

A Traveling Script

Labor Migration, Precarity, and Performance

Geraldine Pratt, Caleb Johnston, and Vanessa Banta



The written criticisms of our testimonial play offered by the students in a graduate dramaturgy class at the University of Philippines Diliman (in Metro Manila) made for a sobering read: “No new stories”; “White man’s play for white man’s problems”; “Where is the Filipino dramaturg? Sensibility of the director is not attuned to the sensibilities of the audience”; “Why are the Filipino characters speaking in English?” The students were commenting on the performance of *Nanay*, which took place at the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) Theater Center in Manila in November 2013. *Nanay* was developed collaboratively in Canada from 2007 to 2009 by university researchers (Johnston and Pratt), theatre artists, and the Philippine Women Centre of British Columbia (PWC-BC). We wrote the play to stimulate public debate about Canada’s Live-In Caregiver Program (LCP), a temporary labor migration program initiated in the early 1990s to bring mostly Filipino women to Canada to work inside Canadian homes as domestic caregivers.

Until November 2014, when the terms of the program were slightly changed, migrant workers admitted through the LCP had to complete 24 months of registered care work within a 48-month period in order to qualify to apply for permanent residency in Canada. The LCP represents an important route for Filipino migration to Canada and it is one of the country’s

largest and longest running temporary labor migration programs. Numbers vary in any particular year but in 2008 there were almost 40,000 live-in caregivers in Canada, concentrated in Vancouver, Toronto, and Calgary. The structural problems of the program have been well documented (see Pratt 2004, 2012), including: the deskilling of migrant women (many of whom are college educated and migrate from professional careers), family separation (the median length of separation between mothers and their children is seven to eight years), and the live-in requirement that has rendered migrant women vulnerable to different forms of abuse (this requirement became optional in November 2014 and the program was renamed the Caregiver Program). And yet, despite decades of critical research on the program, substantial cross-country organizing of migrant advocacy groups, and an exponential expansion of the program in the first decade of this century, there has been remarkably little public debate about migrant labor in Canada. It is precisely this lack of visibility that prompted the writing and performance of our testimonial play.

Nanay was originally designed as a site-responsive installation of testimonial monologues in the Chapel Arts Centre in Vancouver's downtown eastside. Over 12 performances, in small intimate groups, audiences were led through a series of different rooms wherein they encountered different characters (performed by professional actors) with different relationships to the politics and hard ethical dilemmas of care and migrant labor in Canada. The play premiered at Vancouver's PuSh International Performing Arts Festival in 2009; later that same year, we toured the project to the Hebbel am Ufer Theatre in Berlin for their Your Nanny Hates You! Festival. In 2012, a script reading was conducted in Edinburgh, followed by a second reading with the Filipino community in Whitehorse, Canada, in 2015.

The project was crafted from interviews conducted with Filipino women, their children, and their employers (many of whom are desperately searching for quality care for their children and ailing parents). These are interviews that Pratt (a white Canadian university-based researcher) had conducted in collaboration with the PWC-BC over the previous 15 years. The program trades two years of indentured servitude for the possibility of Canadian citizenship. These workers are both highly visible and little discussed. We hoped that the play would open up a space to critically assess and debate a program that brings mostly college-educated women

Figure 1. (facing page) Teatro Ekyumnikal actor "Jocelyn," in Nanay by Caleb Johnston, Geraldine Pratt, and Rommel Linatoc (trans. Vanessa Banta), directed by Rommel Linatoc. Bagong Barrio, 2014. (Photo by Vanessa Banta)

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Figure 2. Patrick Keating and Hazel Venzon performing a verbatim dialogue between husband-and-wife employers, in *Nanay* by Caleb Johnston and Geraldine Pratt, directed by Alex Ferguson. PETA Theater Center, 2014. (Photo by Caleb Johnston)

from the global south to work in conditions of vulnerability in Canadian homes, in a country that lacks a national childcare program and adequate eldercare.

Canada's live-in caregivers are a minority among the Philippines' vast labor diaspora. One in 10 Philippine nationals works outside the country, over one-third of the national population depends for their daily subsistence on remittances from a family member who is an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW), and 27 percent of the youth population in the Philippines grows up with at least one parent working abroad (Parreñas 2005, 2010).

Canada and the United States are considered to be among the most desirable and least dan-

gerous of migrant destinations, so much so that domestic workers and Filipino-Canadian activists alike feel that their stories of hardship in Canada often go unheard in the Philippines, even by family members. We were told as much by the domestic workers who participated in creating *Nanay* in Vancouver. The project motivated them to tell their stories differently and more explicitly to their family members in the Philippines. We took *Nanay* to Manila because it seemed important to carve out an intimate space where audiences in the Philippines could witness the sustained and nuanced testimonies of caregivers living in Canada; to put often painful stories into conversation with their family members in the Philippines; and to circulate these testimonials in the context of local debates taking place around migration.¹

Despite its origins in and execution through a sustained 15-year intercultural research collaboration between Pratt and the PWC-BC, and the cofacilitation of talkbacks by Pratt, Philippines native and UBC PhD candidate Teilhard Paradela, and Filipino-Canadian UBC PhD candidate and former member of the Vancouver PWC-BC, May Farrales, the play nonetheless was perceived by graduate students in Manila to be a "white man's play for white man's problems."² Further, Migrante International, an alliance of Filipino migrant advocacy groups that arranged for activists and migrants to attend the PETA production and participate in post-performance public forums, raised additional questions about audience and venue. Migrante

1. It clearly required substantial financial resources to do this and we were fortunate to obtain a Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Public Outreach grant, as well as a grant from the United Kingdom's Economic and Social Research Council. The PETA production was directed by Alex Ferguson, a Vancouver-based director, and performed by professional actors, four from Canada and four from Manila. For a consideration of the PETA production in Manila see Pratt and Johnston (2014, 2017).

2. The graduate students in question were in Vanessa Banta's dramaturgy class at the University of the Philippines, Diliman, where she was teaching at the time. As a Filipina native of Manila, Banta began collaborating with Johnston and Pratt through the process we describe here, and is thus positioned very differently to the script than the other two authors.

rightly noted that the professional production at the PETA Theater Center was largely inaccessible to migrant workers—it was simply too expensive—and would thus do little to generate discussion among those whose lives are most affected by migration. Migrante invited us to bring the play to migrant-sending communities. We returned to Manila to collaborate with Migrante from July to October 2014, a process that culminated in a community adaptation and performance of *Nanay* in Bagong Barrio, Metro Manila, a key migrant-sending community. This was a significant reorientation, from a play performed by professional actors to a nonprofessional community performance.

We began our partnership with Migrante by contributing our testimonial script as communal property to see what might evolve in an open-ended collaboration. The first step of this process involved translating all but one scene from English to Tagalog. This was critical given the criticism of the PETA production, the intended audience, and the significance of English-language instruction as a primary instrument of US colonial policy in the Philippines. In a 1970 article, Renato Constantino described English instruction in schools as the “first and perhaps the master stroke of the plan to use education as an instrument of colonial policy” (in D. Rodriguez 2010:164). Translating the script into Tagalog moved it more fully into the context of the Philippines and recalibrated the transcultural creative process. As a language spoken by no national peoples other than Filipinos, Neferti Tadiar argues, “one might call it a drop out language—simply speaking it arguably constitutes an act of defiance of the transnational” (2009:171). Working with a Tagalog script certainly repositioned English-speaking Canadians (in the case of Johnston and Pratt), now reliant on the willingness of Filipino collaborators for ongoing informal translation, throughout the creative and rehearsal process.



