

**Creating Imagined Homelands and the Politics behind Balikbayan Identity**

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## **Abstract**

‘Balikbayan’ is a Filipino term used to describe Filipinos who have left the homeland, and have returned for temporary visits. Due to the large economic contribution of balikbayans in the past, which currently makes up for a significant portion of the Philippines’ GDP, the Philippine state has hailed those who occupy this status as ‘Heroes of the Nation’. This status has led to a particular set of discourses and politics surrounding those who identify or are identified as a ‘balikbayan’. In the recent years, balikbayans have been targeted by real estate development companies as sources of capital due to the widely held belief by Filipinos that balikbayans are very wealthy. Many development companies specifically look to target balikbayans to purchase luxury enclave development properties in the Philippines as investment properties. Using data that I had gathered from my fieldwork in the Philippines in the summer of 2014, I will examine what role these luxury properties and consumer consumption have in displaying the balikbayan identity, why it is such a desired subject position by Filipinos, and the discrepancies between the state definition of balikbayan, versus on the ground definition of balikbayan.

**Dedicated to the people who first peaked my interests in this topic,  
and encouraged me to investigate it further.  
My parents, Max and Melba Humilde**

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## **Introduction**

### ***The Philippine Real Estate Phenomenon***

I initially became interested in Philippine real estate and the politics surrounding this phenomenon a few years ago, when I began hearing a lot of people talking about the new, ‘high-end’ condominium developments that were being built in the Philippines. During this time my uncle purchased a unit from a highly anticipated development in an area of metro Manila that was previously used as a military base. I remember him announcing his purchase in a ‘high-end’ development called Serendra one evening at a family dinner. This sparked conversations long afterwards about why he bought the unit in the first place, as the Philippines was so far away, and debates over whether it was better to retire in the Philippines or to simply stay in Canada. I found it highly interesting listening to these spirited debates and watching the discourses and logics of transnationalism (though I did not realize it at the time) playing out right in front of me. As a result I started to wonder to myself, why is it that Filipinos who have lived in another country for the majority of their lives, and have even become naturalized citizens in these countries, still desire to maintain ties and even return to the country which they chose to leave in the first place?

Months after these debates surrounding properties in the Philippines surfaced, I was walking through a popular mall in my hometown of Ottawa, Canada shopping with my mother, when a lady at a kiosk in the middle of the mall approached us and asked if we were Filipino. Once my mother and I replied ‘yes’, the woman quickly ushered us to her kiosk and began her sales presentation of these properties in the Philippines that were in the process of development. My mother, who was in no mood at the time to sit through an entire sales presentation, quickly thanked the lady and continued on with her shopping. At the time I remember being taken off

guard to see a woman in Ottawa, Canada looking to specifically target Filipinos living in Canada as potential buyers of a condominium located in the Philippines. I took note of the oddity of the incident, but then quickly put it out of my mind until months later when I was reading an advertisement in a Filipino travel magazine that read, “A Scent of European countryside living at Twin Lakes.” I also thought this was quite odd, due to the fact that I was reading a Philippine travel magazine that was advertising condominiums for sale in the Philippines, but was using European imagery such as vineyards and European style villas. The advertisement itself, I found, was a very strange juxtaposition of images of the Philippines landscape in the background, with European-style villas in the foreground. As I flipped through the magazine, I noticed that there were many more of these developments being advertised that were quite similar to the European-themed developments I had seen earlier. Although they were not all European themed, they were all luxury, exclusive enclave communities, modeled after the ideals of ‘Westernized’ countries. It was then that I thought back to the encounter with the sales agent at the mall in Ottawa, and it dawned on me that many of these developers were setting out to target Filipinos who were overseas. Filipinos who were stereotyped by *Philippine Nationals*<sup>1</sup> to be wealthy due to the fact that Filipinos who work abroad bring back foreign currency that is typically worth much more than the local currency, and thus their money goes farther. *Balibayans* is the term Philippine Nationals use to describe those Filipinos who live and work in another country, but who return to the Philippines for periodical visits. While large-scale emigration in the Philippines began between 1907 and 1929, during the labor shortages on sugar plantations in Hawaii, it has only been during the last 45 years, according to Vicente Rafael (1997), that there has been such a large-scale and, more importantly, state-encouraged movement of Filipinos who become

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<sup>1</sup> I use this term to describe those who had never left the Philippines

<sup>2</sup> Data retrieved from the Commission of Overseas Filipinos, Global Mapping of Overseas Filipinos 2011.

temporary workers or immigrants. This movement has become so large that migration has become part of the nation's everyday life. This is evidenced by the high volume of advertisements for immigration agencies, advertisements looking for workers in other countries, and the everyday discourses present among the people in the Philippines, which I had especially taken note of during my time in the Philippines.

### ***The Balikbayan subject position***

Balikbayans occupy a very special position in Philippine society because of their privileged status. They are mobile, they have access to the cultural exposure of 'abroad', and they bring back currency that is worth much more than the local currency. As of 2011, it was estimated that there were approximately 10.5-13.5 million Filipinos who were currently living or working overseas (The Commission of Overseas Filipinos, 2011).<sup>2</sup> In many ways, they are seen as, and treated like, tourists. As Vicente Rafael points out, "being a balikbayan depends on one's permanent residence abroad. It means that one lives somewhere else and that one's appearance in the Philippines is temporary and intermittent as if one were a tourist" (1997:270). At the same time, however, balikbayans are also known to be a strong economic force in the Philippines due to their hefty economic contribution in the form of remittances to the country. Remittances make up 12% of the Philippines' GDP, and it is the most importance source of foreign exchange in the Philippine economy (Ang et al. 2009). Remittances from Filipinos in Canada alone add up to approximately \$1.5 Billion Dollars (CAD) annually (Friesen 2011). This contribution has not gone unnoticed, especially by the Philippine State, which has hailed balikbayans as 'Heroes of the Nation'. Being a balikbayan comes with some perks such as visa-free entry into the Philippines and membership/access to VIP lounges located in some of the Philippines' largest

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<sup>2</sup> Data retrieved from the Commission of Overseas Filipinos, Global Mapping of Overseas Filipinos 2011. Retrieved May 10, 2014.  
[http://www.cfo.gov.ph/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&id=134&Itemid=814](http://www.cfo.gov.ph/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=134&Itemid=814)

malls. As Rafael notes, because balikbayans are seen as “foreign sources of ‘aid’, [they] come to occupy ambiguous positions. Neither wholly outside the Nation-state, they hover on the edges of its consciousness, rendering its boundaries porous with their dollar-driven comings and goings” (1997:268-269). In this way balikbayans occupy a periphery subject position within the state, and within Philippine culture.

At the same time, it is important to understand that the notion of the balikbayan as a subject position is also conferred to a particular identity. The idea behind the concept of balikbayan is that this is a particular position of privilege within Philippine culture to which only certain Filipinos have access. Balikbayans have the ability to come and go from the Philippines and typically have access to more powerful states, while at the same time holding permanent residency or citizenship within these more powerful states. In this way, the balikbayan position is intermittent and so, in order for balikbayans to demonstrate their position and to differentiate themselves from locals, they must do certain things that are symbolic in nature and that thus convey their claims to this identity within the shared cultural system.

It was Stuart Hall (1996) who first challenged the long-standing notion of identity in the social sciences. Previously most scholars understood the notion of identity from the perspective of a Cartesian ideology, which postulated that identity was fixed rather than fluid. Stuart Hall came to challenge this understanding by exploring the notion of subjectivity and considering how actions and discourses produce individual, human autonomy, and consciousness of the self. Identity is part of this discursive process, a signifying practice that operates on difference. When it comes to emulating a particular identity, people will use certain practices in order to symbolically play up traits or characteristics of their identities, which characterizes them as different from others. According to Stuart Hall, “[i]dentities are about questions of using history,

language and culture in the process of becoming not being. How we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves” (1996:4). Thus, for Hall, identification is a process and identities are constructed within, not outside of, discourse. Thus, he argues, we need to understand the historical and institutional forces that surround this discursive practice.

Judith Butler (1990) provides further insight on this issue, as she argues that different identities become internalized by individuals who take them on; this process of individuals taking on various identities is what she calls ‘performativity’. In her consideration of gender identity, she argues that there is no identity behind expressions of gender, but that instead “[i]dentity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (Butler 1990:24-25). In this thesis I will examine how those who take on the balikbayan identity internalize and perform this identity through symbolic displays of dress, speech, and consumption of real estate property.

An important perspective on subjectivity and identity construction can be found in the work of Chris Weedon (2004), who draws on Althusser’s (1971) concept of a ‘*knowing subject*’. A knowing subject is a person who is sovereign and rational with a unified consciousness and who is in control of language and meaning. People become knowing subjects when they recognize themselves in relation to other people and institutions within a larger social structure. Weedon argues that this process is fundamental for human societies because the recognition of the self interpellates the individual as a subject within a particular ideology and discourse, which in turn dictates how subjects come to know themselves and thus take on a particular identity. This approach follows from the work of Michel Foucault (1986a, 1986b, 1988) whose theoretical considerations of subjectivity has helped to shift scholarly concerns away from the earlier notion of a fixed identity, and made way for an understanding of subject positions as fluid and

changing, as well as how these positions allow subjects to experience, understand, and conduct themselves within society. Foucault defines subjectification as the relationship and process between social actors and the modes in which such persons come to occupy subject positions. People occupy these positions by recognizing the spots they occupy within society and conducting themselves accordingly based on the discourse and articulations that define these positions. According to Foucault, subjectification occurs through the workings of ‘*technologies of the self*’, which can be defined as the techniques through which human beings come to experience, understand, and conduct themselves (1986a, 1986b, 1988 cf Rose 1996). As Rose states,

“[o]ur experience of ourselves as certain sorts of persons...is the outcome of a range of human technologies, technologies that take modes of being human as their object. Technology, here, refers to any assembly structured by practical rationality governed by a more or less conscious goal. One can regard school, the prison, the asylum as examples of one species of such technologies” (1996: 132).

Thus, subjectification is a process through which people come to recognize the position they occupy, positions that are informed by structures of power such as the government, the dominant culture or the state (Rose, 1996).

Chris Weedon notes that a wide range of social practices come into play when subjects are recruited to a particular identity.

“As individuals are inserted within specific discourses, we repeatedly perform modes of subjectivity and identity until these are experienced as if they were second nature . . . the wide range of identities available in a society and the modes of subjectivity are not open to all people at all times. They are often restricted to specific groups, usually on the basis of class, gender, and race, that are all exclusive to and policed by the groups in question” (2004:7).

Weedon discusses how identification fixes people into a particular mode of subjectivity. While identity might be fluid and plural, once a person identifies with a particular identity, they are subsequently fixed into a particular mode of subjectivity, which in turn gives individuals

“a singular sense of who they are and where they belong. This process involves recruiting subjects to the specific meanings and values constituted within a particular discourse and encouraging identification. A wide range of social practices, for example, education, the media, sport and state rituals offer subject positions that encourage identification” (2004:19).

Therefore, through the process of identification, an individual becomes a subject of a particular ideology, and thus takes on a particular subject position in which they are an agent of and become subject to that particular mode of subjectivity. Through this process of identification a person comes to understand which identities are open to them, and which identities they are able to assume based on the ideologies that make sense of these subject positions.

As noted above, the balikbayan subject position is an intermediary subject position, one that is dependent on permanent residency elsewhere, and is only occupied intermittently (during one’s travels back to the Philippines). However in the time that people occupy this subject position, they are subject to particular discourses of the Philippine state, culture, and its ideas. Thus, those discourses surrounding the balikbayan subject position recruit those who are eligible to assume this identity based on the assertions and understandings of this position. With this in mind, I will be drawing on Weedon’s (2004) approach to inform my investigation of balikbayans and the state and cultural discourses and ideologies that are related to this subject position. I will investigate how balikbayan subjects come to understand these discourses, ideas and practices, and subsequently assume this identity of the balikbayan. According to Weedon, “[i]dentity is made visible and intelligible to others through cultural signs, symbols and practices” (2004:7). Thus, my investigation particularly focuses on the practice of consumer consumption, especially how the consumption of luxury real estate condominium properties is used to symbolically to convey to balikbayan identity, and how this practice is largely influenced by state and cultural discourses that dictate the balikbayan position. I will investigate why these condominiums are

such a desired form of investment, and how the motivations of balikbayans to choose this particular form of investment, rather than mutual funds or stocks, is related to larger cultural and state discourses and practices which inform the balikbayan subject position.

### *Investigating balikbayan identity*

During the summer of 2014, I conducted an anthropological investigation into how the motivations of balikbayan subjects to purchase exclusive, high-end real estate properties are influenced by larger cultural and state discourses. What I found was that this particular practice was used by balikbayans to symbolically inform others of their particular identity, and that the logics behind the purchase of these properties was heavily influenced by larger cultural and state discourses. The balikbayan position is indeed an exemplary position, one that is also temporary, and acquired only through migration. However, I will argue that the balikbayan identity is not monolithic, despite the fact that all those who occupy this subject position are subject to similar discourses and ideologies dictated by the Philippine state and culture. While there is a particular ideology and discourse present which characterizes balikbayan subjects and dictates who is eligible to assume this identity, there are still different forms of this identity. These different forms are based on ideologies surrounding socioeconomic status and economic success achieved while abroad, which acts as a form of cultural capital and which create a hierarchy as individuals strive to differentiate themselves within the balikbayan subject position. High-end real estate, such as luxury condominiums, act as symbols and indicators of which form of balikbayan identity subjects occupy, and where they are positioned within this hierarchy. The balikbayan identity, and subsequently its position on this hierarchy, is defined largely through engagements with consumption (such as the consumption of luxury condominiums, or goods from ‘abroad’), and lifestyle choices (such as the pursuit of work abroad or the relocation of family abroad).

Following Arjun Appadurai (1986), I argue that these commodities have social lives; they are used as signifiers for a particular balikbayan identity and thus they send particular social messages. In the following chapters, I will argue that these objects and lifestyle choices are partly influenced by a mentality that was engendered under the United States colonial rule of the Philippines.

Cesar Polvorsa Jr. argues that “for Filipinos, the experience under U.S. rule engendered a colonial mentality that glorified the United States as a vastly superior culture and a prosperous country,” something which is widely believed in the Philippines to this day, as I will demonstrate in the chapters to follow. He goes on to state that “from the perspective of Filipino immigrants, the main goal is to escape the underdevelopment of the ‘East’ and take part in the prosperity and high status of the ‘West’” (2012: 183). According to a study by Yen Le Espiritu, “[b]esides imposing strong unequal military and economic ties between the two countries, this colonial heritage produced a pervasive cultural Americanization of the population, exhorting Filipinos to regard the American culture, political system, and way of life as more prestigious than their own” (2003: 24). I will argue however, that this high regard for American culture also extends to Westernized cultures in general (such as Canadian, British, Australian), any culture that is considered by Filipinos to be ‘Westernized’. By consuming certain objects and making certain lifestyle choices through migration, purchase of property, and the blatant display of ‘Westernized goods/brands’, balikbayans are communicating a particular set of signifiers which express certain notions of status and hierarchy and thus shape ideas of identity, community and success. In this way, this affinity for Westernized culture acts as a sign of affluence in the Philippines, and is a means of gaining cultural capital. I use this term in the same manner as Pierre Bourdieu (1992) where he argues that cultural capital is a type of social asset such as education and skills, or style

of speech or dress, or physical appearance which can be acquired by individuals through the process of socialization and that allows them to gain mobility within society. In my study I found that as balikbayans display their affinity for Americanized or Westernized culture through language, style of speech, and dress, they are able to mark themselves as balikbayans and solidify their identity within the balikbayan subject position.

Shalini Shankar's (2008) ethnography 'Desi Land', is an account of South Asian American teen culture during the Silicon Valley dot-com boom. In this ethnography, she discusses how Desi teens and their families define and desire aesthetic tastes through engagements with consumption and material culture. According to Shankar, material culture defines Desi style and success on a number of levels. Style is not only reflected in objects, but also in the types of lifestyle choices teens and their families make. Shankar notes that consumption has been described as a language of communication through which objects communicate meaning associated with shared symbolic systems. Objects that confer status in one's clique or community are highly valued and shape meanings of identity, community and success. Shankar references Thorstein Veblen (1953) and Pierre Bourdieu (1984) who both argue that objects are used as social markers to signify social class. Alongside status, consumption is central to shaping identity, as well as kinship, expression and relationships. Using this framework, I will argue that, similar to a 'Desi' lifestyle, the balikbayan identity is defined largely through engagements with consumption (such as the consumption of goods from 'abroad', or goods obtained from family members from 'abroad' who send back balikbayan boxes, and the purchase of luxury condos) and lifestyle choices (such as the pursuit of work abroad, or the relocation of the family abroad).

In recent years there have been a number of pieces that have focused on balikbayans, or as some have dubbed them, Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWS), or Overseas Filipinos (OFs). Vicente Rafael's (1997) "Your Grief is our Gossip": Overseas Filipinos and Other Spectral Presences" is one of the key pieces that considers the Philippine balikbayan identity and how this identity contrasts with the Philippine OCW (Overseas Contract Worker) identity. He notes that balikbayans occupy ambiguous positions that are

"neither wholly outside the nation-state, nor in it...they have sentimental attachments to the homeland due to extended family and loyalty to the nation-state. At the same time, being a balikbayan depends on one's permanent residence abroad. It means that one lives somewhere else and that one's appearance in the Philippines is temporary and intermittent, as if one were a tourist" (1997: 269-270).

In the following chapters, which will incorporate data from my fieldwork undertaken in the Philippines during the summer of 2014, I will discuss the issues of social and cultural capital associated with this balikbayan identity, and how monetary and material remittances from balikbayans act as signifiers to display a particular social status. I will also consider how balikbayan consumerism acts as a way for balikbayans to maintain ties of kinship with their friends and family and, as Albuero (2002) argues, to demonstrate loyalty to the nation-state. Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr. has also investigated overseas Filipino migration in his book "Maalwang Buhay" (2009) and how these movements affect kinship relations, economic and social mobility, along with the logics behind investing in property back in the homeland, and the significance of these dwellings. In his other piece, "Dialectics of Transnationalism: Shame and National Identity" (1996), he looks at the transformation of the migrant's national identity, and argues how 'international migration has a strong connection to nationness' (105). Through the ritual of remittances Filipino's overseas affirm their identities and keep ties with the homeland, and this journey of migration Aguilar argues, comes to completion with the return to the homeland. My

thesis focuses on the homecoming of Filipino migrants- whom Filipinos call ‘balikbayans’ - and how luxury real estate properties, among other consumer goods- are used as economic and social capital in order to display migrants’ newfound social status. While both Rafael and Albuero provide important insight into the cultural and social significance of balikbayan identity, there has not been an in-depth consideration of how consumption, lifestyle choices, and symbolic objects (such as luxury condominiums) shape meanings of identity, status, and socioeconomic success. Aguilar’s piece, “Maalwang Buhay” (2009) touches on this briefly, however his primary research focus is on how these houses embody familial connections. While Andre Ortega’s “Building the Filipino Dream: Real Estate Boom, Gated Communities, and the Productions of Urban Space” (2012) doctoral dissertation also examines balikbayans, and life inside the gates of new suburban real estate developments in the Philippines whose demand for, have been driven by Overseas Filipinos, what is particularly significant about my observations is that unlike Ortega (2012) who relied on interlocutors to gain access inside these gates - which are considered to be exclusive spaces – during the duration of my fieldwork, I spent my time in the field as a resident of one of these communities. Due to this carte blanche access to this space, I believe I can add to this large body of literature by offering fresh insights, and a different perspective of life inside the gates, and the complexities of the balikbayan identity. While Ortega (2012) discusses the complexities of the return of Filipinos Overseas and how their return has been playing a significant role in shaping Philippine society and culture – including the demand for real estate- he does not investigate the differential forms and hierarchical dimensions of this identity. In this piece I will argue that the balikbayan identity is not monolithic – there are varying degrees of success achieved while abroad, and in order to display this status within the

hierarchy, balikbayans express this through engagements of consumption by using signifiers such as real estate, Westernized consumer goods etc., in order to communicate this social status.

While the Philippine State encourages members of its population to migrate for work to other countries as a way of garnering foreign investment in the form of remittances, the idea of migration has become such a fixation in everyday Philippine life that many Filipinos look towards a future ‘abroad’ in order to achieve socioeconomic prosperity. Through achieving economic prosperity abroad and returning to the homeland as balikbayans, Filipinos are able to gain social capital through a process of consumption which displays their success and new social identity. I will examine how the demand of balikbayans for high-end, luxury condominiums play a role in this process of consumption, display of wealth and new social capital. I will examine what motivates people to leave the Philippines in the first place, what significance the ‘balikbayan status’ has not only for those who migrated, but those who have been left behind, what role these luxury condos have in people lives, and how they serve as a marker for a particular identity.

### ***Methodology***

I come from a Filipino background. I was raised in a Filipino household by parents who were first generation immigrants. My mother and father both migrated to Canada in their mid-twenties, and have lived in Canada for the majority of their adult life. I migrated to Canada when I was around three years old, thus I am typically labeled as ‘generation 1.5’. However, while I was raised in a Filipino household, I do not necessarily identify with Filipino culture. I do not completely identify with a Filipino background/identity as I have only been back to the Philippines twice since migrating to Canada and do not remember much of the time I lived there. In fact, most of the prevailing and lasting influences in my life come from an Anglo-Canadian

cultural influence. Thus while I consider the Philippines to be my ancestral land, I do not necessarily claim it to be my homeland. At the same time, my parents and the majority of my extended family have maintained a large aspect of Filipino culture and tradition, which I was also strongly influenced by, and thus I must acknowledge that when I write about my particular insights on the Philippines and my knowledge of Philippine culture, they come from an insider position. I have a strong understanding of the Philippine culture, and have the ability to speak the main dialect of Tagalog with fluency.

