

## *The Trope of Ibayong Dagat in the Narratives of the Filipino Diasporic*

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### **Abstract**

The study involves a qualitative analysis and interpretation of the narratives of the Filipino diasporic who may be Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), returnee OFWs, and migrant Filipino workers who have converted to permanent residency and/or on to citizenship of the receiving countries. The narratives mostly come from the Philippine radio program “Serbisyong OFW” which airs from Monday to Friday on Philippine radio station 702 DZAS. The program feature on OFWs comes in, however, during the Wednesday and Friday schedule of the same program. The rest of the narratives come from off-radio stories shared with this researcher. For this study, 40 of such narratives aired between January to May 2017 and 5 off-radio stories were considered for inclusion. Of the 45 narratives, only 15 were selected for analysis given the objectives of the inquiry. The study is part of a growing discourse on Filipino migrant workers who are located in the Middle East, Asia, Europe, in the United States of America, in New Zealand, and in Australia. The study focuses on the chronotopic function of *ibayong dagat*, at once a real and an imaginary space whose temporal reality has grown dense with stories that have accumulated through time, thus inviting some organizing principle or, at least, a collective nomenclature. It highlights the recurrent themes unique to the narrators’ space-time realities – themes of struggle, adaptation, accomplishment, fragmentation, including negotiated tension and sadness that resonate in the narrative lacuna. Informed of cultural-specific nuances, the study has polysemic potentials for further research.

Keywords: *Ibayong dagat*, chronotope, Overseas Filipino Workers, trope

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## Introduction

The Philippines witnessed a massive international labor migration in the 1980s when labor export became a major thrust to sustain and improve the country's Gross National Product. This was the time when Filipino migrant workers were hailed as "bagong bayani" (literally, the new heroes), an appellation often read as a gesture of national co-optation in labor export (Aguilar, 2000, p. 172). The stock estimates from the Commission on Overseas Filipinos (2015) placed the number of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) at 10.5 million in 2012 (cited in Aguila, 2015).

As early as 1860s – 1890s though, there had been an out-migration of Filipino workers. In the absence of a nation (Philippines then was a colony of Spain), the Filipino migrant workers were collectively known as "Manilla men" or, alternatively but rarely, "Philippine islanders". They worked in the Straits settlements (i.e., Singapore, Penang, Malacca) and in the waters of Australia. Along with other nationals, the Manilla men were shipped to Australia to work as divers for the thriving pearl-shell industry in Port Darwin and Northern Territory (Aguilar, 2000, p.177).

The narratives of OFWs' forays into faraway lands and waters are characterized by thematic polarities tending toward either a fairytale 'success' or a tragic 'failure'. The high watermark of OFW narratives might be the story of the Manilla men who were accorded with high regard by their Australian employers for their skill in pearl diving, adaptability to a multicultural setting, cautious industry, and English abilities. They carved an impression of consistent honesty as well. While other divers pocketed part of their pearl finds, the Manilla men turned in all the pearls that they had gathered (Dashwood Report of 1902, p. 55, cited in Aguilar, 2000, p. 27), setting them apart from fellow divers.

OFW narratives slid to an unimagined low, on the other hand, in the execution in 1995 of Flor Contemplacion, a Filipino domestic helper in Singapore. The Contemplacion story jolted the Filipino awareness out of its dream-like acceptance of the OFW phenomenon on to a stark realization of the travail and dangers of labor migration

The study sought to find alternative narratives, the in-betweens in said thematic polarities and the elements of the OFWs' nuanced 'success' and/or 'failure'. Moreover, the study inquired into the trope of *ibayong dagat*, a visual image with rich potentials in ideational and emotional signification. Specifically, the study worked on the following objectives: to articulate the meanings invested in *ibayong dagat* in the context of the shared narratives of OFWs; to establish the themes of such narratives; and to identify the narrative lacuna in the stories and its implication.

