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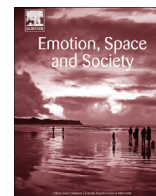
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## Filipino migrant stories and trauma in the transnational field

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## ABSTRACT

We put to work recent efforts to decolonise trauma theory in the context of our experience of writing and performing in the Philippines our testimonial theatre play about Canada's Live-In Caregiver Program (LCP). The play, a collection of monologues based on verbatim scholarly research transcripts, was performed in Manila in November 2013 and October 2014, first as professional and then community theatre. We think through what it means to move a trauma narrative about family separation from Vancouver to Manila, both in terms of the reception of Canadian-based trauma and how it works in relation to traumas based in the Philippines. As a contribution to the geographies of trauma, we consider efforts to think what it would mean to decolonise trauma studies, and examine how trauma narratives gather other narratives as they travel, the politics of scholars from the Global North soliciting and circulating trauma narratives in the Global South, and the possibilities of building collective politics through individual stories of trauma.

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## 1. Arrival

We<sup>1</sup> arrived in Manila on the morning of November 8th, 2013, just as Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) was expected to hit. The schools were closed and the roads – usually clogged with traffic at 9 am – were eerily empty. The winds picked up velocity throughout the day. It turned out to be one of the strongest tropical cyclones on record, the most powerful typhoon ever to hit land and the deadliest in Philippine history: one approximation is that 6300 people died. UN officials estimate that over 11 million people were affected, with many left homeless. Colleagues at the University of Philippines (UP) Diliman campus in Manila were numb; many of the faculty members at their sister campus in UP – Visayas,

Tacloban – one of the areas most devastated by the typhoon – were presumed dead. Filipino friends and family in Canada, so many of whom come from the Visayas region, were desperate to receive information about their loved ones.

We were in Manila to stage our testimonial play about Filipino labour migration to Canada. We had developed the play from transcripts of interviews with Filipino migrant domestic workers, their children who reunite with them in Canada after many years of separation, nanny agents and Canadian families in need of commodified care. It had been performed in Vancouver and Berlin (see Pratt and Johnston, 2013; Johnston and Pratt, 2010). The play is based on research materials gathered in Canada and it is thus written from a Canadian location. It is meant to invite discussion about a range of challenging issues: the crisis of care in Canada; the politics, economics and ethics of the 'global care chain' through which women in the Global South leave their families to care for families in the Global North; and the challenges of family separation and reunification for Filipino families. The Filipino monologues run through a range of emotions: hope, frustration, despair, anger, despondency, pride; but the tone and substance dwells mostly within the more negative emotions and the trauma of indentured servitude and prolonged family separation.

As our landing into another scene of trauma in the Philippines suggests, the transport and reception of our play was no simple

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<sup>1</sup> This is a wandering 'we'. The research on which the play is based was done by Geraldine Pratt and the Philippine Women Centre of BC. The original script for the play was written by Caleb Johnston and Geraldine Pratt and the performance was developed in collaboration with the Philippine Women Centre. Vanessa Banta began to work on the play as dramaturg when Johnston and Pratt took the play to Manila in November 2013, and then took on a more central role as collaborator when the script was taken up and developed by Migrant International from July through to October 2014. This last version of the play, translated to Tagalog by Vanessa Banta, was performed in Bagong Barrio Caloocan City in Metro Manila in October 2014.

matter (see also Johnston and Pratt, 2014). In this paper we examine several questions opened up by taking *Nanay* to Manila that sit within broader discussions of transnational memory and multidirectional trauma. We trace how the meaning of experiences that are framed as traumatic in Canada were received in the Philippines, and consider what it meant to put different experiences of suffering in different places into dialogue. We are interested in investigating whether and how trauma may serve as both a medium for exchange within and across different sites and scales and as a political response to the structural violence of global labour migration. In re-situating the play (and the issues that it raises) within the context of the Philippines, we examine how narratives collected and dispatched from Canada gathered other narratives within their transnational transmission. We address the politics of encountering in Manila intense and unforeseen stories of what could be framed as trauma, the ethical problematic of that witnessing, as well as the productive possibility those individual narratives offer for collective politics.

## 2. Deploying the trauma paradigm

The idiom of trauma emerged in the research upon which the play is based especially in relation to the stories told by children who have been separated from and reunited with their mothers in Canada. A number of those interviewed in Canada appear to show the classic symptoms and aetiology of trauma, namely the involuntary repetition of memories in flashbacks as a result of an encounter with danger when the subject is unprepared and psychic defences are down<sup>2</sup> (Pratt, 2012; for this interpretation of trauma see Caruth, 1996; Cheah, 2008; Luckhurst, 2008; Radstone, 2007). Cathy Caruth's influential reinterpretation of trauma, in which she stresses that traumatic events are fully evident "only in connection with another place, and in another time" (1996, 9) is itself geographical. Our reading of domestic workers' labour migration to Canada adds another layer of spatiality; the time-spaces of family separation are themselves sources of trauma. Framing children's (and in some cases mothers') experiences as trauma places emphasis on the depths of psychic upheaval and the extent to which families are ambushed by migration in a variety of ways.

There are other geographies involved in the transmission and reception of trauma narratives. The transmission and reception of trauma narratives are uneven and thoroughly embedded within existing unequal geopolitical and other power relations, and only some narratives gain wide audiences and empathetic reception (Craps, 2014; Radstone, 2007; Whitlock, 2007). In Judith Butler's phrasing (2004), some lives (and traumas) are judged to be grievable, while others are not.

So too, being framed and heard within a global trauma discourse is not necessarily positive and carries with it certain risks. Familiar patterns of who tells and who receives stories of pain and trauma can reinscribe hierarchies of privilege and marginalisation: the privileged listen and empathize and the marginalised experience and tell (Pedwell, 2014). Calling on Naomi Klein's analysis of disaster capitalism, Jacquelyn Micieli-Voutsinas (2014; see also Perera, 2010) notes the ways in which trauma narratives can do the work of deepening opportunities for

privatisation and other neo-liberal reforms, with the effect of solidifying existing geopolitical hierarchies of privilege.

