at the grass roots, as expressed in our battle-cry: ‘*Kaya ito ni Pinoy! Kayang-kaya niya!!*’ ‘The Filipino can do it! He can really do it!’” In this battle cry, as Ramos calls it, he is calling upon Filipinos to continue to do the work that has led to the “growth of the economy,” touting the virtue of “self-reliance” even at “the grass roots” of the nation. Ramos also moves the idea of patriotism from a sacrificial death in times of revolution and war, towards “citizenship for peace and development,” that “if each of us pulled his or her weight, then we as a nation can be bound together — not only by the common memory of our past sufferings — but by the progress we can enjoy together.” Ramos explicitly calls for a kind of individual sacrifice that, while echoing the revolutionary calls of dying for one’s country, has been adapted to the demands of the current time. Here is a shift that is as significant as it is transformative in the discourse of migrant workers: President Ramos is anchoring the idea of patriotism and heroism onto work, personal responsibility, and social obligation. This is an enunciation of the expectation that the Filipino citizen should be ready and willing to engage in the type of action that is necessary for national development.

In 1997, which is Ramos’ last SONA, he names humans — notably, not citizens — as capital, although the intent remains constant: “To create high-wage jobs in the future, human capital investments are the key.” To invest in the citizenry (and to participate in these investments) is not only patriotic, but democratic. It is in this same year when Ramos faced widespread critique for the execution of Flor Contemplacion, with his administration facing “allegations from the Filipino public that the government, particularly the highly paid, highly trained foreign service officials, did not do enough to defend Contemplacion because she was ‘just a maid’,” (Gonzalez III and Torneo 2021, p. 258) and therefore not considered important enough. As Fajardo describes it, “Filipino/as in the Philippines and around the world were outraged by the injustice, the Singapore’s state violent actions, and the inaction and sense of powerlessness of the Philippine state” (2011, p. 71). Here, the Philippine state is unable to protect migrant workers who are outside of the jurisdiction of the country; the class differences

between the Filipino middle class, and the working class labour citizenry, emerge as a battleground — migrant workers are valuable in their role as resources, but are not valuable enough to be rescued by the same government that calls for their labour and their remittances.

Ramos' vision of the Philippine citizen is made visible in three aphorisms: (1) People with more are obliged to help people with less, 1993; (2) There is no free lunch in the world, 1994; and finally, (3) God helps those who help themselves, 1995. Ramos anchors his idea of good Filipino citizenship on a citizen defined by a moralistic individualism, a reliance on self, and the prioritisation of patriotic sacrifice that is bound not to revolutionary death, as in traditional heroism, but in a life dedicated to the service of the modern nation. He calls for the creation of a “talent pool” (1995) populated by citizens who live and labour not just for the present betterment of their country but also for a “beautiful future” (1997), all of which are clearly enunciated expectations for the Filipino citizens that he governs. Ramos' good citizen is therefore a neoliberal creation, one who is eminently marketable to foreign markets as hard working and moralistic, and is a self-sufficient hard worker who associates hard work with patriotism. His presidency is marked by calls towards citizens' self-sufficiency and a turn towards a description of Filipino citizens in market-oriented terms — yet a description that prioritises morality as well as literacy and competence (1992) when it comes to marketing a resource.

Joseph Ejercito Estrada: 1998 to 2000

The Philippine's only president who established his reputation as an actor before he entered politics, Estrada, popularly-known as Erap, saw a political rise from a mayoralty to the presidency that was in part powered by supporters who hail from poor and working-class Filipinos who were drawn to him as a politician who “actually talked like the masses” (Abinales and Amoroso 2017, p. 260); Evangelista characterises Erap's language as “simple, aggressive, yet relatable ‘masa’ (mass/es) language—the machismo of the street” (2017, p. 255). His term “began shortly after the Asian financial currency crisis when foreign investors took flight from the ‘crash’ that their sudden run had centrally helped to create,” which created a crisis of both “economic deficits” and the president's “political-moral deficits” (Tadiar 2004, p. 103). Estrada's term ended in an impeachment — on charges of plunder and embezzlement — in an event that is often called EDSA II, referencing both the first People Power Revolution as well as “the shared geography of mobilization” (Hedman 2018, p. 284).

Erap's first SONA in 1998 — a year which marked the centenary of Philippine independence from colonial Spain — is defined by the theme of calling on Filipino citizens to sacrifice, one which continues Ramos' calls to action regarding the expectations that the state has of the citizen: "Kailangan magbanat tayo ng mga buto, at tunay na serbisyo ang siyang dapat na maging balangkas para sa ating mga solusyon," or "We need to stretch our bones, and true service is what should be the framework of our solutions." The saying "magbanat ng buto" is one that not only implies sacrifice and hard work, but *extraordinary* sacrifice and hard work; the implication being that the government's calls to action will be inclusive of citizens embarking on such 'true' sacrifice and 'true' service.

In 1999, Estrada openly publicises the nation's gratitude for overseas workers and their economic contributions to the country: "It is time once more to pay tribute to a special class of Filipinos: our overseas workers. They as a group kept our GNP growth at positive rates even during the worst of times. They continue to be our economic saviors" — labour outmigration is explicitly presented by Estrada as a patriotic action that has a tangible and traceable economic benefit through the badly-needed remittances that are sent homewards from the labour diasporas, for which both the nation and he as president are performing gratitude. This is the first time that OFWs are discussed in the SONAs in direct relation to the Philippine GDP; their already rhetorically-granted status of *bayani* through their direct contributions to the country's economic health and survival is openly enunciated using the public stage of the SONA.

In the year 2000, Estrada calls for an end to the conflicts in Mindanao, the southernmost region in the Philippine archipelago, which sits in a complicated place and space in Philippine geographies and culture.²⁸ Estrada says, "[t]o begin with, we will write a new history for Mindanao." As the president, Estrada calls to the similarities between Muslim Mindanao and the rest of the Philippines as he makes a rhetorical move towards peace talks in the South: "My Muslim brothers: We worship the same God — the God of Abraham and Moses... He is on

²⁸ Mindanao, often referred to as "Muslim Mindanao" in Philippine politics and media, is a place that occupies the national imagination as "an exceptional space of violent conflict versus the rest of the Philippines" (Adam 2017, p. 50). Adam argues that the 1960s was the emergence of the conflicts between Muslim and Christian militias, which was the political milieu from which the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) came about in 1972 (2017, p. 52). Tigno traces the conflicts in Mindanao back to pre-colonial history, and further argues that the Spanish colonization, where the Spanish Catholics clashed with the Islamic islands, was when the modern understanding of Mindanaoan violence "can be said to have taken root and is now embedded into the fabric of contemporary Philippine society" (2006, p. 24). Chalk describes it as the "Mindanao secessionist problem," which is the question of "how to assimilate a people that, for all intents and purposes, do not recognise or identify with the political, cultural, linguistic, ethnic or religious parameters of the Philippine state" (1997, p. 80). Mindanao as a region is often discursively presented as being distinct from the rest of mainstream Filipino culture; this includes how the war, violence, and ongoing after/effects of the Mindanao peace processes are discussed.

the side of peace, and therefore on both our sides... Let us now invoke our common God as we build the structure of peace.” Estrada attempts to evoke the idea of a singular divinity in his calls for peace in Mindanao. Ultimately, Estrada calls for “the whole country—the government, the legislature, even the judiciary, the private sector and civil society—to work together in unison rather than to fall apart in dissension. We can ride the storm if we unite. It will blow us apart if we fight.” In this, Estrada attempts to pull together the different factions of the country to unite under his leadership.

On January 21st 2001, three years after his inauguration as president, the second People Power Revolution happens, and Estrada is impeached from the office of the presidency on charges of plunder and embezzlement. This is an event that is also referenced in Philippine history as EDSA II. At this moment in historical time, “[t]he masses suddenly became visible in a country where the poor are often viewed by the middle class as literally unsightly, spoken about and spoken down to because they are deemed incapable of speaking up for themselves. They are acknowledged only to be dismissed” (Rafael 2016, p. 95); Estrada’s corruption as president has led to his downfall. In his brief tenure as president, Estrada imagined the Filipino citizen in ways that were reminiscent of Ramos — under whom Estrada served as vice president — such as in the calls to sacrifice that he makes in his first SONA. Additionally, Estrada openly expressed gratitude for the migrant workers who have kept the Philippine economy going at “positive rates,” explicitly calling them “economic saviours.”

Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo: 2001 to 2010

Macapagal-Arroyo is a US-educated economist whose political turn towards the United States as an ally and economic partner defined a decade of Philippine politics, especially with regards to labour. She is the second woman to hold the office of the presidency in the Philippines, and is the first president who was a child of a former president.²⁹ Upon his impeachment, then-vice president, Macapagal-Arroyo fulfilled the rest of Estrada’s term, after which she herself was elected to a full term of office.

In Macapagal-Arroyo’s 2001 speech, she begins her campaign to introduce the practice of absentee voting, framing it as a benefit for Filipino citizens who live and work outside of the national borders, “And I ask Congress to enact a law giving overseas Filipinos who continue to play a critical role in the country’s economic and social stability, with the right to vote.” As

²⁹ Of which there are three at the time of writing: Macapagal-Arroyo, Aquino III, and Marcos Jr.

Estrada thanked the financial contribution of migrant workers to the country's GNP, Macapagal-Arroyo acknowledges their 'critical role' in the nation's "stability" and offers a legislative gesture of gratitude in the form of the right of absentee voting.

In 2002, Macapagal-Arroyo continues her advocacy for additional legal rights for overseas Filipinos. She describes the act as, "the least return for the enormous contribution of our overseas Filipinos to the national welfare." Here, she acknowledges the breadth of OFW contribution to the country, and rather than merely expressing gratitude verbally, as Estrada did (1999), she has taken the stance that the government needs to match their economic contributions with action. It is in 2003 that, after two years of campaigning, the Overseas Absentee Voting Act of 2003 (RA 9189) is passed, as is the Citizenship Retention and Acquisition Act of 2003 (RA 9225).

Macapagal-Arroyo describes Filipino citizens not in the sense of them being part of a resource commons who are "allowed" to work abroad (Marcos Sr.), but in a market-oriented way akin to Ramos. She openly acknowledges their worth in the labour market: that "Eight million Filipinos live and work abroad, in jobs where they enjoy the comparative advantage of an English-speaking education, advanced skills, and a uniquely caring nature." The enumeration of signifiers in a way that highlights training and a "comparative advantage" is reminiscent of Ramos' 1993 SONA, where he describes how foreign observers marvel at Filipino workers, especially "their literacy, their competence, their resourcefulness, their high sense of moral values." Ten years on from Ramos, Macapagal-Arroyo's 2003 SONA has maintained the signifiers of education and training, but replaced his focus on "moral values" with the more easily-marketable "caring nature," particularly as Macapagal-Arroyo was marketing Filipina women for feminised roles such as domestic workers, nurses, and carers. Yet, in both of these descriptive strings, there is a problematic blurring together of expected labouring and personal attributes that the state associates with the Filipino citizen that is being implicitly demanded of the Filipino citizen-as-worker.

In this same SONA, Arroyo declares that, "The Filipino will work anywhere because he is not afraid," highlighting once more a personal characteristic —courage — rather than speaking to the national lack of available work within the national borders as a problem that labour outmigrants are seeking to solve. Her choice to describe the Filipino in these terms is significant: she is communicating not only to potential foreign employers, but also to the OFWs

abroad and would-be migrant workers alike, that these are the attributes that are vital to being a labour migrant.

In the 2004 SONA, Macapagal-Arroyo connects patriotism to opportunities for success, saying that, “To expand youth opportunity, we need to focus on technical and vocational education; on strengthening English, science & technology, & love of country. As I said in my inaugural (address): it is not free markets but patriotism that makes countries strong.” Despite her assertion that the strength of a country is based on “patriotism” rather than “free markets,” the ways in which she describes how her government ensure that educational opportunities available to Filipino youth are oriented towards being able to participate in the labour market. To reference her 2003 SONA, where she describes English literacy, skills, and care as a comparative advantage, in this year she maintains English literacy and skills but has replaced care with patriotism for the youth. Macapagal-Arroyo’s ideation of Filipino citizenship and nationalism therefore demands a specific performance of patriotism — one that intertwines marketable skills like training and language fluency with love of country — and connotes the creation of youth who will become patriotic workers, who are then free, if they so choose, to participate in the labour market.

In her 2005 SONA, Macapagal-Arroyo acknowledges the departure of Filipino citizens who are leaving the country because of their disappointment with homeland politics: “But by and large, our political system has betrayed its promise to each new generation of Filipinos, not a few of whom are voting with their feet, going abroad, leaving that system behind.” Here, she concedes the Filipinos who have migrated to other countries can be read as an indictment of the failures of the system for the citizens. She anchors these moments of departure in feelings of “betrayal” at the degeneration of the “political” system, but she does not speak to the effects of this political failure on the country’s local economy and the terrain of job availability.

In 2006, she speaks directly to the OFW, saying “*Sa ating mga OFW, tunay kayong mga bagong bayani. Sa inyong paglilingkod sa pamilya, sa ating bayan, at sa Diyos, maraming salamat,*” or “To our OFWs, you are truly new heroes. For your service to family, to the nation, and to God, thank you.” The rhetoric of gratitude towards the heroism of the OFWs continues to be made publicly, as are the ways in which the responsibilities of the citizen are commingled across several scales: the family, the nation, and God, a choice which imbues the decision of outmigration with a national and divine tone. Macapagal-Arroyo here refers to labour outmigration as a *service* that is being performed for family, nation, and God; the use of

‘service’ or *paglilingkod*, in addition to collapsing such differing categories of relationships into a singular mode of service, also rhetorically collapses together family, nation, and God.

It is in this year that Macapal-Arroyo launches the Supermaids Program; Guevarra calls this essentialised marketing of Filipino workers racial branding, wherein “[t]he image of Filipinos as compassionate, loving super-workers is part of a racialized and gendered process of commodification that attempts to mobilize a form of competitive advantage in the global economy” (2014, p. 131). This explicitly neoliberal marketing of Filipino migrant workers, and Filipino women especially, is what Lindio-McGovern articulates as the ways in which “[t]he neoliberal nation-state must participate in making labor cheap and even disposable, since disposability of labor contributes to the creation of permanent underemployment that shapes the precondition for making wages low” (2023, p. 226); a part of the competitive advantage of hiring Filipino workers is specifically that they are “disposable,” that after their contracts end they are to go back home to the Philippines and the state of employment does not have any responsibilities of social reproduction towards them as non-citizens.

In 2008, in an echo of the 2004 SONA four years ago, Macapagal-Arroyo re-introduces the notion of care into the SONA, “I care for our OFWs, famed for their skill, integrity, and untiring labor, who send home their pay as the only way to touch loved ones so far away.” She is making personal-affective pronouncements as the president to indicate that she publicly “cares for” migrant workers; despite this deployment of the word “care,” her relationship with Filipinos working abroad is one that is continuously refracted through a market-oriented relationship. From this perspective, hers is an administration that cares within the ambit of the global labour market: she cares by continuing to provide opportunities through marketing citizens as commodities, and by ensuring that they are cared for while they labour abroad. Caring, in this instance, is not a way to ensure that Filipino citizens can stay in the Philippines, but rather, that they will be cared for if they choose to work abroad.

In the SONA for 2009, Macapagal-Arroyo once again thanks OFWs explicitly for their contributions to the nation, saying that, “*Sa hirap at ginhawa, pinapatatag ang ating bansa ng ating overseas Filipinos*,” or, “Through difficulty and ease, our nation is made stronger by our overseas Filipinos.” While she made the claim in 2004 that it is patriotism and not free market participation that makes the nation strong, here she notes that it is migrant workers participating in the global labour market that makes the nation strong; here, there is an association of labour migration, as an act of patriotism, with the strength of the nation. It is also of note that she

claims OFWs as “ours,” that the strength of the nation is buoyed by the labour of “our” citizens who are resources. Macapagal-Arroyo politically performs public gratitude for the labour and remittances that OFWs provide using the platform of the SONA. Naming the sacrifice of working abroad, she says, “I know that this is not a sacrifice joyfully borne. This is work where it can be found — in faraway places, among strangers with different cultures. It is lonely work, it is hard work.” Emotionally, Macapagal-Arroyo is continuing to make public performances of gratitude to the labour diasporas through the SONA.

Macapagal-Arroyo’s last SONA in 2010 draws a traceable connection between education as a skills-training exercise and the benefit of particular sets of skills to local and global economics: “Our educational system should make the Filipino fit not just for whatever jobs happen to be on offer today, but also for whatever economic challenge life will throw in their way.” In this way, education is proffered by the president as an investment into an appealing economic future, one which *may* include the option of working abroad. The Philippine educational and training systems become a pathway towards a ‘better’ future through possible opportunities of exiting the country as labour migrants. Contrary to previous SONAs by Marcos Sr. and Ramos that framed sacrifice as a demand, Macapagal-Arroyo frames it as a choice that has been made by the citizen, one that the government understands is difficult and for which it is grateful. However, in her description of foreign nations primarily from the perspective of being “strangers with different cultures,” Macapagal-Arroyo subsumes geopolitics and differential power dynamics between employer/employee into the singularity of cultural difference.

Throughout her SONAs, Macapagal-Arroyo’s imagination of the good Filipino citizen is defined by her focus on OFWs. Macapagal-Arroyo’s presidency happens in a post-labour export policy Philippines, where such sacrifices are already and continue to be made by Filipino citizens. Her public expression of gratitude is in contrast to both Marcos Sr. and Ramos’ *demands* for sacrifice from the citizenry, or rather, in their description of such sacrifices as patriotic. Ideal Filipino citizens, ideal Filipino *migrant* citizens, in her rhetoric, become sources of economic, national, and emotional strength for the rest of the nation. Serquiña puts forward the argument that Macapagal-Arroyo “was fully aware of the political value of migrant workers in maintaining her authority and power as the nation-state’s leader” (2016, p. 212), and because of this, “was adept at corporatizing the whole enterprise of labor out-migration” (p. 213). Her SONAs illustrate that she is skilled at utilising a “market-based lexicography,” revealing her

“inclination for market economies and neoliberal philosophies in crafting both public policy and statist rhetoric” (Serquiña 2016, p. 209). Thus, while Macapagal-Arroyo was the ‘CEO’ of the national business of sending Filipino workers abroad, her political performance of gratitude through the SONAs and through her fight for absentee voting reveals that she sees a *visible* exchange as necessary in this market relationship: the nation and the government’s gratitude in return for the sacrifice that the labour migrants are making.

Benigno Simeon Aquino III: 2011 to 2015

The late Aquino III is the second of three Philippine presidents who are themselves the children of former presidents. A senator who decided to run for the presidency after his mother, former president Corazon Aquino, died in 2009, he was a fourth-generation politician from the Aquino family. Aquino III’s administration, according to Claudio, “seemed like a continuation of liberal ascendance,” yet with its failure to “forge a state that addresses people’s needs from healthcare, food security to education, the liberal state has turned into an ineffectual abstraction” (2017, p. 258-259). It is these failures that are often cited as the reason for the right-wards political swing that happened in the Philippines after the Aquino III presidency.

In 2011, his first SONA, Aquino III refers to the citizenry as “*At sa mga minamahal kong kababayan, ang aking butihing mga boss,*” or “To my beloved countrymen, to my noble bosses.” This reference to the citizens as an employer is a departure from the market lexicography of Macapagal-Arroyo, who denoted herself as a CEO of a national business. In doing so, Aquino III diverges from an understanding of the Filipino citizen as resources (Marcos Sr.; Ramos) or the citizens as talent pools (Ramos), which have been made by previous president. Rather, Aquino III names the presidential relationship between himself and the citizenry as a place of accountability and responsibility *towards* the citizens, rather than the citizens as being commoditised or being accountable for the success of the nation.

Aquino III, like Ramos before him, speaks to a politics that is rooted in a politicisation of cultural values: “*Ngayon, ang kultura sa gobyerno: bayanihan para sa kapakanan ng taumbayan,*” or, “Now, government culture [is]: community-oriented unity for the welfare of the people.” Here, Aquino III references the Philippine value of “bayanihan,” as Ramos does with the notion of help and compassion in mutual aid (1992). It is a presentation of government culture — and therefore, policy work — that is intended to be grounded in internal investments into the community.

In his 2013 SONA, Aquino III anchors the success of democracy in the relationship between the citizen and the state, in a sentiment which highlights the importance of a participatory national democracy: “*Kayo pa rin ang sisigurong magpapatuloy ang ating nasimulan; kayo ang sisigurong mabubura na ng tuluyan ang mukha ng katiwalian; kayo ang sisigurong hindang-hindi na tayong muling lilihis sa matuwid na daan,*” or “You are the ones who will ensure that what we started will continue; you are the ones who will ensure that the face of corruption will be erased thoroughly; you are the ones who will ensure that we will never again stray from the straight path.” However, in so doing, Aquino III individualises the responsibility of a clean democracy, extending it beyond the ambit of elected politicians within the government to include regular members of the citizenry. This individualisation — specifically the individualisation of democratic action from the government to the citizens — is a rhetoric that was also deployed by both Marcos Sr. and Ramos, who understood citizen investment, participation, and deployment to be vital to nation-building.

In 2014, Aquino III describes himself as “*ama ng bayan,*” or the “father of the nation,” a specific gendering of his presidency that speaks to patriarchal notions of leadership. When the claim to this title is juxtaposed against the fact that he refers to the citizenry his bosses, the metaphor suffers: how does the patriarchal notion of a father leading a family coexist with a president whose citizens are his bosses? These roles create a paradox of relations, wherein as a father, he is the authority figure and holds the decision-making power, while at the same time ostensibly being beholden to his employers, all the citizens of the country that he leads. Aquino III restates the importance of the relationship between the government and the citizen: “*Talagang hindi nag-iisa ang gobyerno. Sa pagsusulong ng malawakan at makabuluhang reporma. Totoo nga po: Kayo ang aming lakas,*” or “Truly, the government is not alone in launching widespread and significant reform. It is true: You are our strength.” The president and the citizen are thus presented as being hand-in-hand, an intimate notion of participative democracy from a president who is nurturing a political image of a politician who is a father but also a humble employee. Aquino III attempts to rhetorically collapse the power dynamic that defines the difference between the government/politicians and the citizenry.

In 2015, which is his final SONA Aquino III continues to speak to the citizenry as his employers: “*Kaisa-isang interes ko ang kapakanan ng aking Boss,*” or “My singular interest is the welfare of my Boss,” emphasising that his role as president is to continue to check in with his “boss” to ensure that he is moving democratically in service of their needs and their

interests. In this SONA, Aquino III speaks explicitly regarding the labour experience of OFWs, articulating that their contributions to the country are important, but that the circumstances are a tragedy at the same time: “kikilabutan akong angkinin ang tagumpay na nagmula sa pagpapalayas ng ating mga kababayan,” or “I would be horrified to claim success that comes from our countrymen who have been forced to leave.” This expressed sentiment is a powerful rhetorical framework to utilise and express for the president of a country that has become — to a significant extent — dependent on remittances from migrant workers, and one that puts his rhetoric in opposition to the market lexicon utilised by Macapagal-Arroyo. It is powerful that as the president, he makes a public acknowledgement that the financial benefits of remittances are, ultimately, paid for by the *forced* departure of Filipino migrant workers.

The Filipino citizen that Aquino III imagines is one who takes not only an interest, but a personal responsibility for democracy. This Filipino citizen works hand in hand with the president, and will continue the work of ensuring clean governance beyond his own presidency. Aquino III’s prominent divergence from previous presidents regards the benefits of having a subset of the population having been forced to work abroad; in utilising the sentiment of *kikilabutan*, or ‘would be horrified,’ he frames himself as a president who feels horror and shame regarding some circumstances of labour migration.

Rodrigo Roa Duterte: 2016 to 2020

The fact of Duterte’s presidential win in the 2016 elections against the Liberal Party candidate Mar Roxas — who was endorsed by Aquino III — is inextricable from his Mindanaoan roots as the first president hailing from the region, and from his political reputation as the then-mayor of Davao City.³⁰ Rodrigo Duterte’s running mate was Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who ultimately lost the vice-presidential race to Leni Robredo; as president, Duterte “publicly thanked and acknowledged the Marcoses’ help in financing his campaign” (Martin 2019, p. 424), with the Marcos and Duterte families forming a political alliance called the UniTeam (Ayson and Reyes 2023). Teehankee argues that “the Duterte phenomenon is not a revolt of the poor; it is elite-driven” (2016, p. 72); as Pangalagan argues, “[t]he growing nostalgia for perceived political and economic stability from a bygone era combined with the emergence of a leader who carries a promise to dismantle oligarchic rule have set the stage for a break in the

³⁰ Duterte’s involvement with the Davao Death Squads, an extralegal vigilante group who were allegedly responsible for the deaths of supposed drug dealers and petty criminals, has not been legally verified, although “allegations of mayor Duterte’s direct or indirect involvement is part of a more encompassing urban legend about his persona” (Breuil and Rozema 2009, p. 416).

post-dictatorship liberal democratic landscape” (2018, p. 153). Duterte’s ability to “tap into this emotional underside of Filipinos in a way that the Left has never been able to do with its anti-imperialist program” as Bello argues (2017, p. 81) and despite facing charges at the International Criminal Court at the time of writing in 2025 and 2026, the former president still enjoys a strong base of support in both the homeland and the diasporas.

In 2016, Duterte describes the Filipino citizen as “disciplined, informed, and involved,” someone who “shall rise from the rubbles of sorrow and pain so much so that all the mirrors in the world will reflect the face of a passion that have changed this land.” He makes the implication that while the current moment that has been wrought by the previous administration is being experienced as sorrowful and painful, these emotions will be lifted during and perhaps by his presidency. He positions his presidency as a new beginning for the nation. This new beginning is for a Filipino citizen who is expected to be “disciplined, informed, and involved.”

It is in the 2017 SONA that Duterte explicitly names OFWs as heroic figures for the collective nation: “They are our heroes. They and their families have sacrificed much for our country.” While in previous SONAs, sacrifice is framed as something that is being asked of the citizen (Marcos Sr., Ramos, Estrada), in the Duterte presidency, the sacrifice of departure has already occurred. Additionally, Duterte refers to the sacrifice of migration as an experience that both migrants and their families have had to endure for the nation: an act of heroism by both the *bagong bayani* and the families that they leave behind. Labour migration and the sacrifice that it entails is openly described to in this instance as relational; Duterte stops short of collapsing together citizens’ responsibilities to family, nation, and God, as Macapagal-Arroyo did in 2004.

Duterte’s 2018 SONA also speaks directly to the country’s OFWs, saying that, “You epitomize the innate resilience of the nation.” Here, Duterte characterises not only OFWs as resilient, but the entire nation as well; as workers, migrants endure for the sake of their responsibilities, and are representative of how the nation of the Philippines defines itself. Duterte takes the time to address citizens who are dissenters, particularly regarding the protests against his administration: “If you think I can be dissuaded from continuing this fight because of [your] demonstrations, your protests, which I find, by the way, misdirected, then you got it all wrong. Your concern is human rights, mine is human lives.” While Aquino III explicitly called the citizenry his bosses, and Duterte notes that politicians are employees of the people, in this particular instance he is chastising his citizen-critics by making the claim

that his cause as the president is nobler than theirs — that while the citizenry might be his ‘employers,’ as the president, he has considerations that are ‘more important’ than his critics might believe: human *rights* vs human *lives*.

In the 2019 SONA — the year of the worldwide lockdowns instigated as emergency measures against the COVID-19 pandemic — Duterte describes the citizenry and the nation as being ‘our’ own enemy: “Honestly I have identified the enemy who dumped us into this quagmire we are in. I have met the enemy face-to-face, and sadly, the enemy is ‘us’.” This is a clear pivot away from the language that he deployed in his first SONA in 2016 where he describes the Filipino citizen in complimentary terms, as being “disciplined, informed, and involved.” The enemy, he is arguing, is not to be found outside the borders, but rather, internally. Duterte’s characterisation of the Filipino as his own enemy echoes Marcos Sr.’s first SONA in 1965, where he describes the citizen in less-than-flattering terms: “For today, the Filipino, it seems, has lost his soul, his dignity, and his courage.” From 1965 to 2019, the Filipino citizen has not progressed, but rather, has regressed.

In 2020,³¹ Duterte emphasises the importance of a government and a citizenry that works together, sans the idea that the citizens are his employers: “Let me say that the strength of a nation rests in the hands of the people acting as one with the government, in the pursuit of common goals and objectives,” once more an individualisation of the labour of national betterment from the government to the citizen. Despite the political power and role of the president of the republic, Duterte is drawing the citizens into the idea that the strength of the nation is collective, and rooted in personal responsibility. Duterte addresses the OFWs directly during his SONA, saying, “Mga kababayan ko na naghihirap sa ibang bansa, nandito ang inyong gobyerno para matulungan kayo at inyong mga pamilya,” or “My countrymen who are toiling in other countries, your government is here to help you and your families.” In this offer of aid specifically to migrant workers from the government, Duterte takes a similar approach as Macapagal-Arroyo did in her 2008 SONA, wherein she described herself as president as someone who ‘cares’ about OFWs; one difference is that for Duterte, the responsibility for the OFWs are tied to the body of the government, rather than to the president as a figure of leadership, as Macapagal-Arroyo did.

³¹ On March 16th 2020, Proclamation 929 is signed by Pres. Rodrigo Roa Duterte: *Declaring a State of Calamity Throughout the Philippines Due to Corona Virus Disease 2019*. This Proclamation declared a State of Calamity in the Philippines for six months (Section 1) “unless earlier lifted or extended as circumstances may warrant.”

In his final SONA in 2021, Duterte establishes himself as a Filipino person first, before he is a politician or before he is president. He frames himself as such in order to justify the war on drugs that he has been waging for the entirety of his tenure: “I am a Filipino and I love my country. I do not want my country in disarray because of drugs. I do not want families (to) breakup and become dysfunctional. *Iyon ang masakit sa akin* (That is what hurts me).” He proposes that the reason for his continued success and high national ratings as the president is the fact that he continually ignores what critics have to say about his actions: “Neither did I allow criticisms, however intense, to dampen my determination and initiatives, because my purpose was pure and unpolluted.” In this, he is echoing the sentiment in Marcos Sr.’s 1972 SONA, where he says that the government has not been “mandated by our people to inaugurate the age of despair.” Duterte, ultimately, describes his presidency as one that has improved the circumstance of the nation, that “gone are the days when the Philippines decides and acts in the shadows of great powers.” He frames himself as the president who has led the Philippines to a politically *independent* present, from what used to be a politically dependent past.

As with presidents like Estrada and Macapagal-Arroyo, Duterte speaks specifically to OFWs throughout his SONAs, naming their sacrifice (2017) and their resilience (2018) in a performance of political gratitude, and offering governmental aid (2020). Yet while in his initial SONA (2016) Duterte had praised the discipline of the Filipino citizen, his final SONA in 2021 makes the accusation that ‘we’ (the nation/the citizens) are ‘our own enemy,’ who are standing in the way of national progress. The developmental arc of the Filipino citizen that Duterte imagines throughout his term begins with a disciplined individual (2016) and eventually sees a regression into standing in the way of his own success (2019). Duterte makes a distinction between those who support his actions as president and those who are making demands that attempt to curtail the violence of his actions; as president, he also frames criticism of his political actions as personal (‘this is what hurts me,’ 2021). I read this as the president delineating between the people that he considers to be his supporters/good citizens and those who are vocal critics, or citizens with unreasonable demands.

Duterte’s macho persona as a politician is one that sits at “the intersection of many forms of strong masculinity—the strongman leader, the disciplinarian father, the punisher, the womanizer” (Evangelista 2017, p. 259), which plays into traditional Filipino patriarchal norms. His type of charisma is described by Bello as *cariño brutal*, a “Filipino-Spanish term that refers to a volatile mix of will to power, a commanding personality, and gangster charm that fulfils

his followers' deep-seated yearning for a father figure who will finally end what they see as the 'national chaos'," (2021, p. 163) one which "strongly appealed to voters within Manila itself, where his calls for a brutal and immediate implementation of 'law and order' have resonated particularly well" (Teehankee 2016, p. 72). Duterte enjoyed widespread support within the national bounds, and some of Duterte's most stringent supporters are overseas Filipinos, who according to Bello, "first really rallied behind the idea of a Duterte candidacy, pushed him to run, and played a prominent part in the tumultuous Facebook campaign to promote his candidacy and aggressively defend him while he was president" (2021, p. 162). Some groups of overseas Filipinos continue their defense of him, and have held rallies in opposition of his ICC arrest (Abad 2026).

Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr.: 2022 to present

In 2022, Ferdinand "Bongbong" Romualdez Marcos, Jr. is elected to the presidency.³² The eldest son of former dictator Ferdinand Edralin Marcos Sr., he is the third Philippine president who is a child of a former president. Teehankee observes that "great effort was exerted during Marcos Jr.'s presidential inauguration to evoke the memory of Marcos Sr.," including "the pomp and pageantry of a military parade and the inaugural speech delivered with the familiar tone and cadence of a booming baritone voice" (2023 p. 12). Marcos Jr.'s presidency is aesthetically and politically intended to be an echo of his father's political career, which ended in the EDSA Revolution in 1986. Marcos Jr.'s status as the eldest son of former authoritarian strongman Marcos Sr. speaks to the continued power of the Marcos family in Philippine politics, despite decades of ongoing domestic and international critique.

In Marcos Jr.'s first SONA in 2022, he directly addresses the efforts of OFWs, and in his overtures towards the population working outside the nation, he associates the idea of the government with the idea of home. He says, "*Bawat Pilipino sa ibayong dagat na nagsasakripisyong lisanin ang kanyang pamilya sa Pilipinas upang maghanapbuhay ay nararapat lamang magkaroon ng pamahalaang matatawag nilang 'tahanan' habang nasa ibang bayan,*" or "Every Filipino across the ocean who has sacrificed leaving their families in the Philippines in order to work should rightly have a government that they can call 'home' when they are in foreign lands." In this early gesture of gratitude towards the OFWs, Marcos

³² Marcos Jr.'s sitting vice president is former Pres. Duterte's daughter, Sara Duterte; this is significant because it is an explicit unification of two political families, and — at least initially — signalled Marcos Jr.'s support and protection of the previous president. However, the political alliance between the two families have disintegrated with Marcos Jr.'s cooperation with the ICC for the detention of former Pres. Rodrigo Duterte (Araneta-Alana 2025).

Jr. does not offer a way home, or a country that citizens do not have to leave in order to seek and gain employment; rather, he signals towards the government as a place of “safety” for Filipino foreign workers. While other presidents (Macapagal-Arroyo, Aquino III, Duterte) speak towards the sacrifice of OFWs in their SONAs, Marcos Jr. moves the OFW from the market position of being a commodity, to the national position of being a national commons of strength, made visible for Filipino citizens to perhaps emulate. He declaims,

“*Sa ating mga kababayan na nasa ibang bansa* (To our countrymen who are abroad): You deserve a Home in Government not only for the money that you send home, but you are not cold tools of the economy. You deserve it for your sacrifices, for our country and your perseverance and excellence in the global arena... You, OFWs, represent the fighting faith of the Filipinos as a nation and as a people. Let us transform your overseas journey into inspirational stories for all time.”

In doing so, he performs not only gratitude, but elevates OFWs onto a pedestal of idealised behaviour.

In 2023, Marcos Jr. presents an imagination of the nation-building project as bound in the compassion and love that Filipinos have for their fellow Filipinos and for the Philippines. He says, “Every Filipino has unanimously risen to the challenge that we have made to them to be part of our nation’s future. *Handa silang maghandog ng tulong dahil mahal nila ang kanilang kapwa-Pilipino at mahal na mahal nila ang Pilipinas,*” or “They are ready to give help because they love their fellow Filipinos, and they love the Philippines very much.” This is an echo of Ramos’ 1992 SONA, wherein he describes the Filipino citizen as having “always accepted that people with more are obliged to help people with less — in the name of a common, compassionate humanity.” By creating linkages between community-oriented cultural values and the future success of the nation, the president anchors the Philippines’ accomplishments not in government action, but in an patriotic notion of care and love.

In this same SONA, Marcos Jr. describes the Philippines as a “service export powerhouse,” although he follows up with a hope that has also been repeated across several administrations: “It is our wish that one day foreign employment will be driven by choice and not by necessity. It is a noble calling that our OFWs have answered, requiring great sacrifice from them, their families, and their communities.” In this move to frame labour migration as a “noble calling” — and not as an action that is propelled by politics, lack of opportunity, or financial necessity — Marcos Jr does not politically acknowledge the failures of the Philippine state to provide adequate labour opportunities for its own citizens, leading to ongoing waves

of labour outmigration. To refer to labour outmigration as a “noble calling” implies not only that it was a choice, but a selfless and heroic choice in service of the greater good for the nation itself.

In 2024, Marcos Jr. connects the citizen to the economy, similar to both Marcos Sr. and Macapagal-Arroyo, saying that, “[t]he great bulk of the country’s wealth is being created by the skill, industry, and resourcefulness of all Filipinos,” which was then followed up by the call that “[w]e must harness the totality of the Filipino’s potential.” Wealth-building, in this instance, is tied securely to the idea of the Filipino as an opportunity and as a resource; that the Filipino’s “potential” must be “harnessed (in its) totality” is a return to Macapagal-Arroyo’s market-based lexicography. He continues to speak about OFWs and their actions not just with gratitude, but with honour: “Kaya hindi lamang pasasalamat, kundi parangal ang ating ipinapaabot sa lahat ng ating mga OFWs. [applause] Sana ay napapanood nila ito. Ramdam na ramdam hanggang dito sa ating bansa ang inyong sakripisyo,” or “It is not just with gratitude, but also honour that we extend to our OFWs. [applause] Hopefully they are watching this. Your sacrifice is deeply felt in our nation.”

In moving from “they” to “you,” Marcos Jr. creates a moment of personal conversation between himself and the OFW who may be watching the SONA. By describing the nation as ‘ours,’ he places himself alongside the families and kin networks who are the immediate recipients of the material benefits of migrant work in the form of remittances, but who are also most intimately afflicted with the loneliness wrought by the distance between family members. In doing so, he further continues the presidential tradition of individualising the responsibility of care and aid to the level of the citizen (Ramos, Aquino), who are operationalised to care for each other as a national responsibility: much like the families of the OFWs are part of the sacrifice of labour migration, citizens must take care of each other for the success of the nation-building project.

In 2025, continuing Ramos and Macapagal-Arroyo’s market-oriented descriptions of Filipino citizens, Marcos Jr. calls for international investment in Filipino labour: “My single resounding message to the international business community is this: The Philippines is ready. Invest in the Filipino... Our cavalcade of dependable and hardworking Filipinos, innately skilled, adaptable, and possessed with a heart for service, are here, ready to work and to succeed with you.” Alongside the descriptors of labour (dependable, hardworking, innately skilled, adaptable), Marcos Jr. emphasises another supposed advantage to the hiring of the Filipino

worker: “possessed with a heart for service.” As an enunciation of expectation, this list of identifiers is not only what the international community can expect of Filipino workers, but what Filipino workers must then be able to deliver to their foreign employers.

As the president, Marcos Jr. explicitly calls to OFWs throughout his SONAs, directly addressing them in his speeches. He consistently speaks of the work of the OFWs with gratitude, and regards their contribution to the Philippines as an honourable sacrifice, elevating them from being only Philippine national heroes into the pantheon of *international* heroes. He describes the actions of migrant workers as a point of emulation; the behaviour of the Filipino migrant worker is not only described in essentialised, market-oriented terms for the global labour market, but in patriotic terms to serve as a model for good citizenship. Finally, Marcos Jr. attempts to create an image not just of the Philippine nation as “home,” but also of his government, specifically, as a safe haven for migrant workers abroad.

Terraformations of Belonging: Citizenship and National Identity

How have Philippine presidents shaped the national imaginary with regards to conceptions of belonging and made a transition towards a neoliberal, self-sufficient Filipino citizen who is not only willing to work for the good of the nation, but is willing to work abroad in service of the family and the nation? What are the ways in which belonging has been terraformed in the Philippines, particularly as manifesting through the modality of citizenship?

In the case study of the neoliberal Filipino labour brokerage state, I put forward the argument that belonging has become terraformed through the country’s continued investment in the labour brokerage system. Beyond the expectations of of good-citizen-as-worker, the continued investment in labour brokerage has led to the creation of the good-citizen-as-migrant-worker: a citizen who is also a migrant worker, a self-sufficient person and a brokered commodity, an individual who is ‘here’ and is ‘there’ — a citizen who is temporally anchored through kin relationships and affective connections, but is territorially hyper-flexible for the accomodation of the demands of global labour. This archetype of self-reliance is pushed to the extreme in the context of Philippine outmigration; labour brokerage demands the production of an ideal citizen who participates not merely in local employment, but also in paid labour outside of the country’s borders. In brief, while the normative ideal of the self-sufficient neoliberal citizen can be understood as the citizen-as-worker, the ideal citizen in the Philippine brokerage state is the citizen-as-*migrant*-worker, in fulfillment of the state’s role in the global labour market. The Philippine state therefore adapts to the demands of global migration “by

creating a pool of cheap, impermanent, and conveniently disposable labor” which allows it to remain pivotal in the global labour market, and yet, simultaneously “perpetuates the peripheral position of the Philippines in the global political economy” (Lindio-McGovern 2023, p. 226). In this structure, the country needs to remain peripheral in order to maintain the profitability of labour export.

These political expectations regarding citizenship — expressed by the president through the SONAs as well as in policies that reflects the market orientation of the state — indicate that the Philippine state’s good citizen is one who is participatory in, or is necessitated into, fulfilling these demands. The terraformation of belonging — as seen in the status and expectations of citizenship — is made visible in a labour brokerage state wherein citizenship is a *possessive* or a belonging to, as opposed to a *membership* or a belonging *with*. It is made visible here that citizenship, both in the legal and imaginative sense, is “a flexible and continually changing concept that shapes and/or reflects our complex historical, socio-political, and cultural dynamics” (Kim 2023, p. 485). The terraformation of belonging through the changing status of citizenship is an adaptation of the country in its role of labour broker, a continued investment into the foreseeable future where the citizen continues to be an exported commodity in a global labour market that functions in this particular manner.

The short decades between the presidency of Marcos Sr. to the presidency of his eldest son Marcos Jr. has witnessed the ways in which citizenship as a mode of national belonging has been terraformed: contingent ways in which the president seeks to answer the problems of political unrest, poverty, and under- or unemployment, primarily through the market’s demands for Filipino labour.

The good citizen under Marcos Sr. is contingently a collectively-owned and collectively-accessible “resource” (1968), a citizen who subordinates their needs to that of the nation (1970), will accept training in technical and vocational schools to jointly solve development and employment needs (1976), and is able to weather economic crisis because they are “used to deprivation and impoverishment” (1979). Marcos Sr. continues this rhetoric of citizen as a “resource” in 1985, sparking the paradox of a citizenry who is the resource that themselves owns the resources in question. While Marcos Sr. uses the phrase “quiet hero” to describe the Filipino worker (1968), it is Aquino — succeeding him as president after the EDSA Revolution — who contributes the term *bagong bayani* to the national political lexicon in a speech that she delivers in Hong Kong in 1988. The title of *bayani* is a titular reward granted

to those Filipinos who embark on the long-acknowledged sacrifice of migrant work. The politics of public gratitude therefore functions in a top-down manner: the president, who is the representative of the nation, acknowledges their heroism, and so too does the nation. In Estrada's three year presidency, he similarly performed gratitude towards the OFWs whose remittances were contributing towards the country's GNP, explicitly linking overseas work and the sending of remittances to a patriotic act of economic heroism.

Ramos' call for good citizenship is governed by what he refers to as "moral values," as well as the speculative investment in a "beautiful future" (1997) that is anchored in the individualism of neoliberal self-sufficiency — a citizen for whom a "high sense of moral values" is just as important as "their literacy, their competence, their resourcefulness." This begins the practice of framing the citizen in market-oriented terms. Macapagal-Arroyo's presidency is significant with regards to the popularisation of this type of market lexicon, her "caring" relationship to OFWs, and her public and legislative acts of gratitude towards Filipinos overseas. Her descriptions of the comparative advantages of Filipino workers — or rather, what she highlights — see changes across the years of her tenure that are reflective of what can be considered desirable on the global market.

- In 2003: English fluency, advanced skills, and a uniquely caring nature.
- In 2004: for Filipino youth, the focus was on English, science & technology, and love of country.
- In 2008: skill, integrity, and untiring labor.

