

***The Image of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) as Reflected in Philippine Children's Literature: A Contextual Analysis***

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The Asian Conference on Literature & Librarianship 2015  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

Every year millions of Filipinos opt to work abroad mainly for economic reasons. According to the Commission on Overseas Filipinos, approximately 10.5 million Filipinos worked or resided abroad in 2012. Stories about Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) are often in the news, which are sometimes good, but most of the time bad.

Many Filipinos are employed as educators, seafarers, medical professionals, production and technical staff, etc all over the world. Additionally, many domestic workers are sought after because Filipinos are known for caregiving and patience. The rising flow of OFWs is unavoidable because Filipinos need to survive, even if this would mean separation from their families (Quinto, ADB, 2004).

This paper aims to explore how the image of OFWs is depicted in Philippine children's literature. How many children's story books contain images or stories of an OFW? Were they properly and accurately depicted and documented? The authors will examine ten (10) children's story books published within the last five years and analyse the plight of OFW's in Philippine children's literature anchored on the theory that *Literature mirrors life*.

Keywords: OFW's, children's literature, Filipinos, Philippine children's literature

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## **Introduction**

One of the rewards of literature is the pleasure it gives the reader whether child or grown-up (Almario, 1994). People turn to literature for information, leisure reading, entertainment, or even to escape reality. Some may like what they read, while some may not. Being able to relate to literary characters is one of the great influences of literature. In general, literature will always be a part of life.

Literature is also seen as a reflection of our society (citation). By providing “mirror books”, Filipino children’s literature create venues for re-thinking present conceptions of childhood and family relations, which will help to understand the complexity of their present world (Gangi and Barowsky as cited in Torres-Yu, 2011).

The phenomenon of migration is not a new concept in Filipino children’s literature. Globalization has been transforming family structures and family relations, bringing fundamental changes to social and cultural worlds of Filipino children. This process invariably implicates mainstream Filipino children’s literature in ways that re-affirm, as well as challenge, traditional representations of family and childhood (Torres-Yu, 2011).

This study focuses on the image of the Overseas Filipino Workers in Filipino children’s literature, its implications and its sociological and cultural impact.

## **Background of the Study**

### *Children’s Literature in the Philippines*

Filipino children’s literature can historicize its roots from oral tradition. Except for the known “baybayin” – i.e. the oldest writing form of the prehistoric Filipinos, most folklores and tales were told orally. The ‘*caton*’ or ‘*cartilla*’, which instructed children how to write the Roman alphabet, was the only available children’s book during the Spanish colonization of the country. These, along with hymns and songs for the Virgin Mary, which were sung every *Flores de Mayo*, were the only available texts for children. The Americans, through the Thomasites, eventually brought in a lot of books to the country’s shores. These included classics such as Aesop’s fables, stories by Mark Twain and Louisa May Alcott. Most of these folklores, which were originally created for adults, were tailored to fit the reading needs of children (Alba, 2003).

The more significant of these stories were the ones published by Severino Reyes who used the pen name ‘Lola Basyang’. Reyes published his story for children in ‘Liwayway’ magazine on May 25, 1925, the first of about 400 stories retelling folktales (Alba, 2003).

Traditionally, children’s literature includes picture books, poems, short stories, plays or novels written for children. Films, comics, books, radio, television and computer multi-media software and their popularity with children have expanded this original definition (Paterno, 1996).

In the last decade, children's literature in the Philippines has become a big market. Many Filipino authors are being published now and there is now an awareness in patronizing locally produced books. Many Filipino adults today will remember how their childhood was spent with characters such as Pilandok, Tiktaktok at Pikpabom, Digong Dilaw, Ibong Adarna and Langgam at Tipaklong. All these were possible through the concentrated efforts of local publishing houses such as Adarna House, Cacho Publishing and Bookmark, and the organizations Philippine Board on Books for Young People (PBBY), Children's Literature Association of the Philippines, Inc. (CLAPI) and National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA).

#### *Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs)*

The OFWs have become a major force that has been sustaining the country's economy. No less than Senator Manuel A. Roxas in 2005 has admitted that OFWs "have kept us afloat over the last few years and are thus a central leg of our economy" (Carandang, 2007).

