

**“To Live My Life”:  
An ethnography of cross-border life and kinship from the  
perspectives of Filipina/o-Canadian youths**

**by  
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Master of Arts, University of Victoria, 2010  
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## **Ethics Statement**

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this work, has obtained, for the research described in this work, either:

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or

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation concerns the labour youths perform in their search for well-being across borders. I draw from ethnographic, life story, and visual methods following 15 months of research with ten young people. These youths lived apart from and later reunited with their mothers who moved from the Philippines to Canada to perform domestic work. Through their stories of precarity, care, and hope, participants reveal how a good life or a better life is a relational construct with shifting significations depending on their past experiences, present conditions, and hopes for the future. Their imaginings of a better life, grounded in their understandings of happiness, hardship, and sacrifice, often defy neoliberal and capitalist emphasis on work and money associated with personal success, and instead are oriented towards time with loved ones, relational senses of happiness, and, in some cases, a return “home.” What they also revealed is the complex reconfiguration of home across borders where reunification creates and disrupts more complex social worlds that include but also extend beyond parents and nuclear family settings. Stories of friendships, romantic relationships, music, poetry, and photography illustrate how these young people formed relations and coped in ways often missed in literature pertaining to family migration and reunification. Placing youths’ perspectives at the centre of this ethnography ultimately reveals the living labour they inject into their social, familial, and economic lives to hold their worlds together through precarious times as they persist in living and dreaming otherwise.

**Keywords:** children and youth; transnational migration; family; labour; Philippines-Canada; ethnography

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to the youths whom I have known through the course of my work and studies. It is my pleasure to know you, spend time with you, learn from you, and serve you. May this work continue to break down structural barriers, amplify your voices and hopes, and build empathy so that you can be exactly who you are and want to be.

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Any errors in this dissertation are my own.

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## Chapter 1.

### Introduction: A life that is supposed to be for me



*Figure 1 Bird. Photo by Vea, 2015*

Migration is nothing but a bird travelling from place to place trying to find the best place that will fit his needs and demands. Migrating here to Canada is a tough decision to make. I have to leave the culture and the friends that I live with just so I can be in a place where I get to fulfill a life that is supposed to be for me. Just like a bird, my family migrated here so that we don't have to face the struggles of worrying about what to eat the next day or the fact that we might not even think about eating because we don't have the means to. Leaving the Philippines is a choice that is necessary to make. There is no other alternative. Either my family lives or dies. – Vea, age 17

Vea<sup>1</sup> is the child of a former migrant worker. It was October of 2015 in Vancouver, British Columbia when Vea and I sat down to look through some photographs that she took of her life around the city. These were images that captured both ordinary places that constituted her

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<sup>1</sup>All names are pseudonyms and some aspects of youths' lives have been altered to obscure their identities. Most participants had birthdays over the course of our time together, so the ages I have indicated here are not always precise. It is also important to note that while I have indicated age, it should not be considered a biological fact or reflection of young people's competence. For a fuller and more critical analysis of age in childhood and youth studies, see Barrie Mayall (2008) and Pia Christensen and Allison James (2008).

daily activities as well as temporal representations of a nostalgic past and hopeful future. By this time we had spent several months getting to know each other; through stories, images, and participant observation, I learned about her life before and after her migration to Canada. Having arrived in Vancouver less than a year before we first met, Ve'a's memories of her childhood home and a more familiar life were still visceral, yet she continued to pursue the path her mother forged for her as she tried to figure out how to live in this country that was supposed to be full of promise for her and her family.

Ve'a was less than two months old when her mother, Mama, left the Philippines to return to China where she was a domestic worker. Mama later moved to Canada under the Live-in Caregiver Program where she worked for several more years until she attained an open work permit and received permanent residency. She then sponsored her daughter's and husband's immigrations as part of their long-awaited journey to live in Canada together. Ve'a thus spent most of her life—sixteen years—without Mama's physical presence until their very recent reunion at the Vancouver International Airport. Knowing that her mother worked hard to ensure her family's well-being first in the Philippines and now in Canada, Ve'a repeatedly expressed to me how she was trying to make a life for herself amid the challenges of migration and family separation: "It's all for our own good, to make a new life, cuz now that I've realized it's what it is. It's life, it's to establish a life, make a new life." Life was not just a matter of living day-to-day, although that was also often a struggle, but it was a matter of sacrificing the present to build something more for oneself and one's kin. Acknowledging how persisting through present conditions can be a kind of temporal and material sacrifice begs the question: what kind of life do these youths imagine is possible and hope to build? Ve'a, once certain, now seemed to be constantly trying to reconcile why her path towards betterment felt so full of loss.

Growing up, Ve'a was surrounded by those whom she considered her closest family: *Tita* (aunt), *Nanay* (aunt<sup>2</sup>), *Kuya* (cousin<sup>3</sup>), *Ate* (sister), and Papa. When she and Papa moved to Canada, they initially revelled in the feeling that the life they had always waited for was coming to fruition and that they would finally reunite with Mama. Yet they also encountered the difficult realization that this meant leaving everything and everyone familiar to them—the only life they

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<sup>2</sup>*Nanay* in Tagalog can also refer to mother, but in this case when Ve'a translated her use of *Nanay* into English she would say "my aunt."

<sup>3</sup>*Kuya* in Tagalog is a respectful and endearing term used to refer to men who are older than the speaker. As a kin idiom, it is often used to refer to an older brother or older male cousin. In this case Ve'a was referring to her older male cousin.

had ever known. As Vea sat with me, she choked back the tears reflecting on how living apart from the rest of her family caused her to feel incomplete since “my whole self depends on my whole family.” The separations she underwent signified a rupture in life, ironically for the purposes of making a life, that Vea could not seem to reconcile in spite of her reunion with Mama and the start of her new life in Canada. She mourned the loss of those who were not here with her, especially Ate who was not permitted to visit; the Canadian government recently rejected Ate’s application for a visitor’s visa. This news shocked Vea and she wept thinking that her family would never be together again, at least not in this country. She dwelled in the deep sense that even as she fulfilled the life her mother worked so hard to secure, she was being torn apart. Through tear-filled eyes she told me of the grief she perpetually endured. Life is not what she imagined it would be but it is “a life that is supposed to be for me.”

\* \* \*

This dissertation is based on a fifteen-month ethnographic study conducted throughout 2015 and part of 2016 in British Columbia’s Lower Mainland, traditional and unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples of the Tsleil-Waututh, Skwxwú7mesh, Musqueam, and Kwikwetlem Nations. I draw from life stories, visual representations, and participant observation with Vea and nine other Filipina/o-Canadian<sup>4</sup> youths who were born in the Philippines, lived apart from a parent who worked abroad, and then experienced family reunification in Canada. These parents

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<sup>4</sup> I refer to the participants’ backgrounds as “Filipina/o” in order to account for both male and female participants, thus not erasing the feminine form (“Filipina”) with the more common masculine form (“Filipino”). A discussion of the “a/o” ending, also sometimes replaced with “@,” can be found in McElhinny et al. (2012). These scholars state that “following de Jesus (2005), we believe that the erasure of women in the term ‘Filipino’ maintains the invisibility of women’s lives in academic analysis” and that “the term [is] in keeping with the political spirit of ensuring the importance of gender and its intersectionality for Chicana/o (Elenes 1997) and Latina/o studies (Hernandez-Truyol 1997)” (2012, 28). Taking gender inclusion beyond the masculine/feminine dichotomy is also of growing concern reflected in the usage of “x” endings, such in “Latinx” or “Filipinx.” According to Huffington Post writers Tanisha Love Ramirez and Zeba Blay, “Latinx is the gender-neutral alternative to Latino, Latina and even Latin@...It’s part of a ‘linguistic revolution’ that aims to move beyond gender binaries...[and] makes room for people who are trans, queer, agender, non-binary, gender non-conforming or gender fluid” (2017). The usage of “x” in “Filipinx” was recently highlighted in a conference title: “Transnational Filipinx Studies,” held at York University in November 2016. While I acknowledge the significance of the “x” in challenging gender binaries, as an ethnographer I chose to use the “Filipina/o” version because it most closely aligns with how the participants in this study referred to themselves. They most often spoke of themselves and others as “Filipino,” though they occasionally used the term “Filipina.” I will stay close to the words and descriptions of my participants, while keeping in mind important challenges to dominant forms of language.

were migrant mothers who performed domestic labour in China, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Canada. As with most ethnographies, the stories shared in this dissertation are not generalizable examples, but rather are intimate illustrations of the dynamic and agentive ways youths lived in and persisted through the kinds of precarity that ruptures families and remakes worlds across borders. I ethnographically explore how global socioeconomic and geopolitical inequalities penetrate families in ways that draw both paid and unpaid labour from youths as they grapple with the precarity of home, attempt to hold their families together over time, and commit to the collective life-building projects that mark their sense of kinship.

Particular kinds of ontological fragilities, uncertainties, and significations of hope drive migration, as do the politics of how lives are differentially sustained, valued, and made mobile (Fassin 2012; Jackson 2011, 2013). Drawing from Judith Butler (2009, 25), precariousness is the underlying fragility of life, whereas precarity is the uneven distribution of precariousness that makes some lives more susceptible to injury, violence, or death. Butler argues that it is particular political conditions—in this case shaped by race, class, and gender relations in a political economy of migration, labour, and care—that render some lives more precarious than others. Speaking specifically about the domestic labour often performed by migrant mothers to maintain other families, feminist scholars importantly point to the imbalanced value placed on familial lives, leaving some parents and children more precarious for the sake of benefitting others (Colen 1995; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2004; Parreñas 2005a; Pratt 2012; Tadiar 2009). Shellee Colen coined the term “stratified reproduction” to identify the ways in which “physical and social reproductive tasks are accomplished differentially according to inequalities that are based on hierarchies of class, race, ethnicity, gender, placed in a global economy, and migration status and that are structured by social, economic, and political forces” (1995, 78).

There are intersections between the precarity of labour and the precarity of life: while many scholars characterize precarity according to the decentralized and insecure labour of the neoliberal era and its associated economic conditions, ethnographers also point to a kind of social precarity as the tenuousness of economic and material stability that reconfigure the relations of home and family (Allison 2013; Han 2012; Millar 2014; Muehlebach 2012). The material, temporal, and relational uncertainty of life in capitalist labour markets not only shapes how and why migrant parents perform labour away from home, but as we will see, affects how their children live in the aftershocks of familial rupture and engage in life-building projects among kin.

By life-building, I do not subscribe to a childhood developmental perspective that assumes children's physiological and cognitive immaturity and their progressive growth as a biological fact.<sup>5</sup> Instead, I draw from anthropological concerns with "the processes through which communities cope with various forms of social suffering" (Das et al. 2001, 3) and the "hope that our lives may be made more abundant, for ourselves and those we love" (Jackson 2013, 6). I take the position that children and youths are actively engaged in these processes of coping and hoping in ways that are informed by but not always congruent with what might be conventionally expected according to neoliberal capitalist ideas of educational attainments, career paths, and self-sufficiency. I employ concepts such as tenuousness, tenacity, and tenderness to illuminate the ambivalence that arises when the insecurity of home merges with a driving desire for a better life, all in the context of intimate family relations. *Ten-*, deriving from the Latin "to hold," is useful for thinking about precarious attachments made weak in global labour and migration systems tied to gender, race, and class where lives are unequally valued and where livability is made ever more difficult. It is also useful for thinking about the will to grip, to cling to that which we believe is possible. This prefix speaks to precariousness when life is stitched together *tenuously*, to hope when future possibilities are gripped *tenaciously*, and to care when people hold together *tenderly*. To hold, a verb, implies action, and so I draw from nuanced theorizations of agency in relation to context—both "lateral" as in the mundane carrying that takes place in the everyday (Berlant 2007; Pratt 2010) as well as more intentional strategies to reconfigure the course of life by asserting a direction towards that which is imagined to be better (Ahmed 2010; Olwig 2007a, 2011; Ortner 2006). As anthropologists have argued, capacities to act are always mediated within a sociocultural framework of what is defined as action and what kinds of actions are available under particular circumstances (Ahearn 2001; Ortner 2006). For families coping with the uneven impacts of capitalism including labour export and expropriation in the global market, life-building is captured by Veá's invocation of "to establish a life" and "to make a new life." These utterances reflect her active understanding of both her mother's efforts to build a life in Canada as well as her sense of care and obligation to fulfill her mother's sacrifice and what she believes will be her future. These utterances also reflect a kind of rupture where she senses that she must start again, finding her footing and starting anew in ways that are both grievous and hopeful.

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<sup>5</sup> Theories of child development are common in the fields of developmental psychology and pediatrics. See the works of Jean Piaget (1936), John Bowlby (1969), and Erik Erikson (1950). For anthropological and sociological critiques of these theories, see scholarship by Pia Christensen and Allison James (2008), Allison James and Adrian James (2008), and Barrie Mayall (2002).

In what follows, I consider how precarity is navigated through familial efforts to hold together through work, love, and hope, even as things seem to fall apart. I draw from youths' life stories from before their parents moved abroad, to their time spent separated, to family reunification in Canada, to what youths believe their futures hold, specifically examining how they ground their experiences through a lens of purpose that gives them a hope to grip to in the midst of uncertainty. Yet as I will show, the meaning of a good life for youths was contingent based on intersections of their past experiences, their current circumstances, and what they imagined could ensue in the future. In particular, the meanings of family, home, happiness, and well-being shifted over time, and thus what youths ultimately aimed for was also altered through emergent situations and understandings. Notions of betterment also shifted for youths upon facing pragmatic economic realities and recognizing the losses that came with leaving loved ones behind. Attention to youths' ambivalence enables a critical examination into the tensions of growing up with multiple attachments—thin and thick, tenuous and tenacious—to people, places, and possibilities, as well as to the labour that goes into coping with precarity by redefining the contours of what a good life entails.

### **Placing Vea in Canada's labour and immigration regimes**

Vea's mother was one of approximately 175,000 domestic workers in Canada between 2009 and 2013 under what was the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP) and is now the Caregiver Program (CP) (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2014a).<sup>6</sup> Each year several thousand children join their mothers after long waits to migrate to Canada and reunite with family members (Kelly et al. 2011). Despite the programs' two-year labour requirement before workers can apply for permanent residency, delays in the process mean that the average length of parent-child separation is eight years (Pratt 2012, 17). Factors that extend the length of time families spend apart include mothers moving to intermediate destinations first such as Hong Kong, China, or Singapore (Barber 2009; Constable 2014; Parreñas 2005a, 2015), as well as uncounted time in Canada resulting from any lag caused by a worker switching employers (Pratt 2012; Stasiulis and

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<sup>6</sup> In late 2015, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) was changed to Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). This name change resulted from the initiatives by the newly-elected majority Liberal government.