### **Ibayong Dagat: From Trope to Chronotope**

In the Philippine radio program "Serbisyong OFW," the expression *ibayong dagat* is dished out in plenitude such that it becomes a pat expression. Any discourse on Filipino migrant workers inevitably leads to *ibayong dagat*. Literally, the expression means the faraway seas. Its deployment, however, implies an absent-present reference to the lands that lie beyond those waters. Such lands pertain to the receiving countries of OFWs.

The Philippines is an archipelago more or less composed of 7,100 islands. Thus, it is no wonder that its inherently metaphorical language finds much inspiration in expressions that refer to the waters that circumscribe its islands, such as *ibayong dagat*. Collocationally used with the term OFW, *ibayong dagat* achieves a semantic density in relation to the narratives shared by Filipino migrant workers through “Serbisyong OFW”. The term *ibayong dagat* is used as an organizing trope or an oft-deployed image which, in the study, is inscribed anew in its inquiry into the OFW narratives, their unfolding in a specific time and locale, and the possibilities of meaning that such implies. In this context of surplus meaning, the trope of *ibayong dagat* becomes a chronotope.

In the context of the study, *ibayong dagat* is a conceptual locus that holds a trace or traces of time that define it and historicize it (Folch-Serra, 1990, p.266). *Ibayong dagat* is at once a real and an imaginary space where time is made visible in the sojourns of the Manilla men to the Settlement Straits and the waters of Australia, the Ilocanos to Hawaii plantations, the construction workers to Saudi Arabia, the domestic service providers to Hong Kong and Singapore, and the health workers and professionals to all parts of the world. Likewise, *ibayong dagat* is a storied site of thematic polarities and everyday realities in the lives of the OFWs translatable into a discursive space of which the discussion that follows is a tributary.

## **Discussion**

The narratives were organized according to the following themes: the precarious life of the undocumented, identity construction as a site of tension, Filipinanness and patriarchy, the imperative of cross-cultural proficiency, and the narrative lacuna in the stories of the OFWs. The analysis focused on the unique experience articulated in the shared narratives of Filipino migrant workers (whose true names were withheld for privacy) in their space-time contexts. The analysis was also attentive to the concept of text as a cultural artifact.

The researcher based the analysis on the transcription of the 15 narratives, recorded at the time of airing in MP3 format, in the light of relevant literature and studies.

Narrators	Countries of Work	Highlighted Experience
<u>Lina</u>	Italy	Entered the country through the <i>baklas</i> system; now a legitimate OFW
Remy	Lebanon, Iraq, and Germany	Worked as a housekeeper for a German consul, later on, her lover; helped Filipinos to a safe passage to Jordan
Marie	Cambodia and Thailand	Entered Cambodia through missionary work; presently a teacher in three public schools in Thailand
Hope	Dubai and Lebanon	Entered Dubai through office work; married and separated from a Lebanese when he took another wife
<u>Maningning</u>	Qatar	Wrestled with patriarchy
Gabby	Cruise Ship	Found brothers among fellow seafarers
Leo	Cruise Ship	Spoke his mind; thereafter, felt life aboard a ship more tolerable
<u>Oteng</u>	Cruise Ship	Lived by the virtue of <i>pakikisama</i> , or the skill of getting along with others
<u>Minda</u>	Japan	Integrated well in Japanese culture
<u>Roel</u>	Australia	Got somewhere with happenstance ability
Nestor	USA	Pointed to cultural adaptability as the key to integration
Millie	Hong Kong	Built her parents' dream stone house
<u>Manseha</u>	New Zealand	Experienced equality, respect, and fair go in New Zealand
Lila	New Zealand	Owened her friend's story; decided against OFW life
Dina	Singapore	Paid the cost that OFWs pay – estrangement from family