According to the study conducted by the Department for International Development (DFID) in 2007, they defined migration as an economic, social and political process that affects those who move, those who stay behind, and the places they go. And with the advent of globalization, labor migration has become a worldwide phenomenon. People are crossing borders to search for better job opportunities and to provide a better future for their families (Reyes, 2007).

Philippines is the major supplier of labor migrants to over 100 countries and the leading female migrant sending countries along with Indonesia coming from the region of Asia. Based on the "Stock Estimate of Overseas Filipinos" in 2005, more than 8 million (10%) out of the 85 million Filipinos were working or living in abroad. While over 72% of total migrants from the Philippines were women workers. Many of these women work as domestic helpers, nurses, caregivers, and entertainers.

The absent-mother seems to be the emerging common form as an increasing number of women continue to join the international labor market. According to Yinger, recent assessment shows that men no longer constitute the majority of international migrants. Hence, it is estimated that about 10 million children are growing up without a mother (Carandang and Lee-Chua as cited in Torres-Yu, 2011).

OFW children grieve, worry and fantasize about their parents coming home. In time, they become numb to the absence: they become like orphan. Young children cope by playing, while older ones strike up friendships and rationalize the departure of their parents. Meanwhile, OFW teenagers, particularly females, acquire the inclination to look elsewhere for parental care (Bautista, 2011).

Given these scenarios, there were many heart breaking circumstances that resulted from the migration of a parent/s to become an OFW such as: prone to crime, drug dependency, alcoholism and gender identity problems. Alarmingly, there were also reports on incest between fathers left behind and the older female children.

## OFWs in Filipino Children's Literature

This study will look into the image of the OFWs as depicted in Filipino children's literature. In the last decade, there is a great improvement in the publication of Filipino children's books. More and more Filipino authors have their written work published. Among these books, how are the OFWs being presented?

### Methodology

This study will use contextual analysis as a method to obtain results. This will include formal analysis, which will include a discussion of who made it including the author's background, what era it was written and its cultural significance, the format used, its social purpose and target audience, summary and relevant review.

The selected published books for the contextual analysis are the following: *Displaced* by Aneka Rodriguez; *Dear Nanay* by Zarah Gagatiga; *Lost at Sea* by Raechelle Castellon; *See, I'm holding Daddy's hand* by Edilberto Sulat Jr.; *Si Pepe at si Pilar* by Ed Maranan; *My father, the shape shifter* by Maria Cecilia Sevilla; *May higante sa aming bahay (There's a giant in our house)* by Rhandee Garlitos; *Ang mga kahon ni Kalon = Kalon's boxes* by Michael Coroza; *Mister World and his magical box* by Alelie Drew Ayroso; and *Uuwi na ang nanay kong si Darna* by Edgar Samar.

### Discussion & Findings

The following tables summarizes the image of the OFWs in the ten selected Philippine children's literature:

Tables 1-6 : Summary of contextual analysis

Title of the book	Author / Background of author	What era was it written? Cultural meaning and significance	Format	Target audience	Social purpose Image of the OFW
1. Displaced	Aneka Rodriguez is a future lawyer who once worked for Adarna House as its senior writer and researcher. She has a degree in Broadcast Communications from the University of the Philippines where she also took up <u>masteral</u> studies in literature. Displaced, a novel for young adults written in verse, is her first book. (book ( <a href="http://adarna.com.ph/authors/aneka-rodriguez/">http://adarna.com.ph/authors/aneka-rodriguez/</a> ))	2009: The Survey on Overseas Filipinos (SOF) conducted in October 2009 recorded a total of 1.9 million Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in the country during the period April to September 2009. Of this total, 47.2 percent or approximately 900 thousand were women.  Source: <a href="http://web0.psa.gov.ph/content/close-half-ofws-are-females-results-2009-survey-overseas-filipinos">http://web0.psa.gov.ph/content/close-half-ofws-are-females-results-2009-survey-overseas-filipinos</a>	Verse; 152 pages; some illustration	Teenagers growing up with <i>mothers</i> working abroad	The OFW is a single mom. She has to work abroad to support her child whom she left with her mother (child's grandmother).  Global Parenting, wherein parenting becomes a long distance love affair synchronized with the fast paced development of technology (Reyes, 2007).  Image: Global parent
2. Dear <u>nanay</u>	Zarah C. Gagatiga is a teacher-librarian, storyteller, blogger and children's books author. She was inspired to write this book during her trip back from a conference abroad where she was seated next to a woman who is an OFW. This book also made her recall about the two years that his dad spent working as an OFW.	2013: The number of overseas Filipino workers (OFW) being deployed to other countries has been constantly increasing for the past 3 decades. Singapore is one of the top five (5) destinations for OFWs. About 10.2% out of 70% of OFWs work in Singapore.  Source: <a href="http://www.rappler.com/nation/32361-ph-migration-report-ofws">http://www.rappler.com/nation/32361-ph-migration-report-ofws</a>	Short storybook, 32 pages, colored & illustrated	School-aged children with <i>mothers</i> working abroad	The OFW is a mother who works in Singapore. Leaves home to provide for her husband and 3 children's studies and daily needs.  Philippines is a patriarchal society but today more and more women / mothers leave home to work abroad.  Image: Sacrificing and loving mother; man of the house

3. Lost at sea	<p><b>Raechelle</b> Castellon is a freelance writer. She lives in Quezon City with her five-year-old daughter Eleanor <b>Iskra</b>. "Lost At Sea is a story that is a product of something bigger than me," she says. She is not a daughter of a seafarer or overseas Filipino worker (OFW), but she has friends who are. She saw how many of them grew up feeling resentful and estranged from their absentee parent who, they later realize, were working not only for them but for their extended family as well. Can that story be told to young children? <b>Raechelle</b> does, in <i>Lost At Sea</i>.</p>	<p>2010-2013: According to Philippine Maritime Industry Facts, the Philippines is the world's main supplier of seamen since 1987 and is the manning capital of the world. The ratio is 1 out of 5 seamen in the world is a Filipino. In 2013, the number of Filipino seafarers in the world is approximately 460,000 in comparison to the 250,000 figure in 1996, about 21% from the total number of OFWs in 2013.</p>	<p>Children's storybook with colored illustrations; 24 pages</p>	<p>For all <b>seafarer's children</b> around the world</p>	<p>The OFW is a father who works as a seaman or seafarer. It turned out that he provides not only for their family but also to their relatives.</p> <p>Image: Generous, Good provider and family supporter to relatives</p>
4. See, I'm holding daddy's hand	<p><b>Edilberto B. Sulat Jr.</b> is the University Relations Officer of the University of the East. He is the Editor-in-Chief of <i>UE Today</i>, the official publication of UE's management. He has contributed album reviews to <i>Jingle chordbook</i> magazine and written entertainment- and lifestyle-oriented material</p>	<p>2010-2013: According to Philippine Maritime Industry Facts, the Philippines is the world's main supplier of seamen since 1987 and is the manning capital of the world. The ratio is 1 out of 5 seamen in the world is a Filipino. In 2013, the number of Filipino seafarers in the world is approximately 460,000 in comparison to the 250,000 figure in 1996, about</p>	<p>Children's storybook with colored illustrations; 24 pages</p>	<p>For all <b>seafarer's children</b> around the world</p>	<p>The OFW is a father who works as a seaman to support their family.</p> <p>Image: Good provider / strong dad</p>