Figure 3. Hazel Venzon and Marichu Belarmino in *Nanay* by Caleb Johnston and Geraldine Pratt, directed by Alex Ferguson. PETA Theater Center, 2013 (Photo by Caleb Johnston)



Figure 4. Announcing the show in the barangay basketball court, Bagong Barrio, 11 October 2014. (Photo by Vanessa Banta)

Yet whiteness still clung to the play, or at least this is one possible way of understanding how we were knocked off-script as we collectively improvised towards a community performance. Collaboration, Grant Kester notes, has two meanings, one negative and another positive; this doubleness serves as a warning, he writes, of its ethical undecidability (2011). Working across cultures, geopolitical histories, geographies of uneven development, and unequal and non-equivalent resources, the ease of collaboration could never be assumed. As Diana Taylor argues, performance—as lived process, praxis, episteme, mode of transmission, system of learning, and embodied cognition—represents a rich, creative, and complex site for intercultural collaboration (2003; see also Gilbert and Lo 2007; Knowles 2010).

Reworking the Script

Improvising Collaboration

Migrante's interest in working with us emerged out of their recognition that organizing OFWs involves mobilizing families and entire communities, and that cultural work can be a vital means of doing this. Filipino migrant workers are difficult to organize not only because they are transient and dispersed globally, but also because the conditions that force migration—poverty and underemployment—are all-encompassing. The modest financial resources that we were able to bring to the collaboration enabled Migrante to form a cultural wing named Sining Bulosan, to honor Carlos Bulosan, the Filipino novelist and poet who spent much of his life as a migrant in the United States. To assist in this venture, they enlisted Rommel Linatoc, a trusted member of Migrante with a long history in community theatre in Manila, and his community theatre group, Teatro Ekyumenikal, to train the community actors, develop the script, and stage the performance.

Our process began with a two-day intensive workshop. Linatoc worked with members of Sining Bulosan alongside the more seasoned Teatro Ekyumenikal actors. Although Migrante had hoped to recruit OFWs—many of whom reside in the Philippines at any one point in time, between short-term contracts, or because they have aged out of going overseas—they were unable to do so. The Migrante actors were youths without actor training or, with the exception of one, experience as or with OFWs. During the workshop Linatoc had the young actors improvise a variety of scenarios that were not in the *Nanay* script. In one scene, a landlord throws a peasant family off their land because they are unable to repay money they had borrowed to send a family member abroad to work. Another improvised scene showed a community resisting the demolition of their homes by linking arms to collectively struggle against thugs sent in to violently displace them. A good portion of the workshop was spent memorizing and rehearsing a long, tightly choreographed declamatory poem-tableau or *dula-tula* (drama poem) created by Linatoc entitled “Suitcase, Box, Placard.” The poem exhorts the audience to rise up in protest in response to a lyrical account of a domestic worker who leaves with hope, dies under mysterious circumstances, and returns home in a coffin six months later, a scenario that is less likely, though not impossible, for migrants working in Canada or the United States than those going to the Middle East. For another scene, the actors were asked to write a letter to their mothers. Michael wept as he read his letter: “I hope you are not abused by your employer. I wish you were here so that you could take care of me. I am jealous of my classmates.”³ Michael had earlier revealed that he had no direct experience with OFWs.

At the end of the workshop we reviewed the situation. Linatoc estimated that roughly half of the performance would be based on material from our testimonial script. We would add improvised scenes to bring life to the circumstances that prompt migration, new material from other migration destinations, and tales of the deadly consequences of this overseas work in

3. All translations from the performance are by Vanessa Banta from authors' notes. Throughout this article we have used pseudonyms and left some actors and interviewees unnamed to protect anonymity.

many places. We would add what Linatoc phrased as “Filipino performance elements.” Linatoc judged the community actors to be too young and too inexperienced for the monologue-heavy script; the realistic testimonial monologues too dull for a community performance; and Canada and the Live-In Caregiver Program too distant from the experiences of the Manila migrant community where the play would be performed and where many of the resident OFWs work in the Middle East or in more accessible countries in Asia.

From our perspective, it was a challenging process. We could not see how the poem-tableau or a number of the improvised scenes bore immediate relation to Canada’s LCP. In fact there was no mention of our script until the second day. Moreover, Linatoc’s approach (influenced in part by Paolo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed⁴) appeared at odds with testimonial theatre, which places emphasis on listening closely to accounts of real-life experiences. If there is a defining characteristic of testimonial theatre, it is that the stories told are meant to be truthful representations of what was said by a “real” person.⁵ A testimonial play provides an opportunity for individuals to—in effect—speak for themselves to an audience who is otherwise not likely to listen. It is the proximity to actual experience that is thought to confer a peculiar kind of responsibility on the audience and thereby increase the intensity of feeling and audience absorption (Soans 2008).



Figure 5. Rehearsing a drama poem. *Sining Bulosan and Teatro Ekyumnikal actors in Nanay* by Caleb Johnston, Geraldine Pratt, and Rommel Linatoc (trans. Vanessa Banta), directed by Rommel Linatoc. Bagong Barrio, 10 August 2014. (Photo by Caleb Johnston)

The new scenarios developed and rehearsed during the two-day workshop were based in Teatro Ekyumenikal’s research on migrant workers and improvisations by youths who, for the most part, had no direct experience with labor migration (although in a country in which migration is so pervasive they undoubtedly have felt its effects). Further, one might argue that the objective of testimonial theatre is not to provide answers but to state problems with complexity and clarity; to provoke thought, analysis, and discussion (Forsyth and Megson 2009). Following Jacques Rancière’s (2004) theory of the emancipatory potential of theatre, the intent of the first phase of performances and talkbacks was to disrupt existing and expected identifications and disidentifications, and to bring into the conversation audience members with different relationships to the issue (e.g., employers and domestic workers; Filipinos and non-Filipino

4. For more details about Rommel Linatoc’s approach, see Vaughn Alviar (2016). Linatoc works in and through a hybridity of genres, which place an emphasis both on research and improvisation and a poetic interpretation of the “real.” His reworking of Freire’s methodology is in line with our larger argument: that “genre” needs to be understood in situ.

5. See Carol Martin’s *Theatre of the Real* (2013) for a critical assessment of verbatim theatre’s claims to truth.

Canadians; activists and policy makers) in a space of unanticipated sympathies, reactions, and discussion (Pratt 2012). But this new production, still called *Nanay*, was driving toward a more singular resolution: to raise a placard and join forces with Migrante.