In a transition from discussing citizens using market-oriented language, Aquino III pivots towards the notion that democratic participation on the part of the citizens is vital and expected. Calling the citizens his "bosses," Aquino consistently references democracy as a practice of citizenship — "you will make sure we do not stray from the straight path" in 2013, to "the government is not alone in launching widespread and significant reform" in 2014. However, in a significant departure from previous presidencies, Aquino declares while the contributions of migrant workers are important, he would feel "shame" in claiming as a triumph the circumstances that have led Filipinos to leave the country (2015).

Duterte's notion of good citizenship with regards to OFWs speaks to the ideas of "sacrifice" (2017) and "resilience" (2018) as traits that are praiseworthy in the actions that migrant workers take. He transitions from these moments of praise to offers of governmental aid during the pandemic lockdown years. Finally, Marcos Jr.'s Filipino citizen is one who has a strong affective relationship to the nation and to his fellowmen, one who exists in relation to

his co-citizens and to the nation itself on an emotional level (communitarian aid, love of others, and love of nation, 2023), therefore framing citizenship as a status that is grounded not only in a legal relationship with the state, but also in a responsibility to co-citizens (in *kapwa*). Marcos Jr. has since expanded the traditional lexicon of *bagong bayani*, popularised by Aquino in the 1980s, to *bagong bayani ng mundo*, or new heroes of the world.

The Heroization of the Good Citizen

As I have traced in six decades of the SONAs, the idealised Filipino citizen is an individual who is imagined differently by the past seven presidents: these imaginations range from a type of commons for the national good (Marcos Sr.) to a boss (Aquino III) to citizens whose sacrifices are leading to the creation of wealth for the nation (Marcos Jr.). These imaginations of the citizen are scaffolded onto expectations of responsibility that are bound up in the local economic and labour policies that are implemented and prioritised by each president, in addition to the labour export policies and the continuing marketing of Filipinos the world over. Through the president, the state invokes what is politically expected of its citizens, and defines the parameters for what constitutes good citizenship.

Yet while the phrase *bagong bayani* continues to see usage in popular and academic discourse surrounding OFWs, for the sacrifice of overseas employment to be considered within the bounds of heroism, the nation-state demands specific kinds of financial-affective actions, including but not limited to the remittance cycle. In what Mavelli describes as “the neoliberal political economy of belonging,” to be drawn into or expelled from the narratives of good citizen is now grounded in “an individual’s, or a group’s, capacity to contribute to the country’s financial viability, economic competitiveness, international reputation, moral standing, and self-understanding, and emotional well-being” (2018, p. 483). The granting of the title *bagong bayani*, Roces argues, “was inherently problematic not least because of its overemphasis on migrant victimhood (martyrdom does not only disempower them but results in the feminization of the migrant subjects), but also because it did not reflect migrants’ own perspectives” (2021, p. 174). The ideal good citizen — that is, the citizen who belongs as an object of labour and as a global commodity, one that participates in the imposed life course of labour migration — is discursively rewarded with the title of *bayani*, of hero.

The demand for such heroism is a globalised re-interpretation of the demands of sacrifice that are embedded in the language of the Philippine national anthem, particularly in the concluding line, “*Aming ligaya na ‘pag may mang-aapi, ang mamatay ng dahil sayo,*”

which translates to: “If oppressors arise, it would be our pleasure to die for you.”³³ As an artefact of national identity, one which reflects the responsibilities of citizenship and the expectedly-affective relation between the nation and the citizen, the anthem is a powerful point of contact with idealized Philippine nationalism. While not every person in the Philippines identifies as being of the Catholic faith, Guevarra argues that the Spanish legacy of Catholicism in the Philippines has “become the basis through which this colonial power governed Filipinos culturally,” with the introduction of “narratives of suffering, sacrifice, and martyrdom [becoming] prominent themes” (2010, p. 24) that continue to be cornerstones of national identity. Guevarra further notes that “the state's construction of Filipino migrant workers as God-fearing, self-sacrificing, highly productive workers and citizens echoes these ideals,” (2010, p. 25) contribute to the national discourse surrounding the ongoing mythologisation of the global working class as self-sacrificial heroes who serve not only their families, but also the country. Sacrifice, in this nationalist, Catholic, neoliberal setting, becomes not only expected of ‘good’ citizens, but glorified to and as a point of pride. Rodriguez argues that the citizen’s (un)willing participation in the state’s process of labour brokerage is “represented as a sacrifice akin to those made by anticolonial nationalists: a sacrifice that requires some degree of suffering but ultimately advances the greater national good” (2010, p. 84). The title of hero serves to elevate the sacrifice of migrant labour into actions that not only benefit their families and kin networks, but are also positioned as a national benefit; they are heroes because their sacrifice serves a national purpose.

In this turn towards a projected and culturalised language of heroism rather than political and policy moves towards understanding the realities of labour outmigration as a “reflection of weakness in Filipino national development,” the association between labour outmigration and the OFWs has become “reformulated as an expression of Filipino strength” (Camroux 2008, p. 6). According to Serquiña, the country’s continued reference to heroism serves “to account for the ambivalences in the anointed positions of migrant workers as saviors and slaves to both their sending and receiving countries” (2016, p. 208). There is a disciplinary and regulatory mechanism in the continued and continuing use of this rhetoric of heroism as specifically applied to migrant workers. It is a title that is selective in its purpose, granted “only if migrants support national developmental goals through their regular remittance sending” (Rodriguez 2010, p. 84) and fulfilling their roles as objects of labour export.

³³ Translation by author. Another, perhaps more literal sentiment, is: “It would be our *joy* to die *because* of you.”

Tadiar interprets this title of *bagong bayani* as a form of fantasy production, arguing that “[t]he hero is the inversion of the slave. The slave becomes the object of sacrifice — the martyr — enabling the heroization of the nation” (2004, p. 147). With the generations-long intertwining of the idea of migrant labour as sacrifice with the rhetoric of heroism, Encinas Franco contends that “the term ‘bagong bayani’ legitimizes and normalizes the risks of migrating for work abroad and downplays the huge role of the state in labor export promotion” (2013, p. 57). Guevarra argues that “the state’s construction of Filipino migrant workers as God-fearing, self-sacrificing, highly productive workers and citizens echoes these ideals,” (2010, p. 25) and indeed are vital parts of the national discourse that surrounds the mythologising of the global working class as self-sacrificial heroes. Yet “the downward mobility experienced by migrant Filipinos enables the sublimation of class and foregrounds national identity and belonging” (Benedicto 2007, p. 322), leading to relationships with the home country defined by cultural attachments and social rewards rather than legal protections. To engage in acts of labour outmigration — to be a good citizen, one who enacts belonging correctly — is to forge towards a future that is defined by instability for the benefit of one’s family, benefits that directly advantage a state who then grants the title of “hero.”

Conclusion

In this chapter, I demonstrated the first of three ways in which belonging, as a relationship between the citizen and their nation-state, has undergone a terraformation in the age of migration. I argued that through the commodification of the status of citizenship, what it means to belong in the context of a Filipino citizen has expanded to include expectations of extra-territoriality and hyper-flexibility, and yet that this is unevenly applied based on a citizen’s class standing. In investigating the SONAs as a venue that is used by the president for the enunciation of citizen expectations — particularly as juxtaposed against the neoliberalisation of citizenship and the market orientation of citizens towards being citizens-as-commodities — the terraformation of national belonging has meant that to be a good Filipino citizen, one must fulfill the role not just of a citizen-as-worker, but also of a citizen-as-migrant-worker.

Yet while the SONA as a political speech happens uninterrupted and is broadcast widely along many platforms, both the president and the speech that they deliver do not go unchallenged; discourse surrounding local Philippine politics, both in agreement and in disagreement, flows multidirectionally between the homeland and the diasporas, particularly with the rise of more convenient access to the internet. The emotions that circulate between the

nation-state, its citizens, and non-citizen Filipinos who continue to have affective links to the country are made visible not only in the protests that occur on the day of the SONA itself, but also in the analyses that happen in the time afterwards, through talks and analyses that are often hosted by both supporters and critically-minded organisations and individuals.

In the triptych of chapters that follows, I outline the second aspect of the terraformation of belonging in the Philippine setting that I examine in this work. I explore the terraformation of belonging on both diasporic and national scales, through interviews with family units and individual family members in the Filipino diaspora. In conversation with the families that constitute the Filipino diaspora in Canada, I investigate how migration — as a movement away from the home of origin, and towards a new home nation — is a process which instigates the ongoing terraformations of belonging and identity in the Filipino diaspora as well as the Canadian nation.

An Introduction to the Triptych

The next three chapters of this dissertation are presented as a triptych: collectively, these are the chapters that examine the multigenerational experiences of families of the Filipino diaspora as they navigate the multidirectional flows of relationality within their families, and with both the Philippines as their home of origin and Canada as their new home nation. Migration — which I understand as a temporally-anchored moment of leaving, and yet simultaneously as unending acts of home-making and identity formation in the new home nation — is what provokes terraformations of belonging upon departure. It is these moments which are explored here; terraformations of belonging — whether to the home of origin, the Canadian nation-state, or the place that is Filipino Canada — are negotiated across these interpersonal as well as intergenerational relationships.

Chapter Four investigates the various factors that propel the Filipino migrant outward, away from the Philippines. Alongside these narratives, I explore the markers of Filipino identity that they carry with them into their lives in Canada as the new home nation. In the first section, I argue that a terraformation of belonging is visible in the way that migrants present their departure as a form of protest, of ‘voting with their feet,’ as former Pres. Macapagal-Arroyo said in the 2005 SONA. It is also visible in the ways in citizenship as the hinge of legal belonging is used as a way to intentionally create proximal or distant relationships with the home nation/s. The latter half of Chapter Four speaks to cultural and personal markers of identity in the form of gender, heritage languages, and the culinary. In this section, I illustrate how cultural values from the homeland shape migrants’ interactions within immediate and broader family settings, and how differences in an understanding and deployment of such values can cause tensions between the first generation parents, aunts, and uncles of the Filipino diaspora, and their 1.5 and second generation children, nieces, and nephews. The generational interactions that are explored in this chapter, which are themselves entangled in the politics and cultures of both the Philippines and Canada, show how the terraformations of belonging can emerge in moments of contestation within diaspora families in the long process of immigration and integration.

Following the exploration of familial tension between first and second generation migrants that is explored in Chapter Four, Chapter Five turns towards the communities that, together, are broadly understood to be the Filipino-Canadian community. In the first half of the chapter, I begin this scalar analysis with the family unit, with a particular emphasis on the differences between how parents and immigrant youth navigate experiences of migration.

Following that, I move away from the immediate family, and turn towards extended families, friendships, and chosen families. I appraise how affective relationships are established capaciously, particularly in instances where migrants leave their kin networks behind, or when they are faced with unsatisfactory kin relationships at home.

Chapter Six is the last of the triptych of chapters which focus on the families of the Filipino diaspora in Canada. In this chapter, I inquire into generational proximities to Canada as the new home nation, and consider how the physical space of the household plays a role in the formation of diasporic identity. I then survey the ways in which Filipino migrants understand their own claims to Canadian identity as residents and as citizens.

A Familial Glossary

For further context regarding Filipino family units, I provide here a primer regarding honourifics within a Filipino family. Normatively, nuclear families are comprised of the following members: a mother/*nanay*; father/*tatay*; and their children. The eldest sibling is referred to as the *panganay*, and are additionally granted gendered honourifics as *ate* for eldest/elder sister, and *kuya* for eldest/elder brother, while the youngest child is generally referred to with the gender-neutral word *bunso*. In other Filipino languages, there are gendered terms for youngest siblings, such as *nene* or *inday* for youngest female siblings, and *toto* or *totoy* for youngest male siblings. Aunts and uncles are referred to as *tita* and *tito*, while cousins are *pinsan*. Cousins/*mga pinsan* are also referred to as *ate* and *kuya*, depending on their age within the cousin group. Grandparents are grandmother/*lola* and grandfather/*lolo*. The hierarchy in this traditional model is “age-based” as well as “ladderlike,” (Javillonar 1979, p. 359) with oldest siblings taking on responsibilities for the younger siblings behind them in the ‘ladder’ across their lifetimes. Javillonar describes the eldest sibling in a Filipino family as “generally assum[ing] the authority of a second parent,” (1979, p. 360), and further, that “it is not infrequent that the older sibling is called upon to make personal sacrifices for the younger ones” (p. 361). Yet family is also understood to extend beyond the nuclear: “seeing ‘family’ as encompassing one’s siblings, parents, aunts, uncles, and cousins meant that—at least theoretically—children should have multiple guardians,” (Tungohan 2023, p. 174) and this expanded conception of family also often includes unrelated close adults who are considered kin, who are also referred to as *tita/tito* and *ate/kuya* depending on their age relative to the person who is speaking to or about them.

Chapter Four: The Migration of Peoples and the Movements of Heritage

Introduction

The terraformations of belonging that I explore in this initial chapter of the triptych are reconfigurations of national and diasporic identity that manifest in both the legal and affective sense; by this, I mean that migrants negotiate within themselves their legal and affective affinities not only to the Philippines as a home of origin, but also in Canada as a place of long-term residence, if not as a new home nation. As members of a racialised and minoritised diaspora group, there is also, correspondingly, tension between how migrants might want to reconcile their cultural expressions as Filipinos in a life that is geographically and temporally affixed to Canada.

The chapter below proceeds in four sections. The first is an exploration of the effects of politics in the homeland on decisions that are made regarding outmigration. In the preceeding chapter, I conducted a critical discourse analysis of presidential SONAs and how Philippine presidents imagined — and in so doing, terraformed — the notion of ideal citizenship and therefore their expectations of Filipino citizens. In this section, I follow the ways in which Filipino citizens respond to homeland politics, not only in how it has directly influenced migrants' decisions to depart, but also how it has ongoing roles in the way that they decide to participate in citizenship regimes in Canada. The second part of this chapter is concerned with the ways in which migrants' approaches towards gender, heritage languages, and culinary identities are expressed by families in the Filipino diaspora. Here, I explore not only the direct impacts of such views on familial relationships, access to knowledge, and opportunities for learning for the diaspora-born and -raised generations, but also how disagreements regarding these aspects of identity and culture impact both immediate and extended family relations in the diaspora.

The Impact of Homeland Politics on Membership and Belonging

As I survey in this section, my interviewees' various responses to Philippine national politics — particularly with regards to the results of the 2022 presidential elections — have led to acts of migration and a withdrawal of legal identities that they have identified and enacted as forms of protest. These demonstrations of their feelings of disapproval and unhappiness with the ruling regime through legal means of departure and withdrawal of legal citizenship status in the Philippines in turn influences how they engage with Canadian citizenship regimes. Yet political disavowals such as the ones enacted by my interviewees are not unprecedented: in 1999, a little over a decade after the end of Ferdinand Marcos Sr.'s regime as a dictator,

Maglipon reported the phenomenon of “many Filipinos — activists and ideologues, trade unionists and journalists, religious and cultural workers, along with their families — fleeing the country in the early Seventies and continuing to do so until the Nineties did so under duress,” which he attributed as an aftereffect of Marcos Sr.’s Martial Law (p. 240). This wave of departure from the Marcos regime is also reflected in Canada’s Filipino diaspora: I highlight here anti-Marcos activists such as *Tita* Martha Ocampo and *Tita* Cenen Bagon, whose important contributions on justice, women’s rights, and workers’ rights continued on in their advocacy work in Canada (Magsumbol 2026). These political waves of Filipino outmigration constitute what I understand to be an embodied form of protest.

To illustrate how migration continues to be wielded as a form of protest in the Filipino diaspora in Canada, I bring to the foreground the experiences of six interviewees: *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate; Francesca; Joshua and Greg; and Hazel.³⁴

Tito Paul and *Tita* Kate are a married couple who migrated to Ottawa with their three young children a little over two decades ago. I begin with their narratives as a point of comparison to contextualise the narratives of the latter four interviewees who are relatively recent arrivals to Canada. I emphasise that *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate have been in Canada longer than the other interviewees in this cluster; their relationship to the new home country, Canada, is influenced by the length of their residence. In contrast, Francesca has only been in Canada for three months at the time of our interview; she arrived in New Brunswick with her husband and two young children through the Atlantic Immigration Program. Joshua and Greg arrived in Toronto in early 2023, on a spousal work visa and a student visa, respectively. Finally, Hazel arrived in Toronto on a student visa in 2019. I have arranged these interviews together because as a collective, their experiences allow for a longitudinal assessment of the impacts of homeland politics on the outmigration of Filipino citizens that were made as far back as two decades and as recently as three months from the time of the interviews.

³⁴ Throughout this dissertation, I have written about my role in the Filipino community in Canada, specifically in the Ethics section in Chapter One. In this triptych, therefore, I have chosen to use honourifics for my interviewees as a form of respect and the recognition of my role within the community. I do not use them necessarily to indicate a generalised hierarchy in the way that my interviewees and I have interacted with each other — rather, in this way, I insert into this text these familial honourifics as an artefact of Filipino culture that lingers within the diaspora in Canada. Claravall and Isidro argue that it is necessary to include relevant literary theory into children’s literature for Filipino American children, as the lack of it “can undermine the development of their cultural identity,” and similarly, I make the contention that it is necessary to embed these “cultural ways of being and ways of knowing” (2025, p. 472) into work that is about, for, and by the Filipino diaspora in Canada.

In telling me about their migration story, *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate said that their serious consideration of migrating to a different country began right after the EDSA 2 Revolution that ousted then-president Joseph Ejercito Estrada over corruption charges. Paul remarked that “[a]ctually, it was Erap³⁵ who encouraged us to go to Canada.” Kate made the joke that “[w]e’re political refugees, *oo* (yes).” Paul further explained,

“Probably after the rally in EDSA 2, we said, ‘I think we should consider migrating.’ But we had good lives there, so we were very reluctant also.”

The decision that they made to leave the Philippines is inextricable from their feelings about homeland politics, and this is particularly visible in the comment made by *Tita* Kate that the Estrada administration’s misdeeds and mishandling of Philippine politics had turned them into ‘political refugees.’ Yet, while *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate frame their decision to depart as a direct response to the Estrada administration, they also characterise themselves as Filipino citizens who had already achieved what they considered to be the ‘good’ life in the Philippines. In framing their departure as a political-affective response that did not have to do with personal or professional success or their ability to provide for their young family, they establish a difference between their family’s migration story as a political departure, and the normative understanding of Filipino migration as a *financial* search for a better future. As members of the professional class, both *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate have been able to continue to work in their fields in Canada; one of the proverbial better futures that they were in search for was not financial, but rather, political.

Francesca, meanwhile, had only been in New Brunswick for about three months when I interviewed her over Zoom. Francesca did not specifically name a singular Filipino politician as the reason for her departure, as *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate do; however, she identifies government corruption, popularly perceived, as one of the reasons not only for her and her family’s outmigration, but also as the reason why many Filipinos have left and continue to leave the country. During our conversation, she said — in a tone that indicated that the sentiment she was expressing was a matter of fact, and not a matter of personal opinion — that even though she had already been aware of the political corruption in the Philippines while she

³⁵ Erap is a nickname for then-president Joseph Ejercito Estrada, whose brief presidency is discussed in the previous chapter.

was there, the level of corruption became even more evident to her when she came to Canada. She observed,³⁶

“Corrupt kasi talaga ang government natin. Nung nandito ako, mas lalo ko siyang na-realise, sobrang kurap nila. They are so corrupt, kaya yun mga tao nag-aalisan, kasi wala silang choice. Wala silang choice kasi may pamilya sila, meron silang gustong buhayin, meron silang mga anak na gustong magkaroon ng magandang future.”

“Our (Philippine) government is really corrupt. When I was finally here, I realised even more that they are extremely corrupt. They are so corrupt, that’s why people are leaving, because they don’t have a choice. They don’t have a choice because they have families, they have (people) they want to keep alive, they have children (who) they want to have a beautiful future.”

In this brief excerpt from our conversation, Francesca repeats twice that citizens ‘don’t have a choice’ but to leave, and it is because of the corruption of the Philippine government that its citizens must then make the decision to leave in order to be able to provide for those who are dependent on them. As a mother, Francesca needs to be able to provide for her two young children; she believes that she would have been unable to do so had she stayed in the Philippines because of the lack of available opportunities, a lack which she attributes to government corruption. This, in turn, has led to her decision to migrate to Canada. In the comparison that she makes between the Philippines and Canada, Francesca alludes towards how Canada as a new home for herself and for her family is a place that is unlike the Philippines — that is, how she imagines Canada is as a country that is not immediately defined by corruption, in contrast to how she thinks of the Philippines. Francesca is therefore a would-be permanent resident and eventual citizen who possesses an understanding of Canada that rests on how she has experienced the country she left, rather than with a working knowledge of Canada’s histories. While Canada as a nation is not free of dishonesty or corruption in politics — whether historical or ongoing, as I briefly take up in Chapter One — Francesca’s understanding of Canada’s histories is shaped by how brief her tenure has been in the country at the time of our conversation.

Joshua and Greg, like Francesca and her immediate family, are recent arrivals to Toronto. During our shared conversation, the couple specifically named the results of the 2022

³⁶ Throughout the triptych of chapters that are focused on interview data, direct quotes from the research participants speaking in Philippine heritage languages (PHL) are presented first as untranslated text in italics, followed by the English translations in non-italicised text. I have left in moments of silence, discord, crosstalk, and laughter. All of the direct quotes in this dissertation were translated by the author.

Philippine presidential elections as one of the reasons why they decided to leave. Joshua says that if then-Vice President Leni Robredo³⁷ had been elected to the presidency instead of now-President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., “[w]e would have stayed, yeah.” Earlier in the conversation, Greg had described himself earlier as being “not political” prior to his participation in campaigning for Robredo’s presidential candidacy, noted that it was the 2022 election cycle which pushed him towards political involvement. Robredo’s loss was a watershed moment for the couple in making the decision to leave the Philippines because they both considered the alternative to be intolerable: staying and living through a second Marcos presidency. Greg expands on what he describes as the political nature of their migration story,

“Actually, the turning point was very political, actually. It’s not more of a personal choice, but it’s more of a political choice. *Parang sabi namin*, (It’s like we said,) ‘Okay, if Marcos would have won this election, it’s, it’s a definitive yes’. [Interviewer: *Oh, so kung nanalo si Leni?*] We would have stayed, yeah.”

In his description of how they arrived at the decision to leave the Philippines, Greg draws a line between what he considers to be ‘personal’ and what he deems to be ‘political’: had Robredo won, the political choice that they would have made as citizens who were invested in their country would be to stay and continue their participation in the democratic process. However, due to Marcos Jr.’s win, the couple decided that the ‘political’ choice was to remove themselves from the Philippines. In agreement with Greg, Joshua responded with his feelings about Robredo’s loss and Marcos Jr.’s victory, saying,

“*Hala! I love the Philippines. It’s just that — hindi kasi natututo yung mga tao. Sabi ko nga, nasaan yung character development? Nag-Martial Law na nuon... Right now, what’s happening? Duterte and Marcos, hindi na sila okay, pero sila yung running mates... Kung sila nang-gagaguhan, mas ginagago nila tayo kasi tayo yung bumoto sa kanila.*”

“Hala! I love the Philippines. It’s just that — the people never learn. Like I said, where is the character development? There was already Martial Law before... Right now, what’s happening? Duterte and Marcos, they aren’t okay anymore, but they were running mates... If they are f—g with each other, they’re f—g us over even more because we are the ones who voted for them.”

Joshua frames his political disapproval of the Philippines and the choice that a majority of the voting public made as a critique that is coming from a love of nation (‘I love the

³⁷ The alliance between the Marcoses and the Dutertes, which won the 2022 presidential and vice-presidential elections under the banner of the ‘UniTeam,’ “successfully pooled support from the largely pro-Marcos ‘solid North’ and the Duterte heartlands of Mindanao—as well as the populous Metro Manila Region” (McCargo 2022, p. 358) At the time of writing, this political alliance between the two powerful families has fallen apart.

Philippines’), establishing his political-affective feelings towards the nation before making stringent critiques of the politicians Duterte and Marcos, and the civic body that will live through a future that they govern. Joshua perceives this choice to be a return to a past that has already been lived and a history that has already been written: Martial Law under a Marcos president. He argues that the Filipinos who voted for the current president are creating problems for their fellow voters, *and* those who did not vote the same way (‘where is the character development?’).³⁸

Yet at the same time, while the ‘political choice’ that was made and followed through was departure, it is notable that Joshua does not separate himself from the Philippine body politic when he discusses his feelings about elected politicians (‘we are the ones who voted for them’). Joshua exhibits frustration with his fellow citizens’ decision to vote for Marcos Jr., voters who, according to 2024 reporting by WRN Research, “have no regrets about their choice.” Yet, he continues to include himself as a citizen in his critique of the collectivity of the Filipino body. The political choices that Joshua speaks to were ultimately made by a voter turnout of 83% in the 2022 Philippine presidential election: with 15,035,773 votes cast for Leni Robredo, and more than double that, 31,629,783 votes for Ferdinand Marcos Jr (McCargo 2022, p. 357), an overwhelming majority which decided Marcos Jr.’s victory.

Hazel had been in Toronto since 2019 when we spoke; while her departure from the Philippines was not specifically provoked by the current Marcos presidency, the politically controversial win did lead to her decision to remove herself from the Filipino body politic with regards to her citizenship status. A permanent resident in Canada at the time of our conversation, it was Robredo’s loss to Marcos Jr. that spurred Hazel to make a commitment not only towards applying for Canadian citizenship upon her eligibility, but to not redeclare for Filipino citizenship immediately afterwards.³⁹ Anchoring her choice to commit to Canadian

³⁸ Benedicto makes the argument that social and geographic proximities do not necessarily entail emotional relations that are politically smooth or socioculturally unified: the distress and confusion surrounding a former dictator’s re-burial in the national heroes’ cemetery as voiced by those who disagreed with the decision was met with support and agreement from those who supported former president Marcos and his family (Benedicto 2021). A similar experience is currently happening with the proceedings of Duterte’s “guilty” verdict from the International Criminal Court in early 2025; Filipinos from the homeland and the diasporas are engaging in conflicting campaigns of “bring him home” and “bring him to justice,” with the Dutertes presenting themselves as patriotic victims of non-Filipino institutions, while those who agree with the guilty verdict see it as justice for the many victims of the violent drug war that Duterte waged throughout his presidency.

³⁹ Filipino citizens who gain Canadian citizenship are allowed to redeclare for Filipino citizenship and be dual citizens. Canada also allows for dual citizenship.

citizenship in the same political moment that led to Greg and Joshua deciding to leave the country, Hazel says:

“Mag-Ca-Canadian passport muna ako, kapag natapos na yun [Marcos Jr. presidency] saka na ako magdu-dual citizen.”

“I’ll get a Canadian passport first, and when that [Marcos Jr. presidency] finishes then I’ll apply to be a dual citizen.”

Once ‘that’ presidency is over — a presidency which she refuses to name in this moment of political emotion — Hazel intends to re-establish a direct legal and political link to the country that she considers to be home. However, while it is ongoing, she is revoking the Philippines’ access to *her* personhood as a citizen, and engaging in actions of political distancing. Hazel’s refusal to participate in Philippine politics, and her refusal to be counted as a citizen through a legally-allowed status of dual citizen, is grounded in her politics of disagreement with the Philippine state.

While the decision to leave the Philippines or distance themselves politically and legally from the state made by these six interviewees is not singularly informed by a politician, the perceived corruption of the Philippine government, or with their disillusionment with the Philippine political system, these legal-affective moments of political disagreement were not an insignificant part of the decision-making process. Departing the Philippines and arriving in Canada under different political moments and through various means of entry — the AIP, student and spousal work visas, and sponsorship from the companies of employment — their actions indicate that the decades-old phenomenon of migration as a form of embodied political protest continues in present-day Philippines.

Expressions of Identity: Gendered Lives in the Homeland and in the Diaspora

The culturally conservative, majority Catholic Philippines is one of the last two countries in the world that do not have avenues for a legal divorce — the other one is the Vatican (Abalos 2017). Neither does the country have legally-ensconced protections for members of the LGBTQI2S+ community. While the country has pre-colonial histories of queerness in such figures as *babaylan*, “pre-colonial priestesses in the Philippines” comprised of both women and effeminate men (Tapia 2024; see also, Brewer 1999), as well as critical streaks of feminist theology,⁴⁰ the bill for the protection of the rights of the queer community,

⁴⁰ See Sanchez (2022) *Disrupting Disruptions: Charting and Challenging Notions of Gender in Philippine Feminist Theologizing* for an exploration of critical Philippine feminist theologians.

the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Expression Equality Bill (SOGIE Bill), has been caught in political limbo for two decades and remains unapproved.⁴¹ Hapal, writing for Rappler News, reported the existence of a disinformation network that hampers the legal success of the bill, which they tied to the weaponisation of the notion of religious freedom in the Philippines, as well as the false idea that transgender identity is a mental disorder (2023). Culturally, many young Filipino Catholics also raise protestations to “visible manifestations of homosexuality such as effeminate demeanour and wardrobe. The irony of this view’s implication is that one can be homosexual but it must be kept concealed as much as possible” (Cornelio 2016, p. 106). In a conservative culture that adheres for the most part to the heteronormative gender binary where the father should be the wage earner while the mother keeps the home (Pinzon 2021, p. 286), the Philippines has even had trouble with the feminisation of labour migration. Yet the point must be made that despite these legal and cultural barriers to full legal protections and cultural integration, queer life in the Philippines continues to exist and to be visible in its manifestations.

In this section, I centre the experiences of six interviewees who self-identified as queer members of the community: Joshua and Greg; Teresa; Alexander and Daisy; and Tom.

Together, this group of interviewees have differing experiences of life as queer members of the Filipino diaspora in Canada. Now living in Toronto, Ontario, Joshua and Greg are a gay couple in their early thirties who navigated the Canadian immigration system together as romantic partners. Their experience of gayness in both in the Philippine and Canadian setting, is therefore in contrast to the four other interviewees, who were all raised by first generation Filipino immigrant parents in Canada. Teresa is a gay woman who moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba as a five year old with her parents, and is now in her twenties. Both based out of Toronto, Ontario at the time of our interviews, Alexander and Daisy are queer Filipino youth in their twenties who consider each other to be chosen family. Alexander was born in Atlantic Canada to first generation immigrant parents, and Daisy came to Toronto in her early teens with her younger sibling, through their mother who was employed in the Live-in Caregiver Program. Finally, Tom is a young trans man who moved to Canada as an infant with his parents, and is now in his twenties. Thus, for the latter four interviewees, their identities as queer Filipinos are more influenced by their lives as young members of the Filipino diaspora

⁴¹ The first iteration of a Non-Discrimination Bill against sexual orientation was filed in 2004 by then-senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago. The most current iteration — the SOGIE Equality Bill — was most recently filed by Senators Risa Hontiveros and Loren Legarda in July of 2025.

who have come of age in Canada, who were being raised by first generation Filipino immigrant parents with conservative stances on gender and gender identity that are culturally aligned with the Philippines.

During the shared, in-person interview with both Joshua and Greg, it emerged that one of the reasons that they chose Canada as a country to migrate to is that as a gay couple, they would have protected legal rights in marriage. Across their individual and shared interviews, the couple positively contrasted the established rights for the LGBTQI2S+ community in Canada against the conditions that characterise the life of queer folks in the Philippines. While both men claimed — separately as well as in the focus group interview — that they themselves have never been the target of anti-LGBTQI2S+ rhetoric either in the Philippines or in Canada, they have both witnessed gender discrimination happen to other folks. Greg says,

“What I’m seeing is terrifying. What I’m seeing is, how people perceive these people, *na parang iba sila* (as though they’re different)... They feel like they’re aliens or something, but they’re just human. They’re still trying to explore who they are sometimes... *Dapat nga walang expiration date yung exploration, ‘di ba?* (And there shouldn’t be an expiration date on exploration, right?)”

Greg notes that members of the queer community are treated as ‘alien,’ even though they are ‘human,’ placing the responsibility for these misidentifications on those who are enacting the harm that ensues when differentiating and isolating those with a non-heteronormative gender identity. His use of the terms ‘alien’/‘human’ evokes the notion that homophobic rhetoric characterises queer folks as less-than-human. It is also evocative of the language that has been used in legal debates surrounding the SOGIE Bill, where those who opposed it used argumentations of LGBT+ *as Wrong*, while those who supported it used LGBT+ *as Human* (Gamalinda and Ofreneo 2024, p. 1141, emphasis by authors).

A point of interest is that in describing the harm that he has witnessed perpetuated against victims of gender discrimination, Greg distances himself not only from the experience of having been discriminated against, reiterating his claims that he himself has not experienced it, but also rhetorically distances himself from those who have been discriminated against (‘these people... they’re just human’). Unlike Joshua’s continued use of the word ‘we’ in describing the Philippine civic body’s choice to vote for Marcos Jr., Greg uses ‘they’ to refer to those who are experiencing harm through gendered discrimination. I read Greg’s rhetoric as an action wherein he situates himself as adjacent to the community, but not a member of the

community himself; in his telling of the story, he is an invested and compassionate observer of harms that he himself has not experienced.

Joshua agrees with Greg's anecdote regarding the harms enacted on queer folks in the Philippines, and in turn, describes how common discrimination of gender non-conforming folks is when it comes to the Philippine setting. Joshua specifically names the transgender community as a population that receives such abuse:

“Yung sabihin mong gender discrimination — pero madaming nakaka-experience nyan, especially sa trans community. Sa simpleng buhok nga e, parang nadi-discriminate sila. Di ka pwedeng gumraduate, kapag mahaba buhok mo, whatsoever, madaming ganun. Siguro na-feel ko lang dito na — kaya ko nasabi yun kasi nga parang never kong narinig yun.”

“When you talk about gender discrimination — but a lot have experienced that, especially in the trans community. Even a simple matter like their hair, they get discriminated against. You can't graduate if you have long hair, whatsoever, there are a lot of (rules) like that. I think I feel here — this is why I said (earlier) that I never hear such things here (in Canada).”

Joshua reiterates that these examples of discrimination — which range from restrictions on appearance, such as an allowed length of hair for male or female students, which is then tied to institutional punishment, such as not being allowed to graduate if one does not comply — are events that they have seen in the Philippines, but have not witnessed in Canada. The examples that Joshua gives are heteronormative rules, often applied in institutions such as high schools, colleges, and universities, that are common in the conservative ideologies of a Philippines that continues to subscribe to a gender binary.⁴² In a manner that is similar to Francesca's decription of Canada as the not-Philippines when it comes to political corruption, Joshua and Greg describe Canada as a place where they have not personally seen folks be discriminated against for gender expression, or experienced homophobia aimed at themselves. Turning back towards their experiences in the Philippines once more, Joshua emphasizes that the SOGIE Bill is an *anti-discrimination* bill that is intended to legally protect the queer community,

*“Hindi naman tayo (kailangan) magpa-pass ng ganun (na bill) kung walang discrimination talaga sa third sex.”*⁴³

⁴²See: David (2015) *Purple Collar Labor* for an excellent article discussing the ways in which transgender and queer workers in Philippine call center agencies are both allowed to transgress gender binaries but are also repressed with regards to expectations of their behaviours in a work setting.

⁴³ I note here that Joshua and Greg are the only two interviewees who use the term ‘the third sex,’ which reflects the unevenness of the way that labels travel and are used globally.

“We wouldn’t (need to) pass that (bill) if there was no discrimination against the third sex.”

Using a ‘we’ that indicates that while he is now in Canada, he still considers himself to be a member of the Filipino body — as he did in his earlier comments on the state of homeland politics and the 2022 presidential election — Joshua observes the need for legal rights and protections for the queer community in the Philippines. These are human rights that would not need such specific legislation, he says, if such acts of legal, social, and civic discrimination were not being committed against the community.

Unlike Joshua and Greg, who were born and raised in the Philippines and moved to Canada in their adulthood, Teresa was born in the Philippines and moved to Manitoba with her family when she was five years old. Having been raised by her first generation immigrant parents in Canada, and coming of age in a contemporary Canada where queer protections are enshrined in law⁴⁴ the experiences that Teresa shared regarding her queer identity are centred on her family’s rejection of her queer identity, rather than coming from a sense of legal and social discrimination in the way that Joshua and Greg discussed. Over Zoom, when I asked about how her family responded to her coming out as a gay woman, the question was first met with a long silence — a beat which lasted at least three seconds. Teresa and I both sat in this space, and rather than prompt her to speak, I waited for her to break the silence. After a few moments, Teresa responded,

“I think my own parents were quite... it was taken negatively when I did come out. It's not necessarily something they want to encourage or push.”

During the conversation she had with her parents, which happened about a year and a half before we had our interview, Teresa’s coming out was not met with welcome, but was treated as though it was a part of her that should be concealed. Her coming out did not lead to open conversations within the family, but rather, resulted in secretive discussions about her and her identity that were happening in her immediate and extended family circles, conversations that she described as *chismis*, as gossip.

Teresa shared during our conversation that moments of alienation have occurred between herself and some members of her extended family; however, because of how taboo it is to openly discuss non-heteronormative notions of gender openly within the immediate and

⁴⁴ See: Kinsman (2024) *The Regulation of Desire* for a detailed engagement with Canada’s histories of repression and violence against its queer community.

extended family, she is not officially sure which members of her extended family are aware of her queerness. What she is sure of is that,

“They *chismis* (gossip) all the time. So I know that they know.”

In the face of the negative way that her gender identity has been received in her immediate and extended family units, Teresa maintains that she is the same person that she has always been, the same person that her family knew before she came out. She says that she is “still exactly who they grew up with me being, but just liking women.” Teresa’s coming out destabilised her role in a family unit that expected her to conform to gendered norms in life, including her gender identity and choice of romantic partners. Within the bounds of her extended and immediate family, Teresa’s queerness was met with both explicit and implicit disapproval and criticism; she is contending with the internal shame of being gay in a traditional and religious Filipino immigrant family. After all, “most religious denominations consider homosexual behaviour immoral,” (Wagner et al 1994, p. 93); specifically in the Philippines, Cornelio and Dagle argue that the concept of religious freedom has been wrongly used to invoke the exclusion of queer Filipinos from rights protections (2019). Having been raised Catholic since her childhood, and growing up singing in her church choir since she was seven, Teresa says of her current religious identity that she is,

“Trying to figure out what that all means, on top of growing up with shame of being gay. So I want to consider myself religious, but I guess I’m still trying to figure out what that means for me, like I definitely do not have the same... I don’t approach religion the same way that my parents do or that other people do who are who consider themselves straight.”

In this reflection, Teresa alludes to the fact that perhaps her own relationship to religion vis-à-vis her identity as a gay woman perhaps cannot be the same as that of a heteronormative person’s relationship with religion and religious identity. Teresa is caught in a juncture where her identity as a gay woman marks her as different and as an outsider in two spaces that are important to her: her family, and the church that she was raised in.

In a similar manner to Teresa, both Alexander and Daisy shared that they have complicated relationships with their families that are connected to the rejection or suppression of their queer identities. During our initial conversation, Andrew describes the way that his family responded to his queer identity as “a tiptoe” — that is, his queerness is not an aspect of his personhood that is directly spoken about, rather, it is consciously not engaged with or discussed. Yet, he also understands that for some members of his family, this decision to avoid discussions of his gender identity comes out of concern for his future. Andrew explains that,

“There’s that understanding that it’s from a place of care, which is really challenging to navigate, that you can’t be like fully yourself and that they’re also like protecting you.”

Alexander is cognizant that within the space of a family, the idea of care and how it is deployed can be a troubled application; while families are the social unit which are often understood to be providers of care, it is also true that “care and harm may coexist in the same spaces and practices” (Francisco-Menchavez and Veazey 2025, p. 13). The obstruction of his identity through “tiptoeing” around it, in an effort to keep him safe from broader public opinion is, to him, an act of care that does not allow for the fullness of his being. These ‘protections’ which are imposed rather than accorded upon him also speak to a certain disciplining regime, wherein, as Cornelio argues, queer folks are subject to social expectations, and “[m]eeting these social expectations helps to mitigate the embarrassment that homosexuality supposedly brings upon the individual and the family” (2016, p. 107). Acts of care such as these, I note, are grounded in fear, or perhaps even shame, which can take many forms: a fear of outside judgment against Alexander, as well as against the family; a fear of being shamed; and perhaps even a fear that this aspect of his identity may restrict his success as a Canadian of immigrant descent in some way.

For her part, during our conversation, Daisy reflected on the ways in which some first generation Filipino parents engage with queer identities as though the fact of being queer is inappropriate in and of itself, and therefore they seek to control their children through restricting their actions or their behaviours in order to limit “visible manifestations” of their queerness. She discussed that her chosen family has many members who identify as young queer Filipinos, and relayed that in their conversations,

“And I think we always, often ask ourselves, what would happen if we were back home and we grew up there, a lot of us that have said, including myself... I probably would not have been out. I probably would not explore it...”

Daisy — and in this reflection, members of her chosen family who are also queer — believe that it would be difficult to express themselves as young queer Filipinos had they grown up in the Philippines. Daisy describes life in the homeland for the queer community to be a stifling of identity (‘I probably would not have been out. I probably would not explore it’), but she goes on to say that despite it all,

“I think Filipino queer culture is just an amalgamated, beautiful parts of ourselves that we found around despite all the colonisation and imperialism.”

Daisy imagines queer culture as an aspect of identity that has survived the violence that the country has been subjected to; her queer identity is not just a personal notion of self, but is an one that is subversive of the heteronormative impositions that have been built through the politics and culturalisation of the hundreds of years of Philippine occupation from colonial Spain and the imperial United States. To this, notion of queerness, Alexander agrees, and says, in response to Daisy,

“Queerness is outside of the patriarchal, white supremacist, nuclear family structure that I’ve been raised in and has been imposed on the Philippines... and queerness is about reclaiming anything else, really, that’s outside of that.”

For both Alexander and Daisy, as young Filipinos who have come into their own in the Canadian branch of the Filipino diaspora, their queer identities emerge *despite* the various societal, colonial, and heteropatriarchal restrictions that are embedded in a specific conservative notion of Filipino identity, a form of Filipino identity that they reject. They understand their queerness — as individuals and in the collective of their chosen family — as being in contestation with, and antithetical to the ‘patriarchal, white supremacist, nuclear family structure’ that they have witnessed or were subjected to as they were growing up.

Tom, like Alexander and Teresa, was raised in Canada by first generation immigrant parents. Assigned female at birth, Tom is a trans man; at the time of our conversations, he has transitioned both medically through hormone replacement therapy with the use of testosterone, and socially through his gender presentation, his chosen name, and his transition from being the *ate* or older sister to now being the *kuya* or older brother.

His parents did not prioritise the keeping or passing down of their heritage languages, and so Tom was not raised to be fluent in either Tagalog or Malaweg;⁴⁵ while both he and his mother speak English, Tom explains that they do not speak it with the same fluency. During our conversations, Tom explained that he believes this linguistic rupture between him and his mother affects their relationship negatively. As Tom tells it, he wishes that he had full command of his heritage languages in part so that he would be better able to explain his trans identity to his mother in ways that would make sense to her, that,

“If I had a word, I feel like maybe she could connect with it more. If I had a word in Tagalog, maybe then she would understand like, ‘Oh, it’s like this, because I know this person who is like this and they’re like this word,’ you know? And I also wish that I could speak fluent Tagalog, because I feel like, even if I’m not speaking Malaweg, I feel like there is just like...

⁴⁵ Malaweg is a language spoken in the Northern Philippines, mainly found in the Cagayan area.

if I was speaking in Tagalog, it would reflect, this seriousness, there would be no possibility of mistranslation, where I feel like she would really understand, why I made the decision, why it is important for her to support me, and all the little nuances that come with talking to somebody.”

Wong Fillmore describes this as a language shift, wherein “[w]hat is lost is no less than the means by which parents socialize their children: When parents are unable to talk to their children, they cannot easily convey to them their values, beliefs, understandings, or wisdom about how to cope with their experiences” (1991, p. 343); the generational language shift between his mother (Malaweg/Tagalog) and Tom (English) has created a linguistic gap between the two of them. Tom attributes his mother’s unwillingness to engage with his trans identity to the vagaries of mistranslation: that as youth of diasporic Filipino heritage who was raised in Canada without access to his own languages, he is therefore unable to explain his identity to her using words that are familiar to her, which has, in turn, strained their parental relationship. At the time of the interviews, Tom’s mother still continues to use female pronouns to refer to him in conversation both within their household, as well as to the extended family. Tom says, “I feel like my Mom’s lack of reciprocity — if that’s the word — I don’t want to say inability but that’s the word I’m going to use right now — I think her inability to, at this moment, accept my transness, also impacts Jack and makes him mask in some sort of way.”