Trauma discourse potentially individualises and medicalises an issue and may focus attention on therapeutic outcomes rather than a political response to the structural issues that led to trauma. In the Palestinian context, Marshall (2014) argues that the risks associated with these tendencies are particularly acute. While a discourse about the traumatic effects of the occupation on Palestinian youth has served to justify international humanitarian solidarity, it also produces these youths as security risks, as "at risk and also risky" (283), as "threatened and also threatening" (285) and potentially perpetuates western stereotypes about the volatility and irrationality of Palestinians. Not only do humanitarian deployments of trauma discourse potentially universalise American psychiatric models (which Ethan Watter's refers to as "Americanizing the world's understanding of the human mind" (2010, 1)), in the context of Palestine, trauma discourse can be viewed as "a spatial strategy attempting to keep unruly subjects in their place" (283). The dangers of invoking trauma discourse seem differently but equally relevant in the context of the Philippines, where various psychological clichés (in this case about a distinctive Filipino psychology) have been invoked by U.S. scholars and others to tell a particular history of underdevelopment, one in which the role of US imperialism is largely absent (San Juan, 2006, 50). And finally, Rancière (2010) is critical of the way that discourses of trauma fit within what he frames as the ethical turn within contemporary politics, a turn that can be depoliticising insofar as it fixes attention on injuries of the past rather than on the promise and obligations of the future.

In the Canadian context, the urgency and seriousness associated with trauma discourse has seemed worth the risk and trauma discourse appears to hold the promise of politicising rather than depoliticising immigration policy. The Canadian state, and Canadians more generally, take pride in Canada's success as a welcoming multicultural nation of immigrants, as well as its role as world peacekeeper and alleviator of world suffering (Razack, 2004; Thobani, 2007). Circulating stories of global trauma that result from Canadian immigration policy disrupts this normative script of national goodness and Canada as haven from the world's disorder. As Jenny Edkins (2003) has argued, the political productivity of trauma lies precisely in its capacity to disrupt the smooth functioning of sovereign power in order to create opportunities for social and political change.

We brought the play to the Philippines as a way of putting stories collected in Canada into global circulation. Canadian immigration policy works in tandem with the Philippine Labour Export Policy, and the two need to be thought and critiqued together. So too Filipinos' migration to Canada is typically part of a transnational strategy, and the planning and wellbeing of Filipino immigrants to Canada is intimately interwoven with the planning and wellbeing of their families in the Philippines. It was during assessments with our community collaborators, the Philippine Women Centre, following the 2009 production of the play in Vancouver, that we were told that some of their members were motivated by the play to tell their stories differently to family members in the Philippines, and to be more explicit about the everyday, often hard-to-tell, traumas they experience as migrant workers in Canada. Live-in caregivers are often unwilling to tell, and their transnational families in the Philippines can be unwilling or unable to hear, about negative experiences in Canada. These experiences can be difficult to tell because of a reluctance to worry their families who are so far away and dependent on their remittances for their livelihood. Even when told to family members, their stories often are not heard, given the popular imaginary of Canada as a land of opportunity (Constable, 2013 Polanco, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> A reviewer reasonably asks for more details about this claim. For a fuller discussion see Pratt 2012, in which the Canadian claims are more fully substantiated. Although not many or even the majority of the youths that we interviewed displayed the symptoms of trauma, a number did over the course of our interviews and this was a paradigm that resonated with and has been taken up by community organisers at the Philippine Women Centre.

Taking the play to the Philippines was an effort to share the collective burden of transmitting migrant stories.<sup>3</sup>

A growing literature on transnational memory – yet another geographical facet of trauma studies – points up the ways in which trauma can function as a medium for dialogue and exchange across different traumas and different places: “it is eminently transactable, mobile and adaptable” (Perera, 2010, 31).<sup>4</sup> Michael Rothberg (2008) has argued that the multidirectional memory of the Holocaust has enabled other histories of victimisation to be articulated within a wide range of anti-colonial movements throughout the world. Writing about the performativity of narratives of trauma resulting from the tsunami in Sri Lanka in 2004, Perera (2010) makes note of the ways in which recounting this trauma enabled survivors to articulate other, un- or less speakable experiences of war and violence: “one terror shading into another, war and tsunami soon became interwoven in our talk” (34). Roger Luckhurst (2008) has noted the instability of trauma narratives as they travel: drawing on Bruno Latour’s notion of heterogeneous concepts, he argues that trauma is a hybrid concept that gets “looped” into different knowledges, discourses and practices, just as different resources get “knotted” into it. “Trauma changes shape”, he argues, “and meaning as it crosses boundaries; it is constituted through the controversies generated in these passages” (209).

Nonetheless, bringing the play to Manila raised difficult questions about the trauma paradigm, along with a different assessment of risks; these recalibrations of risk resonate with concerns to decolonise western-based trauma theory. We wondered, for instance, whether the Canadian-based monologues written into the play would be heard as stories of legitimate suffering. As pressing, does talk of trauma (especially by non-Filipino Canadians<sup>5</sup>) work differently in the context of the Philippines? Canadians need to be shaken out of their complacency about the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP, reconfigured as the Caregiver Program in November 2014) in order to engage the issue as a complex problem. A trauma discourse does this work in Canada. But can the same be said in a country that has experienced in the last century alone: colonial and military occupations, civil war, martial law, high levels of structural debt and poverty and, in very recent years, state-sanctioned political killings and massive upheaval through the overseas contractualisation of a significant proportion of the country’s labour force, along with a good number of devastating natural disasters. Talk of trauma might be all too common and work differently in this context and in relation to this context. Tadiar (2015) cautions against a tendency for scholarly accounts to inadvertently share a logic that furthers the project of empire. Narrowing labour migrants to stories of trauma arguably stabilises their experiences too firmly within personal and collective histories

of victimisation and injury. She argues that the project of decolonisation requires that we both abandon our attachments to the abstract free subject of liberalism and supplement our critiques of dominant processes of global racialisation by attending to “remaindered forms of life-making” (155): the intimate, affective interactions of everyday life and forms of social intelligence and imagination that are excessive to existing modes of theorizing social and geopolitical economic relations. In doing so, we may “set the stage (create the platforms) for radical departure from the given conditions of life under empire now” (156). Related but framed differently, critics of the narratives that westerners spin about non-westerners (as well as racialised others in the west) note the propensity to cast the latter as agentless victims (Mohanty, 2002). How much more so within a reading of *history* as trauma, which can imply a melancholic or compulsive repetition of traumatic events (Visser, 2011).