Bakan 2005).<sup>7</sup> Vea's separation from her mother for sixteen years was lengthier than most, though not uncommon amid this kind of chain migration.

Chain migration, where one family member migrates after another to the same destination, occurs as Canada's current labour and immigration systems construct people as individual workers who are here on a provisional basis to fill a temporary need. It is part of the growing trend towards precarious labour and precarious lives across borders as migrants are denied labour mobility, citizenship rights, and regular access to their families while filling labour shortages and supporting national economies (Bonifacio 2013; Constable 2014; Eric 2012; Lan 2006; Parreñas 2015; Sharma 2006; Yan 2008). Canada's caregiver programs are unique from other temporary migrant worker programs in that they create a path towards permanent immigration (Barber 2009; Davidson 2012).<sup>8</sup> Other categories of temporary workers may also gain permanency by transitioning to the Provincial Nominee Program, which largely depends on an employer's sponsorship (Barber 2009). Programs that knit immigration to the performance of certain kinds of work are highly contentious for the conditions set upon workers and their families since their prospective lives in Canada are dependent on their relationship to their employers who are situated in the powerful position of shaping their workers' future lives in Canada.

The "migration crisis" of the twenty-first century is illuminating how global economic inequalities and political turmoil in many regions make for desperate situations where one's only option may be to leave in order to make a life elsewhere (Fernando and Giordano 2016). According to the United Nations (2016), international migration in 2015 rose by forty-one percent since 2000, making the number of migrants worldwide 244 million. We see how states increasingly fortify their borders as debates rage on about their sovereign power to decide who enters and under what conditions; though justification for exclusions must often be made

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<sup>7</sup> Canada is often perceived to be a more desirable destination for migrant workers because of comparatively better conditions than other destinations such as Dubai, Hong Kong, or Singapore (Barber 2009; Constable, 2014; Yea 2015; Yeoh 2006). The possibility of permanent residency, a unique characteristic of the LCP and CP, is also alluring. This point is not, however, meant to undermine the harsh realities migrant workers face in Canada, as they also often labour under strict and exploitative conditions that have been well documented (Arat-Koç with Intercede 2001; Pratt 2012; Stasulius and Bakan 2005).

<sup>8</sup>For the sake of brevity, when speaking about the commonalities between the LCP and CP I will refer them collectively as Canada's caregiver programs in the present tense since the CP is on-going as of this writing and directly emerged from the LCP. When I am speaking about the LCP, CP, and earlier versions of domestic worker programs in Canada, I will be explicit about the precise program to which I am referring.

according to many countries' constitutions and laws. In order to control immigration in economically specific ways, receiving countries like Canada increasingly shape their immigration policies around labour market demands by creating labour channels for temporary workers (Choy 2003; Damasco 2012; Eric 2012; Straehle and Lenard 2012; Yeoh 2006). These regimes extract human labour from the Global South without fully recognizing workers' social lives and political rights, thus drawing people into the Canadian economy while at the same time inducing new forms of precarity for them and their family members. Temporary labour programs thus have far reaching effects that go beyond borders and crosscut multiple geographies and generations.

Through anthropological and ethnographic lenses, this dissertation centres the stories of youths who lived apart from and later reunited with a migrant working parent. In considering the life-building projects taken up by parents and their children, one of the main concepts I apply is that of labour, but not in the conventional sense studied by so many who focus on migrant mothers' work. Rather, this dissertation is an exploration into the kinds of day-to-day labour that youths perform to help remedy familial rupture induced by the violence of capitalism. It is an investigation into how the lived conditions of precarity shape material, geographical, relational, and temporal worlds, and inform the imaginings and hope that underpin the quest for betterment for those who live at the crux of global socioeconomic inequalities. Youths, I will show, attempt to mitigate precarity at multiple scales: by holding their families together in the most intimate enactments of care as well as through reconfiguring life across borders via transnational ties and movements. I consider what youths told me about the labour *they did* to hold their families together and found that it was the kind of ordinary yet deeply significant labour necessary for living, often obscured from purview in broader discussions about migrant work, that makes life possible by living on and living through precarious times.

## **1.1. Research background**

### *Canada's racist labour regimes*

The channels through which people immigrate can tell us much about the conditions that define life both before and after the physical move takes place. Further, the racialized, classed, and gendered ways to enter Canada shape life inside the borders not only for adult migrants but also for their children and subsequent generations who inherit similar subject positions (Pratt 2012). Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) is a key example that illustrates this point. The TFWP allows people to apply for temporary work permits in the general

categories of “high wage” or “low wage” positions (Economic and Social Development Canada 2016).<sup>9,10</sup> The temporary status of those occupying low wage positions, also referred to as “low-skilled occupations” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2014d), renders them an exploitable second class who contribute to the Canadian economy without receiving the benefits of citizenship (Pratt 2012; Razack 1999; Sharma 2006; Stasiulis and Bakan 2005).

The Government of Canada divides classes of temporary migrants according to distinct labour channels. The International Mobility Program (IMP) has an objective “to advance Canada’s broad economic and cultural national interest” (Economic and Social Development Canada 2014, 1). The IMP comprises workers who are in Canada as a result of bilateral agreements with sending countries or under circumstances of “significant benefit,” “reciprocal employment,” “competitiveness and public policy,” or “charitable or religious work” (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada 2015). More plainly, the IMP accounts for situations such as intra-company transfers, entrepreneurial endeavors, or academic-related positions. International Experience Canada also falls under the IMP where youths may come to or leave Canada in order to “travel and work” through a kind of exchange system (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2014c). Alternatively, the TFWP comprises workers fulfilling far less desirable roles in industries such as fast food, caregiving, manual work on construction sites, meatpacking, and agricultural picking. These industries and their reliance on temporary workers are often hotly reported and debated in the media for their depressive working conditions (Carman and Meissner 2014; Canadian Council for Refugees 2016; Thompson 2016;). Significantly, the TFWP is not considered a welcoming avenue for those who will come to stay in Canada but rather is a “last resort for employers to fill jobs for which qualified Canadians are not available” (Economic and Social Development Canada 2014, 1). Unlike those in the IMP who

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<sup>9</sup>Canada’s TFWP was instituted in 1973, then called the Non-Immigrant Employment Authorization Program. Although this is often considered the formal beginning to what is now the TFWP, Canada as a colonial and settler state has always relied on the labour of migrant workers to help build the nation. See, for example, the works of Himani Bannerji (2000), Sunera Thobani (2007), Sherene Razack, Malinda Smith, and Sunera Thobani, (2010), Jo-anne Lee and John Lutz (2005), and Nandita Sharma (2006) who more extensively elaborate on this history.

<sup>10</sup> Until 2014, when the TFWP changed, employment categories were called “lower-skilled” and “higher-skilled” (Economic and Social Development Canada 2014). According to the National Occupational Classification (Government of Canada 2006), “lower-skilled” occupations require high school and/or some specific occupational-related training. These occupations consist of assistant roles in clerical, sales, transportation, trades, or healthcare roles, as well as cashiers, trade helpers, and general labourers. “Higher-skilled” occupations include management, professional, scientific, technical, and trade roles.

receive the flexibility and freedom of open or partially-open work permits, those under the TFWP are subject to the confines of closed work permits, meaning their stay in Canada is contingent on working for a single employer. As many scholars, activists, and journalists have noted, closed work permits foster harsh conditions as they render people disproportionately subject to workplace abuse due to the power imbalance between employer and employee (CBC News 2015; Canadian Labour Congress and Flecker 2011; Galerand, Gallié, and Olliver 2015; Lowrie 2017; National Alliance of Philippine Women in Canada 2009; Pratt 2012; Stasiulis and Bakan 2005; United Food and Commercial Workers 2009).

There is a clear distinction between these two segments of workers: the former is valued and has a place in the nation as contributing and welcomed subjects, while the latter is positioned only as economic and temporary—a last resort. This occupational scheme is not only segregated by class and citizenship potential, but statistics demonstrate how the divide is cast racially: in 2013, the IMP's top two source countries included the United States (34,398) and Australia (17,311), while the TFWP mainly drew from the Philippines (40,655) and India (7,930) (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2014b, 17-18). Many critics argue that in spite of Canada's official multicultural policy, racism is embedded in the country's historical and contemporary forms of the work-migration nexus as migrant workers help build the nation yet are systematically excluded from becoming part of it (Agnew 2007; Bannerji 2000; Coloma et al. 2012; Davidson 2012; de Leon 2009; Lee and Lutz 2005; Razack, Smith, and Thobani 2010; Thobani 2007; Walia 2013).

Much of the Canadian nation-state was built on the backs of migrant workers whose labour was expropriated in order to uphold the privileges and senses of belonging of white European settler populations (Bannerji 2000; Sharma 2006; Thobani 2007). From the time of early colonization and the dispossession of land from Indigenous peoples, the import of people of colour has been a means to build the nation by using migrant labour to construct infrastructure and transport goods. In other words, temporary migrant workers have experienced a history of exclusion from that which they helped to create, as they were “rendered foreigners within the spaces that the free claimed as their home” (Sharma 2006, 61). As a key example, Sunera Thobani (2007, 92) reflects on the fact that 15,000 Chinese workers built Canada's Pacific Railway—a touted symbol of national pride that was critical for building infrastructure to serve white elites. At the same time, the perceived threat to the white nation posed by Chinese migrants meant that they were then systematically rejected from becoming part of the nation through head taxes starting in 1885 and near total exclusion resulting from the 1923 Chinese Immigration Act

(Sharma 2006; Thobani 2007; Yu 2009). Reaping the human labour of migrant workers yet systematically rejecting them from the prospect of citizenship has been repeated throughout Canada's history with examples that include the 1950s Caribbean Domestic Scheme, the 1966 Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program, the 1973 Non-Immigrant Employment Authorization Program, the 1981 Foreign Domestic Movement, the 1992 Live-in Caregiver Program, and what is now the Caregiver Program (Sharma 2006; Stasiulis and Bakan 2005).

The LCP, part of the TFWP, began in 1992 to meet the growing demand for domestic workers in wealthier Canadian homes (Davidson 2012; Kelly et al. 2011; McElhinny et al. 2012; Pratt 2012; Stasiulis and Bakan 2005). Racist Canadian policies restricted immigration from most regions other than Western Europe until the 1950s, but as the demand for domestic labour grew, Filipinas were increasingly commoditized in the global labour market as ideal immigrants to fill racialized, classed, and gendered domestic roles (Barber 2009; Eric 2012; Pratt 1999; Stasiulis and Bakan 2005; Tungohan 2012). This follows what Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (2004) note to be the “global woman”—women who are drawn into the global labour market through processes of globalization, the uneven distribution of capital, and stereotypes that concern women of colour's character. In late 2014, the LCP was transformed into the CP following decades of contestation from migrant rights and labour activists who arduously challenged the Canadian government to eliminate or modify the program, identifying it as inherently exploitative towards migrant women of colour. Staunch opponents demanded the LCP be entirely abolished and replaced with a means to immediately provide caregivers with permanent residency and the same rights and protections as Canadian citizens (National Alliance of Philippine Women in Canada 2009, 2014; Pratt 2004, 107-108; Tungohan 2012). More moderate opponents called for the LCP to be changed by removing what many deemed to be its harshest requirement: the “live-in” component (Tungohan 2012; West Coast Domestic Workers' Association 2014). It was this aspect of the program, some argued, that rendered women highly vulnerable as they had to reside with their employer, which limited their privacy and autonomy from those whom they depended on for their work permits (Stasiulis and Bakan 2005; West Coast Domestic Workers' Association 2014, 26).

In a rather surprising turn of events, the Canadian government overhauled the LCP in 2014, creating the CP in its place. As noted in the name change, the live-in component was removed to allow caregivers to maintain their own residences. This shift came at an immense cost, however; while the LCP had no cap on the number of permanent resident applications it would accept (potentially extending permanent residency to all eligible applicants), the CP has a

cap of fifty-five hundred accepted applications per year, which will likely deny many women the chance to stay. The response to the changes from activists and labour organizations was mixed, but largely one of disappointment; many advocates agreed with the decision to drop the live-in component, were dismayed by the addition of the cap, and remained dissatisfied that caregivers were still only granted temporary status and closed work permits (Caregivers' Action Centre 2014; Friesen 2015; Philippine Women Centre of Ontario 2014; Tungohan 2014). On a broader scale, scholars Ethel Tungohan, Petronila Cleto, and Conely de Leon (2014) argue that the changes to Live-in Caregiver Program are unhelpful because the labour market segregation and deskilling that punctuate many of these workers' lives continue in spite of the recent modifications.

It was no surprise that when then-Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada Jason Kenney held a press conference about changes to the LCP, he chose to do so at Mount Zion Filipino Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Toronto (Tungohan, 2015). Filipina/os comprise the largest category of temporary migrant workers in Canada at forty-one percent in 2014 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2015, 11) and nearly ninety percent of caregivers (Kelly et al. 2011, 5-10). Notwithstanding its framing as a lower-skilled occupation, most LCP entrants are highly educated with sixty-three percent holding a bachelor's degree (Kelly et al. 2011, 12). In fact, LCP entrants are one of the most highly educated groups in Canada far exceeding the mere twenty-six percent of Canadian adults holding any university education according to the 2011 National Household Survey (Statistics Canada 2011). Despite high levels of education, research shows that these caregivers continue to be underemployed in domestic work even after they complete the LCP (Gabriela Transitions Experiences Survey 2014; Stasiulis and Bakan 2005, 91; Zaman et al. 2007, 27).

What this research indicates is that labour regimes in Canada channel racialized migrants, and Filipina/os in particular, into sectors of the labour market that deny their education and credentials, propelling them into a scheme of deskilling that is difficult to escape because it is structurally created and sustained (GATES 2014; Pratt 2012; Stasiulis and Bakan 2005). Thus, in spite of what appears to be a promise of inclusion, research shows that Filipinas in caregiving roles face systemic and blatant racism inside Canada's borders as they are often denied credential recognition, are subject to low-paying and exploitative jobs, lack political recognition, and are faced with multiple forms of social exclusion (Arat-Koç with INTERCEDE 2001; McElhinny et al. 2012; Pratt 2012; Sharma 2006; Stasiulis and Bakan 2005). Research also shows that the labour experiences of migrant Filipina mothers in Canada profoundly impact their children's lives

upon reunification; geographer Geraldine Pratt argues that “intergenerational hauntings” (2012, 28) occur for Filipina/o-Canadian youths whose lives in Canada are often compromised by the conditions set before their parents. Filipina/o youths who later join their parents in Canada often struggle to gain political recognition (Balmes 2012; Largo 2012), combat racist stereotypes perpetuated through public discourses (Catungal 2012; de Leon 2012), resist the alienation that deny them a sense of belonging (de Leon 2009; Pratt in collaboration with Ugnayan Ng Kabataang Pilipino Sa Canada 2003), and, consequently, struggle to complete high school and access post-secondary education (Abada, Hou, and Ram 2009; Abada and Lin 2014; Farrales 2016; Farrales and Pratt 2012; Kelly 2014; Mendoza 2012).