And yet there are good reasons to hesitate over this initial set of reactions, not least because we had entered into a collaboration with an activist organization in a new political terrain, one where a popular revolution ended martial law just 30 years prior. This is a place where extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances attributed to the military and paramilitary continue to attract national and international attention. It is a nation with widely publicized political corruption undermining the democratic processes and a number of ongoing armed struggles. A cultural movement of poems, songs, improvised stage performances, visual exhibits, and protest effigies were and remain an integral component of the resistance against injustice (Guillermo 2001). Given all this, we have been forced to question the individualism of testimonial theatre and our suspicion of collective or seemingly second-hand knowledge that circulates as personal truth.⁶ Traditions of “seditious” drama have existed in the Philippines since the beginning of US colonialism, in an attempt to decolonize the theatrical stage; sustain, recuperate, and reinvent vernacular forms; and enlist theatre for progressive nationalist ends (Burns 2012; Fernandez 1996; Tadiar 2009). Nicanor G. Tiongson (1989) has argued that, within this tradition of political theatre, realism has not been a popular form. Embracing the spectacular, improvising and taking joy in performances of excess and over-the-top dramatics, risking the play of stereotypes: these are characteristics of what Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns calls *puro arte* (2012), a Filipino performance practice that has emerged within and sometimes against a history of US-Philippine colonial relations. Analyzing the social protest theatre practice of the cultural group Sining Bayan in the United States, Burns argues that its use of a multidisciplinary format that combines music, acting, and dance reflects in part the goal of getting as many people on the stage as possible. This is because performances serve as a valuable means to recruit new members to expand and engage political action. Migrante’s Sining Bulosan shares this objective. Moreover, a *barangay* (village) basketball court (where the community play was to be performed) differs significantly from a conventional theatre space. It quickly became obvious that solidarity and collaboration required an embrace of multiple genres, plural objectives, and the possibility that aesthetic choices and cultural work—of necessity—take shape differently in different historical, political-economic, and geographical contexts (Martin 2010). In short, the director’s approach to our script was an important reorientation rather than a problem.

We took the partial sidelining of our script and its focus on Canada’s LCP as a provocation and an opportunity to more fully (re)situate the play and the issues it engages within the setting and history of Bagong Barrio; and to experiment with theatrical form. In an effort to bring the play closer to the intent and methodology of testimonial theatre, after the workshop we started visiting Bagong Barrio with Migrante organizers to conduct interviews and to collect the testimonials of long-term residents and actual migrants who Migrante selected for us to meet. Both Linatoc and Migrante organizers were alert to the performative aspects of Johnston and Pratt’s white bodies and felt that our presence would generate interest about the play within the community.

Most days in Bagong Barrio began with walking together through different streets in the barrio to introduce us to one or another *barangay* captains in the community. These efforts

6. As a case in point, some of the controversy that surrounded the testimony of Rigoberta Menchú, a Guatemalan indigenous activist, turned on the fact that she reported others’ experiences as her own and narrated secondhand reports as firsthand experience. As Mary Louise Pratt (2001) noted in relation to the controversy, the category of personal narrative may operate differently in Western metropolitan and non-Western indigenous cultures. Even in a Western context, Martin documents shifts in ways of engaging with the real, and the melding of fiction and nonfiction, real and simulated (2010:1; 2013).

were most always passively refused: the locally elected official was inevitably otherwise occupied even if a tentative visit had been arranged, but the visits served the purpose of establishing our and Migrante's presence in the community and made visible the organization's network of international collaborators.

As we spent time in Bagong Barrio we heard stories of physical and emotional vulnerability, permanent transience, and economic desperation. People spoke at length about the conditions propelling overseas labor migration: the barrio's swift transformation from a community of unionized workers to a precarious labor force dependent on overseas labor migration and informal work such as peeling garlic and transforming rags into cleaning cloths. This process was driven by the closure of local factories in the early 1980s and by the neoliberal restructuring of labor law, which rendered Bagong Barrio a migrant-sending community in the space of just a decade. We heard stories of long periods of family separation; histories of tremendous personal sacrifice, hard work, and strategic planning; of harrowing abuse experienced in nearby countries; and of faith in and an orientation to the future. We kept meeting the families of women living in Canada under the LCP, though Canada was clearly only one of many destinations. With the director and Migrante, we committed to placing the LCP testimonies from Canada in the context of other migrant stories from this neighborhood and, in line with Linatoc's creative approach, to use the research from Bagong Barrio to create not monologues but dialogues and poems that could be staged as declamatory tableaux.⁷

And so, Joanne, a Filipino nurse hired as a domestic worker in Whistler, a ski resort outside of Vancouver, tells in her monologue (substantially shortened from the original script and previous productions) of being humiliated by having to hand-wash her female employer's blood-soaked panties. Then another woman steps forward (text surrounded by slashes indicates nonverbatim additions):

/Blood soaked panties! Let me tell you what happened to me in Kuwait./ The 21-year-old son came into my room and stole my panties. He then masturbated on them and left them in the laundry for me to see and clean up.

/Why are we humiliated and forced to clean up employers' bodily waste all over the world?/

Ligaya, another domestic worker in Vancouver, ends her monologue, in which she tells of leaving her children with her parents in Manila, with the triumphant: "With all of these challenges, I'm a survivor." Jocelyn—a resident of Bagong Barrio—steps up next to tell her story (taken verbatim from an interview) of being beaten by her grandmother and sexually assaulted by her grandfather when left by her mother in their care. The following is a fragment of this addition to the script.⁸

7. For the original script see Pratt and Johnston in collaboration with the Philippine Women Centre of BC (2014).

8. JOCELYN: Survivor din ako! Napilitan akong maging survivor dahil iniwan ako ng nanay ko sa ere. Bigla akong bumagsak at walang sumalo.

7 years old po ako noon, nung umalis siya.

NPA po ako. No Permanent Address. Kung saan lang ako mapunta, dun ako.

Pinagpapapasahan ako hanggang napunta ako sa lola at lolo ko.

Doon ko naranasan ang pambubugbog sa kamay ng kapamilya. Ginawa akong katulong ng sariling kong lola. Minumura ako. Tapos pag hindi ko nagawa ng tama yung pinapagawa sa akin, iniuuntog ako sa pader.

[...] Tapos dumating yung time na, Martes ng gabi yun, gumagawa ako ng assignment. Actually magwa-1 o'clock ng umaga na noon, tapos bumangon ang lolo ko, lumabas siya sa kwarto. Ikaw ba ate papayag ka na iinom lang ng tubig yung lolo mo, yung kamay niya nakahawak pa sa katawan mo?

JOCELYN: /I'm also a survivor! I had no choice but to be a survivor because/ my mother left me in the air. It is as if she suddenly dropped me from above, and no one caught me. I was 7 years old when she left.



Figure 6. *Reclaiming childhood*, Teatro Ekyumnikal actors in Nanay by Caleb Johnston, Geraldine Pratt, and Rommel Linatoc (trans. Vanessa Banta), directed by Rommel Linatoc. Bagong Barrio, 2014. (Photo by Vanessa Banta)

I call myself an N.P.A.
No Permanent Address.
Wherever I would end up,
that's where I'll be.

I was passed from one relative to the next until I stayed with my grandmother. In my grandmother's house I experienced being beaten, and being treated like a maid—by my own grandmother. They cursed at me. Then, if I wasn't able to do what they wanted me to do, they would bang my head on the wall [...] Then, the time came. It was a Tuesday night. I was working on my [school] assignment. Actually it was almost 1:00

a.m. My grandfather got up from bed and he went out of his room. Sister, would you let your grandfather who is supposedly just drinking water have his hand on your body while doing so?

The monologue from our original play, of a child reunited with her mother who came to Canada through the LCP, was interwoven with a verbatim monologue of a child left by a mother working in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The following is an excerpt from the reconstructed scene:⁹

CHILD OF LCP: [...] I'm laughing but I don't know what I'm laughing about, right?