Further, in a close reading of Freud’s and Fanon’s concepts of trauma, Cheah (2008) argues for the distinctiveness of colonial trauma, as compared to Freudian-inspired classical accounts of trauma. For Fanon (1961), colonial trauma is systematic and planned, the causes of trauma are not repressed or forgotten and the subordination of the ego to the trauma is total rather than partial. That is, it is a different traumatic experience than the one described by Freud and it is not amenable to therapeutic resolution.<sup>6</sup> It is only through collective struggle to alter the material conditions of colonial subjugation that the trauma can be overcome. Although Cheah concludes that neither Freud’s nor Fanon’s account of trauma is fully applicable to the diffuse forms of power in the contemporary global conjuncture, the breadth and depth of colonial experience in the Philippines alerts us to the need to rethink accounts of trauma in this context and suggests the relevance of an approach that locates the wounds of trauma in structured and systematic processes, and a response to trauma in collective action.

We turn to consider how the meaning of the trauma of the LCP changed shape and meaning in its passage from Vancouver to Manila. We proceed through an analysis of three narratives. We first analyse the reception of a trauma narrative that we brought with us to Manila and then introduce two new narratives we were told (and given) while working on the community adaptation of the play in the summer of 2014. The experiences of trauma under discussion are very different, ranging from family separation to incest and sexual assault. Our paper mimics a process of call and response to convey how trauma narratives can solicit and elicit new and different narratives of suffering, and may provoke more wide-ranging discussions of structural and other forms of violence. These three moments of sharing narratives offer different opportunities to think about the effects, ethics and politics of the trauma paradigm as it travels between Global North and South. We begin with a performance at PETA Theater Center in Quezon City, Metro Manila, in which we bring a monologue about an experience of trauma from Canada.

### 3. Transnational reception

Imagine sitting on the edges of a darkened room in a small audience of twenty. Roughly 10 feet away, a lone young Filipino

<sup>3</sup> In November 2013, we conducted a 3-week rehearsal and production process with professional Canadian and Filipino theatre artists, which culminated in a series of public performances at the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) in Quezon City. As part of this process, we entered into a collaboration with Migrante, an international alliance of Filipino migrant advocacy organizations, who arranged the attendance of migrants and activists at the PETA production, and were involved in post-performance public forums. Migrante pushed us to think more fully about engaging migrant families directly by bringing the work into migrant-sending communities. We returned to the Philippines to work with the organisation from July to October 2014, and this collaboration resulted in the creation and performance of a community-based adaptation of *Nanay* in Bagong Barrio in Caloocan City in Metro Manila.

<sup>4</sup> This is a claim that Cathy Caruth made many years ago in her influential book, *Unclaimed Experience*, but, as Stef Craps argues (2014), it is a promise that has not been delivered on within trauma theory, which remains in his view largely Eurocentric. Based in Sri Lanka, Perera’s work is one of a growing number of exceptions.

<sup>5</sup> It is important to recognize that we are differently positioned in this regard. Johnston and Pratt are non-Filipino Canadians while Banta is not only Filipino but also a long-term resident of Manila.

<sup>6</sup> As the editors of this issue indicate, there are many strands of ‘trauma theory’ and along with Cheah’s useful contrast between classical and colonial trauma, distinctions are raised between individual and collective trauma, structural and historical trauma, intergenerational and insidious trauma, among other versions and foci of trauma theory. We do not explore the intricacies of these debates but our focus is clearly on the side of structural and collective trauma.

woman (a professional actor) begins to speak, addressing you directly<sup>7</sup>:

*My mother left when I was in grade 5. So probably that's around 1998.*

*She went to... ? I think she was in Vancouver. I was 11 years old so I was old enough to know she was taking care of children. Two children to be exact.*

*The family that we had in the Philippines was kind of separated. So we're not really attached to relatives and stuff. So pretty much my dad and I have to live by ourselves. When my mom went to Canada, the separation was pretty hard on my dad. Unfortunately when my mom was in Canada my dad had a girlfriend.*

*I think that's the problem when your wife migrates or your husband migrates. You kind of look for somebody to support you and your family as well. Emotionally my teachers were taking care of me.*

*My mom would take care of me in a way that she would send money and letters. But it's hard to connect when you're just sending letters, right? It takes a month before it gets to the Philippines.*

*I don't stay on the phone that much because after a few years being separated from my mom all I could talk to her about is my accomplishments. And then after that I don't know what to talk about anymore. And I end up just saying "Ha? Ha ha. Oh yeah. Heh, heh, heh." I'm laughing but I don't know what I'm laughing about, right?*

*She talks a lot about other children, which I am not interested in hearing about. Since she's separated from me she doesn't know me that much. All the advice that she could give me whenever I tell her my problems is the usual things that a person could see watching teledrama.*

*My mom knew about my dad, but she was patient enough to wait for all the papers to be processed and then they were going to get a divorce. But then she found out that if my dad couldn't come here, then my sister and I couldn't come here as well. So she had to be patient.*

*It was 6 years before I came to Canada. By that time, I was 17 and had graduated from high school and was planning to do accounting in the Philippines. But then I went here and I was back in high school. So it kind of got me confused.*

*Back in the Philippines school is awesome! Really! I love competition and in the Philippines the children that went with me in my private school – they like comparing their grades to my grades. So I had to go, go, go, go, go, go, go! It's very motivating because everyone is competing against each other, and it's seldom that you see a lazy person there. They have a goal towards university.*

*When I came here, it's culture shock. Because the kids here are quite different. I'm not really used to people complaining early in the morning about how tired they are!*

*I keep on thinking what would've happened if I just stayed in the Philippines. Probably I would be in first-year university already and with my friends. And maybe if I'm in the Philippines I wouldn't be this lonely. And I know how to live there. I wouldn't need my parents. When I moved here it's just like you're stuck in a matchbox. It's like a spider stuck in a matchbox and the only four corners you*

*can go to are the four corners available to you. Having no connections with anybody, I just kept everything to myself.*

*I was arguing with my mom all the time: Like why can't you just send me back to the Philippines so I can go to college already? But she wouldn't right? It got me very very depressed. The only heaven for me is work at McDonalds because I could just smile and ask "do you want fries with that?"*