	<p>for various magazines, two TV shows and several newspapers, including the <i>Philippine Daily Inquirer</i>. He has been married for eight years and has a six-year-old daughter. He lives in Quezon City, Philippines.</p>	<p>21% from the total number of OFWs in 2013.</p>			
5. Si <b>Pepe</b> at si <b>Pilar</b>	<p><b>Ed Maranan</b> is a poet, essayist, fictionist, playwright, writer of children's stories, and translator. <b>Maranan</b> has won a total of 30 Carlos <b>Palanca</b> literary prizes for his works in English and Filipino, and was inducted into the Carlos <b>Palanca</b> Memorial Awards for Literature Hall of Fame in 2000.</p>	<p>2010: Domestic work is one of the most important sources of employment for Philippine women both in the country and abroad. About one-quarter of Philippine workers deployed overseas every year enter domestic service. Concern for their safety and protection from abuse is particularly strong in the Philippines in the aftermath of the execution of <b>Elor Contemplacion</b>, a Philippine domestic worker in Singapore in 1995 (ILO report).</p> <p>Source:  <a href="http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/@ilo-manila/documents/publication/wcms_124895.pdf">http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/@ilo-manila/documents/publication/wcms_124895.pdf</a></p>	<p>Children's storybook, colored illustrations; 22 pages</p> <p>Language: Filipino</p>	<p>For all OFWs and their families</p>	<p>The OFW is a mother who forced to work abroad to support the medicine of his ill husband and the schooling of her children.</p> <p>Image: Man of the house; sacrificing and loving mother; died a hero</p>

<p>6. My father, the shape shifter</p>	<p>Maria Cecilia <u>Sevilla</u> dedicates this story to her father, who has been a shape shifter when he worked in China for five years</p>	<p>2011-2013: The large number of Filipinos overseas has made the Philippines one of the most tech-savvy countries in Asia, with a significant part of the population using different technology tools to keep in touch with family members abroad.</p> <p>"The findings show that technology has become an intrinsic part of our daily lives. Filipinos are big believers that technology helps us to communicate better, and it is obvious from the rate of adoption that everyone from young kids to grandparents is finding technology easier to use," said Mae Moreno, Microsoft Philippines Windows Client product manager.</p> <p>Read more:  <a href="http://technology.inquirer.net/6155/ofs-make-philippines-asia%e2%80%99s-most-hi-tech#ixzz3VdK9PtC3">http://technology.inquirer.net/6155/ofs-make-philippines-asia%e2%80%99s-most-hi-tech#ixzz3VdK9PtC3</a>  Follow us: @<a href="#">inquirerdotnet</a> on Twitter   <a href="#">inquirerdotnet</a> on Facebook</p>	<p>Short storybook, 32 pages, <u>colored &amp; illustrated</u>; bilingual (English &amp; Filipino)</p>	<p>Young children, who despite the distance from their OFW parents, can still keep in touch through the aid of technology</p>	<p>OFW fathers, despite working abroad, are still significant and familiar to their young children because of constant communication through the help of technology i.e. <u>videochat</u>, <u>facetime</u>, cell phones and other gadgets.</p>
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<p>7. May <u>higante sa aming bahay</u> (There's a giant in our house)</p>	<p>Rhandee Garlitos wanted a story that glorifies and demystifies the Filipino father. In a society where the Filipino mother is always put in a positive light and the Filipino father relegated at the background, <u>he</u> decided to write a story that could possibly break ground on the way the Filipino child considers an important figure in the family.</p>	<p>2009: Female OFW skilled workers were given much consideration and so much exposure during this year. Almost half of the total 1.9 million were female while the other half were men, who are both single and married.</p>	<p>Short storybook, 32 pages, <u>colored &amp; illustrated</u>; bilingual (English &amp; Filipino)</p>	<p>Young children who are not familiar with their OFW fathers</p>	<p>OFW fathers working abroad: their children, especially the younger ones, not being able to relate and be familiar with them.</p>
<p>8. <u>Ang mga kahon ni Kalon = Kalon's boxes</u></p>	<p>As a well-known poet, Michael <u>Coroza</u> wanted to get out of his box and wrote this short story for Filipino children. He dedicated this story to OFW families.</p>	<p>2009: Due to lack of legal assistance and support from the Philippine government and slow repatriation efforts especially in the Middle East-North Africa (MENA), many OFWs either die abroad because of illness, abuse of employers, or become victims of war and calamities, etc.</p>	<p>Short storybook, 32 pages, <u>colored &amp; illustrated</u>; bilingual (English &amp; Filipino)</p>	<p>Young children with OFW parent/s; Wives/husbands of OFWs</p>	<p>OFW fathers and/or mothers, who are willing to sacrifice even their lives just to help alleviate the financial burdens of their families and loved ones</p>
<p>9. Mister World and his magical box</p>	<p><u>Alelie Drew Ayroso</u> was inspired to write this book when her husband was abducted by suspected state security forces in 2002, which pushed her to become a member of the Families of the Disappeared for Justice (<u>Deseparacidos</u>)</p>	<p>2012: Due to lack of legal assistance and support from the Philippine government and slow repatriation efforts especially in the Middle East-North Africa (MENA), many OFWs either die abroad because of illness, abuse of employers, or become victims of war and calamities, etc.</p>	<p>Short storybook, 32 pages, <u>colored &amp; illustrated</u>; bilingual (English &amp; Filipino)</p>	<p>Young children and families of OFWs</p>	<p>OFW fathers, who having been working abroad, try to send as much love as they can back home through the images of materials things; despite the odds and dangers of not being able to go back home alive.</p>