While he is contending with his mother’s ‘lack of reciprocity,’ Tom does have members of his family who have embraced his transition — that is, he has been accepted as male, but within the bounds of a Filipino patriarchal gender binary. In his transition from *ate* (older sister) to *kuya* (older brother), the affirmations of his masculinity have been bittersweet, because in being recognised as a man, he is now shut out of female-coded spaces that he used to be able to enter. As his family members have told him,

“‘Oh, you’re a boy, you can’t come in here.’ Meanwhile, I had grown up with them, and before it would have been fine. So it just kind of feels like, ‘Oh, you’re excluding me in the hopes of affirming me...’ I get taken aback, because I was, this is something I would have had access to before, but now, it is revoked.”

Tom’s use of the word ‘revoked’ in this conversation to refer to the closing off of female spaces in accommodation of his male identity and his manhood is indicative of how deeply he has taken these moments of rejection. The various revocations of access to physical spaces that are coded feminine — and therefore, in turn, revocations of access to social supports that occur within those spaces — can, and have, led to moments of loneliness as the strict gender binary of Filipino families excludes Tom from spaces of support that he used to be welcomed into.

In Tom's social transition, his gender orientation does not fit into the binary way that Filipino families and Filipino homes are coded for entry and for socialisation. Ahmed writes that sexual orientation "involves a way of orientating the body towards and away from others, which affects how one can enter different kinds of social spaces ... even if it does not lead bodies to the same places" (2014, p. 145); in this sense, Tom's transition foregrounds an uneasiness that appears when spaces that are defined by a gender binary. To be transgender, as Stryker argues, is a movement, to actively "cross over (trans-) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender" (2008, p.1). The traditional heteropatriarchal Filipino gender binary is being asked to accommodate gender expression that crosses over or transitions visibly and socially from female to male.

These revocations are simultaneous to other members of the extended family still referring to him as *ate* rather than as *kuya*. Like his mother, Tom has family members who have not changed the way they address him from the feminine to the masculine. Tom says that he has a younger cousin who still calls him *ate* primarily because the older members of her immediate family do so, and he believes that the conflict between the feminine honourific and his masculine gender presentation is confusing to her. He says,

"She calls me *Ate* [redacted], but sometimes I think because I'm growing facial hair and stuff she uses different pronouns. She'll be like, 'Oh he's over there, *Ate* [redacted].' And I'm just like, 'Okay, affirming,' but still..."

As a trans man, with a masculine gender presentation, Tom's facial hair, pronouns, and the shifting of the honourific from *ate* to *kuya* has unsettled the family's shared geography. In Tom's experiences, the ways in which moments of gendered affirmation within the limitations of a gender binary that his family subscribes to as members of the Filipino diaspora can still cause distress.

For young members of the Filipino diaspora who identify as queer, their identities are often perceived to be in contention with conservative gender ideologies that are rooted in traditionally conservative Philippine cultural values. Simultaneously, they are also in a Canada which has deep histories of documented discrimination against its queer community, and which has only recently started to accord rights and protections to its queer citizens. Kinsman and Gentile note that "[a]lthough no longer as strictly regulated by state laws and policing, queer sexual practices are still regulated through market forces, professional agencies and policies, and within popular culture" (2010, p. 394). Teresa, Alexander, Daisy, and Tom, as queer members of their immediate and extended families, have been met with gossip, disapproval,

outright rejection, or having family members ‘tiptoe’ around the matter. The tension that exists between first generation migrants and their Canadian-born or -raised children is one manifestation of the terraformation of a strongly-held Filipino identity that is deeply grounded in heteropatriarchy, as well as a perceived strong political manifestations of legal rights and protections in Canada as opposed to its lack in the Philippine setting. In Canada, and as Canadians, queer Filipino youth occupy a space wherein there is room to explore their identities as “individual formal and abstract human rights are now increasingly recognized,” yet “relationships often remain stigmatized and our sexualities and our desires are still censored, criminalized, and hated” (Kinsman and Gentile 2010, p. 394).

Philippine Heritage Languages as Cultural and Familial

Language as a form of communication is important not only in because national, regional, and diasporic identities can be constituted through its use— in particular through literature, poetry, local news, locally-adapted religions, and other forms of print, digital, and virtual media culture — but also, in serving as a common point of knowledge across families, co-citizens, and co-ethnics. Tom’s reflections regarding his inability to speak his heritage language of Malaweg and therefore not being able to have substantive conversations with his mother regarding his identity as a trans man, is a specific instance that highlights the role that languages are assumed to play within the intimacies of the family setting, made more complicated by language politics in diasporas that exist in nation-states that speak different languages. In the Filipino diasporas, heritage languages are often considered to be Tagalog/Filipino, which is one of the two official languages of the nation, alongside more regionally-specific languages which are dependent on where the immigrants and their families specifically hail from. Philippine Heritage Languages (PHL) are thus often questions not only of English/Filipino bilingualism, but also the multilingualism of regional languages.

In examining the importance of heritage languages in the lives of the Filipino diaspora in Canada, I turn towards these twelve interviewees: *Tito* Paul, *Tita* Kate, and *Tita* Rosa; Geneva and Melissa; Joy and Daisy; Teresa and Nina; and Jack, Arthur, and Alexander. The immigrant families represented in this grouping all made different choices with regards to what Gao calls the “family language ideology,” or systems that are specific to family units which “either promotes or inhibits children’s language development and use” (2025, p. 1126).

The first three of this group of twelve are first generation immigrant parents, and the latter nine are children of first generation immigrant parents. *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate, and *Tita* Rosa, chose differently regarding whether to maintain their children’s bilingualism or else

focus on English once they had moved to Canada, decisions which impacted both their internal family dynamic as well as how their children were able to establish relationships with the Filipino community more broadly. Joy and Daisy were both in their twenties at the time of the interview; they are not related as kin or chosen kin as interviewees, but I present their experiences with English language development prior to their arrival in Canada as a point of comparison. Geneva and Melissa are sisters who were both in their early twenties at the time of the interviews, speak fluent Tagalog as well as English. They came in their later teens with the rest of their family, landing in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Teresa and Nina are cousins, who had both been able to maintain not only their Filipino identities, but also their Kapampangan heritage as Philippine-born and Canadian-raised children of migrant families. Finally, Jack, Arthur, and Alexander are all second-born sons of first-generation immigrant parents — like Joy and Daisy, they are unrelated, but their experiences regarding language alongside their sense of Filipino identity are resonant when placed in conversation with each other. I have organised this section such that it begins with first-generation parents and culminates with children of first-generation parents; in doing so, I sketch out a longitudinal approach towards PHL where I show how the choices that are made by parents at the point of migration onwards reverberate across their children's lives many years later.

I begin with *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate, and *Tita* Rosa. *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate are a married couple who arrived with their children as a family unit in the 2010s, while *Tita* Rosa arrived in Ottawa with her family in the 1960s. *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate consider *Tita* Rosa to be a chosen member of their family, sharing not only affective relationships, but also a faith community as well. In our shared conversation, *Tita* Kate responded to my question of whether she and *Tito* Paul had decided to raise their children as Filipinos in Canada with an answer that centred the importance of language retention to their family. She says:

“My kids *kasi*, they were speaking English *sa* (in the) Philippines, *e*. But when we came here, we deliberately made sure *na* (*that*) we spoke Tagalog at home.”

Tito Paul and *Tita* Kate both said that other Filipinos in their community encouraged them to continue to speak Tagalog to their children within the home, the reason being that,

“Because they’ll speak English with their friends and at school, so that they can remember... *Kasi* (because) they were still at that age that they could still forget. Bilingual *na kasi sila sa* Philippines, *e*. They were already bilingual in the Philippines.”

In taking the advice that was offered by their community, and therefore making the commitment to speak Filipino at home and ensure the continuation of their children's

bilingualism in Filipino and English, *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate both acknowledge that living in a society that speaks a language not one's own can often lead to attrition, to losing one's 'mother tongue' simply because of a lack of opportunity to speak it consistently. As educational institutions and the processes of being socialised into a Canadian society are able to provide the scaffolding for continuing to speak and learn English, the responsibility of language retention falls onto the parents; De Guzman argues that in this sense, the "parental maintenance of culture is a key factor in predicting adolescent ethnic language proficiency" (2021, p. 164). For *Tita* Kate's children, in fact,

“*Kami lang talaga yung source nila ng Filipino language.*”

“We are really their only source of the Filipino language.”

Their immediate family unit are their children's only way to maintain Filipino fluency through a consistent use of the language. Socialization into any given language ultimately “has a cultural-reproductive function” (Baquedaño-Lopez and Garrett 2023, p. 7). *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate's choice to actively maintain the Filipino/English bilingualism that their children entered Canada with was a way to ensure that their children had continued access to their heritage through their language. For them as parents, the process of ‘becoming’ Canadian, of integrating into a new nation, did not preclude the maintenance of these cultural markers of Filipino identity.

In addition, the couple shared that most of their children's friends who are Filipino were born in Canada, and were not themselves taught how to speak the heritage language in their own families. Baquedaño-Lopez and Garrett make the argument that “children and other novices learn much of what they need to know in order to become competent members of a community *through* linguistically mediated interactions, typically with older and otherwise more experienced members” (2023, p. 3); therefore, their children's friends having access to *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate as members of the community who can speak the language can also mediate other *cultural* moments of learning about Filipino culture particularly through language. In being fluent speakers of a heritage language who have also made the decision to ensure that their children are functionally bilingual, *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate's household has become a source of cultural reproduction in their community, a space where they are able to circulate the homeland language as well as the other characteristics of culture that are linguistically-rooted, such as names of food, or titles of respect within families that are linked to the hierarchy of age in sibling groups. They have been able to create space for their children's

friends, who were born and raised in a Canadian setting with no access to their own heritage languages, to experience some aspects of homeland culture; as a community resource, *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate's contribution is valuable because "exposure to immigrant adults is the most powerful predictor of mother-tongue proficiency" (Lee 2021, p. 194-195). It is evident in *Tita* Kate's linguistic narratives about her children and their friends that she herself understands bilingualism to be "a social process," (Baquedano-Lopez and Garrett 2023, p. 2), and indeed a process that compels persistent contact and learning in order to be furthered.

Tita Rosa responded to *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate's decision to raise Filipino/English bilingual children with some surprise, and explained that this was not a decision she and her late husband had made with their own children. *Tita* Rosa explained that the decision to raise their children primarily in English had been made in order to make their transitions into a new country "easy, easier, easiest." Here, it is evident that as parents, *Tita* Rosa and her late husband believed that "using the dominant language, rather than any other one, has a lot of benefits" (Verhaeghe et al 2022, p. 310). Rather than use Filipino at home and trust to the English-speaking institutions of the public sphere in Canada, as *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate have done for their children, *Tita* Rosa and her husband decided together that they would only speak to their children in English, both at home and in public. *Tita* Rosa recalls that neither she nor her husband spoke Tagalog at all to their children during their childhoods, so that they would be able to "integrate easily with their friends, with the group." I argue that there are unspoken assumptions made visible in the family language policy (FLP) that *Tita* Rosa and her husband established: the first is that learning how to speak Tagalog would hamper learning how to speak in English, and the second is that speaking English with an accent would make integration more difficult for young Filipino children who were new arrivants to Ottawa in the 1960s. In *Tita* Rosa's immediate family, the family language policy — or their "a deliberate attempt at practicing a particular language use pattern and particular literacy practices within home domains and among family members" (Curd-Christiansen 2009, p. 352) — focused on English learning, and not Filipino/English bilingualism. *Tita* Rosa recounts later in the conversation that her now-adult children have since asked her to explain why they were never taught Tagalog/Filipino. She recounts,

"*Sabi nila*, they said, 'Why didn't you teach us?' Because when they are with other Filipinos, they speak to them and they always, 'Oh, we're sorry, we cannot understand.' 'Why didn't you teach us?' ... That's how it should have been, because they were children and they easily would have learned."

Tita Rosa's conversation with her children regarding their inability to speak their heritage language, many decades after their move to Canada, reveal that as generations of the diaspora integrate into Canadian society, there are regrets about not having 'inherited' a language can emerge. The decisions that *Tita Rosa* and her husband made as parents decades ago regarding language acquisition — decisions made in an Ottawa of the late 1960s that is very different from what the Ottawa of the 2020s — echo in the lives of their now-adult children.

Joy and Daisy,⁴⁶ two young women who were in their twenties at the time of our conversations, were both raised in the Philippines by families who intended to eventually leave the country. Both are the eldest daughters in their families, and both have younger siblings. Joy and Daisy both arrived in their teens, having learned English institutionally through the Philippine education system as well as as through certain pre-migration decisions that were enacted by their parents. Joy describes her Philippine education — and especially her parents' choice of sending her to an English-speaking private school — from an emotionally charged perspective:

“I felt that the reason why my parents sent me to that school is because they were — that's not the right word — but like they were grooming me to immigrate.”

Joy used the caveat that 'grooming' was not quite the right word to communicate her emotions regarding this; I understand this to mean that she felt as though being given access to English language learning in this institutional way was not for the sake of education as its own reward, but because from a young age, she was essentially in 'training' to leave the Philippines, for a country where it would benefit her to speak English well. Even though Joy's family was not wealthy, the school that was chosen for her to attend was one attended by affluent members in the community, and it was known for prioritising English language learning. Soberano argues that, “[u]nder neoliberal conditions, language learning is increasingly viewed as a form of capital that learners can leverage for social mobility and economic gain” (2025, p. 461); in choosing to send her to this specific institution, Joy's family was making an investment in her future language skills.

⁴⁶ Joy and Daisy are from two separate family units: Joy chose her younger brother Arthur to be her secondary interviewee, and Daisy was chosen by Alexander to be his secondary interviewee. Their parallel experiences served as an interesting comparative in discussions of English language acquisition from Filipino migrant youth is the reason why I have made a connection between them in this section.

In addition to the academic training that her school provided, Joy's parents ensured that the family had access to cable TV; Joy was able to further hone her English-speaking skills, and specifically in American English, through watching animated shows that were being aired in the Philippines during her childhood and her early teens. These moments of both hard/institutional and soft/cultural language training led to an aspect of her speech that significantly benefited her when she entered the Canadian school system: a distinct lack of a noticeable or identifiably 'Filipino accent,' or what Joy calls 'sound[ing] American.' Joy says,

"The speaking with an accent, like at that school (in the Philippines), it was like the way they were teaching English... it was hard for you to sustain your (own) accent, like you would completely drop it and just sound American, which I guess was to our advantage when we moved... The thing that I remember, like, my first few weeks in Canada, and when I started school here, it was like, 'Oh my god, you don't have an accent.' And I'm like, 'Yeah, the Cartoon Network does that to you.'

As a young migrant entering the Canadian school system, Joy experienced racialisation at a young age: her classmates engaged with her as a new arrival who was a *racialised* Filipino immigrant, a person who was therefore expected to have a noticeably Filipino accent. Yet, she was not speaking with the accent that was expected of her. These expectations that she faced from the school system and from her peers reveal not only that Filipino migrants are encountered by White Canadians as racialised peoples, but that these assumptions begin to be expressed at a young age: Joy was 14 at her arrival, and was entering Grade 9. Now in her late twenties, Joy is hyper-aware of how her speech sounds, and continues to maintain a 'neutral' accent in her corporate life; her hyper-awareness constitutes a response towards what Thobani identifies as "constant white surveillance," which "watches for just such a slip, just such a gesture, that will confirm what the 'knowing' national subject always already knows: 'they' are all really like that" (2007, p. 171).

Joy's identity as a recently-arrived young migrant with no discernible 'foreign' accent made her an aberration to the notion that racialised migrants have accents; in this, Joy and Daisy have parallel experiences. During our conversation, I asked Daisy if she had been raised in a Filipino household in the Philippines — this was a question to which I believed she would have an easy answer, especially as she had grown up in the Philippines. Yet the way in which she answered this question of household, homeland, and identity, was a keen encouragement to let go of the notion that I knew what I did not know (as I spoke to in the Ethics portion of Chapter Two), but also, to rethink and question nationalism and identity, especially *within* the boundaries of a neocolonial nation like the Philippines. Daisy's answer to my question was a

contestation of the very notion of a pure ‘Filipino’ identity. She made the observation that while she was raised within the national borders of the Philippines, the everyday cultural milieu that she was immersed in as a young child and teenager was awash in American culture: having consistent access to the Disney Channel, eating at American restaurants like McDonalds, and speaking what is ostensibly American English. Her understanding of Filipino culture in the homeland as having been rendered permeable to American culture is an interesting counterpoint to questions of Filipino identity within the Canadian nation-state. Daisy points out,

“And so it's weird to say, yes, obviously I was raised Filipino by being in the country, but the way that the country is so bounded by imperialism and colonialism that everything that we were surrounded by were things from America.”

Daisy therefore answered my question of whether or not she had been raised in a Filipino household in the Philippines by describing her upbringing as, while ‘obviously’ having been ‘raised Filipino,’ one that was also certainly ‘very Americanised.’ American imperialism, and the immense soft power of its cultural influence through traditional, popular, and social media, is inextricable from discussions of language, especially in the historic and contemporary relationships that link the Philippines to the United States. Dylan Rodriguez defines this American intrusion into the Philippines through cultural products as “coercive American cultural occupation,” an imperial presence which he argues is “coercive not only because of its overbearing material presence but also because its condition of possibility is genocidal white supremacy” (2009, p. 183). As the Philippines was a colony of the United States between 1898 to 1946, American English was imposed upon the islands (Schneider 2022, p. 143) and used as the language of benevolent assimilation; the effects of this coloniality reverberates to this day. This soft cultural power is bolstered by the United State’s military presence in the Philippines, wherein “through military aid, US imperial power continues to be embedded in the peripheral nation-state” (Lindio-McGovern 2023, p. 228). American influence on the Philippines is therefore not only anchored in military political relations, or the bidirectional economic currents at both the state and familial scales, but also in the soft power of ‘cultural occupation.’ Daisy further explains:

“I grew up with the Disney Channel, so I grew up watching Hannah Montana and all that, and High School Musical, and I learned how to speak English through that, and in school they were teaching English.”

Daisy and Joy arrived in Canada at similar ages (in their teens), but through different pathways (Joy's family arrived through the Skilled Workers Program, Daisy's family came through the LCP) and are from different geographic locations in the Philippines (Joy is from Mindanao, while Daisy is from Luzon). Yet their parallel experiences with regards to English language training through the school systems and language acquisition from American television in the Philippines are similar. They, and others like them, are considered to be exceptional, because they came to Canada with neutral accents; Filipinos who are migrants are often literate in English, having acquired language skills through educational institutions, but "not all Filipinos possess the proficiency in 'standard' educated forms described by linguists" (Martin 2019, p. 140), nor does every person have a similar command of Standard American English (SAE) and its associated accent. Within the context of globalisation and global labour, SAE "is widely regarded as a benchmark of prestige and professionalism in global contexts" (Delim and Quinto 2026, p. 2). From these two interviewees, I extrapolate that English, as a learned skill, is perceived by parents as speculative investments for their young children, particularly in planning for a future in a different country where the language of daily life is not any heritage Filipino language but is English.

In an experience that is thematically resonant with Daisy's contestations against the idea of a pure 'Filipino' identity that exists in the Philippines is a story that Geneva shared about her youth. Geneva was also raised in the Philippines until she was a teenager, and moved to Canada with her family. During our conversation, she described a type of privileged Filipino upbringing that exists in the Philippines, which is a childhood that does not involve the learning of Tagalog or immersion in the culture of Tagalog language. She says,

"I know that there's some parents in the Philippines that don't really raise their kids to be Filipino, like they don't teach them Tagalog and stuff... The thing is that I don't think they ever were taught how to speak Tagalog at home, so they could speak primarily in English.

And I think that's not uncommon in the Philippines, but maybe it's also a celebrity child thing, that they wouldn't teach them how to speak Tagalog because they think it's more, you know, fancy. But I think that learning how to speak the language is a big part of learning or being raised as a Filipino. So I think I just find it weird that they're being raised in the Philippines... I imagine that most of the other parts of them growing up is Filipino, but the language isn't a part of that. And I find that kind of a bit weird."

Delineated in this account is the line that Geneva draws around what constitutes 'Filipino identity,' which seems to definitively include the knowledge of heritage languages, *particularly* for those families who are raising children within the boundaries of the in the

homeland. Noting that this case was perhaps a ‘celebrity child thing,’ Geneva articulates that there are experiences of childhood that, while immersed in quotidian Filipino culture, exclude heritage languages in favour of learning English. While Joy and Daisy were trained in English from their childhoods as preparation for *departure*, the children that Geneva identifies in her classed analysis of language acquisition with regards to national identity are socialised into speaking English to *stay*. English, in this mode of learning, is a class distinction that holds a family and its members apart from other members of Filipino society; while the official languages are Filipino/English, families of a certain class will only use English as the language of privilege.

In their own family, Geneva and Melissa maintain that their parents continued to raise them and their siblings in what they both classified as a ‘Filipino household’ in Canada. According to both sisters, their parents raised them in much the same way that they did back in the Philippines, with a singular exception: once they arrived in Winnipeg, their parents began to exclusively speak English inside the home, taking the opposite direction with regards to a family language policy that *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate had decided for their family. Geneva remembers that,

“At first it was really weird talking to my parents, my family, in English. It was really weird. It was weird to first hear their accent in English, it's weird to me to talk to them in English, but now it's a bit more normal because we've been here longer.”

The geographic transition from being a household of Filipinos in the Philippines to a household of Filipinos in Canada brought with it a cultural change of a household that used to speak Tagalog to a family that now functioned entirely in English, both inside the family home and outside in broader Canadian society. The sisters speculate that their parents chose to speak English within their home for the benefit of English language learning for their youngest sibling, who was in his early teens at the time of their arrival. Meanwhile, Melissa, Geneva, and their older brother had all arrived functionally bilingual. Yet in their own shared household, where they live together as roommates, the sisters keep their mother tongue alive, with Melissa reporting that, “we primarily talk to each other in Tagalog, still.”

Teresa’s parents, meanwhile, subscribed to the same family language policy that *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate had implemented in their household. Born in the Philippines but raised in Winnipeg from the time that she was five years old, Teresa has retained her heritage language due in part to the fact that her parents exclusively speak Kapampangan to her. Her parents were

encouraged by her kindergarten teacher to leave English learning to the educational system. As Teresa tells it,

“My kindergarten teacher, she's like this white lady, she's was really old even back then, but Miss C—, she had spoken to my parents and said, ‘You know, like kids at this age can learn everything and absorb everything so quickly. So don't feel pressured to teach your kid English... I will handle that, your kid will learn English in my kindergarten class.. Make sure representing her culture at home so that she doesn't lose that’.”

As a young migrant, the adults in her life focused on supporting her for different aspects of language learning and acquisition; Miss C—'s advice to Teresa's parents regarding maintaining their heritage language, reminiscent of the advice that *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate received from their own community in Ottawa, has led to an adulthood for Teresa where she is able to speak her heritage languages fluently into her adulthood. Like Teresa, her cousin Nina also speaks fluent Kapampangan, which is their shared heritage language. Additionally, Nina learned to speak Tagalog in her childhood through immersion from the Tagalog-speaking folks that she was surrounded by, as well as through watching FilipinoTV. Equally as fluent in her heritage languages and cultures as she is in English, Nina in part understands her Kapampangan identity through the relationships that are fostered through languages. She says:

“I'm so proud to be Kapampangan and to me, I feel like my language is attached to the people that I know. And so sometimes it makes me sad when people pass away who are Kampampangan and because that's another person who held my language. And so, when my grandpa passed away. it was like, well, that's a person I spoke Kapampangan to, and that's one less person that I get to speak Kapampangan to.”

As a person who was raised in the Canadian diaspora, and identifies firmly as Filipino-Canadian, Nina believes that culture is embedded in the people who practice it, and that this is especially true for language. The fewer there are who speak any given language, the more likely it is to cease to exist; this is particularly true in a diaspora setting. During our conversation, Nina reflected on her views about Filipino youth who did not learn their heritage languages, and how her thoughts on this phenomenon have changed over time. She says,

“...growing up, I remember for some time I thought, ‘Oh my gosh, why don't these people know their languages? Your parents must not have done the right thing!’ But I grew up, and then I realized, you know what? It's because they didn't have a choice. They didn't have a choice because no one was there to let them know that it's okay. Their parents weren't there at home because they had to work. You know, throughout the whole day, no one was there speaking to their kids in their own language.”

Nina brings a class component into her observation of language acquisition and maintenance in the Filipino community: that language acquisition is not only about a desire to maintain cultural heritage, but as a long-term plan, also requires the ability to be able to do so through immersion at home, or through access to a language teacher. For many first generation migrants who are working class, both time and energy are at a premium, and choices that are made regarding parenting could be attuned to more immediate problems like integration. For migrant parents who are like *Tita Rosa*, the choice made upon migration could be to prioritise integration into Canadian culture, rather than the maintenance, retention, or passing on of Filipino national identity through cultural aspects including language.

Finally, I turn towards the experiences of Jack, Alexander, and Arthur. All three are young men in their twenties, second-born sons of diaspora families with first generation immigrant parents. Jack and Alexander were both born in Canada and not raised to speak their heritage languages of Malawag or Bisaya, respectively; Arthur was born in the Philippines and arrived fluent in Bisaya as a seven year old child, but lost his hold on the language during his education in the Canadian system. Significantly, the three of them have in common that they were not raised in a way which prioritised the retention of heritage languages or of Filipino culture.

Jack, who is the younger brother to Tom, does not speak his family's heritage language of Malaweg, nor does he speak Tagalog. However, in his place of employment, he is surrounded by Tagalog-speaking Filipino co-workers who often revert to the language to speak to each other while they are working. As Jack tells it,

“[w]hen they speak Tagalog, I always feel like, I wish... there's always this back voice that's saying, I wish I knew what they were saying.”

That Jack does not speak a common language with his co-workers means that he is cut off from the immersive aspects of cultural participation, both within his family as well as in the workplace. In the one-on-one conversation that we had over Zoom, Jack shared his frustration with not being able to communicate with his grandparents. Jack has learned certain food words and object words, but is not conversationally fluent. When I asked him if there was a possibility that he could learn Tagalog from his family, Jack responds with,

“I don't think I've ever explicitly told them, 'Teach me more Tagalog,' it's never been like a priority of mine, but I have picked up some Tagalog words when I hear them speak amongst themselves and stuff.”

Reflecting on the current linguistic distance which he experiences as a member of the diaspora who is a non-speaker of any Philippine languages, Jack says,

“Maybe I only want [more access to Filipino-Canadian experiences] because I want to be closer with more Filipino friends... I think it would be *nice* [emphasis by Jack] to just have a conversation in Tagalog with people. I just feel so outsider-ish.”

While his genetic lineage is distinctly Filipino, having been born to two Filipino parents, Jack’s inability to communicate in a shared heritage language has caused him to feel, as he says, ‘outsider-ish,’ a community member who is not a part of linguistic in-groups that come into play when groups of co-ethnics gather together. Due to not possessing these language skills, he is left out of cultural language systems and the affective-familial as well as other non-kin relationships that circulate through them. Jack is not only excluded from the sonic spaces of diaspora with regards to his co-workers, but he is also at an impasse with his relationship to his grandparents in the domestic space of the family. He later quips, “At least I look Filipino,” making the implication that even if he does not have access to the specific cultural marker of linguistic fluency, what he can use to signal his Filipino identity — what he has which cannot be taken away from him — is that he is visually identifiable as a person who is Filipino.

The feelings of loss and detachment that are engendered by a lack of access to the heritage language, which Jack expressed during his interview, are similar to how Arthur frames his loss of fluency in Bisaya. Younger brother to Joy, Arthur arrived in Canada at seven years old with what he describes as “really thick, accented Bisaya,” and as he was educated through the Canadian system, “I obviously lost those things.” Arthur describes this process of losing both his accent and his mother tongue with a sense of grief, recounting it as:

“Not only did I lose the ability to speak, but also like, just straight up, the accent’s gone.”

De Guzman writes that in migration, “[t]he experience of being in a completely different space, surrounded by completely different people with completely different cultural practices, can significantly impact a migrant’s sense of identity” (2021, p. 161); I would offer, in reflecting about Arthur’s experience, that this impact is made more significant in migrant childhoods with the loss of language as it is linked to social-ethnic identity. The identity that Arthur and his family carried to Canada, the identifier that he had as a young boy from the Mindanaoan region of General Santos, was lost as he was integrated into his new home country via the institutions of education. I read Arthur’s use of the phrase ‘lost the ability to speak’ rather than ‘lost the ability to speak Bisaya’ as indicative of a sense of deprivation that has occurred with this loss: the language that shaped his childhood and his identity as a young boy

from the Southern Philippines is no longer the one that he fluently speaks as a young man from Canada. The loss of a heritage language comes with the loss of being able to express certain feelings, or even, losing access to a specific version of one's self.

In addition to his family in Canada, Arthur has extended family who reside in Denmark; he also does not share a common language with them. During our conversation about Filipino language and identity, he mused,

“Maybe this is a bit of a sign for me to start at least putting an effort to talk to my parents and to family in Filipino, and especially, I have some family in the Philippines and some in that live in Denmark that don't really speak English also. So, it's a bit difficult to try to navigate conversations with them from time to time whenever I see them.”

While his Danish family does not speak English, they do speak Filipino, another heritage language that Arthur also does not speak. Made visible in this anecdote about the extended transnationalities of Filipino families is the limitations of English as a lingua franca that is spoken in the homeland, as well as a language that is spoken in the world more broadly.

Finally, born and raised in Atlantic Canada, Alexander is a young man in his twenties who was raised by first-generation Filipino immigrant parents, primarily by his mother. According to him, she did not consider it a matter of importance for her children to be raised as either Bisaya⁴⁷ or Filipino; rather, she made the decision that they would be raised in a way that encouraged their assimilation into ‘Canadian’ society, as *Tita Rosa* did for her family. Alexander says that because he did not have access to his own cultures growing up, both in terms of language acquisition as well as cultural practices,

“I didn't have any way to show for myself that I was actually Filipino.”

For Alexander's family, because of the focus on assimilation, their family language plan therefore centered around English,

“My mom was like, ‘I want my children to speak English. I don't want them to be challenged. I want them to assimilate.’ My dad was the one that wanted us to still be part of the community.”

In this instance, there is a conflict between priorities that are displayed by Alexander's mother (the primary parent) and his father (who was often away for work). While Alexander's father was more committed to having them learn Bisaya as a language and as a culture, he was unable to perform the task of immersing his children in this cultural milieu because of time and

⁴⁷ While I have been referring to Bisaya as a language throughout this chapter, it is also an ethnic identity.

distance. This conflict of priorities between his parents meant that Alexander was cut off from the part of his family that would have given him access to or encouraged him to seek out learning about his Bisaya identity. The choices that Alexander's mother made, alongside *Tita Rosa*, contrasts with how Teresa and Nina's parents, as well as *Tito Paul* and *Tita Kate*, chose to prioritise the passing down of their heritage languages in their new lives as Canadians.

Similar to how Jack is experiencing an affective rupture between himself and his grandparents due to their lack of a shared language, Alexander's relationship to his extended family in the Philippines is hampered by the fact that he does not speak Bisaya. With his grandparents, for example, he says:

“For the longest time I couldn't talk to my *lola*, right? She doesn't really speak English. She can punch my shoulder and say, ‘You're so tall,’ but that's about it.”

Alexander names this type of cultural detachment — the inability to speak a heritage language — as concurrently also being a *familial* detachment. The lack of a mutually fluent language between Alexander and his grandparents as well as his extended family does not allow for effective and affective communication between them during visits. A question that is often raised to Alexander during these visits is, “Why don't you speak Bisaya?” To which he refers to his mother as the reason why he does not speak the language: “She's sitting right next to me!” His relationship with his mother, at least with regards to the questions surrounding heritage languages, is coloured by this conflict between them. At the time of the interviews, Alexander is actively learning conversational Bisaya.

Zaragosa, in her masters thesis on Philippine heritage languages in Canada, writes that “the barriers of PHL transmission, unspoken and unseen in the culture, take root in English-centric ideologies that first take form in the Philippines, and is then perpetuated in the global diaspora” (2025, p. 1). Instances of these English-centric ideologies are reflected in the lives of some of my interviewees, such as Jack, Alexander, and *Tita Rosa*. However, in coming to Canada, a country whose linguistic traditions are English and French, some migrant families state that the reason for the lack of focus on heritage language/s is the perceived necessity to focus on Canadian English for the purposes of assimilation. From a Canadian perspective, Nagy reports that with regards to Tagalog as a mother tongue, transmission for youth below 18 is less than 20% (2021). For diaspora-born and -raised Filipino youth, the inability to speak a heritage language can often lead to experiences of cultural-affective detachment, as well as real or perceived barriers of involvement and questions of identity.

In this section, I have discussed two ways in which the acquisition and learning of English has been used. First, in the Philippines, for families who intend to migrate, the learning of English — and a particular type of Standard American English, or “neutrally”-accented English — is intended to aid with life after migrating to a new country. Parallel to this use of English are the experiences of Joy and Daisy: raised in families that intended to migrate, they were both ‘trained’ in English prior even to their arrival in Canada through the educational system and through American English entertainment through cable television. This instrumental learning of English can be contrasted with the ways in which upper- or upper-middle class Filipinos focus on learning English with no intention to leave the country and emigrate elsewhere. This is visible in the way that Geneva, for example, describes exclusive linguistic fluency in English as a particular type of classed upbringing in the Philippines, where English language fluency is used as a marker of affluence to the exclusion of Philippine heritage languages.

Second, in Canada, family language plans fall onto the spectrum of either maintaining heritage languages within the family, or focusing attention on learning English both within and outside the family. The pressures of assimilation — of conformity, of a disappearance into an accepted whole — can create a wall between a diaspora and their heritages and cultures. Jack, Alexander, and Arthur, who were primarily raised in Canada, struggled to connect with their Filipino heritage in part due to a lack of linguistic fluency in their heritage languages. Yet, the decisions that are made regarding English or Philippine heritage languages can lead to the affective-linguistic dilemmas that are faced by some Filipino migrant youth, as well as a lack of security in their own Filipino identity. As the experiences of my interviewees show, identity construction “is a complex and multidimensional process that involves navigating bilingual and bicultural worlds, negotiating family dynamics, and adapting to surrounding microsocial contexts” (Gao 2025, p. 1126).

Culinary Identities in the Diaspora

As a marker of ethnic identity, particularly in diasporic settings, the essentialised culinary is often framed as a shallow introduction into a rich and complex whole. In particular, the emergence and popularity of a handful of key flavours from a wide array of possibilities draw criticism as a marketing technique. The label of ‘Filipino food,’ likewise, is a rather simplified way by which to condense the experiences of over 7,000 islands and over 100 spoken languages into a homogenised flavour profile that can then be marketed as ‘Filipino.’ Yet it is also important to recognise that for Filipino youth were diaspora-born or -raised,

cultural markers such as the culinary can be an easy way of accessing cultural identity — perhaps for some, the only way, depending upon the location where their family has settled, and the demography of the population there. In this section, I explore the culinary memories and identities of five interviewees: Tom and Alexander; Melissa and Geneva; and Hazel and *Tita* Margaret.

Tom and Alexander are both Canadian-raised Filipino men in their early twenties. They are not kin or chosen relations, but their experiences are similar with regards to the relationship between the culinary and Filipino heritage. Melissa and Geneva moved to Manitoba with their family in their teens. Melissa, at that age, was keenly aware that when she moved to a country with an entirely different cultural milieu, she was liable to lose access to the culinary landmarks of her upbringing. Hazel moved to Ontario as an international student in her twenties, and *Tita* Margaret, her mother, was visiting at the time of the interviews but has no intention to migrate to Canada.

In our conversation, Tom described how being able to access Filipino culture through food was vital for him. As a young Canadian-raised person navigating the question of Filipino identity in the diaspora, he says,

“Being so connected to my Filipino-ness was a really big anchor in my life... And it was something I was very proud of sharing, even when my connection to the Filipino culture was very surface-level, I'd be like, ‘Oh, I love Jollibee!’ I think everyone starts there, and then they go deeper.”

For Tom, who notes that a connection to cultura via food can be seen as ‘surface-level’— particularly with his invocation of Jollibee⁴⁸ as a Filipino fast food chain restaurant — the utility of food as an anchor is that it allows those who are able to access it to ‘go deeper’ in exploring the culture. Food culture is not just about the culinary products of the homelands and the diasporas: it also includes the importance of sharing food together, the cultural practices of feeding guests, and the practices of packing *baon* or leftovers. Food culture is therefore and important cultural anchoring point, a cultural conversation which can be understood across both the homeland and the diasporas. In Tom’s experience, it is therefore a way of easing into other aspects of being Filipino. This role of food as a way into more complicated aspects of

⁴⁸ Jollibee, which Tom uses as an example of a “surface-level” connection to his Filipino identity, is a local Filipino fast food chain that is so popular, it has regularly “outperformed McDonald’s” in the Philippines since the 1980s (Matejowsky 2020, p. 278). The company’s name recognition is such that it enjoys strong support not only in the Philippines, but also in the various diasporas. The first Jollibee in Canada opened in Winnipeg in 2016, and according to reporting by CBC News, customers waited in line in -36 weather with windchill on opening day (CBC News).⁴⁸

one's heritage is also reflected in Alexander's experience as a young leader in Filipino student associations during his undergraduate years. Born to first generation Filipino parents, Alexander tells a story about recruiting fellow Filipino undergraduate students for his university's Filipino club:

“Some of my friends were half-Filipino, and they're like, ‘I don't belong there, I don't speak a language, I don't know anything, (but) I've had my lola's pansit before.’ I'm like, ‘Good enough! Please come!’.”

In his recollections, Alexander offers that this little bit of knowledge — of knowing what *pansit*⁴⁹ is, and of knowing how *lola's pansit* tastes like — is enough to begin a journey of the exploration of cultural identity. He emphasises, as Tom does, that while food culture can be considered ‘surface-level,’ it can also be an accessible point of entry for diaspora-born and -raised members of the community. The knowledge of what *pansit* is — a generic name for a variety of noodle dishes of Chinese origin with variants all across the Philippine islands — is a way by which familial inheritances of culture through the culinary are able to break the supposed binary of the private/domestic space of the family and the public space of Canada that is now inhabited by Filipino families in the diaspora. The way that Alexander uses this modality of cultural knowledge anchored in the domestic as a way to encourage Filipino youth to visibly take up space in the university setting is a powerful contention against the ‘invisible’ nature of the domestic and of food as a marker of identity.

Unlike Tom and Alexander, Melissa came to Canada in her late teens. As a teenaged migrant to Winnipeg, Melissa had arrived with an awareness that having access to Filipino cultural objects, specifically food, was not a guarantee. In our interview, Melissa discussed the importance of having access not only to bigger corporations that specialised in Filipino food culture — like Seafood City⁵⁰ and Jollibee, for example — but also to smaller neighbourhood Filipino stores, the Canadian equivalents of Filipino *sari-sari* or corner stores. She says that when they first arrived,

“When we were living in our first apartment, there was a Filipino store right down the corner. And so I would still be able to get everything, like the *pansit canton* and all the chips — Nova, Piatto — everything was still there. I felt so lucky because I had all that access, and I know that not everybody has access to that in other parts of Canada.”

⁴⁹ See: Mercado (2022) for a tabulation of types of pansit across the Philippine island of Luzon.

⁵⁰ Seafood City is a Filipino supermarket that originates from California. The company has several locations in Canada, including: Mississauga (2017), Winnipeg (2019), Edmonton and Calgary (2020), and Scarborough (2021).

Melissa and Geneva, living together in a shared household, expressed a shared affective-cultural relationship to rice — rice is a staple of Filipino food culture, and much of the country's culinary savoury staples are structured upon having a side of steamed white rice. As de Leon writes regarding the importance of rice to Philippine economics and culture, “[t]he presence of rice defines the significance of a meal in the Philippines” (2011, p.24).

During the shared interview, when the sisters were answering the question of whether or not they kept a Filipino household, one of the answers they gave was about rice. Geneva said, “there's a crisis when the rice runs out... I think that's the most Filipino thing of all,” to which Melissa responded with an accusation aimed at her sister that was met with laughter from everyone on the Zoom call: “She broke the rice cooker! It's still not fixed!” The role of rice in Filipino homeland culture is so entrenched — not just in culinaria, but also with regards to economics, domestic politics, and international politics — that it carries over into the diaspora, especially with Filipino migrants who arrived elsewhere after coming of age in the Philippines.

Hazel's Filipino identity, similar to Melissa and Geneva, also influences how she plans her own household. Filipino food culture was made warmly visible in the way that Hazel and *Tita* Margaret welcomed me into their home for our shared interview, for which they invited me over to share a meal. They decided to make *sinigang* for us to share. *Sinigang* is a sour Filipino soup with vegetables — okra, water spinach, white radish, taro, or whatever is available in one's current location — simmered together with protein, and the usual souring agent of choice is *sampalok* or tamarind. In the homeland, as in the diaspora, the shorthand for the usual tedious preparation of tamarind in *sinigang* is a convenient powdered mix that comes in a packet — “the ones sold here taste different from the ones at home,” *Tita* Margaret tells me, as they lay down freshly steamed white rice and pork *sinigang*, the broth thickened with taro, and set little dishes of *patis* or fish sauce on the table, for dipping. Hazel said that *Tita* Margaret had chosen to make *sinigang* because they assumed that I did not get to eat Filipino food often, and they wanted to share this particularly Filipino moment with me. That evening of conversation over a table full of Filipino food certainly spoke to the ways in which “Filipino food evokes Filipino identity and notions of home in a multi-sensorial experience, from the smell and taste of the food itself to the sounds of conversations held alongside its consumption” (De Guzman 2021, p. 166); to be asking questions about Filipino culture in the diaspora while eating a meal that was as distinctly Filipino as pork *sinigang* with *patis* and rice was a moment of reflection for me as a researcher.

Hazel's household is deeply embedded in the Filipino food traditions that she has brought with her into her new life. Hazel notes that she did not learn to cook while she was still residing in the Philippines; rather, she learned how to make Filipino food as a newcomer to Canada, because she felt that it was important for her to be able to make these dishes for herself and her family. When I asked about their household's food culture, Hazel said,

"May weekly planner kami. 'Matic, kailangan mo ng luya, kailangan mo ng sibuyas, kailangan mo ng bawang. Kailangan mo ng bigas, kailangan mo ng ketchup. Kailangan mo ng, yung holy trinity: patis, suka, saka toyo."

"We have a weekly planner. Automatically, you need ginger, you need onions, you need garlic. You need rice, you need ketchup. You need the holy trinity: fish sauce, vinegar, and soy sauce."

Hazel's list of necessary food items are identical to what she would be shopping for if she was in the Philippines. These are all items that are used in making Filipino food in the homeland, as well as in various households in the diaspora, as Hazel attests to. *Tita* Margaret responded to hearing this list with, had an addition: "*'Pag ang bahay walang kanin, bahay ba yun?*" or "If a home does not have rice, is it a home?" As was the case in Geneva and Melissa's household, the situations — a broken rice cooker for them, and a lack of rice for Hazel and *Tita* Margaret — triggered a response of laughter from all participants. It seemed absurd to imagine a Filipino household without rice; rice is, after all, "the basis of commensality, defining small local entities, particularly the household and its associated relations" (Aguilar 2008, p. 45).

Access to culinary culture, in the case of Tom, Alexander, Geneva, and Melissa, therefore range from familial (*lola's* pansit, the rice/cooker) to small neighbourhood stores to the corporations that cater towards Filipino demands. Specifically in Toronto, the culinary has been used as a marker for entry in the broader context of Filipino heritage, a choice which is visible in festivals such as Taste of Manila at Bathurst and Wilson (Toronto's Little Manila), and in the Kapisanan Philippine Centre for Arts and Culture's Kultura Filipino Arts Festival, which also hosts food vendors in addition to local artists. The City has also seen the rise of Filipino restaurants populating the Toronto food scene, such as *Bar Isabel*, *Makilala*, and the Michelin-recognised *BB's Diner*. Food, therefore, as experienced in the diaspora, "becomes both intellectual and emotional anchor," (Ji-Song et al 2007, p. 11) a sensory familiar in the form of accessible culinary memories for a country that diaspora-born youth have not been able to inhabit, and carrying a sense of embodied nostalgia for migrants who spent substantial years of their life in the Philippines. Food, as Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), serves as a

“traditional way of passing down cultural cuisine from one generation to another replenishes the identity of a certain family or community” (Aster 2023, p. 1). Even when the some aspects of the heritage of a migrant culture is essentialised or even set aside in favour of assimilation — such as heritage languages — food is often one of the cultural objects that retain importance for both first generation migrants and their children and descendants. As shorthand, the culinary as a marker of identity that is broadly recognisable to members of the diaspora can become an entryway into places and cultural practices to which diaspora youth may not have immediate access, and can serve as a means by which Filipino identity is enacted continuously in migrants’ daily lives.