In the summer of 2014, I set out to conduct my fieldwork in Manila Philippines, choosing the enclave community located in the Metro Manila Region called Bonifacio Global City. While there were countless other enclave communities similar to this one located in the Metro Manila Region, I specifically chose to focus my study on this particular enclave due to the fact that my uncle owned a condominium in this community and was already well acquainted with many of the guards and residents, thus giving me privileged insider access to the space and the community of residents and staff inside this enclave. In order to understand the role played by the purchase/consumption of high-end luxury condominiums in the display a particular balikbayan identity, I decided to live in an enclave, and gather data through participant observation. In this way I was able to live like one of my participants, which meant that I had access to all the areas they had access to, and I was able to participate in the same daily activities they participated in - such as trips to the market and fitness classes. I was also able to interact with other residents in different buildings due to the fact that most residents frequented particular restaurants or bars in the area. In addition, I had contact with the support staff (such as security guards, gardeners, house keepers, and front desk staff) and was able to interact with sales agents for these enclaves. In choosing to be part of the everyday life around the enclave, I was able to

become familiar with the everyday discourse among the residents and experience the same day-to-day living as the people whom I chose to focus on. I believe this gave me a better understanding of their daily lives and access to people I would not necessarily have had access to through day-to-day interactions. Being able to watch, observe and be a part of daily life gave me a particular perspective on the lives of the people in the enclave, life in the enclave itself, and why there was such a strong demand from balikbayans for these types of communities.

At the same time, in order to understand the role played by ownership of these condominiums in the display of balikbayan identity, I needed to better understand the balikbayan identity itself and its significance. Why is the balikbayan subject position something that is sought after? Why are balikbayans seen as superior to other Philippine identities? What is the actual definition of a balikbayan? Does the state define the balikbayan subject position differently than people on the ground? These were all questions that came up during my investigation of this identity, which I needed to answer in order to better understand this subject position and its linkages to property. During my preliminary research, I had read news articles about how the Philippines was heralding balikbayans as ‘Heroes of the Nation’ and heard stories from Filipinos in Canada about how balikbayans have a very special position in Philippine culture and are now being targeted as potential buyers for luxury condo developments. I knew all these things, but did not necessarily understand the scope of this subject position’s significance. Before entering the field, my research questions focused on how the ownership of these properties inform others of the balikbayan subject position, but what I did not realize initially when I began my fieldwork was the stark significance and the complicated nature behind the balikbayan subject position. Balikbayans occupy this intermediary position in the Philippines, similar to that described for cottagers in Ontario in Julia Harrison’s *A Timeless Place* (2013). In

her ethnography about cottagers in Haliburton, Harrison notes that there is a debate as to whether or not a cottager is a tourist. Those who were cottagers insist that they are more than tourists, as they have strong sentimental attachments to the land and a multi-generational family history at their cottage. However, those who permanently live in the small towns surrounding the cottages see the influx of cottagers during the summers as non-local or tourists who demand special privileges and services, and bring the big city to the cottage (2013:3). While I found that Philippine nationals view balikbayans in a similar fashion, at the same they are treated with deference by Philippine nationals due to their social status as balikbayans and because the Philippine state hails them as heroes. Local ideas about the significance of the balikbayan position is particularly strong; these imagined ideal characteristics of the balikbayan position have in turn created this strong desire by many locals to go 'abroad' in order to become a balikbayan.

In order to understand the politics behind the balikbayan identity, and the strong desire for Filipinos to pursue work and lives abroad, I chose to conduct five semi-formal, in-depth interviews with six interlocutors. While I informally interviewed dozens of other people during my fieldwork in order to get a good understanding of the significance of the balikbayan identity and the role in which property played with regards to displaying this identity, these particular six interlocutors were significant as I collected life histories of their migrations or quest for migration, and hearing about their experiences gave me a very good understanding of the balikbayan identity and the role of migration in Philippine culture. I also engaged in one hour, semi-structured interviews with two government officials - one Philippine congressman, and a former Philippine President - and a handful of Philippine academics who are working on issues

surrounding Philippine real estate, migration and property.<sup>3</sup> While interviewing my interlocutors, I constantly assessed how my contributions were shaping the research findings. Thus, in order to give my interlocutors the fairest possible chance to tell their stories, I made sure to ask open-ended questions as much as possible, never trying to steer them towards one answer or another. I made sure not to structure my interviews in a way that predetermined the answer for my subjects, and I took the time to thoughtfully listen to their stories and their views, and make sense of what they were trying to communicate without any of my preconceived notions affecting my research.

Four of my main interlocutors migrated abroad for economic purposes. I specifically interviewed them because I wanted to get a better understanding of their motivations for migration, their experiences as migrants, and why they chose to invest in properties back in the Philippines. The other two interlocutors were prospective migrants. One of these prospective migrants was engaged to an American. Her green card was in process during the time I spoke with her, and she estimated that she would be moving to the United States in a year's time. However she had already invested in a condominium in Bonifacio Global City, as she hoped to one day return to the Philippines and retire once her children were put through university. I was determined to speak with her because I wanted to understand the motivations and thought processes behind peoples' decision to migrate, and why they were determined to maintain properties in a country that was not easily accessible to them. My other interlocutor had been trying for many years to migrate despite the fact that she lived a very comfortable life in the Philippines. I chose to speak with her because I wanted to understand why people who were considered to be wealthy or well-off in the Philippines were willing to risk thousands of pesos

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<sup>3</sup> Many of the government officials and academics whom I spoke with were friends of colleagues that I had met through my research center, the York Center for Asian Research, in Canada. I had met many of my main interlocutors with whom I pursued interviews, through my parents' friends and acquaintances. Oftentimes, once I had informed my interlocutors about the nature of my study, many of them would refer to their friends, or friends of friends who were balikbayans and owned properties in the Philippines.

for the chance to migrate, despite the fact that they knew there was a possibility of going from skilled professional positions to working in deskilled jobs while abroad. She gave me a better understanding as to why so many Filipinos were willing to risk so much for the chance to migrate abroad as they perceived 'abroad' to be this ideal dreamland to attain socioeconomic mobility and security.

During my period of fieldwork I also spent a fair amount of time sitting in on sales presentations, speaking with sales agents for enclaves that are open to the public, and analyzing promotional materials, such as pamphlets and slideshows of enclaves, in order to ascertain which aspects of the enclaves are emphasized, and what images and ideas are being conveyed to potential buyers. For the purposes of trying to gain a sense of what kind of demographic was purchasing these properties, who these companies were setting out to target, and what their goals for future land development were, I interviewed a handful of sales agents during my one-on-one sales presentations with them. Subsequently, after these presentations, I was invited by the sales agents to attend tours of the developments, which allowed me to gain a perspective on the ideas and images they were trying to convey to prospective buyers, and what types of communities the development company was trying to build. It also gave me a chance to learn about the 'behind the scenes' aspect of these developments, such as who is responsible for the upkeep and the security of the enclave. I understand that my privileged position, and my perceived position as a balikbayan, allowed me access to these particular spaces and people. This also meant that many locals - sales agents included - were quick to assume that, because I was from 'abroad', I had a lot of money. Thus while they were aware of the nature of my trip to the Philippines and my study, many of them still entertained my requests for interviews, and invited me on tours, in the hopes of convincing me to buy property.

During my fieldwork many locals with whom I spoke with tended to trust me and revealed certain information that they may not have revealed to an outsider. I was also given access to certain spaces where locals may not have access. All of this greatly impacted my research experience, the spaces I was able to access, and the insights and the data that I collected. Despite the subjective nature of my insights, I believe the data I have collected for my thesis will offer valuable insights and contribute to the literature on the balikbayan identity.

While Briggs (2007) problematizes the face-to-face interview as a means of gathering anthropological knowledge, he does, however, conclude that it is important due to the fact that “some interview participants have developed more complex ideological constructions that enable them to create an emotive connection with their experiences and words” (561). As Jefferey Sluka notes, anthropologists in the field should always be conscious of impression management. By this he means to be as honest and transparent as possible with your subjects (2012:121-122). With this in mind, I followed Sluka’s methods to be as transparent as possible with my interlocutors about my work, and conscious of the impression I was making. I always made sure that, before interviewing my interlocutors, I took the time to ensure that they understood the nature of my study, and what I was trying to investigate and understand. I also gave them the opportunity to ask questions in return if there was anything that needed clarification. As I chose to pursue fieldwork in my country of birth, there were certain constraints and scenarios in which my position as a researcher became very privileged. While I have had very little physical interaction with the Philippines, I was exposed to Philippine culture my entire life, and there are many scenarios when investigating this topic which gave me a privileged, insider advantage.

Many of my interlocutors, in one way or another, had previous ties with my immediate or extended family members, thus they were much more open to speaking to me about their

experiences. In addition, while I may have been perceived as an outsider of sorts by many of the interlocutors I spoke with, being raised in Canada, and educated in this country - which is perceived by Filipinos to be a superior country and culture - I was in a position of power and, due to my credentials and my background, many people were quite open and willing to share things with me that they may not necessarily have shared with a person whom they perceive to be an outsider.

I understand that these experiences are not necessarily reflective of the experiences of Filipinos, and that the people I interviewed came from a particular set of migrants who were very successful and possessed a degree of privilege. However due to the nature of my fieldwork and the particular field site that I had chosen, this subset of Filipino migrants were the ones I was able to meet, interact with, and gain knowledge from. I know that due to the time constraints of my project, I was only able to glimpse a portion of the reality that is occurring. However, I believe that the experiences of my interlocutors are significant and noteworthy, and shed light on some of the discourses regarding property and migration in the Philippines as they provide a particular lens - while subjective - on how people come to understand the balikbayan identity, and how this identity is deeply intertwined with property and migration. The research and data, which I gathered during my fieldwork in the summer of 2014, provides an on-the-ground perspective on these discourses, how actors come to understand these discourses, and how they play into the larger logic surrounding property, migration, and identity. In Chapter One I will discuss the notion of 'abroad', and how Filipinos come to perceive the geographic space outside of the Philippines as an ideal. In Chapter Two I will discuss the definition of balikbayans - how it is defined by the state and how it is defined on the ground - and the politics and perceptions of those who occupy this position. Chapter Three will look at the enclave condominium

developments, and how property plays a role in defining identities. Finally, Chapter Four will look at the privilege of those who own these properties, and how this privilege dictates the logics behind the balikbayan identity.

## Chapter 1: The Politics of “Abroad”

*This chapter will look at the history of large-scale emigration in the Philippines, and how the logics of migration in the Philippines following President Marcos’ decision to actively support labor policy have evolved. Using ethnographic examples I will look at the central discourses of home and abroad that permeate the Filipino understanding of migration and why ‘abroad’ is an idealized place in the imaginations of many Filipinos. In addition I will examine why this has created a culture of dependence on family members who emigrate, why Filipino emigrants are heralded as ‘Heroes of the Nation’, the implications surrounding those who occupy this position, and how migrating ‘abroad’ creates new social identities and positions within Philippine culture.*

### ***A history of Philippine Migration***

In recent decades countries in the global South have exported migrant workers as a strategy for socioeconomic development. Appleyard (1989) notes that there have been many arguments surrounding this type of socioeconomic strategy, one of the most prominent being centered on Immanuel Wallerstein’s (1974) World Systems theory. Wallerstein argues that the core countries - the industrialized countries that control and benefit from the world market - depend on and exploit the resources (raw materials and human labour) of periphery countries that have an underdeveloped industrial sector. This problem identified by Wallerstein, as Hardt and Negri discuss, is the result of “the case of postmodern aristocracy, the problem consists not only in creating a vertical conduit between a center and a periphery for producing and selling commodities, but also in continuously putting in relation a wide horizon of producers and consumers within and among markets” (2000: 335). In the case of the Philippines, the commodity that is being produced and sold among ‘markets’ is Philippine human labor as Rodriguez (2010) argues in “*Migrants for Export*”. As Appleyard (1989) points out, some political scientists and economists argue that emigration, as a development strategy, is harmful for countries that send these emigrants as they become too dependent on the receiving countries for providing work and wages. On the other hand, there are those who argue that migration

reduces unemployment in the sending countries, and helps to reduce income and social inequalities (Keely and Tran 1989, McKay 2003 etc.). Gibson et al.'s piece "*Beyond Heroes and Victims*" (2001) complicates this notion of migration as beneficial to reducing economic and social inequalities by critiquing the dominant representations of Filipina contract migrants as 'heroes' of national development' or 'victims' of the capitalist economy. Using ethnographic research, Gibson et al. (2001) argue that while many migrants fit both the hero and victim representation, there is a number of other economic identities in which they come to occupy through the process of migration, and have a degree of control in which they appropriate their labour. Therefore we must look beyond the 'heroes' and 'victims' images in which we paint these migrants, as their identities, through the process of migration, are much more complex than merely victims or heroes, and in doing so, we can complicate the arguments surrounding migration is ultimately good or bad. In examining these multiple identities these migrants occupy, we can see that migration can be much more complex than these black and white arguments.

These arguments for or against migration that have been posed in the past Hein de Haas (2008) argues in her piece, '*Migration and Development: a Theoretical Perspective*', are too deterministic and conceptualize migration to be too much of a push-pull linear phenomenon rather than a process. According to de Haas (2008),

"migration [is] also a *cause* of social, cultural, economic and institutional changes in the local, regional, and national development context, in which subsequent decisions on migration and investments are made. Thus *migration is not an independent variable explaining change, but is an endogenous variable, an integral part of change itself in the same degree as it may enable further change*. This is why it is more correct to refer to the reciprocal relationship and broader development processes instead of the – one-way-impact of migration on development" (43).

Therefore, in this this thesis, which will analyze the transnational movements of Filipinos from the Philippines, to ‘abroad’, and back again has been examined from a processual lens as described by de Haas (2008). Migration is not merely about push-pull factors, but a myriad of causes – social, political and economic. Filipino migrants are also not merely ‘Heroes’ as hailed by their government, or ‘Victims’ as dubbed by critics of transnational migration. Their lives, identities, and their circumstances are much more complex than these labels. Migration, and the consequences following migration – whether that is development or otherwise – is a broad process and many factors must be taken into consideration before one can assess the impacts of migration – whether positive or negative, or both, within a micro and macro scale. As de Haas (2012) also notes, “Despite the often considerable benefits of migration and remittances for individuals and communities involved, migrants alone can generally not remove more structural development constraints and migration may actually contribute to development stagnation and reinforce the political status quo” (8). Within the context of the Philippines, Ortega (2012) has noted that the remittances of Philippine migrants have significantly impacted the Philippine economy from a micro-economic scale. Ortega (2012), Gibson (2001), McKay (2003), (Aguilar 2009) are just some of the few who have ethnographic accounts of migrants’ impacts on the local economies. At the same time Ortega (2012) also notes that these remittances from Filipinos abroad also have an impact that can be felt at the macro-economic level. The current real estate boom in the Philippines has been attributed primarily to Overseas Filipinos driving this demand in order to fulfill their “quest for decent living and achieving the ‘Filipino Dream’, save their remittance money to avail of housing loans and acquire houses inside gated subdivisions whose security and amenities are often not provided by the state outside the gates” (134). Whether remittances will contribute to further national development is dependent on whether the

conditions in the origin countries are conducive and attractive for migrants to invest socially, politically, and economically (de Haas 2012). According to de Haas (2012)

“If migration enhances the capabilities of individuals and families, which it often does to a smaller or larger extent, it gives them the freedom and power to invest as much as to disengage from origin countries!...If states fail to implement reform, migration and remittances are unlikely to fuel national development – and can even sustain situations of dependency, underdevelopment and authoritarianism” (19).

While I will make no concrete conclusions on the state of the Philippines and whether their migration model has indeed fuelled national development, I will try to offer some original ethnographic accounts which allude to whether the Philippines’ migration strategy is proving to be beneficial on a national scale.

Many Asian countries have been thrust into the spotlight surrounding this issue of labor for export, as they have used the framework of labour migration for development since the 1970s. Annual out-migration workers typically come from eight major labor-sending countries, all of which are located in Asia. These are Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines and Thailand. As Tyner (1999) documents, large-scale emigration in the Philippines began between 1907 and 1929, during the labor shortages on sugar plantations in Hawaii. During that time approximately 107,000 Filipinos were recruited to work on these plantations. The 1920s and 1930s also saw additional migratory flows to the United States as a result of labor shortages in the Western Continental area. In 1946, the Philippines finally gained political independence following World War II. For over four hundred years, the Philippines had been colonized, first by the Spanish from 1521-1898 (the archipelago was named after the Spanish King, Philip II) and then by the Americans following the Spanish-American war. As a newly independent country, the Philippines centered its economy on the large-scale manufacturing of products meant for domestic consumption. This period was also characterized

by high nationalist sentiments, which led to protective tariffs in order to nurture domestic industries.

By the 1960s, as Tyner (1999) notes, it was evident that this economic strategy could not meet the growing demands of the labor force, as industrial growth could not absorb the estimated 700,000 new workers per year. During the 1960s and 1970s there was also an increased number of students in the professional sectors, however the rate of growth of the Philippine economy and industry could not handle the influx of these students into the workforce. Tyner notes that, due to the political and economic climate of the time, there was an exceptionally high rate of migration of Filipinos in professional occupations to countries with more liberal immigration laws, such as Australia, the United States and Canada, which had opportunities for migrant workers to become permanent residents. Due to U.S. colonialism, both English and Tagalog were taught in schools, which meant that many Filipinos had the language abilities to be able to work in English-speaking countries. Thus, the education system in the Philippines, especially for young professionals, was used as a stepping-stone for gaining overseas employment. During this time the percentage of immigrant professionals migrating abroad from the Philippines doubled from 12% in the 1961-1965 period, to 28% for the 1966-1970 period (Tyner 1999). Tyner (1999) also notes that by 1972 the Philippines government had reached a crisis point. Politicians were unable to agree on how to redirect the economy, and there were growing conflicts between the power-holding elites and the discontented landless peasants, foreign investors and economic nationalists, and President Ferdinand Marcos and his political opponents. This crisis reached its boiling point when President Marcos declared martial law in September of 1972. Due to the unstable political system in the Philippines during this time and the enforcement of martial law, this acted as a further catalyst for many Filipinos to pursue work abroad.

During the Marcos Regime in the early 1970s, the Philippine government took the official stance of actively supporting labor export policy in order to reduce levels of underemployment and unemployment and, for those in the educated and professional sectors, as a way to provide skilled training from working abroad. As Tyner (1999) notes, President Marcos justified taking this stance because it was assumed that those who acquired foreign skills would not only fuel development, but would also promote Philippine development and domestic economic growth through the remittance economy. By the mid 1970s the Philippine state created two labor agencies, OEDB (the Overseas Employment Development Board), and the NSB (the National Seaman Board), which were responsible for recruiting workers for international labor export. Today, there are countless recruitment agencies operating in the Philippines that recruit workers for various occupations in numerous countries all around the globe. While President Marcos was correct in his assumption that exporting labor would stimulate domestic economic growth through the remittance economy, arguably this growth also comes with a strong dependence from resident Filipinos on these remittances coming in from family members working abroad. This dependence is visible not only through state policy, but also as embedded in everyday Filipino culture and the everyday discourses surrounding 'home' and 'abroad', which will be highlighted in this chapter. I will also discuss how this dependence on family members abroad and the images of Filipinos migrating abroad and then returning to the homeland with foreign currency - financially much better off compared to when they left - has fueled the Philippine imagination of life 'abroad'.

By the 1990s, Philippine migrants had dispersed to more than 130 countries. As of 2011, the Commission of Filipino Overseas, a division of the Philippine Department of Foreign affairs,

estimated that there are approximately 10.5-13.5 million Filipinos living and working overseas<sup>4</sup>. According to the former President, Fidel V. Ramos, all of these people have the “common ambition to save enough money to maintain a family, build a house, buy a small farm and/or start a modest business” (2008:46). According to data from the World Bank<sup>5</sup>, migrants’ remittances to their home countries in 2014 have reached approximately \$436 Billion US Dollars – up by 4.4% from 2013. The Philippines is one of the world’s largest recipients of remittances, it is the fourth largest recipient country of remittances next to China, India and Mexico. In fact, 12% of the Philippines’ GDP comes from remittances (Remo, 2012). As of 2014, the Philippine Central Bank (Banko Sentral ng Pilipinas) totals remittances from overseas Filipinos to be \$24.348 Billion US Dollars<sup>6</sup>, although Remo (2012) notes that many other estimates, such as the Asian Bankers association estimate this number to be closer to \$128 billion dollars when illegal channels are considered. To put this into perspective, in 2004, Filipinos Overseas remitted \$8.5 billion, which was half of the country’s national budget. Due to this, they have been celebrated by every Philippine President as ‘modern day heroes’ since the export of migrants became institutionalized and a part of official government policy (San Juan Jr. 2009), a policy which was enacted during the Marcos era. The institutionalization of migration by the Philippine state has led the Philippine diaspora to be the largest diaspora of migrant labor next to Mexico, and the highest per capita exporter of labor in Southeast Asia (San Juan, 2009). San Juan (2001) discusses how diasporic groups in the past have been defined not only by a homeland in which

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<sup>4</sup> Data on the global mapping of overseas Filipinos from the Commission of Filipinos Overseas. Retrieved May 10, 2014. [http://www.cfo.gov.ph/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1340:stock-estimate-of-overseas-filipinos&catid=134:statisticsstock-estimate&Itemid=814](http://www.cfo.gov.ph/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1340:stock-estimate-of-overseas-filipinos&catid=134:statisticsstock-estimate&Itemid=814)

<sup>5</sup> Data from the World Bank Migration and Development Brief 24 <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1288990760745/MigrationandDevelopmentBrief24.pdf>. Retrieved December, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Data on Overseas Filipinos’ Cash Remittances <http://www.bsp.gov.ph/statistics/keystat/ofw2.htm> Retrieved December 2015.

they leave behind, but also by their desire for eventual return to that homeland and a collective identity which is centered on myths and memories of the homeland.

"The Filipino diaspora, however, is different. Since the homeland has long been colonized by Western powers (Spain, U.S.) and remains neocolonized despite formal or nominal dependence, the Filipino identification is not with a fully defined nation but with regions, localities, and communities of languages and traditions. Where is the nation alluded to in passports and other identification papers? How do we conceive of this "Filipino" nation given the preemptive impact of U.S. colonization and now, on top of the persisting neocolonizing pressure, the usurping force of globalized transnational capital?" (2001:255)

Following San Juan's (2001) discussion of the Philippine diaspora, due to western influences on the Philippine homeland itself, how can we define what the Philippine "homeland" and what Philippine "culture" actually is? I will define the Philippine "homeland" and Philippine "culture" as San Juan (2001) defines it, in which the myth of the homeland is derived from assorted childhood memories and folklore together with customary practices of folk and religious celebrations, along with a "residual affective tie to national heroes like Rizal, Bonifacio, and latter-day celebrities like singers, movie stars, athletes and so on". (262) Food, dances, a shared language, kinship ties to the homeland, these practices and common experiences is what forms and defines the basis of the Filipino "culture", and what San Juan (2001) denotes as the organic bonds which holds the community of Filipinos together.