Table 1: Profile of the OFW Narrators

### The Precarious Life of the Undocumented

Lina entered Italy surreptitiously through a recruitment agency who sent workers to Italy by means of the *baklas* system. She paid the agency P 300,000 according to the prevailing rate in 2001. The agency gave Lina a legal passport; however, the picture and the personal details of the true owner were replaced with those of her own. When she reached Milan, Lina immediately destroyed and disposed of her fake passport and reported to the embassy the incident of the “lost” passport. Since work opportunities along housekeeping and maintenance abound especially for female workers in Milan, Lina did not have a hard time finding a job. What should have been a taste of success became a nightmarish existence though. The underground nature of Lina’s employment restricted her movement and, when outside of her workplace or residence, she would scour with her eyes the streets for any sign of the presence of a law enforcer who might pick her up for interrogation and, worse, imprisonment. Two years later, when the government announced an amnesty, Lina availed of this mass pardon through the help of her employer. The latter provided the needed documentation to legitimize Lina’s employment. In 2003, Lina was a free person, liberated from any burden of the guilt, the fear, or the shame that haunts the undocumented.

In formal language register, a prominent Philippine banking system uses the tagline *We find ways*. Finding ways in Philippine popular culture, however, is altogether different. In Filipino street language, the expression *para-paraan* (street smartness) is not the same as *paraan* (formal expression for ways or means to accomplish something). *Baklas* falls under *para-paraan*. Despite its shady nature, *para-paraan* is resorted to in order to cut the waiting time for documentation processing, or as a matter of derring-do for the sake of family economics. In OFW discourse, family welfare consistently appears as the primary motivation in the Filipino migrant

workers' desire to leave the country and try their fortune in *ibayong dagat* (Asis, 2002, p. 74).

### **Narrative Identity as a Site of Tension**

Remy landed in Beirut to find a suitable job. She won Miss Elegance in a local pageant and was noticed by a German consul who offered her to work as a housekeeper in his villa. The consul was thereafter posted in the war-torn Iraq still under the presidency of Saddam Hussein at the time. Remy recalled witnessing buildings razed to the ground because of left and right bomb explosions. When it was no longer possible to live in safety in Iraq, the German consul was recalled for posting in Romania. Remy, however, begged off to stay awhile in the German consul's villa while the consul flew back to his homeland before proceeding to his next post.

Remy found an opportunity to help Filipinos caught in the war to a safe passage to Jordan for their return to the Philippines. With the permission of her employer who was already in Germany at the time, she provided clothing to these transient Filipinos and temporary shelter in the villa once occupied by the German consul. Having established connections with the local Philippine embassy staff, Remy helped arrange for the transport of Filipinos who left by the busloads everyday of her weeklong extended stay in Iraq. At the behest of the German consul, Remy finally flew to Germany, to the home of her employer and the latter's aged parents.

In the course of her narration, Remy expressed her desire to find a place of anchorage. She explained that she had had enough of a life that was always on the go. In Germany, Remy sensed that she had an option. The parents of the German consul wanted her to be their caregiver. Because this development, there was a slight misunderstanding between the consul and his parents. In the end, the consul conceded to his parents' request and flew to Romania alone. In a long while, the consul's father died. Remy met a German suitor who married her and gave her a normative life. The consul called her up and congratulated her, but miserably broke down during their telephone conversation. Remy confessed that they had become lovers in Iraq.

In Remy's narrative two voices emerged. One was that of an altruistic Remy who saw her countrymen to a safe passage from the war-torn Iraq to Jordan on their return to the Philippines and who chose to be a caregiver to the aged and the sick rather than to continue the role of housekeeper-companion to her German employer. The second voice was that of the calculating Remy who, in a quandary, tarried in Iraq and faced a difficult choice in Germany but decided, nonetheless, to a slow but sure way out of an unwanted relationship. These voices are not irreconcilable; rather, they emanate from the same dialogical self and its desire to reconcile such voices to produce an integrated self, or one with a purpose more or less congruent to social norms and expectations (McAdams, 2008, p. 242).