*When I first went here I had no friends, right? The nearest people I could actually blend in with is the people from the fast food restaurants. I got a job there because I went in and saw a lot of Filipinos. It was the easiest way I could have a sense of belonging. Because most of the Filipinos here, they work in the fast food area.*

*But having those people that have been working in the fast food area for like ten years already – being surrounded by them – you kind of begin to think the same way that they're thinking. So if they have smaller goals, you also have a smaller goal, which is to become a manager in McDonalds. I was thinking, well maybe this is the life in Canada. Really. You don't have to go to school. You just go to Walmart. Work there for a few years and then be a manager kind of thing. If I go to work, I'll have the money. I'll have freedom. So that was what was pushing me towards dropping out of school.*

*I thought to myself I don't want to be just at the very bottom and just like the other Filipinos that are working in fast food or retail. So that's why I wanted to finish school. I worked in McDonald's for two years after that but then I chose a medical lab assistant course. I chose it because it's short. It's a 6-month program. Doesn't need a lot of money because the tuition fee is very low. And I liked the name, medical lab assistant. Because I feel like a pro. Having that title instead of 'Store Manager in McDonalds'. I like being an assistant better. I wanted the title. And now I love my job. Like, 'We're going to be taking blood again! Where's my next patient?' It gave me direction to my life. It gave me more pride in myself.*

Edited verbatim from an interview with a young woman whose mother brought her to Canada through the LCP, this monologue tells the story of some of the structural violence associated with the family separation regulated by this government program. Filipino youth in Canada who reunite with their mothers after years of separation often experience intense loss (first when their mother leaves the Philippines and then when they leave their loved ones in the Philippines to reunite with a stranger – their mother), family conflict, depression, disorientation and immediate downward social and economic mobility (Kelly, 2014; Pratt, 2012). From a competitive go-getter in a private school in the Philippines planning a university degree in accountancy, a young person who could access resources that she needed for her emotional well being, this young woman tells a story of family conflict, depression, and loneliness in Vancouver. She became unmoored from her sense of self and struggled to redefine herself in relation to new, more modest occupational goals. The narrative of the troubled children of overseas migrant mothers is a familiar (and contested) one in the Philippines (Parreñas, 2005) but we thought that the difficult experiences of migrant children in Canada would be less known and possibly even more troubling to audiences in the Philippines.

To assess how this narrative travelled, we gauged audience reactions in a variety of ways: through extended (recorded) talkbacks after each performance, audience survey forms (which were filled out as part of the performance) and interviews with family members of domestic workers in Canada who were invited to the play. Over four hundred audience members completed a survey, and half said that the child of the domestic worker monologue resonated with them, second only to a scene of a domestic worker. It

<sup>7</sup> For a video of this scene from the Manila performance at PETA, see <http://societyandspace.com/2014/01/10/johnston-pratt-fieldnote-performing-nanay-in-manila-philippines/>.

resonated in a variety of ways, however, and this monologue was not always received as a legitimate instance of psychological suffering or psychic upheaval. The trauma of reunification in Canada was rarely noted.

Only one audience member commented on the character's struggles in Canada, writing: "The story of the child of the domestic worker resonated with me because of what she said about settling for smaller dreams and the lack of connection she had with her mother. As a college student, I found it heart-breaking that something like that could extinguish the fire inside a dreamer's heart." The experiences of Anj Heruela, the Manila-based Filipino PETA actor who played this part, may give some indication of why so few audience members commented on the shock of immigration to Canada. Anj had no direct experience with the issue of labour migration and none of her family members have migrated overseas. Her relationship with the monologue evolved slowly over time. During the two weeks of rehearsal, she interpreted the emotional peak of the scene to be when the character cries out her desire to return to the Philippines to go to college. But in the first performance, she "got to the part where [she] was talking about 'we had a small goal, to become a restaurant manager'" and felt emotionally overwhelmed. "It was so strange for me because it was alien emotion compared to what I had rehearsed. I was actually kind of afraid of it because I didn't know if I would be able to handle where it would take me." There was, in other words, a shift in where she experienced the emotional peak of the monologue: from fighting with her mother about returning to the Philippines, to understanding the character's profound alienation in Vancouver (including from Filipinos with diminished aspirations for themselves). No doubt mediated by theatrical technique, this was nonetheless a slow and profound process of transnational exchange between Anj and the person whose words she spoke. Possibly the act of saying these words to a young Filipino audience – a set of witnesses – brought her to recognise the trauma of self-alienation in a new or different way.

Not surprisingly a more common point of audience identification and empathy was with the experience of family separation from the perspective of the Philippines. There were many children of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in the audience who could relate to the experience of being separated from a parent. They wrote comments such as the following:

My mother is working in Canada for seven years. After seven years, she just had a month vacation last September. She told us her stories, which are somewhat similar in the play about domestic workers. Hearing those testimonies during the play makes me miss her again so much...

I experienced being away from my mom. I have done things [because] I hated my mom. Now I know how hard it is to be away from them. [Separated family members] must help each other to work the hardships and understand each other.

First of all my father works at the US. For 17 whole years. And I haven't seen him, not once. So hearing the child talk, my heart just stopped. And I keep remembering all the phone calls, letters and emails my father and I had. I just realized that the child was right. I felt the need for a father. My heart melted away because of that scene.

My mom also works as domestic worker. As a daughter, I have to do a lot of things. I must act to be the head of the family because my father was not responsible enough. Her story and I have lots of similarities. I may not be in Canada/abroad but it touches me a lot.

A third reaction was more negative. Rather than empathy for the trauma experienced by the child separated and reunited with her

mother, these audience members saw her as being self centred. From audience surveys:

Because when I see children of OFWs, they appear to be well-provided. They get the latest electronic gadgets, go to school and are not hardworking enough. Yet the one working abroad works so hard!

First, the child of the domestic worker resonated for me because she must understand that she is not the only one who suffers. One can have a goal even if it is hard. Come to think of it her mother suffered also.

A child of a domestic worker in Canada who is unable to join his mother and siblings in Canada because he was too old to be sponsored as a dependent, had this to say<sup>8</sup>:

Interviewer 1: I'm curious about how you felt about the scene where the child is reunited with their mother.

Interviewer 2: You know, *yung kabataan, gusto niya umuwi sa Pilipinas*.