According to San Juan alienation in a host country, along with " a shared history of colonial and racial subordination, marginalization, and struggles for cultural survival through hybrid forms of resistance and political rebellion" (2001: 262) is what unites Filipinos in the diaspora, and what may spur nostalgia, and eventual return to the homeland once they become economically secure. This shared sense of struggle by migrant Filipinos is what holds the diasporic community intact, along with their desires to maintain kinship bonds with family members in the homeland through digital contact, sending material goods from abroad, or

through remittances. Remittances play a large role in the Philippine economy as it "contributes to paying foreign debt, heightens household consumerism" (San Juan 2009: 100). Remittances are the most important source of foreign exchange to the economy, and they are also an incredibly significant source of income for recipient families (Ang et al., 2009). According to numerous studies, remittances are typically spent on consumer goods, household, land, debt repayment and education (Appleyard 1989). At the same time however, despite the positive contributions of remittances, this institutionalization of migration has led the Philippine government to be "the most migrant- and remittance-dependending ruling apparatus in the world, mainly by virtue of denying its citizens the right to decent employment at home" (San Juan 2009:100). Everyday, there are approximately 3,100 Filipinos that leave the Philippines (Ramos 2008:46). Some leave for other countries in order to reunite with family members who have already left, others leave their family members behind in order to work and remit money back to the household with the intention to build a better life back home.

### ***The Idealization of 'Abroad'***

During my time spent in the Philippines I was astonished by how often I heard the phrase "*Na sa abroad sila*", meaning "they are abroad." The word "*abroad*" was typically used in a phrase to describe people who were living or working in another country. One evening I went over for dinner at an old family friend's house with my father. The family we were visiting lives in a subdivision located in the metro Manila area, which, like many subdivisions, is a very tight-knit community. Most people attend the Catholic Church located in the subdivision, children in the subdivision typically go to school with one another, and families are very well acquainted with one another. My parents had both grown up in the neighborhood, and lived there for a number of years after they were married and before moving to Canada. They are both still very

well known in the community. Typically my father takes a trip back to the Philippines every couple of years to visit his mother and siblings who still live there. I had only been back once with him, approximately twelve years prior to the trip I took to the Philippines to undertake my fieldwork. One thing that amazed me was how he could walk down the streets of this subdivision and people recognized him, and how he was able to strike up a conversation with so many people as if he had never left in the first place. I also noticed how people kept tabs on those who lived in the subdivision, even if those people no longer permanently resided there. Many people, like my father, had migrated to other countries, sometimes permanently, other times temporarily; many others had also chosen to become seamen. Many of the families, who had migrated, despite the fact that most of their lives were spent living in other countries, had chosen to keep their houses. In fact, most of them were fully renovated, despite the fact that they were only occupied a few weeks a year. During our time spent there, whenever my father asked about a specific family or person, if they were no longer residing in the Philippines, people would simply say that they were abroad. The term '*abroad*' seemed to be this all-encompassing word to explain where people had gone when they left the Philippines. People would never say the specific place that a person had moved to, unless they were asked where exactly they were currently residing or working.

What also caught my attention was that most of the residents who were living in that subdivision had at least one family member who resided or worked abroad. Everyone seemed to know where these people were living, and what channel of migration they used to go abroad. For example, one of the residents was currently residing in province of Alberta, in Canada. He was there on a student visa, but he was in the process of applying to become a landed immigrant. Many of the people I spoke with commented on how they had seen recruiters from Dairy Queen

in the Philippines. They told me how these recruiters were looking to hire temporary workers for their stores in Alberta or Winnipeg. As Filipinos view Canada as one of the best countries to migrate to, I was told that many people coveted these temporary contracts, despite their impermanence. I was informed that most people who took these contracts were hoping that once they were in Canada, they would find some way to acquire papers in order to reside there more permanently. What struck me as even more astonishing in my conversations was how everyone seemed to know which provinces of Canada were easier to migrate to and to gain more permanent status in than others. For example, while many people had heard that Toronto, a large metropolitan city with a high proportion of Filipino migrants, was a good city to settle in because of the vast Filipino network, they knew that it is very difficult to acquire landed immigrant status in the province of Ontario. Alberta and Saskatchewan were considered to be the least difficult provinces to migrate to, despite the fact that people had heard that some of these places were relatively rural and 'lonely', compared to other parts of the country. Many people were still willing to live in these places because of the chance to migrate to Canada. Canada is viewed by many Filipinos to be a land of opportunity, and is considered to be one of the best destinations to migrate to because of the fact that it is a North American, English-speaking country with universal medical care, a good free education for children, and the chance of acquiring Canadian citizenship. According to Tobias Enverga, whom Fisher (2013) interviewed for his online news article written to commemorate the Philippines becoming Canada's greatest source of migrants in 2012, he notes how many Filipinos believe that "Canada is a paradise for them. There is a blend of cultures and there is freedom. Speaking from my own experience, we can do whatever we want in Canada and we will get rewarded if we work hard". In 2011, 32,00 Filipinos became

permanent residents in Canada, which is double the number only eight years earlier in 2003 (Fisher 2013).

While many Filipinos may still regard the Philippines as their 'home', 'abroad' is an idealized place in their imagination. As Aguilar (2009) notes in his ethnography on the residents of Paraiso, a small, rural village in the Philippines, overseas migration was seen as a chance for residents to attain social mobility. Ortega (2012) also discusses how remittance monies sent by Filipinos Overseas play a significant role in Philippine consumption and investment trends that 'reaches the macro-economics of peso-dollar foreign exchange' (120). Therefore, within Philippine culture, the idea of attaining upward mobility and higher social statuses is associated with going abroad. When I first arrived in the Philippines, my godmother was the one to pick me up from the airport. During our drive from the airport she mentioned to me that her daughter really wanted to go abroad to work once she was done University. I knew her daughter was on her way to finishing up a professional degree, so I asked her about her aspirations to work abroad. When I asked her which country she had her eye on, and if she had looked into whether she would be able to practice dentistry with her degree in other countries, she simply told me that she had not really thought it through, and that she just wanted to go abroad so that she could gain some capital to make investments in the Philippines and live a comfortable life.

Countless other people I encountered in the Philippines, including many of my informants, hoped to be able to go 'abroad'. Many of them had been aspiring to go abroad for years, and many people try over and over again, even if they have been faked by illegal recruiters, just for the chance to live and work abroad. One of my informants, Nina, had a managerial position at a large international company in the Philippines. She makes enough money to live a very comfortable life. Until recently, Nina and her fiancé had some

disagreements over where they should settle with their son, as her fiancé lived and worked in the States. She had no problems staying in the Philippines, as she is able to afford to live an upper middle-class lifestyle. However, after much discussion they have eventually decided to move the family to California. When I spoke to her she was in the process of finalizing her papers to live and work in the States, and she told me that within the next year she and her son will be moving there. I asked her what eventually swayed her decision to settle in the States, instead of the Philippines. She told me that:

***“ Yung hospitalization duon is libre, kasi you really have to work here. Kung wala kang pera dito maaga ka mamamatay.”***

***“Hospitalization there is free, you really have to work here. If you don’t have money here you will die early”<sup>1</sup>***

One of my other informants, Julio, tried twice to go abroad for work before he was actually able to gain legal papers. The first time he applied to go to Saudi Arabia, but in the end it turned out he fell victim to fake recruiters. The second time, he applied to work in Libya but he was faked again. Being faked twice, he was incredibly dismayed by his circumstances, especially since he had lost a large sum of money and assets like his car, as he sold them to raise money to pay the labor recruiters. However, that did not stop him from trying again, and on his third try he was eventually successful in acquiring a contract and legal papers to work in Aman, Jordan. Eventually he made his way to Rome, Italy, where he worked at an Ambassador’s residence first as part of the wait staff, then as the butler for the residence, for almost thirty years. I asked him why he kept trying to go abroad, especially after he fell victim to fake recruiters twice. He explained to me that:

***“Kasi alam mo ang inintindi ko yung ka hirap ng buhay sa Pilipinas. Tapos I have eight children. Saan na kaya kami kung babalik ako sa Pilipinas tapos mg tatanim nanaman***

***ako ng palay? Ang hirap na nga ang buhay ko noon tapos ganun nanaman. Hindi na, kaya I sacrifice everything para ma ka punta ako sa abroad.***

***“I know that life is so hard in the Philippines, and I had eight children. What will become of us if I stay in the Philippines? How will I support my family? What will [our] life be like if I spent it in the Philippines planting rice? Life is so hard in the Philippines, so I sacrificed everything for the chance to go abroad.”<sup>2</sup>***

For many Filipinos, the chance to go abroad and earn wages much higher than what they would be earning in the Philippines due to the foreign exchange rate is one of the many incentives to work abroad, despite the separation from their families for extended periods of time. There is also this perception that you are well compensated for your work in other countries. Discussing the pros and cons of life abroad one of my informants told me,

***“If you work all day in the Philippines, you have nothing to show for it. If you work all day abroad at least you have something to show for it”.***

While in the field, one local radio station played a commercial for a remittance service exclaiming,

***“Kahit taxi driver ang asawa ko ng remit ng 4-5 (4,500 PHP) araw araw! Haya Haya ang buhay!”***

***“Even if my husband is just a taxi driver, he remits 4-5 (4,500 PHP) everyday! Life is great!”***

While many highly educated Filipinos with advanced University degrees migrate to work deskilled jobs, they consider the trade-off to be worth the sacrifice because of the compensation they are able to get for their work due to the foreign currencies they remit exchanging at a higher rate for the Philippine Peso. Another reason that going abroad is attractive is because of the health benefits and educational systems. The limited socioeconomic safety net the Philippine state provides to its citizens, coupled with the high exchange rate, and the high wages that Filipinos who choose to work abroad are able to obtain compared to average wages in the

Philippines, is why 'abroad', especially Western countries, are such attractive and coveted places for Filipinos to migrate to.

'Abroad' is thus understood by Filipinos to be a place where life is easier. The socioeconomic benefits that Filipino migrants gain by going abroad allows them to better their lives, and the lives of their families whom they leave behind. By 'better' lives, I simply use this term in the same manner as San Juan does, which is the ability to attain a livelihood – essentially any income generating work in order to achieve a 'materially improved future' (2009:99). Many times I heard the phrase "*mahirap ang buhay dito*", which means "*life is hard here.*" So I decided to investigate this further; I wanted to examine the linkages between the view that life in the Philippines is so difficult and that going abroad- whether to live or to work - is something to aspire to. I asked Julio why he wanted to go abroad in the first place and he told me that it was because of his large family. He knew he would not be able to support his eight children and his wife if he did not go abroad. This is because of the high exchange rates for foreign currency in the Philippines. While he was in Italy, he told me he was making 1,500 Euros a month working as a butler at an Ambassador's residence. His housing was provided, he lived in a small house at the edge of the property, so his living expenses were very minimal, and he sent most of the money he made back to his family. When I asked why he chose to move to Italy, instead of staying and working in Jordan, he told me that it was because he had heard from fellow Filipinos who were working abroad that wages in Italy were much higher than in Jordan, and he also knew the exchange rate was also very high for Italian currency. When Italy joined the Euro he was able to save and remit more money to his family, as the exchange rate for one Euro was about 71-72 Philippine Pesos. He even recalled a time when one Euro was worth around 74 Philippine Pesos (PHP). After retiring from his position at the Ambassador's residence, instead of choosing a

yearly pension, he decided to take one large lump sum, even though it was only 70% of what he would have received if he chose to receive a yearly pension. He took all of that money and sent it back to the Philippines, which totaled to be about 5 million pesos. With the money he was able to buy land to build a house on, and houses for his children. He also paid for their visas to go abroad and work. In fact, he heavily encouraged them to pursue work abroad.

***“Sabi ko wala kay mg pabaari dito sa Pilipinas. Lumabas kayo, may pera ako. Pumunta sila. Si Alan pumunta sa Dubai, si Jon pumunta sa Dubai, si Millie kumuha ng student visa kasi mahirap pumunta sa London. Binayarna ko yan half a million.”***

***I told them there is nothing for them in the Philippines. You have to leave, I have money I told them. So they went. Alex went to Dubai, John went to Dubai. Elena went to London on a student visa because it's very hard to go to London. I spent half a million [pesos] paying for [them to leave].”***

After exports, foreign remittances are the second largest source of foreign reserves in the Philippines (Bhatia 2013). However, there have been debates about whether or not remittances actually benefit a country's economy in the long term. Some scholars (Keely and Tran 1989, McKay 2003, Lindley 2007, Ang et al. 2009) have argued that remittances close the gap between the poor and the wealthy because they create a growing middle class. Many of my informants who went abroad to pursue work used the money to start businesses back in the Philippines, gain capital for investments, build houses for their families, or to merely send their children to school. Many of them were able to build what they perceived as a more secure future for their families with remittance money, and this is one of the reasons why working abroad was so desired by Filipinos.

Chris and Leah, who are husband and wife, moved to the United Kingdom after their small business burned down. They did not have insurance as only the very wealthy can afford insurance in the Philippines. They chose to migrate for the purposes of working in order to gain

capital so that they may start a business once they had decided to move back to the Philippines on a permanent basis. They were able to save and remit approximately 1 million Philippine Pesos per year while they were working abroad. Now that they have returned to the Philippines, they have started their own business, and have invested in real estate. Compared to the lives they lived in the Philippines beforehand, they describe their lives now as being significantly better than it was before they went abroad to live and work. While dreams of going abroad are heavily embedded in the everyday lives of Filipinos, as are families who live transnational lives and return as balikbayans to the homeland, one cannot downplay the importance of the cultural capital that is gained through the act of going abroad. Part of the reason why ‘abroad’ is equated with wealth and upward social mobility is due to these images and displays of wealth that are attached to the homes of Filipinos who have gone abroad and have subsequently come back to the homeland with the ability to afford these material goods that act as symbolic markers of economic and cultural success. I will discuss this idea of material goods acting as symbolic markers of success further in Chapter 3. Many Filipinos, who have never left the Philippines, see their neighbors, family members and friends coming back to the Philippines from ‘*abroad*’ with large amounts of capital, and with the ability to build better lives for themselves. Thus, the image of these people who are ‘living success stories’ fuel this imagination of life ‘abroad’ and therefore going abroad to live or work becomes the idealized avenue in order to ‘get ahead’ in society.

Filipinos who work abroad and send home remittances are heralded as heroes because many of them sacrifice a lot to work in unfavorable conditions (Bhatia 2013 cf. Marjorie Pajaron). Many of my informants who pursued work abroad typically worked low-wage, deskilled jobs, however because of the high exchange rate of the foreign money their wages were

paid in, they viewed it as good compensation for the work they had to do. Part of this stems from the fact that labor is cheap in the Philippines. Currently the minimum wage sits at about 429 or 466 PHP per day, depending on the sector you work in, which is roughly equivalent to just over \$10 Canadian Dollars. To put this in perspective, a typical meal at McDonalds costs about 200-220PHP, which is about half a day's wage for the average worker. By economically bettering their own lives, and the lives of their families, they not only better the socioeconomic position of their families, but, by bringing their foreign currencies and using it for consumption and investment in the 'homeland', they serve to help keep the Philippine economy afloat and fuel its socioeconomic progress.

### ***Going home***

Interestingly, when people talked about their neighbors who had permanently migrated to other countries, the typical phrases I would hear regarding the frequency with which they return to the Philippines would be, '*ma dalas sila umuuwi*' or '*bihira sila umuuwi*' which means '*they come home very often*' or '*they do not come home very often*'. The word, *uwi* means 'to go home', it is a verb not an adjective. Even at the airport, while I was waiting at the gate for my flight, many people asked me during casual conversations if I was 'going home', then they would ask me how often I returned home. Many of them were appalled when I told them that I had not gone to the Philippines in twelve years. They would often tell me '*That's too long*', but it was good that I was going '*home*', and that I was still able to speak the language despite living most of my life in Canada. I found it interesting in these conversations with Filipinos who had lived away from the Philippines for many years, or for some, the majority of their lives, still called the Philippines home. When I was younger, I distinctly remember that my aunt, who typically returned to the Philippines every two or three years, would always say, '*I'm finally*

*going home!*' in the weeks leading up to her trip to the Philippines. As a child I always found it puzzling how she said she was going home when she had lived in Canada for a number of years, had a house, a job, and had her immediate family in Canada. I remember telling her that she was already home, and that she was not actually going home, but simply just going on vacation to the Philippines. She then firmly insisted to my younger self that she was *'going home'*.

During my fieldwork, I chose to take a flight to the Philippines with Philippine Airlines. I estimated approximately 95% of the people on that flight were Filipinos taking a trip to the Philippines. Speaking with other passengers on the plane during my flight to Manila I learned that some were taking their Canadian-born children for the first time, others were visiting family, or taking care of their affairs back in the Philippines. During the twenty-hour flight to Manila, there was a lot of chatter on the plane. I noticed there was a strong sense of camaraderie - people were walking up and down the aisles to stretch their legs and many of them I noticed would strike up conversations with strangers. Most conversations revolved around how long people had been living in Canada, if they were landed immigrants yet, and how long they were going to be in the Philippines. The common question I heard people asking one another during this flight however was, "*Ma dalas ka ba umuwi?*" or "*Kelan ka huling umuwi?*" which means, "*Do you go home often?*" and "*When was the last time you went home?*" Many Filipinos I encountered still referred to the Philippines as 'home', even when they had lived in Canada for a number of years, had Canadian citizenship, or had Canadian-born children who knew very little about their ancestral land; taking a trip to the Philippines was still viewed by many of these people as 'going home'. It was then that I realized that despite the fact that people own a house in a particular country, it does not necessarily mean that that place is considered to be their home. In Aguilar's (1996) piece, he discusses how international labour migration is a journey of achievement.

“The labour migrant’s identity is somehow suspended, gradually affirmed through remittances, but the ritual is not consummated until the economic journey reaches its completion with the return to the homeland, there to bring home economic and cultural capital: economic savings, unusual appliances, narratives of exploits, and cultural artefacts” (112).

Therefore, for Philippine migrants, the journey back to the homeland of the Philippines is a ritual that completes their journey as migrants. Through the ritual of bringing back economic capital and various other goods which serve as cultural artefacts of their journey and mark them as ‘successful Overseas Filipinos’, they cement themselves into new economic and social positions – or as Ortega (2012) dubs them, ‘the new rich’.

### ***‘Heroes of the Nation’***

80% of the remittances sent to the Philippines come from seven countries, with Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom being the top three countries that send these remittances (Magtulis, 2012). Remittances that are sent back by Filipinos in Canada are estimated to total approximately \$1.5 billion dollars (Friesen, 2011). In Canada, many Filipinos have entered the country through the Live-In Caregiver Program. This program brings in nannies and care-workers for children and the elderly, 90% of which are Filipino. While there have been criticisms that this “migrants for export” Rodriguez (2010) scheme has caused Filipinos to become “servants of globalization”(Parrenas, 2001) - meaning that certain people are motivated to leave their homes and families to work in a foreign country in order to provide care for those in wealthier countries - the Philippine government has heralded these overseas Filipinos who send back remittances as *‘Heroes of the Nation’*. As Ramos notes, the United Nations has declared December 18<sup>th</sup> of every year as International Migrants’ Day and every year the Philippines “honors its overseas Filipinos as New Heroes of the Nation for their substantial contributions to the Philippine socio-economic progress . . . It is, therefore, no exaggeration that

Filipinos abroad have served to keep our economy afloat” (2008:53, 55). Ramos goes on to say that “our persevering *kababayans* (countrymen) overseas have earned ‘bragging rights’ as modern-day heroes” (2008:55). Of course, this endorsement from the Philippine state certainly feeds the fiery imaginary that Filipinos have of life abroad. By remitting higher foreign currencies, Filipinos are able to not only support their families, give them better opportunities, and a higher quality of life, but through helping their families, they in turn, help the entire nation-state, thus fulfilling their duties as Filipino citizens despite the fact that they have chosen to physically leave the homeland.

### ***Occupying a special Cultural Status***

While I was in the Philippines I noticed that it was always assumed that those Filipinos who are coming back to the Philippines from other countries - people whom they call *balikbayans* - are presumed to have a superior economic status and thus to have a special relationship to the nation as they are sources of remittances and have superior cultural status. Leah and Chris mentioned to me that when they returned to the Philippines from the U.K., they were ‘looked at differently’ and treated differently.

***“Alam mo naman dito satin kung bumalik ka lalo na sa province lahat ng ano alam na. Bumalik yan marami ng pera yan kasi ng abroad abroad ka. Sa Pilipinas kung may conte kang pera iba yung tingin sayo imbis na yung walang wala ka. Paranag madami na kikipag kaibigan sayo.”***

***“You know what it’s like when you go back to the province, everyone knows everything about you. They assume you have lots of money when you come back. In the Philippines if you have even just a bit of more money [than the rest] they look at you differently compared to the people who have absolutely nothing. There also seems to be a lot of people who want to be friends with you.”***

Even in my own experience during my time spent in the Philippines I felt that I was treated much differently when it was revealed that I was a *balikbayan* who came from Canada.

Most people would be very impressed when I told them where I lived, many people often told me *'Wow you live in Canada? I've always wanted to go there'*. Most of the time, while running errands in the morning in Manila, I typically threw on a pair of shorts and a t-shirt, tied my hair up in a messy bun, and ran around wearing flip-flops. I noticed that when I was dressed in this fashion, I was treated very differently. I was often ignored by salespeople at stores, or heavily scrutinized by passersby. However whenever I spoke English with my Canadian accent, they would immediately change their attitude and rush to my side to help me. When I told a friend of mine about this he laughed at me and told me it was because I had tanned skin and only people who *'worked outside and swept the streets were tanned'*, and that people who wore flip flops in the Philippines were associated with the lower class because they could not afford proper footwear. However, despite my seemingly disheveled appearance to people in the Philippines, because I spoke English with a Canadian accent, they automatically knew that I was from abroad, thus assuming that I had money, meaning I was to be treated as an upper-classed member of society. It was as if when people know you are coming back to the Philippines from another country, especially a western country, this fact acted like a trump card, and you were immediately given the respect and privilege that only the upper-classed members of Philippine society are given. There is a phrase, *'umasenso sa buhay'*, that I commonly heard people say, which means *'to move up in life'*. Generally, most people desire to do better in life, to move up in social and economic status. However I noticed that many people also associated *'umasenso sa buhay'* with 'abroad'. Like many of my informants, most Filipinos I encountered saw that the only way to break out of poverty, or for their family to move up in socioeconomic status was to go find work overseas, and remit money back to the Philippines.