In essence, the narrative of Marie who entered Cambodia in 2013 as a Christian missionary teacher was not a far cry from Remy's as regards the tensile relationship between conflicting selves. In Cambodia, Marie became sick with persistent cough symptomatic of asthma. She attributed her condition to her surroundings and the dust that she frequently inhaled. Notwithstanding her condition, Marie described her

resolve to stay in Cambodia as a matter of “do or die”. But pressed by her fellow missionaries to return to the Philippines, Marie obeyed the voice of authority albeit with a heavy heart. However, Marie and her companion had to stop by Thailand to meet with another missionary before their return to the Philippines. They were accommodated in a Christian school which happened to need a teacher at that time. The school owner convinced her to join the staff as a supervising teacher. That night Marie prayed for healing and a clear affirmation of God’s desire for her to do her mission work in Thailand. When she woke up in the morning, her coughing eased and she felt a sense of lightness and well-being, thus she stayed.

Presently, Marie teaches an evening class in English to Thai adults who are professionals from different fields. She sees this school for adults as “our market place for winning souls.” During day time, from Monday to Friday, Marie shuttles from one public school to two others, entailing long travelling time which, she said, she enjoyed.

When asked by the program host the process she went through for her documentation, Marie explained that, initially, she was on a tourist visa renewed five times before she acquired a regular school work and the applicable documentation. Her first teaching engagement had the nature of a volunteer work. In her first five months in Thailand, Marie financially depended on on-call substitute teaching in online classes. This, Marie claimed, exposed her to Bangkok nook and cranny and read it as God’s way of preparing her to be the guide of future Filipino missionaries coming to Thailand.

She claimed being visited by fear though because she was working without an appropriate work permit. When she was hired to teach regular classes, Marie finally acquired a work permit. Her husband who had joined her in Thailand, likewise, found a stable job in Marie’s happenstance land. Marie enthused about the prospect of her son, who is graduating with a degree in communication, joining them in Thailand for a one-year exposure to Thai culture.

Marie’s narrative illustrates the concept of narrative identity as “the violence [done] to stories to produce a coherent self” (Paquette, 2011, p. 146). This violence refers to the break from the linear structure of storytelling consisting of beginning, middle, and end (BME) to inscribe different or multiple temporalities in order to accommodate and resolve the ethical tension in the story (Boje, 2008, p. 26, cited in Paquette, 2011, 147). In Marie’s narrative, the violence does not consist in fusing reality with fiction but in harking back to her authentic missionary self in the Philippines when she ministered to the rugby-sniffing street children, feeding their body as well as their mind and spirit, and contributing her personal funds for the mission work. There appears to be an oversubscription to the theme of the missionary slant of Marie’s narrative, a tendency shared by the program in sloganeering thus, “winning Bangkok for Christ.”

### **Filipinanness and Patriarchy**

Hope fell in love with a Lebanese with whom she made a covenant: whatever happened, he would not take another wife. They met in Dubai where Hope worked as an office staff. When they got married, they decided to build a family in Lebanon. He established a family business and Hope became a homebody. She would go to

their restaurant and spend time on small talks with fellow Filipinos. Life and in-laws were good until the husband raised the idea of taking another wife despite the previous agreement. It shattered Hope's world; she went back to the Philippines. Contrary to Hope's expectations, her husband did not show any interest to woo her back. In time Hope knew that she had lost him. Unfortunately, Hope had nothing to build another life on. She demanded financial help from the Lebanese husband. He gave her funds to start a business with. Hope now lives on the income from her businesses consisting of a beauty salon and printing and photocopying services.