10. <a href="#">Uuwi nang nanay kong si Darna</a>	Edgar Samar wrote this book back in his Senior Year in college. Inspired by Filipino Domestic Helpers (DH), who leave the comforts of home and face the barriers in language and culture for the sake of the family's well-being. Driven by circumstances, these DH make decisions for the benefit of their loved ones and those they care for. Working abroad and being a DH at that is not something to be ashamed of.	2002: Domestic work is both an integral and invisible part of Filipino society. The practice of employing domestic help is historically embedded in Filipino culture and continues to be part of everyday life. Related traditions, such as migrating in search of employment and the boarding of less well-off relatives in exchange for household help, likewise are socially accepted and widespread in occurrence. The presence and affordability of domestic help allows women in middle and upper-income classes to leave their household duties and enter the work force, thereby contributing to the economic growth of the country. Source: <a href="http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/@ilo-manila/documents/publication/wcms_124895.pdf">http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/@ilo-manila/documents/publication/wcms_124895.pdf</a>	Short storybook, 29 pages, colored & illustrated	Families of OFW domestic helpers	OFW mothers showing strength and courage despite being far away from their families.
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### ***Displaced by Aneka Rodriguez***

#### **Discussion:**

Displaced as a title is very apt for this story whose main character is a teenager. She is already 12 when her mother left, but as time passes by her memory of her nanay is fading away. As a teenager, she is at critical stage where a mother's physical presence is very important. This is the puberty stage where she feels awkward about herself and she is starting to have crush at school. She is also living at the technology-rich environment and has access to most social media applications and websites such as yahoo messenger and Facebook.

Elay, the daughter in the story narrates how her mother has a big dream for her so she has to work abroad to realize that for her. Her mother will always sends her text messages and email to check on her and her grandmother whom was entrusted to live with her. Her father on the other hand seemed out of the picture as he was apparently also works abroad before but never came back.

The coming home of Elay's mother has been awkward time for both of them because they've been used to communicating from a far. There was a parental authority issue between them and they started to have little fights and power struggle at home. The global parent is already at home imposing authority in person. In this novel, it clearly depicts how family relationship has been disrupted because of the movement of Filipinos outside the Philippines. What is lacking in this novel at the end was that, there was no evidence of closure or reconciliation between the mother and daughter.

### ***Dear nanay (Mahal kong nanay) by Zarah Gagatiga; illustrated by Liza Flores***

#### **Discussion:**

This is a very simple yet very heart-warming story which was narrated by a child who misses her mother who has to work abroad. She was made to understand the reasons why her mother has to work away. The child can't compare all the gifts and material things that they get to the longing with the presence of their mother at home. The separation of children and mother is a sad reality with the OFW families.

Mothers have an integral role in child rearing and when she has to leave home to work abroad, the children who were left behind have a hard time adjusting and coping. In this story, the responsibility of child rearing is befall on the father's shoulder. In Dear Nanay, the father explained to his children that they should not be sad because their mother is working hard so they could have better things in life. Nanay sacrifices for the betterment of their family. In the context of the Filipino society, it's the father who should work for the family. But today, more and more women / mothers work abroad. There is now a reversal of role in the family. What's good in this story is that the children were understanding and they always keep writing to their mother to express how much they love and miss their mother.