The ownership of property and cars acts as an economic and social asset. However it is also an index of the importance of an economic privilege that, through the presumed remittance of a portion of that wealth to family members back home, creates a relationship to the nation that has been described as heroic and thus confers privilege. As illustrated in the examples above, due to low wages, and higher costs of living in the Philippines, there are very few people who are able to afford houses and cars without having to pursue work abroad, or without remittances from family members abroad. Those who do pursue work abroad are typically able to amass capital, due to the fact that most Filipinos work in countries where the currency is worth significantly more than the Philippine peso.

The economic wealth accumulated by migrant workers while abroad and sent home as remittances affords them a special status in Filipino society as they come to occupy a subject position through which they identify as a balikbayan. As Aguilar (2009) notes, migrants allocate large proportions of their remittances towards property construction and renovation. This is because, he argues, properties were seen as a migrants embodiment of hard work even after they are no longer working overseas, and serves as a memorial to their sacrifice they took to leave their family, friends and the familiarity of the homeland behind in order to pursue better opportunities in the unfamiliar 'abroad'. As Stuart Hall (1996) argues, this process of identification is a discursive process that is shaped by historical and institutional forces. Thus individuals who work overseas and return to the Philippines are subject to the particular discourses of the Philippine state, culture and its ideas, especially ideas that involve wealth, economic success, and the social privileges in which Philippine culture awards to those who occupy the balikbayan position. The significance of the balikbayan subject position in Philippine society is demonstrated by the strong reliance on family members who have gone overseas and

remit money back home. This reliance on family members abroad is present in the everyday lives of Filipinos. I remember walking down the street in Alaminos City, a city with a population of 79,788 people, and counting three Western Unions, a remittance service, on one street. There were countless other remittance services on that very same street, including LBC which claims to be the ‘King of the Remittance’ services. Speaking to some of the older members of this community, I distinctly remember many of them complaining about how lazy children have gotten because instead of doing work for family members around the house or farm if they were in need of money to buy luxury items like an iPhone, or an Xbox, many of them would just text their family members who were working abroad to send them money so they could buy the goods that they wanted.

One afternoon, I was listening to a radio show from a local radio station, and I heard one radio talk show host making a joke about how it was the end of the month, meaning the bills would be coming soon, but instead of paying them yourself ask your older sister instead to pay the utility bills for the month.

***“Text sa abroad kay Ate. Kayo muna mg bayad ng kuryente. Katapusan na.”***

***“Text your older sister abroad. [Ask her] to pay the electricity bills. It’s the end of the month.”***

This reliance on balikbayan family members is fueled by the discourse of balikbayans as ‘Heroes of the Nation’. Balikbayans are privileged in status not only due to their wealth and ability to consume goods that signal their economic privilege, but also due to their ability to economically help their family members and help stimulate local economies back in the Philippines. Their status as ‘Heroes’ entails privilege because as balikbayans use this privilege to help their family members in the Philippines, they in turn help the Philippine state. According to

Ortega, these returning Overseas Filipinos – or as I call them balikbayans – presents a significant complication to Philippine society as these successful returnees are typically labeled as the ‘new rich’, due to their “accumulated wealth through investments in small- and medium-scale enterprises that span retail to food businesses. In recent years, accounts of Filipinos who went abroad and became successful entrepreneurs have been features in multiple fora” (2012:75). Therefore, by using their economic privilege to help those back home, either through remittances or by starting small businesses which provide employment that help stimulate local economies, balikbayans gain a special cultural status which creates a significant and lasting bond with the nation state, despite their physical absence.

## **Chapter 2: Balikbayans**

*This chapter will take a more in-depth look at the position of the balikbayan in Filipino society. I will look at the special cultural position balikbayans are afforded within the nation state of the Philippines, and why this position is an exemplary position. I will also discuss the complex social entailments behind this status, and how this particular identity is associated with a national subject position.*

### ***The Balikbayan Program***

In 1989, under the Philippine Republic Act 6768, the *Balikbayan* Program was enacted under the administration of the Department of Tourism in order to attract and encourage overseas Filipinos to visit their motherland. This program, according to Albuero was “dreamed up” by President Marcos and his administration during the period of martial law in order to encourage overseas Filipinos to return to the homeland to witness “firsthand the positive effects of martial law” (2002:286). Part of the aim of this program was to recognize the contribution of balikbayans to the economy of the country (The Philippine Embassy).<sup>7</sup> However, as Richter also notes, President Marcos and his administration also “sought to influence Filipinos abroad politically and the nations in which they resided” (1991:59). According to this act, the following categories of persons are deemed to be balikbayans by the state: a) a Filipino who has continuously been out of the Philippines for a period of at least one year from the date of their last departure, b) a Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) or c) a former citizen who had been naturalized in a foreign country and holds a foreign passport. Under this category, balikbayans are entitled to the following benefits: a) Travel tax exemption, b) Visa-free entry to the Philippines for a period of one year for a foreign passport holder, and c) Duty-free shopping privileges of up to \$2,000 USD. The Balikbayan privilege is also extended to legitimate family

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.philembassy.no/consular-services/visa/balikbayan-program>

members (i.e. spouse and children) who hold a foreign passport if they are travelling to the Philippines with a qualified individual (The Philippine Consulate)<sup>8</sup>.

While the Philippine state has used the definition of the *balikbayan* to create a category of persons with particular privileges in order to encourage Filipinos overseas, or Filipinos who have naturalized in other countries, to visit the ‘motherland’ or ‘homeland’, the term ‘*balikbayan*’ has been floating around for years before this act came into effect. In recent decades it has been a term used to describe Filipinos who live abroad, either permanently or semi-permanently, but return to the Philippines for visits, or have returned to the country upon retirement. In the past, it was used to describe those who had come back to the rural areas from the large cities, such as Manila, to find work. The work *balik* in Filipino means, ‘to return’, and ‘*bayan*’ means town, but it could also mean ‘country’ depending on the context. As discussed in the previous chapter, overseas Filipinos or ‘*balikbayans*’ are a strong economic force in the Philippines. There are approximately 10.5-13.5 million Filipinos who are currently living or working overseas as of 2011, and many of these people send back remittances to their relatives back in the Philippines. Much of these remittances come in the form of foreign currencies, dollars, euros, or pounds, therefore, due to the high exchange rate of these foreign currencies for the Philippine peso, *balikbayans*, upon their return to the homeland, have a high purchasing power as a result of these exchange rates.

### ***The balikbayan position***

On my first evening in the Philippines, as I was walking down Bonifacio High Street, at Bonifacio Global City (BGC), I encountered a sales agent for a condo development. He came up to me, started making small talk, and asked me whether I was a *balikbayan*. I was really taken aback by this question since as an anthropologist I made a conscious effort while getting ready

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.philippineconsulatela.org/balikbayan.htm#1>

for my fieldwork to ‘blend in’ like a local. I mentioned this incident to my godmother a few days later because I was so puzzled by how the sales agent knew immediately that I was a balikbayan, especially when I spoke tagalog fluently and dressed like everyone else. My godmother laughed at me, and told me that he picked me out so easily because ‘balikbayans smell differently’. She told me that there was something about our laundry detergent that distinguishes certain people as balikbayans. Following this conversation, I became highly interested in the sensibilities around the notion of the ‘balikbayan’, and I began to ask myself what does it mean to be a balikbayan? How do the state-imposed definitions of what it means to be a ‘balikbayan’ differ from how Filipinos at the local-level come to use, define and give meaning to this term? How do these sensibilities and definitions affect how Filipinos come to understand the Filipino Diaspora in terms of unity and belonging? This chapter will address and discuss these questions, along with the identity politics that have become attached this term.

During my time in the field, I made a conscious effort to pay attention to how people use the word ‘balikbayan’, and what ideas are attached to this term. Two particular ideas stand out in my mind surrounding the notion of balikbayans. The first is ‘abroad’. The notion of ‘going abroad’ and subsequently coming back to the Philippines for extended amounts of time, while also bringing foreign currency to purchase goods and support family members still in the Philippines, is attached to the definition of what it means to be a balikbayan. The second idea is wealth; balikbayans are almost always assumed to have wealth and money. Based on these discourses that I heard surrounding these different definitions of the balikbayan, it then dawned on me that the idea of the balikbayan is an intersectional position that has to do with socioeconomic and national subjectivities. Filipino nationals, by this I mean Filipinos who permanently reside in the Philippines and have not lived outside of the Philippines for years at a

time, equate ‘going abroad’, that is pursuing work or moving to a different country, with acquiring wealth. Part of the reason for this is the Philippines’ history of sending Filipinos to other countries not only to meet the labor demands of those countries that are short in labor, but also to reduce levels of underemployment and unemployment in the Philippines. In the early 1970s, President Marcos assumed that by supporting this labor export policy, those who acquired foreign skills (and currency) would be able to fuel development and domestic economic growth through the remittance economy (Tyner, 1999). There is a strong emphasis on the remittance economy by the Philippine state as 12% of the Philippine GDP is made up of remittances; it is also the most important source of foreign exchange to the Philippine economy (Ang et al., 2009). In Canada alone, remittances from Filipinos in Canada add up to approximately \$1.5 Billion Dollars annually (Friesen, 2011).

Indeed many Filipinos have left the Philippines to pursue other, perceptibly ‘better’ opportunities abroad. Many of my informants have justified their desires to leave the Philippines and pursue lives and livelihoods ‘abroad’ because of the lack of a social safety net, upward social mobility, and jobs in the home country. However, I must also note that these socioeconomic justifications are only part of their motivations, there are many other underlying motivations for their desires to lead their lives abroad such as gaining special cultural and social status by relocating abroad, experiencing westernized culture, and the privilege of mobility through acquiring citizenship in westernized countries. It is important to recognize, that Filipinos who go abroad not only gain an economic status, which leads them to be heralded as ‘Heroes of the Nation’, but that this status also confers a special cultural status and cultural capital for those who return as balikbayan. Balikbayans are afforded cultural capital and privilege as cultural discourse designates these individuals as exceptional due to their contributions in furthering

social life in the Philippines through the contributions of their remittances. Following Bourdieu (1992), I argue that balikbayans acquire cultural capital as, through their association with ‘abroad’, they have access to highly valued knowledge, skills and education. In turn, this allows them access to a higher social status, and provides opportunities to gain social mobility within society.

At the same time, many of them, once they have saved enough money, choose to go back to the Philippines, sometimes permanently, other times on a semi-permanent basis. I recall my informant, Julio, telling me about one of his neighbors who was a US Navy retiree. He volunteered for the US Navy for the purposes of acquiring U.S. citizenship for himself and his family (many Filipinos were given this privilege by the American State during the Korean and Vietnam war as they were a former colony and the Philippines housed many US naval bases). He referred to his neighbor as a ‘balikbayan’. He told me that this neighbor went back and forth because his children and their families lived in the U.S. and so he and his wife would visit there for a certain amount of time in order to be with them. However, this man also kept a residence in the U.S. because he must spend a certain amount of time in the country as a condition for continuously receiving his pension from the Navy. Julio informed me that, when he does not have to be in the States, he prefers to spend the majority of his time in the Philippines as a retiree. I argue that this ability to travel freely, the cosmopolitan nature of the balikbayan identity, and the exceptional and intermediary nature of this position is one of the defining features of what it means to be a balikbayan.

Chris, another informant, spent 12 years in London, England. He never once went back to the Philippines on vacation during his time abroad because he did not have any legal papers to actually stay in the country. He arrived in England, along with his wife Leah, on a tourist visa,

and they decided to take their chances and return only when they had saved up enough money to invest and start a business in the Philippines. Of course, they tried many times to acquire legal papers to stay and work in England, however they were not as fortunate as some to acquire permanent status in England. Thus, they took their chances and stayed in England as undocumented workers. Leah told me their reason for migrating to England was because their grocery store business, their sole source of income, had burned down, and they did not have enough capital or insurance money (I was told that only the very wealthy could afford insurance in the Philippines) to start a new business. Therefore, they decided to take their chances and go to the U.K. on a tourist visa, and then try and secure permanent status because they had heard through their friends that they could do so, and that the exchange rate was very high there. As Leah and Chris summed up their motivations for leaving the Philippines and residing in the U.K. past their tourist visa,

*It's all because of money, money, money. Kasi an laki ng conversional 2005, 2006 1 is to 100, 105 here. Oh my god. Ang sweldo ko duon ang 1000 pounds, pero 100,000 na yun dito.*

*It's all because of money, money, money. Because the conversion rate was so high. In 2005, 2006 1 pound is to 100 or 105 here [in the Philippines]. Oh my god. My [monthly] salary there was 1000 pounds, but here it's already 100,000 [pesos].*

When they returned to the Philippines, Chris mentioned to me that people in his hometown looked at them differently. Many made the assumption that they were financially well off because they had come back to the Philippine after 12 years of living abroad. I then asked them if they ever saw themselves as balikbayans, even though they did not go back and forth between the Philippines and abroad, but because they had returned to the Philippines on their own terms, and not for reasons concerning their status in England. Chris told me that he never felt like a balikbayan, because he knew he could never go back to England.

***Kasi pag balikbayan ka mostly babalik uli. Babalik uli ng bakasyon ka lang eh***

***If you are a balikbayan, you go back [abroad] because you just took a vacation [in the Philippines]***

Chris saw his time in England like a ‘layover’, a place where he lived and worked for twelve years of his life, but, because of his status, he knew there would be a day where he would have to return to the Philippines. In spite of this, though, he told me that he felt like he was a balikbayan because of the way the people in his hometown treated him. Chris mentioned getting offers from wealthier members of the town to enter into different businesses, and offers to buy parcels of land from different people, as part of balikbayan identity is hinged on the presumption of having acquired wealth from abroad. Chris also recalled how people treated him with more respect because he was labeled as a balikbayan, and due to this recognition, he was given a special cultural status from members of the community. This demonstrates, that, while there is a spatial element premised on mobility in the idea about what it means to be a balikbayan, there is also a privileged element attached to the notion of balikbayans. The fact of going abroad is associated with gaining economic wealth, which, within the cultural discourse of the balikbayan, suggests that these individuals remit part of their wealth to family members back home, thus helping to sustain the nation.

### ***Balikbayan Imaginaries***

Images of balikbayans going abroad and returning to the Philippines fuel the imagination of those who have been left behind, inspiring dreams of wealth from working abroad and, in return, upward socioeconomic mobility back home. In a news article written to mark the Philippines as Canada’s top immigrant source, Friesen (2011) writes about a woman who decided to abandon her career as a teacher in the Philippines in order to become a nanny in Canada. She was aware of the years of hardship that was sure to ensue during this time of migration, however she stated

that she had always wanted to go abroad since she was young in order to help her family. In the article she recalls seeing her neighbors go abroad, and states how, “when they came back they had so much.” Many of my informants made similar statements and had very similar sentiments to this. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Vito was motivated to move to Canada in the 80s for economic purposes because he believed that you were better compensated for your work abroad than in the Philippines. He mentioned to me that he believed that if you spent a few years abroad you were able to move up in social and economic status back home in the Philippines.

According to Vito,

***“Spend a few years abroad and you’re on par with many of the people who were above you when you left.”***

I constantly kept hearing stories from my informants about themselves or people they knew whose lives were changed by ‘going abroad’. As my father and I walked through the neighborhood he grew up in, in metro Manila, he and his friend marveled at how drastically the neighborhood had changed because people had chosen to pursue work abroad. As we walked past the houses, I noticed that a large number of them had undergone renovations, extensions to houses were added on, and sometimes even entire floors were built, which oftentimes gave a ‘monster-house’ vibe to these renovated homes. When I asked about the owners of these houses, I found that many of them worked or lived abroad for most of the year, and they were either renting the house out to extended family members, or had their immediate family who had decided to stay in the Philippines living in these houses. The same thing happened during my time in Barangay Bisocol - a site I chose to visit due to the fact that this was the area my father’s family was from - in Alaminos City, just over 200km to the north of Manila. I remember driving through town and seeing these monster-houses, when I asked about who lived in those houses people often told me that either they were balikbayans who had renovated these houses, or the

houses of successful OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers) who had now come back to the Philippines to retire.

Figure 1: A 'monster-house' in Barangay Bisocol, Alaminos City.



Figure 2: A photo of a more traditional residence in Barangay Bisocol



Figure 3: A photo of a ‘monster-house’ vs. a more traditional style residence in Barangay Bisocol, Alaminos City.



### ***The Balikbayan Position and the State***

As I have argued, the process of relocating and living abroad for a time gives people who are recognized as balikbayan a higher currency of cultural capital. Through physically relocating oneself and actually living in one of these highly regarded western countries, these people are associated with a valued level of social and cultural privilege. As discussed in Chapter One, part of this has to do with the Philippine state glorifying these migrant Filipinos as “Heroes of the Nation.” I have also noted that building and sustaining these ties with overseas Filipinos through special recognition by the state is part of the scheme of the Philippine state to get the overseas population to stay loyal to the Philippine state and help with its nation-building project through their contribution of remittances which make up 12% of the Philippines’ GDP, and help keep its economy afloat.

As Pauline Gardiner Barber (2013) notes, one of the most significant examples of the impact of migration on Philippine economic development was the establishment of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas in 1980. This commission was tasked to promote “the interests, rights, and

welfare of overseas Filipinos,” and “to strengthen their tie to the homeland.” As Robyn Magalit Rodriguez (2010) discusses in her book *Migrants for Export*, President Marcos institutionalized the labor export program through the Presidential Decree 442, which created three state agencies. These were the Overseas Employment Development Board (OEDB), the Bureau of Employment Services (BES), and the National Seaman’s Board (NSB). All of these state agencies were responsible for the development, promotion, regulation, and implementation of the labor export program. According to Rodriguez,

“[t]he Philippine State sought to capitalize on existing out-migration, while also expanding its given new forms of labor demand globally because remittances migrants sent back to the Philippines proved to be economically beneficial. Migrants’ remittances helped to strengthen the country’s foreign exchange reserves and thereby help the government maintain its debt repayments” (2010:12).

Rodriguez also notes that in 1983, the Philippine foreign debt stood at \$42.8 Billion and, in that same year, President Marcos mandated that remittances be sent through the Philippine banking system. In addition, with Executive Order 857, migrants would be subject to punitive measures if they failed to remit their earnings. By the end of the 1980s, the Philippines had become increasingly dependent on foreign loans as trade imbalances and increasing debt forced the state to seek more aid from the IMF and loans from private lenders. This economic situation was made even direr due to the rampant corruption during Marcos’ Presidency, which even overseas employment could not ease. 1983 was also the year that all the existing migration agencies were consolidated into the POEA, the Philippines Overseas Employment Agency, which continues to exist today.

Following the “People’s Power Revolution” that saw the Marcos dictatorship topple, Corazon Aquino became the President of the Philippines in 1986. However, Aquino inherited an economy in shambles and, while she sought to repay the Philippine foreign debt, she was

operating under a national budget that, in 1988, dedicated \$3 Billion, or 37% of the national budget, towards debt repayment. By 1989 this figure rose to 44%. Thus, while overseas employment was supposed to be a temporary measure to keep Philippine foreign debt at bay, it began to have increasing permanence after the Marcos dictatorship, and even until today it helps the Philippine state alleviate its continuing foreign debt (Rodriguez 2010). Therefore the economic contributions from balikbayans are incredibly important to the Philippine state in order to keep its economy afloat, and thus keeping close ties with their overseas population becomes a strong priority, and part of the reason why the Philippine state heralds them as heroes. Without the remittances of balikbayans, the Philippine state would be buried under its foreign debt.

Following his election as President in 2010, Benigno Aquino III devised a new “Social Contract” comprised of a 16-point “Platform of Government” to be implemented for the period of 2010-2016. Point ten on this platform includes a diaspora to development program, also known as D2D, which outlines ten interventions and draws a more explicit link between migration and development in order to facilitate more “effective engagements of overseas Filipinos” in development initiatives. Part of this program requires soon-departing migrants to attend a Philippine government pre-departure orientation, which is necessary for obtaining a formal visa. As Barber (2013) outlines in her ethnographic work, this orientation session covers ways of being a “good and loyal” Philippine citizen relative to remittance practices and official protocols. In this way, Barber notes how diasporic individuals are pressured and relied on for economic responsibility through remittance obligations in order to counter the structural inequality that exists in the Philippines. In Ortega’s ethnographic accounts he notes how one of his informants, Joel “explain[ed] how almost everyone in his village are actually from families

with an OFW that helps in paying for their multi-million peso houses” (243). As Joel explained to Ortega (2012), “someone has to go abroad to pay for the house” (243).

The Philippines Overseas Employment Administration, the government administrative branch designated to handle overseas Filipino workers, and coordinating employment terms with host governments also uses the *Bagong Bayani Awards* (The New Heroes Awards) as part of their strategy to valorize the efforts of Overseas Filipino Workers. This award is a

“national search for the country’s outstanding Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). The awards seek to recognize and pay tribute to our OFWs for their significant efforts fostering goodwill among peoples of the world, enhancing and promoting the image of the Filipino as a competent, responsible and dignified worker, and for greatly contributing to the socio-economic development of their communities and our country as a whole. The BBA aims at providing proper recognition to deserving nominees, thus setting up examples for others to emulate and for the country to be proud of” (Bagong Bayani Foundation Inc.)

These awards are significant as state recognition of the sacrifices and hard work of Filipinos who leave their loved ones behind to pursue better opportunities abroad. At the same time, however, they are also a means by which the state glorifies those who leave, while also specifically outlining what it means to be a ‘model citizen’ of the Philippines. Model citizens sacrifice for their country by going abroad and pursuing work outside of the nation to help offset the foreign debt the Philippine state has amassed, which, in turn, prevents the state from providing sufficient opportunities or social benefits to support the entire population. Those who leave are given recognition because of the socio-economic benefits that they provide to the country through their contribution of remittances.