### *Precarity in the Philippines*

Canada’s TFWP works in tandem with a broader system of global inequality that generates patterns of labour migration (Barber 2009; Rodriguez 2010). The Philippine economic and political climate that drives emigration has arisen through histories of Spanish colonialism, American imperialism, Japanese occupation, and subsequent turmoil under dictatorship and government corruption (Francia 2010; Rafael 2000). Geographers Geraldine Pratt, Caleb Johnson, and Vanessa Banta (2017, 186) argue that it was, and continues to be, a series of interwoven politics, laws, regulations, and practices that have led to the precariousness of life for many Filipina/os at home and abroad who toil in and against hardships that challenge their employment stability, access to land and housing, and long-term prosperity.

Following the end of colonial American rule in 1946, Philippine sovereignty was still tied to US power (Rodriguez 2010, 10). The on-going presence of American advisors, firms, and the military meant that “the newly ‘independent’ Philippine state was, in fact, a neo-colonial one” (ibid.). When economic crisis hit the Philippines in the 1950s, the government turned to the US for support and received such in the form of International Monetary Fund loans (ibid., 11). The shift towards export in the decades to come, advised by the US and expanded under then-President Ferdinand Marcos, marked the growing turn to neoliberalism (Damasco 2012; Eric 2012; Rodriguez 2010). The Marcos regime, in collaboration with the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, imposed structural adjustment policies as a means to repay debt through the 1970s, but in end this served only to collapse the Philippine economy further (Rodriguez 2010, 12). As with most austerity measures, structural adjustment policies heightened socio-

economic inequality due to the withdrawal of social services and growing dependence on flexible and insecure work (ibid., 13). Sociologist Robyn Magalit Rodriguez notes that the resulting burdens were “critically gendered as they require the labor of women, who were represented as an especially docile and cheap labor force” (ibid.). During this era, the Philippine economy increasingly relied on gendered forms of manufacturing, tourism, and emigration (ibid.).

Through the 1980s, more rural modes of subsistence such as fishing and agriculture began to collapse through shifts in land use and the rise of more lucrative export industries (Chaves 2009). In particular, the Fidel Ramos administration created special economic zones in the 1990s as an effort to make the Philippines more competitive to investment through trade liberalization (Pratt, Johnson, and Banta 2017, 171; Rodriguez 2010). This strategy gave rise to growing unemployment, especially in rural regions, while making the kinds of work available in cities more precarious (Sanders and Brown 2012). This rural displacement further contributed to “a surplus population” (Pratt, Johnson, and Banta 2017, 170) that was ultimately forced to emigrate to seek opportunities elsewhere (Tadiar 2009). The insecurity of life in the Philippines was also amplified through failed government-led housing projects and land redistribution measures, making migration and remittances one of the only means to secure any semblance of stability in a ravaged economy (Francia 2010; Pratt, Johnson, and Banta 2017; Rodriguez 2010).

The push to leave the Philippines is codified in the Labour Migration Policy and advocated for through national discourses that claim emigrants to be national heroes—dutiful to their families and the country (Alipio 2015; Parreñas 2005a; Rodriguez 2010). According to the World Bank (2008:x), the Philippines is the fourth largest national receiver of remittances worldwide, following India, Mexico, and China. The World Bank (ibid., 183) finds that the Philippines received approximately US\$17 billion in remittances in 2007, constituting about thirteen percent of its gross domestic product. The same report finds that India received far more remittances, totaling US\$27 billion, but in stark contrast to the Philippines this represents less than three percent of its gross domestic product. The World Bank (2016) further reports that in 2015 personal remittances constituted 10.3 percent of the Philippine GDP, representing a six hundred percent increase since 1977. Commonly considered a “remittance economy” (Banyan 2010; Herrera 2015), the Philippines has come to depend on the nearly 2.4 million overseas workers who contributed more than US\$3.7 billion dollars, an average of US\$1737 per worker in only six months of 2015 (Republic of the Philippines 2015a, 2015b, 2015c).

As Rodriguez argues (2010), Philippine emigration emerged through the legacy of colonial ties, gendered stereotypes about Filipina labour, and government efforts to manage a dwindling economy. In other words, without much else for the Philippines to export yet the need to generate cash, one of the last remaining exports is that of the human body and its labour, especially in response to the draw from countries like Canada that have a high demand for domestic workers due to the lack of a national childcare system, low wages and poor working conditions that propel Canadians away from such roles, and the uneven impacts of feminist movements that result in more Canadian women entering the workforce (Bakan and Stasiulis 1997; Stasiulis and Bakan 2005). Through a co-dependent relationship that informs the flow of migrant workers, Canada takes advantage of Philippine labour export and people's desperate economic situations to fill the demand for cheap labour. As women's studies scholar Neferti X. M. Tadiar (2009) argues, the search for autonomy from oppressive economic and gendered circumstances in the Philippines means that some women turn to other embodied modes of labouring. This is, she suggests, simultaneously and complexly a liberating and oppressive practice informed by histories of economic and political crisis in the Philippines as well as women's search for emancipation, even if it is within the guise of capitalism.

In a global labour market that draws on Filipinas' domestic labour, a mother's emigration may be seen as a viable financial solution for struggling families. Research indicates that in 2004 approximately nine million or twenty-seven percent of all children in the Philippines lived with a parent working overseas (Parreñas 2005b, 317).<sup>11</sup> Tadiar (2009, 35-36) argues that it is women's labour capacity—their constructed and assigned roles to perform ordinary forms of reproductive or “living” labour as opposed to men's surplus labour tied to labour-time that is the most ripe for capitalism to exploit, largely because the reproductive work assigned to women is regarded as free. Because this reproductive labour is so intimately tied to the body, it is the female worker's body that is expropriated, not just the labour she performs (*ibid.*, also see Fortunati 1989). As we will further see, the expropriative capacities of capitalism not only implicate these mothers' labour and bodies, but also their children who too engage in forms of living labour to sustain themselves and their families through enduring precarity and in the pursuit of betterment.

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<sup>11</sup>It is difficult to find recent statistics reflecting the number of Philippine households impacted by migrant labour. Parreñas (2005b, 317) indicates that the statistics presented here were gathered by the non-governmental organization Kakammpi in 2004, but the document is no longer available online and this organization does not appear to offer more recent calculations. The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration attempts to track Philippine citizens working overseas, they do not record information about family configurations.

While at times emigrant Filipinas are framed as “heroes of the nation” (Pratt, Johnson, and Banta 2017, 186), they are also subject to immense stigma when they leave their children (Parreñas 2005a). As many scholars point out, a mother’s migration away from the home is harder to rationalize than a father’s since her obligation of care primarily resides *in* the home (Barber 2008, Parreñas 2005a). Sociologist Rhacel Salazar Parreñas finds that children attest to being impacted the most when their mother works abroad, which suggests that children diligently adhere to the construct that a mother’s care is necessary for their well-being. Parreñas argues that while the global labour market is reconfiguring Filipina/o families, gender roles endure in ways that are particularly difficult for mothers and children to reconcile when life demands otherwise. This is reflected in Ve’a’s sentiment that living apart from her mother caused to feel incomplete. Yet this is not the whole story; Ve’a was also adamant that new relational and subjective gaps emerged when she lived apart from other loved ones including *Kuya*, *Nanay*, *Tita*, and *Ate*. She indicates that even as she felt her mother to be a vital part of herself, the contours of kinship and what constituted a good life shifted through time and geography, as well as emergent and dissipating relations. This does not overturn the significance of one relationship for another, but rather alerts us to the disjunctures that youths like Ve’a navigate daily as they attempt to hold their desperate worlds together through their actions of remembering, enduring, sacrificing, and hoping.

## **1.2. Storied migrations**

In Vancouver’s wealthier westside, it is an everyday occurrence to see a middle-aged Filipina pushing a double stroller with two light-skinned children with blonde or sandy brown hair. The neighbourhood, on the outskirts of a lush university campus, holds a high number of rental apartments but is also home to multimillion-dollar houses with views overlooking English Bay. As Bonnie McElhinny and her colleagues (2012) suggest, these women are hypervisible in their expected roles as caregivers, while the structures that underpin their migrations and histories remain invisible, as do their everyday lives working for Vancouver families. This invisibility follows what Elizabeth Povinelli refers to as “the dynamics of recognition” (2011, 76). Povinelli argues that there is a “social spacing” at work that temporarily pauses the capacity to see another “—a bracketing of the other in a no-man’s land of having been neither recognized nor denied recognition” (2011, 77). Under the TFWP, workers are bracketed from recognition in Canada according to their temporary status, while their family members’ have no space to exist in Canada at all—they are left behind not by parents who leave, but by a state that fails to recognize the long

shadow of global inequalities and people's vital attachments to each other. Povinelli critically questions what can be known when we look to the voices that are left out, asking, "But what if we opened these brackets? What conditions of life would we find in these suspended zones?" (ibid., 77). Butler (2009, 13) similarly argues that an ethical recognition of life implies recognition of precariousness. What follows centres the stories of those who most intimately feel the impacts of global capitalism and perform the living labour that goes into holding everyday life together, while reimagining and redefining the contours of a better life for themselves and their loved ones in ways that conform to but also defy neoliberal capitalism.

This dissertation etches new insights by engaging concerns about how youths who live at the crux of global inequalities work to hold life together and persevere through precarious times. It addresses questions such as: What can youths' memories of childhood, relations of kin and care, and ambivalent senses of loss and hope reveal about the ways in which they register and persist through precarity? How are youths' social worlds and subjectivities reconfigured through their particular migration routes that result in staggered family migrations and prolonged times of waiting? How does the uneven global distribution of gendered labour impact young people who must contend with a reconfiguration of care and labour within their households? Finally, what constitutes a good life or a better life for young people labouring on the margins of capitalism? The pursuit of a better life takes centre stage in familial movements across borders and Veá emphasized this construction through her narration of what she believed awaited her and her family in Canada. She clearly articulated what migration scholars have theorized regarding the driving desire migrants have when they give up a familiar life for the prospect of something better not solely for themselves, but also (and perhaps mainly) for those they love (Abrego 2014; Ahmed 2010; Baldassar, Baldock, and Wilding 2006; Boehm 2012; Coe et al. 2011; Coutin 2016; Dreby 2015; Kwon 2015; Parreñas 2005a; Pratt 2012).

This dissertation puts Filipino/a-Canadian youths' life stories in conversation with theoretical discussions of what migration and the search for a better life entails. The youths that I will introduce strive to remain committed to their families' dreams for a better life, yet they do so among the contradictory experiences they had as children in transnational families and whom Canadian society fails to fully recognize and include in spite of extracting mothers' care work and, as a consequence, also extracting children's living labour. For them, a "good life" is contingent and deeply problematic—they struggle to negotiate what a good life means in relation to its neoliberal constructions associated with working hard in Canada, while simultaneously identifying with the driving desire to return home because life after migration was not what they

thought it would be. The larger familial quest for a good life also had significant implications for youths' everyday lives as they grappled with the unexpected and emergent hardships that continued to create geographical, temporal, and relational ruptures. For Veena and her parents, committing to their family's life-building project in spite of the new hardships they faced after reuniting is an enactment of a hope that defies present conditions, yet those present conditions are still *present*. They are felt. Thus, reaching towards the "life that is supposed to be for me" and making "a choice that is necessary" re-emerge through the text as central tropes that signify sacrifice and an attachment to the possible as a means of understanding, enduring, hoping, and living through uncertain times.

I draw on storytelling throughout the chapters to explicate youths' perspectives on their own lives. Drawing from the work of Hannah Arendt, Michael Jackson (2002) argues that stories enable people to understand and order their lives, giving words to events that may otherwise be unnamable. Stories, he suggests, are not reflections of factual content but rather are the sensual, experiential narrations of what is often considered private life. Many youths I met told me stories they had never spoken of before and thus were trying to orate an interiority and name experiences. Tadiar illuminates how experience is the "mediation between self and environment...as the concrete articulation of the determinative relations between subjective activity and socioeconomic structures" (2009, 38). Storytelling is the mediation between that subjective experience and the world in an effort to make oneself known. It is a political act that can bring disparate experiences together in order to illuminate the patterned and intimate effects of socioeconomic structures in more private spaces. Storytelling is also an assertion of agency through the generation and collectivization of knowledge (Arendt 1958; Das and Kleinman 2001; Dossa 2004).

Looking to youths as narrators of their own life stories reflects what Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman call a "retrieval of voice" (2001, 20). It reveals the sense they make—and are trying to make—of their complex lifeworlds. Through oral, textual, embodied, and visual storytelling, I could see them not only trying to actively make sense of their complex and contradictory experiences for me but also for themselves, attempting to harness the incoherence of life through the meaning-making involved in hindsight as well as the hope cast through imaginative foresight. Parin Dossa points to the temporality at work in storytelling where "complex lives may be captured within a temporal framework: what the past was like, what the present ought to be, and how the future is envisioned" (2004, 37). Youths' stories attempted to conjure a kind of justice in this world through time—that their and their parents' labour would

amount to a fair, redemptive outcome. Many of them also wanted their hardships and hopes to be known, and thus they selectively chose what to share and how through multiple modalities. Their stories command our attention in order to bring their perspectives into broader purview and offer a retrieval of the kinds of stories that tend to easily slip away from dominant discourse (Tadiar 2009).