ARVIN: Whenever we talk, it's like I don't want to talk to her. I would say, Yes, I'm okay. That's it. Then, she would say, "Your aunt will get you away from there." I would go, "Ok." I grew up with that situation, so I'm used to it already. Our conversations were just like that.

Because my uncles told me that my mother would not come back for me anymore. Like that. It was like, in my mind I was convinced that I do not have parents. Because whenever I would have a school assignment, my aunts would not help. I was always alone. They were always at work. I had no one to talk to. They would get a call for a meeting but they would not go. That's why I became angry. That no one was taking care of me.

9. CHILD OF LCP: [...] Tumatawa ako pero di ko alam kung ano ang nakakatawa.

ARVIN: Pag naguusap nga kami ng mama, parang ayaw ko na nga siyang kausapin eh. Oo, okay lang ako. Yung ganon lang. Tapos, sasabihin lang na, kukunin ka na naman ng tita mo diyan. O sige, yan na naman kasi yung kinalakhan ko na eh. Ganun lang.

Sinasabi din ng mga tito ko na yung nanay mo 'di ka na uuwian. Ganoon. Yung parang, nag-ano na yung utak ko, na wala na akong magulang. Kasi kung tuwing may assignment ako sa school, 'di naman ako natutulungan ng tita ko. Lagi akong nag-iisa. Nasa trabaho sila. Kaya sabi ko ako na lang ang magdedesisyon para sa sarili ko.

When they get tired of me, they would just pass me to the next family member. I grew up like that. I finally decided that I would just be the one to decide for myself.

As Arvin's scene develops he tells of his efforts to build a relationship with a mother with whom he had never lived. He met her in Jeddah when he now himself was an OFW and they decided to share an apartment:¹⁰

ARVIN: Whenever we would exchange stories, we cried because we remembered the past. "Ma, if you only knew what I experienced, being passed around." Then, she would tell me about all her experiences working there as a TNT [Tago Nang Tago, undocumented or "in perpetual hiding"]. She became a TNT because when she returned to the Philippines once, she tried to not go back. She didn't want to return, she didn't want to renew her contract. But she said that what she earned in the Philippines was not enough for us. Even more in Manila, if you work here and you have to pay for rent. What would happen to my school? How would she support me? That's why she had to work hard. She was the one who worked so hard so I could go to school. She did it so she could put me through college.

You know, that was the first and the longest time. [...] We spent almost two years together in the same house /in Jeddah/. That's where I felt, Oh this is how things are when you have parents who will take care of you. Your clothes, the time you wake up in the morning. I really felt it there, so I was very happy.

Because I didn't experience it when I was young, my favorite thing we did for "bonding time" was to go to Jollibee together. We always saw children being fed with a spoon by their parents in Jollibee. I said, "That! I want that!" I will point at the food I want to eat from Jollibee and we will eat. We will pretend that I'm still young, that I'm still a baby. I asked her, "Ok, how would you feed me, Ma, now that we are here at Jollibee?" She showed me.

These new scenes bring the LCP in direct conversation with migrant experiences elsewhere as well as with life in Bagong Barrio, in particular the lives of children left behind. This strategy is meant to disrupt the exceptionalism of the Canadian experience. We can ask why Filipina migrant workers are humiliated and forced to clean up employers' bodily effluents all around the world, and we can raise questions about the care of children left behind, whether the mother is in Canada, Japan, or Jeddah. By bringing the Canadian experience in close proximity to experiences elsewhere we suggest that Canada is not the assumed "greener pasture" or "dream destination," and that migrants there share the same concerns as OFWs elsewhere. Also the same scenes take on new meaning in Bagong Barrio. When Joanne ends her monologue

10. ARVIN: Kapag nagkwekwentuhan kami ng mama ko, nagkakaiyakan kami, na naalala yung nakaraan. Ma, kung alam mo lang yung naranasan ko na pinagpapasahan ako. Tapos, nagkwento din siya kung ano yung karanasan niya sa Jeddah bilang TNT. Nag TNT kasi ang mama ko kasi, noong umuwi ang mama ko sa Pilipinas isang beses, sinubukan niya na sana hindi na bumalik sa Jeddah. Pero hindi daw talaga sasapat sa amin ang sahod na kikitain niya sa Maynila lalo na't mangungupahan pa kami. Eh, papaano yung pagaaral ko? Paano niya masusuportahan? Kaya sabi niya noon, kailangan daw talagang magtiis. Siya na mismo ang magtitiis para mapa aral niya ako hanggang college.

Alam mo, doon yung pinaka una at pinaka matagal na magkasama kami. [...] Halos dalawang taon kami magkasama sa iisang bahay sa Jeddah. Doon ko naramdaman na, ah, ganito pala yung kapag may magulang ka, na asikasuhin ka. Yung damit mo, yung paggising mo. Dun ko talaga naramdaman na may nanay ako. Tuwang tuwa ako!

Kasi 'di ko naranasan noong maliit pa lang ako. Ang paborito kong bonding namin ng mama ko sa Jeddah ay tuwing nagpupunta kami sa Jollibee. Kasi diba nakikita natin sa Jollibee, yung may bata doon, na sinubukan ng magulang. Yun! Magtuturo ako sa Jollibee. Kunwari na ako, bata pa, baby ako. Tapos, sinasabi ko, Ma, paano ako? Kunwari baby pa ako. O, sige paano mo ba ako papakinin, Ma? Paano mo ako sinubuan? Pinapakita naman niya sa akin.

about her experiences as a domestic worker in Canada with the statement and question: “I really want to go home, but what about the fate of my family?” the question and emotions evoked are very different when posed to remittance-dependent family members than when asked of Canadian audiences.

Reflecting his desire to create a more dialogic and dynamic performance experience, director Linatoc wrote into the now flexible, fluid, and hybrid script more connective threads and dialogue that allowed the performers to respond to and speak out against their treatment as OFWs. For instance, before and after the challenging monologue of a blatantly racist Canadian nanny agent—the only verbatim monologue taken from the original script delivered by a white North American in English in the Bagong Barrio performance—Linatoc inserted the following, in Tagalog:

PERSON 8: They say Filipinas are calm, good with their personal hygiene, pleasant and loving, and caring. People from other nations often say this.

PERSON 9: That’s what you will always hear from foreign employers. Because of our great love for our families, we would take anything for the sake of our children.

PERSON 10: My nanay [mother] will bear everything for her children even if she is treated as if her being is even lower than a dog’s.

PERSON 1: You’re overreacting! Isn’t it natural for people to think that their race is superior?

PERSON 4: What can we do if all that Filipinos are able to do is be domestic workers?

PERSON 3: There’s nothing wrong with being a domestic worker. Because of the many domestic workers around the world, the government of the Philippines earns money!

PERSON 4: That’s not what I mean. My mother is a domestic worker abroad.

PERSON 5: My sister is one too.

PERSON 4: Let me finish.

PERSON 5: OK. Finish what you want to say. This irritates me.

PERSON 4: The racist Canadian Agent is absolutely wrong.

Beyond these additions the director originally envisioned that roughly 40 percent of the play would be in the traditional form of a processional; his intention was for the processional to weave through the community drawing audiences into the basketball court where the rest of the play would be performed. Though this plan was never fully executed, an improvised Tent City was performed outside the entrance of the basketball court before the beginning of the play, to draw in the community audience. This scene recalled the 2013–14 situation in Jeddah where roughly 1,000 Filipino migrants camped in front of the Philippine embassy, asking to be repatriated to avoid being arrested during a Saudi government crackdown on illegal migrants.