These awards provide recognition to those who sacrifice for their families in order to provide better lives for them and their communities. But, at the same time, these awards also mask the inadequacies of the Philippine State, and the fact that they must export migrants and rely on the loyalties and sentimentalities of these migrants overseas in order to keep the Philippine economy afloat and make up for the structural inequalities. Instead of the state providing social safety nets,

individuals must build and secure these nets for themselves. Thus migrants who send remittances home become 'Heroes' because they provide for themselves and their families what the state cannot. In this way, where the state's role has proved inadequate, the individual fills the role of the state and, in turn, the state recognizes them for these contributions for maintaining the existence of the nation. In this way, through pursuing lives abroad, and doing their duty to the Philippine State through their remittance contributions, which in turn fuels socio-economic development and helps keep the state's economy afloat, the balikbayan subject positions are intersectional with a national subject position.

There is a very strong discourse present among balikbayans and Filipinos abroad that they must be the ones to help out their family members left behind in the Philippines, as they strongly believe that they are the more 'fortunate ones'. Many balikbayans I spoke with mentioned that they were paying for siblings, cousins, or nieces and nephews to be put through school. Chris feels a strong sense of duty towards his siblings that were left behind in the Philippines. He mentioned that, as he was the first one to be able to emigrate from the Philippines, therefore becoming more knowledgeable about the immigration processes and earning a larger income than his siblings, he feels it is his duty to financially assist them with education and household expenses, or immigration expenses if they express the desire to migrate. Similarly, Julio feels it is his duty to ensure that his family in the Philippines is taken care of. He used the lion share of his earnings from his time abroad to buy properties, not only for investment, but also for personal use for his family members. On one of the properties he owns, he built several houses on the land, one for him and his wife, and the others for his children and siblings. He also paid for his children to attain papers to live and work abroad as he believes that they will not be able to build a secure future for themselves if they were to stay in the Philippines. As he was the one to go

abroad, he feels that it is his responsibility to ensure the security of his family. An interesting thing to note is that both Chris and Julio feel that they were unable to build a secure future in the Philippines due to the underdevelopment of the country, the rampant corruption among government officials, and lack of jobs available. Thus, as Julio and Chris, and many others before them, escape the inadequacies of the Philippine state and build more secure lives for their families, they subsequently ensure that the Philippine state continues to exist despite the structural inequalities - inequalities in which motivate Filipinos to leave in the first place - within the home state.

While the state seeks to promote the balikbayan position in order to secure ties and retain the loyalty of their overseas population, at the same time there is also a strong recognition of the balikbayan position at the local, everyday level by ordinary Filipino citizens. As the Philippine state promotes the idea of the 'balikbayan' subject position, this concept has seeped into the everyday discourse of Philippine culture. Those who are balikbayans are revered and seen as being exemplary Filipino citizens who have acted as ambassadors of the Philippine state and culture while living as migrants in other countries, while at the same time 'helping' their home country through their economic contributions. 'Going abroad' is so embedded in the lives of many Filipinos, as is living these transnational lifestyles and maintaining ties and relationships with people at home while abroad. This is evident through images such as those on billboards of cell phone plans that advertise cheap rates to call loved ones abroad. Remittance services are also widely available and accessible by the masses, in order to facilitate the effortless transfer of monetary funds from relatives abroad to relatives back in the 'homeland'. While I was in the Philippines, I saw an abundance of luxury goods retailers, brand new automobiles, and newly renovated properties. When I asked people what is fueling the consumption of these goods,

everyone I spoke to would say that it is the remittances sent by balikbayans to relatives in the Philippines, which in turn benefit the economy, or that it is the balikbayans themselves buying or renovating properties and leaving it in the trust of relatives while they work abroad. Most Filipino nationals (if not all) know of at least one person who lives abroad and so images of balikbayans returning to the homeland with seemingly much more than they used to have before they left is commonplace and resonates in the minds of these individuals. This is why the concepts of ‘abroad’ and balikbayan are associated with wealth and social mobility.

Figure 4: An advertisement of a remittance service at Shoe Mart, a major Philippine Department store.

Ikaw naman ang magpadala sa kanya sa abroad through MoneyGram sa SM

**WALANG DUDA. DIRETSO.**  
moneygrado

- ✓ Send money throughout the world in as little as 10 minutes\*.
- ✓ 284,000 agent locations in 196 countries

\*Subject to agent's availability, hours of operation and local laws and regulations.

Transfer Amount (Php)	Send Fee
0.01 to 5,000.00	500.00
5,000.01 to 10,000.00	600.00
10,000.01 to 250,000.00	900.00
250,000.01 to 500,000.00	1,200.00

Note: Remittance amounts and fees are in Philippine Peso (PHP)

THE **SM** STORE    **SM** Business Services    **MoneyGram** money transfer  
**GLOBAL PINOY**    moneygram.com/moneygrado

Para sa iba pang remittance concerns, call our 24/7 toll-free hotline 1-800-111-60791 or visit www.moneygram.com

Figure 5: An advertisement for a phone plan to 'call abroad'



Figure 6: An advertisement at the Mall of Asia (one of the largest Malls in the Philippines) for a special plan for 'Global' Filipino Families.

**Sun Postpaid Applications**  
now made easier for  
**SM Global Pinoy Families!**

**SUN IDD Plan600**

- Up to 60 IDD minutes or 60 ISMS for as low as P2 per IDD/ISMS
- 120 minutes Sun Calls
- 150 Sun Texts
- 30 minutes Mobile Internet
- 150 Texts to other networks
- Free Android phone

Alcatel One Touch 978      Samsung Galaxy Ch@t      Alcatel One Touch Sapphire 2

**Simply submit the following:**

1. 3 months remittance slip
2. OFW Contract or Proof of Relationship to the OFW
3. Present your SM Global Pinoy Card
4. Proof of Billing
5. 1 Valid ID

In partnership with: **GLOBAL PINOY** **SUN CELLULAR**

### ***Western Cultural Artifacts***

Balikbayans are able to confirm their cultural capital to those back home, while at the same time transferring this privilege to family and friends back home. This association with abroad helps to further instill a desire for abroad in the people back in the Philippines. An excellent example of this type of cultural capital is the notion of the balikbayan box. A balikbayan box is a form of symbolic capital that balikbayans use to bring goods back home in order to give relatives and friends a taste of abroad, and through their easy association and access to these westernized goods, they in turn gain symbolic capital as their ability to access and consume these goods mark them as different. Many Filipinos will bring back a balikbayan box with them, upon their return to the Philippines, or they will send these boxes home from abroad full of goods for their family and friends if they are unable to physically go back themselves. These gifts brought or sent back from abroad are typically called '*pasalubong*'. Many Filipinos are familiar with these goods, but are unable to purchase them because they are 'Western brands' and so are either expensive or merely unavailable to buy in the Philippines. Some examples of these goods - which I have witnessed my own family packaging to send to the Philippines - are: 1) toothpaste, especially brands such as Colgate or Crest; 2) Brand-named clothing such as Nike, American Eagle, Aeropostale or Levis; 3) brands of chocolate such as Nestle, Cadbury or Toblerone; 4) soap, such as Irish Spring, Dove or Ivory, which are quite expensive to buy in the Philippines; 5) school supplies for children, such as notebooks, pencils and pens, markers and crayons, pencil cases and backpacks. Vicente Rafael notes that these boxes are "material evidence of immigrant success as they are symbolic of the promise of immigration itself. Thus they constitute the materialization of a desire realizable only outside of the nation, yet recognizable only within its borders" (1997:271).

Balikbayan boxes have been a staple aspect of balikbayan identity for decades. Alice Jade Albuero, who did a socio-cultural analysis of the balikbayan box, recalls in her thesis how her family brought home “eleven balikbayan boxes in addition to the nine suitcases and assorted carry-on luggage” (2001:1). She goes on to note how the custom of packaging goods from abroad conveys a certain message, “they represent the balikbayans’ wealth and success, as well as their relationships with those in the Philippines . . . to many of the recipients, the material goods in the balikbayan boxes represent their ‘American dream’ and may be considered somewhat sacred and contagious” (2001:9). due to the decades of American colonialization, and current Philippine-American relations, the Philippines has always deferred to the United States of America, and by extension any westernized culture characterized to be part of the wealthy ‘first world’, as more culturally superior than the Filipino way of life. Part of occupying the balikbayan subject position means to be fully immersed in and in touch with this ‘westernized’ way of life, and to be a member of the wealthy ‘first world’. This act of bringing back ‘pasalubong’ - highly anticipated and fetishized goods from the ‘first-world’ - displays balikbayans’ wealth and success and their proximity and access to ‘the American dream’, by which I mean the ability for upward social mobility in countries which many Philippine nationals perceive to be more ‘fair’ and to have more opportunity for socioeconomic improvement. These goods also symbolize the balikbayan sentiments for the homeland and the maintenance of relations with family and friends.

In Alex Humilde’s documentary *Balikbayans* (2015), there is a scene where Nimfa, one of his subjects who has returned to the Philippines for the first time since she had left for Canada, distributes *pasalubong* during a gathering with her family and friends. Following the distribution, one woman - who I also noticed in one shot smelling the goods from Canada - asks

Nimfa if she has any more of those t-shirts with the 'Canada' logo on it. As I have previously stated, such items from abroad are highly desired and confer an element of cultural capital as wearing these items is a way of advertising a connection to Western culture. However, it also displays a national subject position as these goods, or *pasalubong*, are intended for family members or loved ones back in the Philippines. In a sense, this ritual of bringing or sending *pasalubong* back to the Philippines is a way for *balikbayans* to gain recognition within their everyday lives as they symbolically represent *balikbayan* privilege and access to 'the West'. In addition, the distribution of these goods through their boxes and *pasalubong*, according to Jade Albuero (2002), is a way for *balikbayans* to express their love to friends and relatives. The *balikbayan* box, then, is an artifact of sorts which shows that while "economics disunites immigrants from their family and friends, consumerism provides a way for them to show that they care and helps them bring them closer to their loved ones" (Albuero 2002:11). Thus, the symbolic ritual of the *balikbayan* box shows the commitment and sense of attachment they feel towards their friends and family, which they left behind in the homeland. These economic rituals such as sending remittances, using earnings to buy consumer products from 'abroad' which not only objectifies their mobility, but at the same time it also serves as a reminder for their affection towards their loved ones back in the Philippines, along with their commitment to maintaining relationships and ties to the homeland. Investing earnings made from abroad into local businesses back in the Philippines or in property in the Philippines also evidence *balikbayan*'s attachment to the Philippine nation-state. In this way the *balikbayan* position despite being an exceptional subject position, is also a national subject position.

While in the field, I met up with a colleague with whom I share a mutual friend in Canada. During our meeting, we chatted about our personal lives and our experiences living as

transnational Filipinos. As we were discussing balikbayan boxes, my friend told me a highly entertaining story about how one of his uncles, who used to live in the U.S. when he was younger, sent balikbayan boxes to his family who were living in the Philippines at the time. He recounted the time when his uncle sent a box of Crayola markers in the balikbayan box meant for him, and how he used to sniff these markers, and all the other goods in the box from abroad, and take extra special care of them when he was a child. He told me how later, when he moved to the United States, that he found there was actually nothing special about them, since you can buy them for so little and they are basically available at almost every store that sells school supplies. Reflecting upon this story, my friend found it quite comical how special he thought those markers were. After laughing about this story, I asked him why he took such special care of these things. He told me that he revered these goods because he knew they were from abroad, he knew they were coming from 'somewhere else', which is why he took such good care of them and treated them like a prized possession. As I have already mentioned, for many Philippine nationals, there is a fascination with cultural artifacts from the West that has to do, in part, with the Philippines' colonial history with the United States and the sense that westernized culture is superior. Through the act of distributing pasalubong, Balikbayans serve as intermediaries to the 'West' and provide Philippine nationals with a piece of the more 'prosperous culture', which in turns, allows them a degree of cultural capital through the displays of consumption and ownership of these goods, while at the same time it serves as an act to objectify their transnational mobility and demonstrates their affections and desire to maintain their relationships with loved ones left in the Philippines.

### ***Balikbayan perks***

The balikbayan position not only comes with cultural capital and social mobility, but with recognition of their contributions and a privileged status in the wider Philippine society. An example of this is the *VIP Pinoy Card*, which is distributed by Ayala Malls and the *SM Global Pinoy Service*. SM and Ayala are some of the largest land development companies for residential, retail, and commercial real estate in the Philippines, they also develop and own a number of the largest malls in the Philippines. For a membership cost, these cards are available for Filipinos living and working overseas and their families in the Philippines. According to the SM Global Pinoy information website<sup>9</sup>

“[t]he Global Pinoy Center is a specialized all-in-one convenience stop within SM Supermalls offering various exclusives, perks and privileges to welcome and uplift Global Pinoys. Membership is being offered to past, present and future OFWs, Immigrants, Balikbayans, and their immediate beneficiaries such as parents, spouse, siblings and children, and guests”.

There are VIP-style lounges in the SM Supermalls for members and, with this membership, there are discounts for shopping, Immigration Consultancy firms, hotels owned by SM, along with currency and remittance services. The Ayala VIP Pinoy card’s website<sup>10</sup> advertises these VIP lounges, located in Ayala Malls, as a place to “surf the internet and keep in touch with loved ones abroad, relax in a comfortable area, all inside the VIP Pinoy Lounge.” There is also a currency and remittance center in these lounges, and specialists in the lounge that you can consult regarding issues on “financial literacy and investment, property management, communication, travel and more.” These spaces built solely for those who are currently or in the past have sacrificed for the Philippine nation, thus continuously furthering the social lives of

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<sup>9</sup> <http://smglobalpinoy.com/gpc/?p=1961>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.ayalamallsvipinoy.com.ph/>

Filipinos, are rewarded an exclusive space in which migrant's and their beneficiaries can only access. By creating this almost pseudo-gated space in which only those who are recognized as balikbayan are able to have access to, this not only emphasizes the exceptionality of the balikbayan position, but it also materializes the significance of their position within Philippine culture. Interestingly, Ayala and SM are two of the companies who also develop luxury condominium properties, which mainly target balikbayans and overseas Filipinos to invest in these properties. Some developers, like Ayala, are known for developing entire luxury enclaves that not only contain these residential condominium properties, but also come complete with commercial, financial and retail districts within these enclaves. While many Filipinos desire to go 'abroad' in order to gain economic and cultural capital, many of them also desire to return to the 'homeland' upon retirement once they have gained enough capital to build a more secure life in the Philippines. Many of them either choose to renovate their pre-existing properties or to buy these new properties as an investment, with the intention of using these properties during vacations in the Philippines, and then using them as more permanent homes upon retirement. Investment in these properties creates more permanent ties with the 'homeland', especially for those who had sold their familial homes when migrating. Many of these properties play a strong role in the lives of balikbayans, as they are used to showcase their position as balikbayans, and their newfound social and class positions. I will explore more of the politics around these properties and their connection to the balikbayan subject position in Chapter 3.

Therefore the balikbayan position is one that intersects with a social and a national identity. Balikbayans are afforded upward social mobility through the process of going abroad, while at the same time gaining cultural capital through living in the 'West' and taking part in the prosperity which the 'West' is viewed by Filipinos to harbor. At the same time, many overseas

Filipinos still view the Philippines as ‘home’, part of which has to do with the concerted efforts of the Philippines state to maintain the loyalty of their transnational population, in order to secure the billions of dollars in foreign capital which comes in the form of remittances every year. As Patricia Evangelista, the 19 year-old who won the International Public Speaking Competition of the English Speaking Union in 2004, put it,

“[n]ationalism isn’t bound by time or place. People from other nations migrate to create new nations, yet remain essentially who they are. Leaving isn’t a matter of choice, it’s coming back that is. We call people like these “balikbayans”- those who followed their dream, yet choose to return, and share their mature talents and good fortune...A borderless world does not preclude the idea of home. I am a Filipino, and I will always be one. It isn’t about geography; it isn’t about boundaries. It’s about giving back to the country that shaped me” (Ramos 2008).

Balikbayans are not defined by their choices to leave; they leave out of necessity, to follow their dreams because their dreams could not be fulfilled in the Philippines. However, their choice to return, to share the good fortune and skills they have gained while abroad allows them to give back to the country. In choosing to return and give back to the ‘homeland’, they are become exemplary citizens, as it is felt that they allow the Philippines to exist and thrive. Thus, the balikbayan position is an exemplary position, they are part of the country by choosing to return, but they have also chosen to leave so as to be able to “share their good fortune,” which makes them exemplary. However, what we must remember is that these people had to leave in the first place because of the structural inequalities that exist in the Philippines that have hindered them from pursuing their dream, although they remain loyal to the ‘homeland’, a sentiment which is strengthened, and in some ways imposed on them, by the Philippine state through reminders of ‘doing their duty’ in the form of economic contributions. While balikbayans have gone through many sacrifices and should be recognized as ‘Heroes of the Nation’ and credited for the creation of the new middle class, we have to remember why they felt compelled to leave in the first place.

### Chapter 3- Condo Developments

*This chapter will examine the Philippine Privatization Program and how this act has led to the development of Bonafacio Global City – a high-end development in the Metro Manila Region – a former US military base known as ‘Fort Bonafacio’. We will examine how the growth of the real estate sector in the Philippines has been largely due to remittances from Filipinos living overseas. Using ethnographic data from my fieldwork in the summer of 2014, I will examine the symbolic aspects of these condominium developments.*

#### **The Philippine Privatization Program**

In 1992, the office of the Philippine President mandated the Republic Act 7227, the Bases Conversion and Development Act - better known as the Philippine Privatization Program. This act created a government-owned and controlled corporation mandated to ‘transform former US military bases for alternative productive civilian use’ (BCDA website).<sup>11</sup> While this land has in fact been transformed to civilian use, Kenneth Cardenas (2014) notes how the mandate of the BCDA has been to sell this land to the highest possible bidder, thus reserving the use of this land for the highest end of the market. According to Cardenas (2014), Fort Bonifacio, previously an American base in the National Capital Region of Manila, was first privatized in 1995. The initial bloc of 150 acres was sold for \$1.6 Billion US dollars and is currently a master-planned, high-end district, which includes a host of embassies such as the United Kingdom and Singapore, the new headquarters of the Philippine Stock Exchange, and the head offices of several multinational corporations. While many people marveled at the speed this district - along with many others very similar to it - was built, and how these master-planned districts such as BGC were changing the ‘face’ of the Philippines, there are those, along with Cardenas (2014), who have criticized the use of this land as it favors the elite segment of society, while it could have been allocated for socialized housing. During my fieldwork in the Philippines, it was said that Bonafacio Global City - better known to the locals as BGC - was rumored to be the ‘new financial district’. Makati

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<sup>11</sup> [http://www.bcda.gov.ph/about\\_us](http://www.bcda.gov.ph/about_us)

was previously known as the Philippines' financial center, as it contained the highest density of corporate headquarters in the country, and the Philippine Stock Exchange. However, many corporations have purchased property at BGC and plan to relocate their offices from Makati in the upcoming years.

BGC is also known for upscale housing, or residential condominium developments. During my fieldwork in the Philippines in the summer of 2014, I was granted the privilege of living at one of these well-known (not to mention iconic) condo developments, which allowed me to interact with members of the community and become a part of everyday life. Through participant-observation, interviews and everyday conversations with residents, staff and members of this community, I was able to gather insightful data that reveals how these luxury properties have become symbols of social status, mobility and wealth for the transnational elite class of Filipinos, or balikbayans. This chapter will describe these enclaves and condo developments, how these properties are used as symbolic capital to mark class and mobility privileges, a marker for social status, and how these properties come to play into the logics of transnationalism of overseas Filipinos.

In Julia Harrison's *A Timeless Place*, an ethnography about the Canadian cottaging experience in Haliburton, Ontario, she references Roy Wolfe (1962, 1965), who posits that "the primary purpose of cottage life was status-seeking; the flaunting of wealth by lavishing splendor on unnecessary dwellings" (2013: 16). She goes on to discuss Quinn's (2004) point that "multiple residency dwelling is a condition of many in the world today, be they elite second-home owners or immigrants and migrant workers who move regularly between two or more countries" (2013:22) I will make a similar argument about how multiple residences are part of the condition of transnational lifestyles, noting however that luxury condominium properties,

much like cottages, are also being used as an indicator of socioeconomic status for those who were able to afford to purchase them. In addition, these displays of economic capital act as forms of symbolic capital that reference degrees of economic success, which cements peoples' social status within the balikbayan hierarchy.

The balikbayan subject position is not merely a static subject position, nor is it defined wholly on its exemplary nature. It is multilayered and intersectional with a number of different positions including social, cultural and economic subject positions. The balikbayan position is not merely defined by transnational Filipinos privileges to traverse across national borders, but it also has to do with the social status that transnational Filipinos attain upon their return to the homeland. Members of this position are ranked and policed not only by its members, but also by outsiders – Philippine nationals. This social status is variable as it intersects with a number of different positions, and therefore this 'ranking' within the balikbayan hierarchy is based upon symbolic displays of social and cultural capital, such as education, professional and economic achievement acquired 'abroad', attaining naturalization within a western country, affinity for westernized culture or displays of economic success, such as the purchase of luxury properties

Pierre Bourdieu (2005) considers the substantial symbolic components of dwellings as he notes that a dwelling is a material good that

“is exposed to the general gaze, and is so on a lasting basis, this form of property expresses or betrays, in a more decisive way than many other goods, the social beings of its owners, the extent of their 'means' as we say; but it also reveals their taste, the classification system they deploy in their acts of appropriation and which in assuming objective form in visible goods, provides a purchase for the symbolic appropriations of others, who are thereby enabled to situate the owners in social space...” (2005: 19).

Thus, I will also outline and argue in this chapter how these properties symbolically situate the owners of these properties within a particular 'social space', and, as Bourdieu (2005) terms it, a social status. In this case, this social space is the space of the balikbayan hierarchy.