Throughout this dissertation I attempt to stay close to the words of my participants in order to convey their perspectives. The headings of most sections reflect participants' words and I offer many of their quotes to highlight their expressions. My analysis of these stories as well as how they are and are not included in this dissertation are of course partial and situated, shaped by my own positionality vis-à-vis these youths. Undoubtedly, my identities as a white, middle-class, English-speaking, Canadian-born, and university-educated woman stood out as key differences between myself and those I met. As much as I could never imagine living through some of the experiences my participants shared with me and can only do my best to understand them through careful listening, checking back, and learning through other conversations and literature, there are also points at which the arcs of our lives parallel in unexpected ways. While maintaining accountability to name the structures that shape our disparate social positions of oppression and privilege, perhaps there are times where we can try to understand one another through a shared sense of humanity, allowing not just an informed curiosity but a justice-oriented sense of care and responsibility to motivate our aims. As Jackson argues,

To speak of a shared humanity is not to invoke a transcendent category of universal essence but to recognize the extent to which human beings are able to work out ways of communicating and coexisting with one another in the face of seemingly insurmountable differences. That these forms of mutuality are only randomly or rarely attained is no more a proof of ineradicable difference than their occasional attainment proves a common humanity. To invoke the human is simply a way of acknowledging one's potential or capacity for seeing oneself in the other and finding the other in oneself. Such moments are, as Judith Butler observes, often associated with the loss of someone dear to us and the sudden sense of vulnerability that follows. Such grievous loss, she writes, makes "a tenuous 'we' of us all." And "this is how the human comes into being, again and again, as that which we have yet to know." (2013, 86; Butler 2003, 9-37, 10, 36)

I end this section with a point on the role of witnessing as an important consideration for ethnographers working with people and their stories. Witnessing is a critical epistemological position that ethnographers must take in order to move away from oppressive acts of othering and appropriation (Behar 1996; Das 2007; Dossa 2004; Jackson 2002, 2013; Ross 2001). Ruth Behar

(1996) calls for anthropologists to step out from behind their cameras and notebooks to humanly connect with those whom they encounter—arguably the key differentiating point of an ethnographic orientation to research. Through her work with migrant Muslim women, Dossa (2004, 130-131) first suggests that witnessing involves an imperative to state what happened by conveying testimonies to wider audiences. Second, she suggests that witnessing involves being in a relationship with the storyteller. Behar (1996) elaborates on the intersubjectivity of witnessing by suggesting that ethnographers must be vulnerable, reflecting on and incorporating their emotions in their analyses. Finally, witnessing must also comprise not only hearing what is said but also what is left unsaid, as silence can be communicative act (Basso 1970; Das 2007; Dossa 2004, 2008; Ross 2001). Witnessing, rather than merely observing, thus commands attention, reflection, and action in relation to those we meet and come to deeply care about.

### **1.3. Outline of the dissertation**

This chapter provided some contextual background, while subsequent chapters explicate my theoretical framework and concepts, methodological approach, and empirical findings along with my discussion. Chapter two is an analysis of the current literature that pertains to this study and is where I put forth my conceptual framework. I first examine critical feminist and anti-racist scholarship attending to the politics of difference that informs and extends from Canada's immigration and labour regimes. This suggests that gendered, classed, and racialized inequalities in Canada are forms of violence against certain populations, generating uneven allocations and experiences of citizenship. I then examine how anthropologists and ethnographers attend to the localized reasoning and responses family members have to the kinds of life circumstances that propel them to move away from and towards one another. This literature makes space to consider the ways in which not only parents but *youths* contend with the kinds of precarity that impinge their familial relations, the materialities of daily life, and senses of belonging and home. I configure a conceptual framework that focuses on life and precarity, labour and care, and hope as a constellation of lived conditions and responses young people have to the tenuousness of their material and relational lives and their imaginings of betterment. Putting these concepts to work with youths' life stories paves a path towards thinking about how youths grappled with the precariousness of life through labour and hope, revealing the sacrificial nature of life-building they engaged in not only for their own futures but for their loved ones' futures as well.

In Chapter three, I explicate how I went about designing and conducting the study as a youth-focused project. I discuss how I approached the topic methodologically as well as the

nanced decision making that went into not only producing rich ethnographic data, but was also an enjoyable and rewarding process for the participants whose lives are busy with other commitments. By ensuring that participants felt meaningfully included and directed some of the research outcomes, I sought to consider and challenge dominant power relations. I also show that hierarchies of power in research relationships are at times difficult to mediate amid ethics requirements that propagate prescriptive measures. I illustrate how procedural ethics may not be appropriate in given situations, arguing instead that situated or emergent ethics can better account for the complexities and heterogeneities of youths' lives, with such approaches being more anthropologically and ethnographically informed.

Chapter four reveals the ways in which children and youths were often acutely aware of the material conditions that propelled their mothers to work overseas. I demonstrate this through participants' stories of the materialities of everyday life, including their houses and food, which signified the challenges they and their parents' faced in their daily struggles to survive. Houses and food were not only indicative of an economic precarity, such as a lack of money, but also a social precarity punctuated by strains on familial relations and changing forms of care. Who was present at home and around the dinner table are memories that signified youths' broader sentiments about living with and apart from vital kin. I argue that the material conditions of daily life, reflected to me by participants' memories of their childhoods and their more recent experiences, are registers of precarity and changing life conditions. These registers were not only meaningful at the time of separation in terms of understanding why mothers had to go but also constituted emergent meanings in the present as youths grappled with the arc of care—including the presence and absence of people and things—in their lives.

Extending from feminist insights that have been highly attentive to the ways in which migrant mothers care for their children from afar, in chapter five I consider children's perspectives of their mothers *and fathers*. With their fathers' work and earnings displaced through the demand for feminized labour, youths often watched their fathers respond to changing roles and responsibilities in the home. The change in parent dynamics following the family separation significantly impacted how the household was managed and enactments of daily forms of care. I show how older siblings were often acutely aware of their parents' marital strife and the different challenges they each faced based on their different locations in the family and labour markets. More specifically, youths' stories reveal how they laboured to emotionally care for their fathers who often seemed at a loss and mothers who often seemed to be suffering. This chapter provides the most acute example of the labour that youths exuded towards their parents and siblings when

precarity impinged each family member differently and challenged their relationships with one another.

Chapters six and seven address the ambiguities and ambivalences of geographical and temporal challenges that came with transnationalism. In chapter six, I demonstrate the ways in which family and home are reconstituted when a mother moves away. The findings allow for a deeper analysis of the labour youths performed as they grappled with having a mother away; I demonstrate how prolonged separation manifested as forms of waiting and this speaks to not just the geographical but temporal divide that takes place over the long course of chain migration. I argue that the time youths spent waiting to migrate to Canada and reunite with their mothers was productive of other kinds of relations and life experiences that reconfigured youths' subjectivities. While some youths attested to ordinarily carrying on, others underwent significant life changes that made the migration and reunification process all the more difficult. Time, as social construct, phenomenological experience, and mode of power, was thus differently felt as ordinary, lagging, and even reversed depending on youths' age, life experiences, and migration trajectories.

In chapter seven I demonstrate that while reunification literature often focuses on the process of a mother and child coming back together, this can obscure the relationships youths form with others in the meantime. Cared for by grandmothers, aunts, or siblings as well as becoming close to best friends, romantic partners, and confidantes meant that the time youths spent apart from mothers was utilized to cultivate vital connections to others that were often quite painfully ruptured upon emigration. Thus, while reunification can signify a reconnection with one family member, it was also often paradoxically experienced as a rupture in other kinds of foregrounded relationships that constituted youths' everyday lives and sense of self in the Philippines. Maintaining relationships with loved ones back in the Philippines occurred through tasks of cooking, making phone calls, practicing faith, and playing music as youths explained to me how they fostered continuities to people and places most closely associated with home.

I then examine the resurgence of precarity in chapter eight according to the living conditions and daily lives of the participants in Greater Vancouver. I detail how their lives unfolded upon reunification in ways that were often initially very gratifying, but over time became increasingly disappointing. The joys of family reunification were challenged by the perils of educational upgrading and the demands of work that impinged upon family time—time together that had been denied in the years apart prior. In addition, although some youths experienced their new houses as bigger, better, and more stable than anything they had before,

other participants found their houses to be unwelcoming due to the sensory experiences of the enclosure and isolation of being alone most of the time. Life in Canada, in other words, was not what many participants hoped it would be as they came up against new challenges and insecurities. I argue that the surge of precarity and senses of sacrifice in the present generated two pulls: a nostalgic tug that drew youths back, imaginatively, to a better past in the Philippines *and* a hope that time and effort would unfold something better for them and their families in Canada. This leads to my discussion of the future in the chapter that follows.

Chapter nine focuses on the ways in which youths planned for and enacted the future. Youths' dreams of a better life were not so much for themselves (as their parents hoped) but rather, reciprocally, for their parents. While much of the literature points to the ways in which parents sacrifice for their children, my research finds that children in turn hope to sacrifice through labour and money for the sake of their parents—to *give their parents a better life*. Some youths flipped the narrative entirely as they hoped to attain a career that would allow them to send their parents back to the Philippines to enjoy the life they never had, thus revealing how life-building is about much more than a one-way trajectory, geographically and generationally. This speaks to Tagalog concepts of will and fulfillment, as Jeremiah Reyes (2015) discusses, by the intertwining of lives through not only interdependent forms of care but also interdependent senses of *being* where one's life is inherently tied to another. Further, the findings in this chapter elucidate how many participants defined a good life, often valorizing family and relations over work or money. Well-being, my participants often argued, concerned happiness vis-à-vis family and senses of home and not luxurious lifestyles or financial prosperity.

In chapter ten I shift to the dynamic and sensory modes of storytelling the participants evoked to reveal other realms of life through music, poetry, and photography. In rather surprising ethnographic moments, youths revealed deeper metaphorical significances by using their passions and talents to give voice to their losses, frustrations, and dreams. These songs and images did not focus exclusively on parents, but on friendships and romantic relationships that I had otherwise failed to consider. In doing so, the participants redirected my attention towards other forms of living labour and less language-bound modes of expression to reveal the heartache and nostalgia they experienced as part of their migratory journeys. Here I suggest that if we are to recognize the implications of our exclusionary and precarity-inducing immigration systems, we must be attentive to the hardships youths express that lay outside of our commonly asked questions, beyond the purview of what we expect to find. I apply Lisa Stevenson's notion of "anthropological listening" (2014, 2) to consider how we might take what youths have to say

about pop music, dating, friendships, and their shifting feelings seriously in our considerations of what is painful and what is hopeful for them.

I conclude by reflecting on the ways in which youths construct senses of hope as a means of imaginatively manifesting a future that constitutes the life they believe they could and should have. It is this image of the life they are supposed to have, that is supposed to manifest from all of the work of living, which they often grip to tenaciously. It propels them through hard times with driving desire to be with and care for their family members just as their family members have done for them. This future, as we will see, is elusive, seeming to constantly escape their grip, yet it is an alluring destiny—"a life that is supposed to be for me." I wonder how we can make space for these dreams to be known, for if we know, perhaps we can also make space for them to manifest, as we might hope for our own children. My hope is that this dissertation carves out some of these spaces for Ve'a and her friends to put their experiences and hopes out into the world.

## **Chapter 2.**

### **Theoretical and conceptual framework**

What does Veena mean by “a life that is supposed to be for me?” More specifically, what can anthropological literature and other cross-disciplinary understandings of the motivations and journeys of migrant workers and their families tell us about both the lived conditions of capitalism and the cultural logics that shape life through labour, care, and mobility? This chapter engages with a range of scholarship that contributes to conversations about the kinds of social, political, and economic structures that shape lives and kinship across borders. It also considers the sense parents and children make of their precarious circumstances and how they respond through mobility and transnationality to survive and persist through difficult times. It thus draws together scholarship that is: 1) critical of immigration regimes that render some people more precarious than others through the allocation and denial of social citizenship in relation to gender, race, class, and labour market position; and 2) attentive to the political economies that shape labour and family configurations, as well as how family members, as dynamic and agentive individuals, differently interpret their circumstances and manifest alternative futures.

What these two arenas of scholarship offer are critical lenses on how socioeconomic and racialized disparities are propagated by borders and segregated labour markets, as well as how people contend with precarity in and through the migration-labour nexus. What this literature often lacks is centring the perspectives of youths as competent narrators of their own life stories, able to apprehend their circumstances through remembering the past, enduring and redefining the present, and (re)imagining the future. While current literature importantly provides insight into the structural violence faced by migrant parents, new insights can be gained by focusing on the perspectives of their children who hold connected yet different subject positions in terms of kinship, paid and unpaid labour, and the prospect of what life in Canada means. Youths’ life stories tell us not only about the subjectivities of migrant young people as they struggle with the precarity of home and migration, but also about the temporalities of life-building—how material conditions change, how relations are forged and severed, and how betterment is contingent on shifting significations of what a good life means.

The latter half of this chapter provides the conceptual groundwork for what follows. I draw from literature that engages with the entanglements of life, labour, and care through precarious times. I consider how precarity can manifest as the fragility of life and insecurity of labour, but also how those gaps are productive of new kinds of responses and imaginings that fall outside of conventional neoliberal capitalist life aspirations and expected parent-child relations. I am also considerate of how care figures into these discussions since it is often understood as a means to mitigate the insecurity of life, but can also further induce precarity when it is denied, withdrawn, or expropriated. For the youths I met, it was not only a matter of the care they did or did not receive that came to punctuate their understandings of their relations, but also the care they imbued towards others through their own living labour. Though the concept of living labour has been applied to analyses of the care work performed by migrant Filipinas (Tadiar 2009), it is useful to extend this concept to consider the labour that goes into more mundane forms of carrying on as youths also engage in the necessary labour of ordinary life as a means to survive and persist. What this allows me to consider is how with the extraction of their mothers' work comes the subsequent extraction of children's labour as they help mediate the paucity of care propagated by capitalist expropriation. It is the performance of this care that leads to shifting significations of betterment, contingent upon relations that are affirmed and repudiated over time.

## **2.1. Politics of Difference: Immigration, citizenship, and the state**

I begin by discussing Canada's immigration and labour regimes in relation to how citizenship and belonging are informed by a politics of difference. First, however, it is critical to elucidate what I mean by the state and how it informs subjectivities. The state is not a static entity but "an ever shifting assemblage of planning, operations, and tactics increasingly informed by neoliberal reason" (Ong 2006, 99). Foucauldian scholars claim that as governments retreat from using overt force to manage people's lives, more elusive tactics of governmentality arise where people come to manage themselves in ordered and specific ways (Foucault 1977, 1983; Miller and Rose 2008). As Foucault (1977, 2008) argues, these tactics work on the individual level through discipline of the body as well as at the level of entire populations through a biopolitics that informs how lives are differently valued and invested in. Aihwa Ong (1999, 2006) and Sherry Ortner (2006) demonstrate how governing forms of power are not static and homogenous, but manifest contextually as they are socioculturally mediated—that is, taken up and transformed by people in the scope of everyday life. Ortner argues that there is a connection between governing forms of power and people's subjectivities, with subjectivities being defined as "the

ensemble of modes of perception, affect, thought, desire, and fear that animate acting subjects” (2006, 107).