Maningning worked as a manager for 10 years in a top brand motorcycle company in Doha, Qatar. She noted sadly that Arab men did not think highly of women. Sometimes, the women themselves – the so-called KFC and phone credit card girls and women who sported an active night life -- were at fault for giving the impression that they could be had easily through a mutually-beneficial arrangement. However, there were instances when the blatant disrespect came from a patriarchal mindset. Maningning did not get used to such treatment such that once she punched an Arab who thereafter threatened her, "I'll bring you to jail, you Filipini." Maningning decried the plight of Filipino women who endured verbal and gestural abuse but would not do anything for fear of being sent back home by a force greater than the values of dignity and respect.

The narratives of Hope and Maningning invite diachronic referencing – the pre-colonial Filipina who were strong, assertive, and equal with men (Castro, et. al, 1985) and the contemporary Filipina who operate in the public sphere of work, agency, and appreciation of self-worth (Mercaida, 2004, pp.144-169 & pp. 181-223).

### **The Imperative of Cross-cultural Proficiency**

The narratives told by Gabby, Leo, Oteng, Roel, Nestor, Millie and Minda instantiate the imperative of cross-cultural proficiency on the part of migrant workers. Leo, Oteng and Gabby are all seafarers. Of the three, Oteng has the longest seafaring history and, like Gabby, is a returnee OFW. Oteng is now an owner of a bakery and a parcel of land planted to cash crops such as ginger, garlic, banana and papaya trees while Gabby is a bakeshop franchisee. Roel worked as a rose farm manager in Australia before becoming a teacher. Nestor works as a caregiver in Hong Kong, while Millie is a returnee from Singapore where she worked as a domestic service provider. Of these narrators, Minda is out of her league because she became an OFW by "applying" to become the wife of a visiting Japanese national.

Seafaring can be a more trying job compared to a land-based employment. This is particularly so when one is a utility man, a waiter, or a cook, among other roles.

Gabby worked as a utility man who cleaned cabins and washed dining and cooking utensils. The magnitude of this routine chores can be understood from Gabby's own description – washing tall piles of plates and cauldrons, dipping gloved hands in hot water and, despite the protective gloves, sustaining abrasions because of continuous exposure to strong detergents.

The ship is a world by itself, Gabby said, because in it one finds fellow seafarers of various ethnicities. The ship is also a home itself, he added, since one finds his brothers among fellow workers. Gabby's six-year experience as a seaman did not

have cross-cultural issues. This is indicated in his length of stay and volitional exit from seafaring. Further, Gabby completed three work contracts with his carnival cruise employer whose criteria for renewing work contract included: one or two completed work contracts, good performance evaluation, and adaptable personality.

Leo worked as a waiter for a cruise ship with a 900-passenger capacity. In contrast to the trouble-free seafaring life of Gabby, Leo's was action-packed and conflict-ridden. For Leo, his job was a test of patience particularly in the cruise ship where he worked because the food was served a la carte. Leo was in charge of three tables that sat eight passengers each for a total of 24 hungry and irate *balaggans*, a name-call laced with prejudice, Leo admitted. He explained that they were "low end Israelis". Every time he would open the dining area, they would rush to the place causing a slight commotion. They would get impatient waiting for the food to be served. One time, when Leo was carrying a large bowl of hot soup on a tray, unintentionally, he hit one on the head with the edge of the tray. Since there was a big crowd and he was not the only waiter carrying a bowl of soup on a tray, the victim pointed to just anyone and lodged a complaint against the waiter. The cruise management made the motion of investigating the complaint but, Leo assessed, that it was a perfunctory act. Leo kept quiet because he did not want to lose his job. Shortly, a similar incident occurred. This time, and again in a hurry to serve the diners, the head waitress called his attention to his sluggish ways of doing things. Heated words were exchanged. When Leo resumed his duties, his superior retaliated by pushing him off his way such that he nearly spilled the hot soup upon the seated passengers. In a split second, he was tempted to scald her with the soup out of self-pity and sense of injustice. Leo reported the matter instead to their maître d. In their audience with the maître d, Leo explained that he was doing his job in the best way he could and, if he needed to be corrected, it should be done without being shouted at and being publicly embarrassed. Anyway, every matter could be settled in a peaceful manner, he opined. After the confrontation in the presence of the maître d, Leo observed that head waiters no longer publicly embarrassed the waiters under their supervision.