## **The rise in land investments**

Cardenas (2014) notes that, in 2010, the Philippines hosted a labor-force of 37.1 million, 1.9 million of which were deployed overseas on temporary contracts. During that same year remittances totaled \$18.76 Billion US Dollars putting the Philippines just fourth in the world behind India, China and Mexico. Receiving families use these remittance funds for three primary expenditures: education, consumption of consumer goods, and real estate investment. Real estate, if considered a separate subsector, is considered to be the second fastest growing sector of the economy over the past decade. At the end of 2002, the gross value of real estate development stood at approximately 8.8 Billion PHP, but by 2010 it had grown to 22.1 Billion PH= The growth of this sector is attributed to the remittances from overseas Filipinos, who are fueling the demand and sales of these condominium developments. According to one interview Lucas conducted with John Victor Antonio, a real estate developer and Century Properties managing director in the Philippines, “[o]ur rule of thumb is that 30% of all remittances are being used for spending in the real estate sector, whether it is used to buy property or spent on housing improvement.” (2007, Philippine Daily Inquirer)

This latest trend marks a significant shift from the pattern established in previous decades where the bulk of remittances were used for consumer goods, with very little left for savings and investments. Antonio has gone on the record to note that, “OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers), are the main factor driving up this market” (Lucas 2007, Philippine Daily Inquirer). His firm has gone on to launch several projects aimed at this cash-rich sector, as 50% of Century Properties sales come from OFW buyers (Lucas 2007). Cardenas (2014) notes that Vista Land estimates that 60% of their sales are from overseas Filipinos, Robinson’s Land estimate 40%, and Ayala Land 20%. Many of these investments are poured into Manila, the capital city of the Philippines,

and its periphery. According to Lucas (2007), large and small real-estate developers are now investing heavily in wooing expatriate Filipino buyers including big-name Philippine property developers such as Ayala Land Inc., Megaworld Corporation, and Robinson's Land Corporation. These firms embark on periodic sales tours in Europe and the US aimed at attracting Filipino buyers, some even setting up permanent sales offices in areas with high concentration of potential clients - typically in areas where there is a strong presence of overseas Filipino communities.

I encountered one of these firms on one of their sales tours in Canada, a few years prior to conducting my field study. I was at the mall with my mother in my hometown of Ottawa, Canada, when a lady manning a kiosk in the middle of the ever-popular Bayshore Mall approached us and asked if we were Filipino. When we answered 'yes', she quickly ushered us over to her kiosk where she had an array of pamphlets outlining condominium developments in the Philippines, which her firm was working on. After a brief, preliminary sales presentation, she gave us her business card and invited us to attend a longer sales presentation in the near future. I was puzzled during this time as to why a sales representative from the Philippines was specifically targeting Filipinos in Canada as possible purchasers of real estate property in the Philippines. Over the next few years, a handful of my own relatives in Canada announced that they had purchased property in the Philippines, many of them opting to purchase condominium units in developments located in the National Capital Region of Manila. Many of the developments in the pamphlets they showed me were portrayed to showcase a particular upper-classed type of lifestyle, and emphasized the luxury and exclusivity of these properties. I began to notice how many of my friends and family, who were overseas Filipinos, were discussing the possibility of purchasing these properties, and how they were tied into ideas of 'homeland'.

Many of them wanted to invest in their homeland. In some ways, it had to do with nationalist sentiments - many of the Filipinos I encountered hoped to relocate to the Philippines upon retirement as they believed that going back to the 'homeland' was what you were 'supposed to do'.

This strategy of specifically targeting expatriate Filipinos in Western countries, with high foreign currencies, has been an incredibly elaborate campaign for these firms. I have previously noticed advertisements for these properties in Filipino grocery stores, along with the business cards of several sales agents. A friend of mine also recalled the time when he was approached to be a sales agent for one of these development companies as he was an expatriate Filipino with lots of connections and contacts in his local community.

This targeting of expatriate Filipinos by real estate firms continues in the Philippines as well. Upon arriving at the Manila airport, as you descend the escalator from the International terminal to the immigration and customs screening, you will notice several large billboards advertising these developments. Many of the highways in the Philippines are also lined with gigantic billboards advertising these communities. One advertisement I found incredibly clever was Ayala Land Inc.'s advertisement located right beside the immigration counter in the International terminal of the Manila Airport; the tag line on this particular advertisement read 'The Best Homecoming: Coming Home to the Best'. The entire area where the baggage claim was located was also littered with billboard advertisements of condo properties and, just past the customs area, before the passenger pick-up, there was an Ayala Land Inc. kiosk, complete with pamphlets, and a model of their newest project, manned with a sales agent, looking to specifically target balikbayans who had newly returned to 'the homeland' (see Appendix A).

During my time in the Philippines, I encountered many of these sales agents at kiosks from various development companies. They were all very knowledgeable about the ongoing and newly launched projects at their respective companies, ready to answer any question you had about the company and their newest developments. In addition to their elaborate 3-D models, all of them were armed with their mobile slideshows on their tablets, containing information about floor plans, payment schedules and financing options. On my first night in the Philippines, I was walking along the iconic Bonafacio High Street, an area modeled after Fifth Avenue in New York City, lined with high-end shops, trendy bars and restaurants, and beautifully planned urban green spaces. It was here that I encountered my first sales agent (outside of the airport), and it was here that I was first asked whether I was a '*balikbayan*'. While I was taken aback by this question, this is when I first began to notice how many of these sales agents for these development companies were actively looking for and targeting balikbayans who might be considering the possibility of permanently returning to the Philippines in the future.

But why is it that balikbayans are the perfect target market for these condominium properties? What exactly is it about these properties that make them so attractive for balikbayans to purchase? What exactly is the cultural significance of these properties to balikbayans and to Philippine nationals? As I have noted, Bourdieu (2005) argues that dwellings, such as these condos, have a symbolic component attached to them. They are an indication of social status and allow the owners of these properties to be situated within a particular social space. While balikbayans hold a special position within Philippine culture, there is still a hierarchy present within this position and one's status within this hierarchy is conferred through the consumption of highly valued objects (cf Shankar 2008). The consumption of these objects in the homeland shapes the meanings of status and success relative to other balikbayans, and to Philippine

nationals. Thus the consumption of these luxury properties in the homeland is a way for balikbayans to show off their success abroad, as these properties are physical and symbolic indicators of their economic means and their newfound social status, also act as signifiers of their status within the balikbayan hierarchy. At the same time, many of these balikbayans do not live full-time in these properties, and thus either allow their parents, siblings or extended family members who live in the Philippines to use the property as Vito, or Chris and Leah do. As Aguilar (2009) notes within his own ethnographic investigation, these properties serve as a memorial and living reminder to the family members who are given the privilege to occupy the dwellings when family members are abroad, and to the wider community of the care and affection balikbayans have towards their family members in the Philippines, even though they are not physically present. These properties represent overseas family members love and attachment to loved ones back to in the Philippines, while at the same time presenting these members and themselves the ability to reap a higher social status within the local community – despite their physical absence- and upward social mobility. As Aguilar (2009) puts it, these houses are kept and maintained as cultural investments, and displays to others that Filipino’s who are overseas still view the Philippine locale as their origin and that they are till part of the community despite their physical absence.

### **Serrendra**

During my fieldwork in the Philippines, I had the privilege of living in one of these master-planned, high-end enclaves. I lived at Fort Bonafacio in one of the Serrendra towers for two months. The unit is owned by my uncle, an overseas Filipino, who has purchased this property for vacation purposes, but with the intention of using it as a future home upon retirement. He offered to let me rent out his unit during my stay in the Philippines. As I was a

resident of Serrendra, I was able to interact with the other residents and staff, and become a part of everyday life. I conducted my fieldwork in the months of May and June, and during most of my stay here I saw very few residents who actually lived in the building. In fact, I was the only resident occupying a unit on my floor. The amenities in the building were all luxuriously designed. In my particular building we had a gym, sauna, indoor and outdoor lounge area, along with several pools and cabanas. To top it all off, I was only a stone's throw away from the shops, corporate offices, markets and restaurants at Bonafacio Global City (BGC). BGC also boasted its own shuttle system to get around the area, along with the best hospitals in the country, a handful of the most prestigious International Schools, an outdoor track available for public use, golf courses, expensive spas and an astro-turf soccer field where one of the Philippine professional soccer teams practices. It was urban living at its finest. Everything I could ever want or need was all within a short walking distance, and I quickly began to see why there was such a high demand for these properties.

During the time I spent at BGC, I felt it was easy to forget sometimes that I was in the Philippines. I have lived most of my adult life in urban areas, I have always been privileged with living in areas where I was a short walk away from a park, or a bike trail, or a handful of grocery stores, trendy restaurants and bars. When I informed my family and Filipino friends that I was going to be in the Philippines for two months to conduct fieldwork, many of them were quite worried about me. They told me not to venture out alone - especially because I was a woman. Many were concerned that, because I would be labeled as a 'balikbayan', I would be a target for pick-pockets or muggers. I received the same reaction from my family in the Philippines. I was frequently warned me not to go anywhere unaccompanied, and to be very careful. There is a general feeling in Manila that one must be cautious of your belongings, as there are generally a

number of pick-pockets looking to catch those not on their guard. While I was wary about my surroundings when I ventured outside of BGC, whenever I was inside the enclave, I could say that I felt right at home. I never felt unsafe walking around by myself, even late at night, and despite the scorching heat, oftentimes I felt like I could be in the middle of Manhattan.

Properties at BGC are in high demand. According to many residents of Manila, and many of the earliest residents of the first towers to go up at BGC ten years ago, there was absolutely nothing at Fort Bonafacio, besides the informal settlers who were previously soldiers at the base. In the span of ten years, Ayala Land Inc., one of the Philippines' most respected and reputable land developers, transformed the base into an iconic district. Within the next couple of years, the demand for condominium units in this enclave skyrocketed. According to one of the sales agents I spoke with for Ayala Land Inc., Serendra's three bedroom units initially started out at 8 Million Pesos, but due to high demand they are currently on the market for 20 Million Pesos. Ayala Land Inc. also sells a number of these units to Japanese companies with headquarters in BGC, as they house their employees who are posted in their Manila offices in these units. As many Japanese companies are headquartered in BGC, I was also informed by a sales agent that one of the factors driving the inflation in prices for these units is that Japanese investors are given the option to purchase these units before they even become available to the public. Many of them will buy these units in bulk, and then sell them once the prices become inflated. However, one unit for each building is reserved for a lottery for the public, as there is such a high demand for them.

### **Securitization**

I spent a number of hours casually interacting with the staff at my building. Over time, I became a common fixture and, by the end of my stay, many members of the staff could recognize my voice on the phone when I called down to the front desk, as we had built amicable

relationships. I was quite sad to say goodbye to them by the end. At the same time, I gained a wealth of information from them, not only about the development, but also about life in the Philippines and the desires of Philippine nationals to 'go abroad'. All of them had moved to Manila for economic reasons, as their permanent homes were in the provinces, the rural areas in the Philippines, and the only source of livelihood they had in these regions was farming. Historically, there have been economic migrants leaving the countryside flocking to Manila in search of employment. However what I found interesting about the migrants that I encountered at Serendra was that, despite the fact that they all acquired well-paid jobs in Manila, many of them still desire to work abroad. They were very curious about what my life was like in Canada, and all of them stated that the current job that they held was being used as a stepping-stone to find employment to work abroad, despite making above-average wages in their current position. For them, like so many others I spoke to during my fieldwork, they dream of going abroad, not only to gain economic capital, but social mobility.

At the same time, I learned a lot about the 'behind the scenes' aspect of Bonafacio Global City through the condominium staff with whom I interacted. My building - and I assume all the other residential buildings in the enclave - keeps a very strict log of the tenants who live in the building, and who is allowed inside the building. Before arriving in the Philippines, my uncle gave me a package to take with me and also asked me to photocopy a government-issued ID. Upon arrival at Serendra, I handed the package over to the front desk security, complete with a letter from my uncle stating that I was authorized to stay in his unit and invite any guests, along with information about my citizenship and country of residence. I noticed that this information was kept in a manifest by the security guards, which was how they keep track of who is living in the building and who is allowed inside. Each residential building is gated, and there are several

armed guards patrolling the vicinity. Before you are allowed past the gates, if you are in a car, you are asked to open your trunk and guards check underneath the car for weapons or explosive devices. There are also guards patrolling the foyer and the main lobby. I would estimate that on any given day, once you reach the elevators, past the lobby, you would have passed at least 5-7 armed guards. If you have visitors coming in who are not already on the list of authorized guests, the front desk will not allow them to come up to your unit unless you give them telephone confirmation that that particular person is indeed your guest (each unit had a phone that connects straight to the front desk). If a resident has ordered take-out from one of the nearby restaurants, the delivery boys will typically be accompanied by security personnel to the unit, and then escorted back down. Security personnel also make note of the cab numbers that residents use when leaving as an added measure of security for the residents.

In my conversations with the security personnel in my building, I asked what the likelihood of an actual threat to the community was. The guard answered that there is a chance of a real threat, 'especially in places like *these*', he emphasized. I asked him what he meant by that, and he explained that security threats are not uncommon, especially in Manila where there have been many instances of 'hold-ups' (robberies), and rarer - while still a real threat - of explosive devices being used by members of local terrorist groups or political activists. He said that these gated communities are targeted due to their exclusivity, and because, if an incident were to happen in one of these communities, it would be a huge loss of profit for the developers as they would have to rebuild. In addition, many buyers would be skeptical of purchasing properties in certain places if they were deemed to be 'unsafe'. Thus every security precaution possible was taken.

I also noticed heavy securitization within the community of BGC. There were guards in every shop, and armed guards with K-9 units patrolling the streets. Before entering one of the malls, I also had to go through a metal detector and was physically searched by a guard - although all the malls in the Philippines employ this procedure. One of the security guards at my building also informed me that all the security personnel at BGC were contracted from security firms, all paid for by Ayala. Not a single security personnel was a government worker, they were all from private firms. There was a running joke among the residents of the enclave, and residents of Manila who frequented BGC, that things run so smoothly at BGC because there are no 'real policemen' present there.<sup>12</sup> Numerous times, before heading out for my morning run, I was asked by security guards which route I was taking and was warned that I should avoid 'the bridge' at all costs. This bridge they were referring to is the bridge that links BGC to a major highway, which also contains a number of informal settler communities. While BGC had previously been known to house a number of informal settler communities of ex-military personnel and their families, many of these people had been relocated elsewhere, or had been moved to the periphery and surrounding areas of Bonafacio Global City.

Manila has been previously described as a "12 million megalopolis where residents live 3,400 times past its rate of sustainability . . . Manilaenos often cultivate a self-protectiveness, a simmering fear about theft, car accidents and random crimes" (Fantauzzo 2014: Buzzfeed). Many of the residents that I interviewed were indeed concerned about the crime rate in the Philippines, especially in metro-Manila. As balikbayans are associated with wealth by locals, many of them believe that they will become targets for crime, which is why the concept of these

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<sup>12</sup> Philippine policemen are stereotypically painted as corrupt due to their low salaries, many believe this is what makes them prone to accepting bribes in order to make ends meet for their families. It is also difficult to fire public service workers versus private sector employees. Private security companies are also viewed as more efficient because they employ contract workers, and thus these workers must maintain a high level of service in order to keep their contractual positions.

gated communities with heavy securitization is so appealing for them. At the same time, as I have argued previously, these properties act as material evidence and physical and symbolic indicators of the status and means of their owners. Part of the reason that these properties and developments exude and maintain such an exclusive and securitized façade is to symbolically display their social status. In her work *Behind the Gates- Life, Security, and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America* Setha Low laments that

“[a]t the level of the built environment, the walls and gates are visible barriers that have social and psychological as well as physical effects. In practical terms, gated communities restrict access to streets and thoroughfares that would otherwise be available for public as well as private transportation.” (2003: 12).

Low also notes that, within gated communities, open space land, such as parks, which should be designated to the public domain, are, instead available only to the people who live within the development. The physical barriers and displays of securitization serve as physical reminders of the exclusive nature of this enclave and the status of those who live in this development. They act as reminders for locals of the economic means and the social status of the residents, those who hold the status of ‘balikbayan’, have ‘access to abroad’, and thus have attained the success that is attached to the promise of immigration.

### **Keeping up with appearances**

Another aspect of daily life at BGC that I was privileged to have observed by being a resident there was the up-keep of the community. The lawns at BGC are always perfectly manicured; there was not a single weed in sight during the time I spent there. It was interesting, however, to see how they maintain these lawns - it is typically through manual labour. I would often encounter young men in the late teens to early twenties on their hands and knees weeding the grass. I also did not notice any sprinkler systems in place at any of the residential or commercial areas. Typically, I would see men in white uniforms out on the lawns watering the

grass, trying to make sure there were not any brown patches despite the 40+ degrees Celsius heat during the summer months. One evening, while coming home much later than normal, I encountered some maintenance staff on their hands and knees picking up pebbles from the gardens at my residence. When I asked them what they were doing, they informed me that they were taking the pebbles to be bleached because there was too much dust in the air and so the rocks were turning grey, thus they needed to be bleached in order to retain their former colour. I was astonished at how much effort and emphasis was put into keeping up the appearances of the enclave. However, I found that this entire effort to maintain the 'look' of the enclave was incredibly important for the residents and even the non-residents who were just coming to visit the area. I will describe this in the sections to follow.

In my casual conversations with the staff at the residence, I was told that, previously jeepneys - a means for public transportation for the masses in the Philippines - were not allowed in the community until many of the support staff had issued complaints, as they could not afford the cost of a cab going to work everyday and many of them did not have cars. In my speculations with friends as to why this rule was previously put into effect at the community, many mentioned that, in Ayala Land's Inc.'s attempts to model BGC after the upper East side in Manhattan New York, the sight of jeepney's would have served as a reminder that this community was - despite the strong effort to keep up aesthetic appearances of the enclave - still located in the Philippines. I also learned that coding laws - laws, which dictated when you were allowed to drive your car in Manila based on a code on your license plate - did not apply at all in within the gates of BGC. It was as if BGC is its own entity - a community that is largely unaffected by the laws going on outside of the enclave. While living in BGC, part of me felt like I was living in some sort of hyper real environment where everything is eerily orderly and manicured, compared to the areas

I had typically dubbed as ‘Manila’. Interestingly enough, one of the residents I encountered told me that they had faced much criticism from their friends about how they had come to live in the Philippines and yet were not living in the ‘real’ Philippines. Having spent a number of weeks in the summer with my family in Manhattan, I could understand this criticism as I often had a sense of déjà vu while walking through the streets of BCG. I might have forgotten altogether that I was in a different country if it were not for the people and the sight of the jeepneys, which reminded me that I was actually in Manila. It dawned on me that this seemed to be the whole goal of the design of the enclave; to create a place very similar to the iconic American cities that many Filipinos have seen, heard about and revere due to the Filipino culture’s high regard for American culture.

I argue, then, that the desire to own property at one of these stylized enclaves can be linked to the symbolic capital that can be gained through this acquisition. When a balikbayan acquires one of these properties this symbolically and physically conveys a message regarding their economic means and also reveals, as Bourdieu (2005) has stated, their taste and thus their social being as an owner of this property. Therefore, as I have stated previously, because of the American colonial history and influence on the Philippines, which has according to Espiritu (2003) enforced and produced this pervasive belief within Filipino culture that the “American culture, political system, and way of life as more prestigious than their own”. This does not just go as far as regarding American culture as more prestigious than their own, but this belief has also extended to regarding Westernized cultures similar to American culture as culturally more prestigious than Filipino culture. Thus, by aligning one’s ‘taste’ towards Westernized cultures and mimicking the Westernized way of life by living in these enclaves designed to look and feel like a Westernized city, in this way balikbayans gain not only economic but symbolic capital by

owning these properties and aligning their tastes towards Westernized cultural tastes. As Ortega (2012) notes in his dissertation,

“the American dream to owning a home is a bench mark from which multiple forms of economic and social capital are built, the Filipino dream is a bench mark from which multiple forms of economics and social capital are built, the Filipino dream is similarly tied to housing as an essential means of social reproduction, wrapped in upward social mobility and emergence of the ‘new rich’” (140).

Therefore through embodying Westernized culture through the pursuit of this ‘American dream’ of owning a home which serves as a benchmark for economic prosperity, balikbayans not only betray their new economic means, but it also serves to mark their achievement of attaining the American dream, and in living in spaces which mimic the Westernized way of life they also betray to others their affinity for Westernized culture, which typically can only be fully attained through transnational mobility.

### **Property as Symbolic Capital Investments**

A couple of days into my stay at Serendra, I was speaking to a guard at the front desk who was in charge of the manifest. I commented on the lack of residents currently occupying the building and he told me that, out of the 550 units in the building, only 50 were occupied. While construction on the building had only been finished less than a year before I had come to stay, 79 of the units had not even been ‘turned over’<sup>13</sup> because the owners who had bought them were currently living in another country and have not been able to come back to the Philippines to sort out the paperwork and gain possession of their unit. When I asked where the owners of the units were typically from, he mentioned that most of them lived in Canada, the United States or Australia. Filipino Nationals who had purchased these units typically did not use the units and rented them out to people, or used them as weekend properties. I found that the guard I spoke to

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<sup>13</sup> Units which are ‘turned over’, mean that the development company has given the owners of the property possession of their unit

was correct about where the residents were typically from, as many of the residents I encountered from my building and other buildings were typically living in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and other countries of 'the West'. All of them were economic migrants, who had pursued opportunities abroad because of job shortages in the Philippines, and who felt that compensation for work was 'fairer' in their destination countries. Many of them also chose countries where English was the primary language, as Filipinos are taught English in schools due to American influence and colonization in the past. I did not meet too many Filipino Nationals during my time at the enclave - possibly because many of them used the properties on weekends and I only encountered them on rare occasions. However, I did notice that the amenities, especially the pool and cabana area, were typically packed on weekends as many owners would invite friends or family over for the day as guests.

Two of my informants, Chris and Leah, were economic migrants who had moved to the U.K. in order to save enough capital to start a business in the Philippines as the exchange rate for British currency was very high at the time of their move, and it was quicker for them to amass capital in the U.K. for investments. As part of their investment strategy, they also bought land and condos to rent out in the Philippines. They thought of buying a condo unit for investment purposes while in London, England, where they had encountered a sales agent for these developments. They informed me that the development company they bought their condo from had headquarters in England and were specifically targeting overseas Filipinos. They had plans to rent out their condo in the future, but as of right now, they were currently using it as a weekend property. They lived in the country, a few hours drive just outside of Manila where they owned a house, however they believed that renting the condo property out would make a really good investment for the future as the condo was in the metro Manila area, and the property was

on the more ‘upscale side’.<sup>14</sup> Their property featured a man-made beach, with units surrounding the waterfront, nightclubs, spas and a beach club for residents and their guests only. They informed me that they were going to be using this property as their weekend property for a little while longer, as they and their family were thoroughly enjoying the amenities and the property as a weekend getaway. They mentioned that, during their stays there, most of the people they encountered who owned property in the building were from ‘abroad’. The reason they thought this was the case was because,

**‘Sa tingin ko lang madali yung conversion ng money parang madali bumili kung na kita mo sya sa abroad...kaya mas target nila ang mga clients taga abroad kasi mas malaki yung conversion. Mas madali kasi sya ma ka bayad’**

*‘From what I can see, the money from abroad, the conversion is so high so it is easier for people who have gone abroad [to gain enough capital to buy property]...that’s why they target clients from abroad, because their money is converted so high [in the Philippines]. They can easily pay [for the property].’*

Reading an article from the *Philippine Inquirer*, I noted how many Filipinos overseas usually opt for properties which cost about two million pesos on average (approximately \$50,000 CAD). While this may not seem like very much by foreign standards, this is considered to be in the middle-class bracket by Philippine standards. Many of the properties at BGC - considered to be an upper classed ‘high end’ district - start around 7 million pesos. Rodolfo Oliverio, a merchant seaman that Macaraig (2010) interviewed for an article, stated that “[i]f you work [in the Philippines], nothing will happen. The salaries are too small. The only way to afford a house is to become an overseas worker”. Many people I spoke to had this very same attitude, that the only way for you to make a living - and from the many conversations I had with my interlocutors this meant to simply be able to afford a house, a car, and send their children off to school and get an education - was to work and earn wages abroad.