Conclusion

Diaspora identity formation is a process which is tied to intangible values, objects of cultural heritage, and other moments of cultural importance that migrants either preserve for themselves and their families, or reject in favour of assimilation into the new home nation. Some of my interviewees, who came as young children and are now young adults, are experiencing what Wolf refers to as “emotional transnationalism,” an experience “which situates them between different generational and locational points of reference—their parents’, sometimes also their grandparents’, and their own—both the real and the imagined” (1997, p. 459). Within the Filipino diaspora in Canada, the “generational and locational points of reference” begin to diverge between generations. These choices — of preservation or assimilation — often have intergenerational repercussions, as the experiences of my interviewees have shown. For example, with regards to heritage languages, migrant youth who have not been able to learn or keep their languages can experience not only cultural detachment, but also familial detachment.

As a political process, I read migration as a terraformation of the expectations that Filipinos leave to labour; in queering the obligations of neoliberal citizenship of engaging in migrant work, families like Tito Paul’s and Tita Kate’s, and Francesca’s, who left the country as a unit, are engaging in a refusal to assume the role of being a commodified worker. Gendered identities, in the case of Greg and Joshua, are also an extension of their political departure from the Philippines; in addition to expressing their refusal to participate in the Marcos Jr. administration as citizens, they are able to live full lives with legal protections in contemporary Canada. Other interviewees, like Alexander and Daisy, see their identities as queer Filipino-Canadian youths as a reclamation of identities that have survived imperialism and colonialism; I read their queer identities, as well, as a terraformation of what is normatively-understood to

be 'Filipino' in the Philippines. In living lives where they have chosen to be members of the Filipino diaspora who are also queer, they push back against the demands of heteronormatively-acceptable behaviour demanded of the queer community: invisibility. Tom's identity as a trans masculine member of their family is itself a visible challenge to the structural troubles of the way that a Filipino family organises and structures itself according to the gender binary.

Finally, questions of access to cultural heritage such as language and food culture are other modes of terraformation which originate within families. While Filipino culture is officially bilingual and in practice can be multilingual, in the context of the diaspora in Canada there is difficulty in passing on heritage languages to diaspora-born and -raised children; therefore, what becomes terraformed is the notion of what defines Filipino identity, if not the ability to speak Philippine Heritage Language/s. Food, similarly, is another aspect of heritage and identity that is difficult to promulgate due to an uneven access to ingredients and food items that are tied to homeland culture; yet, its importance as a means to access identity continues in the ways that it is represented in Filipino festivals, community centres, and as a common diasporic language of sorts.

Chapter Five: The Making and Re-Making of Familial Relations after Migration

Introduction

The previous chapter substantively explored the ways in which homeland politics and various aspects of Filipino cultural heritage continue to influence the lives of migrants and migrant families in the Canadian diaspora. In this chapter, I transition towards an examination of how the family as various units of inter-relatedness collectively experience the effects and after-effects of migrations. Asis et al make the argument that “[t]he Filipino transmigration experience has ‘unbounded the family in several ways — by making it necessary to maintain family ties astride borders and across space, by expanding ‘family’ to include kin many times removed, or by regarding non-kin as ‘family’ based on ‘family-like’ relationships” (2004, p. 212). Not limiting this chapter to the nuclear family model, I understand families as Awi does, as “an affective space of intimacy in which experiences are constituted by a socio-cultural context” (2023, p. 47). In this chapter, I focus on the ways in which familial relations, both kin and non-kin, influence how migrants experience migration and integration in the new home country.

The lives and experiences of my interviewees are reflective of the many configurations of ‘family’ that exist outside of the Western cis-heterodox expectations of the nuclear family. As I explore familial relationships from the scales of the immediate to the extended and finally to chosen, I anchor my notion of the family in Aguilar’s “culture of relatedness,” which he describes as “understanding social relationships in terms of their embedment in the larger structures of kinship” (2013, p. 351). I therefore engage with families as social institutions — which can include both kin and non-kin relations — that provide care for each other in a manner which is multidirectional (Francisco-Menchavez 2025), and note that other forms of families emerge when such care is lacking.

In order to more fully explore how families experience the intergenerational processes of migration, this chapter unfolds in five parts. First, I examine the ways in which the status of parenthood can influence a Filipino citizen’s decision to leave the Philippines and settle in a different country. I begin my analysis with the narratives of interviewees who are parents: parents are primarily the initiating agents when it comes to familial migration, and migration policies often allow for family or parent/child migrants, yet I offer that as members of the family unit, children do not get to contribute substantively to such decisions regarding migration. Second, I explore the migrant experiences of siblings, including those who migrated together, and those who are distant but are in transnational sibling relations. Relationships with

siblings are often left unexplored in the literature, yet these relationships can be vital to the lives of young migrants as they acculturate into the new home nation together and can influence their roles in the social reproduction of the family in the diaspora.

Third, and moving outwards from the space of proximal residency and the limitations of biological relations, I examine the role of extended families in the lives of migrants. While I did not explicitly seek out these extended familial relations during the course of my fieldwork, what consistently surfaced through the interviews is that when they exist, family units in the diaspora are not defined solely within the immediacy of parents and siblings, but also through the extended network of cousins, aunts, uncles, and chosen family members. Fourth and finally, and moving from kin to non-kin relations, I examine the role of friendships and chosen kin in the Filipino diaspora. In choosing to include the scales of immediate, extended, and chosen family units in this chapter on the role of families in the lives of the Filipino diaspora in Canada, I hearken towards the way that similar scales of ‘family’ and familial relations occur in the homeland and can be replicated within the diaspora. Strong non-kin relations can also include membership in activist organisations, for example such as those that are explored in Francisco-Menchavez’s *Labor of Care* (2019) and Tungohan’s *Care Activism*.

I. The Immediacy of Families

I. A. Migration as Parenting

For migrants who made the decision to depart the Philippines with their families, parenthood was often given as a significant reason for leaving the Philippines. The answer of migration to a different country — Canada, in this particular instance — was often a response to the question of how to give their children a chance at a better life with more opportunities than would have been available to them in the Philippines. Parenthood, and the accompanying impetus to seek out an imagined better future for one’s children, are strong drivers for making the choice to leave the homeland; as Francisco-Menchavez argues, “the seemingly individuated logic and disruption of motherhood vis-à-vis migration becomes part of a system of labor export that has transformed the decision to migrate into a normalized and acceptable performance of Filipino mothering” (2019, p. 85). In making decisions for the family that was ultimately about the children involved, parental decisions to migrate lead to lives lived in proximity to more futurities than was thought possible in the homeland, but distant from the cultural and quotidian accoutrements of what constitutes Filipino identity.

This section focuses on five interviewees who expressed that their status of being a parent was deeply implicated in their journeys as migrants: Francesca, who is a mom, and her

mother *Tita* Lisa; and *Tito* Paul, *Tita* Kate, and *Tita* Rosa. The first two, Francesca and *Tita* Lisa, provide a contrasting perspective with regards to the experience of being mothers whose families have taken part in migration. *Tita* Lisa is a wife to an OFW husband, and so stayed at home while her husband worked in the Middle East. Francesca, on the other hand, came to Canada with her two children and husband, and did not go through the same experiences of separation from her spouse that *Tita* Lisa did. The latter two, *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate, are a married couple whose decision to leave the Philippines and migrate to Canada is grounded not only in homeland politics, as was examined in the previous chapter, but also in the hopes they had for their children, particularly in terms of opportunities that the Philippines did not offer.

I begin here with *Tita* Lisa, Francesca's mother. She is currently based out of the Philippines, and she does not intend to migrate to Canada to join her daughter. In their family's shared migration story, *Tita* Lisa was the parent who stayed home to raise the family when she and her husband decided that he would move to the Middle East for work, a decision that was made in order for them to be able to afford college tuition fees for their three children. Pinzon observes that "[e]ducation for their children is the most frequently cited reason for OFW parents who decided [to] work abroad" (2021, p. 287); this is certainly reflected in the decision that *Tita* Lisa and her husband made. During our one-on-one conversation over Zoom, *Tita* Lisa explained that they considered their children's higher education to be a financially urgent reason to embark on labour outmigration. Despite the rationality and calmness with which she was telling her story, *Tita* Lisa described the separation between her and her husband as emotionally and physically taxing on her as a person, a parent, and a wife. She became, in her own words, a single mother who had to take on the active role of both parents in their household.

Despite the fact that *Tita* Lisa considered her husband to be an active participant in the family through the remittances that he sent home, it fell upon her to shoulder all of the other responsibilities of parenthood. *Tita* Lisa describes the experience of separation from her husband through a language of distance. She spoke about the desire for acts of care that would circulate back to her, care which had previously been provided by her husband,

"It wasn't really easy. Because you become a mother — no, a father and a mother at the same time. There is this feeling of loneliness *minsan* (sometimes), isolation, and emotional distress. So actually, emotional and psychological strain. Being physically separated from one spouse, extended periods, can lead to a feeling of loneliness."

The narrative that Lisa shared here is a window into life for left-behind wives who become, as she called herself, single mothers, with the departure and absence of their husbands who are working abroad. Lisa describes a type of parenthood wherein both the care/feminised and household/masculinised responsibilities were solely hers to perform as the parent who is present, a reorganisation of the family's socially reproductive labour which was physically and emotionally taxing even with the continued material provision of her husband who was working abroad. Migration literature often writes about the relationships between mothers who leave and the children who have been left-behind, as well as the lives of female OFWs (Parreñas 2005; Acedera et al 2018; Francisco-Menchavez 2019), but academic literature about the wives of OFWs are less prominent (Domingo 2025). *Tita* Lisa's experience as the left-behind wife of an OFW, which is itself not an uncommon experience in the Philippines, is vital towards understanding the circulation of care work and social reproduction within the context of transnational families.

Despite acknowledging that there was a "sense of empowerment and independence" in the way she was able to successfully navigate life as a single parent to three children, during our conversation, *Tita* Lisa reiterated the loneliness that comes with being the primary parent, the parent who is physically with the children:

"But you never mind about your well-being, *diba*, your health. Never mind even your, *may sakit ka*. So *kailangan mong tumayo sa hatinggabi, painumin sila ng gamot*, checking *kung okay sila*. Sometimes *may masakit din sa 'yo*, *walang magbibigay sayo*, na '*pakihilot nga yung likod ko*!' *Yung mga ganun, diba, wala yung nandyan siya lagi*."

"But you never mind about your well-being, right, your health. Never mind even your, if you are sick. So you need to get up at midnight, make sure they take their medication, check if they are okay. Sometimes you are also in pain, no one can give you, 'Can you please massage my back!' That kind of thing, it isn't there when he [her husband] is always there."

Tita Lisa's examples of the lack of support in the social reproduction of the family are centred around the giving and receiving of care: while she was caring for the family, and not being able to take care of her own needs at the same time, the person who used to be the one to take on this responsibility was physically out of the country. In examples of how multidirectional care flows in transnational families, as in Francisco-Menchavez's *Labor of Care*, social reproductive tasks would not be left to a singular person. Rather, what becomes operationalised are many other members of the immediate and extended family, particularly when it comes to caring for children. *Tita* Lisa, however, was alone; what she mentions as intimate tasks of care, such as wanting to be massaged to ease physical pains, are acts most

often associated with spouses, rather than with other members of the family. In addition to the physical strains of hands-on parental responsibilities that she had to accomplish alone, *Tita* Lisa observes that “the distance can strain the marital relationship, (and) impose emotional challenges for the wife and the husband.” The intimacies of a familial relationship, including those of marriage, can be difficult to maintain, as she points out, because of the distance and separation across time zones as well as the limitations of technology, along with the physical absence of a spouse.

In contrast to the separation of her OFW father and her stay-at-home mother, while Francesca also decided that leaving the Philippines would be the solution to her search for a better life for her children, she made the decision that they would migrate as a family unit. Francesca, therefore, came to Canada with her husband and two young children: nobody was left behind. Francesca reflects that perhaps because her own father was an OFW, looking towards foreign shores as an option in her own life was not such a strange idea. Francesca herself had worked abroad in Japan before the COVID-19 pandemic, and had also been employed as a virtual assistant for an American client in Florida prior to their arrival in Canada. In fact, it was Francesca who was the primary force in her own family’s decision to immigrate to Canada; her husband, who she describes as coming from a middle class family, was reluctant to engage in the journey of outmigration. While I have previously discussed Francesca’s feelings regarding what she has characterised as the false ‘choice’ of migration in the Philippines vis-à-vis the corruption of the Philippine government, in this chapter I focus on Francesca’s parenthood as itself being a push factor. In her own telling, her life is divided into before and after becoming a parent. As a mother, Francesca sees their migration to Canada as a part of her responsibility to her children: in moving, she is able to provide a better life for them, a life which the Philippines, at this moment in time, is unable to do so for her children.

“Siguro malaking factor na motivated ka as a parent... Kasi nung single ako and yung salary ko was enough for me, wala akong problema kung ano ang nangyayari sa Pilipinas. Wala akong pakialam.”

“I think it is a big motivating factor to be a parent... Because when I was single, and my salary was enough for me, I have no problem with what is happening in the Philippines. I didn’t care.”

Francesca describes her personal relationship to the Philippines as apolitical and apathetic (‘I have no problem with what is happening in the Philippines. I didn’t care’) when she was single and had only herself to take care of; it was after becoming a parent that she

became determined to leave for a better life. The family's applications for the AIP had taken time to be processed, particularly as Francesca and her husband initiated their applications during the pandemic lockdowns. Yet, Francesca's family's visas arrived on the same day that her daughter was diagnosed with moderate autism; for her, the simultaneity of these two events — the diagnosis and the arrival of the visas — were a sign from God. Francesca believes that it was His way of telling her, "Don't worry, we got you." Their successful application to enter Canada, here, is a divinely-blessed moment where Francesca was then able to fulfil her parental responsibilities. Francesca's departure from the Philippines was thus spurred by her disillusionment with local politics, alongside her belief that in the current state of the Philippines, it would not be the best place to raise her children.

It is in a similar manner — as in the collision of local public politics and the ostensibly-private responsibilities of parenting — that *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate made their decisions. As previously discussed in Chapter Four, for *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate, their impetus for migration occurred during the Estrada administration's impeachment and ejection from office. They also imagined the Philippines was as a place where opportunities for their children would be limited. Therefore, while they have spoken about the political roots of their decisions to leave the Philippines, as parents, their move was also animated by a desire to give their children what they described as 'better choices,' opportunities to thrive as youth and as eventual adults that were simply unavailable in the Philippines as they knew it. *Tito* Paul says of the move,

"It's really more for the children to have choices. So, the choice is for them. What really triggered us is... while we're comfortable here, the trajectory of how the Philippines will grow will take some time... we cannot afford [to wait] for that."

Tito Paul's use of the word 'here' to indicate the Philippines rather than Canada is indicative of the diasporic experience of having a sense of home/here that is multiply located, rather than geographically fixed, a reflection of the geographic un/fixity of 'home' for diaspora populations. While *Tito* Paul seems to be optimistic that the Philippines will progress, he is unwilling to wait for that moment in the national-economic timeline — essentially, he is reluctant to sacrifice his children's future while waiting for the Philippines to become better as a country. In describing the family's decision to migrate as anchored in the knowledge that political time is slow, while family time is generational but quick, *Tito* Paul acknowledges that the temporality of progress, measured in 'growth' of the country, was not going at the pace that would make it amenable for a good future for his children.

From the stories that interviewees who are parents have, leaving the Philippines for Canada is often motivated by the desire for ‘better,’ i.e., a better future for their children, or more choices than the Philippines can offer. Parental imaginations of what is ‘better’ can span from being able to access medical care, to opportunities for careers, to a future that is not mired in the political corruption that they have witnessed in the Philippines. The choices that migrant parents make are bound not only in their own financial (in)securities, but also in the ways that they perceive the Philippines as a place of (im)possibility, whether for themselves or for their children. In these parental imaginations, Canada becomes the not-Philippines: if the Philippines is a place of impossibility, Canada is a place where possibilities exist, and importantly, are *accessible*, or at least believed to be. Yet, at this juncture, I also want to offer a caveat from a different perspective.

During my initial conversation with Hazel — who had immigrated to Canada through a student visa, and is herself not a parent — we discussed that many OFWs are parents who want what they describe as a better life for their children, and that they attempt to accomplish this through migration, whether for labour temporarily, or for settlement on a more permanent basis. Hazel reminded me,

“I think you’re expecting *kasi na parang karamihan ng parents sa Pilipinas ay umaalis, ay nag-aabroad. Andaming Pilipino dito, andaming Pilipino sa US, andaming Pilipino sa Europe, madami pa ring Pilipino sa Pilipinas!*”

“I think you’re expecting that many parents in the Philippines leave, or go abroad. There are a lot of Filipinos here, there are a lot of Filipinos in the US, there are a lot of Filipinos in Europe, [but] there are still a lot of Filipinos in the Philippines!”

Hazel, here, made the observation that my perspective seems to be skewed towards the idea that Filipinos leave, while she, as a recent and reluctant migrant to Canada, knows that there are *many* Filipinos who are in the Philippines who have chosen to stay. I read Hazel’s response to my work here as a way of re-establishing or reframing the processes of immigrating *away* from the Philippines; that it is not a country that is intended for its citizens to leave it, that Filipino parents who decide to stay in the Philippines are not necessarily ‘bad’ parents who have made a disadvantageous choice for their children.

I take Hazel’s comments that ‘there are still a lot of Filipinos in the Philippines’ seriously. I also note that — from the interviews as well as the continued presence of labour migrants and the diasporas — I believe it is not an unreasonable assumption to make that there are Filipinos, especially parents, who make the choice to leave for a variety of reasons that

range from financial urgency, political necessity, or even to dreams of a better future for their children. The experiences that were shared by *Tita* Lisa, Francesca, *Tito* Paul, and *Tita* Kate offer many reflections on the Philippines and its diasporas. For example, it speaks to the ways in which the role of the Philippines as a labour brokerage state influences families on an immediate as well as a longer-term scale; contextually, it also situates migration as an act of parenting.

I. B. Parentification, Gender Roles, and Sibling Relationships in the Diaspora

Throughout my interviews, I observed that one of the aspects of Filipino culture that is often carried over into the lives of the diaspora — alongside aspects of culinaria and food culture — is that of the honourifics for siblings. That is, even when the interviewees do not otherwise speak any of their heritage languages, they will still often refer to their older siblings as *ate* (older sister) or *kuya* (older brother).⁵¹

Whether raised together in Canada within the same immediate family unit, or having arrived together as youth migrants, siblings experience migration differently alongside and in relation with each other. The reasons for these differences can include familial aspects such as: birth order, with oldest siblings often operationalised as third parents; as well as gender, with gendered expectations for daughters to take on tasks of social reproduction for the family that sons are not expected to perform in the same way; or age, where a young migrant's age at the time of arrival can create different pathways towards integration that might not be made available to older siblings. Additionally, parentification is an experience that many eldest children of migrants are subjected to; my use of the term parentification here is in reference to what Cho et al describe as instrumental parentification, which is the process of “children assuming a caretaking role by performing household chores or taking care of their younger siblings” (2024, p. 275). Sometimes, these expectations are anchored to birth order, as well as gender, as in the case of the eldest daughters of immigrant families. As Klassen et al observe, however, “[b]ecause migrant families tend to be smaller, with fewer extended family members, and because both parents are often working long hours, it is also possible that the parents' socio-economic precariousness is associated with a subjectively increased the burden for both children and parents, as compared to the situation in the country of origin” (2020, p. 2772). That is, for some migrant families, it is the act of migration that instigates the process of

⁵¹ *Ate* and *kuya* are not universally used in the Philippines, but are universally-recognised. *Manang* and *manong* are the gendered equivalents are used in some Visayan and Northern Luzon languages; in Filipino-Chinese families, there are specific terms to use for older sisters and brothers, which are dependent on the order of their birth.

terraformation for certain children in the family unit, and operationalises them into the roles of care-givers and performers of tasks of social reproduction.

In this section, I highlight the narratives of five interviewees: Nina; Geneva and Melissa; Joy and Arthur; Hazel; and Tom and Jack.

Nina is the youngest daughter of a sibling group of three, with two older brothers; when their family arrived in Winnipeg, she was five and her older siblings were eight and ten. Geneva and Melissa are sisters, third and second respectively in a sibling group of four. They arrived in Winnipeg when they were sixteen and eighteen. Melissa is the *ate* to Geneva and their younger siblings, and Geneva is also an *ate* to their youngest brother, their *bunso*.⁵² They also have an eldest brother, their *kuya*. Joy and Arthur arrived in Mississauga at fourteen and seven, respectively, a sibling group of two. Hazel, who is in Toronto alone, is the second-oldest of her transnational sibling group, who are all in the Philippines. She has an older sister, an *ate*, and similar to Geneva, she herself is also an *ate* to her younger siblings. Finally, Tom and Jack are brothers raised in Hamilton; Tom is *kuya* to Jack, who himself is *kuya* to their youngest sibling. As a cluster of interviews, the experiences of these five interviewees cover youth experiences of migration from childhood to young adulthood, from living together to living separately in the same country, and living separately in different countries.

Nina, is the *bunso* or the youngest, and is also the only girl in her sibling group. She believes that her arrival at such a young age mattered in the process of her successful integration into Canada as a young migrant; that because she was so young, she was able to integrate at roughly the same pace that other Canadian-born children in her age cohort were being socialised:

“Everybody is willing to talk to you because you would have just learned English, right? No one is excluding you because you are different, because you don't yet know how to speak their language, because you have other things in common that they prioritize.”

In addition to learning English at the same pace as her Canadian-born cohort within the educational system, Nina was able to access opportunities at the same pace that Canadian-born children were able to do so, including having been able to learn French from first grade. Opportunities such as these were unfortunately not as available to her older brothers due to the age that they were at their arrival. Thus, while Nina's sibling group all arrived at relatively young ages, she believes that she has emerged into her young adulthood in Canada with a

⁵² *Bunso* is the Tagalog word for youngest sibling, and it is gender neutral.

comparatively different experience in the Canadian education system than her *kuyas*, her older brothers, were able to have.

I now move from the youngest daughter in a sibling group, Nina, to the oldest daughter, Melissa, to examine the role of gender in addition to birth order. As the second-born sibling with an older brother, Melissa has gendered responsibilities in the family home that were not expected of him. As Melissa recalls, there was a lack of expectation from their parents that the *kuya* of the family would be performing care and domestic labour for the benefit of the family — tasks, it must be noted, that are coded as feminine work, such as cooking, cleaning, and laundry. Melissa therefore, as the eldest daughter, contributed towards supporting the family's mental load when it came to maintaining the physical spaces of the home in addition to tasks of social reproduction. She says,

“Well, I have to be an admin, I'd have to help my mom do all the cooking and stuff, do laundry... I did all the university stuff first, like all the student loans. So, I even had to help my brother with all of that stuff, too.”

Their parents could not or were not able to provide this kind of administrative support to their youngest child as they themselves did not attend university in Canada, and so they turned to Melissa. Similarly, Geneva, who was the third child and the second eldest daughter, was expected to contribute in the same way as Melissa was. Geneva describes, for example, that there was a specific order as to which each member of the family was asked to do the cooking during the times that their Mom was unable to:

“So there was me, because I liked to cook more than she did. And then there was, I think, my *tita*, or you (here she turns to Melissa) so, either one of you. And *then* came all the men”
(emphasis by Geneva).

Geneva observes that she was first on the list to take on the task of cooking because she ‘liked to cook more than’ her mother did, but the emphasis that she places on the word ‘then’ is reflective of the gendered unevenness in the expectations of domestic labour on the children of migrant families. This example of a gendered hierarchy of responsibility is a continued sedimentation of gender roles from the homeland that are reflected in the diaspora, and that continue to be expected of female members of the family in the new home state; these expectations of female homemaking also exist in the Canadian context. Later in the interview, Geneva says that she believes that especially as a new migrant, their mother was overwhelmed that she now had more responsibilities on her plate as they started a new life in Canada, and needed more support; to access the support that she needed, she chose to lean on female

members of the household. Fresnoza-Flot argues that “[b]ecause of this gendered division of labour, most migrant women rely on their daughters or other women among their kin to perform care work in their households” (2014, p. 171). Thus, the normative assumptions regarding gendered roles of carework carried over from the Philippines continue on in Canada, and are enfolded into also-existing social expectations in Canada that it is the women of the family that perform such domestic work, even when they are also engaging in wage work.

These domestic responsibilities that the *ates* shared — or that were expected of them — became a point of contention in their request to move out of the family home. Their *kuya* was granted permission to move out, yet their parents displayed an unwillingness to grant them the same privilege when they asked for permission to do so. In this parental decision, they both observed that their parents trusted their oldest son more than they trusted their two daughters to be able to independently take care of themselves. This was despite the fact that both Geneva and Melissa have proven to be capable of taking care of people and of a home through their ongoing participation in the social reproduction and care economy of the household.

Melissa also attributes this reluctance of letting them leave to the fact that she and her sister perform many of the domestic duties at home. She explains it as,

“Well, I guess... it's because if they let me leave, she [their mom] wouldn't have... anyone helping her. I do all the cooking. It's fine when my brother left, because he doesn't normally do those things.”

These gendered expectations of the household — the provision of both administrative and socially reproductive labour — influence not only the immediate lives of their families, but also affects their futures. As the family members who were relied upon to perform domestic work, the sisters were vital to the running of their household in a way that their brother was not, and so they were only allowed to move out with some reticence. Glebova, Lal, and Gangamma argue that when migrant families experience world-changing transitions together, there is an associated transition in roles and expectations in the family; that is, “[c]hildren need to step up to various adult roles to help their families survive. Role reversal also happens when children who often adapt to the host society faster than adults become cultural brokers for their parents” (2024, p. 6). However, as the *ates*, Melissa and Geneva were expected not only to perform these roles as members of the family, but also to *continue* to perform them for the benefit of the family as a collective unit.

While not to the same extent as Melissa and Geneva, Joy, who is the oldest daughter in her family, has also been subject to expectations from her family that have been placed on her but not on her brother. Joy and Arthur both noticed and attested to the ways in which gender influenced the ways that they were treated within their immediate and extended families. Arthur says, “there’s a clear difference... you know, age order plays its role, but the gender aspect definitely adds its mix into it, and the unique combination of the older sister then the younger brother.” The older sister-younger brother combination that Arthur mentions here can be attributed to “a combination of birth order and role taking” (Okudaira et al 2015, p. 82), where older sisters are parentified into a role that necessitates not only the achievement of success in matters of education and career, but also the simultaneous contribution of care labour and aspects of familial social reproduction. The *ate* is expected to succeed and to support, to provide care while simultaneously being a high achiever. During their shared interview, the siblings theorise that the pressures that were placed on Joy as the *ate* can be traced to their family’s specific dynamic as “a very matriarchal family,” one which places “a lot of expectations” on the female children that are not similarly projected onto the male children of the family.

Because of the female orientation of their family, these expectations are not similarly projected on the male children. Arthur describes his experience growing up as, “my sister got the brunt of it, and then obviously, I had a little bit of leeway,” with regards to expectations of success from their parents. Joy notes that while both the *ate* and *kuya* roles for *panganays* can have overlapping expectations — “like being good in school, like making sure you got a good career” — she has observed that *kuyas* “get a little bit more grace” especially with questions that seem to be more targeted towards an expectedly gendered domestic future, such as “when are you getting married?” or “when are you getting kids?”

However, in contrast to the experiences of parentification that Melissa, Geneva, and Joy experienced, Hazel’s relationship with her family is one that is vertical and involved, despite the transnational nature of their sibling relationships. Hazel continues to participate in her family’s life in many different ways, including partaking in family decision-making processes and being in constant communication with her siblings through group chats and voice or video calls. Hazel describes her initial days in Canada away from her family as lonely; now geographically and temporally separated from a family unit that both her and *Tita* Margaret described multiple times during our conversations as being close, she says that what helped her to mitigate the loneliness was the use of technology, including webcams, participation in family group chats, and voice/video calls. She describes her initial arrival as,

“Ang lungkot nga nung una e. Naka-webcam ka tas nakatingin ka lang. Tapos ang blotchy pa nung ano, nung signal, so parang patanong, ‘Anong ginagawa ni ano? Ano yun?’ Tas dadaan-daan lang siya.”

“It was so sad in the beginning. You’re using the webcam, and all you can do is look. And then the, the what-do-you-call it, the signal is so blotchy, so you have to keep asking, ‘What are y’all doing? What is that?’ And then they just walk by.”

During the interview at their home over our dinner of pork *sinigang*, I asked Hazel if her close relationship with her siblings had changed or had become less tightly-knit with her migration to to Canada. Hazel paused to think, and responded with noticeable hesitation,

“Hindi. [isang saglit, dalawang saglit]. I hope... Hindi naman.”

“No. (a beat, then two beats of silence). I hope... No, it hasn’t.”

I read her pauses here as a hopeful thought, that even if the distance between the siblings as a group now spans both borders and time zones, Hazel is optimistic that a changed relationship does not mean a *lesser* relationship. Baldassar and Merle write that “...we are not suggesting that virtual forms of care are equivalent to embodied forms, but instead that it is the quality of the relationships, rather than the form or mode of caregiving, that is important” (2014a, p. 12). *Tita* Margaret, her mom, responded that in her observation, the sibling relationship was not negatively changed, saying, “*Hindi*. No (it hasn’t).” When I then asked a follow up question — specifically, if she still feels a connection to her siblings who are no longer proximal to her — Hazel laughed and said:

“Oo. Oo kasi naghahanda sila kahit, birthday ko naghahanda sila! [dito, malakas at ‘di makapaniwalang tawa galing sa kanya] Sino ako, si Jesus??”

“Yes. Yes, because they put on a spread even when, on my birthdays, they celebrate! [here she bursts into delighted and incredulous laughter] Who am I, Jesus??”

In this exchange, Hazel’s understanding of the transnationality of her relationship to her siblings is rooted not only in their shared affections for each other, but also in the ways that they celebrate across distance and time, from the banality of calls and messages to the absurdity of *in absentia* birthday parties. For the left-behind siblings, the importance of celebrating Hazel’s birthday in the Philippines is that it is an act that contributes towards maintaining the sibling relationship through the distance. Care is exhibited and circulated within their sibling group in both traditionally-understood (participation in the remittance cycle) and less-common ways (the celebration of in-absentia birthdays). Yet, it is by highlighting that care can be expressed in “both embodied and virtual ‘love’,” that there is then an ability to “bring more

care actors into the frame and recognise the role played by wider family networks” (Baldassar and Merla 2014b, p. 33). In this transnational sibling configuration, Hazel and her siblings are all receivers and givers of sibling care, which circulates multidirectionally between them all.

Finally, I conclude this section with the experiences of Tom, who is the *panganay* or the oldest in his sibling group of three, and the *kuya* to Jack, his younger brother. Tom’s social transition involved a parallel change in roles within his sibling group and his immediate as well as extended family: from being the *ate*, he has now taken on the role of *kuya*. When Tom decided to make his social transition official, he initiated a conversation with Jack and their younger sister to let them know that he was now ready for them to call him *kuya* rather than *ate*. Tom’s role as a *kuya* to his siblings is an important aspect of his identity: for example, his Instagram handle incorporates his chosen name and his title of *kuya*, and much of how describes his imaginations of masculinity revolves around his relationship with his younger brother, Jack.

Yet Tom’s previous socialisation as the family’s *ate* continues to be relevant in how he re/imagines and re/shapes his own masculinity, and his role as now being an older brother to his younger siblings.

“I do think that being called an ate... for a majority of my life, and [even if] it no longer will be going forward, it’s still an honour, because — and I’m not saying that there aren’t, to just discredit kuyas — but ates take on a lot of stuff. You’re the first defense between your sibling and your parent, right? I’m proud to have had the experience of being called ate. But I think in this new stage of my life, I’m incorporating what I learned from being an ate and then like applying it to what I think a kuya should be.”

The ways in which Tom performs masculinity, not just for himself but also for the younger brother that he is ‘raising,’ is important to consider; he approaches questions about masculinity with an awareness that what he cultivates is an important aspect of his role as an older sibling, not just for himself personally as a now visibly-masculine person who is interacting with the world. His is a type of masculinity that Abelson refers to as ‘transformative masculinity,’ (2014) one which involves “being conscious of their interactional style with other men and women not to reproduce inequality through their practices” (Anzani et al 2023, p. 541). Abelson writes that this aspect of consciousness makes “[t]rans men’s view of men doing gender” a keen way of exploring masculinities, because “[t]his awareness is due to their female biography⁵³ and the process of transition, which likely makes trans mens’ practices of

⁵³ In a footnote, Abelson writes that the word ‘biography’ is meant to describe the portion of trans men’s lives where other people recognized them as female (2014, p. 550).

masculinity and experience of other men's masculinities more salient than other men" (Abelson 2014, p. 550). At one point during our conversation, Tom reflects that he is proud to have been able to model a gentler kind of masculinity, one which is informed by his previous role as *ate*; this is a type of masculinity that does not define itself as exclusive from notions of femininity.

Tom's sense of masculinity — and specifically, the way that he is modelling masculinity for his younger brother Jack — is therefore infused with the histories of his having been feminised as an *ate* before he became a *kuya*. Tom continues to emphasise the importance of his previous experiences as the *ate*, as the eldest female sibling, and enfold it into his current life and ideas about masculinity. When I asked him about Tom's transition, Jack says that their relationship as siblings has not changed because of it; neither of the brothers reported any strain between the two of them when Tom initiated his transition or in the time afterwards. While there is a renegotiation of roles in their sibling relationship as Tom moved from being *ate* to *kuya*, Jack explains that he thinks of his brother as, "[h]e's just Tom, and he's my sibling. He's never changed in personality." For Jack, the essence of Tom's personhood continues to be the same; Jack does not question his older brother's gender identity at any point in the interviews.

Siblinghood in the Filipino diasporas — as in the homeland, as in many cultures across the world including within the Canadian context — are gendered in particular ways, as the experiences of my interviewees can attest. In the stories that these siblings shared, gender is not just a marker of self and self-identity: within diasporic family units, gender also becomes a marker of responsibility, an indicator of one's role within the family unit. Gender and gendered socialisation, too, and the way that they are deployed within the specificity of the family unit, influences the ways in which oldest siblings model behaviour for their younger siblings.

As the interviewees in this section demonstrated, diasporic families have various definitions of what constitutes the Filipino identity of a household. Migrants who are more recent arrivals, like Joshua, Greg, and Hazel, leaned on proximity and temporality as ways to define the continuation of their Filipino identities within their households. They defined what Filipino is based on cultural markers, such as artefacts, language, and cultural identities. For diaspora-raised interviewees, like Joy, Teresa, and Nina, their definition of what constitutes a Filipino household relied on how they defined what constitutes being 'Canadian'; that is, whether they defined their identities alongside or against it, their notion of 'Filipino' self, family, and household was influenced by the way that they understood Canada. Baldassar and Merle argue that "'being together' as well as 'doing family' can be maintained by fulfilling a

series of duties and mediations, even from afar. This points to the importance of including transnational families in our understanding of common family forms” (Baldassar and Merle 2014, p. 40). Here, the idea of family as a multidirectional flow of care relations breaks the normative boundaries of the ‘nuclear’ to make room for a more capacious experience of Filipino families in the diaspora in Canada.

II. Extended Relations

The unit of extended families was not a type of familial relation that I explicitly sought out during the recruitment phase, but it was a motif that continually emerged in the conversations with my interviewees. As Aguilar writes, a sole focus on the nuclear family in a Filipino setting, even in a Filipino diaspora setting, “marginalizes other relationships outside of spousal and parent-child relations” (2013, p. 348). I therefore follow these “cultures of relatedness” (Aguilar 2013) through the scale of extended families as they manifest in the Filipino diaspora in Canada, and offer that extended familial relationships remain influential in the diaspora, as they do in the homeland.

In this section, I take up the narratives of four interviewees: Teresa and Nina; Joy; and Daisy. Teresa and Nina are first cousins who were raised with a close-knit community comprised of their immediate families, the enmeshed extended family network, and the broader community of Filipinos in Winnipeg. Joy, who is the eldest daughter in her family, has a relationship with her extended family in the Philippines, which is refracted through their ongoing relationship with her mother, and her refusal to participate in the same practices of provision that her mother continues to perform. Like Joy, Daisy, too has a relationship with her extended family in Canada that is mediated through her relations with her own mother, not in the form of remittances sent homeward, but rather, in the form of being cautioned against behaviour that would cause the family shame. Taken together as a set of interviews, the experiences of these four young women illustrate not only the role of the extended family on the lives of migrant youth, but specifically, the role of the extended family on the lives of migrant girls and women.

Having grown up in close proximity, cousins Teresa and Nina maintain a close relationship; for their focus group interview, they requested that we schedule it during a day when Nina would be home in Winnipeg so that they could do the interview together in the same room. Teresa and Nina share strong convictions about having been raised, specifically, as Filipino-Canadian children of Kapampangan Filipino immigrant parents in Winnipeg. Describing their childhood, Teresa says that their parents, collectively,

“Weren’t afraid of us losing our identity... they understood that we’re going to be Filipino, regardless, at the end of the day.”

Their shared extended family — by which I mean Teresa and Nina’s immediate families acting as extended families to each other — made a decision to maintain their heritage identities as families who hail from Pampanga. Both Teresa and Nina therefore had a cousin group, aunts, and uncles who together formed a close community. As members of two of the first families in their area in Winnipeg that established a base for the Kapampangan Filipino community, Teresa and Nina were immersed in Filipino and Kapampangan culture to the point of never having had to lose their heritage identities. The extended family’s shared commitment to maintaining their cultural heritage allowed Teresa and Nina to never have lost it in their acculturation into Canadian society, but also to feel secure in their identities as they explored what being Canadian means for them.

While Teresa and Nina understand their extended family from this community- and family-oriented perspective, Joy’s behaviour as a now-adult member of her extended family is contrasted with her mother’s perceived ongoing generosity. That is, as a member of the extended family who resides in Canada, Joy is judged negatively because she does not participate in this expected continuation of the remittance cycle for extended families. Francisco-Menchavez writes that families are “the required hinge that keeps migrants moored to serial migration and a steadfast remittance policy” (2018, p. 150); in Joy’s refusal to participate in the same way that her mother continues to do, she not only breaks this particular cycle with regards to the individual’s relationship with the former home nation-state, but also with regards to the extended family in the Philippines that have become accustomed to this financial ritual. Joy describes her mother as occupying a very specific role in the extended family: for instance Joy describes her mother as being a person that *gives* a lot, even though giving might not have been the best choice to make at a given moment. Her mother, in coming to Canada and becoming Canadian, has taken on the role of migrant provider for the extended family. Joy says,

“God bless my mom... she never says no to helping. She never asks for it back. But then I almost think she doesn't quite realise that she's feeding into this idea that we can just spend money, like, willy-nilly, send money like back home.”

The act of continuous giving that Joy’s mother engages in is contextualised against what are considered to be Filipino values and expectations: community- and family-oriented rather than individualist, and additionally, of being in the better environment and better future

that was the goal of migration in the first place, and thus, being expected to occupy the role of the person that gives. Belford and Lahiri-Roy observe that “[m]igrants are often socio-culturally obligated to extend emotional and financial support to families left behind” (2019, p. 63); in the case of Joy and her family, the expectation was extended to continue these financial supports into the next generation, and Joy’s refusal has created tension within the extended family unit who disagree with her choice.

As Joy comes from a family which is matriarchally-oriented, I read the expectations about Joy’s mother as a larger echo of the ways in which Geneva and Melissa, as *ates* in their family, were expected to continue to provide domestic labour and care to the family unit, and were met with reluctance when they proposed to end the arrangement and move out on their own. In contrast to her mother, Joy as the *ate* in her immediate family does not participate in this tradition of giving towards the extended family in the same way that her mother does. Joy’s choice of non-participation is therefore a disruptive moment in the economics of the transnational family that has been ongoing for years. Because of this, Joy says that her extended family has referred to her over the years as,

“She’s *maldita*, or a *suplada*,⁵⁴ and all. She’s *dalok*,⁵⁵ you know?”

Awi argues that, “[m]aintaining good interpersonal relationships is linked to continually extending help or providing favours among family members and relatives” (2023, p. 37), and in her refusal to participate financially, Joy has been given the reputation of “greedy” and “selfish” by the same family members who are themselves the continuing recipients of what her mother sends home.

Daisy came to Canada with her younger sibling; they were able to come to Canada after their mother received permanent residency through the LCP. Currently active in the Filipino community in various visible roles, Daisy had an opportunity to be interviewed by local news media regarding the work that she does. While she says that her mother has “a sense of pride that she’s able to see her daughter do this amazing thing in politics,” ultimately her mother has cautioned her that,

⁵⁴ *Maldita* and *suplada* are Tagalog words that stand for mean-spirited, and are gendered female.

⁵⁵ *Dalok* is a word in Bisaya and other Philippine languages that means ‘greedy.’

“Okay, you have to be careful on what you're going to say online, because I don't want the *titas* and *titos* to comment bad things about you. You have to be careful in the way that you're trying to say things because it might bite you in the a—.”

The sentiment of not wanting Daisy to be criticised by members of the extended family is reflective, I believe, of migrant parent anxieties about their children, who are themselves migrants in a new country. While the advice that Daisy's mom offers is presented as a protective moment ('I don't want the *titas* and *titos* to comment bad things about you'), I read this in a similar way to Alexander's family 'tiptoeing' around his queer identity: that in these instances, anxieties that manifest in attempts at protection can become moments of care that cause harm. Daisy, however, interprets this moment differently: she believes that she was given this advice because her mother wants her to act in the way that a 'model minority' would. Her mother frames her comments as being cautionary, as she worries that Daisy's politics — and specifically being outspoken about her politics in official venues — would open her up for criticism, or else put her in a situation where she faces backlash in both her personal life, with their extended family members in Canada, as well as in her professional life, where she might face repercussions for her actions. As a visibly Filipina woman in the sphere of Canadian policy and politics, Daisy's mother would be more comfortable if, rather than performing difference as a way to contest White settler supremacy, Daisy instead was “deploying her/his difference effectively so that it is reassuring and not alarming,” which could then be “a means for acquisition of some measure of acceptance by nationals” (Thobani 2007, p. 170). Yet for Daisy, to be political, in this instance, was to transgress expectations of how Filipino migrants as model minorities should behave in Canada: model minorities who are expected to display gratitude, rather than open criticism of the current systems.

The extended family, then, as with other familial relations, can be a source of familial strength as well as a way to accessing Filipino heritage identity, and it can also be a source of distress and judgment. As evidenced, for example, by Daisy's mother's advice, culturally, Filipino children “are expected to not only hold a sense of respect for elders but also to signify this respect through their behaviours” (de Guzman et al 2024, p. 8). Significations of respect can extend towards policing one's own behaviour, so as not to bring shame (in the form of backlash) to the family or to the community. Diaspora families thus exist in entanglement across both the immediate/nuclear and extended spectrum of families, from where tensions emerge regarding expectations of Canadian-raised children and their first generation parents.

While families can be an institution that provides care for its members, “they can also produce disappointment and even trauma” (Baldassar and Merla 2014a, p. 7).

III. Friendships, Chosen Families, and the Capaciousness of Care

Chosen families and friendships were other threads that emerged across the interviews, sometimes unprompted; they are forms of relations which my interviewees named as vital to their lives in Canada, filling in a lack of familial relations or else creating new relationships that served as alternative modes of multidirectional care in moments where the immediate family was unsatisfactory or unfulfilling. In this section that highlights non-kin relationships in the community, I focus on five interviewees: Geneva and Melissa; *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate; and Alexander and Daisy. Between their experiences are represented lives as young migrants, queer youth, and migrants who moved to Canada in their adulthoods.

Geneva, who moved to Canada as a teen, observed that she had ‘more to lose’ than her youngest brother, who was not yet in his teens when the family left the Philippines to settle in Canada. Melissa’s last day in the Philippines was bookended by an unexpected gesture of kindness from a group of friends that she would leave behind. For *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate, notions of fictive kinship were established with their Filipino next door neighbours, who welcomed them into the already-existing Filipino community in Ottawa and served as guides in their long-term integration. Finally, I close with Alexander and Daisy, who name each other as members of their chosen family, and for whom the continuous acts of having ‘chosen’ each other is intertwined with their experiences as queer Filipino youth.

During our conversations, Geneva shared that she believed she and her two older siblings had ‘more to lose,’ especially with regards to the already-established relationships that they were compelled to leave behind. She explains,

“We had spent more time in the Philippines. Because we’re older, we had more long-term friendships.”