And finally, drawing on what we learned about the history of Bagong Barrio from long-term residents, we made a poem that was used to advertise the play in short street skits prior to the performance and at the end of the actual performance in a tightly choreographed declamatory tableau:¹¹

CHORUS: We are the people of Bagong Barrio

Do you know your history? Do you know what you are capable of?

11. CHORUS: Tayo ay taga-Bagong Barrio

Alam niyo ba kung ano ang hubog ng ating nakaraan?

In the 1970s Bagong Barrio
was known for resistance to
land issues, to water issues, to
housing issues

We could mobilize 7,000
people in an afternoon

We had jobs and could feed
our families

And then our jobs were
contracted out and our
factories were moved to
export processing zones

We work and we work and
we work and we work and we
work

We make paper bags for
National Books

We sew scraps of fabric to
make cleaning cloths

We peel garlic all day for 70 pesos a bag

We use our ingenuity to invent jobs out of the air

But there are no more secure jobs and people have to leave in order to survive

We need to analyze and organize

You will feel safer when you organize

We will create our own security together

Here at home

Not in some foreign land



Figure 7. Sining Bulosan and Teatro Ekyumnikal actors calling the audience to see Nanay by Caleb Johnston, Geraldine Pratt, and Rommel Linatoc (trans. Vanessa Banta), directed by Rommel Linatoc. Bagong Barrio, 2014. (Photo by Vanessa Banta)

Nung 1970s, ipinaglaban natin ang ating mga karapatan sa lupa, bahay at tubig
Pitong libong katao ang nagtipon tipon noon upang magaklas
May trabaho tayo noon at hindi gutom ang ating mga pamilya
Hanggang sa pagdating ng salot na kontraktwalisasyon at paglisan ng mga pabrika patungong export
processing zones
Puro na lang tayo trabaho. Trabaho dito, doon. Kahit ano, kahit saan. Tayo ay nagtrabaho
Sa dilim, naduduling tayo sa kadidikit ng bag na papel para sa National Bookstore
Sumasakit ang mga daliri natin sa pagbabasahan
Ang likod natin sa pagbabalat ng bawang para lang sa 70 pesos kada bag
Gamit ang mapanglikhang isip, nakakagawa tayo ng trabaho kahit mula sa ere
Loob natin ay hindi panatag
walang anu mang kasiguruhan sa trabaho ang meron tayo
Kaya ang iba sa atin ay lumisan patungong ibang bansa para lang mabuhay
Kaya tayo nang magsuri at mag organisa
Kapag tayo ay magsamasama, tayo ay ligtas sa kapahamakan
Mayroong kasiguruhan sa piling ng masa
Hindi sa lupa ng dayuhan ngunit dito sa ating pinakamamahal na bayan



Figure 8. A call to action from the *Sining Bulosan* and *Teatro Ekyumnikal* actors in Nanay by Caleb Johnston, Geraldine Pratt, and Rommel Linatoc (trans. Vanessa Banta), directed by Rommel Linatoc. *Bagong Barrio*, 2014. (Photo by Vanessa Banta)

Politics, Precarity, and Performance

As a Migrante cultural event, the performance was always already enmeshed in politics. Before the play, there were short speeches from, first, one of the two elected Congressional representatives of GABRIELA (a nationwide network of grassroots organizations advocating for women’s issues), and then a councilor from Barangay 150. A third barangay councilor also attended the play, breaking from the other councilors who, we were told, were collectively boycotting the event, cautioning local residents against attending our “red play.” Even before the day of the performance, Migrante seemed to have met with passive resistance. Just days before the performance, they were told that the venue, a community basketball court, was available only until 6:00 p.m. (just two hours after the scheduled start of the play). Despite previously promising the facility, the barangay captain had scheduled a basketball tournament for early that evening. Only after negotiating was Migrante able to secure the facility until 7:00 p.m. And then it became known that only half of the chairs rented from one barangay office were to be delivered.

There were numerous other unrelated challenges and setbacks on the day of the performance—seasonal torrential rains threatened to flood the basketball court, rented audio equipment and one community actor (who was to deliver one of the main monologues) failed to show up. One barrio resident, Marilou, who had invited some of her “old day friends [...] so [that] their memories would be refreshed” argued that the “timing was wrong [...] the performance was [scheduled] at the same time as the 4Ps—conditional cash transfers for the urban poor.” Others were not able to attend because of work: “They had to finish peeling the garlic by 7:00 p.m.”¹² Still others were hesitant to get too close to the performance, opting instead to observe from a distance. They peeped through a chain-link fence, or gazed down from the balconies or roofs of surrounding houses: “I saw one mother was watching so far away. She could see the actors.”

12. Quotations from community members in attendance are from interviews conducted by the authors in Bagong Barrio in August and September 2014, and from follow-up interviews in September 2015.

And yet, despite all of these complications, the play took place. And perhaps this is one of the most political aspects of the event: in conditions of extraordinary precarity, the play took place. Shannon Jackson notes that, “theatre’s anachronistic territoriality [which demands physical, durational co-presence] might be the most interesting thing about the medium right now” (2011:180). The significance of this performance resides in the temporary occupation of public space and the physical, bodily assertion of principles of equality through public assembly in the midst of precarity. In Judith Butler’s phrasing: “When the bodies of those deemed ‘disposable’ assemble in public view, they are saying, ‘We have not slipped quietly into the shadows of public life; we have not become the glaring absence that structures your public life’” (in Puar et al. 2012:168). They are “exercising a plural and performative right to appear, one that asserts and instates the body in the midst of the political field” (Butler 2015:11). In the context of a neoliberal ethos that individualizes responsibility and celebrates the entrepreneurial self, public assembly is a disruptive “assertion of plural existence” (16). Theatrical performance almost always involves sustained collaboration through time and space. In circumstances such as those of *Sining Bulosan*, this was an accomplishment in and of itself.

Although it is challenging to gauge community reaction and wise not to overstate the impact of the performance, we know that for some the performance in Bagong Barrio was deeply felt. One resident, herself a former OFW, was, we were told by a Migrante organizer, “just speechless, she just cried,” because she saw the experience of OFWs in other countries. From an older Migrante member who had made the promotional posters:

It was easy for me to cry. I didn’t know that was the story. I wasn’t there for the rehearsals. The first time I saw it, I cried. In the beginning [after the show] I didn’t want to approach anyone. I felt very emotional. I remember my siblings in Jordan — they were there for 10 years. We didn’t know what the conditions are. We don’t know if they are being raped or exploited. It made me angry because it was clear from the stories that the government is not providing support and not stopping migrants from [being exploited/abused]. So now it is clearer to me.

This man, a talented illustrator, was intent on turning the play script into a comic book.

Two days after the performance, Marilou, a long-term resident, reported that those who attended were “excited that we have a show like that.” The children in particular (about 30 sat on tarps on the ground to the side of the performance space) “understood the topic. [...] They weren’t bored by it. They were very attentive. All the children.” Finding one child crying after the play, Marilou asked him:

“Why are you crying?” [He said:] “I miss my mother.” A nine-year-old boy! Christian is his name. He was left with his grandmother since birth [his mother is working in Canada in the LCP]. But now, because life is hard, [his grandmother also] works as a domestic helper. So, his *tita* [aunt] is taking care of him now. He’s not happy. Of course, he feels it that his mother is gone. Our children were able to relate to the play.