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<sup>14</sup> I later found out that their property they owned was developed by Century Properties, but endorsed by Paris Hilton, and was marketed as a ‘Paris Hilton lifestyle brand’.

Many of these real estate properties are being used by overseas Filipinos, or balikbayans, who come back to the Philippines because the exchange rates for foreign currencies are so high and they are able to stretch their money further in the Philippines. However, why is this a desired form of investment? Why are balikbayans choosing to invest in property rather than mutual funds or stocks? What other considerations are made when purchasing these properties? In a conversation with Nina, one of my informants who owns a condo at Bonafacio Global City, on Park Lanes, right across from one of the most exclusive golf courses in Manila, I broached the topic of condos as investments. Nina handles corporate accounts for a large company, and she is highly educated, however she informed me that she chose to invest in real estate property for a number of reasons, not solely for economic purposes. Nina admitted to myself that she is not very 'literate with stocks', and at the time she first purchased the condo she was looking for investment options. One of her friends had newly purchased a condo at the time and had told her about it. She saw it as a good investment to add to her portfolio, especially since, according to Nina, 2008/ 2009 was the 'prime time' to start buying condos as this is when construction first started on these enclaves, and there were flexible payment schemes for these properties. Part of the reason the payment schemes were so flexible at this time was also due to the competition between developers, there are many developers looking to sell properties, however Nina went with Megaworld Corporation because she trusted them as a company.

***“They deliver what they promise, and I’ve seen some of their units already, and I’m confident they can provide a good investment...Ayala and Megaworld [are known for] the high end condominiums. Megaworld is also into community establishments, they don’t just build condos if there is a possibility to have other establishments. This is one thing that caught me as a buyer. We had been looking for an investment before and in a good area...I bought this because it was facing Manila Golf so no buildings will ever go up there. It’s also near St. Luke’s [hospital] so when we grow old the hospital is also there. It’s in a good location”***

It seemed as though who the developer was, was incredibly important for buyers. Certain corporations were more reputable than others, especially when it came to building ‘higher end properties’. Many people I spoke to, if they had the economic capital, preferred to buy properties in the ‘high end areas’ – areas that are modeled after iconic Western cities such as Manhattan - as they believed it would be easier to rent out or sell for a profit in the future. This is because owning property within Western-stylized enclaves is considered to be a symbol of prestige for Filipinos as it confers a high social status and it demonstrates how a person’s taste aligns with Western cultural tastes. In Nina’s case, part of the reason she chose Bonafacio was because it was an emerging business district, thus her tenants were typically working at the corporate offices in the area on long-term contracts. Her current tenant just renewed their contract for an additional three years, however she informed me that she had a number of offers to buy the unit. She declined all of them because the property was a good return on investment, and that you could “*see your money from the investment every month*”. At the same time, these properties also act as a way for Nina to build symbolic capital and thus strengthen her social status upon her eventual return to the Philippines. Nina has plans to return to the Philippines upon retirement, and has deemed the condo to be an ideal location to live. The condo is located in one of the most securitized pedestrian communities in Manila, and one of the best hospitals in the country is located right in the enclave. Therefore, Nina’s reason for purchasing this property was not merely for an economic investment, but for future use upon retirement. In purchasing this property in preparation for her eventual return to her home country, Nina is able to acquire symbolic capital and secures an advanced social status in the home country despite her physical absence.

In my conversations with Nina, I asked her if most people in her building lived permanently in other countries. Nina admitted she did not know many people in her building as she is renting it out to a tenant right now, and is currently staying with her brother before her and her son permanently moved to San Francisco to be reunited with her fiancé. She did notice, however, when purchasing her unit from the development company, the development company had blocked off entire floors strictly for the purchase of balikbayans. When she asked to see the floor plan of the building she had bought a unit in, she asked them why certain floors were blocked off, and the developers had informed her that those floors were being saved for the balikbayans. It is interesting to note how development companies are reserving entire floors strictly for balikbayans, meaning that developers are specifically targeting this segment of the market for sales. Nina speculated that the developers were strategically placed balikbayans on the same floor so that when they have all gone off to their permanent homes, the company might turn off the electricity on that floor in order to save energy and money. I never confirmed these speculations during my fieldwork, but it would be interesting to find out why they grouped all the balikbayan investors on specific floors.

In his essay analyzing the social lives of commodities, Appadurai (1988) notes that objects have the ability to confer status and thus are used as signifiers of identity. In this case, where the particular commodity is real estate property within luxury enclaves, ownership of one of these highly coveted addresses sends certain social messages and symbolically communicates status, taste, and the social class of balikbayans. The balikbayan position is one that is hierarchial and thus those who occupy this position must display their economic success in order to symbolically place themselves within a certain position in this hierarchy. Not every balikbayan is obscenely wealthy - although many of them are assumed to be by Philippine

nationals - therefore these properties act as an indicator of socioeconomic status for those balikbayans who are able to afford to purchase them. While development companies who develop these high-end communities target balikbayans, as many balikbayans were able to stretch their money out further in the Philippines, there is also a particular class of balikbayans they are targeting. If 2 Million pesos is the average amount of money Filipinos spend on properties and this is considered to be in the middle class bracket, then properties in BGC, which start out at 7 Million Pesos for a 1 bedroom unit - triple the average amount - means that these developers are catering to a specific class of balikbayans. The fact that some balikbayans are able to afford properties in this area means that they have achieved a particular level of economic success and are able to indicate this level of success through the type of property they purchase.

Vito, an economic migrant, who moved to Canada as he thought the country has 'greener grass', owns one of these coveted addresses at BGC. When asked why he decided to buy property in the Philippines, he stated that it was for future personal use. He plans to eventually spend half of the year in the Philippines once he retires because he 'likes summers in Canada'. Currently, he spends a few weeks a year in the Philippines on vacation and uses his condo during that time. He also loans the property to his mother and siblings when they are in Manila on vacation. When I asked him why he would want to spend 6 months in the Philippines, when he moved to Canada for socioeconomic reasons (better social security net), he explained to me that,

***“No matter how far we get in Canada, we are never going to be like the white people here. Our culture is different, we’re different. They will never understand us, so it’s just better to go back. It’s smarter to retire in the Philippines, a small amount from your CPP can let you live like Donald Trump in the Philippines. I don’t need OHIP [either], you can pay for someone to take care of you when you’re old in the Philippines. I always tell my clients to invest and retire in the Philippines. I don’t know if other financial advisors do, but I’ll tell them the truth, it’s better to go back there. Your money is worth more there, so why not go back?”***

Vito's statements shed light on the cultural inferiority he may feel in his destination country. While he is considered to be upper middle class, has achieved a high level of professional success in Canada, and has established strong roots in the country, he nevertheless still feels a degree of inferiority with respect to the dominant culture. However, by choosing to purchase property in his homeland of the Philippines, Vito symbolically shapes a more socially significant identity as a balikbayan, signifying his success and expressing the relationship and the bond he continues to have with the 'homeland', while, in turn, conferring this status to members of his family. While I am not arguing that this is the sole driving force for Vito's decision to put down stronger roots in the home country by spending a large amount of his retirement funds on an upscale property, I do believe this is an important factor to take into account.

Another important thing to note in Vito's statement is the issue of class. As Shankar (2008) has stated, the consumption of material culture is one of the most tangible and immediate ways of signifying success to one's community. This allows people to create alliances and differentiate themselves from others. Thus, the consumption of material objects such as property can act as social markers to symbolically signify an elevated class status. Through achieving economic prosperity 'abroad', Filipinos are able to return to the homeland and occupy this special balikbayan status as they now have the necessary economic means to gain social mobility and symbolic capital through the consumption of these real estate properties, which, in turn, displays their newfound success and social identity.

These lifestyle choices and patterns of consumption display balikbayans' new economic means and social status, as these objects, and lifestyle choices communicate ideas of success within the Filipino symbolic system. These choices also subsequently link balikbayans to the national community of the Philippines, despite the fact that they may occupy an exceptional

status. Thus, these symbolic objects and practices help shape the meanings associated with balikbayan identity, the entire Filipino national community, and their socioeconomic success achieved through migration. As Aguilar (2009) notes,

“migrants worldwide allocate large proportions of their remittances to houses, house construction and renovation...House construction would be productive to human capital if people lived in it but in the case of migrants building houses they and their families would not live in the immediate/distant future seems irrational – that economic behavior seems irrational” (150).

Therefore, according to Aguilar (2009), he concludes that these properties are seen as a safe and secure “piggybank”, a kind of investment. They are also the physical embodiment of migrants’ hard work overseas, and will continue to symbolically embody their hard work even when have returned to the home country for good and are no longer overseas – as in the case of Chris and Leah. These properties not only give the migrant’s higher status in the local social system, but it also objectifies upward social mobility and a memorial to hard work overseas (Aguilar 2009).

The growth of the real estate sector in the Philippines has largely been attributed to the remittances from overseas Filipinos, however balikbayan investments in real estate are not solely driven by economic motivations. Many balikbayans are drawn to invest in these properties because of the symbolic nature of these properties as they confer a particular social status and physically serve as material evidence of their success as immigrants, in their homeland. From my own experiences and observations as a resident in these enclaves, I have noted the intense securitization of the enclaves and the Westernized designs of the space. The nature of these designs not only serves to mark the residents of these enclaves as different due to their higher in social and economic status, but at the same time, it also physically reminds non-residents of these differences. By choosing to live in spaces that are stylized to look like iconic cities of the ‘West’, residents also demonstrate how they have aligned their tastes towards Western cultural

tastes. Therefore, through these symbolic displays that confer balikbayans newfound social and economic positions through the consumption of material culture, balikbayans are able to use these displays and materials to showcase their success that they have achieved abroad, in the homeland and gain cultural recognition, an elevated status and prestige in this manner. But why is it, that these properties, and the balikbayan status are considered to be so prestigious? We will discuss this idea of prestige in relation to the balikbayan identity and real estate properties in the subsequent chapter.

## Chapter 4- Privilege and Prestige

*This chapter will examine why the condominium developments and real estate properties described in Chapter 3, are deemed to be such a prestigious form of symbolic capital by Filipinos. I will describe how the design of these enclaves try to convey ideas of prestige, and discuss how these properties are used as a form of cultural investment in order to create and cement balikbayans' status despite the fact that they are physically absent form the homeland.*

### ***Identity politics and gaining cultural capital***

During my time in the field, whenever I revealed to people that I was from Canada, there seemed to be this reverence from people when they knew I was from abroad. At the same time, people tended to treat me differently, in some ways they would immediately act more courteous, as I watched their eyes light up once I told them where I was from. I noticed this trend not only with myself, but also with other balikbayans. In many ways, they were also treated and looked at differently, similar to the ways in which you might treat a VIP customer at a trendy restaurant. Many of my informants who had recently returned to the Philippines also felt the same way, especially Chris and Leah, who, as I have said, found that people treated them differently upon their return to the Philippines from England.

But why is it that those who are coming back are so revered? Cesar Polvorsa Jr. argues that “for Filipino’s, the experience under U.S. rule engendered a colonial mentality that glorified the United States as a vastly superior culture and a prosperous country... from the perspective of Filipino immigrants, the main goal is to escape the underdevelopment of the ‘East’ and take part in the prosperity and high status of the ‘West’” (2012:183).

Ortega (2012) makes the argument that the remittances that come from Filipinos overseas play an incredibly significant role in the consumption and investment trends in the Philippines which can be felt on the macroeconomic scale. Thus, balikbayans – Overseas Filipinos – who are temporarily or permanently returning from their stint abroad are considered to be the ‘new rich’ as their remittances fuel consumption and investment patterns which has started to change the

Philippines on a macroeconomic level. Many families also depend on these remittance monies coming from abroad as evidenced by Ortega (2012) and Aguilar's (2009) accounts to not only help start small, local businesses, but also to improve their quality of life through the purchase of larger homes, the ability to send children to better schools, and the purchasing power to buy appliances such as rice cookers or ovens which many in the Philippines consider to be a luxury. Yen Le Espiritu also makes a similar statement to Polvorsa regarding the colonial legacy of America in the Philippines, which is still apparent to this day. According to Espiritu, "[b]esides imposing strong and unequal military and economic ties between the two countries, this colonial heritage has produced a pervasive cultural Americanization of the population, exhorting Filipinos to regard the American culture, political system, and way of life as more prestigious than their own" (2003:24). I would argue that this does not just go as far as regarding 'Americanization' and American culture as more prestigious than their own, but extends to westernized cultures very similar to American culture, such as Canadian, British, Australian culture. Any culture considered to be 'westernized' is regarded as culturally more prestigious than Filipino culture. Therefore, balikbayans are seen as exemplary due to the fact that their mobility gives them the ability to be immersed and have the affinity for westernized cultures – which they consider to be much more prestigious than their own – and also because of their new economic ability which affects Philippine economics on a micro and macro level, while giving them social mobility, cultural and symbolic capital at the same time.

One of my friends in the Philippines - who is a Filipino-national, but also has dreams of going abroad - told me stories about people she went to school with who did not know how to speak Tagalog (which is the main dialect of the Philippines). She said that many of them were restricted from speaking Tagalog by their parents. Some parents even went as far as not allowing

their children to watch Filipino television shows, they were only permitted to watch television shows in English. Wondering aloud how counterproductive it would be to not be able to learn the main dialect of the country that you live in, my friend told me that many parents do this for two main reasons. First, in case the child or the family were to pursue a life abroad, they would be linguistically prepared and they would also only have a mild Philippine accent, if any at all, which they saw as more advantageous as it was believed it would allow them to adapt better to the host culture. Second, English language capabilities are a sign of affluence, especially when these language capabilities are unobstructed by a Filipino accent. I noticed in particular that English-language capabilities, especially when spoken in a style similar to standard North American English, is a means of gaining cultural capital by signaling a link with westernized culture.

In the process of gaining this association with North American or westernized culture - either by going abroad or through concentrated efforts - through language, style of speech, and dress, balikbayans are able to build this identity that links them to the prosperous and high status of the 'West', and in doing so, they gain cultural capital which affords them upwards social mobility. Therefore, the balikbayan subject position, is also associated with a more privileged social status. Thus, while acquiring wealth is what pushes many Filipinos to migrate and pursue other opportunities elsewhere, part of the ideas around what it means to be a balikbayan is centered around gaining cultural capital through migration, and thus acquiring the means for upwards social mobility.

### **Ideas of Prestige**

Although people gain social capital and status by going abroad, there is still social hierarchy present among balikbayans. This chapter will discuss these enclaves and condo

developments, and how many of these development companies are primarily targeting balikbayans as their primary customers for these developments. I will discuss why these condos are considered to be such a prestigious form of symbolic capital, and how these properties enable balikbayans to construct and cement a particular social status within the balikbayan hierarchy, while being away from the homeland. It is not merely about bringing back economic capital, but the amount of economic capital that is brought back and displayed through symbolic capital—such as ownership of luxury goods or properties, creates a particular hierarchy amongst those who hold the balikbayan position. This is where ownership of property comes into play. Ownership of these properties is an important way in which balikbayans can build symbolic capital and thus strengthen and advance their social status in preparation for a return to their home country. In my conversations with Nina, she kept emphasizing that she wanted to invest in a condo in a good area, and that she specifically searched for high-end properties that were being built by reputable upscale developers. This underlines the role of these properties as symbolic capital and as vehicles that would demonstrate her social and economic status to others. While Nina chose to invest in this type of property partly for economic reasons, it was clear that there were also powerful symbolic reasons shaping her decision to purchase. By purchasing and eventually living in an enclave known to be modeled after the iconic cities of the West, balikbayans and people like Nina not only display their economic means, but also symbolically demonstrate that their cultural tastes are aligned with Westernized cultural tastes. This lifestyle choice, to purchase property and invest money into this particular property not only confers one's status in the community, but also acts as social markers to signify class. I argue that, alongside status, consumption is also central to shaping identity, as well as such things as kinship, expression and relationships. Similar to the 'Desi' lifestyle described by Shankar (2008),

the balikbayan lifestyle and identity is defined largely through consumption of material goods and lifestyle choices - in this case these commodities are properties in luxury real estate enclaves. These objects and lifestyle choices are indicators of certain kinds of tastes and symbolically act as signifiers for the balikbayan identity, due in part to a mentality historically engendered under U.S. colonial rule. They are a type of 'cultural investment' to portray status. In my conversations with Vito, he explained that he chose to buy a property at Serendra because,

***“ [It is] popular and prestigious. I chose Serendra because I wanted to be ‘big time’ when I came home, and I wanted my family to feel the upper class lifestyle. Everyone knows Serendra now, if they don’t they’re idiots. Whenever I tell people I have a condo at Serendra they’re always impressed”***

Serendra is marketed to be one of most prestigious enclaves in Manila. Its entire design conveys ideas of exclusivity and prestige. The enclave boasts some of the most exclusive International schools, hospitals, and sports facilities. There are luxury car dealerships, such as Lamborghini and Porsche- the most ironic aspect of this is that driving in Manila, you can barely drive anywhere above 60km an hour because of the traffic congestion on the roads. However, on weekends I saw a number of people with their luxury sports cars parked on the side of the road, while the owners sipped on their coffees on a café patio. Out of curiosity, I approached one of the owners, and asked them if there was some sort of race track that they drove these cars on, and they explained to me while there was no facility in the region as of right now, BGC blocks off some streets and allows them to drive their cars around at high speeds in the early mornings on weekends. I also noticed that I hardly ever encountered homeless persons asking for money, as was common in other areas of Manila. The one time I did encounter a homeless person begging for money, I was sitting on the patio eating breakfast, when a man and a small child approached me and asked if I had any cash to spare. Before I could even look in my purse for cash, a guard was already escorting the man and the child away, while another security

guard profusely apologized to me for letting the man slip under his notice and disturb my breakfast. Although I reassured the guard that it was no trouble at all, I took note of the intensive securitization of the enclave, and the efforts people took to maintain the exclusive image of the place.

The way these properties are marketed is also incredibly noteworthy. Immediately upon arrival to the Philippines, I was invited to attend a sales presentation at a rather upscale convention hall. At this presentation, each prospective buyer was assigned to a property agent for the particular development company, and they would then conduct a one-on-one presentation of the properties in development. During these presentations, you were given the opportunity to interject and ask the agent any questions you had about the properties or the developments. During the presentation, I paid particular attention to the language the agent used to highlight aspects about the enclave. He put a strong emphasis on the exclusivity of these properties, how the enclave was being modeled after Park Avenue in New York City, and how luxury, high-end retailers had already signed on to put flagship stores in the enclave. When I asked him where they were getting all the money to build these developments, and who was buying them, he simply told me that the '1% were buying them'. He explained to me how balikbayans were the ones who were making the economy in the Philippines good, and how they were the ones stimulating the demand for these properties. When asked whether he had many buyers who were Philippine nationals, he told me that I would be surprised how many wealthy Filipino nationals there were - typically doctors, lawyers and celebrities were the ones who could afford these properties.

As I reflected upon this presentation, I realized that by explicitly disclosing that these properties are for the elite class was done for a particular purpose. Advertising, according to

Bourdieu, is effective because it “panders to pre-existing dispositions in order to better exploit them, subjecting the consumer to its demands and expectations in the guise of serving these dispositions” (2005:23). By presenting these properties in a light that only those in the upper classes can attain, they appeal to those who want to symbolically display their social position within the balikbayan hierarchy through the ownership of these properties. Bourdieu (2005) goes on to discuss how “the symbolic effect of the advertisement is the product of a collaboration between the writers, who draw on their inherited cultural fund of words and images capable of awakening unique experiences in their readers... the readers, armed with their previous experiences, both of the ordinary, and also the literary, world, project onto the text/pretext the aura of correspondences, resonances and analogies which make it possible for them to recognize themselves in it” (24). These presentations, the phrases they use to catch the buyers attention, the types of lifestyle and idealistic family arrangements the pamphlets and photos used in marketing material portray, phrases which allude to ideas of prestige and exclusivity through ownership of such properties appeal and exploit the pre-dispositions of the consumer who desire these very things. As Ortega (2012) discusses in his piece, many of these new ‘posh’ developments are typically marketed to “embody nuclear family ideals” (385). While the reality of who comes to occupy in these dwellings actually deviates from the how they are marketed, I will argue that these sales presentations, and the particular words and images that the agents draw upon during their pitch, are capable of doing the same thing to the audience of potential buyers looking for a property to invest in. Therefore, while these presentations are meant to showcase the exclusivity of such developments, they also cater to the desires of those who wish to cement themselves in a particular social position while embodying particular lifestyle ideals such as a nuclear family arrangement, and thus allow the consumer not only to envision themselves in such a position, but

these presentation are also garnered towards recognizing their pre-disposed desires in attaining and flaunting that social position through property. This is why this type of symbolic capital is so highly desired by balikbayans. The design of these enclaves alone betrays a particular prestigious and highly coveted status – the status of not just a balikbayan – but a highly successful migrant.