In contrast to having ‘more to lose,’ their youngest brother had not yet had the time to develop such relationships. This is the second time that youth has been invoked as a ‘benefit’ — although I use this word warily — when it comes to acts of migration: the first was with Nina, who said that she was able to integrate more easily into the education system at five years old, and the second is Geneva, here, who speaks of her younger brother who had not yet formed these bonds, and thus did not ‘lose’ relationships in the same way that his older siblings did. The types of relationships that Geneva describes when it comes to migrant youth are often lost

to the distance of migration, although the rapid development and relatively easy access to technology and the social internet has seemed to mitigate the affective attrition of such relationships.

For Melissa, the friendships that she had to leave behind in the Philippines emerged as an important point in the narrative of her migration, particularly with regards to her feelings of loneliness as a new migrant. She tells the story of how her close friends saw her off when she departed for Canada:

“They drove to my house early in the morning, and then they drove me to the airport... I didn't expect to see any of them there, actually, but there they were. And so that was like, I don't know if I should be crying, I felt too emotional, but also just happy that they were there still, that I got to see them one last time.”

It was therefore with a final act of care that her close friends punctuated the last day of her life in the Philippines, and therefore, how she began her new life in Canada; the joy of such relationships is bookended by the grief of losing it, and the difficulty of maintaining relationships over distance. Melissa reflects on her arrival in Canada as a part of her life that was lonely, in the same way that Hazel does. She says,

“There was a really long period of time where I just felt like even though I was with my family... to me, it still feels like I was alone because I didn't really have, you know, friends... and it still felt lonely.”

For all youth, but particularly for migrants in their late childhood or teens, friendships are a vital part in the developmental journey of adolescence that is not quite fulfilled by the family; for young migrants who are losing their established relationships, the loss of friendships can be difficult to navigate. While there is a wealth of literature on left-behind children⁵⁶ and the implications of these separations on the transnational family unit, less has been written about the left-behind friendships of migrant youth. These losses traverse even the contemporary moment with widespread access to the internet and the proliferation of virtual means of connections like social media applications and video calling platforms.

In Filipino culture, the act of claiming and naming chosen kinships is a common practice. Many Filipinos — in the homeland as well as in the diasporas — are familiar with the concept of having *titas*, *titos*, and cousins that are not blood kin, but are treated with the same

⁵⁶ For literature on left-behind children, see: Parreñas *Children of Global Migration* (2005); Madianou and Miller *Mobile phone parenting* (2011); Acedera and Yeoh *The Intimate Lives of Left-Behind Young Adults in the Philippines* (2022).

level of deference as if they were. For *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate, moving to Canada alone with their three young children, they observed that fictive kin relations were of immense help in their acculturation into broader Canadian and Filipino-Canadian culture. It was through these kinships with their Filipino neighbours that they were able to get situated into a community of fellow Filipinos in Ottawa. *Tita* Kate describes their initial interactions and longer-term relationship with their neighbours, an anecdote that is indicative of the ways in which welcoming support groups and kinships are necessary for the integration of new members of the community,

“We met them *dahil neighbours namin sila*, they were really very helpful for us, because they helped us, I would say, get familiarised, with the life here: brought us to Costco, brought us to the car dealer, if you needed a car dealer. *Parang sila yung una naming family dito. Nung hindi namin alam kung ano yung Thanksgiving, nakiki-Thanksgiving kami sa kanila.*”

“We met them because they were our neighbours, they were really helpful for us, because they helped us, I would say, get familiarised, with the life here: brought us to Costco, brought us to the car dealer, if you needed a car dealer. They became like our first family here. When we didn’t know what Thanksgiving was, we would celebrate Thanksgiving with them.”

Having access to kin relations who were willing to shepherd them through what it meant to live in Canada, according to *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate, was invaluable; their neighbours “became like our first family here,” introducing them not only to the notion of what Canadian holidays were like, but also material recommendations like Costco and car dealerships. Research surrounding kinship in migrant families tend to highlight immediate, nuclear family units. Pivoting towards the role of non-kin relationships in migrant settings allows for a more capacious understanding of the ways in which care flows outside of the ways that care is socially expected to circulate (i.e., through the biological family). To consider friendships and chosen families to be aspects of a community of care (Francisco-Menchavez 2018), as is visible here in the experiences of *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate, affirm that the giving and receiving of care is not limited to social-biological definitions of care relationships.

The broader academic use of the term “chosen family” is often attributed to anthropologist Kath Weston’s 1997 book *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*, where Weston explains that “lesbians and gay men, originally relegated to the status of people without family, later lay claim to a distinctive type of family characterized as families we choose or create” (p. 29). These ideas of chosen and created families are reflected in the relationship that Alexander and Daisy have built with each other, as well as with their friend group. Highlighting an idealised notion of care relations that is grounded in reciprocity but not extraction, Alexander

describes the experience of having a chosen family by comparing it to the traditional notions of family:

“It's like the hope that you have for your real family... Imagine that without the difficulties, without the politics, without the built-in structures that we get from crab mentality⁵⁷... This is an opt-in, unconditional versus like the conditional you can't opt out [of], almost.”

Daisy's description follows a similar framing, describing a chosen family member as:

“Someone that you can be fully yourself with and that you can trust fully, and someone that you choose to love unconditionally... (to) ‘love unconditionally’ is a choice, and that's what happens, I think, with found families.”

Both Alexander and Daisy situate the affective and care relations of the chosen family as a ‘choice,’ one that is ‘opt-in, unconditional,’ as opposed to the normative associations of care within the nuclear family as ‘conditional,’ that ‘you can’t opt out.’ In these descriptions of chosen kin, of relationships that exist outside the boundaries of the family and do not even necessarily share physical spaces together in the household, Alexander and Daisy illustrate that chosen kin can be a counterpoint to complicated or unsatisfactory relationships with blood family, filling gaps of affection and relation; their chosen families are what fill the gap of affective relationships and acceptance of gender identities.

For members of the diaspora who are experiencing moments of disarray due to the effects of migration, or who find family kinships to be exclusionary, they often seek out emotional supports and care relations that are not bound to heterodox notions of the nuclear or immediate family. In the way that the interviewees describe chosen kin and friendships, care that is given is not ‘expected,’ but rather, was performed freely; this situates the kin relationship of family as a place where care is expected, but not always received. In this way, the chosen family is a way for individuals to be able to fulfil care needs and participate in care relations in ways that are satisfying and safe, and determined by choice rather than by necessity.

⁵⁷ Crab mentality is a term commonly used in the Philippines to describe how communities pull each other down rather than celebrating other folks' success, as a comparison to crabs in a bucket. Lasquety-Reyes, however, notes that the term ‘crab mentality’ is “of foreign coinage (even if you call it *talangka* mentality, indigenizing the animal does not make the expression indigenous” (2016, p. 75). In this explanation, he proposes that the term was created by Americans “to describe a particular Filipino social behaviour which they witnessed and which they found objectionable — objectionable from a more individualistic American point of view” (p. 75). It bears noting that this term sees use in the contemporary Philippine lexicon as a way to criticise fellow Filipinos.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the diasporic family as a site where differing imaginations of self mediated through the social, political, and cultural geographies of the homeland as well as the new home nation meet, sometimes violently. The expectations and experiences that surround the family are in a process of constant re/negotiation; in the context of diaspora and Filipino heritage, there are moments where expectations surrounding an individual's participation is shaped by values and cultures from the homeland, even when the individual in question does not themselves align with such values. Migration is a process that alters the directions and flows of care and care obligations within a family unit, even as it additionally-operationalises family members into roles of ongoing service. The relationship between individuals and their extended family members become mediated not only by the distance between them, but by expectations that are grounded in what becomes expected of the person who is the "provider," and what such a role entails.

The terraformations of belonging in this chapter are made visible in the ways in which families stretch to accommodate not only new roles, new modes of care, and new social locations that they encounter in Canada; the notion of family as a structure that is defined by relation is one that changes in the context of migration. I argue in earlier chapters that one of the ways in which the Philippine state terraforms belonging in citizenship is the transition from belonging *with* (affective/national) to a belonging *to* (commoditisation/object of labour). In this chapter, I offer that one of the ways in which *familial* belonging is terraformed follows a similar path. Rather than an individual migrant belonging *with* a family as a member, they are operationalised into belonging *to*, such that further expectations can be made of them with regards to roles of social reproduction or financial provision, whether in the immediate or the extended family unit.

Chapter Six: Diasporic and National Contestations of Affective and Legal Identities

Introduction

In Chapter Six, the last of the triptych of interviews, I examine how diaspora formation terraforms the notion of belonging through national identity towards both the home of origin and the new home country. Belonging, in this instance, is engaged with as “an emotionally constructed category to understand its implications for citizenship and nationhood” (Ho 2009, p. 791); that is, throughout this chapter, I highlight the ways in which my interviewees’ feelings of (non)belonging ultimately lead towards an internal terraformation of their Filipino diasporic and Canadian national identity.

This chapter unfolds in four major parts. First, I explore the concept of proximity, from a generational perspective; that is, I consider the ways in which it is deployed by my interviewees to denote affective relations to the home of origin and/or the new home nation. Second, I consider the role of the household vis-à-vis the immediate family as a window into the ways by which migrants who are new arrivals maintain their Filipino identity collectively in Canada. Third, I examine how new migrants imagine their own identities as Filipinos in Canada, as racialised and gendered migrants who have entered or were born into legal and social spaces of multiculturalism. Fourth, and finally, I survey the various ways by which members of the Filipino diaspora have laid claim to their Canadian identity.

I. Generational Proximities to the Canadian Nation-State

According to Statistics Canada’s Classification of Generation Status (2021), the first generation of immigrants is defined as persons who were born outside Canada, while those who are second generation are those born in Canada with at least a single parent born outside Canada, the children of immigrants. These definitions, as this trilogy of chapters indicate, are made complicated by the experiences of Filipino-Canadian youth who moved to Canada at a young age and were raised as Canadians; a shorthand that is often used is that they are 1.5 generation immigrants. Writing about Filipino immigrants in France, Fresnoza-Flot describes 1.5 generation migrants as “children who spent part of their childhood in the Philippines before joining their parents in France and completing their education in that country” (2014, p. 1153); the important temporal points common to 1.5 generation migrants are that they spent a what they would consider a significant amount of time of their childhood, usually up until their young adulthood, and have been raised in their new home country since. Fresnoza-Flot’s (2014) analysis additionally describes 1.5 generation children using the Filipino words *laki doon* (grew up there), in contrast to *laki dito* (grew up here). These terms emphasise that in

analyses of diasporic experiences, such as what I perform in this work, it is important to keep in mind two aspects of life experience: (1) the location where an individual was raised; and (2) the length of time that they resided there prior to moving or engaging in migration. I argue that this is so because, as I track in Chapters Four and Five, the length of time that a migrant has resided in their home of origin profoundly influences the way that they understand their Filipino diasporic identities, their Canadian national identities, and especially the way that they define both the Philippines and Canada as countries. Proximity, within the context of diaspora that is being examined here, is an intertwining of geography, temporality, and access to heritage.

A person who is a second generation immigrant from the Philippines is normatively construed to be a person who is a generation more distant from the home of origin, and therefore one generation closer to Canada as the new home state. Yet this understanding of proximity from a generational perspective is insufficient in exploring the development and terraformation of diasporic and national identities. How many generations, for example, would it take for migrant populations to be considered close enough to Canada to no longer be considered migrants? How is the deployment of ‘Canadian’ identity problematised in racialised and gendered populations like the Filipino diaspora in Canada? In the context of settler-colonialism, how are such proximities rooted in power and domination, and anchored in policy-making that shapes this multicultural Cnaada? I therefore deploy the discourse of generations — first, 1.5, and second — aware of the contexts within which they are useful as well as where they might be problematic to deploy, and understand that these labels of proximity are not sequential in the way that the straight-line thesis is imagined, wherein “each new generation represents on average a new stage of adjustment to the host society, that is, a further step away from ethnic ‘ground zero,’ the community and ethnoculture established by the immigrants, and a step closer in a variety of ways to more complete assimilation” (Alba and Nee 2015, p. 27). Rather, I think of the language around generations as a way for discourse to begin, rather than as a way to conclude a conversation.

Below, I explore the narratives of three interviewees: Nina, Joy, and Arthur, all three of whom arrived in Canada together with their families as very young children or in their early teens.

Nina was raised in what she consistently describes throughout the interviews as a family that is decidedly Filipino and Kapampangan, as well as being Canadian. Nina is confident in

her self-definition of herself as Filipino-Canadian. Meanwhile, Joy and Arthur, who are siblings, have had different responses to the questions of their Canadian identities — their experiences serve as a reminder that even within the same family unit, migrant youth can have markedly different experiences of integration into the new home nation. Taken together, this cluster of three interviews offers a complex image of how diaspora-born and raised migrants think of themselves as both Canadian and Filipino.

Nina, having migrated to Canada at five, considers herself to be a 1.5 generation migrant. This is unusual, as often, migrants who decide to take on the label of 1.5 generation are those who have spent substantial amounts of time in the Philippines prior to their arrival: Nina, however, arrived as a child. When I asked her to elaborate about this, Nina attributed the strength of her generational identity to the fact that she grew up in the tightly-knit Manitoba Filipino community, a place where “you don’t lose your culture because you don’t really have to find it.” For Nina, Winnipeg is the place that is the anchor of her Filipino identity, and in fact, it is a location that serves as a point of comparison for her when it comes to other places as a member of the Filipino diaspora in Canada. During our conversation, Nina reflected on the fact that had she grown up in a place like the City of Ottawa, which she describes as less close than her community in Winnipeg, she would likely consider herself to be a second generation immigrant. Osborne makes the argument that places *live* — that is, “*abstract* space is transformed into *particular* place by the processes by which people create material and social realms through *living there*” (2006, p. 150, emphasis in the original). The *place* of Filipino Winnipeg is vital to Nina’s identity: not only is it the geographic location of the community with which she identifies herself, and which has shaped her own identity, her Filipino community has created a particular experience of growing up for her that meant she never lost her culture and cultural identities. Diaspora here is a place that has been terraformed by the lives and ongoingness of Nina’s community.

Because of the way that Nina was raised — in a family and community that prioritised both her Filipino and Canadian identities — her understanding of her Canadian identity is defined by hyphenation. For her, the hyphenation of her identities into the singular Filipino-Canadian is as important as the identifier 1.5:

“I think that's why I really associate myself with being Filipino-Canadian, because as much as I have that Filipino experience, there's always that Canadian part of it that's attached.”

For Nina, there is no contradiction in this simultaneous existence; to be Filipino *and* to be Canadian is simply who she is, and this she attributes to the ways in which she was raised.

Joy similarly identifies herself as a 1.5 generation migrant, having arrived when she was fourteen, and with her hometown of General Santos City prominent in her memories. Joy's strong identification with her youth in the Philippines reveals the tensions which exist between homeland and diaspora cultures, particularly when it comes to claims, impositions, and conflicts regarding national identities that are attached to specific embodied experiences. While the .5 is vital to Joy's conception of herself, she observes that it is often those "from the homeland," often "friends or family," who refuse to identify her as being Filipino, and deny her the proximity to national identity that she claims. She says that she has been told by family members back home, "[b]ut you're not really Filipino anymore. You're Canadian." Joy maintains that this binary notion of diasporic and national identity that is being imposed on her by a family member is a false and hurtful claim because her childhood years in the Philippines are "the most vivid parts of my life as a young person." In this way, the erasure of her Filipino identity comes from members of her extended family in homeland, a label which then situates her outside of the in-group rather than acknowledge a hyphen that denotes Joy's inclusion.

In contrast to his older sister Joy, Arthur identifies solely as a first-generation immigrant. When I asked him about his generational identifier during our one-on-one conversation, he had initially included his sister in his response, saying "I would probably say *we're* first-generation Filipino Canadians" (emphasis mine). The difference between Joy and Arthur is one of the examples of the differences between sibling groups that I note in this triptych of chapters.⁵⁸ Referencing the importance of geography and temporality once more, I believe that the age gap between Joy (14) and Arthur (7) at their arrival in Canada has created differentiated experiences for them; Joy having spent more time in General Santos than Arthur has means that, at least in this instance, Joy evokes the identifier of .5 while Arthur does not.

⁵⁸ Other notable differences within the experiences of sibling groups include: Nina and her brothers having varying levels of success within the Canadian educational system, which Nina attributes to the ages at which they arrives; and Geneva and Melissa having to take on more tasks of social reproduction while their oldest brother did not have to do so, or was not asked to do so by their parents.

Arthur remembers that he had to conform to Canadian social norms in his earliest memories of arriving as a child; one story that he told was that he experienced a lot of bullying when he was growing up, particularly with being taunted as a young child, specifically,

“this one stereotype that all Filipinos eat dog.”⁵⁹

These incidents of bullying that came from his peers weaponised Orientalised North American stereotypes of what the Philippines is, and how Filipinos act. He says that the incidents of bullying that were specifically made with reference to his ethnic identity meant that,

“[i]nstead of retaining part of my identity as a Filipino, I would try to conform to the point where, I would have to lose my identity as a Filipino.”

As a young immigrant, Arthur was faced with the decision to prioritise conformity to ensure that he would survive the violent processes of his acculturation as a child; to conform in this manner, according to Kalu, “does not come from within but from without and is premised on a common interpretation of social meanings by individuals” (2017, p. 74). In other words, the bullying that Arthur experienced has forced his conformity in order to survive. Arthur’s experience as a young child in Ontario who was bullied for his ethnic identity as well as his accent led him towards a conception of identity that is exclusionary: to become and to *be* Canadian is to *not be* Filipino.

The three interviewees display varying levels of attachment to their Filipino diasporic and Canadian national identities. While both Nina and Joy use the identifier of 1.5 generation, they have anchored it in differing geographies of home, Nina’s .5 is in reference to her strong Filipino and Kapampangan identity even though she was raised for most of her life within Canadian borders, and she uses it to communicate to other diasporic Filipinos that she is secure in her identity as a Filipino Canadian, with regards to both culture and family. Joy’s .5, on the other hand, is in reference to her childhood in General Santos, and she uses it to signal to homeland Filipinos that her identity as a person who grew up in the Philippines has not been overwritten by now having lived a life in Canada. Arthur, meanwhile, identifies as a first generation immigrant of Filipino descent, and explains that this is because he has lived in Canada for most of his life, as well as being in deference to his parents’ sacrifice in order for the family to gain permanent residency and citizenship.

⁵⁹ The use of this particular stereotype against migrants of Asian descent is one that has a long history in the United States and Canada. Ji-Song Ku et al write that the continued deployment of “this controversy is about determining who is a ‘real’ American and who is not, what sort of cultural practice is ‘mainstream’ and what is exotic, and what sort of food is disgusting and what is palatable” (2020, p. 2).

II. Diasporic Identity Formation

II. A. New Filipinos in Canada

In this section, I move from an exploration of generational identity discourse as a way to indicate proximity with the Philippines as well as with Canada, towards a consideration of how relatively new immigrants understand the identity of Filipino vis-à-vis the identity of Canadian.

In this section, I highlight the experiences of four interviewees: Joshua and Greg, Francesca, Hazel, and Geneva.

All five interviewees whose narratives are featured in this section were born and raised in the Philippines, and came of age in the homeland before they made their way to Canada as immigrants in their teens and adulthoods. Joshua and Greg arrived in Canada together as a couple, and the recency of their arrival meant that they had a comparative understanding of what Filipino identity means; that is, they saw a difference between what they would classify as Filipino as opposed to Filipino-Canadian identities. With Francesca, who is a recent arrival, her notion of Filipino identity sits at the context of a multiculturalism wherein the primary culture is ‘Canadian,’ and wherein the embrace of this primary cultural identifier could lead to an erasure of Filipino identity. Hazel and Geneva, meanwhile, both approach the question of Canadian identity from the perspective of a ‘paper’ identity — that is, the notion of a nationality made legal through a passport is not considered to have the same affective weight as an understanding of belonging that is rooted in having been raised in a country’s cultural milieu.

During our shared conversation, I asked Joshua and Greg whether or not they have observed what they would consider to be a noticeable difference between homeland Filipino culture and diaspora Filipino-Canadian culture. While he is now in Canada and is committed to the idea of applying for permanent residency and eventual citizenship, Joshua answered the question from an external observer’s perspective: that of a Filipino person looking at Canada. Joshua says that he believes there *is* a difference, and that this difference is grounded in the processes of cultural acquisition, or how people are socialised and immersed into what it means to be a member of a group. He observes,

“Number one *kasi*, the fact *na dito ka lumaki, yung culture ng bansa na yun, ng Canada, yun na yung makukuha mo* — even though *sa household kausapin ka ng Tagalog, yung mga Filipino culture o events na ina-ano niyo, Pasko, Noche Buena, Media Noche... since lumalaki ka dito, nakikita mo yung outside world. So marami kang makakasalamuhang tao.* In a positive sense: *you’re making yourself diverse din. Hindi lang pala yung Pilipino na*

alam ko, na culture na alam ko, marami din akong malalaman... Unlike kasi sa Philippines if lumaki ka (dun) totally, the Filipino culture yung makukuha mo sa family mo, kung ano man yung pinamulat sa 'yo ng family mo and all."

"Because number one, the fact that you grew up here, the culture of that country, of Canada, that is what you get — even though in the household you are spoken to in Tagalog, you have Filipino culture or events that you (participate in), Christmas, Noche Buena, Media Noche⁶⁰... Since you grew up here, you can see the outside world. So you encounter many (different) people. In a positive sense: you're making yourself diverse too. It's not just the (being) Filipino that I know, the culture that I know, there are many other things I will learn... Unlike in the Philippines, if you grow up (there) totally, the (kind of) Filipino culture you will get from your family, (is) whatever they raised you with and all."

Joshua observes that it is the process of immersion in both Filipino and 'Canadian' things that ultimately 'makes' a person Canadian. Joshua describes being raised in Canada as 'making yourself diverse, too'— diversity, in this instance, is understood as a trait that is learned through interaction; that is, to be Filipino-Canadian is to be or become diverse. In this understanding of Canada vis-à-vis the Philippines, Filipino culture is collapsed into a monoculture, while Canadian culture is understood as 'diverse' because of the presence of many other peoples. This, to me, was a surprising point, because I do not classify the Philippines as a monocultural nation, whether in terms of language, culinary identities, regional cultures, or even religion.

On the other hand, when I asked Greg about how he approached his sense of self as a Filipino person living in Canada, he puts his genetic heritage in conversation with Canadian citizenship, saying,

"I consider myself Filipino, 100% Filipino. Yung lang talaga. That's it. Siguro alam mo, kahit maging Canadian citizen na 'ko, feeling ko pag dumating ako duon [inaudible] akong Canadian... [huminto siya dito] Pero kasi, I am a fully-blooded Filipino, e. So I consider myself na Filipino talaga."

"I consider myself Filipino, 100% Filipino. That's it. I think, you know, when I become a Canadian citizen, I feel as though when I get to the point of being a Canadian citizen... [he paused here] But you see, I am a fully-blooded Filipino, e. So I consider myself really Filipino."

While Greg considers himself to be what he describes as a 'fully-blooded' Filipino at the moment of our conversation, the pause in his sentence right after he mentions the notion of

⁶⁰ In Filipino celebrations of Christmas, Noche Buena is the midnight feast as the 24th becomes the 25th, and Media Noche is the New Year's Eve midnight feast happening on the 31st.

becoming a Canadian citizen is significant: I read it as an indication that perhaps his feelings towards his new home will be re-evaluated when the state grants him a legally full relationship, that a legal commitment will be met with an affective relation to the new home nation.

Similarly, when I asked Francesca what her relationship was to the idea of a Canadian identity as a newcomer who was intending on applying for permanent residency and eventual citizenship, she also paused to think about how she would answer this question. With many pauses between her sentences, and with many caveats to indicate that these were her personal feelings, Francesca told me over our Zoom conversation that,

“I think — for me, *ha* — *pag naging* Canadian citizen *na kami*, *ang habol mo lang naman* — for me, *ha*, on my mindset — is the perks and everything. *Pero* the way *ka makitungo sa ano*, the way you represent yourself... [*Mahabang hinto*] *Ewan ko, siguro kasi tatlong buwan pa lang naman ako dito, hindi ko alam kung after ten years andito pa rin ako sa Canada if mag-iiba ako*. *Pero* I don’t think so, e. I don’t think so.”

“I think — for me — when we become Canadian citizen(s), all that you want is — for me, on my mindset — is the perks and everything. But the way that you interact with, the way you represent yourself... [A long pause] I’m not sure, maybe it’s because I’ve only been here for three months, I’m not sure if after ten years of being here if that will change me. But I don’t think so. I don’t think so.”

From her responses, first, I make the observation that for Francesca, the question of Canadian citizenship is not approached as an individual, but rather, is a collective, familial notion: she says ‘when *we* become Canadian citizen(s),’ rather than only referencing herself. As the mother of a family that departed the Philippines together, in fact as the person who instigated their move from the Philippines to Canada, Francesca thinks of the family unite as being enfolded into the Canadian body politic together, too. Second, Francesca makes a distinction between the status of legal citizenship and how she understands her *self*: that is, the self as it interacts with others, and the self that is a representative. For her, to legally become a Canadian citizen at a certain point in her future does not mean losing how she understands herself at the point of the interview, which is a Filipino person.

Third, I consider the pause that both Greg and Francesca took before answering the questions that I posed. I understand these pauses as indications that while Francesca is sure of how she feels now, there may perhaps be changes in her future that she has not foreseen yet. Despite the affective hesitations that are visible in her pauses, Francesca was committed to completing the processes put in place by the AIP, first for permanent residency and then

afterwards for citizenship when she becomes eligible in the near-future. While her affective ties to Canada and a corresponding identity are not as strong in comparison to her ties to her own Filipino identity, it is clear that Francesca's legal commitments to Canada — as the nation which has allowed her to care for her children in the way they need — is firm.

I also asked Alexander his thoughts on the choices of assimilation and integration that are faced by the Filipino diaspora in Canada, and whether he has observed a difference between these two processes. As a member of the diaspora who was born and raised in Canada, Alexander explained that for him, to be an integrated member of Canadian society is to have a relationship with the nation that allows him to exist *fully* as a Canadian of Filipino descent,

“I'm part of this space as I am, versus like, have to surrender that in order to win.”

Coming from a childhood where he was unable to claim or even access the multiplicity of his identities — unlike, for example, Teresa and Nina — Alexander in his adulthood is ensuring that he is able to make claims to his Filipino identity by being active in the Filipino community, and taking steps to learn his heritage language of Bisaya. From Alexander's perspective, to assimilate or be assimilated is to be disappeared into the assumed polity of a liberal multicultural Canada, while to integrate is to be allowed to retain what makes him unique in his immigrant experience, and still be able to claim his identity as a *Canadian*.

In our initial conversation, Hazel, who was also born and raised in the Philippines, brought forward the idea that she had a legal relationship with Canada ('on paper'), particularly in comparison to her having an affective one with the Philippines. Her affective relationship with the Philippine nation contrasts with the way that she has withdrawn herself legally from the Philippine state, as discussed earlier in Chapter Four. However, Hazel also proposes the notion that Canadians *look* a certain way, that Canadians have phenotypical features which *she* does not and cannot possess as a racialised migrant. The deeply-embedded notions of Canada and Canadians as white are not lost in the contemporary moment among new immigrants.

“*Kung magiging Canadian ako, it's probably sa paper lang. I'm not really gonna hold on to it. Pag lumabas ako ng ibang bansa, sasabihin ko ba na Canadian ako? Mukha ba akong Canadian? Passport lang. It makes sense, papel lang naman yan e, nasusunog yan and everything. Ako, sa pagkatao ko, wala naman sa veins ko na Canadian ako.*”

“If I become Canadian, it's probably only on paper. I'm not really gonna hold on to it. When I leave to visit other countries, would I say that I'm Canadian? Do I look Canadian? Just the

passport. It makes sense, since that's just paper, that will burn and everything. Me, in my personhood, there isn't anything in my veins that says I'm Canadian."

In Hazel's facetious comment of 'do I look Canadian?', I offer that what her question shows, as Maiangwa indicates, "[i]dentity is laden with ideological underpinnings tied to cultural symbols and rituals linked to one's affective or fixated attachment to an in-group or a distinctive place that may embolden affective polarization, with its attendant violent and othering" (2023, p. 9). For Hazel, who is a racialised person, holding a Canadian passport would become a moment of interrogation from other people rather than a satisfactory answer to the question of her national identity. Hazel's response brings to mind then-NDP leader Jakeet Singh's contention that "I think Canadians look like all sorts of people," in an election where the Quebec NDP kept only one seat out of a previous 59 under the leadership of Jack Layton (Bouchard 2020, p. 316-317). Hazel is hyper-aware that her Filipino-ness, both embodied and cultural, marks her as Other even if she identifies herself as Canadian. Hazel questions whether strangers would believe her if she declares herself to be Canadian ('there isn't anything in my veins that says I'm Canadian'), a sentiment quite unlike that expressed by Teresa and Nina, who are both confident in their own Canadian identities.

Geneva, like Hazel, is similarly ambivalent about the Canadian citizenship that she now holds. She acknowledges, like Francesca does, that becoming a Canadian citizen includes perks, like having a "strong passport." Yet, during our conversation, Geneva muses,

"Why do I feel some sort of shame about getting citizenship? To many people, it's just a trivial thing, right, getting citizenship. like, But there's definitely... I feel like I'm losing a part of me here, but it's just citizenship, I guess."

Of the many emotions that I encountered during the interview process, *shame* regarding becoming Canadian was not one that I expected; I had thought I would encounter joy, ambivalence, and perhaps sadness, and I did throughout the interviews, but I was not prepared to encounter shame. Notably, Geneva is not saying that she is encountering shame through other members of the diaspora, or even members of her own family. The shame that she feels is internal, and I link it to the relationship between 'getting' Canadian citizenship, and 'losing' a part of herself in return.

Additionally, I read the 'I guess' which punctuates Geneva's sentence as reflective of feelings of ambivalence about using or adopting 'Canadian' as a marker of identity, particularly

with regards to the notion that the passport is ‘paper.’ Geneva follows this up with a reflection on her own self-identification vis-à-vis citizenship and the passport, saying,

“I don't really consider myself Canadian, other than, you know, legal status or whatever.”

In probing the feeling of shame that Geneva has expressed regarding this loss, I note that “[e]xamining the emotional logics of citizenship helps interrogate the substance of social relations and structures instead of reifying them” (Ho 2009, p. 789). The shame that she feels over losing Filipino citizenship and becoming Canadian is, as she says, connected to her feeling that she is ‘losing’ a part of herself which has been an important aspect of her identity, even though she ultimately concludes that ‘it’s just citizenship, I guess.’ Yet, this feeling of shame that is connected to the loss of legal identity is of note, because the Philippines and Canada both allow for dual citizenship for their citizens, and these are both avenues of legal belonging which Geneva is aware of. While procedures that lead to permanent residency and citizenship have been accessed or will be accessed by the interviewees — processes which have “facilitated the formal integration of immigrants into the national polity” (Bauder 2014, p. 12) — there are still moments of contention between what they perceive to be their Filipino identities and their Canadian identities.

The formation of new forms of attachment and identity is itself a multi-generational process for diaspora groups, and as Hazel and Geneva’s experiences illustrate, steeped in a variety of emotions. Hazel’s thoughts regarding what it means to ‘become’ Canadian is that it is an acquired identity which she can then layer on top of her being Filipino: to become Canadian in the ‘paper’ sense is an identity that she attributes with a temporariness, because paper burns, and layers can be removed, or legal national identities not recognised, as she notes throughout our conversation. Geneva and Hazel’s conceptions of ‘paper’ identities as racialised women illustrate that as a technology of administrative identity, while “[t]his official paper not only conveys the facts of citizenship but also the evidence that appropriate officials were involved in the production and verification of these facts” (Robertson 2014, p. 71), it does not denote a thick attachment to the nation.

II. B. The Diasporic Filipino Household

After exploring the changing terrains of the relationships between parents and their children, and between siblings — how migration from the home of origin and the integration into the new home terraforms these relations — I then sought to examine the household. That

is, I asked questions about the geographic and cultural markers of identity that comprised or defined a Filipino household in the diaspora, according to those who inhabit them.

Below, I highlight the answers of six interviewees. The first three are Joshua, Greg, and Hazel, who came to Canada as adults. The latter three, Teresa and Nina, and Joy, all came to Canada as children or as youth migrants with their parents. I have chosen to structure this section along this spectrum to illustrate the different ways in which first generation migrants and their 1.5 or second generation counterparts imagine or define what the ‘Filipino’ household looks like.

Joshua and Greg are romantic partners who live together in an apartment-style unit which is located in a home that has been subdivided into several living spaces. The other tenants are Filipino, as are the landlords, who also live in one of the units. Hazel, meanwhile, lives in an apartment complex with her partner, who is also Filipino, and at the time of the interviews, her mother, *Tita* Margaret was staying with them while she visited. I mention these physical spaces, the house subdivided into apartment-style units and the apartment complex, to highlight the differences in the way that Joshua and Greg think of the milieu of their Filipino household in contrast to how Hazel does so. Meanwhile, Geneva and Melissa are sisters who live together as roommates, while Joy lives by herself. Teresa lives with her family in Winnipeg, while Nina cohabits with her partner, who is also Filipino, in Ottawa. I do not include the physical geographies of the spaces which Geneva, Melissa, Joy, Teresa, and Nina occupy, as their definitions of what makes their households Filipino — or not at all — did not extend beyond the interiors of their homes.

Newcomers Joshua and Greg characterise their household as Filipino primarily through the notion of proximity: that is, they live in a Filipino home because they themselves are Filipino, the house they rent is owned by Filipino landlords, the tenants in the other units are also Filipino. In addition to this, within their own household, they have made the choice to consistently use Filipino material culture, which is visible in their choice of everyday household items as well as in the items and food that can be found in their kitchen. Joshua explains,

“Technically speaking, all of the things, all of the food that we are eating, all of the *ginagamit naming mga bagay for pagluluto* and all, it’s [a] very Filipino thing. *Meron pa nga kaming walis tambo, from Baguio.*”

“Technically speaking, all of the things, all of the food that we are eating, all of the items that we use for cooking and all, it’s [a] very Filipino thing. We even have a *walis tambo*⁶¹, from Baguio.”

The reference not only to food but also other household items — specifically naming a broom from Baguio — indicates that for Joshua and Greg, having access to these items as artefacts of everyday use contribute towards maintaining their Filipino cultural identity. Lipman writes that “home becomes a place of hidden things, or a place to hide things — to store as much as to display — a form of archive” (2020, p. 10); in this sense, Joshua and Greg’s home is an archive of their past lives in the Philippines through their use of identifiably-Filipino objects, and their consumption of Filipino food. This is an archive that, for them, is housed in a physical location that they consider to be Filipino, even as they reside in Canada, through their proximity to other Filipinos. Home is understood here as that which includes “transportable socio-cultural practices and commodities that migrants hinge upon in maintaining connections with ‘home’” (Belford and Lahiri-Roy 2019, p. 64)

Hazel defines her Filipino household in a similar way to Joshua and Greg; by this I mean that there is a focus on the Filipino identity of the occupants of the home, as well as in the cultural milieu of her home. She answers my question of whether she keeps a Filipino household with enthusiasm:

“I do! *Bakit? So sa kaso ko*, for me, because I live here in Canada *tapos ang partner ko is Filipino*. Like it just kind of makes sense *na parang...* in between conversations *like kapag nagka-family kami na parang* we want to make sure *na marunong siyang mag-Tagalog*, like even just that consideration is like *parang ang, yun ang call ko na maging Filipino household kami*. Like we’re not going to be just like an immigrant family in general, but having those kinds of culture embedded *kahit sa mga anak namin na dito lalaki. So yun yung Filipino family.*”

“I do! Why? So in my case, for me, because I live here in Canada, and my partner is Filipino. Like it just kind of makes sense that... in between conversations like when we have a family, we want to make sure that they (their future children) know how to speak Tagalog, like even just that consideration is like, that’s my call that we are a Filipino household. Like we’re not going to be just like an immigrant family in general, but having those kinds of culture embedded even in our children who will grow up here. So that is the Filipino family.”

⁶¹ A *walis tambo* is a long hand-held broom from the Philippines with soft bristles made of grass, often used in an indoor setting. from the City of Baguio in the Philippines are brooms that are considered to be of very high quality — in Ontario they can sometimes be found in Chinese supermarkets, and more recently, in Filipino markets like Seafood City — and it is important to Greg and Alex that a cleaning implement they use daily is from home. It is not merely an object that is used to clean their living space; rather, the *walis tambo* is a cultural object, a reminder of the distant home in their own home in Canada.

Significantly, Hazel includes time and temporality in her personal definition of what it is which makes her household identifiably Filipino: the plans that she and her partner are making in the present in order to ensure that their future child or children will be raised in a Filipino household. For Hazel, being Filipino — and thus keeping a Filipino household — is not an experience that is limited to the singularity of her own lifetime. Rather, as a first generation immigrant, Hazel is planning to ensure that when she has children, they will continue to have access to their heritage cultures and language, despite growing up in Canada and being immersed in Canadian culture. It is this intent to pass down cultural generational knowledge that, for her, ensures that her household is Filipino. Like migrant acculturation into Canada's milieu, her Filipino identity, when examined from the lens of parental choices, is multi-generational. Generational time, as she is extrapolating here, is a hope that her descendants will continue to value what she believes is important: the continuing access to Filipino identity, whilst still being raised in a Canadian context.

Joy, meanwhile, has a very different answer in comparison to Hazel's certainty that she keeps a Filipino household: Joy said that while she and her younger brother grew up in a household that she would classify as Filipino, she herself does not keep one. She explains,

“I don't think so. I was definitely raised in a Filipino household, for sure. Do I run a Filipino household? The household of me? No, I don't think so. I think there are parts of my household that are Filipino, and I think there's also parts of it that are very Canadian, like, I feel like Filipino households [are] very open. There was actually a reel (on Instagram) that talked about this where it's like the *báhay kúbo*,⁶² is like open concept, because the one room is everything, and you share that space. But I could never imagine myself constantly sharing space with people, and that's just me as a person, like I need time for myself, and I need to have my own space.”

Joy refers to a type of vernacular architecture in the Philippines to support the metaphor that she is using: the *báhay kúbo* as a shared space for a family. In her answer, Joy reflects on the ways in which she defines the notion of Filipino identity. In saying that her household (‘the household of me’) needs to be singular rather than accessible to other members of a family, her answer is grounded in the dichotomy of the community-oriented life which is ostensibly Filipino, in comparison to the individualistic approach which is more ‘Western,’ or ‘Canadian.’ Defining a Filipino household as ‘constantly sharing space with people,’ which is antithetical

⁶² A *báhay kúbo*, is a rural house common in the farmlands of the Philippines. Described by Cabalfin as an example of “vernacular architecture” (2020), these types of houses are raised on stilts and often have an open-concept layout. Traditionally, *báhay kúbo* can be lifted using the stilts, and relocated with a group of people in a process known as *bayanihan* (literal translation: group effort).

to her own need for personal time and space, Joy defines her individualism and need for personal time and space as ‘Canadian.’

However, for both Teresa and Nina, this dichotomy between Filipino/communitarian and Canadian/individualistic is not as clear-cut as it seems to be for Joy. For the cousins, the making of their Filipino identities is a process that is inextricable from how their Canadian identities have been shaped; in both their individual and their shared interviews, they presented these hyphenated identities as parallel and joined, and not at all exclusionary. During their shared interview, where they were together in the same room but we were virtually on Zoom, I asked if they felt that they had been raised in a Filipino household. Teresa immediately answered, “Yes and no.” She then went on to explain that her parents,

“Weren't too obsessed with making sure that everything, every part of my learning and representation came from a Filipino point of view especially... we always had family meetings where we talk about ideas and perspectives, because they understood that, like raising me here is different from raising me in the Philippines.”

Offering a response to Teresa’s observation about the way that her family balanced being Filipino with being in Canada, Nina, for her own immediate family, clarifies:

“At first when you asked that question, I thought, ‘Oh, yeah, absolutely.’ But then after further reflection, I'm thinking, you know what, my family in the same way that Teresa mentioned, a lot of it for us was about integration in Winnipeg, and so that meant, like, trying different things.”

To raise their children in Filipino households in Winnipeg, Teresa’s parents and Nina’s parents embraced not only the aspects of cultural life that made them Filipino — such as their heritage language of Kapampangan — but also the aspects of their new lives that now anchored them to Canada. Nina explains that to her, having been raised in a Filipino household meant that her immediate and extended family raised the children in a way that preserved specific touchpoints of Filipino culture — like their heritage language of Kapampangan — while also adapting to the mores and conventions of Canada as a new country and Winnipeg as their new hometown.

The traditions which make a family ‘Filipino’ create a household that exists beyond the geography of walls, doors, windows, and roofs; as my interviewees illustrate, the Filipino household in Canada takes on many forms: as a container for cultural artefacts from the homeland, as a place within which future Filipino children will be raised, and as refuge from the responsibilities of the extended family.

III. Making Claims on Canadian Identities

In this section, I turn my attention towards how migrants reconcile their notions of identity and belonging with and to Canada as their new home nation, specifically as members of the Filipino diaspora in Canada. I focus on the narratives of the following eight interviewees: Alexander; Teresa and Nina; Joy and Arthur; *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate; and Francesca. Across the experiences that this specific grouping of interviews shared, the interviewees are representative of a multigenerational narrative of the various ways in which belonging and identity are claimed: the first five interviewees are diaspora-born and -raised, while the latter three are migrants who arrived in Canada as adults.

Alexander was born in Canada, and was primarily raised by a first generation immigrant parent who prioritised her family's assimilation into Canadian society, a decision which influenced how Alexander defines his own identity. Teresa and Nina, meanwhile, were raised in families and communities that encouraged their growth as Canadians while continuing to circulate their Kapampangan and Filipino identities within the family. Joy and Arthur are migrants who came at 14 and 7, and who both experienced difficult moments in the ways in which they were integrated into the Canadian educational system. *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate, meanwhile, strengthen their Canadian identities through a participation in the democratic process, and through their embodied identity in the corporate setting, respectively. Finally, Francesca, who is a recent arrival to the country, has some reservations about her affective Canadian identity, but is fully committed towards legal notions of belonging and will be applying for her permanent residency and citizenship at the point which she becomes eligible.

For Alexander, a key experience of his childhood and youth as a young Filipino born in Canada was growing up in a household that prioritised becoming Canadian rather than necessarily passing down and passing on the family's Filipino and Bisaya identity. Alexander explains that this aspect of his childhood was his mother's response to societal expectations of migrant assimilation into Canadian culture, that,

“There was quite a good pressure for us to assimilate. So from the get-go, we were always quite separate from our culture. There weren't many Filipino families around. And even then, when we did meet them, those kids were better integrated with Filipino culture. And then my brother and I were more so at the fringe, like, ooh, the performative, like they can dance

*tinikling*⁶³ and stuff, but not actually, like, know the food or the life or the language, to really integrate (into Filipino culture).”

He describes his childhood as existing at the peripheries of the type of Filipino cultural identities that were made available to him, with regards to being Filipino. Alexander observes that when faced with the pressure to assimilate, a decision was made to prioritise Canadian social norms and practices, and a simultaneous deprioritisation of ensuring that he and his brother had access to Filipino culture. He compares his more Canadian-inflected upbringing to the other Filipino families that his family was in contact with, that ‘those kids were better integrated with Filipino culture,’ while he and his older brother were ‘at the fringe.’ While he and his brother participated in cultural dances, he describes the act as ‘performative,’ rather than a form of cultural immersion into their Filipino heritage. In what I read as an expression of resentment, here Alexander describes his knowledge of Filipino culture as a child and into his youth as lacking.

In contrast to Alexander, Teresa and Nina were raised in a way that prioritised both their Kapampangan heritage and their new Canadian identities. During our conversation, I posed a question to both of them regarding what they thought about the concepts of assimilation and integration. I was curious to see how two young women who had been raised by first generation immigrant parents in such an integrative way would engage with this question, this lived difference between the two concepts. Teresa described the difference between assimilation and integration using the language of emotions, that,

“I think assimilation comes out of fear, whereas integration comes out of, like, curiosity.”

Here, Teresa explicitly identifies integration and assimilation as social processes, and connects them with associated emotional responses: that the person who chooses or conforms towards either assimilation or integration is making these decisions emotionally. Responding to Teresa’s answer, Nina explains,

“I think integration is a way for us to keep the things that we have been doing but adding on top of that. It’s not removing one for the other, but rather complementing... We’re not taking away any traditions, but we’re just adding new ones.”

⁶³ The International Encyclopedia of Dance defines *tinikling* as a mimetic bird dance, one which “imitates the movements of the *tikling* birds as they walk and prance in the forest and ricefield” (eds Cohen and Dance Perspective Foundation 2005)

Coming from a family who have become community builders in the Filipino community in Winnipeg, Nina further notes that for them, and their family,

“Building a community is integration.”