D: Ah! That has something to do with attitude. Psychologically speaking, that has something to do with the attitude. I don't get it.

Interviewer 1: Oh?

D: She doesn't really understand what her mother did for her. All she cares about is what she wants. It's one sided.

Interviewer 1: Oh okay.

D: It's her attitude. You don't really understand what she wants. If she really understands what she wants and then she asserts what she wants, then it will be good, *di ba?*

The same trauma narrative was thus interpreted very differently by various audience members. We had imagined that in the context of the Philippines this monologue would deepen the critique of the Philippine government's Labour Export Policy, given that it demonstrates how family separation is devastating in its consequences in enduring ways, even after migration to Canada. Not surprisingly, the more common response focused on the experience of family separation in the Philippines. Rather than judging this to be a failure of communicating the situation in Canada, mirroring Anj's slow process of transnational exchange, we came to understand how this thickens rather than minimised our critique of migration to Canada, by speaking across multiple destinations and thus to the magnitude of the phenomenon of labour migration: "My father works at the US," "I may not be in Canada/abroad but it touches me a lot." As noted by others who have written about transnational memory (e.g., Perera, 2010; Micieli-Voutsinas, 2014), this repetition of experience across otherwise different contexts is another – geographical – way of thinking about trauma and its capacity as a medium for dialogue and exchange.

However, audience members' statements that the monologue made their heart 'stop' and reactivated their own experiences of loss also raise questions about responsibility among those who solicit and circulate trauma narratives. We turn to address this issue in the context of our production in Bagong Barrio, an area of the urban poor in metro Manila.

<sup>8</sup> Eight family members of six live-in caregivers in Canada were able to come to the PETA production. Most flew from other regions or islands: Baguio, Cebu and even Leyte (just days after the latter was hard hit by typhoon Haiyan), taking time from work and making a great effort to come to Manila. We were able to interview all but one after they saw the play.

#### 4. Research and responsibility

In July 2014, we began working with Migrante International in Manila to bring our script and research to Bagong Barrio, a community in which over a third of households are reliant on remittances from overseas workers. We drew on Migrante's history in the area, which began in the 1990s, when they led a (successful) legal campaign to repatriate 200 OFWs then marooned in Saudi Arabia. Migrante has remained in Bagong Barrio, where it maintains a number of full-time organisers who work closely with resident activists to organise migrant workers and their families. Migrante works closely with local youth experiencing issues related to systemic poverty and the challenges of family separation and labour migration. Our partnership was designed to support Migrante's interest in organizing youth into Sining Bulosan, a community-based cultural group, and, more broadly, their interest in using performance as a tool for political mobilization. When we started this collaboration, there was some concern on the part of Migrante and the Manila-based director of the play that the community would be unfamiliar with the LCP, and we agreed to integrate the material from Canada with narratives from Bagong Barrio. As part of this process of gathering new material, during the first rehearsal (with the knowledge and assent of Migrante) we took aside two of the young community members who had been recruited to perform in the play, to interview them separately and privately. At this time we did not know them well, although we had spent two full days with them in the two-day workshop that began our collaborative process. The interviews were conducted in Tagalog, with Vanessa Banta as lead interviewer.

That night we heard the story of Jocelyn, a young vibrant woman, possibly 18 or 19 years old. Her narrative was like a house of mirrors in relation to our script, reflecting the same themes in intensified and distorted forms. She fled Mindanao at age twelve, stowing in a container drum on a ship, with only the clothes that she was wearing and water to sustain her for the three-day journey. Her mother had abandoned her when she was eight years old, leaving her with a stepfather. Jocelyn fled Mindanao because of the civil war (between the NPA and the military): "I experienced waking up in the morning and hearing grenades explode suddenly." Even after she found her mother and second stepfather ("third father") and was living in Tarlac: "I would hear a sudden drop of a pan on the floor and immediately hide under the bed." Trauma one.

Jocelyn herself has experienced doing paid domestic work to survive and to care for her siblings. She has done this kind of work on and off in order to survive since she was a grade four student. Jocelyn is also well acquainted with feelings of abandonment. When she was thirteen and reunited with her mother, enquiries about her birth father led her mother to say: "if I didn't want her to treat me as if I were dead too, I should treat my third father as my father." After Jocelyn went to live with her grandmother and aunt in Caloocan City in Manila, her mother called her: "I thought she would ask how I was doing. But she told me that she wished I wasn't born instead. 'I just called to let you know that you do not have a mother any more. I don't have a child like you.' Of course, as a child who's longing for the love and care I never received from a mother, it hurt a lot ... It was the reverse of what I expected from her." Her mother subsequently married a Japanese man that she met in the Philippines and moved to Japan. She married in Manila without contacting Jocelyn, who learnt of the marriage when she saw the wedding dress, invitations and pictures. She asked, "Who got married?" The relatives present at the time "didn't answer me." This was another sudden shock: "my mother left me in the air, and I suddenly got dropped. I fell and no one caught me." "I thought, she just gave birth to me and then she said goodbye. I'm like a puppy in

the street." Trauma two.

When living with her grandmother Jocelyn gained an intimate knowledge of some of the damage that likely contributed to her mother's neglect. "It was in my grandmother's house I experienced being beaten, being treated like a maid by your 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..." "And then, her husband, my grandfather ... I learnt something about him that didn't make me feel good as a child. He sexually abused my mother and that's why she rebelled against them and she became pregnant at 14." "So, when I was there, my grandfather would send me some signals. I decided to ask for permission from my grandmother to apply for a job so that I will not be with my grandfather everyday because the same thing will happen to me." Her grandmother agreed but the same thing nevertheless did occur: "It was Tuesday night. I was working on my assignment ... My grandfather got up from bed and he came out of his room. [Addressing Vanessa] Sister, would you let your grandfather who [has just got out of bed to drink water] have his hand on your body?" Trauma three.

We were unprepared for the extent, intensity and depth of Jocelyn's personal disclosure. She has experienced multiple distinctive traumas associated with the shock of war, abandonment, and sexual abuse. As this became apparent in the interview we began to interrupt her periodically to ask her to consider whether she would like to stop, and whether or not we should continue to record her testimony. At the end of the interview, Jocelyn revealed that she had never before told her story: "I'm thankful to Anakbayan<sup>9</sup> because now I've opened up and to you for listening. For the first time, I opened up about it. I feel better." Asked about her relationship to the issues raised in the play she responded: "I have experienced some of them so my reactions in the scenes are just like my reactions before." Of her story in relation to the play: "I just want to share that. I know I'm not the only one who has been left behind."