One thing I especially noticed during the sales presentations I attended was the emphasis on how the developers were using ‘very advanced technology for the third world’. The agent I was speaking with was referring to the rainwater storage technology the developers were using in order to take a ‘greener’ approach for urban development. He exclaimed how this particular developer was taking a ‘first world approach’ to transforming the urban landscape of Manila and the Philippines as a whole, and emphasized how the development company he worked for, had a vision to transform Manila into a ‘world class city like the Asian cities of Hong Kong and Singapore’. He also explained that if Manila was put on the map and was as iconic in the same way the ‘first world’ Asian cities like Hong Kong and Singapore were, it would give people the incentive to permanently relocate. It is interesting to note how these ‘third world tropes’ circulate in everyday discourse, and how it was emphasized in these sales presentation how these enclaves are meant to be modeled after these iconic ‘first world’ cities, and how the development company had a vision for Manila to be on par with the ‘first world’ Asian cities. In choosing to purchase property in these enclaves modeled and designed to uphold an aura of ‘first world cities’, they are symbolically gain capital as there is such an emphasis in Philippine culture of acquiring Western symbolic capital. In this way, physically living in a place that greatly resembles and is modeled after American cities is one of the ultimate forms of symbolic capital that one can acquire. As American culture is deemed to be so prestigious by Filipinos, this is why these properties – and this type of symbolic capital- are considered to be so prestigious. It is

not only a way to convey a transnational social and class status through the ownership of these properties, but in living in a place that ‘resembled the first world’, it was like being in the ‘first world’, but being in the homeland where they are given a revered social status and recognition. These people are able to occupy a position in the higher rungs of the balikbayan hierarchy, while at the same time being able to enjoy the replicated ‘first world’ landscape. Bourdieu (2005) discusses how there is a particularity in the production of dwellings, “...property expresses or betrays, in a more decisive way than many other goods, the social being of its owners, the extent of their ‘means’ as we say; but it also reveals their taste, and classification system they deploy in their acts of appropriation and which, in assuming objective form in visible goods, provides purchase for the symbolic appropriation of others, who are thereby enabled to situate the owners in social space by situating them within the space of tastes” (19). Thus, I will argue, through the purchase of these properties, enclaves designed after the idealized ‘first world’ which Philippine culture reveres, these owners are symbolically making a statement not only about their economic means, but in turn situating themselves in a space of taste while symbolically displaying their privilege. These people are positioning themselves within a social space in order to make a statement about not only having the economic means to ‘belong’ to a space which resembles the first world, but through cultural exposure by migrating in the first world and living there, they have acquired the necessary forms of cultural and symbolic capital in order to embody all the ideals that the Philippine imaginary has about the ideals of ‘abroad’, which the Philippine culture idealizes so much. Therefore, balikbayan residents symbolically situate themselves within the balikbayan hierarchy through inhabiting a physical space that is designed to uphold all the Filipino ideals of ‘abroad’. In doing so, they also cement their position within the upper rungs of the balikbayan hierarchy due to the ideas of prestige attached to this type of symbolic capital.

### ***Asserting Balikbayan Status***

While balikbayans are nationally recognized for their contributions to the state and thus given a special status within Philippine culture, many of them also desire to become socially recognized for their status through symbolic displays of fashion, and aesthetic taste such as styles of dress or through the blatant display of luxury ‘westernized’ brands and goods such as Louis Vuitton, Michael Kors, or Coach branded items. Many balikbayans use styles of dress with ‘Canada’ logos, or ways of speaking/ conducting oneself, to differentiate themselves from Filipino nationals. According to Vicente Rafael (1997) part of balikbayan

“ambition [lies] in setting themselves apart from the rest of the ‘natives’ rather than affiliating with them. In that sense, balikbayans emerge as figures to be envied. Their easy association with Western consumer products and their access to powerful North American state apparatus mark them as different: they represent the fulfillment of Filipino desires realizable only outside of the Philippines” (1997: 272).

I have argued, however, that this access that balikbayans have extends not only to North American countries, but further to what is typically labeled as the prosperous ‘westernized states’. I was told by one of my informants that balikbayans are able to afford certain desirable goods which act as markers of wealth within Philippine culture - such as luxury condo properties, or newly renovated monster houses - because they have ‘access to abroad’. The concept behind ‘access to abroad’ actually means access to powerful westernized states that are coded as the opposite of the Philippines, which many Philippine nationals understand to be a ‘third world country’. Thus, this access means that balikbayans are associated with the ‘prosperity and high status of the West’ (cf. Polvorsa 2012), which in turn grants them higher social status due to the Philippine fetishization of Western culture.

Shalini Shankar’s (2008) ethnography *Desi Land*, an account of South Asian American teen culture during the Silicon Valley dot-com boom, considers how Desi teens and their families define and display aesthetic tastes through consumption. This material culture, according to

Shankar, defines the Desi style and success on a number of levels. Style is not only reflected in objects, but also in the types of lifestyle choices teens and their families make. She notes that, through consumption, objects communicate meaning that resonates with shared symbolic systems. Objects, which confer status in one's clique or community, are highly valued and shape meanings of identity, community and success. In the case of the Philippines, the choice to migrate, to pursue a life 'abroad', send remittances homes, and subsequently come back to the Philippines and display wealth through the consumption of luxury goods and a 'westernized' lifestyle is a way for balikbayans to demonstrate their elevated status. Thus the choice to pursue a life abroad, and subsequently return to the Philippines is a lifestyle choice, as is the choice to invest money in acquiring or renovating property in the Philippines, despite the fact that they may be permanently residing in a country that is thousands of miles away.

### **'Branding' Land Developers and the balikbayan hierarchy**

During one sales presentation I attended, one of the sales agents for a newer enclave in the process of development explained that the enclave design was inspired by Park Avenue in New York. He also noted that the developers envisioned a space where there were high-rise residential buildings, with 'high end' retailers on the ground floor of these buildings, workplace offices in certain towers, and that all of this urban landscape would surround a Central Park-esque area. Many developers and sales agents desperately try to appeal to and emphasize the 'first-worldness' and exclusivity of their developments through advertising and their sales pitches. I was assured many times how this particular development was very exclusive, and how that development used various forms of 'first-world' technologies.

### **“There is no place like home”**

In part, this desire to relocate to the Philippines upon retirement is due to the privilege of transnational mobility, as overseas Filipinos have the capacity to relocate from one place to another. However, for many Filipinos there is also a longing to go back to the ‘homeland’. As Vicente (1997) notes, many balikbayans long to return to the Philippines because of their special cultural status within the Philippines. Due to the fact that the balikbayan status depends on one’s permanent residence abroad, their presence in the Philippines is temporary and intermittent. At the same time, balikbayans are perceived to be associated with sources of capital, as they are known to reside in countries that are perceived to be very wealthy. Thus, according to Rafael, balikbayans are “...generously accommodated by local officials” (1997:270). In this way, the special cultural status balikbayans occupy within the homeland is one of the reasons why returning to the Philippines, even only for temporary periods of times, is so appealing for Filipinos. In other ways, it has to do with building up an investment portfolio in a place where their money could be stretched further due to the high exchange rates as mentioned of foreign money as discussed in previous chapters. Antonio notes how, “Up to 70% of all our online inquiries come from abroad. There are overseas Filipinos with large investing capacities. They want to stretch the value of their dollar, so they buy properties here” (Lucas 2007, Philippine Daily Inquirer). However, while part of the reason why Filipinos choose to invest back in the homeland has to do with their ability to stretch out their foreign currencies further, their motivations are mostly fueled by their desires to keep ties with the homeland and, in particular, the special position and status that they occupy in Philippine culture.

One online article in the Vancouver Sun discusses how the road shows of Philippine development companies in Europe, the United States and Canada are used to directly seek out

their target markets. These in-person encounters allow sales agents to make a connection with their target demographic and to cash in on the money and sentimentalities of Philippine immigrants and contract workers currently residing abroad (Lindsay 2014). In this article, Dextre Hubag, the international marketing director for the development company Century Properties Inc. (one of the larger development companies in the Philippines), claims that “[t]here is a market for Filipinos living in Vancouver, because at the end of the day, there’s no place like home. Filipinos, whether they have changed their citizenship, will still go home to where they are born” (Lindsay 2014). But the question is why Filipinos living abroad have this strong desire to return ‘home’. I remember speaking to Nina and Julio about why they thought balikbayans, even after spending so many years outside of the Philippines and naturalizing in their host countries, plan to eventually come back and settle in the Philippines. They both told me that Filipinos choose to come back because “[t]here is no place like home” as I had previously mentioned in Chapter 1. I pondered for a very long time what that actually meant, and why so many Filipinos perceived there to be “no place like the Philippines” when so many of them do whatever they can to escape in the first place. From my conversations with my interlocutors and from the data gathered from my fieldwork, I believe that it is through occupying this intermediary subject position as a balikbayans that Filipinos are able to fulfill their economic and social aspirations, while remaining connected and close to what they perceive to be their ‘homeland’ of the Philippines. The balikbayan position is an exemplary position, but it is through this periphery and intermediary status that balikbayans are able to be part of the Philippine state. They are able to hold a special position within Philippine culture despite their physical absence, and despite the fact that they may have formed attachments to their country of naturalization. This position allows them to keep their allegiances to both states, while at the same time

encouraging the subjects' attachments to other states as their position is also dependent on having the affinity for another - typically more powerful Westernized culture- and permanent residence in a different state.

Chris and Leah also admitted that, while they had perceived life to be hard in the Philippines, if you have the economic capital, life in the Philippines is not so bad. I found that many balikbayan have incredibly strong sentimental, emotional, and nationalistic ties with their homeland. Many of my Filipino friends in Toronto, Canada, still keep up with news and the popular culture in the motherland through subscription to The Filipino Channel. There is also a strong Filipino community in Toronto, a number of Filipino restaurants, and the presence of Philippine-based restaurant chains in the GTA. Many Filipinos still celebrate Philippine Independence Day in June. In my hometown of Ottawa, Canada, there is a large picnic at one of the major parks in order to commemorate Philippine Independence, which has very strong turnouts every single year. Many Filipinos strive to keep a piece of their culture despite migration. As former President Ramos (2008:56) puts it,

“The overseas Filipino’s constant longing for home -amounting to a sense of undeserved exile- is the very same spirit that can provide the basis for inspiring and nurturing among us a greater love of country, deeper sense of nation, identity, of solidarity and pride, more than what some of our elected officials exhibit today... What does it mean to be a nationalistic Filipino? Nationalism is no longer confined within the shores of the Philippines... As Filipinos cross borders, we now know that they carry along more than just pictures of loved ones, but, more importantly, love of their Motherland. This is what true nationalism means- the pride of being Pinoy [Filipino] which grows in strength the farther and longer one is away from Inang-Bayan [motherland]”.

### **Balikbayan recognition**

I recall reading an ethnographic study by Deidre McKay (2003) of a small rural area of Ifugao, Philippines. McKay notes that 62% of households in this area report that members of the family are migrant workers, and that households that receive remittances are characterized to be

more advantaged than households that do not. Many of the community leaders in McKay's (2003) study commented on how you could 'pick out' which households had migrant workers abroad. This was because remittances in this community typically went towards material goods, such as the renovation of houses, agricultural implements, cars and locally novel appliances such as stoves and rice cookers. Remittances are also used for capital for investing in agricultural land, and new crops.

I found the same to be the case during my stay in Alaminos city, particularly in the region of this city called Barangay Bisocol - where my father's family was originally from. Walking down the road you could easily 'pick out' which households received remittances from migrants abroad. These houses were not only monstrous in size compared to the others, but the presence of new cars and motorcycles in the driveway typically signaled that someone who had belonged to the household was currently sending remittances back from abroad. Vicente Rafael's (1997) article references Alex Escalmado, a Filipino-American newspaper publisher who claimed how balikbayans overseas can have a "radical effect on people's lives- building houses in depressed rural villages, paying off medical bills, sending little brothers and sisters and cousins to school"<sup>15</sup>. However, as Vicente comments in this piece, balikbayans hover on the edge of the nation-state, "rendering its boundaries porous with their dollar-driven comings and goings. In this sense, they take on the semblance of spectral presences whose labor takes place somewhere else but whose effects command, by their association with money, a place in the nation-state" (1997: 269). Indeed the economic contribution of balikbayans has a lasting effect on the lives of not only themselves, but also the friends and family that they help to support back in the

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Schoenberger's *ibid.* Karl Schoenberger, "Living Off Expatriate Labor", *Los Angeles Times* August 1, 1994. A1

homeland. However, due to the pervasive belief that all balikbayans are wealthy, sometimes it creates too strong of a dependence on family members abroad.

It is interesting to note how many balikbayans strive to gain recognition of their economic success and newfound status from their fellow countrymen in the Philippines through migration and return migration. After I presented my research at an academic conference, one colleague of mine who had also done research in the Philippines commented how he felt that despite balikbayans' longings to return to the homeland to be with their countrymen, they choose to spend their time in the homeland in these exclusive spaces, with an air of artifice as they try to simulate what these developers render 'abroad' to look and feel like. Despite their longings for the homeland, they choose to spend their time in a place simulated to feel just like the place they chose to leave, and in a way isolate them. These properties may be a point of pride for many balikbayans as it cements their privileged identities, however it is ironic that while these properties are also supposed to symbolize their promise of return to the motherland, they are returning to artificial and isolated- albeit beautifully designed communities - which are designed to look and feel nothing like the motherland. At the same time, the way these properties are designed – to mimic the 'first world' – is part of the reason why they are deemed to be so prestigious. From the sales presentations to the designs of the enclaves, all of these things allude to ideas of prestige and exclusivity of the space. The exclusivity of the space then betrays the exclusivity and highly coveted status of the balikbayans who can afford to own property in that particular space. These properties not only symbolize owners' exemplary status as balikbayans, but also their status as economically successful migrants. At the same time, developers hope that by transforming the urban landscape of the Philippines to resemble more of the 'first world' will incentivize balikbayans to permanently relocate back to the Philippines. Due to the symbolic

ideas of prestige attached to these properties and balikbayans' desire to relocate back to the 'homeland' because of their privileged status in the Philippines and their longings to keep ties with the homeland, they purchase these properties in part because of their prestigious symbolism and partly because it symbolizes the promises of their return. It will be interesting to do future longitudinal ethnographic studies on how the symbolic nature of these properties will evolve in the future. Will their balikbayan owners occupy these properties full-time in the future? How will these properties come to dictate the logics of return migration in the future?

## Conclusion

Balikbayans are given a special cultural status in the Philippines as they are recognized by the Philippine state as ‘Heroes of the Nation’ due to their economic contributions. Their privileged economic position, which they gain through migration, allows balikbayans the ability to better the economic situation of their families in the Philippines. These remittance contributions by balikbayans have kept the entire nation of the Philippines afloat, thus despite their physical absence from the nation state, these remittances create a significant and lasting bond between the migrants and their homeland. Despite the fact that many of these migrants migrate to the more perceived prosperous and prestigious ‘Western’ countries, many of them choose to return to the Philippines, and in doing so they become exemplary citizens, as their choice to return proves their loyalty to the homeland. Therefore, the balikbayan subject position not only has to do with a social position, but also a national subject position.

Many balikbayans use lifestyle choices and patterns of consumption in order to display their exemplary social and cultural status, and their economic means and success achieved through migration. Consumption of high-end real estate properties, such as the ones I have described in Chapter 3 and 4, have a symbolic aspect attached to them as they confer a particular social status and are material evidence of the success of their owners’ success as immigrants. The ideas of prestige and privilege which the spatial design of these enclaves are supposed to mimic – designs in which are determined to model these enclaves after iconic cities of ‘the West’ – serves to physically marks the residents of these enclaves as socially and economically privileged, and reminds non-residents of these differences. These properties are indeed a prestigious form of symbolic capital as the ideas behind the design of the space links owners to the high status of ‘the West’ – a culture in which Filipinos deem to be more prestigious than their

own due to the legacy of American colonialization. This is why luxury real estate as a form of symbolic capital is deemed to be so prestigious, and so desired; because Filipinos regard Western culture to be more prestigious than their own, these properties not only symbolically link its owners to the prestige of 'the West', but the design of these spaces simulated to 'feel like the West' physically links them to 'the West'.

While my research has showcased the linkages between national, social and cultural identities to real estate and consumer consumption, I must acknowledge that my research itself had a number of limitations. As I was only in the field for a few months, I could only collect as much data as time would permit, and the time limitations on my research project affected my decisions on which subjects I chose to speak with, along with the people I was privileged enough to speak with. The time of year I chose to conduct my field research was also a limitation. Many of the units at BGC were empty during the time of year I chose to conduct my fieldwork, as it was not peak season for balikbayans visits. I was informed by interlocutors that most balikbayans typically visit the Philippines during the Christmas holiday season, and if I had chosen to conduct my fieldwork during that time, the people I met, their stories and experiences of migration and as balikbayans may have presented different insights which would have steered my work into a different direction. I must acknowledge that my interlocutors which I spoke with during my research project really helped shaped my perceptions surrounding what it meant to be a balikbayan, and while their definitions seem to align with the definitions of most Filipinos, there may have been other perspectives that I was unable to uncover due to the time limitations.

Due to the prestigious, upper-class aspect image attached to the site in which I chose to research, I also must acknowledge that many of my interlocutors were very successful economic migrants, and I must recognize that there have been many others who were not as successful.

Therefore, the views I present in my research are very limited, as all my interlocutors have come from a place of privilege. I must also acknowledge that one of my strongest limitations to my research is that these types of developments which I had investigated are relatively new - construction for many of these places only began ten years ago and the symbolic aspects (such as their prestige) attached to these developments have only begun to take shape within the past several years. Certainly the symbolic nature behind this enclave has the potential to evolve and change over the years. However, this limitation itself could pose an avenue for future research. Will the symbolic meanings attached to these developments evolve over time or will they remain constant? Will these properties merely remain as symbols of balikbayans' attachment to the homeland or will balikbayans come to occupy these properties full- time? If they do how will this presence of balikbayans change the landscape of Philippine culture and the Philippines itself. Only time and future research will tell.

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## Appendix A: Fieldwork Photographs

Republic of the Philippines  
Department of Finance  
**BUREAU OF CUSTOMS**

**CUSTOMS DECLARATION**

All arriving passengers must provide the following information. If traveling with a family, only one (1) declaration is required to be made by the head or any responsible member thereof. Please fill up completely and legibly.

SURNAME / FAMILY NAME FIRST NAME MIDDLE NAME

SEX  MALE  FEMALE BIRTHDAY (MM / DD / YY)

CITIZENSHIP OCCUPATION / PROFESSION

PASSPORT NO. DATE AND PLACE OF ISSUE

ADDRESS (Philippines) ADDRESS (Abroad)

FLIGHT NO. AIRPORT OF ORIGIN DATE OF ARRIVAL

PURPOSE / NATURE OF TRAVEL TO THE PHILIPPINES

1.  Balikbayan 4.  Business  
2.  Returning Resident 5.  Tourism  
3.  Overseas Filipino Worker 6.  Others (Specify)

NO. OF ACCOMPANYING MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY: \_\_\_\_\_

NO. OF BAGGAGE: Checked-in \_\_\_\_\_ Pcs. Handcarried \_\_\_\_\_ Pcs.

GENERAL DECLARATION: (Please read important information at the back)

1. Are you bringing in live animals, plants, fishes and/or their products and by-products? (If yes, please see a Customs Officer before proceeding to the Quarantine Office).  Yes  No

2. Are you carrying legal tender Philippine notes and coins or checks, money order and other bills of exchange drawn in pesos against banks operating in the Philippines in excess of PHP10,000.00?  
If yes, do you have the required Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas authority to carry the same?  Yes  No

3. Are you carrying foreign currency or other foreign exchange-denominated bearer negotiable monetary instruments (including travelers checks in excess of US\$10,000.00 or its equivalent)? (If yes ask for and accomplish Foreign Currency Declaration Form at the Customs Desk at Arrival and Departure areas.  Yes  No

4. Are you bringing in prohibited items (firearms,ammunitions and part thereof, drugs, controlled chemicals) or regulated items (VCDs, DVDs, communication devices, transceivers)?  Yes  No

5. Are you bringing in  Jewelleries,  electronic goods, and  commercial merchandise and/or other prohibited items?  Yes  No

A customs form given to travellers before landing in Manila. Under the section ‘Purpose/ Nature of Travel to the Philippines’ Balibkayan is considered to be its own category of traveller.

Philippine Airlines **DUTY FREE PHILIPPINES**

**PASALUBONG EXPRESS**

**GIFT PACKS UNDER \$50**

**TOBLERONE \$38**  
Pasalubong Pack  
Get the gift for every purchase of 3 (Three) Pasalubong Packs.  
SKU: 242544

**HERSHEY'S \$35**  
Pasalubong Pack  
Get the gift for every purchase of 3 (Three) Pasalubong Packs.  
SKU: 242535

**NESTLE \$37**  
Pasalubong Pack  
Get the gift for every purchase of 3 (Three) Pasalubong Packs.  
SKU: 242537

**CADBURY \$38**  
Pasalubong Pack  
Get the gift for every purchase of 3 (Three) Pasalubong Packs.  
SKU: 242538

**LINDT \$39**  
Pasalubong Pack  
Get the gift for every purchase of 3 (Three) Pasalubong Packs.  
SKU: 242539

**GUMARAS \$33**  
Mango Truffles  
Pack of 2  
SKU: 2424918

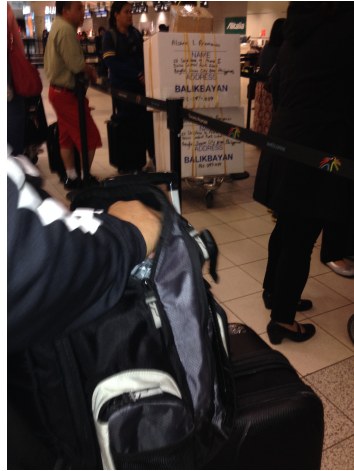
**VUVO \$42**  
Premium Vodka 1 Liter  
Pack of 2  
SKU: 2414389

\*Assessment & Promo Item may vary due to availability.

Philippine Airlines offers a duty free service called ‘Pasalubong Express’, which sells gift packs full of what Filipinos consider to be ‘westernized’ goods.



An advertisement for enclave communities built by Ayala Land Inc. positioned right by the Immigration counter in the International terminal of the Manila Airport.



Travellers with Balikbayan boxes at the Toronto Airport waiting to check into their flight



Balikbayan boxes at the Manila Airport waiting to be claimed by passengers from a Philippine Airlines flight from Toronto, Canada.



An Ayala Land Inc. sales kiosk positioned right outside the International Terminal at the Manila Airport.



An advertisement for condo developments in the Philippines at a Filipino grocery store in Ottawa, Canada.



Billboards on the side of a major highway in Metro Manila advertising condo developments



A snapshot of the community located right outside Bonafacio Global City.



A panoramic view of a section Bonafacio Global City.