To integrate as Canadians into Canadian society, in their family, was to create a community that allowed access to both Filipino and Canadian identities not just to exist, but to flourish — in their specific case, it is this process that has allowed their regional identities of being Kapampangan to continue well into their adulthood.

Joy and Arthur, who came as children who were young enough to enter the Canadian educational system, but old enough that their Filipino identities were already taking shape, had a different experience to either Alexander or Teresa and Nina. When I asked Joy about her experience being a young migrant of fourteen, she described the immediacy of her arrival through moments of trauma that still reverberate in her life as a young woman in her late twenties. Joy experienced being forced into behaving according to broader societal expectations of how young migrants should act, especially within the confines of the school environment. These were expectations which came not only from her new environment — Canada, as she was broadly experiencing it — but also from her Canadian classmates:

“I gave up a name, you know, and you give up certain things, like your history, like learning about your history, or at least have to put in the effort to learn all that history, because it's not given to you on a plate anymore. And it's also hiding things that feel very natural to me, like I remember I would have to ask if it was okay for me to eat with my hands or something like that... Like, I find myself having to police myself a bit at work, because it's like, I don't want to be perceived as this uneducated person, because that's what white people think all the time it's like, ‘Oh, this person has an accent. Oh, clearly they're not smart’.”

For Joy, the question of her traumatic assimilation is answered through examples of her changing her accustomed-to behaviours that were within the norms of Philippine culture, being afraid of having her accent perceived as ‘not smart,’ and reflecting on the Anglicisation of her given name. Accent-related anxieties such as the one that Joy discusses here are “not just rooted in the fear of negative evaluations (FNE) but also can be influenced by concerns about ethnic prejudice and the navigation of identity” (Xue and Noels 2025, p. 233). Despite the multicultural nature of present-day Canada, certain accents are still associated with negative traits, such as a lack of training or even of intelligence.

Upon entering the school system, she found out that her Canadian classmates could not pronounce her name in the way that it should be pronounced. Joy ultimately adopted a shortened version of her name with an Anglicised pronunciation, which is the version of her name she continues to use to this day at her workplace. Pennesi notes that “adopting an English name or a ‘Canadianised’ version of one’s name is a strategic move to increase the chances of securing employment” or in the case of Joy, “of ‘fitting in’ more generally” (2016, p. 48). As a racialised woman working in a corporate environment in Canada, Joy’s sense of what behaviours she has to hide in order to assimilate well are specifically those behaviours that additionally mark her as Other, as not-Canadian. During our conversations, Joy notes that despite the adaptations that she has made to her name and her behaviours, she still questions whether her assimilation into Canadian culture is an ongoing process. She says,

“I almost see Canadian as the environment, but me, as a person, is the Filipino. Yeah, I’m like, navigating a Canadian environment as a Filipino. And so I wonder if a part of that is knowing that I have to still assimilate.”

Many years after her arrival, Joy’s notion of her own Canadian identity is one that is marked by an understanding of herself as moving through a milieu that is Canadian, in the body of a person who is Filipino, and therefore being hyper-aware of this difference.

In contrast, her brother Arthur lays a strong claim to his own Canadian identity. As he tells it,

“You know, despite me still technically being by blood, Filipino, I still identify myself as a Filipino Canadian. I will always say that, because first off, I spent majority of my life here, you know, and also the fact that we, at least my parents spent... they spent a good amount of years for us to get our citizenship. I think that it does a bit of a disservice to not only my parents, but also, you know, to the country in itself that I’m basically living in, saying that, I’m just Filipino... I would more say that I’m Filipino Canadian. I’m a Filipino who also just also lives in Canada, right?”

Arthur anchors his own Canadian identity on two aspects of his life: the first is the length of time that he has been residing in Canada (“I spent majority of my life here”), and the second is to honour the sacrifices that his parents made in order to finally be able to get Canadian citizenship. He uses the language of ‘disservice’ to denote that it would be an injustice to the labour that his parents performed if he himself did not identify as Canadian. However, Arthur also nuances his observations with an acknowledgement that that he is, ‘by blood, Filipino,’ a sentiment which reminds me of Jack’s comment, made in the context of not being able to speak his heritage languages, that at least he ‘looks Filipino.’ This observation that Arthur makes is evocative, too, of other understandings of identity expressed in the

interviews, specifically Greg's notion of national identity as 'by blood' alongside Hazel's description of it as 'in my veins.'

Reminiscent of his older sister Joy's definition of herself as a Filipino who exists in the environment of Canada, Arthur anchors his Canadian identity — and more broadly, his family's — in the struggles of the immediate past and the present, and in doing so he situates himself and his family firmly in the country of their now-citizenship. In Arthur's example, we see the effects of time on belonging and identity, wherein time "is also inextricably implicated in the bureaucracy and administration of how the state manages and controls migration by deciding when and which immigration status to give to people" (Hughes 2022, p. 194). These are processes which, of course, involve the children of migrants.

Unlike Arthur's claim to identity, which comes through the avenues of parental sacrifice and the length of time that he has been residing in Canada, *Tita* Kate — married to *Tito* Paul — observes that part of the reason why she has come to take on her own Canadian identity is because of work. As a Filipina woman working in the Ottawa branch of the company which employs her, she has inadvertently become a representative of Canada and Canadian values when interfacing with international clients or representatives. She says,

"So sometimes *nga, minsan*, you know, when you hire our HR from Canada. *So ako yung lalabas*. Sometimes they expect white, but of course it's diverse *na, 'diba?* I have to speak (about), 'Oh, what is it like? What's Canada like? What is also, what is it, how are the Canadians?' *Parang* because of that, for about 10 years now practicing HR here, *parang na-inculcate na sa'kin yan na*, I'm representing Canada already, so *parang naging* half-Canadian *ako*, I would say *ha*, because of my work."

"Sometimes, you know, when you hire our HR from Canada. And I'm the one that comes out. Sometimes they expect white, but of course it's already diverse, right? I have to speak (about), 'Oh, what is it like? What's Canada like? What is also, what is it, how are the Canadians?' Because of that, for about 10 years now practicing HR here, it seems inculcated in me that I'm representing Canada already, so it's like I've become half-Canadian, I would say, because of my work."

For *Tita* Kate, life as a Canadian of Filipino descent working in a corporate environment means that she has become a stand-in, a representative, not only for her Filipino identity, but also for the diversity and multiculturalism that Canada is known for in the business world. While discussing that she has become a representative of Canada's multicultural values because of her embodied identities, *Tita* Kate reflects on the fact that her life experiences in Canada have allowed her to,

“[a]ppreciate the differences in culture, in backgrounds, in religion, the way I understood people, you know, the diverse cultures, more.”

Tita Kate’s observation regarding the diversity of ‘cultures’ is reflective of how deeply-embedded the language of culture is in Canada, wherein the primary way in which Canadians encounter each other is couched in the language of ‘culture.’ Migration, as her experience demonstrates, is a process that “enable[s] individuals to come into contact with other nationalities and cultures, thereby altering perceptions of self and ‘other’,” (Ho 2009, p. 789) leading to changing notions of self identity. Still, *Tita Kate* caveats her own observations regarding ‘Canadian’ identity by saying that she has become, in her own words, ‘half-Canadian,’ leaving room in her own self-identification for how she personally understands the interplay between her Canadian and Filipino identities.

Tito Paul’s relationship with his Canadian identity similarly begins with an attachment understood through a legal perspective. Like *Francesca*, he observes the benefits of having a powerful passport — that it is now easier to travel internationally because of the global strength of this legal document — but he concludes with a declaration of his internal and civic commitment to his new home country. *Tito Paul* observes that his feelings changed from a paper affiliation to an affective legal notion of belonging around five years after they arrived, and when they had settled into their lives in Canada. He says,

“After the fifth year, I think that that was the zone that it changed, really, that I need to be contributing as a Canadian, not as a Filipino. So I owe it now to this, to my new country.”

Tito Paul’s use of the word ‘owe’ in this instance is not dissimilar to *Arthur*’s comment that to not acknowledge his Canadian identity would be a ‘disservice’ to his parents and his now-home country. Yet later in the focus group conversation with *Tita Kate* and *Tita Rosa*, *Tito Paul* made a comment regarding Philippine colonial mentality (David 2014) that I want to position alongside this sentiment. *Tito Paul* said,

“So remember that, Dani, that colonial thinking that, ‘Hey, we got our new master here, and they’re feeding us, they’re giving us,’ but no, we’re working. We’re also giving our fair share.”

Rather than foregrounding a discourse of gratitude towards the new home state, *Tito Paul*’s call is instead is for civic participation from the Filipino diaspora, a democratic participation that attempts to push against the practices of an inherited colonial mentality from the Philippines. Here, *Tito Paul*’s response is indicative of the fact that participation in the civic responsibility of citizenship, or “[t]he articulation of claims for political and social recognition

is integral to being emotionally involved as a citizen, thus bolstering a sense of ownership or belonging” (Ho 2009, p. 801). The relationship between the migrant and the new home state, in this conception of membership, is not one that necessitates the performance of gratitude from the migrant, but rather, is a co-beneficial dialogue that recognises the benefits provided by both parties. It is a process that is mutually accommodative which would, according to Kunst et al, “requires immigrants’ willingness to integrate and majority members’ active work toward achieving a society where all cultural groups are equally integrated” (2015, p. 1438).

Tito Paul’s words therefore caution against thinking that the benefits of ‘being in Canada’ only flow one way — from the state — because migrants are also persons who are contributing to Canadian economies and more broadly, to Canadian society. Gratitude is not expected or offered in Paul’s sentiment: rather, it is a true dialogue between the citizen and the nation-state. Now a Canadian citizen, *Tito* Paul expresses his frustration at the Filipino diaspora, and what he perceives as their lack of participation in the civil process. *Tito* Paul says,

“I care more about this country. I really want people to participate in — the Filipinos especially — I want people to participate in the, you know, regardless what party you are and what thoughts you have. But it’s important for us to participate in our social and political life and that’s... I feel bad that we don’t take enough time to really discern and know what’s good for us. So, there’s always that assumption that Canada will always be a nice country, but no, because we have to participate. You have to contribute, and know really what’s best for us.

The problem is, for me, is that we’re not participating enough or knowing enough.”

Tito Paul’s emphasis on participation regardless of party politics indicate that his desire is for Filipinos to be participatory in the machineries of democracy, that ‘we have to participate’ in order to ensure that Canada remains a ‘nice’ country. He observes that Canada as a country is only ‘nice’ insofar as Canadians have collectively defined it as such in the contemporary moment, and as migrants of Canadian descent, to not participate in this ongoing co-creation of the Canadian national identity is to fail to uphold the democratic ideals that make Canada the country that it is. Key to ‘becoming’ Canadian as Filipinos therefore, is consistent civic participation.

Still, other interviewees have a relationship with their Canadian national identity which is mediated by the passport. Francesca — who came to Canada as an adult and had come of age in the Philippines before leaving the country — comes to her Filipino identity from a more values-based rather than legal status orientation, while in turn coming to her Canadian identity primarily from a perspective that is focused on the legal status that citizenship would afford

her and her family. Despite her currently-thin attachment to Canadian identity, Francesca, however, is willing to commit to the process of applying for PR, and eventually, for Canadian citizenship. She describes the way that the Atlantic Immigration Program works as,

“‘You work here, you stay here, you bring your family.’ *Parang, wala nang uwian to. Saka ano yun e, work permit ang application mo, sabay mo ng, after, parang within thirty days, kailangan mag-apply ka ng PR. Yun yung pinaka, kumbaga naka-rule. Hindi pwedeng naka-work permit lang, kailangan PR. Ibig sabihin, ganun ka-ano yung immigration na mag-stay ka, sa New Brunswick. Pero hindi naman required na forever ka na dito, unlike sa Provincial Nominee.*”

“‘You work here, stay here, you bring your family.’ It’s like, there’s no coming home anymore. And it’s that, you apply for a work permit, and then within thirty days, you must apply for PR. That is the biggest rule. You can’t just be on a work permit, it has to be PR. What that means is, that’s how (intent) immigration is that you stay in New Brunswick. But you aren’t required to stay here forever, unlike the Provincial Nominee.”

In the way Francesca describes the process of immigration, it is implied as a given that she will take the next legal steps towards becoming Canadian. Francesca illustrates the commitment that coming to Canada through the Atlantic Immigration Program entails: that a migrant who decides to enter through this pathway is not just coming to Canada for a brief period of work, but rather, is here long-term with the intent of integrating into Canadian society. Despite the emotional complications that characterise how she personally understands the difference between her national identities of Filipino and Canadian, Francesca is dedicated to a legal declaration of allegiance to Canada.

Throughout this section, notions of belonging as shared by the interviewees were made complicated not only by their own internal feelings regarding their migration journeys, but also in the various ways in which they were received by Canadian society. The terrain that diasporas enter can be both welcoming and hostile, depending on the social location which migrant groups and individuals find themselves occupying. Diasporas continuously engage in the work of becoming members of their homes of origin as well as the new home nation: cultural, social, and political practices mark them as both, even though this can become a vexed relationship as well. The cultural, social, and civic participation of diasporas and migrants terraform what the notion of being ‘Canadian’ implies, and the work of becoming — understood in the context of the diaspora as becoming Filipino as much as it is becoming Canadian — is a story of navigating the unfamiliar while also, simultaneously, being the stranger (Ahmed 2000).

Conclusion

In this chapter — which is the last of the triptych devoted to exploring the interviews that I conducted — I traced how the Filipino diaspora in Canada connects to Canada as the new home state, vis-à-vis their relationship with the Philippines as their home of origin. I structured the interviews around questions of different modalities of belonging. Ultimately, these have included identity formations structured around the generational model of proximity to the new home nation, and its allusions towards not just legal and affective proximities, but also the corresponding distance; the association of Canadian identity with the impermanence of ‘paper’ passports; and the everyday lived interpretations of Canadian identity framed as claims-making through various processes of democratic participation, including applications to permanent residency and citizenship.

The terraformations of belonging that I track across the experiences of my interviewees are mediated by the ways in which migrants are encountered by Canada as a nation-state, and vice versa. That is, their relationship with Canada is shaped by Canada’s relationship with them; while there is a commitment to legal status through citizenship, there is also an acknowledgement that affectively, it is not only national membership that makes a person ‘Canadian.’ What is being terraformed in these instances, I argue, is the way that migrants understand their own relationship to nation; whether as permanent residents or would-be citizens in a foreign country, or as citizens who have now accessed legal membership. Belonging *to* a nation, in the legal-affective sense, is a transformation of identity and attachment that occurs slowly over time.

A Conclusion to the Triptych

These last three chapters of the triptych have been devoted towards a close examination of the interviews that I conducted for this research project; throughout the conversations that I had with my interlocutors, emotions were how they contextualised many of the relations that they saw themselves in, from parenthood and siblinghood, to being citizens and residents, to being members of chosen families and of the Filipino community broadly understood. Migration, as an intergenerational process of movement and settlement, “invariably affects emotions as both (corporeally) embodied *and* (societally) embedded” (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015, p. 75, emphasis in original). The emotions that individual migrants feel regarding their migration journeys are mediated not only through their own bodies, but also through the communities that they find themselves in — or the absence of such a community, in some cases. To ground an analyses of familial interviews regarding migration in emotion is to ensure that the Filipino immigrant is not just presented or examined as a labouring body, but a fully-feeling human and as a participant in society. To engage with the emotionality of the migration process is to acknowledge that the statistics and recorded experiences of what happens during migrations and settlement happen to human beings existing in relation — to their families, to nation-states, and even towards the idea of being Filipino or becoming Canadian. The emotions that were shared throughout the interviews were not only positive — what my interviewees communicated was a vast array of feelings that ranged from hope and resentment to anger and ambivalence. The stories of migration that they shared, and therefore, the internal terraformations of belonging that I traced throughout these interviewees, are immersed in emotions. As I have demonstrated in this triptych, relationality is vital to the lives of the Filipino diaspora in Canada; whether in the multidirectional circulation of care and belonging in kin and chosen families, or in the ways in which migrants develop feelings of being in relation with their new home nation, it is acts of attachment and ongoing connectivity that instigate positive terraformations of diasporic and national belonging.

I approached these narratives with an eye towards the effects of gender and gendered identities on the relationalities that exist between individual, family, diaspora, and nation. Due to an unexpected make-up of the folks who had agreed to speak to me about their experiences, many (but not all) of the stories that were shared are from queer and female members of the Filipino community in Canada. I draw these observations together not to imply that emotions are female or queer in their origins; rather, I offer them here as a matter of fact. While my own embodiment as a cis Filipino woman may be seen as a point of commonality between myself

and female interviewees, which may make interviewees perhaps more amenable to sharing aspects of migration that are emotional, I also note that similarly-emotional conversations were also shared with me from male respondents.

Chapter Four, which dealt with the ways in which the homeland is brought over into the new home town, examines politics, sociocultural values, and aspects of heritage like language and culinary traditions. As such, emotions and gender — as separate threads, but also entangled together in the lives of the interviewees — were quite visible. For example, it emerged that political dissatisfaction and anger with homeland politics were one of the reasons that migrants considered departing the Philippines. Francesca mentioned corruption in the Philippines on a general note, but *Tito* Paul and *Tita* Kate, Joshua and Greg, and Hazel all explicitly mentioned presidents (Estrada and Marcos Jr., respectively) as an impetus for outmigration. Hazel goes a step beyond migration and describes her participating in the Canadian citizenship regime vis-à-vis her refusal to engage in dual citizenship for the Philippines as a revocation of the home of origin's access to her political personhood.

As well, Joshua and Greg, who had come of age in the Philippines and migrated as adults, discuss the experiences of the LGBTQ21S+ community in the homeland from a rights-based perspective, highlighting the matrix of politics and conservative heteropatriarchal culture in the fact that the SOGIE Bill has not yet been passed. Teresa says that her identity was not welcomed and not openly discussed by her immediate and extended family, describing her gayness as an aspect of her identity that her parents “did not want to push.” Alexander similarly describes his queer identity as not being openly talked about, but rather, is being “tiptoed” around; he notes that his family means this to be a moment of protection for him, but I also read this as a moment wherein care can become harm within the space of the family. Daisy, a young queer woman, situates her queer identity against the heteropatriarchy of the Philippines and frames it as a moment of resistance, that she is embracing her identity as revolutionary, one that survives “despite all the colonisation and imperialism.” Finally, Tom's identity as a trans man is one that his mother refuses to engage with, an unwillingness that he attributes to his not speaking a shared heritage language well enough to explain the importance of his queer identity. Teresa, Alexander, Daisy, and Tom are all Filipino youth who are now in their young adulthood, all of whom were raised by first generation immigrant parents.

In this same chapter, emotions also circulated within the family units that I interviewed, specifically around the question of Philippine Heritage Languages. In this section, it was

evident that the choices that parents made with regards to language retention or the focus on English had effects not only on the immediate upbringing of their children, but onwards into adulthood as well. Language learning, and specifically English language learning, was also mentioned by two unrelated interviewees — Joy and Daisy — who had been raised in the Philippines from the perspective of a skill they had been trained in prior to their departure, a language that they learned not only because it was one of the country's official languages, but specifically for the possibility of future migration. Joy was sent to a school that specialised in English training, and had access to cable TV and therefore, to American English language shows; Daisy, meanwhile, specifically mentions that she honed her English language skills also through cable TV. Joy feels some trepidation about this trajectory for herself, describing that it felt as though she were groomed to leave, while Daisy highlights what she sees as the porous boundaries of what it means to be raised within the Philippines but exposed to American culture through media from an early age. Geneva, who was also raised in the Philippines and came to Canada in her teens, discussed what she saw as a “weird” aspect of Filipino culture — that there are Filipinos who speak English to the exclusion of their heritage languages, and how this happens often with “celebrity” children. Thus, depending on whether a family is intending to stay in the Philippines or migrate elsewhere, English as social capital is utilised quite differently.

Yet, for three secondborn sons, the lack and/or loss of a Philippine language has led to experiences of feeling excluded from their co-ethnics, their culture, or even within their own immediate and extended families. Jack has noted that perhaps he wants to learn Tagalog to feel a stronger sense of belonging within the Filipino community and to be able to speak to his own grandparents. Alexander, meanwhile, explains that his cultural detachment has effectively become a familial detachment. In contrast to both Jack and Alexander, Arthur came to Canada speaking his heritage language of Bisaya, but his education in the Canadian school system has meant that he lost his language fluency, and experience which he describes as having lost the ability to speak.

Food as culinary object and cultural artefact also carried emotions when it came to discussions regarding Filipino identity. Tom, for example, uses Jollibee as an example for having had an initial shallow introduction into his Filipino identity, but that he used it as a stepping stone. Alexander uses the phrase “lola's pansit,” or “grandma's pansit,” as a shorthand for identity, telling his classmates that this was good enough to start a conversation around Filipino identity. For Tom and Alexander, using food as a shorthand created opportunities for

finding and having conversations with like-minded young Filipinos in Canada. Hazel and *Tita* Margaret, on the other hand, invited me to their home for our final shared interview and made *sinigang* for me; the emotions that were shared regarding this meal ranged from a homesickness for regional specificity in food, to questions regarding access to Filipino food in Canada.

Chapter Five turns its attention towards the space that is the family, and the broader networks that exist beyond the Western normative of the nuclear family. Gender was, unsurprisingly, a major theme in this chapter; the section that speaks about the role of parents was comprised of the stories of four mothers and one father. Tita Lisa, who was the left-behind wife of an OFW husband, discussed how the separation from her husband, while empowering, was also lonely, as the care that she would have been receiving from her spouse was no longer available. Francesca, Tita Lisa's daughter, made the choice to migrate with her entire family; she was the one who had instigated the process of migration, as her husband was reluctant to leave the Philippines. The effects of gender, too were evident in the conversations regarding parentification in the family unit. Siblings Geneva and Melissa — second and third in their sibling group of four — mention that their roles as *ates* were markedly different from what was expected of their *kuya*, the eldest brother. Their parents were reluctant to let them move out, which the sisters attributed in part to the ways that they contributed to the home through domestic work; their brother, who was not expected to participate in the same way, was allowed to move out before they were. Another point wherein gender and emotions emerged was in the stories that Tom shared; as a *kuya* who used to be an *ate*, Tom's notions of transmasculinities, including in how he has "raised" his younger brother Jack, are informed by his socialisation as a girl, his journey regarding masculinity, and the ways in which his queerness has led to rejection or revocation by some members of his immediate and extended family.

As my interviewees have shared, relationships with extended families are often complex and defined by vexed negotiations. Joy, for instance, is judged harshly by her family members for not participating in the remittance cycle the same way that her mother does and continues to do so. Daisy's mother attempts to tell her to tone down her political opinions in her professional life, for the sake of not being criticised by the extended family. However, chosen families can also be rewarding relationships, particularly for young queer Filipinos, as Daisy and Alexander show. These positive emotions emerge not only in the way that they describe their relationship to each other, but also their relationship to the other people that they consider to be members of their chosen family.

In Chapter Six, which is where I explore the ways in which the terraformation of national identities are held in tension between being Filipino and being Canadian, emotion was particularly evident. In the conversation regarding generational proximities, for instance, Nina and Daisy revealed that they both use the identifier of 1.5, but in different ways. For Daisy, she associates it with her childhood in General Santos, and how important those years were to her life; for Nina, she holds it to mean that her childhood in Winnipeg has allowed her to keep her Filipino identity because of the way that she was raised. Meanwhile, Arthur thinks of his generational identifier as a facet of his identity that is anchored in time — he has been residing in Canada for most of his life — as well as in honour of his parents’ sacrifices for them to gain citizenship. He firmly considers himself to be a first generation Canadian. For my interviewees who are more recent arrivals to Canada, there are expressions of ambivalence that surround the identifier of “Canadian,” even if they already have or are committed to pursuing other legal identifiers such as permanent residency, citizenship status, and passports. Geneva, for example, said that she felt guilt about giving up Filipino citizenship, even though pathways for dual citizenship exists. Greg took a pause as he considered what it would mean for him to become Canadian, and so did Francesca, when I asked a similar question. While Hazel did not pause or hesitate, she answered me by asking another question back: “Do I look Canadian?” Migrants’ relations to the idea of national identities — Canadian national identities, in these instances — were not singularly informed by their access to passports, but also how they personally saw themselves as distant to or proximal to a ‘Canadian’ identity.

Ultimately, this triptych of chapters was an exploration of the lives of the Filipino diaspora in Canada. While I began my analysis from the heteronormative unit of the immediate family, beginning at this scale allowed me to explore the ways in which parents imagine migration as a parenting choice, and from there, explore the ways in which parents, siblings, and cousins all experience acculturation differently. Moving outward from the scale of the immediate family, to the extended family, chosen families, and friendships, also allowed me to comparatively examine the ways in which heritage, culture, and values were valued differently across the lives of my interviewees, and how all of these were passed on through moments of relationality between individuals and families.

Chapter Seven: The Fictive, The Factual, and the Canadian Gothic

Introduction

In the preceding chapters, I explored the terraformation of belonging and identity in the Filipino diaspora in Canada from two key perspectives. I first began with an examination of how terraformation occurs at the scale of presidential imagination and global politics through the SONAs, and subsequently, explored these occurrences at the scale of the everyday lives of the individuals and families of the Filipino diaspora, which my interviewees shared through individual and focus group interviews. In this penultimate chapter of my dissertation, I explore the third and final aspect of the terraformation of belongings through a critical reading of fictive works which have been created by members of the Filipino diaspora with regards to the diasporic experience. I close out my analysis of the ongoing terraformation of Filipino diasporic and Canadian national belonging as manifesting in fictive works written by members of the Filipino diaspora in Canada. Specifically, I situate the curated selection of texts as works of Canadian literature and as cultural artefacts which contribute to the imaginaries of diasporic as well as national identity; I will be examining them from the perspective of the Canadian Gothic, which I deploy here as both genre and analytic lens. It is my contention that the cultural artefacts examined here terraform not only the diaspora's notions of belonging and identity, but also that of Canada as a 'nation' in relation to its diasporas.

In this chapter, I first establish the place of Canadian Gothic horror within the landscape of Canadian literature, broadly understood. I clarify how it can be both a genre of literature as well as a useful analytic in examining the selected fictive works; with its insistence on remembering what has been buried and forgotten, and the ways in which it lingers in the liminalities of what has been unsettled in the processes of immigration, Canadian Gothic is generative in contextualising the diasporic spectres that emerge in settler colonial Canada and post-colonial Philippines. Second, I explore the imagery of spectres and hauntings; specifically, I turn towards the role of what has been made invisible and invisibilised in the relationship between diaspora and nation/s. Third, I survey the 'fictive' as a term that is anchored between the spaces of the national and the literary. I argue that the fictive is a way by which diasporas terraform previously-held notions of belonging through identity-formation not only for the diaspora, but also for the nation. Fourth, using the Canadian Gothic as a lens for critical engagement, I closely read three works from the Filipino diaspora in Canada. I begin with Motzie Dapul's *Bulok*, the first episode of the audio drama *Hi, Nay*; followed by Louie Leyson's *Glossary for an Aswang*, a poetic glossary; and finally, *What's Best for the Girls*, a

chapter from Jennilee Austria-Bonifacio's *Reuniting With Strangers*. Fifth and finally, I conclude with the argument that the fictive — such as in the three I explore — can be regarded as a challenge to sedimented mainstream narratives that are espoused by the settler-colonial nation regarding its racialised and minoritised diasporas. Specifically with regards to the Filipino diaspora, these fictive works engage with the spectral figures of the past, and powerfully question the labels which get affixed to groups in part due to the social and economic context of their arrivals and integrations. The fictive works relay often previously-unconsidered narratives regarding not only Filipino migration to Canada, but also about the Philippines as a sending nation: the immigrant *babaylan* in Dapul, the diaspora-born narrator asking to be made a monstrous *aswang*⁶⁴ in Leyson, and the left-behind mother figure in Austria-Bonifacio. It is in this thematic — the haunting enacted by the diaspora on the new home state as it struggles against the label of invisibility imposed upon it through its insistence on remembering aspects of migration that remain undiscussed — that I anchor this penultimate chapter of the dissertation, over a decade after the publication of *Disturbing Invisibility*.

In 2012, the book *Filipinos in Canada: Disturbing Invisibility* was published. Seminal to the emergent field of Filipino Studies in Canada, the contributors and editors examined the various ways by which the Filipino community in Canada experienced being invisible as markers of migrant labour in the Canadian landscape, while simultaneously being made hypervisible through labels that have become sedimented in the Canadian mainstream. These 'sticky' labels — in other words, these Orientalising tropes, in the manner of Said — have been used to define the Filipino diaspora: "victimized nanny, selfless nurse, and problematic gangster youth" (McElhinny et al 2012, p. 5). Further described as "spectral figures," which not only "enable the visibility of Filipina/o lives in Canada within a narrow purview," these labels also "contribute to the misrecognition and alienation" (McElhinny et al 2012, p. 5) of the Filipino diaspora in Canada. Two decades on from the publication of this book, some of these labels remain affixed to the Filipino diaspora. In this chapter, I turn my attention from *Filipinos in Canada* as an academic response to these spectres, and towards the fictive works and cultural artefacts that the Filipino diaspora have produced, which I argue are a terraformation of these sedimented ideas of what the Filipino diaspora is, and where the

⁶⁴ Ramos defines the *aswang* as "most usefully understood as a congeries of beliefs about five types of mythical beings identifiable with certain creatures of the European tradition: (1) the blood-sucking vampire; (2) the self-segmenting viscera sucker; (3) the man-eating weredog; 4) the vindictive or evil-eye witch; (5) the carrion-eating ghoul" (1998, p. xvi). Most popularly referenced is the manananggal or the "self-segmenting viscera sucker," of Leyson's "long coiled tongue."

diaspora's place has been affixed or located in the multicultural mosaic that is Canada. Yet multiculturalism, as Barrett argues in his book about Black Canadian writers, "does not capture the experience of invisible visibility, and of being rendered 'Nothing,' which each of these writers express in their work," and further argues that "multiculturalism, in its many forms, insufficiently addresses race and racism in Canada" (2015, p. 8). It is my goal in this chapter to offer a reading of these fictive works that address the limitations of multiculturalism specifically with regards to the Filipino diaspora in Canada.

The liberal notion of multiculturalism is enshrined in Canadian myth-making, particularly in commonly-used metaphors of integration such as the mosaic and the 'tossed salad,' as well as in the making of new citizens from the citizenship guide to the pageantry of the swearing-in ceremony itself.⁶⁵ I read multiculturalism, as a symbol of Canadian domestic and national identity and politics, as itself being a spectre of a past that insufficiently attempts, as Barrett has observed, to address race and racism and its role in the definition of Canadian nationhood and therefore, the Canadian citizen. Yet, as Halford argues, "one problem with the politics of recognition is that, when enacted by the Canadian state, it has contained, controlled, distorted, and exploited the Other. Ultimately the Canadian national imaginary relies on the construction of an exalted, compassionate self, which inevitably results in a contrasting figure of the Other" (2025, p. 14). This liberal multiculturalism is one which creates a figure of the Other by which to define itself against. Singh notes that this notion of multiculturalism brings to mind the comparisons of the benevolence of Canadian multiculturalism vis-à-vis the assimilationism of the American melting pot, that "if indeed there is 'no official culture' in Canada but only an impartial procedure for dealing equally and fairly with the diverse cultures of Canadians, then, as is commonly asserted, all cultural groups are able to 'keep their culture' in Canada" (2004, p. 477). Multiculturalism in this broad sense is a political manoeuvre which seemingly makes room for the 'multi' in multicultural — that is, the Other that can co-exist alongside what is widely understood or ensconced as 'Canadian' culture. As cultural artefacts that are produced about the diaspora by members of the diaspora, I offer that fictive works such as the ones examined below are a contestation of these symbols of liberal multiculturalism. The histories with which they contend serve to cohere not only what is known about the Filipino diaspora, but also what is known about the Canadian nation-state within which it resides.

⁶⁵ Explored in more detail in Chapter One.

I offer that these works challenge mainstream national identity-formation — that which Cooke describes as “the work of settler colonial national-imaginaries” that “functions to generate a comfortable distance between a historical colonial ‘then’ and a contemporary ‘now’” (2016, p. 237) — through a reintroduction of the narratives of Canadian migration from the perspective of a racialised and minoritised diaspora, accounts which function to re-stitch together the ‘historical colonial’ and the ‘contemporary.’ In making this argument, I hearken to Barrett and his analysis of Black diasporic writers in Canadian literature (2015). He argues (2015, p. 12),

“Thus the lived experience of black diasporic life in Canada provides a narrative framework by which to transform the nation from the uneasy space of the diaspora within. These narratives accomplish what political critique and sociological analysis cannot: a linking of black diasporic and Canadian aesthetics, politics, and identities in a manner that is not a simple unification nor a violent segmentation, but an ongoing transformative practice.”

In this chapter, I explore how fictive works produced by the Filipino diaspora can similarly serve ‘to transform the nation from the uneasy space of the diaspora within’; acknowledging that the relationship between a White settler colonial Canada and its racialised diasporas are haunted, as it were, by spectres of political and visceral violence. Yet, in utilising the notion of haunting to analyse the fictive works in this chapter, I do not make the implication that diasporas are dead or dying. To experience a haunting is “to feel that something is awry— even if one cannot yet name what demands attention” (Bernhardt 2026, p. 189); it is in this unease which is the space where contested terraformations of Canadian national identity can occur.

I. Canadian Gothic Horror as Genre and as Lens

My deployment of the Canadian Gothic as both a genre and analytical lens is informed by its *insistence* on remembering what has been buried; I argue that it is this insistence which makes it an appropriate lens by which to examine these fictive works which explore diasporic identities within the broader sphere of Canadian national identity. To remember in this active way is to instigate the terraformation of previously-established labels; it is a destabilisation of seemingly-disparate identities that have been affixed together for racialised minorities, such as that of ‘Filipino’/‘migrant worker,’ ‘Filipina’/‘nanny,’ or even ‘Filipino youth’/‘gangster.’ The Canadian Gothic as an analytic lens disturbs and unsettles not only the sedimentation of these labels, but also the definition of what ‘Canada’ means as a nation, and therefore, questions that multiculturalism means as a national identity: how do racialised and minoritised groups imagine

the nation that has created the identities of ‘racial’ and ‘minority’ for them, within the context of such a liberal multiculturalism?

Canadian literature as an oeuvre of national literary works spans many genres, and are reflective of the histories of the peoples that now reside together in present-day Canada. Neilson, writing in 2024 about how Canada’s writers and poets have written about care and its institutions in the national context, defines Canadian Literature as a “blend of settler lit, Indigenous lit, and the literatures of various diasporas, though I recognize the tensions inherent in claiming Indigenous writing, for example, under the ostensible sign of nation” (2024, p. 6). Here, Neilson reflects upon the uncomfortable tautness of the concept of ‘nation’ as a container for all that it holds; from settler colonialism to indigenous relations to diasporic configurations of identity, the “idea of Canada is constantly shifting, and these changes are negotiated in — among other places — literature” (Halford 2025, p. 5). Pennee describes national literary culture as “a source of and a response to colonization,” and the importance of the study of the postcolonial is that it is “necessarily a methodological hinge between what is possible the end of a malign cultural nationalism and the beginning of perhaps a more benign globalization” (2004, p. 76). Yet, while “diasporic culture is by definition tied to that which has been lost rather than to its negotiation with the majority culture within which it operates,” (Huyssen 2003, p. 153-154) I offer that these cultural artefacts are in contention with the nation, exploring not that which has been lost, but rather, that which has been buried, as a way to ‘negotiate’ with the hegemony of mainstream Canadian understandings of the national self. Barrett gestures towards a different way of thinking about Canadian ‘national’ fiction with respect to its diasporic writers. Referencing Black Canadian authors Brand, Austin Clarke, and McWatt, he notes that their writing “places nation, diaspora, race, and citizenship into a troubled and transformative exchange. Rather than desire diaspora in place of nation, they render the nation diasporic, articulating the fiction of the nation from its margins in order to imagine different conceptions of national and individual identity and belonging” (2015, p. 12). To highlight the diaspora as a way to complicate the nation compels analyses of identity that terraform what was previously known regarding belonging and identity, particularly in the case of racialised and minoritised diaspora groups.

Goldman, a scholar of Canadian literature, writes that “[i]n Canadian literature, haunting and possession are powerful tropes for highlighting this tension between the desire to face the past and the fear of what skeletons may emerge from the familial and national closets,

if we engage in this uncanny process” (2012, p. 6). Having identified certain sedimented labels and spectres as haunting not only the Filipino diaspora but also the Canadian nation, it is from this place of tension which Goldman gestures towards that I locate my attachments to Canadian Gothic as both genre and analytic, a way to unsettle the past and scrutinize the ghosts which arise. Canadian literature, as a space which constitutes Canadian national identity, is a place where the nation can ‘face the past,’ despite, as Goldman argues, “the fear of what skeletons may emerge from the familial and national closets.” In confronting the settler-colonial histories of the Canadian landscape — which is presented on the domestic and international stage as possessing an almost-apolitical multiculturalism, as I explored in my introductory chapter — the answer to the question of national identity becomes defined by what has ‘always’ been there, by what is visible, and a fear of engaging with what may have been or what has been buried. For Francis, the fraught nature of an imposed identity means that “the traumatic ordeals of nation building continue to haunt both those excluded or dispossessed of the full benefits of national belonging *and* those who are at the very centre of a particularly Canadian hegemony” (2022, p. 5). What emerges upon close examination of ‘nation-building’ has the possibility to delegitimise what was presumed to be ‘natural’ in the political terrain of belonging and identity.

Literary theorists have expanded on specific categorisations of the Gothic as a genre of horror fiction. Punter describes the Gothic novel, traditionally-understood, as having “an emphasis on portraying the terrifying, a common insistence on archaic settings, a prominent use of the supernatural, the presence of highly stereotyped characters and the attempt to deploy and perfect techniques of literary suspense are the most significant” (2013, p. 1). From these hallmarks of the genre, Kulperger describes the movement towards postcolonial feminist Gothic, a subgenre that “seeks to, above all, materialize and familiarize those motifs of trauma and haunting, grounding them in the brutal realities and ongoing legacies of colonization” (2009, p. 98). Howells, in turn, describes the Canadian Gothic as ‘wilderness Gothic,’ and speaking to the importance of the environment to Canadian art and literature, she describes wilderness Gothic as “emphasizing not only location but also dislocation, refiguring the classic tropes of European Gothic in a New World context” (2007, p. 106).

In the Canadian setting, the Gothic has therefore been dislocated from European ‘archaic settings’ to the perceived or experienced hostility of the Canadian wilderness; alongside this movement is the turn towards the experiences of the Indigenous peoples who inhabited the land before the settlers arrived. Carpenter offers the designation of an *Indigenous* Gothic as a genre that “draws from traditions of the genre but also refigures it to cast

colonialism as the true horror” (2017 p. 50). These definitions, characterised by their geographic movement and adaptation to the environment, make perceptible the ways in which the Gothic as a genre is one which casts its attention not only on what is visible at a given moment, but also towards those moments which exist past the point of visibility: the historical and locational context of the hauntings that are being experienced. Canadian Gothic is therefore one way by which Canadian literature has delineated the evergreen questions of its national identity. Sugars and Turcotte describe the evolution of the Gothic into the Canadian Gothic below (2009, p. xvii):

“Initially, it is fair to say, the Gothic emerged as a way of responding to the unfamiliar by demonizing and even fetishizing the ‘unknown’—be it human or landscape. Often this monstrous presence was figured as an Indigenous one—a danger lying just beyond the garrison but not sufficiently removed. Over time, Canadian writers began to appropriate this force, to bend it to a national purpose, and to map the parameters of an identity that might embrace what was resonantly local so that the Gothic became a way to insist on, rather than deny, a colonial history.”

The collective act of creating national imaginaries through politics, the arts, and cultural expressions of shared values and belief systems, culminating in a commonly-held national identity “can help achieve a feeling of coherence and unity in an otherwise diverse body of people” (Galway 2008, p. 173); yet the nation as a technology of organising the residents of the state is as exclusionary as much as it is inclusionary, and to identify who the citizens of a nation are is to also identify who the citizens are *not*. Halford argues that “[m]uch like surveillance, the national imaginary not only simplifies as it sorts, but also shapes identity in complex ways” (2025, p. 5); these identities are often imposed onto racialised and minoritised groups, in the way that ‘sticky’ labels, for example, have emerged and endured for the Filipino diaspora in Canada.

The ways in which Canada imagines itself and its diasporas, certainly in the literary sense, is an act wherein it “surveys its cultural and political imagination and is sponsored by those imaginations (and vice versa)” (Neilson 2024, p. 22). The terraformation of belonging that I explore here is that of Canadian national identity: I posit that that processes of terraformation of belonging in Canada as a multicultural nation that seeks out migrants for particular purposes of nation-building are already occurring, and that in this process of nation-building, certain migrant groups experience what Houdek calls “racial sedimentation,” or “the process through which the material rhetorics deposited in common sense come into formation

and manifest in discourse” (2018, p. 286). Such ‘sticky’ labels for minoritised groups become sedimented into the national *terra*, within which diaspora groups are then situated or placed.

With these histories in mind, I therefore do not begin this analysis from colonial notions of *terra incognita* or *terra nullius*, or the notion that the Filipino diaspora enters a Canada where the *terra* is ‘natural’. Rather, I begin from the perspective that the Canadian *terra* is a space of contestation, negotiation, and co-production between diaspora groups, settler groups, Indigenous peoples, and the nation-state. I engage with multiculturalism as a collectively-shared symbol of national identity, complicatedly rooted in liberal notions of democracy in a bilingual and multicultural Canada. In terms of national myth-making, Canadian multiculturalism, as Barrett notes, “is about the stories Canadians tell themselves about their nation, and this language of Canadian multiculturalism sets out the imaginative terrain from which Canadians narrate their nation from both the centre and the margin” (2015, p. 3). Reading with the Canadian Gothic as a lens, my engagement with the fictive works below seeks to present not only a narrative of the Filipino diaspora as told from the perspective of the diaspora, but also an image of Canada as a nation and as a national identity from that same subaltern perspective. The authors of the Filipino diaspora whose works are featured in this chapter have been able to “lay bare the constructedness of a natural or timeless national identity in their insistence on the relevance of specific historical moments, and their retrieval of repressed cultural memory” (Orton 2012, p. 28). Their works speak against mainstream notions of how the Filipino diaspora is understood in Canada, offering not only a reimagination of the Filipino diaspora, but also of the Canadian nation-state. What Dapul, Leyson, and Austria-Bonifacio bring to the forefront are modes of remembering, which I invoke within the genre of the Canadian Gothic, particularly evident in their careful attention towards modalities of Filipino identities and experiences in Canada that have been repressed, or else are not often spoken about in mainstream conversations of Filipino migration to Canada.

Kulperger notes that “[w]riters in postcolonial states therefore invoke the conventions of the traditional Gothic—that of the uncanny, the spectre, and the ghost—as mnemonic devices in the recovery of regional and national histories and traumas” (2009, p. 101); as the role of literature in the creation of national identity includes the ‘recovery’ of what has been hidden to make sense of the present, what is ‘postcolonial’ is a period of time that is ongoing. For the Filipino diaspora, this is made complex by the fact that the Philippines is a postcolonial/neocolonial nation-state, and they have landed in a country that was defined by

settler-colonialism that is now a ‘multicultural’ country. The ongoing creation of identity on a national scale, therefore, “like the geographical borders of the nation and its regime of citizen rights, remain contested terrain, for outsiders as well as insiders” (Thobani 2007, p. 69). I extend Kulperger’s argument to Filipino writers in Canada; the writers who are in ‘states of postcoloniality,’ such that the *experience* of ‘post’-coloniality continues to impact the lives of migrants, and that these are erstwhile little-known experiences of migration or of integration that then emerge in the fictive works.