With her approval and encouragement we worked a small part of her narrative into the play, and constructed it as a response of sorts to a monologue by a domestic worker who is telling of the economic pressures that led her to leave the Philippines, come to Canada as a live-in caregiver, and to leave her three children in the care of her parents. This monologue ends with the statement: "I am a survivor!" to which another actor responds with a monologue taken verbatim from Jocelyn's interview. We place centre-stage the Tagalog version developed for and performed in the community play (and relegate the English translation to endnotes).

*[Survivor din ako! Napilitan akong maging survivor dahil iniwan ako ng nanay ko sa ere. Bigla akong bumagsak at walang sumalo.]*

*8 years old po ako noon, nung umalis siya.*

*NPA po ako. Non Permanent Address. Kung saan lang ako mapunta, dun ako.*

*Pinagpapasapahan ako hanggang napunta ako sa lola at lolo ko.*

*Doon ko naranasan ang pambubugbog sa kamay ng kapamilya. Ginagawa akong katulong ng sariling kong lola. Minumura ako. Tapos pag 'di ko nagawa ng tama yung pinagagawa sa akin, iniuuntog ako sa pader.*

*Since grade 4 hanggang 6 working student ako. Kahit nung first year hanggang third year, working student pa rin.*

<sup>9</sup> Jocelyn is a member of Anakbayan, a national organization of Filipino youth, which seeks to "unite the youths from different sections of society to advance the cause of national democracy" (see <http://www.anakbayan.org>).

*Trabaho sa umaga, aral sa gabi. Naging baby sitter po ako ng isang abogado. Ang sweldo ko lang noon ay 1500 pesos a month. Tatlo yung bata. Tatlo rin naman po kaming katulong pero dalawang bata ang inaalagan ko. Syempre pagdating ko na galing ng school, bibihisan mo yung mga bata. Di ka na makakatulog ulit kasi papasok din yung mga bata. Aayusan mo sila, sasamahan mo sila sa school. Minsan meron pa silang activity na magaral sila ng taekwondo, ballet, voice lesson. Kahit mahirap, tiis.*

*Tapos nagkita kami uli ng lola ko, 16 ako nun. Hindi sana ako sasama kung hindi lang niya sinabi sa mga amo ko na idedemanda daw niya sila ng child abuse. Kasi nga dahil sa age ko. Sabi ko sa kanya, doon na kasi ako halos parang lumaki sa amo ko eh. Pero, siyempre para hindi magulo, sumama ako.*

*Akala ko nagbago na ang lola ko. Akala ko tutulungan na niya akong makatapos. Noong unang dating ko dun, oo, ang bait niya. Maasikaso. Siguro wala pa sa isang linggo, bumalik siya sa ganoon. Ginagawa niya uli akong katulong.*

*Tapos dumating yung time na. Martes ng gabi iyon, gumagawa ako ng assignment. Actually mag-1 o'clock ng umaga na noon, tapos bumangon ang lolo ko, lumabas siya sa kwarto para uminom ng tubig. Ikaw ba, ate, papayag ka na iinom lang ng tubig nakahawak pa ang kamay niya sa dibdib mo?<sup>10</sup>*

I was 8 years old when she left.

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. It was in my grandmother's house I experienced being beaten, being treated like a maid by your 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.

Since Grade 4 to Grade 6, I was a working student. And, from First Year high school to Third Year, I was still a working student.

I would work in the morning, study at night. I became a baby sister for a lawyer. His kids. There were three of them. There were three maids but I took care of two kids. Of course, when I came home from school, you would dress them up. You wouldn't be able to sleep well because the next day, the kids would go to school. You would dress them up, you would go with them to school. Sometimes they would even have after school activities – taekwondo, ballet, voice lesson. Even it was difficult, I persevered.

I saw my grandmother again. I was 16. I wasn't going to go but she said she'd tell my employer that she will sue them for child abuse because they hired me and I'm 16. I told her I grew up with my employer. But, of course, to avoid conflict, I went with my grandmother.

I thought she changed already. I thought that she would help me finish school. When I first got there, yes, she was kind. She doted on me. But, it wasn't even after a week, that she went back to her old ways. She again treated me like her servant.

Then, the time came. It was a Tuesday night. I was working on my assignment. Actually it was almost 1 am. 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?

In Bagong Barrio, Jocelyn's monologue was performed by another member of the cast, and Jocelyn cried at every rehearsal when she heard it. The actor who performed it spoke of how emotionally difficult it was to carry the burden of Jocelyn's message (and cried when she spoke about this in an interview focused on her participation in the community play process). Jocelyn had nightmares after the first interview and as of November 2014 Migrante was still searching to provide the appropriate psychological support. After each rehearsal, Jocelyn was asked if she still wanted her testimony included in the play, and whether or not she was comfortable with the possibility that it would be performed in the presence of her family members in Bagong Barrio. Throughout, she remained steadfast in her desire for her experiences to be included in the public production. She expressed a further hope that a video recording of the live performance would reach her mother in Japan. We nonetheless took some efforts to maintain the anonymity of her story within Bagong Barrio by altering some of the specifics that would readily identify her to other members of the community.

By writing Jocelyn's testimony into our play we are including the direct testimony of a child left in the care of her grandparents. It is a story from Bagong Barrio that we framed as a kind of response to presumptions that grandparents will adequately care for children left behind by migrant parents. The director, Rommel Linatoc, was enthusiastic about this addition, seeing Jocelyn's monologue as a way to reveal one problem associated with mass labour migration that few in the Philippines wish to acknowledge or address. The addition of the monologue might also be seen as a response to Rothberg's (2008) call for comparative studies of trauma. He posits a comparative approach as one way of decolonizing trauma studies (which has for the most part been Eurocentric in focus). In his view, a comparative approach can create opportunities to explore parallels and differences between forms of violence in different parts of the world, inside and outside (and between) the Global North and South. And yet, we were not entirely truthful when we inserted Jocelyn's story within our script because, though her abuse at the hands of her grandparents is certainly true, she is not a child of an overseas migrant worker. The ease of slotting her story into another trauma narrative speaks to claims about trauma: that it is a discourse that crosses boundaries easily, with a capacity to get looped into different knowledges, discourses and practices and to solicit memories of other traumas. As such, trauma is a medium for linking different places and times (Luckhurst, 2008; Micieli-Voutsinas, 2014; Perera, 2010). We presumed that Jocelyn was participating in the project because she had personal history with overseas labour migration, but she told us about a different set of traumas. These other experiences are both unrelated and related to the traumas associated with the LCP; certainly civil war is one factor driving migration and abuse by grandparents is also experienced by children of OFWs. In Jocelyn's words: "I have experienced some of them so my reactions in the scenes are just like my reactions before." She took comfort in knowing that she is not the only child to be left behind.