Oteng was a seafarer for 30 years. He went the rounds of a utility man, an assistant cook, and a chief cook before retirement. The ship he boarded was an "academy" where future seamen were being trained hands-on for officer roles. Oteng started as a mess man doing odd jobs. He hung around the kitchen and became a friend of everyone, including the chief cook to whom he extended sundry help until, unofficially, he started cooking meals specifically for Filipino seamen on board. The crew were predominantly Indian and Pakistani and the usual meals were cooked with curry. Oteng's meals catered to the taste of the Filipino crew who did not like curried dishes. Shortly, Oteng became an assistant cook preparing dishes for Filipinos. As an assistant cook though, he still got orders from the chief cook to do mess man duties such as fetching cavans of rice from the stock room, replenishing kitchen supplies, scraping lard from and washing huge pans and cauldrons. He did not mind these added-on duties. However, Oteng had some rough times when Filipinos complained of the routine menu and the amount of food served them compared to the sumptuous meals served to non-Filipino crew. Oteng reasoned that he only made do with the supplies issued his kitchen. At the end of his narrative, Oteng concluded that his 30-year seamanship alienated his children from him.

Of the three seafarers, Gabby and Oteng exemplify the same level of cultural proficiency. Gabby lived by a peaceful and accommodating life principle. Oteng lived by the Filipino value of *pakikisama* or getting along with people in whatever place or circumstance one finds oneself. Also, both of them did not report any incident of altercation with fellow seafarers and officers. Leo, who is the youngest of the three, exhibited an impatience not found in the first two. His narrative though is realistic in its account of the presence of work-related conflict. This may be explained by his proximity to the incident compared to the distant retrospective vantage from which Gabby and Oteng related their stories.

The 1996 Report to the UNESCO of the International Commission of Education underscored the need for an education curriculum that would prepare 21<sup>st</sup> century workers in global citizenship in the advent of complex technologies and the birthing of a borderless world. Such training in global citizenship would include skills in multiculturalism, communication, collaborative problem solving, among others. The same report likewise emphasized the values of lifelong learning, inclusion, full respect to pluralism, building relationships among individuals, groups and nations, and learning to live together and manage conflicts in a peaceful manner (Delors, 1996, pp. 13-14, 21-22). Gabby and Oteng acquired their education before globalization vis-à-vis 21<sup>st</sup> century skills became an education byword. Regardless, both seafarers manifested adaptability to a multicultural workplace. In Leo's case, although there were some rough edges in his interaction with his superior, his homegrown sincerity and communication skills proved adequate to convey his point about the values of mutual respect and consideration in the workplace.

Roel, Nestor and Millie each displayed cultural adaptability in the work setting. In his initial years in Australia and his family, Roel lived in a caravan house, a trailer kind of shelter with bunk beds but without a washroom or toilet. He and his family depended on the good heart of a fellow Filipino who allowed them the use of their toilet. Roel, who taught English in the Philippines, worked as a utility person in a rose farm in his initial years in Australia. His billionaire employer, who did not miss his industry and dedication to work, offered him to try his hands at propagating new varieties of roses imported from Africa. Roel did his job well and was promoted to rose farm managerial role. He pointed to anonymity as a positive factor for Filipinos like him to be accepting of any kind of work available. Likewise, Roel's happenstance ability or the knack for responding to situations beyond one's control with self-efficacy (Krumboltz, et.al., pp. 15-16) worked well as an adaptation strategy for him.

Nestor is a licensed physical therapist in New York. The city impressed him as very [culturally] diversified and welcoming to migrant workers. His hurdles sounded minuscule but, given his cultural roots, might not be quite so. He had a problem with first-name calling basis and doing away with honorific titles both of which mattered much in the Philippines. Ten years in America and now an immigrant, he sits easy with the ways of his second culture.