II. Ghosts in the Diaspora(s)

As a collective, the Filipino diaspora is not unfamiliar with the affective rituals of ongoing disembodiment that socially reproduce home and maintain kin relationships.⁶⁶ For transnational families who are separated due to the demands of labour and life, “[t]he future is always experienced as a haunting: as a virtuality that already impinges on the present, conditioning expectations and motivating cultural production” (Fisher 2012, p. 15); many families think of the future as a moment in place and time when reunification can occur, while the inhabited present is the necessary gamble of distance and separation in order to fulfill that goal. In the coda to his 2021 book *Filipino Time*, Allan Punzalan Isaac writes about the experience of attending *e-burols*; an adaptation of the Tagalog word *burol*, meaning a funerary wake, *e-burols* are broadcasted real-time viewings of wakes in the Philippines. Adapting to a new world where many Filipinos are abroad, whether as labourers or as residents, the broadcasts are offered as a service by some funerary homes in order to allow relatives from various time zones to pay their respects to the dead and to the mourning family. Such viewings are one-sided: cameras that broadcast the room where the visitation or wake is happening are not often equipped with microphones, and while the attendees can say hi to or wave their hands at the camera, the viewer is unable to participate — a long distance séance that transforms the living viewer into a ghost that haunts a time zone distant from their own. In this chapter, however, the ghost that haunts is not the Filipino immigrant. Rather, the ghosts and spectres

⁶⁶ Throughout the five decades since the establishment of the labour export policy in the 1970s, the rapid development of telecommunications technology particularly in this last decade has allowed swifter modes of communication between migrant workers and their families. What began as letters sent through mail transitioned to prepaid phone cards, and in quick succession moved towards messaging applications like Yahoo!Messenger and AOL with the introduction of the internet. In the contemporary moment, the more widespread access to internet in the Philippines as well as globally have led to easier voice and video calls through platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and FaceTime and the widespread if uneven adoption of internet access. For more context regarding communications and relations within the Filipino diasporas, see: Francisco-Menchavez’s *Labor of Care* (2019), as well as Soriano and Cabalquinto’s *Philippine Digital Cultures* (2022).

are associated with the violence of political timelines and historical memories: moments of lives as Filipino migrants in Canada that Dapul, Leyson, and Austria-Bonifacio have called from invisibility. For a body to breach the terrain where it was buried — for a secret to emerge and become a ghost, and then to enact hauntings as disruptions in a supposedly-established terrain — is for a ghost to become “a crucible for political mediation and historical memory” (Gordon, 2008, p. 18).

In the United States, sociologist Grace M. Cho argues that the lives of the Korean American diaspora is haunted by the Korean War (2008, p. 12):

“If the historical condition of possibility for Korean diaspora is the Forgotten War, the psychic condition is that of enforced forgetting. The acknowledgment of a traumatic past is systematically disavowed by a matrix of silence, the major components of which include the institutions of U.S. global hegemony and social scientific knowledge production, along with the more intimate forces of familial desire and shame. The result for the Korean diaspora in the United States is that one is often an unwitting participant in one’s own erasure.”

Cho describes a system where the intimacies of the family (desire and shame) are intertwined with institutional power (a matrix of silence, global hegemony, knowledge production) and are therefore instrumentalised in order to attain a particular goal: that of forgetting. To have memories erased — or forcefully suppressed — in such a deliberate manner allows for the perpetuation of an institutional matrix of silence. Alongside Cho’s work regarding the Korean diaspora in America, I situate De Léon’s work on the role of the landscape not only as a deterrent for migration, but also as an erasure of the dead (2015). Anthropologist Jason De Léon describes the use of the Sonoran Desert as a hostile landscape to be an intentional part of migrant deterrent, one which integrates the harshness of terrain into policies of border control (2015, p. 3-4):

“The terrible things that this mass of migrating people experience enroute are neither random nor senseless, but rather part of a strategic federal plan that has rarely been publicly illuminated for what it is: a killing machine that simultaneously uses and hides behind the viciousness of the Sonoran Desert.”

Cho’s and De Léon’s works are similar in one sense: that the movement of racialised and minoritised people into a time and space of ‘post’-colonialism are encountered through a deliberate not-knowing, a violent matrix of institutional or geographic landscapes alongside policy choices that kill and have killed racialised peoples, and which, in the contemporary moment, raises unquiet ghosts of racialised diasporas in the landscapes they inhabit. The

terraformation of internal and external landscapes in the name of protecting asymmetrical power dynamics enacted by an imperial or colonial power is always violent, even when it is made invisible institutionally or geographically. Here, I push back against this invisibility of the role of the nation/state in the experiences of those who have or would cross borders into ‘nationally’ charted territories; furthermore, I push back against the ways in which the state has invisibilised the violences it enacted on peoples that it minoritised. In contemporary Canadian politics, what was previously buried has re-emerged in the context of incidents such as the discovery of unmarked graves on locations that were previously residential schools⁶⁷ (Whiting 2023). These are moments where ghosts of the Canadian past materialise as hauntings: to bury a body, to attempt to invisibilise or erase stories, is to emplace a ghost that will re/emerge at a future time. The ghost “becomes a means of considering the ‘traces’ of the colonial past in the cultural present” (Clack 2024, p. 354); to engage with a ghost is to not only confront the ills of the past, but also to contend with its ongoing effects on this present that is inhabited by peoples divided along asymmetries of legal status as well as the sociocultural effects of generations of policy discrimination.

As I situate the fictive works by Dapul, Leyson, and Austria-Bonifacio within the Canadian Gothic tradition, I recall a question that is posed by Goldman: “why are so many Canadian stories of haunting written by women?” To this, she offers an answer: “the associations between the female and the ghostly tend to appear owing to anxieties connected with the nature and place of female desire and agency within patriarchal culture” (2012, p. 33). The question of female agency in Filipino outmigration is one that is often debated in the public sphere; however, there is a documented rise in the number of women who left the country to work abroad in the 1990s. The experiences of women are inextricable from the stories of Philippine migration, and as such, are entwined with the popularly-known narratives of Filipino migration to Canada, particularly with the prominence of Filipinas in the now-defunct Live-in Caregiver Program. I note, too, that the literature around Filipina foreign workers and labour migration tends to highlight the heteronormative expressions of womanhood and motherhood.

An important intervention in this gap is the documentary *Sunday Beauty Queen* by Filipina documentarian Baby Ruth Villarama (2016), and the analysis conducted by queer scholars Piocos (2022) and Dela Cruz (2024). In discussions of the role of women in the

⁶⁷ See: the report of the Office of the Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites associated with Indian Residential Schools, 2024.

Filipino labour market, one aspect that is often relegated into a type of invisibility is the experience of queer women who are labour migrants. In *Sunday Beauty Queen*, one of the main characters that Villarama follows is Leo Selomenio, referred to by the other OFWs as ‘Daddy.’ Dela Cruz writes that although North American sensibilities would perhaps identify Selomenio as “butch lesbian or transmasculine,” when he is situated “within the context of Filipino sexualities he would be read as a *tomboy*” (2024, p. 411). The documentary follows Selomenio as he makes arrangements for a beauty pageant in Hong Kong, and along the way, provides care and shelter for his fellow OFWs. Leo Selomenio’s role in the Filipino community in Hong Kong as ‘Daddy,’ his legibility to the Filipino gaze as a *tomboy*, and the ways in which he is taking care of those who need help is perhaps one of the most visible manifestations of queer Filipino OFWs in the mainstream.

To reflect this importance, the authors whose works were selected for this chapter are therefore female and/or queer members of Canada’s Filipino diaspora; the main characters of the fictive works, too, are female. Throughout this analysis, I operationalise Baguisa’s notion of Filipino womanhood, or the experience of being *babae*, to think through the role of women in the Filipino diaspora in Canada: in Baguisa’s analysis of Filipino-Canadian nurse/rapper Han Han’s Tagalog song *Babae Ka*, she makes the argument that *babae*, “is a category of experience—one underpinned by the incongruity of Western gender sexual forms to speak for Filipino/a/x ways of knowing and defiance of dominant forms of subjectivity perfected by the Canadian nation state” (2023, p. 294). Baguisa’s *babae* is not just a label for womanhood, but an expression of insistence against how Filipina womanhood has been sedimented as particular expressions of labour for the state. The economic necessity of the Filipina body’s movement out of the national homeland and towards the global labour market — away from the Filipino family — has been marked by gendered anxieties that emanate from the Philippines’ heteropatriarchal culture. What Velasco term the “global Filipina body” describes the Filipina migrant whose agentic desires and decisions are a “geobody” that “corporealizes devalued and feminised Filipina/o transnational labor” (2020, p.3); in foregrounding works by women and queer members of the diaspora that are about the experiences of female migrants, I push back against a singular understanding of the Filipina as a gendered labourer in both the Philippine and the Canadian settings.

I further highlight two ways in which this curation of stories written by women and queer folk about women and queer folk in the diaspora is a significant choice. First, it is a

means by which I push back against the male-dominated genre of Filipino publishing, a fact which Cruz observes in her book *Transpacific Femininities*. In all three works, it is the desires of women and femme folks — for a safe life, for a fanged heritage, for a better life for her children — and their decisions to seek these out in the alternative elsewhere that is Canada. Second, it is through highlighting the experiences of women outside of labour that I seek to resist the enfolding of Filipina migrant women into a solely labouring story in the landscape of Canadian multiculturalism. Consequently, I offer that the narratives below highlight female and queer Filipino-Canadian cultural production therefore serves to queer an understanding of the Filipino diaspora in the Canadian mainstream.

III. An Archive of Hauntings: National and Literary Fictives

Curated together as an archive of haunting — borrowing the turn of phrase from Ann Cvetkovich's *An archive of feelings* (2003) — I understand spectres and the act of haunting beyond its supernatural condition. As an archive of hauntings, the works illustrate the ways in which experiences of Filipino migrants in the Canadian setting have the capacity to terraform what has been sedimented: in the reminder of what has been buried and the effects of such burials in terms of diasporic and national identity. I consider them to be “a form of uncanny contact that troubles the boundaries between past and present, here and elsewhere real and unreal, familiar and strange” (Freed 2018, p. 4). In agreement with Barrett, who writes that “[i]t is in their fiction and poetry, rather than in their sociological accounts or public protest, that these authors rewrite the nation from a black diasporic perspective” (2015, p. 9), is through a critical engagement with fictive works that experiences of border-crossing from the Philippines to Canada are examined as a haunting of the Canadian nation. This spectre, per Smith, is “a strangely historical entity that is haunted by the culture which produced it” (2007, p. 147). While the Canadian Gothic is itself a genre of Canadian literature, it is also an analytic which makes legible — or visible — the experiences that lie below the structures of migration, or are foundational to the ways in which migrants are then sedimented into their locations on the mosaic.

Here, I re/connect — or re/member — the literary fictive to the political factual. Early on in this dissertation, I referenced Filipino political scientist Filomeno V. Aguilar's notion of citizenship, primarily his analysis of the status of citizenship as the “hinge connecting the fictive nation to the empirical state” (2018, p. 836). I take Aguilar's understanding of the nation as fictive, and I situate it alongside sociologist Avery Gordon's notion of the sociological fictive. Gordon speaks of the fictive as “what has been and must be exiled to ordain the

authority of the discipline and the truthful knowledge sociology can claim to produce” (2008, p. 25); such aspects that have been exiled in the configuration of the facts of the matter, particularly for academic analyses, can and do emerge in fictive works. The space where Aguilar’s national fictive (citizenship as a legal status) and Gordon’s literary fictive (that which has been exiled for the institutional production of truth in a discipline) come together is where I situate my understanding of the fictive that I deploy in this chapter — that the narratives shared in these textual cultural artefacts, which are embedded in the experiences of migrants and migration, are revelatory not only of what happens during the chronological timeline of migration, but also what happens in the time afterwards.

The fictive is a term that I use to refer to works that would be classified as fiction, but whose context foregrounds experiences that have often been made invisible. This invisibility can be imposed by the state — as in Cho (2008) — for example, in the state’s demands for family separation in the care industry for Filipino migrant workers who were live-in caregivers in Canada. It can also be an invisibility which manifests as a metaphorical gap in discussions of family, such as in the experiences of left-behind families in the context of outmigration. Leetsch et al argue that “[m]igration (hi)stories, as they are adapted for and live forth on screens, stages and in stories influence the formation and distribution of knowledge about migration” (2023, p. 2); fictive works are therefore vital to a circulation of knowledge that is led by the diaspora rather than the race- and class-bound stereotypes that are circulated by and within the new home nation.

Together, the choice of texts that I have curated considers the extent to which the separation of families and the transnationality of affective relations follows the diaspora to its place of new settlement, alongside the challenges of reunification and integration. Writing about the relationships between media, politics, and identity, Kellner argues that “society and culture are contested terrains and that cultural artifacts are produced and have their effects within determinate contexts” (2020, p. 9). Stories as cultural artefacts, as parts of media culture, “provide surrogates for both individuals and groups who are able to participate in imaginary communities through cultural style and consumption and who can produce individual and group identities through the appropriation of media cultural images” (Kellner 2020, p. 113). In this way, these fictive works firmly situate the narratives of the Filipino diaspora within the narratives of Canadian national multicultural identity. Chowdhury notes that narrativization is “a place-making practice where migrants repeatedly tell stories about their former homes,

reflect on memories, seek affective engagement with the new place, and finally, amend with the present life” (2024, p. 3-4); in limning the boundaries of the place that is Filipino Canada, the fictive works serve as artefacts of terraformation.

III. Diaspora Fictive

A. Motzie Dapul’s *Hi, Nay*

Motzie Dapul’s audio drama *Hi, ‘Nay*⁶⁸ is about new immigrant Mari Datuin, whose life in Toronto takes an unexpectedly supernatural turn when she moves into a new apartment in a new building. This series can be classified in the horror genre as it explores the haunted geographies of Toronto from the perspective of Mari, who is a *babaylan*.⁶⁹ The title of the show references the first words that Mari says at the beginning of every episode, as she calls her mother to tell her about her life in Canada; this phone call is the show’s primary framing device. As a way for listeners to enter the story, the calls are a resonant choice for a show about a Filipina migrant who is distant from her immediate family — for Filipinos in the homeland and in the diasporas, there will be a familiarity with the maintenance of kinship associated with phone calls and transnational family members, while for members of the audience who do not have family members abroad, it is a way to highlight the importance of communications technology in the lives of transnational families. It is an ongoing reference to the ways in which transnational Filipino families continue to enact multidirectional care in non-proximal familial relationships (Baldassar and Merla 2014). The phone call affixes the narratives geographically to both the Philippines and Canada through telecommunications (Francisco-Menchavez; Soriano and Cabalquinto); while the show is set in Toronto, where Mari lives, and later episodes echo out across the Canadian landscape, the phone calls are a direct reminder that Mari as an immigrant continues to have affective ties to her home of origin, in addition to those that she fosters with her new friends in Toronto.

Hi, Nay is an audio drama, a form of “audio-based digital narrative,” which seeks to “deliver literary content through auditory means in the digital realm” (Palanisamy and V 2025, p. 2). However, I engage with it in this chapter as a textual cultural artefact of Canadian literature, a fictive work that I read using the lens of the Canadian Gothic. I focus my analysis on the first episode of the show, which is titled *Bulok*,⁷⁰ and I do so primarily because it is the

⁶⁸ *Nay* is short for *nanay*, a word for mother in Tagalog and other Filipino languages. *Hi, Nay* is a phrase which translates to “Hi, Mom.”

⁶⁹ For other depictions of Filipino *babaylan* in a contemporary setting, see Rivas (2022) and Chua Manansala (2018) for discussions of the Netflix animated show *Trese* (2021_)

⁷⁰ *Bulok* means “rotten” in Tagalog.

episode which introduces the characters and the setting to its listeners, and therefore offers an indication into what the overarching narrative of the story might be like. *Bulok* begins, as most of the episodes do, with Mari calling her mother: “Hi, *Nay!* I know it’s been a while since we last talked, I’ve been...busy.” She goes on to tell her mother about the “questionably cheap two bedroom apartment in downtown Toronto” that she now lives in, a unit in a building where construction is still ongoing “over an older place as far as I can tell.”

This introduces Toronto as the setting of the story to listeners who might not be familiar with the city; it also highlights the fact that the City of Toronto as a setting is one of overlapping geographies dating back to its incorporation in 1884 (Freeman 2010). The city emerges as a character throughout the episode — and the broader narrative throughout later episodes — and thus, “it seems therefore pertinent to focus upon ways in which the city becomes one site for challenging the status quo and for reimagining how communities can function in ways that exceed normalizing logics” (Dobson 2009, p. 184). The supernatural nature of this version of Toronto highlights that *Hi, Nay* is a representation of the ways in which urbanisation transforms “the traditional narratives of the supernatural,” and does not necessarily lead to these narratives being “forgotten” (Vicerra and Javier 2013, p. 7); modernisation, and in this case urban development, becomes a place where haunting occurs. Hauntings are moments and spaces where the past re/emerges to inhabit the present; time, as experienced in these moments, “forces the point of nonsynchronism,” (Cua Lim 2001, p. 288) wherein “[t]he temporality of haunting, through which events and people return from the limits of time and mortality, differs sharply from the modern concept of a linear, progressive, universal time” (p. 287). While the building that Mari and Laura live in is firmly situated in the present, the creature that haunted it emerged from its past, and in this instance, from the basement which is the foundation of a building built over a much older edifice.

Mari tells her mother the story of what happened with her upstairs neighbour, Laura. On a day that is otherwise not unusual, Mari hears commotion in the corridors and looks outside her unit; Laura makes eye contact and runs towards her open door — the only door that has been opened on the floor — in the hope of escaping the *thing* that is in pursuit of her. Laura rushes into her apartment, and Mari throws the deadbolt, a protective act which she “suspected wouldn’t stand against whatever this thing was.” Securing her door, however, did ensure that Mari could prepare for the creature’s imminent arrival, using such items as “salt, spices, vinegar, candles, and whatever religious iconography I could grab from my little altar near the

door.” Laura was being chased by a creature through the corridors of their ostensibly clean, new Toronto building. Mari describes the creature as,

“A mass of stretched gray skin – human skin, but from someone long dead, stretched so thin you could see something rotting and roiling beneath, but somehow keeping its shape, keeping itself together, a flimsy flesh sack dragging itself across the floor.”

This description, which highlights the unnatural aspects of a creature which should be dead but is not only alive but giving chase — the contrast of rotting organic matter in a clean urban environment — is a familiar one in the horror genre, where “the monsters are identified as impure and unclean... Characters regard them not only with fear but also with loathing, with a combination of terror and disgust” (Carroll 1987, p. 54). The creature’s apparent filthiness is set in contrast to the like-new cleanliness of the building that is still-in-construction, a liminal and yet-uncompleted space that nevertheless has been cleared for the habitation of residents. Skin, here, is described as a layer which contains the rot, holding it together so that what is dead can reach through and harm the living. Mari describes the ghoul as a “mass”; here, I will argue that it is also corporeally a haunting, a figure that is wrapped in the skin “from someone long dead.” While not an intangible ghost, the figure is a remnant of the building’s past that has come back and infiltrated the present in a manner injurious to both Mari and Laura, a moment where the building’s long-dead past is haunting its supposedly-new present. The creature that they encounter within the ostensible safety of an urban building in downtown Toronto is a resurrected materiality of human and non-human deaths. It is a threat of a monstrous and deadly reckoning that Mari staves off through her practice of being a shaman, practices and belief systems that she has brought with her from the Philippines to Canada. The actions that Mari performs next takes the form of Filipino folk magic:

“Then I threw the spices. And the skin began to smoke. It roiled and twisted. It seemed startled, almost. Like it didn’t expect someone to start trying to fight back, especially not like this. Not with.... Folk magic and intent. It really didn’t like when I grasped the anting-anting around my neck and started a bulong, whispering my prayers – prayers to a belief that holds the minds and hearts of billions, and prayers to an older, kinder ear that still cares for its people.”

Mari throws the items that she has taken from her altar at the intruding ghoul while performing a *bulong*⁷¹ or a whispered prayer; injured by both the incantation and the harms caused by the physical objects, it temporarily withdraws from her door, leaving both Laura and

⁷¹ An *anting-anting* is a Filipino good luck charm, and a *bulong* is a whispered prayer.

Mari safe for the moment. While they need some minor medical treatment, both survive this initial encounter thanks to Mari's skills as a shaman,⁷² or a *babaylan*.

A few days after the incident, Toronto detectives Donner and Murphy knock at Mari's door to ask questions about how she was able to vanquish the ghoul. During their conversation, it comes to light that Laura is their first 'survivor'; not knowing how to interact with the supernatural in the same way that Mari does, and not having the same skills as her, the detectives often arrive in the aftermath of such incidents, investigating the deaths after they have occurred. Donner, Murphy, and Mari make their way to the basement of the building to conduct a closer investigation. The revelation is made that because Mari's new place of residence was being constructed atop an older one, urban wildlife, among other things, had fallen into the literal and fantastical cracks, and become reanimated into monstrosities. The episode culminates with the three of them working together to defeat the ghoul; between folk magic and the materiality of bullets, they vanquish the creature.

As the introductory episode to a horror audio drama, *Bulok* introduces Filipino characters to the show's listeners in a way that is not often visible in mainstream media: Mari is a *babaylan*, a powerful figure in pre-colonial Philippines prior to Spanish occupation.⁷³ The specific shamanistic aspects of Filipino culture that materialise within a story set so firmly in Toronto — such as Mari's pantheon of gods and the practices of *bulong* alongside the components of her altar — allows the Philippines to emerge from its normative reputation of a primarily-Catholic nation that generates workers for the Canadian social-reproductive labour market. These systems, which have been erased and repressed in the modernity of the Philippines, not only save her in the first episode, but make her a powerful figure throughout

⁷² See: William Henry Scott's *Barangay*, specifically Chapter 12, *Tagalog Society and Religion* for a historical brief on the Tagalog pantheon and some associated worship rites.

⁷³ Rowsell argues that in Filipino horror, "filmmakers capture the ghostly hauntings of colonialism that continue to linger among the Filipino consciousness" (2025, p. 14). Writing about the popular Filipino horror series *Shake, Rattle, and Roll* (SRR) — a popular series of Filipino anthology films that began in 1984 and are still being produced today — Tolentino makes the argument that horror studies could be seen as a modality for "the horrific real, or the translation of historical terror in filmic horror, or the conversation between historical and filmic terrors" (2016, p. 137). SRR has been used as a stage by which to speak about the vagaries of politics in the Philippines; in 2011, one of the anthology films in SRR featured Ondoy and the injustices and marginalisation suffered by the poorer social classes" (Shima 2022, p. 37). According to Aistrophe and Fishel, writing about the relationship between world politics and the horror genre, horror "is at once an access point for ethical engagement with the human consequences of extreme violence and a complex terrain where dark imaginings can be politically loaded and culturally specific" (2020, p. 633). Goh writes about the film *Aswang* (2019), which makes use of the "aswang as metaphor for the systemic violence caused by President Duterte's anti-drug campaign" (2024 p. 11). In using the monstrous as a commentary for real-life monstrosities, "the aswang's shapeshifting ability and predatory nature align with the manipulation and abuse of political power, transforming the effigy into a shared symbol of collective unease" (Goh 2024, p. 11-12).

the entirety of the narrative. In the Philippines, *babaylan* were “pre-colonial priestesses” who shouldered roles that were deeply embedded in their communities (Tapia 2024, p. 323); Mari’s departure from the Philippines and her finding a new community in Toronto allows her to tap into a role that is similarly deeply-embedded.⁷⁴ While Mari’s altar and the accoutrements of her practice are located within her home, behind her door, with her introduction to Donner and Murphy she no longer practices alone within the confines of her home, but rather, works her powers in the public sphere as she is recruited to help the two detectives with their investigations into the supernatural nature of Toronto.

Hi, Nay is a story about Mari using her powers as a *babaylan* to aid Donner and Murphy in their investigations regarding Toronto’s supernatural past. As a new immigrant, there are power asymmetries that exist between Mari and her associates who have institutional authority, but these institutional asymmetries are in turn subverted by the fact that Mari is able to contribute to their goals due to her connection to her gods. This introduces the listener to the Philippines as a space that is not merely a contributor to Canada’s labour needs; that is, *Hi, Nay* steps outside the notion of Filipino women in Canada as migrant workers, and instead draws attention to how the Philippines’ pre-colonial past and practices have survived in the age of post- and neo-colonialism, and into the age of globalised migration.

Reading this work from the perspective of the Canadian Gothic, Dapul writes the Canadian condominium in place of the European castle or the Canadian wilderness; yet, the haunting that emerges is still uncanny, and one that forces the reader to engage with the fact that to be a migrant is often to step foot into places where one is unaware of the histories that create the lived experiences that they have.

III. B. Louie Leyson’s Glossary for an *Aswang*

Louie Leyson’s nonfiction poem, *Glossary for an Aswang*,⁷⁵ is about the histories of the Filipino diaspora in Canada, a piece for which they won the CBC Nonfiction Prize in 2023.

⁷⁴ During the Spanish colonisation of the islands, Spanish forces began “forcefully removing *babaylans* from communities and demonising their adherents and followers through association with sorcery and witchcraft, alongside the systematic Christianisation of the natives” (Rivas 2022, p. 50). The conversion of much of Philippines to Spanish Catholicism — with the exception of the Mindanao region, which to this day has kept its Muslim identity — has led to the almost-near eradication of *babaylan*, and the practices that were associated with the *babaylan* were delegitimised in favour of institutional powers like the state, and organised religions like the Spanish Catholic Church.

⁷⁵ Ramos defines the *aswang* as “most usefully understood as a congeries of beliefs about five types of mythical beings identifiable with certain creatures of the European tradition: (1) the blood-sucking vampire; (2) the self-segmenting viscera sucker; (3) the man-eating weredog; 4) the vindictive or evil-eye witch; (5) the carrion-eating

It is written in the form of a glossary, as the title indicates, and from the perspective of the presumptively diaspora-born narrator. The narrator as a would-be *aswang* — or at least as a second-generation person who desires to be an *aswang* — attempts to summon this part of their folkloric heritage. I classify this piece within the horror genre, inasmuch as the *aswang* is a mythological creature in the Philippines that is well within the sphere of Filipino horror; one of the most popular renditions of *aswang* in Filipino mythology is the *manananggal*, which is “is a female figure that splits into two halves in order to feast on the flesh of infants” (Diaz 2018, p. 119), where the female torso grows wings and the bottom half stays inanimate. One way to kill a *manananggal* is by sprinkling salt onto the open wound of the bottom half; this folkloric importance of salt as a means of exorcism is reflected in Dapul’s choice of spices at her altar, as discussed in the earlier section.

The horror genre serves as a meditation and commentary regarding colonial and political themes that the country of production has experienced.⁷⁶ Ghost stories and accounts of other folkloric monsters “are at once fraught with historical inscription and insinuate the limits of homogenous national-historical time” (Cua Lim 2009, p. 99), wherein hauntings and monstrosities continue in a circular loop that can catch victims unaware, queering the expected linearity of standard time. Tuck and Ree define a glossary as that which “ordinarily comes after a text, to define and specify terms, to ensure legibility. Glossaries can help readers to pause and make sense of something cramped and tightly worded; readers move from the main text to the back, and forth again” (2013, p. 640). Leyson’s *Glossary*, as a text that moves across history, political events, horror, and myth, offers a Filipino diasporic perspective which illuminates how “[n]ational belonging and notions of ‘home’ are linked to the political choices that subjects make in their day-to-day lives and are contingent on how individuals position themselves in relation to their location and history” (Largo 2018, p. 105). In this sense, the reader of Leyson’s *Glossary* is able to move from entry to entry, evenly spaced across the alphabet, while also moving across borders and temporality. Leyson’s *Glossary*, while seemingly ordered according to alphabetical logic, is immersed in a similar queerness of experiencing time: the narrator not

ghoul” (1998, p. xvi). Most popularly referenced is the *manananggal* or the “self-segmenting viscera sucker,” of Leyson’s “long coiled tongue.”

⁷⁶ The prominence of Filipino folklore in the fabric of the culture is deeply-embedded; horror as a ‘real’ experience has been weaponised against Filipinos as a war tactic, specifically by the United States during the occupation. Goh writes that “U.S. Colonel Edward Lansdale gained notoriety for exploiting the *aswang* legend as a tool for psychological warfare against the ‘Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon’ (Hukbalahap), a predominantly peasant army opposing U.S. intervention after the Japanese defeat in World War II” (2024, p. 5), and that camouflaging deaths as ‘*aswang* attacks’, “the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) strategically employed folklore against the Huk and the Philippines” (p. 5).

only brings the reader across borders from the Philippines to Canada and back again, they also evoke the differentiated times that transnational families have left or have previously inhabited. Yet, the narrator's desire to be the *aswang* is a rebellion to the orderly timeline of migration; thus, while a glossary is alphabetically-oriented and ordered, the *Glossary* is a rebellion against this falsely-imposed order.

Chronologically, Leyson's piece is written after the Filipino diaspora has found itself in the "cramped and tightly worded" places and spaces of Canadian histories and national identities, establishing not just its own "legibility," but also a self-definition. Through this definition of self that emerges in the terraformation of what is known (Filipinos as Canada's labour migrants) and what has been relegated to the background (second wave feminism and the necessity of 'cheap' labour to ensure the continuity of Canadian households in a two-parent working household), the narrator terraforms the Canadian landscape of benign and welcoming multiculturalism, a questioning of an identity that is taken as 'natural.'

It is the immediate past of migration that informs the present that the narrator and their family inhabit as Filipino migrants who have settled in Canada. Beginning with the word Asemic ("Nothing on my brown body is legible") and ending with Vengeance ("Mary⁷⁷, whose ancient name has taught me that vengeance, too, is a form of desire"), *Glossary* makes its way from the past to the present alphabetically, creating a path of legibility across the various illegibilities of migration and integration. In recreating a pattern that is ordered and familiar through the alphabetical organisation of a glossary, the piece is mirroring the ways in which migration as a process is made externally orderly and familiar through the infrastructures of managed migration processes. Yet, both the poem itself and the processes of migration reveal, or betray, the internally disorderly and unfamiliar that exists within the experiences of racialised migrants, particularly for the Filipino diaspora in Canada. Under *Narrative* — which sits between *Lacuna* ("numbers so easily turn the Filipina material body into an abstraction") and *Non-Perishable* ("But what must it mean... to eat and to send that which is non-perishable, that which can never die?") — the narrator declares, "Watch as I narrate the body back into existence." In this narrative of the Filipino diaspora, which Leyson uses to "narrate the body back into existence," *Glossary* situates itself antagonistically towards the notions that national

⁷⁷ A reference to Mary, the mother of Jesus, who is an important figure in Filipino Roman Catholicism.

progress and development are abstract, disembodied, and propelled forward without the use of exploitative labour.

I turn my attention towards two entries in particular: *Aswang* and *Excess*. When situated in conversation with each other, these two entries speak to the effects of heteropatriarchy on gendered labour migration: continually crossing over between the realities of migrant life and horror folklore, and between the factual and the fictive. Under *Aswang*, Leyson writes,

“Bad girls become *aswang*. My mother told me so. Half-woman, half-animal creatures. As a girl I'd stay up and wait to shape-shift into one, crouching alone in the dark of my room. I would whisper prayers to God. I would beg him to pity the poor, defanged thing I'd become. Where are my wings, my scales, my long coiled tongue. I don't want to be soft anymore.”

Here, the narrator closes the geographic distance between the ‘bad girl’ and God through praying for a wished-for transformation of becoming an *aswang*. The distance between the monstrous and the divine in this mythological prayer is not the chasm between heaven and hell; rather, the identity of *aswang*, if granted, would become a divinely-granted transformative moment that would allow the narrator to step beyond her identity of being a ‘poor, defanged thing.’ Despite the mythological story of the *aswang* as an often feminine-coded monstrous creature who feeds on unborn children, the female is reimagined here as a protective invocation. It is a queering of how womanhood is understood in its role in both Filipino myth and the way that Filipina womanhood is understood in Canada; Baguisa’s *babae* speaks to this insistence of self-identification, and a disobedience to what she refers to as “the overwrought narrative of race produced by Canada’s federal policy of multiculturalism” (2023, p. 19).

Under the entry for *Excess*, Leyson writes:

“The Philippines is a place in which everyone is born already wanting to leave, poisoned as it is by centuries of overlapping occupation. Spain, Japan, America. Nations are landscapes that capitalize on longing. Yet so many of these landscapes fail to permit permanent residency to OFWs at all, disqualified as they are in Hong Kong, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Israel — even as they continue to be amongst the most dependent in the world on Filipino migrant work. They are allowed to exist in these nations as labour doled over a handful of years, but not as people. Never as whole lives. Upon arrival, their bodies are already an excess.”

Leyson makes corporeal in *Excess* the Filipino bodies that populate the streams of labour migration flowing outwards from the country, towards countries that are dependent on labour that has been marketed as highly-trained, fluent in English, and most importantly, is temporary. Desires are entangled in labour migration: to become a migrant worker, in this sense, is bookended by the necessity of leaving spurred by the desire for a better life, and the

inevitability of coming back, spurred by the desire for kin relations. The hyperflexibility of Filipino citizenship,⁷⁸ alongside the commodification of citizens as the state continues its investments into labour brokerage, are made visible in this passage. As an artefact of dis/order *Glossary* brings together the contradictory life experiences of a people whose “bodies are already an excess,” from a nation “in which everyone is born already wanting to leave,” which itself is a place that “capitalize[s] on longing.” Yet, I keep in mind that, as I discovered in the interviews which populate Chapters Four, Five, and Six, leaving as an act carries different meanings for migrants; thematic overlaps exist, but the rationales for leaving encompass circumstances from financial necessity to political refusals of regimes.

Leyson’s *Glossary* for the lives of the Filipino diaspora in Canada, I argue, is a fictive evocation of the monstrous that brings together the folkloric and mythological (the *aswang*) with the material and the political (the plight of overseas workers, and the distance between diaspora-born youth and their heritage). In *Glossary*, the prominence of the imageries of *aswang* and femininity alongside narratives of female migration allows Leyson to open a window for the narrator and the reader to be in intimate proximity with the violent experiences that Filipina migrant workers are made to undergo in the global labour market: the embodiment and materialisation, as it were, of abstraction and of numbers. What Leyson perceives as the ongoing invisibility of the diaspora to the broader Canadian population served as the impetus for them to write this *Glossary*. It therefore serves as an introduction of the Filipino diaspora in Canada not only to the non-Filipino Canadians who may be uninformed, but also to the Canadian-born diaspora as a means of co-remembering. Consigned to a status of worker — labour itself being a necessary and invisible infrastructure of the nation, often only becoming visible at moments of tension such as strikes or protests — the disturbingly invisible Filipino diaspora can therefore be understood as a ghost which haunts.

Within the tradition of a feminist Gothic horror, the summoning of the *aswang* identity as a form of self-protection — a means to rescue the self — casts the narrator in a situation wherein their powerlessness may yet be precluded by an ancestral monstrosity. The themes of haunting and monstrosity are woven throughout the glossary: the narrator seeks her folkloric ‘fangs’ as a form of resistance to the twinned forces of the Spanish and American colonial histories of Philippine labour migration, and the Canadian settler colonialism of Filipino

⁷⁸ I write about the hyperflexibility of Filipino labourers as a form of terraformation of citizenship as a status in Chapter Two.

invisibility against which the Filipino diaspora in Canada is affixed. Largo describes the “aswang”⁷⁹ as a being that “embodies a contested national belonging because she is simultaneously capable of uprooting and regrounding herself” (Largo 2018, p. 105); in this sense, Leyson’s *aswang* is in contestation not only with her Canadian self, but also her Filipino identity. I read the aswang through Baguisa’s *babae*, “as a departure from the dominant and oversimplified conceptions of identity formation,” whereing the prayers to become an *aswang* then “reanimates an occluded lineage of feminist power and signals the dynamic potentialities in an embodied politics of disobedience” (2023, p. 302). To call towards an *aswang* heritage as a diaspora-born Filipino migrant is to embody a disobedience against an imposed identity and expectations of behaviour, impositions which can come both from within the community or from the new home nation — to unsettle what has been sedimented, and to therefore terraform what is known.

Glossary for an Aswang, in the theoretical and literary work that it performs, serves as a re/introduction and a re/assertion of the Filipino diaspora and of Filipino womanhood to readers who may not have any context for Filipino migration; it is also a challenge to previously held notions regarding the diaspora, what has been referred to as sedimented labels or spectres of imposed identities that haunt the diaspora. In our interview, Leyson said,

“I noticed that there's a weird dissonance, where Filipinos are everywhere, Overseas Filipino Workers specifically, are everywhere... But people act like they're not there, and they just ignore them, and also don't know anything about them, or what kind of conditions they have, they're just in the background.”

Leyson deploys the glossary as a device in order to establish the conjoined histories of female labour migration in the Philippines and the demands for labour in social reproduction Canada which has led to a hypervisibility of the Filipina woman in particular fields (Bakan and Stasiulis 1997); yet Leyson also points out that to be encountered primarily as labour relegates workers into the background, into an invisibility. In *Glossary*, Leyson performs what Sharpe calls the “theoretically necessary imaginative work of placing herself and the viewer into the material conditions of the past that is not yet past” (2010, p. 155). To terraform the notions about the Filipino diaspora in Canada that have been in wide circulation for decades, Leyson re-contextualises Filipino labour migration to include not only the demands that have brought the workers to Canada, but also their lives after migration.

⁷⁹ “*Asuang*” is a variant spelling of the word “*aswang*.”

Read in the tradition of the Canadian Gothic, Leyson's *Glossary* insists on reminding the reader — the general public, but also those who seek out Canadian literature in the context of the CBC's writing contests — that migration is a violent phenomenon. The violences that occur in the Canadian setting against workers and against women do not occur in a location far outside of Canadian borders, but rather, within the nation. The monstrous is not just the alien, but the global forces of migration that brings the 'outsider' into the borders of the nation, and the multiculturalism that then sediments them into ordained places in the national body. Cohen writes that "the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond—all of those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate Within" (1996, p. 7). As the narrator has experienced being Othered as a member of the Filipino diaspora in Canada, individually and as a member of a racialised diaspora, they seek out an identity that their mother has cautioned them against: the monstrous that has been relegated to mythology, to fiction, and to the elsewhere that is the Philippines, far beyond the oceans from Canada and its Filipino diaspora. Stang et al write that "[t]he monstrous also sometimes offers space for the subversion of hegemonic norms and power structures ... and a point of identification for marginalized groups" (2025, p. 7); I understand Leyson's *aswang*, therefore, as a monstrous identity which is itself a confrontation of how Filipino women are understood as docile workers, an assertion of agency in identity formation; to call on an *aswang* identity as a diaspora-born Filipina woman queers notions of what Filipino women are supposed to be like, both in Canada and in the Philippines.

III. A. Jennilee Austria-Bonifacio's Reuniting With Strangers

Jennilee Austria-Bonifacio's debut novel *Reuniting With Strangers*⁸⁰ was almost subtitled *A Novel Told In Stories*. Her book is, indeed, a collection of stories about the Filipino diaspora in Canada, loosely threaded together with the character of Monolith, a young, non-verbal boy who has just recently joined his mother in Toronto. Austria-Bonifacio says that it was the young Filipino migrants she met through *Filipino Talks*⁸¹ who inspired her to write this novel. As an author, she felt that she "needed to make sure that it captures the fact that so many

⁸⁰ Austria-Bonifacio shared that the title of the novel, *Reuniting with Strangers*, is a reference to the documentary *When Strangers Re-Unit* (1999), a documentary about Filipino migrant workers in Canada and the communities that they form which Austria-Bonifacio saw when she was an undergraduate student at the University of Guelph. The film was directed by Marie Boti, alongside Florchita Bautista.

⁸¹ *Filipino Talks* is "an initiative that builds bridges between Filipino families and Canadian educators" (Austria-Bonifacio, *Filipino Talks*). The need that this initiative fills is the gap between what the Canadian education system knows about the Filipino migrant story, and how young Filipino students entering the education system are caught in the difficulties of integrating into a new country and new system, alongside the messiness of family reunification.

of my students, they always say they feel voiceless.” The reader encounters the complexity of these young characters’ emotions firsthand: having been given access to the young characters’ innermost thoughts, while they are having difficulty expressing these same emotions to their parents or guardians, highlight the book’s title as a reference to the fact that they are all *strangers* at the beginning of the reunions.

While the novel itself is not a traditionally ‘horror’ story, here I want to pay attention to Gordon’s argument that works of literature and fiction “open the doors to understanding haunting,” and that “haunting is a part of our social world, and understanding it is essential to grasping the nature of our society and for changing it” (2008, p. 27). That is, I make the argument that horror is not always confined to the ghoul, as in Dapul’s *Bulok*, or an *aswang*, as in Leyson’s *Glossary*. In this novel, the horror exists in the long-term separation of families — a phenomenon which is as Canadian as it is Filipino, in the consequences of labour migration, an occurrence that de Leon describes as “particularly striking” found in “the disproportionate number of children being separated from their mothers, a phenomenon which is directly attributable to the high demand for Filipinas in the global labour market—a reflection of the feminization and racialization of contemporary migrant labour” (2014, p. 139). From this perspective, I believe that reading Austria-Bonifacio’s work from the perspective of horror is not unmerited, particularly because of the way that her characters are haunted both by the effects of migration, and by what McNally has called the ‘monstrosity’ of capitalism (2011). In light of impending separations, what Austria-Bonifacio reveals to her readers are traumas that are experienced not only by the left-behind children and migrant mothers, but also by the carers who step in as surrogate parents, who are then themselves separated from the children they care about, family members who are, similarly, left-behind. These are, writ in the fictive, the effects of the long-term separation of Filipino families which has been deemed necessary in service of Canada’s needs for workers.

The stories in the novel represent a wide swathe of the lives of the Filipino diaspora in Canada ranging from Sarnia to Montréal to Toronto. I focus on the chapter *What’s Best for the Girls*. I have chosen to do so because it is a telling of an ostensibly-familiar even in the landscape of Filipino Canada: the impending reunification of a mother and her daughters after many years of separation. Fictively, this chapter shows that the practice of familial care should not merely be understood through the labour that is provided to care for the family, but also through the affective connections that build familial relationships. While this chapter is

reflective of the anxieties regarding family separation that are often referenced in terms of the Filipino diaspora in the literature (Pratt 2009; see also, Pratt 2012), it challenges that mainstream narrative by introducing a character that is not often discussed: the surrogate parent in the Philippines for whom the reunification of parent and child in Canada entails a longer-term separation for them and the child they have cared for. The story that the chapter tells illustrates the limits of understanding family primarily through the lens of the immediate family; even though the *bunso* is the aunt, she is their surrogate mother, and considers herself and the twins to also be a family unit of their own. The space that is inhabited collectively by the family unit — the two sisters, and the younger twin girls — is a transnational domestic sphere where, in addition to personal relationships, economic and culture forces have led to “gender, care, and gendered care [being] collectively reimagined and reperformed” (dela Cruz 2024, p. 411). The interplay of responsibilities between the sisters show how responsibility and familial understandings of obligation, often anchored in age-based hierarchies, can shift with the effects of family separation in migration.

Written in an epistolary format, the chapter is multiply-located between the physical and virtual geographies of the Philippines and Canada. The seams between these two countries meet through emails and a singular real-time chat conversation. The epistolary mode of framing this narrative effectively communicates to the reader that despite technological advancements, the lack of immediate access to one’s conversation partner lead to conversations that are vexed not only by emotions but also the distinct limitations of technology and of time differences. Cabalquinto argues that “the performativity, embodiment, and negotiations of mobile family rituals are influenced by the uneven ‘digitalization’ of the domestic home” (2022, p. 32); rituals of family that the sisters are practicing are both mediated and obstructed by the very technologies that they are using. The main characters are two adult sisters who are making decisions about the future of young twin girls who are their daughters and nieces, respectively: thirteen-year-old girls Chrisselle and Gracielle. Their mother, based out of Iqaluit, Nunavut, is making preparations to bring her children to Canada with her. Through their conversations, the complex familial histories of the family are revealed, and entirely from the perspective of the adult sisters. This is a striking contrast to the textual silence of the twin girls, whose thoughts about migration and whose relationships with their aunt and their mother are not made visible in the text.

Two details are revealed at the outset that provide context for the relationship and interactions between the mother and the aunt:

- (1) The mother of the twins is the elder of the two, the *ate* (often called '*Teh*' in the narrative), and it is the *bunso*, the younger sibling, who has been the twins' surrogate mother since the *ate* began working abroad;
- (2) Their email addresses and chat users are 'TitaMama' (AuntieMama) for the younger sister, and 'PinayIqalummiuq' for the older sister, which communicate through their chosen honourifics and usernames how they themselves understand their identities personally as well as in relation to the extended family unit and communities they inhabit.

TitaMama's username expresses a life and an identity that is anchored in her identification as being both aunt and mother to her nieces, who she has been raising in the absence of their working mother. The username PinayIqalummiuq implies the embrace of a life that is integrated into rural Northern Canada alongside both the Filipino and Inuit communities. The two adult sisters remain unnamed in the chapter; Austria-Bonifacio explained during our conversation that the two characters not having names and referring to each other with their familial honourifics throughout the story — *ate* and *bunso* — is because the sibling dynamics between them can be to some extent considered 'universal' within the context of the Philippines; that is, the events that have transpired within this particular family are mirrored in many other families across the diaspora.