As Luckhurst notes, the passage of trauma discourse across boundaries kicks up controversies along the way. We might ask why Jocelyn chose to tell her story to us. And what was our role soliciting this narrative? Trauma's mobility need not be emancipatory if mediated, legitimated and managed by western scholars, as one facet of the global management of trauma narratives (Micieli-Voutsinas, 2014). (We note in this regard that Jocelyn directed herself in the interview primarily to Vanessa Banta who

<sup>10</sup> [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.]



conducted the interview in Tagalog, although we recognise that this likely further complicates rather than simplifies the encounter.) As a related but different concern, Radstone (2007) criticizes the overwhelming emphasis on intersubjective exchange in dominant versions of trauma theory, between the one who has been traumatised and the one who witnesses their account. Because the subject of classical trauma is often characterised by that which it cannot fully know or remember, Radstone argues that the witness (or analyst) assumes a starring role in many accounts of trauma, in which the sensitivity and empathy of the witness is foregrounded.

However, Jocelyn is clear that she is telling her narrative in the context of collective community organising. She is thankful to Anakbayan for giving her the resources to open up to us and she places her faith in Migrante to transport her narrative to Japan. By incorporating Jocelyn's story into a community production we have tried to relocate the exchange of telling and witnessing: the actor and Jocelyn share the burden of her narrative and our goal – in collaboration with Migrante – has been to pass the act of and responsibility for witnessing back to and through the community of Bagong Barrio. In the talkback following the performance, some audience members appeared to accept the responsibility. One person in the audience, with roots in community theatre, noted that it had been a long time since the community had something like this production, calling up the past work of cultural workers and labour organisers during the years of martial law. Beyond the performance in Bagong Barrio in October 2014, youth have performed excerpts in seven impromptu street performances; the work was featured during a mass public demonstration at the Congress of the Philippines; two performances were staged in the Parish church of Sta. Quiteria in December 2014 (sponsored by a Migrants' Ministry program); and a segment of the play was performed for students of St. Theresa's College. Further, in our latest correspondence with Migrante (July 8 2015), we heard that one of the activists with whom we worked in Bagong Barrio is now working as the organization's regional coordinator in Central Luzon, where they have established a new community-based theatre group in the community of Nueva Ecija. "[I]f everything falls into place", Migrante wrote, "who knows – we might be able to stage the *Nanay* play in the provinces. We are crossing our fingers for that."

All of us who were part of this process understand these moments of recovering collective memory of the experiences of a vast global labour diaspora as one part of working through trauma, and its performance to open up other possible responses to trauma, including resistance and a shared politics.

## 5. Trauma and resilience

We heard a second story of trauma the same night that we interviewed Jocelyn. Arvin, a shy young man in his mid-20s, had already been a subject of speculation at the workshop. Some participants noted that he rarely looks you directly in the eye. When he shared with us his story we had a better understanding of why this might be so.

Arvin's mother left the Philippines to work in Saudi Arabia when he was an infant: "Since then, she would only go home every 5 years. After 2–3 weeks, she would leave again." Arvin was passed from family member to family member: "I got passed around. When my uncle gets tired of me, I would go to my aunt's. It was like that ... I had to take care of myself. I didn't experience play when I was young. I didn't experience care ... That's why I became angry. That no one was taking care of me." At the age of 14, Arvin was literally forced to scavenge food for survival when living with his grandparents in the provinces: "I finally decided that I would just be the one to decide for myself ... I got used to eating whatever was

available. I would eat anything: coconuts, fruits. I brought these habits and skills to Manila."

Under the legal age to migrate as an OFW, at age 22, Arvin found overseas work in Saudi Arabia. His work driving trucks for long hours was extremely dangerous but through a series of extraordinary coincidences, Arvin was reunited with his mother, and they lived together as mother and son for two years: "My mother said: 'Son, here's what we'll do. Because I have a job and you have a job. Let's just rent a place. We'll split it. I'll pay for our rent and you will pay for the other house expenses.'"

And "that was the first and the longest time [that he lived with his mother]... 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. Whenever we would exchange stories, we cry because we remember 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.<sup>11</sup> He described the process of bonding with his mother as an adult (here translated from Tagalog to English):

A: Ah, the time when we bond. We will pretend that I'm still young, that I'm still a baby. I will point at food to eat from Jollibee, and we will eat. It's like, I want to play myself, I'm still a baby. It was our system. Ok, we would just share our stories. Ok, how would you feed me, Ma, now that we are here at Jollibee? That. It's our bonding.

I: Was it like role-play?

A: Because I didn't experience it when I was young ... I see that in Jollibee. Children, they are fed by their parents. That's it. That's what we do for our bonding. I would say, 'Ma, how about me? Pretend I'm still a baby. How would you feed me?' Like that. Instead of taking care of someone else ... She would show me!

Arvin has committed to caring for his mother in return and his ambition is to save enough money to build a concrete house for himself and his mother in the province from which they come, strong enough to withstand the onslaught of hurricanes and typhoons. "Here, we always have typhoons, earthquakes. I made sure they're building a house that, even though I'm away and I hear about an earthquake or a typhoon, I am sure that that house is made with cement and is safe and stable. I will not worry. My parent needs a permanent home here." "At least now that we've been together, I understand why she had to sacrifice everything for me. It was all just for me. As my payment, even though she didn't succeed in putting me through college, I tell myself that if she worked really hard for me to live, I will also work very hard myself. I will not be satisfied until I finish building that house for her." His mother, now 64, is planning to return to the Philippines in the near future. Arvin, in the meantime, left for Jeddah soon after our interview, replacing his mother as the next generation of OFW. Arvin hopes to share the house with his mother in the Philippines some time in the future.