Nationalism can produce senses of community and alienation based on hierarchical schemes of who is considered (and not considered) to belong (Anderson 1991; Barth 1969; Comaroff and Comaroff 2005, 2008). In recent decades, however, some anthropologists have suggested that states are becoming less relevant to nation-building as people, commodities, technologies, and ideas transverse and defy borders, moving amid alternate planes or “scapes” of mobility (Appadurai 1990; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Gupta and Ferguson 1992). Nina Glick-Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc (1995) notably advocated for a turn away from methodological nationalism or a state-centric perspective and towards a transnational anthropology that does not confine its inquiries to the spaces within borders. Alternatively, others argue that states maintain their relevance via their sovereign power to restrict borders through immigration policies, detention, and deportation (Besteman 2016; Boehm 2012; De León 2015). As well, states foster a politics of difference by generating gendered, classed, and racialized segregation through the distribution of labour, welfare, housing, and political power (Aretxaga 2003; Fassin 2012; Ong 1999, 2006; Stasiulis and Bakan 2005). As follows, critical scholarship that pertains to the politics of difference in Canada helps expound how sovereign power restricts immigration, as well as how immigration channels maintain segregated citizenship statuses and labour market positions that most negatively impact migrants of colour.

Histories of race-making and race relations in Canada reveal the ways in which state formation and nation-building have led to a politics of difference, including various forms of inclusion for the dominant population and marginalization for both Indigenous and migrant groups (Lee and Lutz 2005).<sup>12</sup> By a politics of difference, I mean the ways in which “hegemonic discourses, relations of power, role assignments, and the distribution of benefits assume a particular and restricted set of *ruling norms*, even though they usually present themselves as neutral and universal” (Young 1999, 416, also see Austin-Broos 2011; Comaroff 1995; Gupta and Ferguson 1992). Critical anti-racist scholars argue that Canadian nation-building has primarily

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<sup>12</sup> For a discussion on how anthropologists have employed and critique the concept of race, see works by George Stocking (1987) and Ann Stoler (1995, 2002, 2005). For further discussion on race relations and racism in Canada, see Vijay Agnew (2007), Sharryn Aiken (2007), Himani Bannerji (2000), Parin Dossa (2009), Frances Henry and Carolyn Tator (2005), Yasmin Jiwani (2005), Jo-Anne Lee and John Lutz (2005), Peter Li (2007), Jean McDonald (2007), Roy Miki (2005), Ali Rattansi (2005), and Sunera Thobani (2007). For a discussion on the concept of racialization, see Robert Miles (1989, 1993).

been a project of making and maintaining whiteness through the colonization of Indigenous peoples, the import of Europeans, and barriers placed on immigration from certain regions of the world (Bannerji 2000; Razack, Thobani, and Smith 2010; Thobani 2007; Walia 2013). Thobani (2007, 41) argues that violence against First Nations people was legitimized and encoded into law early in the colonization process as European settlers sought to establish conquest and legitimize their authority in order to garner and maintain dominance. Canadian citizenship is now based on white supremacy or the “preferred race” of white Europeans as opposed to Indigenous peoples and “‘non-preferred race’ immigrants” (ibid., 75). Although multiculturalism is prominent in Canadian policies and nationalist discourse, Thobani argues that it merely pays lip service to subdue anti-racist, anti-colonial movements while maintaining white privilege. In sum, discourses of diversity assume a neutrality or equality among those living in Canada while obscuring power relations and, ultimately, protecting a colonial and racist status quo (Bannerji 2000).

Racism does not occur in isolation from other subject positions associated with oppression and privilege. Intersectionality, originally theorized by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989), takes into account how “inequities are never the result of single, distinct factors. Rather, they are the outcome of intersections of different social locations, power relations and experiences” (Hankivsky 2014, 2). As Crenshaw argued, gender and race always intersect to inform women of colour’s oppression (also see Collins 2008; Lorde 1984). Other scholars also point to the politics of difference concerning class, ability, sexuality, age, language, and more in shaping everyday barriers towards social inclusion and access to resources (Yuval-Davis 2006). Feminist anthropologists are also attentive to intersecting forms of oppression; Henrietta Moore (1988) writes about the history of women’s poor inclusion in ethnographic research as well as how Black feminist anthropologists and scholars are routinely sidelined in sociocultural anthropology. She challenges anthropologists to pay attention to the ways in which discrimination based on gender, class, and race emerges in how ethnographic research is conducted and how knowledge is valued in the discipline. Ortner (2006, 20) similarly suggests that race, gender, and class discrimination often overlap in everyday American discourse as one form of antagonism spills into another; these practices, she argues, affirm “the hegemonic processes that sustain systematic inequalities” (ibid., 19). These feminist interventions lend themselves towards more complex intersectional understandings of the division of labour, globally and in Canada, that inform migrant parents’ lives and the lives of their children who also exist in a web of power relations based on their generational status and age.

Social scientific research on feminized labour migration and domestic work reveals how these forms of migration are not only gendered but also tightly woven into a system of inequality based on race and class.<sup>13</sup> Colen (1995) notably demonstrated that migrant domestic workers in the US are often mothers of Afro-Caribbean heritage who care for the families of upper-middle class American women while leaving their children in the care of others. This handing off and handing down of domestic labour is part of what Arlie Hochschild (2000) and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2015) identify as the nanny care chain. The nanny care chain is “a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring. A typical global care chain might work something like this: An older daughter from a poor family in a third world country cares for her siblings (the first link in the chain) while her mother works as a nanny caring for the children of a nanny migrating to a first world country (the second link) who, in turn, cares for the child of a family in a rich country (the final link)” (Hochschild 2001). Hochschild notes the class aspect to the chain whereby it usually starts in a poorer country and more rural region and often ends in a richer country and more urban centre.

There is a patterned trajectory in the care chain, informed by migration, race, class, and gender dynamics, with middle-class Filipinas filling the demand for domestic work in Canada. As Pauline Barber argues, Filipinas are often framed as “the ideal immigrant” (2009, 1276) to fill caregiving roles in Canada. The following ethnographic examples illustrate how the stereotype operates. In a study conducted with migrant domestic workers, their employers, and placement agencies in Vancouver, Pratt (1997) finds that racist stereotypes prevail among those looking to hire a nanny. She finds that the stereotypes applied to prospective European domestic workers included ideas that they migrated voluntarily, expected good compensation, were well-educated, held strong communications skills, and were a suitable fit for Euro-Canadian families. These women are, however, considered unlikely to stay in Canada for a long period of time due to their familial attachments and likelihood to return home without any long-term need to stay (*ibid.*). Alternatively, Pratt finds that Filipinas are stereotyped as uneducated and poor, and thus willing to accept lower wages for harder work. It is also often assumed that they will stay in Canada longer due to their unfavourable conditions back home, perceived desperation, and desire to achieve Canadian citizenship (*ibid.*). As scholars have shown, work conditions for these Filipinas reflect their employers’ stereotypes, as they are required to work long hours, perform menial tasks, and face abuse due to the assumption that they will accept and endure such conditions as

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<sup>13</sup> For more on mobility in relation to class privilege, see the works of Vered Amit (2007), Meike Fechter (2007), Sawa Kurotani (2007), Karen Fog Olwig (2007b), and Aihwa Ong (1999).

part of their desperation to stay (Arat-Koç with INTERCEDE 2001; Pratt 2012; Stasiulis and Bakan 2005).

Sociologist Daiva Stasiulis and political scientist Abigail Bakan (2005, 86-106) also identify disturbing differences among migrant domestic workers in Canada. The LCP and CP are renditions of earlier programs including the 1950s Caribbean Domestic Scheme, which sought to bring women of Caribbean heritage to Canada to perform domestic work. Due to the growing preference for Filipina domestic workers through the 1980s, Caribbean women became less desirable and were increasingly less likely to receive labour placements. This preference, Barber points out, emerged as “the Philippine state is aggressively promoting the qualities of Filipinos in various global labour markets, and immigrant receiving countries such as Canada are receptive to ‘Brand Philippines’” (2009, 1276). As Pratt (1997) points out, many prospective Canadian employers and hiring agencies perpetuate and feed off assumptions that stereotype migrant women of colour. Stasiulis and Bakan find that these “patterns of structural discrimination” (2005, 87) lead to the preferential hiring of Filipinas and displace Caribbean women, provoking the latter to enter Canada without documentation due to their inability to obtain a work permit. Those working with an undocumented status are all the more susceptible to labour exploitation, which is evidenced by how they receive less pay, lack health care benefits, and maintain fewer employment records (Stasiulis and Bakan 2005, 100-101). These findings affirm that the Canadian labour market is not a benign realm of capitalism or one that adheres to the principles of multiculturalism, but rather perpetuates and draws on stereotypes and socioeconomic inequalities to expropriate labour among different migrant groups. This is significant given that Canada’s rhetorical claims to diversity and gender equality obfuscate the structural violence that surface through a sustained politics of difference.

It is important to note that in spite of the second-class citizenship these workers often experience in Canada, Filipinas who emigrate from the Philippines to perform domestic labour are often not the poorest. Rather, although they may struggle financially, they have enough resources to secure care for their children, navigate the bureaucracy associated with work permits, and make the financial arrangements, which may be in the form of cash or loans, to travel abroad. Moving abroad, Barber (2008, 29) notes, not only draws on the class-based resources one has access to, but also allows for upward class mobility through remittances and prestige associated with emigration, albeit at the expense of gender and racialized subordination (McKay 2007, 2011, 2015). Drawing from Bourdieu, geographer Philip Kelly (2012) similarly suggests that the social capital that comes with migration is often converted into economic capital. Barber argues that

Filipina domestic workers are often complicit in class subordination in Canada as they perform subordination in the workplace, while at the same time drawing on their education, access to technology, social networks, and activist groups to express militancy in the diaspora. Thus, there is a complex class dynamic at work that is deeply intertwined between one's life in Canada and in the Philippines. Kelly (2012) outlines these nuances in terms of position (location in societal division of labour), process (position in hierarchy of inequalities), performance (how it is played out through consumption), and politics (how class experiences are expressed). This dynamic of class subordination in Canada alongside assertion of class mobility in the Philippines and militancy in the diaspora follows what Tadiar (2009) expresses when she similarly suggests that women's choices to perform labour abroad is both complicit with and defiant of the oppressions brought about by capitalism. The entanglements and aspirations of class mobility is evident in scholarship that considers migrant adults, yet youths also live amid these tensions and aspirations, perhaps witnessing, experiencing, and imagining them differently from their parents.

Barriers towards full economic, social, and political inclusion impact not just migrant parents, but also subsequent generations. Examining the long-term impacts of emigration from the Philippines, Pratt, Johnston, and Banta refer to "intergenerational stagnation" (2017, 170) as children are often unable to escape a cycle of precarity in spite of their parents' ingenuity. Drawing from the British Columbia Ministry of Education statistics and ethnographic research, May Farrales and Geraldine Pratt (2012) find that youths from Filipina/o-Canadian families in Metropolitan Vancouver have some of the lowest graduation rates and grade-point-averages among Vancouver high school students. They suggest Filipina/o-Canadian students' low score on both measures and the prevalence of this pattern for boys and girls is alarming, and that these outcomes must be placed within a broader context of structurally-induced barriers. Farrales (2016) finds that these youths are delayed in their secondary schooling for a number of reasons including often being held in English language classes, which, as uncounted courses, deny them enough credits towards a timely graduation. In other research, Maureen Mendoza shows that Filipina/o-Canadian students at the University of British Columbia are underrepresented due to systemic challenges in accessing post-secondary education, and among those who are able to attend, they "still demonstrate elements of segmented isolation and discord" (2012, 360). Related to Filipina/o-Canadian youths' marginalization, John Paul C. Catungal (2012) critically assesses media representations of three young men who died in Vancouver in 2003 and 2008. He reveals how the media perpetuates racialized stereotypes of young Filipino-Canadian men and their

grievous mothers while it ignores the structural violence that shaped their marginality long before their deaths.

The aforementioned scholars caution readers not to view these youths as social problems with the inability to adapt—Farrales (2016) notes that the education issues identified among young Filipina/o-Canadians emerge due to immigration and educational policies in Canada that delay these students' entrances into the school system until it is nearly too late. In other words, immense barriers are put in place by governing systems that prevent these youths' educational success according to dominant measures. According to Farrales and Pratt (2012), these youths' educational experiences are indicative of marginalization that start with the treatment of their parents and move down through the generations. As Pratt poignantly states, "mothers' sacrifices during the LCP provide the grounds for family strife, are bound up with children's difficulties adjusting to life in Vancouver, leave mothers with a diminished capacity to support their children at school, and propel children into the Canadian labour market as unskilled workers" (2012, 28). She further argues that "although their mother may have earned her family's entry into the realm of the governed in Canadian society, her experiences under the pressure of sovereign power live on in her own and her children's lives" (ibid., 16). Thus, the marginal status of these migrant parents in Canada has implications not only for their time as temporary workers, but for their family members who are drawn into similar systems of marginality in Canada.

Anthropologists have theorized the uneven allocations of rights, opportunities, and obligations through concepts including "flexible citizenship" (Ong 1999), "negotiated citizenship" (Stasiulis and Bakan 2005), and "hierarchies of humanity" (Fassin 2012). Ethnographic scholarship shows that these structural inequities are intimately lived through the struggle to ascertain the material resources needed to survive and the challenge of garnering senses of home, belonging, and kinship in unstable circumstances. Flexible citizenship, according to Ong, "refers to the cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions" (1999, 6). Seeking out, acquiring, and drawing upon citizenship can be a strategic means to engage in capitalist endeavours for individuals and the states that invest in them. This argument lends itself towards better understanding the Philippine state's investment in labour export among some of its citizens by promoting English language education (Rafael 2016) and encouraging studies in the medical fields to fill the demand for nurses, care aides, and caregivers abroad (Choy 2003; Rodriguez 2010). While some benefit from their flexibility and mobility, others toil as low-paid exploited workers. Stasiulis and Bakan suggest that migrants in Canada are

similarly subject to “negotiated citizenship” where citizenship is not a complete set of rights or legal status but rather “a pool of rights that are variously offered, denied, or challenged, as well as a set of obligations that are unequally demanded” (ibid., 2). Deborah Boehm similarly theorizes what she refers to as “contingent citizenship,” which “is national membership that is partial, conditional, or relational” (2011, 162). While Stasiulis and Bakan (2005) emphasize the way citizenship is navigated and negotiated, Boehm’s concept points to the relationality of citizenship, such as how one’s citizenship and sense of (non-)belonging is construed in relation to kin, for example.