A Migrante organizer told of meeting another resident after the play who said that her daughter also had to work in Canada. Her daughter was trained as a nurse, but working as a caregiver: “Her mother was crying when she was telling me the story. Because the children often tell their grandmother they miss their mother.” Marilou also told us about the community’s reaction to the play: “They were curious. ‘Imagine, the writer is a foreigner.’ But, I told them: ‘That’s our story, based on the [interviews done here]. It’s our lives.’”

As important and perhaps more enduring was the effect on *Sining Bulosan* youth. Given all of the setbacks that plagued the performance, Migrante met with Teatro Ekyumenikal the week before the scheduled performance to consider canceling the show. But the young *Sining Bulosan* actors insisted they persist. In the assessment the day following the performance, the capacity to work through the challenges—including the inability of the director to continue

due to ill health and other commitments, along with the absence of several of the original Sining Bulosan members—was judged to be a substantive accomplishment. From Boni, the Migrante organizer in charge of production:

I can see the changes since we started: not just in skills but in people. You stood your ground. You did not give up, despite personal problems. As a collective we helped each other to overcome our struggles. That's why we are still here.

Even those who could not continue working with the group remained present, he told the young Sining Bulosan members at the assessment, because some of their stories are now embedded in the script. He noted that this process began with their performances of the Bagong Barrio verse as a short street play:

The performances had another purpose. They led to breakthroughs and new revelations. They weren't just to advertise the play. They helped to build confidence and shed fear. They were a way of talking to people. They were important because that skill is important for building the company.

In effect, they taught the participants to be organizers.

For some, one significant aspect of the play was that this was the first time they had heard the history of Bagong Barrio—its long history of union organizing, of strikes and protests during the turbulent repressive years of martial law (1972–1981), and the more recent experiences of OFWs. Paul, one of the community actors, said:

This is my first time in a theatrical production. [...] One part I really like are the struggles of the people in Bagong Barrio: their fight for their homes, water, electricity. I am happy that it was adapted to the experience of Bagong Barrio. It made it come alive. The production helped in getting us all here, binding us together. I was surprised that there were audience members who cried because they saw their experiences.

Or as Arman, a Migrante organizer and resident of the barrio, noted:

I saw the history of Bagong Barrio for the first time. Before I only heard of it from other people but had not understood it that way. That's why I think that theatre production is a powerful tool for understanding stories. The interviews that we did, those interviews helped us to understand what Bagong Barrio is about. [...] I'm happy that we did the play even if in the beginning I didn't give it a chance. We did it. In Bagong Barrio we are open to the possibility of continuing the project and we hope that we are able to take it to other areas.

In a postperformance assessment, Migrante judged the project a success: they had succeeded despite many personal and organizational challenges, recruited new members through the process, and the performance contributed to building confidence and organizing skills among youths in Bagong Barrio.

If taking up public space is in itself a politically significant event, the transience and persistence of our one-off performance for this struggling community is additionally significant because it signals that it could happen again. As indeed it has. Sining Bulosan has performed scenes from the play at mass demonstrations and at other Migrante events. At the end of the performance in Bagong Barrio, a Migrante leader was approached by a priest from the neighboring barrio of Santa Quiteria, who asked about the costs of restaging the play in his parish church as part of their Migrant Ministry program. This initiated a relationship between Migrante and members of this parish church. Because the majority of the actors in the Bagong Barrio performance were from Teatro Ekyumenikal (whose commitment to work with Sining Bulosan had ended), Migrante asked that the parish church involve their theatre group to restage the performance in Santa Quiteria. Rehearsals opened an opportunity for Migrante

to educate and organize these community actors. The script was further adapted to the circumstances of Santa Quiteria. From Allan Bonifacio, the Migrante member in charge of the production:

Because the end of that [Bagong Barrio] performance was focused on Bagong Barrio or on the stories of the individuals [from Bagong Barrio], I had to create one chorus that discusses the collective experience of all so that we could use the script in other places too. We talked about it and there was a collective decision made regarding these changes. But, similar to other materials for community theatre, the piece remains open to any change depending on the length of time and process of creating or mounting the production. If the theatre artists are able to immerse themselves or do more research in the places where they will perform they can adapt it and the piece will speak more to the specific experiences and feelings of the audience.

The play was performed in Santa Quiteria on 28 November 2014, as a matinee and evening show attracting an audience of roughly 300 in total.

As for the future of the play: it is evolving. In summer 2015, Migrante organizers report that a member of Sining Bulosan asked the former producer for the script. Different segments of the script have been performed in different contexts. Though Sining Bulosan may choose to work more fully with dance and rap rather than our script, we were told by a Migrante leader that the organization “recognizes the potential of the project in all aspects—organizing, developing leaders, and even as an income-generating project.” The former producer, who has been moved to another region to organize migrants there, holds on to the prospect of working with theatre:

I'd like to try what our cultural activists in the '70s did. They had material they always used in rehearsal. This was their way to recruit new members, while they still responded to the invitations from other organizations to perform for their campaigns, indoor activities etc. This way, they would always meet and the cultural workers were always active.

This vision places our collaborative script—ever changing, being adapted to new circumstances by new members—at the disposal of these cultural workers, exemplifying the “rhizomatic potential of interculturalism—its ability to make multiple connections and disconnections between cultural spaces—and to create representations that are unbounded and open, and potentially resistant to imperialist forms of closure” (Lo and Gilbert 2002:47).

Returning with an Archive

In what is now a highly influential distinction, Diana Taylor (2003; 2012; 2015) contrasts the archive, an authorized place for storing objects and a system of classification, from repertoire (or performance). The archive sustains a form of knowledge that is rational, linear, individualized, enduring, and works across distances at a remove from the knower. The repertoire, on the other hand, is embodied, ephemeral, requires presence and is a kind of “knowing in place” (Taylor 2012). As we worked with Migrante to situate our play in Bagong Barrio, we assembled new materials that reveal how the LCP is embedded in a much bigger problem: the transformation by the Philippine state of large portions of their population into migrant labor, the value of which lies (at least to the state) in the remittances OFWs send home. We heard life stories of OFWs' modest capacity to sustain their families in Bagong Barrio despite years of separation under precarious, even life-threatening work conditions. We heard of their careful investment strategies in education and housing that buy their children access to temporary overseas jobs in relentless intergenerational cycles of disposability. Beyond hoping and anticipating that these materials will circulate as repertoire in ways that are useful to Migrante, we want to make use of the authority of the scholarly archive, because these are stories of lives too easily and simply rendered as disposable surplus, in part because they are stories of disposable lives in Manila, a city that itself is consigned to the margins. Manila's trauma of martial law, and the fact that

80 percent of the urban infrastructure was destroyed in WWII and over a third of the residents still live with precarious rights to housing in informal settlements (Garrido 2013) make Manila especially susceptible to erasure: a “history of disappearing and forgetting” is embedded, Tadiar argues, “in [Manila as an] urban space” (2009:144). In this context, the enduring, distance-defying quality of the archive and a testimonial genre that attends with care to the details of individual lives holds radical potential. Tadiar insists that

To decolonize [...] means to ask, How do we mobilize other social analytics to bring into operation remaindered forms of social intelligence, imagination, and sensibility that might not only dispute what is given in empire and the very frames within which such things (like “race as difference”) are given but also, in doing so, how do we set the stage (create the platforms) for radical departure from the given conditions of life under empire now? (2015:156).