At the end of the interview, we asked Arvin which parts of his story he would like us to tell others by including them in the play. He asked that we tell of his joyful reunion with his mother and his plans for the future, in other words, precisely those intimate, affective interactions of everyday life and forms of social intelligence and imagination valorized by Tadiar (2015). In the performance in Bagong Barrio, we juxtaposed his testimony with the story of

<sup>11</sup> Tago ng Tago (always in hiding). This term is used for Filipinos 'always hiding' from immigration authorities because of their illegal status. Arvin's mother's illegal status likely explains why she was unable to periodically leave Jeddah to visit him in the Philippines after a certain period in his childhood.

separation told by the child in Canada (above). The following is an excerpt from the reconstructed scene, translated here into English:

*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 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 will 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 call for a meeting but they will not go. That's why I became angry. That no one was taking care of me. When they get tired of me, they would just pass me to the next family member. Until I met some friends who would always give me advice. I grew up like that. I finally decided that I would just be the one to decide for myself.*

Juxtaposed with the experiences of a child of the LCP in this scene, Arvin's monologue then moves toward his story of reunion, his strong love for his mother, his sense of filial responsibility and his great hopes for the future. In this, Arvin's choice is to move his self-narration of his traumatic childhood to a story of recovery and self-mastery. Thinking of what it would mean to decolonize trauma theory, Visser (2011) writes that the existing trauma paradigm is too limiting and prescriptive if 'authentic' trauma is theorised as a compulsive and melancholic repetition of unassimilatable psychic experiences, a telling and retelling of events experienced as trauma. In her view, if trauma theory is to be decolonised, agency and empowerment need to be incorporated as non-trivial modes of theorising trauma's aftermath. She calls for a reorientation to forward looking narratives directed towards subverting traumatic experiences, narratives that go beyond a preoccupation with repetition and containment (see also Morris, 2008). Arvin's own recovery thus works along side what Shields (2012: 16) describes as "the affectively dis-empowering melancholia of trauma that arrests and immobilizes the body". His movement towards resilience and feeling loved involve literally embodying and reclaiming absence scenes from his childhood through role-playing and building a secure home – constructed out of cement – in which he and his mother can reclaim his notion of family, protected from the vagaries of natural disasters, from earthquakes and typhoons.

And yet the only way he can see to accomplish this involves going to Jeddah as an OFW, slotting himself into the very system of labour migration that was the source of his childhood trauma. There are other reasons for being cautious about the effects of resilience narratives. Months after Haiyan, for instance, the Philippine nation's spirit of resilience has been invoked often in depoliticising ways that either mask the inadequacy of the Philippine government's efforts to provide the most urgent aid or to create and implement a comprehensive rebuilding plan for its people. The OFW with the tremendous fighting spirit and great love for the family back home now carries a heavier burden than before to 'insure' life and security for the family.<sup>12</sup>

However, by placing Arvin's personal and individual trauma in conversation with another testimony of separation and other iterations of narratives of resilience ("I am a survivor!"), we are aiming for a more expansive discussion of structural issues. The repetition

of the same or similar stories – trauma and individual resilience, trauma and individual resilience, trauma and individual resilience – points to the tenacity of OFWs, their appetite for struggle and the inadequacy of individual response. Working alongside and in collaboration with a migrant organisation, we hope to induce audiences to link Arvin's 'personal' act of resilience to a broader analysis and collective struggle. As noted above, Fanon (1961) has argued in relation to colonial trauma that the only way to master the wounds of colonial violence is through the formation of a collective political subject that works to destroy the conditions that have induced that trauma. Through the repetition of stories of individual resilience we aim to communicate the futility of individual efforts and the necessity of a collective response. Our collaborative process is of course one small part of Migrante's larger, long-term commitment to this project.<sup>13</sup>

## 6. Final thoughts

Taking a narrative of the trauma of family separation from Canada to the Philippines was not a seamless journey. The trauma experienced by a daughter of an OFW in Canada, manifested in depression and a fundamental reorientation of ambition and sense of self, was largely unrecognised or relocated away from Canada by audiences in Manila. This suggests one spatial story about trauma: that reception and the process of witnessing – what is heard and constituted as trauma – are context dependent. Both the utility and theorisation of trauma also may be context dependent; to frame family separation as traumatic in Canada possibility has a different meaning and opens up a different space of politics than naming family separation as traumatic in the Philippines. We take seriously Tadiar's (2015) and others' cautions about securing social and psychic life in fixed categories of race and in particular in injury named trauma, although we want to suggest that this foreclosure works differently in different places at different times, in ways that have yet to be fully explored.

We have focused on how the narratives that we brought with us to the Philippines provoked new and other stories of traumatic experience. Rothberg (2008) finds some potential for decolonising trauma studies in these multi-directional conversations across traumas of the Global South and North. In the case of a vast transnational Filipino labour diaspora, it seems useful to think about these proliferating stories, not so much in a comparative frame as Rothberg suggests, but as a diffuse network of interrelated stories of trauma. A monologue of family separation in Canada drew out stories of labour migration to the USA, Jeddah and elsewhere, radiating stories of separation. A story of marital breakdown of a Filipino family in Canada was merged with experiences of child abuse in Bagong Barrio. The knotting and linking of these stories builds to a larger global vision of the misery of long-term family separation and prolonged labour migration experienced by Filipino labour migrants around the world. Repetition of these traumatic experiences across places is entirely different than the kind of melancholic repetition of frozen memories or flashbacks described in classical psychoanalytical accounts of trauma. One criticism of the historical trauma paradigm – that it stabilises history in a melancholic repetition of the same – might be rethought from the perspective of repetition across space. We speculate that a geographical reading of repetition of trauma across places can have the opposite effect: one of cultivating collective commitments to political engagement and change.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2013-11-11/remittances-are-insurance-for-typhoon-ravaged-philippines>.

<sup>13</sup> See Francesco and Rodriguez (2014) for the discussion of Migrante International's network of transnational organising, with a focus on the interplay between local specificity (New York and Hong Kong) and global coordination.

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