The disparities in how people are differently valued and treated by states, employers, and organizations are indicative of what Fassin calls “hierarchies of humanity” (2012, 223) where there is an assumed ontological inequality between lives. The hierarchy is affirmed through global domestic labour, as some reproductive lives are valued more than others (Colen 1995). Further, one’s *lifetime* is differently valued when a migrant mother’s domestic labour “produces both the personal ‘free time’ or valued and value-productive ‘surplus time’ used for investment in human capital” (Tadiar 2013, 24) for another parent. The material, relational, and temporal inequalities that emerged from the differential valuation of people’s lives also play out for children who are born into and grow up at the crux of how these gains and losses unfold in everyday life.

The literature discussed here suggests that immigration regimes are generative of a politics of difference that unfold through labour and familial relations. It reveals how parents attempt to carve out space in the destination country for themselves and for their children by labouring in exchange for citizenship. The strive towards citizenship—in all of its uneven forms—shapes not only the kind of lives parents create for themselves, but youth subjectivities that are bundled with the statuses and experiences of their kin. But, I argue that youths are not just recipients of the outcomes of their parents’ labour or the subject positions that they are implicitly assigned in Canada. Rather, we can also look to the ways they define their own lives in spite of their non-recognition and marginalization by the state in which they will come to live. Youths’ life stories reveal how they contest their parents’ relegation in the labour market by configuring other kinds of future—ones that they hope benefits not solely themselves but their siblings, parents, and distant kin. This labour that youths imbue in and against the Canadian nation-state reveals the seeping effects of mothers’ labour expropriation as youths also invest themselves in the signification of coming to Canada in the search for familial well-being, in spite of what feels

like a sacrificial present. In what follows, I further explore ethnographic research on the relationship between labour migration and kinship.

## **2.2. Cultural Logics: Family migrations and ambivalent kinship**

In this section, I demonstrate how anthropological attention to kinship provides another lens to consider youths' subjectivities and senses of belonging in familial and transnational contexts. Ong suggests that cultural logics are "rationalities (political, economic, cultural)...[that] shape migration, relocation, business networks, state-capital relations, and all transnational processes that are apprehended through and directed by cultural meanings" (1999, 5). Attention to cultural logics suggests that people cannot be understood solely as victims of exploitive capitalist systems, but are also cultural and agentive beings that make diverse meanings of life and engage in different kinds of life-building practices. Karen Fog Olwig suggests in her research with migrant Caribbean women and their families that although the care chain reflects a pattern of structural inequality, "analysing Caribbean exchanges of care primarily in terms of Western practices of exploitation may do little justice to the complex system of social relations and cultural values in which the Caribbean care chain is embedded and the moral and ethical considerations that it implicates" (2012a, 935). Nicole Constable (1999) and Sally Yea (2015) similarly draw attention to the ways in which migrant Filipinas working in Hong Kong and Singapore, respectively, may not always desire or be able to return to the Philippines. In these cases, women's mobility is not solely shaped by their expropriation but by the constellation of social and economic relations—positive and negative—that unfold over time and complicate straightforward notions of home and return. These ethnographers draw our attention to the nuances of personal circumstances and the agency people express even as they perform labour on the low rungs of capitalism, leading us to consider how people make sense of and potentially transform their life circumstances in less predictable ways.

Bettering children's lives is at the crux of many parents' decisions to migrate (Boehm 2008; Orellana et al. 2001; White et al. 2011). Research suggests that parents often migrate with the intention to provide remittances that may go towards building cultural capital through education, owning or upgrading a house, purchasing land, or the prospect of reuniting in the destination country (Olwig 2011; Pratt, Johnson, and Banta 2017). It is important to note that betterment itself is a social construct. Olwig states how "the notion of improvement proffers a general rationale for leaving one place for another at the same time as it enables the migrant to determine the specifics of the desired improvement. The social construction of improvement, that

takes place in migrants' narratives, therefore provides a flexible space of interpretation" (2011, 42).

At the same time as parents seek to better support their children, they may also be scrutinized by the media, educators, clergy, and other dominant voices that adhere to the ideology that a parent's presence is key to a child's "proper" development (Duque-Páramo 2012; Parreñas 2005a). Filipina mothers in particular are subject to the simultaneous pressure to remedy their families' financial struggles while also coming up against dominant ideologies about children rearing. In particular, Parreñas (2005a) finds that dominant gender ideologies regarding family roles often place the brunt of child care responsibilities on women, which subsequently induces their blame when emigration is the only viable option to garner increased economic stability.

While many researchers suggest that there are negative psychosocial impacts for children when a parent emigrates (Beiser et al. 2010; Graham and Jordan 2011; Graham et al. 2012; Jordan and Graham 2012), anthropologists show that it is imperative to ethnographically consider the ways in which families rationalize their transnational separations and the divergent impacts these practices may have on different family members. Maria-Claudia Duque-Páramo (2012) offers a critique of dominant discourses invoked by the Colombian media that suggest children whose parents work aboard suffer in their absence. She finds that these biases are similarly reflected in academic research that employs terminology such as "children left behind" and focuses on "rupture, abrupt breaks, and family disintegration" (ibid., 482). Alternatively, she argues that parental migrations are often the result of household strategies to meet children's basic needs, generate social mobility, and improve human capital. Olwig (2011) also finds that women's emigration may be a means to escape repressive relationships and unachievable expectations, allowing them to garner freedom in some respects, though not without other costs. Thus, changes in familial relations must be understood according to the sense people make of their lives and how they go about transforming their circumstances within the realm of the possible. This literature lends itself to the understanding that living apart can be a means to hold life together in other ways and these separations, as we will see, do not necessarily dissolve the nuclear family, which can take on other forms.

Family separation across long distances and for work purposes often follow long-held kinship beliefs and practices in diverse communities. In the Caribbean, shared familial values play a central role in generating senses of relatedness and place among geographically dispersed kin (Olwig 2007a). "Foundation narratives" (2007a, 17), Olwig explains, enable a social group to

lay claim to belonging and relatedness through the ties that bind histories, memories, and values to places and people. Olwig extrapolates how these narratives can continue to draw family members together in spite of transnational distance as they imagine themselves inherently rooted to what constitutes their foundations or origins. For example, the families in Olwig's study pride themselves on their professions, whom they married, home ownership, educational attainment, and performing charity. They rationalize their migrations as ways to maintain these values and social positions in their home communities in spite of living abroad, and sometimes at the expense of becoming marginalized in their destination countries. Steven McKay (2007, 2012, 2015) similarly suggests among Filipino seafarers that although they are marginalized on their ships due to racist and classist systems of labour segregation, they maintain values associated with hegemonic masculinity in the Philippines through asserting their breadwinning status and conspicuous consumption. Thus, family is not only construed through cohabitation and proximity but through shared histories, common values, claims to places of belonging, and fulfilling social roles. We see this performance of kinship in the literature on Filipina labour migration and among my participants where the kinds of care a mother can no longer provide in person may be remedied, to some degree, through remittances, gifts, and long-distance communication (Parreñas 2001, 2005a, 2005b). As I will later discuss, children grappled with multiple narratives about how they should be with and be cared for by their parents who may not be able to fulfill all of their parental expectations at once.

Who counts as parents and who performs parenting is a diverse and contested arena of kinship. The role of multiple carers in childrearing is a key site of inquiry for anthropologists who examine dynamic caring practices in many parts of the world including West Africa (Bledsoe and Sow 2011; Coe 2008, 2011), the Caribbean (Forde 2011; Olwig 2006, 2007a, 2012a), and Latin America (Boehm 2012; Duque-Páramo 2012; Leinaweaver 2007, 2008). The nuclear family is often a middle- and upper-class ideal imported through European colonization, and is often not possible for poorer families who must utilize various resources to ensure children's care. Cati Coe (2008) historicizes parental and child mobility in Ghana by tracing the impacts of agriculture and colonization on kinship practices. She found that the introduction of cocoa farming in the early twentieth century required workers to move seasonally and involve children in labour activities to build relationships between households and generate more income. Coe argues against the idea that family separation is new amid contemporary forms of globalization and instead observes how it emerged in relation to colonial capitalism. In other words, kinship as a set of beliefs and practices constantly undergoing transformation as it is woven into social processes that impact

households and their reconfiguration over time, the performance of care, and the fulfilment of obligations. As I explore in this dissertation, it is not only parents who are engaged in transforming their familial practices of labour and care, but also their children who redefine the contours of kinship including to whom they feel closest, who or what constitutes a sense of home, and how they also engage in caring for their kin.

Scholars who study parental labour emigration reveal the dynamics of care in children's lives as grandparents and other female kin take on primary roles in their day-to-day lives. Kristin Yarris (2014) observes how her young Nicaraguan participants often reflected on the significance of their grandmothers' support and were sorrowful at the idea of having to say good-bye in the event that they moved to reunite with their mothers abroad. Similarly, Heather Rae-Espinoza's (2011) Ecuadoran participants showed deep senses of attachment to their grandmothers who became like their mothers. In Parreñas' (2005a) study, she found that caring roles were rarely taken up by Filipino fathers, as I discuss in chapter five, and instead usually fell to eldest daughters, aunts, or grandmothers.

Kinship and care are not only reconfigured inside and across homes, but also across borders through what Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila (1997) call transnational mothering—mothering across borders or “from a distance” (Parreñas 2001). Parreñas illustrates how this occurs through material forms of care including gifts and remittances as well as telephone calls and letter writing. In a more recent study, Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller (2012) elucidated the effects of contemporary technology in mediating transnational relationships between Filipina mothers and their distant children. The use of video chat and social media, they show, has the effect of allowing for greater intimacy and real-time communication, while also increasing the demand for each other's attention and at times amplifying the pains of living apart. Their research highlights the divergent experiences and expectations between mothers and children who attempt to contend with their day-to-day lives while grappling with the separation via the means of communication that are available. My study complements these works by foregrounding the tensions youths grappled with as they garnered senses of closeness with other family members who were most present through their childhoods, while also acknowledging and feeling indebted to the vitality that their mothers injected into their lives. Yet my study diverges from the aforementioned literature because it illuminates not only the multiple carers children relied on in their mothers' physical absence, but also how these young people became carers themselves towards their mothers, fathers, and siblings as they performed their own forms of living labour on the sidelines.

My research further draws on literature that concerns ambivalence in kinship to make sense of the contradictions within and across youths' stories and families. Children and youths separated from their parents by migration often express ambivalent feelings about their familial separations. Michael Peletz argues that ambivalence is a particularly relevant concept for thinking about kinship, defining it as "the simultaneous 'coexistence...[of two or more powerful] contradictory emotions or attitudes (as love or hatred) towards a person or thing,' which may entail emotional or attitudinal 'oscillation, fluctuation, variability, and so on'" (2001, 415, [Oxford English Dictionary n.d.]). Kinship, he suggests, often reflects relationships rife with contradictions such as love and despise, care and neglect. Parreñas' (2005a) research in the Philippines with adult children who lived with a parent away demonstrates ambivalence in how her participants reflect on their childhoods; one participant expressed both her appreciation and sense of disappointment towards her mother. Along similar lines, Pratt (2012) reveals how mothers' visits home were tension-filled and full of misrecognition for their children who at times avoided their mothers due to estrangement or fear of another impending departure. Acknowledging such contradictions do much to reveal how people grapple with a multitude of attachments and conflicts in domestic life.

Anthropologists observe that feelings arise according to cultural logics, that is, what makes sense in a given relationship based on how it is culturally constructed and socially mediated. Rae-Espinoza relates the emergence of emotions to culture where emotions arise as "culturally shaped concepts of the child and parenting practices [that] greatly affect how children adapt and adjust to parental emigration" (2011, 115). Similarly, Coe (2008) argues that parents and children make sense of their transnational family circumstances based on the "structures of feeling" (cf. Williams 1977) that are specific to cultural and familial contexts, forming normative understandings of what constitutes growing up, being related, and caring for each other. As one example, ethnographic studies often discuss the role of sacrifice in familial relationships and how this value-laden act can produce ambivalent feelings associated with losses and gains for those involved (Duque-Páramo 2012; Parreñas 2005a; Pratt 2012; Yarris 2014). Yarris points out that narratives of sacrifice may be evoked by a carer in order to guard children from feeling abandoned, working to "reinforc[e] a shared narrative that mother migration is a sacrifice made for the sake of children's well-being" (2014, 294).

Yet not all family members may share the same sentiments concerning their situations since parents and children make sense of their circumstances differently due to their dissimilar social positions as well as what they take up and reproduce at the personal level (Coe 2008;

Olwig 2006; Rae Espinoza 2011). Coe's (2008) work in Ghana, Rae-Espinoza's work in Ecuador (2011), and Olwig's work on Nevis (2006) illustrates how children, even those in the same family, might feel differently about their circumstances as one sibling might lament the loss of a parent's presence while another might have felt satisfied with the care they received. While Coe (2008) is interested in the structures of feeling that are configured through the cultural logics of kinship and parental labour emigration, Rae-Espinoza is attentive to "the role of individual factors in shaping children's reactions to parental emigration" (2011, 137). Research shows that both forces are at work—the structures of feeling induced by cultural understandings of kinship and care, as well as more personal sentiments that surface through a constellation of factors that concern each person differently. Thus, researchers cannot assume all family members will feel the same way concerning their familial situations as attachments, subjectivities, and senses of belonging are based on a myriad of structural, local, and personal circumstances that inform specific experiences.

Ethnographic research concerning family members' personal perspectives help ground understandings of ambivalent kinship by demonstrating the different expectations and experiences of parents and children who attempt to survive, care, and show love to each other over distance, and whose feelings shift as life unfolds and relations change. How people grapple with the tensions of competing desires and expectations among family members, especially in the face of economic hardship, reveals the fissures where kinship ties might be affirmed, repudiated, or recast. Youths, I show, are actively part of the work involved in formulating kinship as they receive and provide care with their loved ones and reimagine sacrifice as something they can imbue towards their parents, grandparents, and siblings.

These scholarly contributions suggest that in order to understand the implications of contemporary forms of migration on family life, it is important to contextualize relatedness, sociality, and mobility according to what people think, feel, and do. It is also important to recognize that while political economies and cultural logics inform migration decisions, reasons for migration change as lives unfold. As Olwig suggests, notions of social improvement change as migrants "(re)assess their lives and achievements in the light of the different conditions of life in which they find themselves" (2011, 42). In other words, migration and settlement are not singular trajectories with ultimate aims but are constantly emergent processes that are navigated across generations. Jennifer Johnson-Hanks calls these transformative events "vital conjunctures," which she suggests are "rarely coherent, clear in direction, or fixed in outcome" but instead are "negotiable and contested, fraught with uncertainty, innovation, and ambivalence"

(2002, 865) since they may hold multiple meanings based on context. Theorizing migration as vital conjunctures can challenge research that focuses on integration in receiving countries or the negative psychosocial impacts of parental emigration on children. Rather, it can draw our attention to the complex and, at times, contradictory experiences of family members living together and apart.