Tadiar finds in Filipino migrant domestic workers a means of imagining forms of sociality that are typically illegible. While these migrants are legible as racialized and exploited workers, she argues, it is also important to understand that, as

conduits of other people’s wills and aspirations, accommodating and conforming to the bodily, emotional, psychical, and metaphysical requirements of individuals and communities, to which they are attached as vital, component yet alienable parts, they act in a very practical but also otherworldly sense as forms of human media — technologies of reproduction rather than full-fledged sovereign (self-determining, self-owning) individual subjects. (152)

Within this practice of “self lending” Tadiar recovers other ontologies rooted in histories and economies of spirit mediumship and debt-bondage.

Sharing the aspiration of “setting the stage” for a radical departure from existing conditions of life (but doing so in very different terms), we archive two further scenes from Bagong Barrio, taken directly from verbatim testimony (with editorial additions marked by slashes) and not yet performed. We do this, not to stabilize and reclaim meaning, but to put life stories from Bagong Barrio into wider circulation, moving towards unknown and unanticipated destinations.

Scene One: Cruel Optimism

LUIS: We were living hand to mouth. So, I told myself I will continue my studies. My wife was selling items so she supported me somehow. She said, “OK, study.” By the mercy of God, I finished vocational school. That was when I had the courage to /migrate/. That was in 1984. Even if I didn’t want to, thinking of your family, it doesn’t matter if you want it or not. Expenses were increasing, your salary decreasing.

When I went abroad, I went to Saudi Arabia. During my first months, sadness really defeated me. It was in Saudi where I learned the saying of workers, “Welcome to this prison without bars.” My first run, I was really defeated by sadness.

I was there for 14 months only. When I left Saudi, I said, I don’t want it anymore. I don’t want to return to you.

The second time, I returned and applied for a maintenance job at a hospital of the Ministry of National Defense. I worked there for over 20 years.

I went home four times in those years. /All I could think about was/ money. As long as I send what they need here it doesn’t matter so much if I come /home/. Whenever you go home, the first thing you think of are the gifts you need to bring. /And/ when you get here and you see your family, you want to treat them by taking them out. What if you don’t have the money to do so? Where is your heart? Or is it love too when you sacrifice

going home as long as your child holds cheap candy or chocolates? Even if you are not there, you are happy /knowing this/. Am I right? /If/ you go home you carry the burden of spending for everything. In /all/ my years abroad, I went home four times. I don't regret it. Because, why? You will go home and there are people and things you love—yes. But even that causes you great pain.

My experience in /Saudi/? I worked hard even though my salary was not high and not low. It was just enough. Hand to mouth. I was sending money and she was working. Even if she was working and I was sending money, we didn't have enough.

(Joyce enters and faces the audience directly)

JOYCE: /Having him overseas,/ It was nothing, it was natural. Of course, you have to help out your husband. You have to raise your children, for him, for the whole family. /But/ it's hard to be a mother and a father. It's hard because you are in charge of everything. Your children, your house. It was very hard...

When my husband went abroad, the money he sent was able to help but it was also not that big. I had to budget it in the right way. Everything was budgeted. All the money I got I stapled and divided. The money to pay for the electricity, water, tuition, transportation, allowance, school projects. You couldn't do anything beyond that. You couldn't subtract anything from that. If I felt we were about to run out of money, I knew it was time for me to work harder.

I had so many jobs. Imagine in a day: in the morning I sold dried fish. Then, I would do the laundry for someone. At 3:00 p.m. I would start selling again. At night—you know that Shell gasoline station over there?—I will sell Balut [bird embryo eaten from shell, sold as street food].

My husband was away for 28 years and I didn't even experience rewarding myself or relaxing. That SM [shopping mall] over there? I couldn't enter that. I would enter it when he would go home and he would say, "Let's go out." I told him, I teased him, "That SM, I will get lost in it." How would you enter it when all your money is already stapled? You couldn't unwind. I couldn't even go to the movies. I only watched once. I was forced by my friends. They said, "Come!" Even if I didn't want to, but because I was teased... I only experienced it once. That was not repeated.

/With all of that I managed to put our three daughters through university./ He came home for the graduation of my youngest from high school. The next time was when the youngest graduated from college. There were cellphones then already. I remember /telling/ him /on the phone/, "Her name is about to be called! I will let you listen." I told him, "When her name gets called you will hear it." I always cry when I remember. "Listen, your child is being called!" We did that until all of them finished.

LUIS: Saudi made me go home. It was part of the implementation of Saudi Arabia's policy. I don't want to brag about myself but they really didn't want me to go. They still needed my service but the time came when a royal decree stated that after age 60 /you have to retire and return home/. It was really their law.

/And/ now, there are no jobs for me here. I'm thinking of leaving again. Honestly, here in our country [...] even if you have a lot of experience, nothing. That's what I notice. We can't do anything because there are so many Filipinos who are unemployed. I don't try to apply here anymore because I know no one will accept me. But, really your body can still work. When you stop working, as soon as you stop, that's when you feel so many things in your body.

JOYCE: He has many illnesses.

LUIS: I think that's what happens when you really do not have anything else to do. Your body will desire to work because you got used to it. That's what I would consider my experience with work.

JOYCE: My eldest daughter is in Saudi. She's a nurse. Then my other one, she went abroad too [to Saudi]. She studied computer science but she took /certification for/ CSSD: sterilization of all medical instruments in the hospital. But, she only stayed there for a year. She encountered a problem there. But she was able to get out.

She got pregnant there. Her boyfriend committed suicide. He hung himself. If you're pregnant there, of course, that's illegal, right? It's going to be a big problem if she gets stuck there alone. So, my other daughter helped out. I don't know what the exact plan was. She said, "don't say anything." I don't know what they did. All I know was that my daughter said, "I got it, ma." They were able to get her out of there. She gave birth here.

Of course, she cried and cried. Even her sister was crying. Me? As much as possible, you won't see me crying. I would fight. I would say, "What's the problem? Let's figure out a way!" You have to be strong when faced with a problem. You have to be wide and open-minded when it comes to a problem. Assess, what is the bigger problem? You go there first. Find a solution. They know that's who I am. He says to me, "I envy you because you're brave." It's really like that. We have to be strong when it comes to problems.¹³

Scene Two: What Falls Away

(TALA is an energetic, charismatic 17-year-old girl with a slightly mischievous "tomboy" demeanor; stylish in T-shirt and cargo shorts. She has short hair. She holds an iPhone, which is always prominent as she talks.)

TALA: My cousin was working here in [Manila in] bars as a GRO [Guest Relations Officer; she gets customers to buy her drinks]. Of course she was not earning enough and she can't work that way forever. She dared to leave the country because she couldn't provide. She went to Dubai. No one knows what her job is. We were all surprised then when she called to tell us she's in jail.

I think that was last year. When she called, I was about to ask her to send me something, "Ate, buy me a T-shirt." Then, my aunt said, "How would she buy that for you if she's in jail. You see! She's in jail." My aunt said that her visa and papers were confiscated and hidden. Of course, if you get caught doing something and you don't have your documents, you will be put to jail.