***Lost at sea by Raechelle Castellon; Illustrated by Maria Bernadette Solina-Wolf***

Discussion:

Many children are growing up with absentee fathers because they have to work overseas. More often, the mother who was left behind also acts as the father. This is the common scenario in the OFWs families. The father is absent in the growing up years of their child and his presence is felt virtually through the advent of communications using technology. In this story, technology-based communications was not used, instead, it was through pictures and audio tapes. That was the way of communication in the family where the child grew up only hearing his dad's voice. Hence, she barely knew her dad because he only came home occasionally, until the day he finally came home because he suffered stroke. Steady communication is important to hold the family together while one member is sacrificing for the family. Shared photos and audio tapes clearly shows strength in communication even though the words "I miss you" and "I love you" are best heard in person. OFWs families has rely to different modes of communication just to keep up with the happenings and daily occurrences at home that they have missed witnessing and experiencing personally.

A child growing up without a clear memory of his father is also a typical scenario. Coming from the perspective of a young girl, this is very sad. But it was reconciled at the end when the seaman father came home after suffering from a stroke. They had a chance to re-acquaint and bond with each other.

On the part of child-rearing, the shared responsibility becomes one-sided because the other parent is away. The full burden befall on the mother's shoulder. All the troubles, problems and decision making in the family were implemented by the mother and is shared via the long distance relationship.

Another important insight in this book was the part where the coming home of the father which was happily celebrated not only by the immediate family but also their relatives. Whenever an OFW is coming home, it is always a festive occasion as evident in the story. Apparently, the father also gave financial support to the extended family (relatives) as was revealed at the last part of the story. Supporting your extended family or relatives is a family custom and tradition that up to this day still holds true. Within the family, those who have means and capable of financial help always give help.

***See, I'm holding daddy's hand by Edilberto B. Sulat Jr.; Illustrated by Palma Tayona***

Discussion:

This is another story of a seaman father who works away in a ship to support his family. The story was narrated by the young boy who misses his dad so much. He was able to cope by imagining his father's hand always holding him no matter what happened. The young boy understands that his father's job as a seaman is not bad even though he is far away from the family. In this story, the father told his son that his working away help keep his son and mommy's tummy filled; all the utilities paid; that he has allowance every time he go to school and to even make sure that he is at school. All these are economical in nature and is again typical of why there is an OFW in the family.

This is similar with the first seaman story where the mother and son were left behind and all the responsibility is left with the mother. Again, the son is growing up with an absentee father and the father misses out on a lot of things that is happening with the son. The father's image here is a father who is very strong and one who loves his family so much.

***Si Pepe at si Pilar by Ed Maranan; guhit ni (illustrated by) Marlon Perez***

Discussion:

This story was written in rich Filipino language and depicts the simple life of Filipinos who live in the province. The main character are two children who were friends and neighbors. They attend the same school and they are both honor students in class. They share with each other their life's dream when they grow up. Their parents are friends and also share the work in the field and whatever jobs they can find to meet both ends.

When Pilar's father got ill, her mother started doing jobs in the city three times a week until she accepted to work abroad as a domestic helper in Canada. Pilar was so sad and did not like her mother to leave them. But someone has to work to support the medicine needs and matriculation of her and her siblings. When Pilar's mother started working abroad, Pilar's grades in school dwindle. Before she was an outstanding student, but when her mother left, she studies suffered. She also has to assume all the mother's work at home. In this story, the responsibility of child-rearing and domesticity at home befell with Pilar. For a child like her, that is too much to have even if she has an aunt to help out in the family. Pilar was forced to grow up into maturity because she has assumed bigger role at home when her mother left.

It was also clearly depicted in the story the improvement in the life of Pilar and their family. Now, they have a television when before only the barangay captain have in their place. Again these are material things that can never buy back the time of Pilar's mother away from the family. But this is a sacrifice a mother has to do for the sake of her family.

This story has a very depressing ending. Pilar's mother died while working overseas and her death was not resolved in the story. This is the other side of the plight of the OFWs in search of greener pasture. Many of them became a victim of torture,

physical abuse and death leaving their family in grief and in search for justice. In the end, Pilar told herself that when she became a teacher someday, she will not leave her hometown but will stay her as a teacher.