Jackson sums up how social structures, cultural logics, and human agency intertwine to inform migrants' experiences, as he states, "a person's life unfolds unpredictably within a complex field of forces. First are those oppressive and largely contingent forces that we call natural, historical, or political... Second are the forces of one's cultural upbringing... A third set of factors might be called psychological, since they cover character traits that are not wholly determined by culture nor natur[e] nor histor[y]" (2013, 76). Critical theoretical approaches in relationship with ethnography have the potential to be attentive to the politics of difference, inviting us to pay attention to the intersecting forces that shape one's life without reducing experiences to a single set of factors. In what follows, I lay out my conceptual framework to allow for further consideration of the conditions that shape the insecurity of life and how people contend with those insecurities through dynamic forms of kinship, labour, and care. This allows us to think more about how the youths I met envision and strive towards "a better life," "a nicer life," and "a life that is supposed to be for me" through everyday forms of living labour intimately tied to their enactments of kinship and the circulation of sacrifice across generational and geographical planes.

### **2.3. Life Itself: Precarity, care, and possibility through uncertain times**

Having provided an overview of the critical scholarship on mobility and ethnographic literature on diverse family configurations, I now turn to my conceptual framework. Participants frequently referred to the emergent theme of *life* as they spoke to me about their ontological concerns of existence including being and becoming in relation to geography, time, care, and kinship. As we will see in the subsequent chapters, participants often framed ordinary moments concerning their childhoods, families, and migrations within the broader specter of life; they reflected on the conditions of their lives that led their mothers to leave, how their lives changed over time, and what kinds of lives they hoped laid ahead not only for themselves but reciprocally for their parents and other loved ones. In doing so, they revealed their own theorizing about the relationships between precarity, sacrifice, and betterment. In what follows, I consider

anthropological and sociological discussions of life in relation to livability, precarity, and labour. I also discuss how care emerges as central relations that can help mitigate but can also amplify the effects of precarity when relations are strained or care is withdrawn. I then consider potentiality and hope, which help illuminate how precarity can foster not just the degradation of life but the imaginative capacity to redefine the existential meaning of present conditions. What this framework reveals is how life can be characterized by both a sense of foreclosing, loss, or abandonment shaped by structural barriers to inclusion and well-being, as well as an opening up towards the future and its possibilities. These juxtapositions of geographies and temporalities allow me to make sense of what my participants told me about their spatial, temporal, material, and relational worlds.

## **Life**

The question of what constitutes a life is an entangled ontological and political inquiry. Life quite simply could be defined as a matter of being, but, as Butler argues, “the ‘being’ of life is itself constituted through selective means; as a result, we cannot refer to this ‘being’ outside of the operations of power, and we must make more precise the specific mechanisms of power through which life is produced” (2009, 1). She goes on to argue that how a life is recognized or apprehended reveals much about how being is defined; how it is experienced for oneself, seen by others, and politicized through sovereign power that depends on interpretations of whose lives matter and how the conditions of such lives are shaped accordingly.

Stevenson identified “a regime of life” to be “a political system” (2014, 68) where the primary objective is to merely keep people alive. Stevenson exemplifies this through a look at how the Canadian settler state sought to keep Inuit people alive only so far as to ensure they do not die during times of tuberculosis outbreaks or the on-going rise of suicide plaguing their youths. She argues that the government performs anonymous care—care that is imbued on anonymous people by anonymous providers “that requires life to become an indifferent value—that is, a regime in which it doesn’t matter who you are, just that you stay alive” (ibid., 7). This speaks to Foucault’s (2008) theorization of biopolitics where life is maintained by directing care at certain populations as a means of letting live or letting die (Foucault 2008; Stevenson 2014, 96). These theories, drawn from anthropological and sociological perspectives, enable a conceptualization of life according to political conditions—how living and dying are shaped by

the mediations between the sovereign power of governments and populations who rely, to some degree, on forms of recognition for survival.

The differential valuation of human life is evident in studies that concern biopolitics (Foucault 2008) and necropolitics (Mbembé 2003), that is, the ways in which some lives are sustained while others are actively killed. Didier Fassin (2012) considers the ways in which lives are differentially deemed worthy of care and compassion where humanitarian regimes, which are intended to protect and sustain lives equally, in fact show empirical preference for some lives over others. Fassin evidences this through the decision-making that goes into French immigration and welfare decisions, and how life-saving technologies are preferentially allocated to some people over others. In another overt case of biopolitics, Jason De León (2015) investigates the orchestration of death by the US government as undocumented migrants are channelled through the barren and brutal landscape of the Sonoran Desert. The grievability of such deaths, Butler (2009) argues, points to how lives are (or are not) recognized. Speaking specifically about lives lost in war, she states,

One way of posing the question of who “we” are in these times of war is by asking whose lives are considered valuable, whose lives are mourned, and whose lives are considered ungrievable. We might think of war as dividing populations into those who are grievable and those who are not. An ungrievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all. We can see the division of the globe into grievable and ungrievable lives from the perspective of those who wage war in order to defend the lives of certain communities, and to defend them against the lives of others—even if it means taking those latter lives. (ibid., 38)

Butler’s concern about how lives register as worthy of being recognized speaks to broader considerations about how structural violence is imposed on those who are made to matter less in a global system of inequality.

In thinking about life alternatively to the commonplace life/death binary, Stevenson (2014) proposes alternate understandings of how people are interpellated outside regimes of life and categorical subject positions. She explores how people continue to be brought into *being* even when they are far away or have died, such as through names, images, and memories that extend their lives. She calls this extension of being “life beside itself,” which “cannot be reduced to what biopolitics ‘is’ or ‘enacts’ in any mechanical or intentional sense” (2014, 44). Instead, this kind of living relies on relations through which one is cared for, remembered, or carried on in name (ibid.). What this scholarship suggests is that in defining what life is, biopolitics emerges through

the power and authority to define who counts and to sustain those lives, as well as more nuanced understandings of what *living* entails in socially and culturally meaningful ways beyond the biophysical.

## **Livability**

The next set of questions we could ask include not just what constitutes a life, but what constitutes a livable life (Butler 2004) or well-being (Dossa 2004; Jackson 2013). For Butler, livability is shaped by not only what is bearable, but what is worthy of being lived through the possibilities of “persistence and flourishing” (2009, 2). As Butler put it,

What makes for a livable world is not an idle question. It is not merely a question for philosophers. It is posed in various idioms all the time by people of various walks of life. If that makes them all philosophers, then that is the conclusion I am happy to embrace. It becomes a question for ethics, I think, not only when we ask the personal question, what makes my own life bearable, but when we ask, from a position of power, and from the point of view of distributive justice, what makes, or ought to make, the lives of others bearable? Somewhere in the answer we find ourselves not only committed to a certain view of what life is, and what it should be, but also of what constitutes the human, the distinctively human life. (2004, 17)

In considering the paradoxical experiences of alienation and hope brought about by migration, Jackson draws from the work of Spinoza to explore “the question of life itself” and how life “can be accessed, augmented, possessed, preserved, and shared” (2011, 6). For Spinoza (1982), and subsequently for Jackson, life is not biophysically determined but a matter of persistence—“the struggle for being” (Jackson 2011, 6). Well-being, Jackson observes, consists not just of what is needed to survive in the most basic sense, but what makes life worthy of being lived (*ibid.*, 60). Jackson directly correlates people’s drive to move with an existential struggle to persist and be well in spite of the lived conditions that may confound these aims upon arrival in the destination place. Jackson goes on to suggest that “migrant narratives are, in many ways, allegories of human existence, in which the hope that our lives may be made more abundant, for ourselves and those we love, constantly comes up against the limits of what we may achieve and the despair into which we may be plunged when we find ourselves unable to achieve that state of well-being and flourishing” (*ibid.*, 6). Migrating is thus a mode of actualizing life by redefining the limits of the present through the search for and belief in the possibility of betterment.

Pushing this notion of life as persistence further, João Biehl and Peter Locke (2010) draw from a Deleuzian framework (Deleuze 1995) to argue that all life is a matter of becoming—a processual unfolding of that which constitutes living out both the confines and possibilities. The notion of becoming, Biehl and Locke suggest, are “those individual and collective struggles to come to terms with events and intolerable conditions and to shake loose, to whatever degree possible, from determinants and definitions” (ibid., 317). An ethnographic approach to becoming is a supplement, they argue, to Foucauldian notions of biopolitics and neo-Marxist ideas of structural violence whereby there is a lived dynamism to everyday life that is not prescriptive: the emergence that accompanies becoming is characterized by “the ways in which social fields ceaselessly leak and transform (power and knowledge notwithstanding), and the in-between, plastic, and ever-unfinished nature of *a* life” (ibid., 318). There is possibility in this notion of life as a becoming beyond the steadfast power of biopolitics as people imagine and craft an existence for themselves beyond what the limits might entail, “bringing into view the immanent fields that people, in all their ambiguity, invent and live by” (ibid.). This idea of becoming thus highlights the immanency of life that people generate for themselves by coming up against and potentially pushing through the perils that seem to prevent possibility.

The “good life” and a “better life” are re-emerging tropes not only in this dissertation but other work that pertains to the ultimate aims of cross-border migration (Ahmed 2010; Berlant 2011; Boehm 2008; Constable 2014; Pratt, Johnson, and Banta 2017). Drawing from Aristotle, Hannah Arendt (1958) distinguishes between *zoe* and *bios* or mere life and political life. While mere life is biological life, political life is full of speech, action, and mutuality. *Bios* is a precursor to *zēn*—a good life (Agamben 1998; Arendt 1958). These theorists provide us with a means to think about life and livability in accordance with my participants’ references to a good life, which was often constitutive of having food to eat, a house to live in, and receiving a good education, as well as garnering relational well-being by being with their families, eating *together*, and having a shared sense of home and happiness.

One’s striving towards self-improvement and life’s betterment must also be evaluated critically as part of a governing project. The “good life” is a construct generated through hegemonic neoliberal forces pulling people into a self-governing system of labour that often does not fulfill its own promises (Ahmed 2010; Berlant 2011; Constable 2014; Davidson 2012; Povinelli 2011). Critical scholars often argue that fantasies of the good life generate and circulate according to neoliberal ideologies that inform how people should live, work, and govern themselves according to capitalist projects that extract labour while offering few rewards.

Neoliberal governmentalities shape people's behaviours by working on individual subjectivities as "a new mode of political optimization...reconfiguring relationships between governing and the governed, power and knowledge, sovereignty and territoriality" (Ong 2006, 3). Stated another way, neoliberalism is characterized by an emphasis on individuals becoming autonomous, self-sufficient, and self-regulating subjects of capitalism based on promises that may never come to fruition (Berlant 2011; Miller and Rose 2008). The work that goes into attempting to ascertain a good life is characterized by scholars as "exhaustion and endurance" (Povinelli 2011), "the promise of happiness" (Ahmed 2010), or "cruel optimism" (Berlant 2011) where those on the outskirts of capitalism struggle to attain betterment through attachments to certain objects, people, or places that are deemed desirable and good.

The aforementioned literature illuminates the political workings that underpin neoliberal drives towards labour, garnered through fantasy-filled promises of betterment. While they reveal the oppressive nature of neoliberal capitalism, my research grounds such workings in the ordinary experiences of youths who do not uniformly adhere to neoliberal notions of betterment but dream up new ideas of what a good life could entail in the course of discovering existential possibilities for themselves and their loved ones. My consideration of life in this dissertation attends to the ways that politics are woven into the course of these youths' everyday existence, while also attending to the creativity with which they carve out alternative futures for themselves and their family members. Life, for them, was not just an oppressed experience guided by a lack of material resources, parents' decisions to move abroad, and unattainable fantasies, but was a matter of fostering kinship, care, and possibilities. This becoming was exemplified in the labour young people imbued into their families and the sacrificial nature of their relations. Children and parents garnered and circulated well-being for each other, exchanging and shifting positions of giving and taking as they sought to delicately navigate how their lives were contingent upon others' labour, well-being, and recognition.

## **Precarity**

Precariousness has come to characterize much in this contemporary moment with the rise of insecure labour, withdrawal of social welfare, and dominance of neoliberal ideologies occurring at a global scale. It means that holding life together in the present becomes ever more arduous, much less thinking about and imagining what the future might hold. Precarity, at times

narrowly employed to focus on labour, is now more broadly theorized in accordance with life itself. Precariousness, according to Butler (2009), is the underlying fragility of life that we all experience. Precariousness is thus an ontology that points towards the conditions of living, which are, Butler states, very much socially and politically informed. More precisely, precarity signifies the political conditions that draw upon and amplify precariousness, making some people more precarious than others. Precarity is thus “the politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks...becoming differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death” (Butler 2009, 25).

The concept of precarity emerged from the Italian version of *precarietà* and the French word of *precarité*, which speak to classes of people uprooted from regular employment and engaged in left-wing labour mobilization and activism (Thorkelson 2016). It is thus a political concept tied to economic and social phenomena that emerged in particular times and places. But, as Eli Thorkelson (2016) notes, precarity holds its own politics as a concept that has been taken up and applied elsewhere to describe various forms of alienation, anxiety, and transformation of contemporary times. Thorkelson identifies the spectrum of its usage with, on the one hand, precarity referencing the tenuous economic conditions of uncertain, flexible, and temporary labour sparked by neoliberal demands of the workforce (Cross 2010; Lee and Kofman 2012; Ross 2008). On the other hand, he references its social relevance, much like Butler’s work, where precarity manifests through historical processes and is an existential state of being in the world (Hundle 2012). The extent to which the concept has been applied is now vast, revealing a kind of shared concern and critique of present conditions “as precarity, in short, is a shorthand for those of us documenting the multiple forms of nightmarish dispossession and injury that our age entails” (Muehlebach 2013, 298).

For Thorkelson, how the concept of precarity has been so vastly applied is potentially problematic because crosscuts so many complex social categories and may not reflect how people see and describe themselves. What this suggests is that there are tensions in how the precarity concept is utilized and that it is inherently a political concept in terms of its referents and application. What is useful here is how precarity differs from poverty as a means to describe the challenged situations my participants identified in their material and social lives. My participants were not the poorest of those in the Philippines but fluctuated between working- and middle-class statuses that allowed them to garner just enough capital to make their journeys abroad. In most cases, the class status of my participants, as they described it, was tenuous with one parent holding more capital than the other. This imbalance between parents had economic and social

ramifications, as both parents together were often unable to bring in enough income to support the family. In particular, when the father was of a lower class standing, held less human capital in the form of education, and failed to bring in enough income, it often led to more contentious relationships with in-laws and an increased burden on the mother, reflecting the perils of gendered expectations and hypogamy (Pingol 2001). The concept of precarity thus allows for consideration of how class dynamics tied to migration, labour, race, and gender in and across families as well as in and across communities lead to particular kinds of struggles.