TitaMama initiates the email exchange between herself and her older sister by sharing her concerns that moving "*the girls*" to Canada might not be the best choice for them. PinayIqalummiuq responds with an attempt to assuage her sister's anxieties, as well as a clear claim to motherhood of the twins: that she is "so excited to see *my girls* again" (p. x, emphasis mine). In this exchange, PinayIqalummiuq enacts her claim on her daughters as the legitimate mother, reminding her sister through these declarations that as a surrogate parent, she does not have authentic claims towards making life decisions for the young girls. This contrasts with the way in which TitaMama has raised them for most of their young life.

Their exchanges continue through email, and because of the two women's vastly different approaches to the 'happiness' or the titular 'what's best' for of the twins — with PinayIqalummiuq arguing that her children joining her in Canada is 'what's best' for them, while TitaMama believes that they should stay with her in the Philippines — the sisters are unable to come to a resolution via email, and decide to speak via instant message. Throughout these conversations, which are more immediately-communicated, TitaMama reminds

PinayIqalummiuq that when she conceived the twins, she did not want them (p. 49), and follows up by reminding her older sister she is owed an *utang na loob*⁸² for raising the twins: “Now, you’re the one with the utang na loob to me. I raised them like my own children. You’re not the mother they need — you never have been. Let them stay with me” (p. 52).

Ultimately, TitaMama asks PinayIqalummiuq to do what is unthinkable for a migrant mother who has been navigating the Canadian immigration system in order to be able to send for her children: “I have a proposal for you, *Teh*. I want you to leave one of them behind. If you’re so determined to ruin their lives, at least spare one and leave her with me,” (p. 56) a proposal to which PinayIqalummiuq responds, “You must have lost your mind” (p. 56).

In her definition of what parenthood and motherhood entails as a proximal act of kinship, I read TitaMama’s actions as attempts to disrupt what she believes is the illegitimacy of the ‘mother’ relationship that PinayIqalummiuq claims over her own children, as she has been separated from them for many years and does not know her twins as intimately as TitaMama does. The penultimate act of the chapter is one that ends in a confrontation that happens off the page: in fear that her sister will not let her daughters go, PinayIqalummiuq makes the unannounced decision to fly to the Philippines and pick up her twin girls in person to take them with her to Canada. The last, unanswered email in the chapter is from PinayIqalummiuq, updating TitaMama on how the twins are doing in their new home in Iqaluit, which she ends with a nod to their emotional disagreements: “When you find it in your heart to forgive me, you know how to reach me. I love you so much, *Bunso*. We all do. I just hope that eventually, you’ll agree that this is what’s best for the girls” (p. 66), bringing the reader back to the title of the chapter and the roots of the original disagreement.

In my initial reading of the text, I engaged with the title at face value: I believed that the titular girls are the twins who were moving to Canada to join their mother. After many readings of the work, I offer the interpretation that the title could also be understood as being in reference to the twins’ geographically distant migrant mother and their proximal aunt who raised them in the Philippines. Throughout this chapter, the reader encounters stories not just of the twins as they are being raised, but also those that are indicative of the relationship between PinayIqalummiuq and TitaMama. These include moments from many years ago that tell how PinayIqalummiuq initially did not want to be a mother, and eventually, of the many

⁸² A recurring phrase in the lexicon of Filipino culture that is often translated to mean “debt of gratitude,” which Isaac also translates as “debt of obligation” (2022, p. 123).

personal and professional sacrifices that TitaMama made to be able to care for the children left in her care as PinayIqalummiuq began working abroad. For the sisters, fear is a defining characteristic of their relationship: the fear of losing the twins, and the fear of no longer being a mother, whether biological or surrogate. Throughout the years that this arrangement is in place, the sisters swap roles with each other: first as the ‘mothers,’ and then ultimately as the ‘owers.’ In TitaMama’s proposal, reminiscent of the Judgment of Solomon from 1 Kings 3:16-28,⁸³ I read her attempt at a fair and just solution to the problem at hand, one that would not leave her, ultimately, alone.

Yet in a departure from this major theme of the rest of the novel, in this chapter, in a narrative that is about the lives and futures of two young children, where the most important adults in their lives are making decisions about what is ‘best for them,’ the reader does not encounter anything directly from the twins. Other young characters in the novel are able to enunciate their concerns, even if for some of them this is only internally and to the reader, rather than externally to the adults in their lives (names of chapters, names of characters). Yet all of the information that the reader gets to know regarding the twins — their supposed feelings, personalities, hobbies, and even preferences regarding food — are filtered through the memories and perspectives of TitaMama and PinayIqalummiuq. This was a deliberate choice on the part of Austria-Bonifacio, who says, “Nobody asked the kids! That was a major point of that chapter.” The children themselves, whose lives are being changed monumentally with the move to a new country, do not get to express their own choices over the matter of migrating to Canada.

Another alternate reading of this chapter is that the two adult women are also still contending with their lives as younger women, if not as children. The child, and their roles in their families, emerge in the ways that the sisters talk to each other and discuss what a good future entails; the role of *ate* or older sister is shared between the two, a tense and complicated call for a recognition of expertise brought about by adult responsibilities. Mecija writes that “[t]oo often, studies of childhood delineate a border between ‘the child’ and ‘the adult.’ The child is too easily left behind once conventional schemas of development and ‘growing up’ are imposed” (2024, p. 13). In this chapter, TitaMama, who is the sister and the surrogate mother who has been left behind, is still entangled and “become part of social relationships stretched

⁸³ King Solomon is asked to judge a case where two women claim motherhood over a singular child. He offers a solution: to cut the child in half so that each ‘mother’ gets a part of the child. The real mother refuses this while the false mother agrees; the child is ultimately given back to the real mother.

across time and place, even though they might never actually relocate or move at all” (Baldassar and Merla 2014, p. 6). Thus, from this perspective — as a person who is estranged and physically distant from her sibling and her surrogate daughters — “The theme of loss runs through the literature on emigration and may be experienced particularly by those left behind” (Marchetti-Mercer 2012, p. 378).

Reading this novel, and particularly this chapter, in the genre of the Canadian Gothic, what Austria-Bonifacio brings to the surface is not just the requirement of family separation that many migrant families experience before they then reunite as strangers in Canada; she highlights the disruption that occurs in those who have been left behind in the Philippines as well. To be the person who is left behind in this sense, because family members have made the decision to migrate, highlights the “monstrosity” of capital and the demands that it places upon families, which as McNally describes, lies in “its elusive everydayness, its apparently seamless integration into the banal and mundane rhythms of quotidian existence” (2011, p. 2). After such an enduring separation, there is no choice but to continue. By writing about the left-behind and surrogate parent, Austria-Bonifacio’s work terraforms the normative conversations about family separation which focuses, deservedly, on the emotional strains that occur between migrant parent and their left-behind children. It allows the losses of migration to be understood as reverberating beyond what is understood as the ‘immediate’ or ‘nuclear family’ — that the kin relationships that animate the space of surrogate parenting also create strong affective bonds, and that adult siblings, too, are still members of their own immediate family.⁸⁴

Fictive Terraformations of Diasporic and National Identities

Influential figures from Canada’s early settler colonial era, like Catherine Parr Traill, Susanna Moodie, and Earle Birney, have elucidated on the country’s supposed empty landscapes, which they defined by its ‘lack’ of ghosts (Sugars and Turcotte 2009, p. xii). These readings of the landscape as empty is a colonial terraformation, a refusal to engage with what is pre-existing, and a resistance to understanding the already-there as also-human; I situate my understanding of hauntings as responding against these imperial notions of terraformation. In this chapter, the argument I make is that the version of Canada within which these fictive and sometimes fantastical have emerged from and are set in is neither empty nor is it ‘lacking ghosts,’ but rather, consists of hauntings. The ghosts which I refer to are, as Tanner describes them, “the historical and modern ideologies, policies, and practices that haunt the lands we live

⁸⁴ See: Marchetti-Mercer (2012) for an exploration of left-behind friends and siblings.

on, and those that appear wherever members of the dominant cultural group are present to ensure the propagation of oppressive traditions and status quos” (2022, p. 4).

Francis writes that “one of the most important emblems of Canadianness to emerge in the past forty years has been the idea of this country as a uniquely *multicultural* nation” (2022, p. 159). Yet it is important to consider that there are also, as Singh suggest, “very real limits” to inclusion into these ideals, that “[m]any ask if inclusion and incorporation entails a form of assimilation, and on that basis question its desirability” (2022, p. 596). The culturalisation of difference under the auspices of liberal multiculturalism “has evoked a double-edged critique from writers who see the mosaic as potentially exclusivist and essentialist” (Johnston et al 2007, p. 76) — a place where, as I argue, racialised and minoritised peoples are ‘sedimented’ into place.

Considering the three texts along a spectrum of fictive expressions of migrant experience, it is Austria-Bonifacio’s *What’s Best for the Girls* that is closest to expressing the intimacies of family separation. The hyperrepresentation of Filipino women in the live-in caregiver program, and the corresponding traumatic separation of families due to the necessity of migrant work are experiences of the Filipino diaspora in Canada that have all been well-documented in the factual — that is, in activist as well as academic work (Pratt 2012; Tungohan 2023; Tigar 2025; de Leon 2014; Magsumbol 2025). While not necessarily a novel that would be classified as horror, I argue that Austria-Bonifacio’s work can be understood as *horrifying*. *What’s Best for the Girls* showcases the characters’ long-term separation and anticipated moments of reunion, and concurrently, what an anticipated long-term separation means for the left-behind surrogate parents. It shows the protracted nature of migration for families who have been separated, the family time which is imbricated in government time, and how the notion of migration as an event with a singular date of departure and arrival is an oversimplification not only of the event itself but also of the government practices which govern it.

Leyson’s *Glossary*, meanwhile, deals with the folkloric in the figure of the *aswang*. The piece itself speaks to historical moments and places that are real: her fiction is grounded in the political histories of the Philippines with regards to migration, and her descriptions of the diaspora are firmly in Canada. Her work explores how a migrant family which has settled in Canada collectively imagines the Philippines of the past that they have left behind, as well as a Canada of the present that they currently inhabit. Together, these real and imagined

geographies and legal-effective affiliations to both the home of origin and the new home nation co-constitutes the lived circumstances of generations of migrants in Canada.

Dapul's *Bulok* is the most fictional of these three fictive works: while it is the story of a new immigrant to Toronto, the immigrant in question is a Filipina shaman who is using pre-colonial Tagalog faith practices to banish ghouls. It introduces a fictive example of such practices in Mari's patronage of the Tagalog pantheon, in the description of her altar, and in the practices of *bulong* that she performs. As a new immigrant, and an adult, unlike the twin girls in *What's Best for the Girls*, Mari's decision to migrate is bound up in her own decision-making; later on in the series, Mari's family history is revealed as having been forged in the violent political moments which occurred during Marcos Sr.'s Martial Law. Yet, *Bulok* also offers a fictive version of Toronto where urban infrastructure is being built on the bones of buildings past, an ongoing urban terraformation in service of capital and urban development that unfortunately leads to the re-emerging of what has been buried or what has fallen into cracks, where dead things cross back into the land of the living.

Reading these works from the perspective of the Canadian Gothic, and observing the unsettled nature of multiculturalism as a terrain, Chassot observes that the presence of the ghost "makes us more attentive to what may be there even though it is not quite visible, not quite within our reach, and attentive to what really is not there, even though we thought it was, or wish it were" (2018, p. 2). Thobani argues that liberal multiculturalism "constructs communities as neatly bounded, separate cultural entities, unchanged by the process of migration and dislocation," and that they are "perceived as untouched by either the external factors within which their cultural practices take place, which change the histories and destinies of the nation, or by the changing realities within the geopolitical order" (2007, p. 149). Through reading these fictive works as a rupturing of what has been sedimented, I establish that such neat boundaries — forcibly neat boundaries — are false. The national imaginary embedded in liberal multiculturalism, which Halford defines as "the symbols that nationals use to define themselves can seem hypocritical when compared to their behaviour" (2025, p. 12).

Yet I also do not discard the notion of the national. Pennee argues that "the national remains useful in our attempts to cross the major divide of globalized life—the divide between increasing social fragmentation on the one hand, and an increasing need for alternative methods of social integration, on the other" (2004, p. 77). Therefore, in the tradition of the Canadian Gothic and the process of unsettling that it insistently brings to light, to live with ghosts,

Goldman argues, “involves coming to terms with the often violent, synthesizing ambitions of the nation-state and the alternative histories and modes of knowing that the state, in an effort to create a unified national image, suppressed or tried to assimilate” (2012, p. 8). Perhaps to live as ghosts — as presences that conjure things-to-do — is to trouble the notion of ‘coming to terms,’ by an insistence on remembering. Even as settler colonialism continually aims to disappear those it deems abject (), it is evident in these endeavours of disappearance that the Canadian state is continually unsuccessful, as Indigenous subjects return in material confrontations: the landscape is not devoid of ghosts, and Canada, as it was then, as it is now, was never empty.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have situated these fictive works alongside academic writing in order to explore the terraformation of both diasporic and national belongings and identity. I locate these texts historically in the manner of Egholm Lund, wherein “contextualising a text — the etymology of *context* being ‘weaving together’ — also describes the local act of reading a historical text, entangling the *pastness* of literature with the *now* of reading” (2022, p. 171). An examination of the historical fictive is therefore a vital component of the arc of this dissertation, since narratives such as these “play a significant role in the framing and shaping of ‘imagined communities’,” (van Rensburg and Feinauer 2014, p. 104). I name these sedimented spectres here — the nanny, the nurse, and the gangster — as phantoms that are generated to haunt the diaspora. It is therefore also through phantoms — a list which includes “the ghost, the vampire, the monstrous, and the uncanny,” (Sugars and Turcotte 2009, p. xvi), and to which I add Dapul’s ghou, Leyson’s *aswang*, Austria-Bonifacio’s threat of violent absence — that I read the national and literary fictives covered in these texts from the perspective of the Canadian Gothic. These phantoms, and these fictive texts, are a contestation, a move towards disobedience, as Baguisa’s *babae* argues. In looking towards hauntings, I have attempted, as Gordon does, “to make the fictional, the theoretical, and the factual speak to one another” (2008, p. 26).

Chapter Eight: Terraformations of Family, Diaspora, and Nation in Filipino Canada

Terraformations of Belonging in the Diaspora

What, then is a diaspora? Mavroudi argues that a diaspora is “a process in which space, place, and time can be seen as bounded and unbounded within constructions of identity, community, and the nation-state” (2023, p. 473). Quinsaas, on the other hand, proposes that what forms a diaspora is the process of collective participation, that “[m]igrants become a diaspora when they develop collective identities in times of political and social conflicts” (2024, p. 4). I build upon Mavroudi’s geographic and Quinsaas’s social approaches towards diaspora, and offer that a vital aspect of what constitutes a diaspora is an ongoing terraformation of belonging and national identities — that is, the insistence on self-identification and the unsettling of what has been buried, in order to co-create a “new” diasporic and national identity. Throughout this dissertation, I have made the argument that terraformation is a generative heuristic which can be used to make sense of the ways in which belonging changes along three axes: (1) in tracking how expectations regarding Filipino citizenship has changed in the chronological timeline of the SONAs; (2) how diasporic and national identities transform in the lives of the Filipino diaspora in Canada, particularly through the relations in and across kin and non-kin families as well as in the legal-affective relations between individuals and nation-states; and (3) finally, how diasporic and national identities are unsettled through fictive works that are produced by diaspora groups.

The term terraformation, when used as a heuristic, signals a world-change; this is the reason why I was drawn towards the concept, as it reflects the world-change of monumental proportions that is instigated by migrations, that I attempt to sketch out using the long arc from departure to acculturation in the case study of the Filipino diaspora in Canada. Monumental is not a word that I have come to easily, or lightly.

Through the SONAs, I explored the ways in which terraformations of belonging manifested through the changes that were occurring in the legal status of citizenship; I tracked the transformation of Filipino citizenship from a belonging with (a membership) to a belonging to (a possessive). Yet these changes, and even the SONAs themselves, did not go uncontested: Filipinos in the homeland have a long tradition of critical activism against regimes, histories of student protests, and as some of my interviewees did, they can use migration as a form of protest. For the Philippines to have terraformed its expectations of its citizenry in order to accommodate capital, and commodify its working-class citizens into objects of labour, is itself monumental.

Throughout my interviews, I found moments of contestation and negotiation within and across family units, as parents and children sought to define their lives either within or against the context of having uprooted and replanted their lives in Canada. Once more, the changes are monumental: language is either lost or successfully passed on to the second generation; belonging and identity are restructured across the scales of ‘paper’ and ‘blood’; and Filipinos in Canada begin to make claims upon Canadian identities, an unsettling of what has been sedimented in order to terraform previously existing terrain. The influence of homeland politics, for example, is a factor that has proven significant to how migrants understand their political, affective, and cultural relations to the home of origin and the new home nation.

Across the the three fictive works, I make the argument that what they terraform is not just the notion of belonging and identity for the Filipino diaspora, but also for the Canadian nation. In challenging, fictively, how the Filipino diaspora is portrayed — or sedimented — within mainstream understandings of Canadian histories, these works contribute towards challenging how Canadian multiculturalism as a mode of national mythmaking creates specific identities for its racialised and minoritised peoples. This, too, is monumental, in that a diasporic group is unsettling its new home nation in an effort to terraform a singular understanding of the Filipino as worker or labourer, to then note that the nation was, in this exchange, an importer and exploiter.

Future Directions

There are two important themes that I look forward to revisiting in future work. The first is the role of religion in the diaspora, and the second is the pursuit of further familial and intergenerational interviews.

The Philippines is a country which contains many different religions: the most prominent and deeply established, due to over 300 years of Spanish occupation, is Roman Catholicism, but there are also Evangelical and Apostolic sects that have been brought over by more recent American missionaries to the country. Additionally, there are also Filipino Muslims, folk religions, as well as folk religions, and many different sects of Protestantism. The role of religion in the constitution of Filipino national identity is a phenomenon that I was not able to pursue in this dissertation, but I believe that the importance of Filipino religiosity and the community-making ability of such religious groups extend into the diaspora in Canada. Questions regarding politics in both the Philippines and in the diaspora in Canada is also therefore influenced by religion as well. Maboloc observes that “[r]eligion and politics are

intertwined in Philippine political culture because Filipinos consider the Church as their protector from the excesses of their government” (2008, p. 135). This protection is not just a matter that is ascribed to the Catholic Church; as Cornelio and Adalma note, “In the Philippines, evangelical and independent churches — even if they constitute only a minority — are among today’s most politically influential religious groups.” (2021, p. 312). In future work, would be important to further pursue this matter in the context of the diaspora, with a specific focus on Filipino churches including the First Filipino Baptist Church, the Filipino Alliance Church of Toronto, the Toronto Pilipino Seventh-Day Adventist Church, and the Filipino United Pentecostal Church Canada.

In conjunction with this focus on religious groups and religiosity, I believe that it would be important to explore how the queer community in the Filipino diaspora exist within or contend against their own or their family’s religious views. Although I was able to explore some aspects of the experiences of queer Filipinos in this dissertation, particularly with regards to their familial relations as well as their political relationship with the Philippines, it would be valuable to be able to explore the relationships that arise between gender and religion in a diaspora that branched out from a country which is notably religious.

Second, I would like to continue conducting familial and intergenerational interviews with regards to the processes of acculturation experienced by diasporic families. I was able to interview parents, sibling groups, cousins, and two mother/child pairs, but it would be beneficial to follow up on previous interviews and seek out the children of the parents I spoke to, or the parents of the siblings that I interviewed. The ability to compare data, for example, regarding how siblings were differently integrated due to their age upon their arrival, would be made richer by including data from their parents. Similarly, for children whose parents did not impart their heritage languages, it would enrich the data to be able to establish the reasons as to why assimilation into Canadian culture was prioritised over the children being able to speak said heritage languages.

I believe that any research that I do in the future will be anchored in the notion of diaspora as a place of terraformation. As the Filipino diaspora in Canada continues to exist, the characteristics that constitute a recognisable Filipino culture will continue to be terraformed; likewise, with the continuing rise in the number of Filipinos who have chosen Canada as a place of settlement, the ways in which Canada understands itself, its mythologised identity as a benevolent multicultural nation, will also continue to see contested terraformations.

Epilogue: The Diaspora and the Dis/Embodiment of Multicultural Belonging

I began this dissertation with histories of migration that were personal and familial: I used the markers of my family's journey as a wayfinder to present the expansive effects of Philippine labour migration not only from an academic perspective, but also one which humanises the stories that are embedded in the many reports, books, articles, and thinkpieces about the topic. I commenced with the family as the core of the experiences of migration in the Filipino diaspora: from parents who decide to leave their families behind, to parents who bring their children with them, or siblings who decide to make their way abroad and be separated from their families, the stories that were shared with me in the interviews were about family. Migration, as I have learned, and as I keep on learning, is a relational act: by this, I mean not only the decisions that are made to leave, which are rooted in relations to the family and to the state, but also the decisions of choosing to stay in the new home nation.

The family is what is carried over, into the new home, and has soft cultural power over what gets remembered and what gets left behind not only for themselves but for the diaspora at large; these include not only the more obvious artefacts such as language and culinary culture, but also values that are associated with the collectively-imagined national Filipino identity. Migrant families, in the decisions that they make internally and collectively, are indicative of how diasporic identities, as Hall observes, are "those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (1990, p. 235). In these explorations of the experiences of the Filipino diaspora in Canada, examined through the framework of terraformation as a world-change that involves both the nation-state and the departing or integrating diaspora, I offer that such changes are deeply and inescapably agentic, contested, and political. Migrant bodies are re/configured by a maelstrom of legislation, and are often bound in bureaucratic time, as well as in the cultural meanings that reside in national and legalistic notions of belonging. The migrant is therefore always a political figure, a manifestation of the politics of a state: this holds true whether the migrant is being perceived by the Philippines as a departing citizen-migrant, or by Canada as an incoming potential migrant-citizen.

The calendar date of a migrant's arrival in their new home nation, as my interviewees' narratives suggest, is not the beginning of their story. Rather, a migrant's arrival serves as the bridge between their life in the home of origin and their new home town, a continuation of decisions that are made in response to circumstances that have compelled their departure. As Tka Pinnock writes, "My memories—those I remember and those I forget—are always part of

me for the lived experience of a thing can never be unlived” (2024, p. 333); while I now answer to the identity of Filipino Canadian, and consider Toronto ‘home,’ I am reminded that in the present multi-culturality of Canada, many Canadians arrive ‘home’ — or become legally Canadian — much later than birth. As I locate Filipino Canada within and beyond the borders of Canada, I remind myself that the terraformation of citizenship and culture does not come without a cost. On the afternoon of my citizenship ceremony, on the bus ride back, I remember reflecting upon when it was that I had begun to identify as both Filipino and Canadian. In 2023, prior to becoming a Canadian citizen, I had received a grant through the Philippine Studies Group along with seven other graduate students at York University who were in Filipino Studies; among other places, this was reported on the digital website of Inquirer.Net. The article, which was tagged “Fil-Canadian,” referred to us in the headline as Canadian grad students. I eventually came to the conclusion that for me, the article was not wrong. I *was*, or *am*, Filipino Canadian. Yet to call the Philippines ‘home’ is to imagine a place of post-colony that has been left behind, and to think of Canada as home is to engage with a place steeped in histories of race and settler-colonialism. In the terraformation of Canada as a space that has yet to fully reckon with its histories as a settler colony, many more monumental changes are sure to come.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethics Approval



OFFICE OF
RESEARCH
ETHICS (ORE)
3rd Floor, Kaneff
Tower

4700 Keele St.
Toronto ON
Canada M3J 1P3
Tel 416 736 5914
www.research.yorku.ca

Certificate #:	STU 2023-017
Approval Period:	02/16/23-02/16/24

ETHICS APPROVAL

To: **Nadjie Magumbol**
Graduate Student of Political Science
ndm@yorku.ca

From: Alison M. Collins-Mrakas, Director, Research Ethics
(on behalf of Janessa Drake, Chair, Human Participants Review Committee)

Date: Thursday, February 16, 2023

Title: **A Political Economy of Emotions: Citizen/ship, Nation/alism, and the Transnational Family in the Philippines as a Labour Brokerage State**

Risk Level: ☒ Minimal Risk ☐ More than Minimal Risk

Level of Review: ☒ Delegated Review ☐ Full Committee Review

I am writing to inform you that this research project, "**A Political Economy of Emotions: Citizen/ship, Nation/alism, and the Transnational Family in the Philippines as a Labour Brokerage State**" has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines.

Note that approval is granted for one year. Ongoing research – research that extends beyond one year – must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any changes to the approved protocol must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process by submission of an amendment application to the HPRC prior to its implementation.

Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Office of Research ethics (ore@yorku.ca) as soon as possible.

For further information on researcher responsibilities as it pertains to this approved research ethics protocol, please refer to the attached document, "**RESEARCH ETHICS: PROCEDURES to ENSURE ONGOING COMPLIANCE**".

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at acollins@yorku.ca.

Yours sincerely,

Alison M. Collins-Mrakas M.Sc., LL.M.
Director, Office of Research Ethics

RESEARCH ETHICS: PROCEDURES to ENSURE ONGOING COMPLIANCE

Upon receipt of an ethics approval certificate, researchers are reminded that they are required to ensure that the following measures are undertaken so as to ensure on-going compliance with Senate and TCPS ethics guidelines:

1. **RENEWALS:** Research Ethics Approval certificates are subject to annual renewal. **Failure to renew an ethics approval certificate or (to notify ORE that no further research involving human participants will be undertaken) will result in the closure of the protocol.** No further research activities may be undertaken until such time as a new protocol has been reviewed and approved. **Further, it may result in suspension of research cost fund and access to research funds may be suspended/withheld;**
2. **AMENDMENTS:** Amendments must be reviewed and approved **PRIOR** to undertaking/making the proposed amendments to an approved ethics protocol;
3. **END OF PROJECT:** ORE must be notified when a project is complete;
4. **ADVERSE EVENTS:** Adverse events must be reported to ORE as soon as possible;
5. **POST APPROVAL MONITORING:**
 - a. More than minimal risk research may be subject to post approval monitoring as per TCPS guidelines;
 - b. A spot sample of minimal risk research may similarly be subject to Post Approval Monitoring as per TCPS guidelines.

FORMS: As per the above, the following forms relating to on-going research ethics compliance are available on the Research website:

- a. Renewal
- b. Amendment
- c. End of Project
- d. Adverse Event

Appendix 2: Ethics Renewal



OFFICE OF
RESEARCH
ETHICS (ORE)
Kaneff Tower
4700 Keele St.
Toronto ON
Canada M3J 1P3
ore@yorku.ca
www.research.yorku.ca

Certificate #:	STU 2023-017
Initial Approval:	02/16/23-02/16/24
Amendments:	
Renewals:	02/09/24-02/09/25
Current Approval Period:	02/09/24-02/09/25

ETHICS RENEWAL

To: **Nadjie Magsumbol - Graduate Student**
Department of Political Science
Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies
ndm@yorku.ca

From: Alison M. Collins-Mrakas, Director, Research Ethics
(on behalf of You-ta Chuang, Chair, Human Participants Review Committee)

Date: Friday, February 9, 2024

Title: **A Political Economy of Emotions: Citizen/ship, Nation/alism, and the Transnational Family in the Philippines as a Labour Brokerage State**

Risk Level: ☒ Minimal Risk ☐ More than Minimal Risk

Level of Review: ☒ Delegated Review ☐ Full Committee Review

I am writing to inform you that this research project, "**A Political Economy of Emotions: Citizen/ship, Nation/alism, and the Transnational Family in the Philippines as a Labour Brokerage State**" has received ethics review and renewal by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines.

Note that renewal is granted for one year. Ongoing research – research that extends beyond one year – must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any changes to the approved protocol must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process by submission of an amendment application to the HPRC prior to its implementation.

Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Office of Research ethics (ore@yorku.ca) as soon as possible.

For further information on researcher responsibilities as it pertains to this approved research ethics protocol, please refer to the attached document, "**RESEARCH ETHICS: PROCEDURES to ENSURE ONGOING COMPLIANCE**".

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at: 416-736-5914 or via email at: acollins@yorku.ca.

Yours sincerely,

Alison M. Collins-Mrakas M.Sc., LLM
Director, Office of Research Ethics

RESEARCH ETHICS: PROCEDURES to ENSURE ONGOING COMPLIANCE

Upon receipt of an ethics approval certificate, researchers are reminded that they are required to ensure that the following measures are undertaken so as to ensure on-going compliance with Senate and TCPS ethics guidelines:

1. **RENEWALS:** Research Ethics Approval certificates are subject to annual renewal. **Failure to renew an ethics approval certificate or (to notify ORE that no further research involving human participants will be undertaken) will result in the closure of the protocol.** No further research activities may be undertaken until such time as a new protocol has been reviewed and approved. **Further, it may result in suspension of research cost fund and access to research funds may be suspended/withheld;**
2. **AMENDMENTS:** Amendments must be reviewed and approved **PRIOR** to undertaking/making the proposed amendments to an approved ethics protocol;
3. **END OF PROJECT:** ORE must be notified when a project is complete;
4. **ADVERSE EVENTS:** Adverse events must be reported to ORE as soon as possible;
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 - a. More than minimal risk research may be subject to post approval monitoring as per TCPS guidelines;
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FORMS: As per the above, the following forms relating to on-going research ethics compliance are available on the Research website:

- a. Renewal
- b. Amendment
- c. End of Project
- d. Adverse Event

Appendix 3: Sample Informed Consent

Informed Consent Form Interviews

Date:

Study Name:

A Political Economy of Emotions: Citizen/ship, Nation/alism, and the Transnational Family in the Philippines as a Labour Brokerage State

Researcher name:

Dani Magsumbol, Politics, PhD 5, York University, Principal Investigator

Supervisory Committee: Dr. Ethel Tungohan (supervisor), Dr. Leah F. Vosko, Dr. Jakeet Singh.

Purpose of the Research:

The research project focuses on the experiences of Filipino immigrants in Canada, and the experiences of families as well as individuals in determining what Filipino culture and identity means to them.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:

If you agree to participate in the interview and focus group, you will be asked questions that are about your experiences as a Filipino migrant in Canada, including your thoughts about storytelling, identity formation, and arts & culture. The duration of this interview will be one hour.

Risks and Discomforts:

The experiences of being a Filipino immigrant are complicated. If the questions that I bring up during the interview session bring up feelings of discomfort, it is okay if you decide to take a moment to process, or choose to not answer the question. You may even decide to end the interview at that point, and that is acceptable too (see “withdrawal from the study” below).

If you choose to end the interview, the researcher will stop the recording, and will debrief with you. At this point, you may decide or choose to have a discussion that does not go on the record to process what points caused discomfort, and the researcher will share resources that are accessible to you.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:

You will benefit from being able to discuss your experiences as a migrant, or a person of Filipino migrant descent, specifically in Canada, with a focus on your own voice and narrative. The self-identity of migrants can sometimes be overlooked in academic writing about labour migrants, and this project seeks to highlight that. The Canadian academic community, specifically in the emerging field of Filipino-Canadian studies, will benefit from your contribution by illustrating the important role of Filipino migrants and their families in Philippine culture as well as Filipino-Canadian culture. The focus on the familial and intergenerational experiences of being OFWs or being a family with OFW members will also be beneficial to discuss.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary, and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision to volunteer or to withdraw will not influence the relationship you may have with Dani Magsumbol, nor will it affect the nature of your relationship with York University either now or in the future.

Withdrawal from the Study:

You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with Dani Magsumbol, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the

event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

In-person OR Zoom interview:

You will have the choice to participate in the interviews and focus groups either in-person or via Zoom. If conducting this interview via Zoom, research participants have the option of turning off their cameras and/or using a pseudonym. To protect participants' privacy and consent, we ask that participants not share the Zoom link with anyone. Please note that Zoom servers are located outside of Canada, and Zoom stores users' names and usage data outside of Canada.

For Zoom interviews:

This study will use Zoom Video Communications to collect data if the participant chooses a Zoom interview. Zoom is an externally hosted cloud-based service. When information is transmitted over the internet privacy cannot be guaranteed. There is always a risk your responses may be intercepted by a third party (e.g., government agencies, hackers). Further, while York University researchers will not collect or use IP addresses or other information which could link your participation to your computer or electronic devices without informing you, there is a small risk with any platform such as this of data that is collected on external servers falling outside the control of the research team. If you are concerned about this, we would be happy to make alternative arrangements (where possible) for you to participate, perhaps via telephone. Please contact ndm@yorku.ca for further information. Recordings (audio/video) will be saved in a password protected file to research team members' local computer, not the cloud based service. Please note that it is the expectation that participants agree not to make any unauthorized recordings of the content of a meeting/data collection session.

Confidentiality:

All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research.

Data will be collected via handwritten notes and audio recordings on a digital device. Your data will be safely stored in a locked filing cabinet at my home office, as well as on a password protected folder on the researcher's computer, and only the primary researcher will have access to this information. The information will be kept until the defense of this dissertation project in September 2024, upon which time all transcribed and recorded interviews will be permanently deleted. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact me at ndm@yorku.ca. You may also contact the Department of Politics at York University. This research has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Director, Research Ethics in the Office of Research Ethics, 3rd Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University (e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I, _____, consent to participate in *A Political Economy of Emotions* conducted by Dani Magsumbol. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature _____
Participant

Date _____

Signature _____
Principal Investigator

Date _____

Additional consent

1. Audio recording

☐ I consent to the audio-recording of my interview(s).

2. Video recording or use of photographs

I _____ consent to the use of images of me (including photographs, video and other moving images), my environment and property in the following ways (please check all that apply):

In academic articles	☐ N	☐ Y
In print, digital and slide form	☐ N	☐ Y
In academic presentations	☐ N	☐ Y
In media	☐ N	☐ Y
In thesis materials	☐ N	☐ Y

Signature _____
Participant Name:

Date _____

Appendix 4: Social Media Callouts

Hello!

My name is Dani Magsumbol, and I am currently a PhD candidate at the Department of Politics at York University.

In my dissertation, I am thinking and writing about the emotional attachments that Filipino immigrants & their families have towards their cultural identities and legal citizenships, in tandem with how labour migration affects the lives of OFWs and their families.

In my family life, I am the daughter of a former live-in caregiver. In 2009, after many years of separation, my mom was finally able to send for me and my brother to join her in Toronto.

For my dissertation research, I write about the ways that Filipino families love each other and maintain their relationships through the distance and time difference that happens when family members have to be abroad to work.

I also try to understand the choices we make as we navigate being Filipino in Canada, with a focus on intergenerational identities in immigrant families, and use that knowledge to expand the ways that the experience of being a Filipino immigrant is understood.

If you are:

- [1] Filipino*
- [2] Living in Canada*
- [3] Arrived as an OFW on a work visa between 2012 to 2022*
- [4] Are now either PR or a Canadian citizen*

I would love to speak with you and a family member of your choosing about your experiences as Filipino immigrants in Canada.

There will be three interviews in total:

- [1] An interview with you, the OFW*
- [2] An interview with your family member*
- [3] An interview with the two of you together*

The interviews will range from about 45 minutes to an hour.

I am seeking out interviewees all across Canada, a total of ten families.

I am not able to offer monetary incentives, but will have a small token of appreciation for after the interviews.

I am not able to offer monetary incentives, but will have a small token of appreciation for after the interviews.

If there is any interest at all, please let me know. My email is ndm@yorku.ca, and I am happy to discuss further via Zoom or email if you would like to ask a few questions before committing to the interviews.

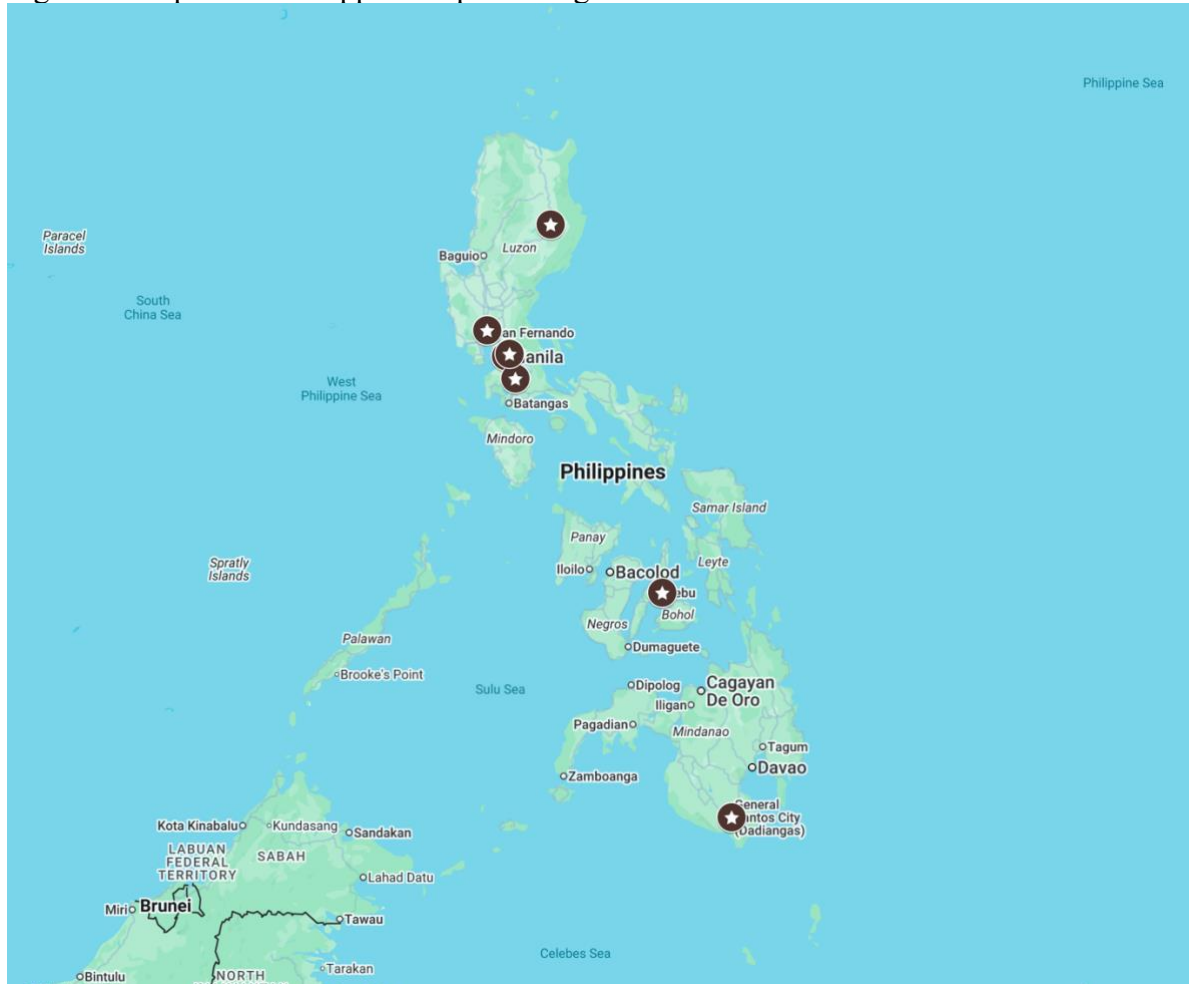
This brings me to my callout for research participants.

*Maraming salamat
Salamat guid
Thank you!*

Appendix 5: Maps of Interviewee Locations in the Philippines and in Canada

Across the interviews, the following Philippine cities and provinces are represented: Manila, Calamba, Laguna; Pampanga; General Santos City; Cagayan Valley; Quezon City; Cebu City.

Figure 1: Map of the Philippines representing transnational locations of the interviewees.

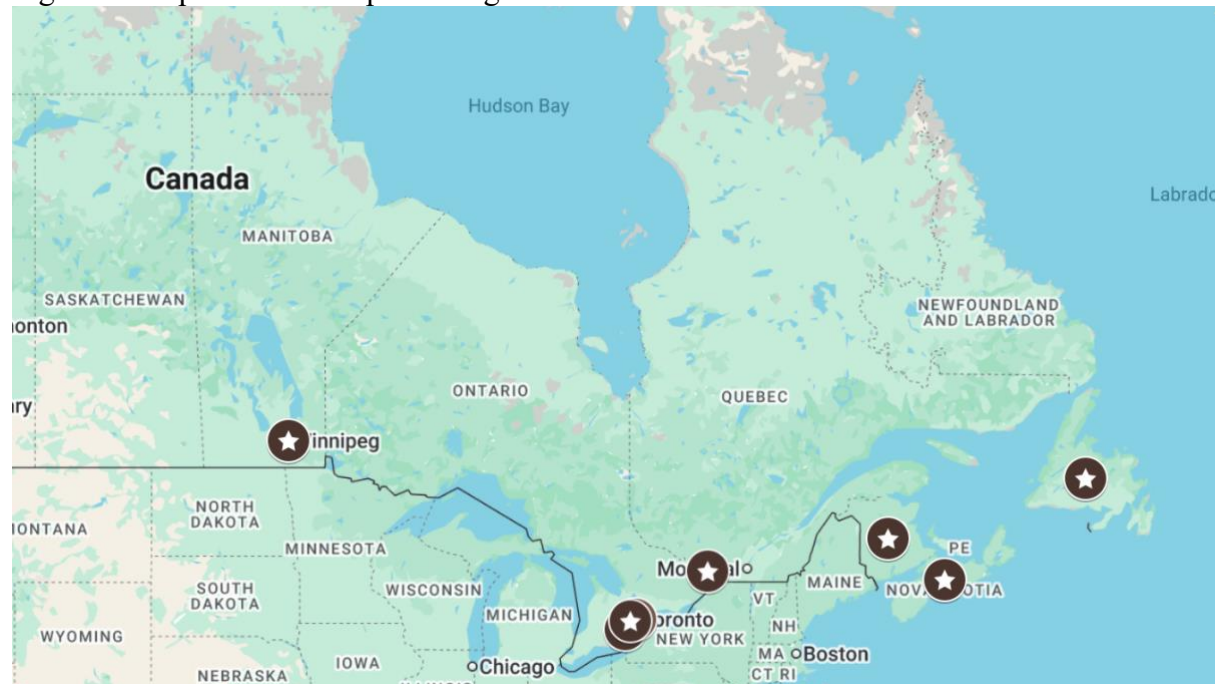


Source: Created by author

Source: Created by author

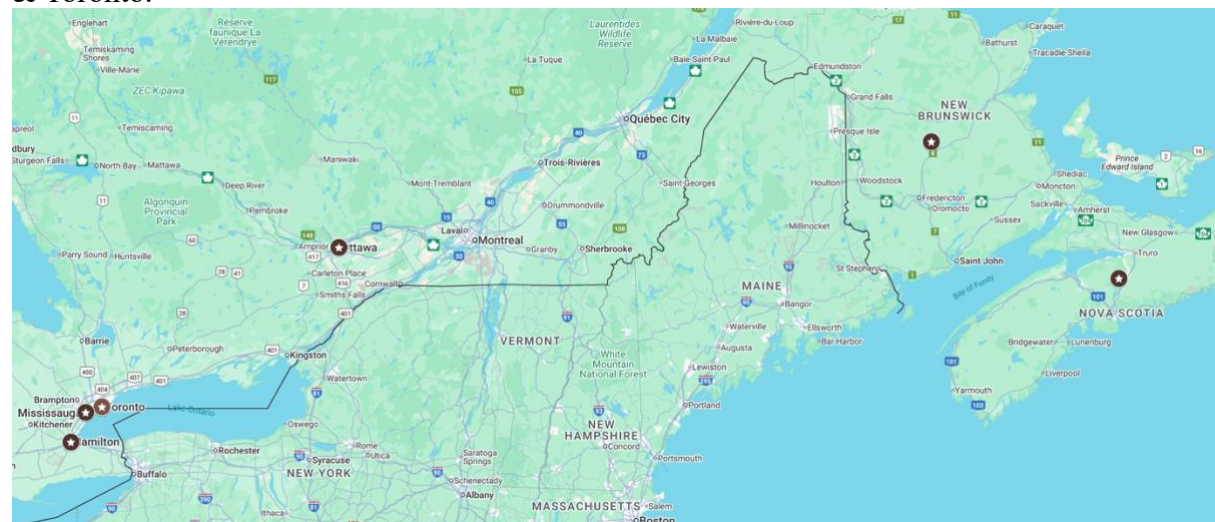
Across the interviews, the following places in Canada are represented: Winnipeg, Manitoba; Ottawa, Toronto, and Hamilton, Ontario; Nova Scotia; Newfoundland; and New Brunswick.

Figure 3: Map of Canada representing the locations of the interviewees



Source: Created by author

Figure 4: Map of Canadian Locations, Expanded to Show Details of Mississauga, Hamilton, & Toronto.



Source: Created by author