My aunt couldn't get a hold of her, and my cousin hadn't called for months. And then, when they finally got to talk, that was the time my cousin was just released. She was crying, she wanted to go home. But, of course, because she couldn't find a good job here, she went back to Dubai to take a chance again. She was here for a week. Then [my cousin] was gone.

Of course, if it's your relative, you really worry. However, everyone who lives here is poor and having a difficult time. They can only focus on one thing: work. My father, all he does is work. /He drives a jeepney and sometimes works as a mechanic./ Then, my mother peels garlic. Of course we don't have enough.

In Bagong Barrio, all our houses are connected. There are six families /in my mother's extended family, all living side by side in the same building. We've lived here almost all my life./ My father always says my mother's navel is buried here. She doesn't want to

13. This testimonial scene is the amalgamation of two life stories recorded in Bagong Barrio.

leave. We have lived in other places, but we always end up here. We always go back to Bagong Barrio.

We return because, like, when we were in Pampanga, we had our own house, but we didn't have a source of income. It was in Pampanga that I experienced... You know when you go to the river and you try to find, "Here! Here's a piece of metal!" I was only seven. We were scrap collectors. My mother would do the laundry for others. Then, sometimes we children worked as load carriers at the market. We would carry melons and get a melon as payment. Whenever I think about that time now, I think that's such a hard thing to do—it's like when you're going to eat, you think I better eat a lot because there's a chance that I won't be able to eat the next time.

We came home to Bagong Barrio when I was 10 or 9 and we've never left since. My grandmother was able to get a big piece of land [when she first squatted here in the 1960s]. We're happy here. We are happy we live in Bagong Barrio. But there are times when we don't eat because we don't have anything.

I want to improve our situation. That's my first dream. I want to build us a house that's just for us because that place we have right now, /the rumour is that it/ will soon be demolished. I like imagining things. I would buy a house just for my family, a house this high, or with this color. Everything I imagine! I want my house to at least have four floors. I want it high. Then, on the first floor, we have a small store or a grocery. Anything as long as it's some sort of business to help my family. Here in Bagong Barrio. That's where I grew up. I don't want us to live in an executive village /in Manila/. I grew up like this; why would I want to go to a village? I still want to be /here/. My family is always included in the plan. I want their lives to be better when my life is better. I want us all to be successful together.

Do I want to go abroad? I used to. When I was about 15 years old, I wanted to be on an airplane. I wanted to work in a different country because I thought I would earn more. Now I want to go to places like those if I am doing better so I could just experience them. I want to go to Paris. I want to go the Eiffel Tower and take a selfie.

I want to live /here/ because it's where my *lola* [grandmother] grew up, grew old, and died. I really just want to stay here. If the president of /the National Housing Association/ dies, maybe they will forget /to/ demolish /our houses!/ /When they come to demolish/ I will protect our place. But can I do that? Can I go against them? I think the demolition team will lose. Other residents in Bagong Barrio have guns. When their houses get demolished, pak! People would drop dead in their camp. It's possible that everyone dies. They won't be able to demolish us completely.

While the first scene exemplifies survival, resilience, and resourcefulness, it also archives the repetition of precarity across generations, despite the "characters" doing everything an entrepreneurial subject can do: invest in education and the cultivation of self, work hard, manage resources carefully and strategically, take calculated risks and invest wisely in income-generating opportunities. It enriches the script that we took to the Philippines immeasurably because it references the largesse of countries that offer temporary work opportunities—the proverbial win-win-win situation for sending and receiving countries and migrant workers alike. This arrangement has been celebrated by prominent agencies such as the Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM 2005). The stark reality is that many smart, educated, articulate, diligent, hardworking, and resourceful migrants barely manage to survive and the costs of social reproduction are absorbed by families at home.

Tala, on the other hand, refuses to inhabit the "cruel optimism" (Berlant 2011) of the fantasy of upward mobility when she scoffs at the idea of living in an executive village. She refuses to access her rights to "migrant citizenship" (R. Rodriguez 2010) when she declines a future as a migrant worker. Her interest in traveling is touristic: she desires Paris as a site of a selfie

and not a job as a migrant. She wants to live in Bagong Barrio, which on the face of it seems an unlovable place, because this is where her lola grew up, grew old, and died and where she and her family have lived most of their lives, happy but for the lack of food. Her refusal to subject herself to the kind of self-lending that Tadiar sees in domestic workers might be another, albeit very different way of thinking about what falls away from standard accounts of migration, at least from the perspective of Canada or the United States, where it is presumed that these countries always already are the desired destinations for Filipinos. Dylan Rodriguez writes of the “arrested raciality” of Filipinos within the Philippines and the mass internalization of the dream of migration to the United States (2010). The peculiarity of US colonialism in the Philippines has rendered the United States, he argues, as “a site of redemptive and existential progress” (2010:186), and as an object of almost religious desire. The radicality of Tala’s words is that she eschews that dream, and simply wants to stay put. This might be one small but significant gesture towards displacing the global “structuring dominance of white life” (D. Rodriguez 2010:199).

The same testimony takes on different meanings in different contexts. In Canada, Tala’s words profoundly unsettle Canadian immigration policy insofar as the poverty of the Philippines is routinely called up to justify almost any degradation under the LCP, on the supposition that in comparison to the Philippines the possibility of migrating to Canada under any conditions is worth it. In the Philippines, they strike at the heart of the so-called “colonial mentality.” Tala’s testimony, in other words, challenges in different ways both ends of the global care chain. We archive Tala’s words with the hope of bringing different audiences close enough to feel their import.

Collaboration, and Repertoires of Learning and Un-Learning

The collaboration with the Philippine Women Centre of British Columbia began with participatory research and feminist antiracist scholarship. Collaborating with *Migrante* in the Philippines opened new questions about insidious and enduring patterns of colonialism and what shared commitment towards decolonial futures might mean. Without overstating our contributions to decolonial practice, it was through and within the messiness of our collaboration that we learned how performance can be a site of learning (and unlearning), negotiation, shared labor, and “the mindful surrender of agency” (Kester 2011:115).

Following Denise Ferreira da Silva’s (2007) distinction between the “transparent I” of the white European subject and the “affectable I” of the racialized mind/body subjected to laws of nature and the supposed superior force of Europeans, Dylan Rodriguez suggests that perhaps the most promising strategy is not to claim some kind of authentic radical possibility for the Filipino subject/body but to undo the presumption of the “social and philosophical coherence” of the transparent white subject and to displace its “presumed dominion over the lived meanings of race/place/body” (2010:199). In a small way this is perhaps part of the process in which we were engaged with Rommel Linatoc and *Migrante*. Addressing the issues of the Canadian Live-In Caregiver Program from within Bagong Barrio opened up new perspectives on it, but the LCP is only part of the world of migration endured by those from Bagong Barrio. We met families in which one daughter worked in the LCP, another as a “seafarer” physiotherapist on a cruise ship, another on a farm north of Manila. A child of the LCP cried at the play not only because his mother was in Canada but because the precarity of his lola had forced her to work as a domestic helper in Manila. Some aspects of the play for which we had little sympathy grabbed the attention of and moved audiences to tears. The confusion of genres was only confusing to us. We learned and unlearned what we thought we knew.

The script, we hope, continues on its travels in ways that we cannot control or know in advance. We use the power of the scholarly archive to put two new testimonials into the world, with hopes that they too can be destabilized and destabilizing through performance.

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