***May Higante sa aming Bahay = There is a giant in our house by Rhandee Garlitos; illustrated by Ferdinand Guevarra III, published in 2009***

Discussion:

This is a story told from the point of view of a very young boy, Matt Matt, who was surprised seeing a very big man inside their house one day. Turned out, that big man, whom his mother, older brother and sister happily received and welcomed to their home was his father, working abroad as an OFW. It was not explained how his mother was able to explain to him the absence of his father while the father was away working abroad.

In general, OFW fathers and/or parents have hard times and feelings when they get back home and their children are not familiar with them. Children in turn, are in need of role models, who may be the adults in their home. Sometimes, children even feel neglected and resentful towards their absent parent. Given these circumstances, most of the time, only one of the parents, or worse, none serve as role models for their children. Sometimes, the grandparents or other relatives take charge of the care for the children.

***My father, the shape shifter = Ang tatay kong nagpapalit-palit ng hugis written by Maria Cecilia Sevilla and illustrated by Jomike Tejido, published in 2013***

Discussion:

The large number of Filipinos overseas has made the Philippines one of the most tech-savvy countries in Asia, with a significant part of the population using different technology tools to keep in touch with family members abroad.

“The findings show that technology has become an intrinsic part of our daily lives. Filipinos are big believers that technology helps us to communicate better, and it is obvious from the rate of adoption that everyone from young kids to grandparents is finding technology easier to use,” said Mae Moreno, Microsoft Philippines Windows Client product manager.

In this story, despite being away from home, through the help of technology, Luis’ father becomes a cell phone, a computer or even a toy car. Despite the distance, they can still keep in touch with each other. As time goes by, it is inevitable that the boy would miss his father but with the aid of modern technology, his father is either just a call or chat away. Although the boy also sometimes feels loneliness because of the absence of his father but this is being compensated with hours of talking and chatting through cell phones and the internet. This is one of the happier stories about OFWs.

***Uuwi na ang nanay kong si Darna written by Edgar Samar and illustrated by Russell Molina, published in 2002***

Discussion:

One of the sad realities is that Filipinos or Filipinas for this matter, are often typecasted as Domestic Helpers (DH). It is true that there are many DH employed around the world but is also a fact that there are also Filipinas who work as engineers, doctors, nurses, teachers, etc. abroad.

In this story, the nanay (mother) is being compared to Darna, a Filipina heroine known for her courage and being kind-hearted. She is working as a DH abroad to help sustain the studies of her son and for the family to be able to have a decent life. Working because of economic reasons and although she does not have any super powers, she can make everything clean in one sweep, shiny in one swipe, and turn any grimes into dimes, all the while singing her favourite songs. Throughout the story, it is depicted how the mother works hard despite being away from the comforts of home and facing the barriers in language and culture for the sake of the family's well-being. She always makes decisions for the benefit of her loved ones, not just her immediate family but with her other relatives as well.

Told from the point of view the son, the reader can automatically see how much he misses his mother. Despite her absence, the father is always there to show him love and affection, and try to explain to him why his mother has to go away to a faraway land. Sometimes the mother would send stuff and material things to compensate for her absence but the son always looks forward as to when her mother would come home.

The time the mother came home is such a happy experience for the whole family, especially for the son. No material things can ever replace his mother's place in his heart.

***Mga kahon ni Kalon = Kalon's many boxes written by Michael Coroza and illustrated by Gigi Lapid, published in 2010***

Discussion:

Told from a third person's point of view, this story is one of the sadder and harder points of being an OFW. Many Filipinos venture and risk going abroad despite the odds of having abusive employers, contractualization and non-regularization, accidents and calamities abroad or while on board a ship, illnesses and plagues, just to compensate for their and their families economic needs.

This story of Kalon, who grew up in a very poor community, is one hard pill to swallow. Poverty and hunger is rampant in the cities of Metro Manila. People tend to flock there to look for stable jobs that may sustain their living. Sadly, not everyone is given the opportunity of having a good income-earning job and many settle for daily wages, which are below the necessary amount for their family's daily needs. Many opt to try their luck and apply as blue-collar or skilled workers abroad.