Millie worked as a housekeeper for five years in a Filipino-Chinese household in Hong Kong. Her qualities of hard work, honesty, and filial piety endeared her to her employer. The latter helped her to deposit her savings in a Hong Kong bank and to remit money to her parents in the Philippines. Through her savings, Millie fulfilled her parents' fondest dream – a stone house that would stand strong against the storm.

Though hardly schooled, Millie had metacognitive skills in that she acquired cultural proficiency at work.

Minda's narrative is a cut along the fairytale plot. She married a Japanese national whose mother rejected her for being of the people who killed her soldier husband in World War II. Minda not only accorded her mother in law the respect due her but even cared for her in her days of illness until death. Minda is into a small-scale enterprise and mixes well with fellow Filipinos and Japanese neighbors. She mirrors Filipino resiliency and adaptability.

### **Lacuna in the OFW Narratives**

Manseha worked as an administrator in an Auckland city office. Lila nearly made it as a migrant worker in New Zealand having gone through the rigorous process of applying for a work visa under the New Zealand's skills migrant category. Dina is a domestic service provider in Singapore and, on the side, serves as an active founder-director of an international organization helping migrant Filipino workers with problems in their countries of deployment. Their narratives have the same distant trajectories from their persons and personal lives.

Manseha was all praise for New Zealand's culture of respect for human rights, equality, and fair go – one gets the salary commensurate to one's abilities and contribution to organizational productivity. She hardly missed the Philippines because she had established a new circle of friends with whom she would prepare and serve Philippine cuisine during get-together. Her narrative was broad angled and panoramic, without any reference to personal details, particularly her family of origin and the remittances sent home. These topics had always been a familiar fare in other OFW stories.

Lila had all the opportunities to settle in New Zealand. Her migrant family application was automatically considered and, eventually, approved by the New Zealand Immigration Service (NZIS), unlike others that had to be drawn from the routine lottery on the basis of threshold points only. Lila narrated a double story in which the main story was that of her friend who had acquired a work entitlement because of her husband who held a permanent resident visa. Lila's own life story was referred to at the outset of her narrative but was elided altogether when her narration shifted to her friend's migration story thick with plot complications – integration struggle, broken family, husband's infidelity, his death and his ashes withheld by the newfound partner.

Dina was articulate in describing her cultural adaptability and her skills in multi-tasking. Conversely, her zest vanished when she referred to her children who hardly responded to her Facebook messages. Dina's narrative along with those of Lila and Manseha sustain a lacuna that is comprehensible only in intertextual reading. Oteng and Leo are father and son. In the audio recording, Leo routinely coughed and resorted to one-liners when his narrative veered toward the subject of separation from family that came with a seafaring job. He would always leave for money, he emphasized [but how great the cost would be], in truncated statement. Oteng's narrative uttered what was unutterable but resonant in the stories of Leo, Lila, and Dina - separation from family resulted in estrangement.

## **Conclusion**

The foregoing study brought the expression *ibayong dagat* into a discursive space on Filipino migrant workers' experience in their receiving countries. It explored the possibilities of meaning making arising from the deployment of a usual pat expression through an inquiry into its chronotopic significance in the nuanced narratives of 'success' or 'failure' using a temporal-spatial framework. Thus, from a trite trope, the expression is made anew in the surplus meaning evoked from the 15 narratives included in the inquiry.

The study focused on the themes outside the recurrent thematic polarities in the stories of Filipino migrant workers. The results showed that cultural norms played out in OFWs' means of entry and in their responses to the culture of their destination: *para-paraan*, *pakikisama*, and happenstance ability in deciding on a temporary career shift toward professional integration. The study also confirmed the existence of the conflicted selves, untellability, and lacuna in the life stories whose trajectories are wide-angled, panoramic, and distant from what is personal and private.

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