Out of luck and hard work, Kalon's father was one of the few, who was able to go abroad and work there. As he earned money in Dubai, he kept sending Balikbayan

(homecoming) boxes, which contain different merchandise and stuff, to his family including Kalon that can help them. Despite the many boxes, which really help a lot in the living of Kalon's family, he knows that this will not compensate for the absence of his father. Until one fateful day, the box that came home did not contain merchandise anymore, instead the body of his deceased father.

This story just shows how much Filipinos are willing to sacrifice their lives just to earn a decent living for their families. Sadly though, the Philippine government lacks legal assistance and repatriation efforts are very slow especially in the Middle East-North Africa (MENA), causing many OFWs to die abroad either because of illness, abuse of employers, or as victims of war and calamities, etc.

***Mister World and his magical boxes = Si Ginoong Mundo at ang kanyang mahiwagang kahon by Alelie Drew Ayroso; illustrated by Frances Alcaraz, published in 2013***

Discussion:

This story has a lot of similarities with Kalon's many boxes. The only and big difference is that the father is employed as an engineer and not a blue collar worker. Thus, his work brings him to the different corners of the world thereby sending his family balikbayan (homecoming) boxes containing different souvenirs and famous items from the particular places he has visited. The father is also well-equipped with different languages because of his exposure to different cultures, which he in turn, teaches to his children. He also sends them different currencies and foods from the places he's been to. The father is a hardworker and he does this to send his children to good schools. He provides for the needs of his immediate family.

The family's mean of communication is through cell phones and letters. The father would often send letters with different languages in it enveloped in his love together with his magical box. Although one day, a different letter arrived at the family's doorstep. It contained the sad news that the father was abducted by pirates while on board a ship. Distraught, the family missed the father so much. Eventually, more letters arrived containing how great the father was. A balikbayan containing many items also came coming from the father's many friends around the world.

The absence of a father and/or a mother, who works as an OFW is already a big challenge for a household. But the bigger challenge is how families of OFWs face uncertainties and insecurities that any time, those family members may be taken away from them through the natural course of death. It is also a big challenge to explain it especially to children of very young age. OFWs sacrifice a lot including their lives for the convenience and comforts of their families back home.

## **Conclusion**

Among the ten selected stories, here is how OFWs are depicted in Philippine children's literature:

1. Working abroad equals better life – The main reason of working abroad is to provide a better life for the family left behind. All sacrifices of working abroad compensate for the better life of the family in the Philippines.
2. Extended family support – Filipino tradition includes helping not only the immediate family but also the relatives of the OFWs. Because OFWs are perceived to have more capacity to help financially, relatives come to them to ask for help.
3. Heroism (family and nation) – OFWs are hailed as modern day heroes because of the remittances that they send back home which also boost the economic conditions of the country.
4. 'Balikbayanbox'- This is also very traditional Filipino customs to send presents or gifts in the form of balikbayan boxes. OFWs always bring home something for everyone whenever they come home. This is evident in some of the books selected for this study.
5. Global parenting – OFWs are global parent because even though they are working away from home and from the family, they still communicate with their children through various technology available to them. Even if they are away, that does not stop them from being a parent/s to their child/ren.
6. Material things cannot replace physical presence – As mentioned earlier, OFWs aim for a better life that is why they opted to work abroad. They send money and gifts to compensate their absence but these material things cannot replace their physical presence. Warm hugs, kisses and being around is still needed by their loved ones.
7. Domestic violence – There are OFWs who leave home to work abroad to escape domestic violence in their own home. Sadly, there are OFWs who also suffer violence in the hands of their employer.
8. Lack of government support legally – There were two stories where the OFWs came home dead. It took a while before the bodies were able to transport back home. In this case, lack of government support in legal terms is lacking. Also, there are countries where Philippine embassy does not exist.
9. Great sacrifice – OFWs stay employed abroad despite abusive employers, tenureship, illness, calamities and accidents, and death because back home in the Philippines there is uncertainty for a better job. It is better to work abroad than be in the country jobless.

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