## Care

Living through precarious times often depends on collaboration and care. Precarity is, on the one hand, marked by abandonment as people may be rejected from stable work, political recognition, social relations, or other forms of well-being (Allison 2012, 2013; Biehl 2005). Precarity is, on the other hand, also a site of transformative politics where people retain the ability to defy their conditions even if it contests normativity (Barchiesi 2011). As Franco Barchiesi shows, transformation lies in how people who face precarity “recast social relations and imagine political alternatives” (2011, 12). Tadiar similarly suggests that the life that goes unconsumed by capitalism and imperialism—“remaindered life” (2015, 151)—is rife for life-making, that is, forms and practices of personhood and sociality that...persist in creative, transformed ways as practices of ‘living’” (ibid.).

For my participants, it was not only the kinds of care they received from away parents and closer family members, but also how they felt the paucity of care when it was withdrawn and the kinds of care they imbued into the gaps that marked the relationship between precarity and care in their changing social worlds. Analytical attention to precarity illuminates not only how political forces unevenly value lives by provoking the fragility of some over others, but also how collectivity and care are exercised to push against such forces to mitigate their impacts. Butler points out how “precariousness implies living socially, that is, the fact that one’s life always in some sense is in the hands of another. It implies exposure to those we know and to those we do not know; a dependency on people we know, or barely know, or know not at all. Reciprocally, it implies being impinged upon by the exposure and dependency of others” (2009, 14). Jackson (2013) more intimately looks to the intersubjectivity of existence where life is so often defined by the ethical and social relations that enable us to realize ourselves and each other. Thus, an

apprehension of how living take places through precariousness and how being and working together can mitigate precarity draws our attention to relations of care that can be distant (Butler 2009, Stevenson 2014), intimate (Han 2012; Jackson 2011, 2013), or violent when withdrawn or denied (Allison 2012; Fassin 2012).

Care, Stevenson argues, is “the way someone comes to matter and the corresponding ethics of attending to the other who matters” (2014, 3). Anthropologists have attended to the novel forms care takes through precarious times, showing how the reconfiguring of relations, home, and labour take place to manage crisis and generate other possibilities for the persistence of life. As one example, in the aftermath of the kidnapping, torture, and release of his friend Jabar in Barsa, Iraq, Hayder Al-Mohammad (2012) observes the kinds of responses taken up by Jabar’s wife and friends. First was the work of waiting to hear about his condition, followed by figuring out how to carry on with life after the trauma. Al-Mohammad makes the point that one person’s precarity can be spread across the lives of others who are intimately drawn into the crisis. In other words, the work of sustaining a life is not located in an individual’s “own efforts and struggles alone but is distributed across persons people whose lives, efforts, and struggles are enmeshed and entwined” (ibid., 601), countering neoliberal assertions of individuality and self-sufficiency. As another example, Clara Han (2012) looks to the use of debt among poorer Chilean households as a means to buy time. Debt allowed her informants to wait out a crisis sparked by state violence including unemployment, trauma, drug use, or incarceration. Han is interested in the “moral projects in everyday life, in which care is a problem rather than a given” (ibid., 24). In other words, violence is enacted when someone or something that is depended on withdraws care.

This concern for care as a problem resonates in the work of Andrea Muehlebach (2012) and Anne Allison (2012) who show how the state withdrawal of care in Italy and Japan, respectively, can have dire consequences for some lives that are disadvantaged. In Italy, the government works on citizens’ subjectivities to encourage them to fill the gaps of social welfare as a moral act, but in doing so offloads the burden of care onto those who may in fact need it the most (Muehlebach 2012). Precarity here is generated by state withdrawal from people’s lives and the formation of a moral code that compels people to respond by voluntarily labouring for each other as good citizens. And in Japan, the rise of loneliness for abject youths unable to find work or other meaningful social roles leads to their social withdrawal or suicide (Allison 2012). While Muehlebach’s work speaks to how moral imperatives work to govern people and create productive citizens, Allison’s research illustrates what happens when people see no alternative to

their abandonment.<sup>14</sup> What this literature suggests is that precarity and care are interwoven concepts that concern how relational, economic, and political ruptures are created, sustained, and responded to by states and citizens.

## **Labour**

As the aforementioned scholars suggest, care and labour intersect to reveal the work that goes into making and sustaining life. Many scholars have considered the kinds of emotional labour that are commoditized through domestic work (Colen 1995; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2004; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Parreñas 2001). This scholarship links closely with Michael Hardt's (1999) notion of affective labour that includes the kinds of immaterial work that goes into providing information and services, shaping life, and performing emotion. To be sure, I do not mean that all aspects of caregiving are immaterial—there are certainly many material aspects to labouring within a household. Hardt connects domestic work to affective labour by stating: “numerous feminist investigations analyzing the potentials within what has been designated traditionally as women’s work have grasped affective with terms such as kin work and caring labor. Each of these analyses reveals the processes whereby our laboring practices produce collective subjectivities, produce sociality, and ultimately produce society itself” (ibid., 89). He goes on to state that affective labour is nothing new, but what is interesting about the ways in which it manifests today is that it reveals the extent to which the immaterial aspects of care work have become imbued with value and drawn into capitalist systems. He argues that the harnessing of affective labour—for example by the Philippine government’s interest in labour export and the Canadian government’s interest in importing domestic workers—is a form of biopower: “the power of the creation of life” (ibid., 98).

The question of how labour is expropriated, performed, and offered emerges in my research not only because it concerns migrant working parents but also because youths evoked notions of labour, both paid and unpaid, in their narratives of growing up. It is thus critical to theorize what labour is in this context. Arendt made the important distinction between labour and work in *The Human Condition* (1958). She argues that labour is what is necessary to live and primarily constitutes that which is consumed almost immediately, leaving little if anything

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<sup>14</sup> Allison also discusses forms of care and activism that emerge through the phenomenon of loneliness in Japan. See Allison (2009).

additional or surplus to be recognized, valued, or sold. Alternatively, Arendt defines work as that which is beyond labour, producing items that are more tangible, durable, and valued. This distinction between labour and work is important in my research—though the youths I met did not always work (though some did), they always laboured as vital contributors to their households, particularly in the physical absence of their mothers. Further, although their mothers worked, the invisibility of what they produced (such as time for their employers to engage in other tasks), makes it appear less as work and more as labour in the capitalist system. It is this invisibility of mothers' affective labour and youths' living labour that devalues their contributions, experiences, and complaints.

Drawing from Marxist-feminists like Leopoldina Fortunati (1989), Tadiar's distinction between labour for living and labour for capital is useful here. Living labour is constituted by the basic kinds of work that go into the reproduction of life itself (Tadiar 2009, 24). Labour only becomes labour as it is commonly understood when it is separated and objectified from its bare reproductive forms and associated with value. "This value," Tadiar states, "as a 'being-for-itself' is realized in the labor which exceeds necessary or reproductive labor" (2009, 34). This kind of living labour, Tadiar argues, is feminized in its association with reproduction and thus a lack of value. Surplus labour is often only recognized as valued labour when it exists above and beyond what is necessary to live and thus can be performed and sold in exchange for capital (Tadiar 2009, 24). The value of surplus labour is attached to time, with labour-time becoming the incremental units to which capital is measured (*ibid.*). Tadiar illustrates the gendered dimensions of labour when she states that "it is this masculine labor that is represented in the category of abstract universal labor-time, the measure of value which now applies generally to all labor and that therefore predicates the gendered difference between so-called productive and non-productive activity" (*ibid.*, 35). Because feminine work is disassociated from labour-time and material surplus, it is often regarded as free in spite of its deeply corporeal performance and implications (Tadiar 2009, 36). These are the ideological means through which labour expropriation of feminized work is justified and the work itself is undervalued. This living labour, performed not only by migrant parents but also their children, is not only a means of survival through precarious times, but more broadly enables capitalist systems to thrive through the violence of a corporeal inequality.

What the aforementioned literature and examples suggest is that there are entanglements between life, labour, and capitalism that reflect the complexities of how living labour is increasingly extracted by exploitative systems that render care a commodified yet deeply

undervalued object of desire. It is also the performance of living labour in the midst of precarity that offers families—youths and their parents—the potential to transform their circumstances by doing what they feel is necessary not only for own sake but for the sake of others who have exuded care and sacrifice. I thus explore this negotiation of labour as it was performed by youths who navigate complex systems of labour in relation capitalism, labour in relation to kinship, and labour in relation to hope.

## Hope

Once again reflecting on Ve'a's sentiments about what she believed will come to her and her family, it is necessary to consider potentiality and the concept of hope. What are the entailments of hope amid the precariousness of life? Ernst Bloch (1954) is helpful here, as he conceptualizes hope as a not-yet-conscious. This not-yet-conscious of hope implies its unknowability, lacking concrete form in its imaginative yet destined state. Without a concrete manifestation, hope is also a not-yet-become, a not-yet-manifested as the future is always impending. Hope opens up potentiality and, as Bloch argues, counters the closure provoked by suffering, fear, and anxiety. It gives us something euphoric to dream about—a not-yet state of that better life. Hope, in Bloch's sense, implies attachment to the future as “the world is full of propensity towards something, tendency towards something, latency of something, and this intended something means fulfillment of the intending” (18). He argues that hope gives us reason to endure in the present and to act intentionally towards what is coming.

As Jackson (2011, xii) acknowledged, anthropological engagements with the idea of hope come from an array of theorists including Bloch, as discussed above, as well as Gabriel Marcel (1962), Pierre Bourdieu (2000), and Hannah Arendt (1958). As both Jackson and Hirokazu Miyazaki (2004) suggest, these philosophical approaches often consider the existentiality of hope—its characterization as a form of temporal pregnancy, anticipation, or utopia, for example (Jackson 2011, xii). What is most interesting to Jackson is the anxiety that hope generates, which can “spring from the fundamentally unstable and ambiguous nature of our relationships with others and the world” (ibid., xiii). He thus puts the question of the social and all of its ambivalences at the forefront of his ethnographic inquiry, rather than attempting to nail down precisely what hope is. Similarly for Miyazaki (2004), hope is a *method* of knowledge. He looks not to the object of hope or the conditions that generate it but rather to how hope is kept alive.

While hope is a method of living through precarious times for many of the participants I met, Ve'a's sense of hope also alludes to what she believed to be her destiny. Hope, as I will show, is both a means to endure the present and a not-yet—an ideal life that is not only dreamt of, but actively laboured towards by Ve'a and her peers. The labourious binding these youths engage in via their sense of what is to come is vital to how they understand their lives, as it enables them to know why their mothers left, why life is hard, why precarity continues to surface, and that the labour they perform will be worth the reward. Together, my conceptual framework weaves a way to understand how precarity is registered in such a way that it provokes a labourious response from those who perform the living labour that is necessary to sustain daily life and to cultivate a life otherwise. It is through the labour of caring for and informing the lives of loved ones that youths engage in and manifest a future-oriented hope not only to attain the aims sought for them by their parents, but also to reconfigure the possible for their parents as a mode of sacrificial return and mutual well-being.

The ontological fragility that Butler speaks of is illuminated in Ve'a's text as she referred to her family's daily struggle to find enough food—to nourish their bodies and survive in a most basic sense. Her life circumstances were both exacerbated and mitigated by the ways in which her family was swept up by global capitalism and the labour demands that simultaneously created, sustained, and redefined the conditions of her life. As I will discuss throughout this dissertation, life-building in the face of re-emerging forms of precarity are central themes in the narratives of Filipina/o-Canadian youths impacted by parental labour migration and long-term family separation. Their apprehension of the conditions that led to their mothers leaving, their conditions of their lives during mothers' times away, and the latter hardships of life in Canada point to how “the possibility of being sustained relies fundamentally on social and political conditions, and not only on a postulated internal drive to live” (Butler 2009, 21).

This dissertation engages in questions of how a precarious life is lived, how precarity is apprehended and mitigated through care, and how youths imagine themselves and their families flourishing through their life-building projects. It also speaks to how the threat to one's existence, or the existence of loved ones, results in “labor often assuming novel forms” (Allison and Piot 2014, 5), that is, youths assuming the kinds of living labour that they feel is necessary to sustain their siblings', parents', and other family members' well-being even if it implies that they must forego other desires and lifeways. Finally, it speaks to youths' capacity to imagine and hope in a future-oriented direction—how they not only invest themselves in various forms of living and surplus labour, but labour as hope implanted in the present for the purposes of a better future.

They illustrate how hope situates the performance of labour in the present for another time and place. Hope, I will show, is inextricably linked with how youths live through the hardships of precarity, perform the labour of living, and imbue care towards their loved ones as part of a relational sense of being and becoming.

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Critical scholarship on the politics of difference helps us to better understand how the politically-induced conditions of precarity manifest in the contemporary world, shaped by neoliberalism and capitalism, as well as gendered, classed, and racialized divides that value some lives more than others. Ethnographic inquiries into cultural logics and human agency that shape domestic life also provide more nuanced understandings of how people contend with circumstances based on the meanings they make of their worlds and the possibilities presented to them. Putting what participants told me and showed me about their lives into conversation with the literature and concepts presented here will bring to the fore the work they do from the margins of capitalist and neoliberal systems to hold their families together, to maintain a livable life, and unveil the potentialities they believe their lives hold. It provides us with a glimpse into the entanglements of neoliberal capitalism and the extraction of parents' labour with the lives of their children, and in doing so, calls us into relationship with these youths by witnessing and hearing their stories of struggle and hope through precarious times.

## Chapter 3.

### Methodology



*Figure 2 Example of a neighbourhood book exchange. Photo by author, 2017*

People are so full of knowledge. — Veia

Veia showed me a photograph of a neighbourhood book exchange. The image revealed a small bookcase with three shelves, much like the one I captured in Figure 2.<sup>15</sup> It was brightly painted and staked to the ground at the edge of the sidewalk. It is a kind of community book exchange that you see throughout Vancouver neighbourhoods; people come to drop off a book or

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<sup>15</sup> I took a similar photograph to the one Veia provided, but in another location for the purposes of confidentiality.

two and pick up a new one, exchanging knowledge and pleasure. Vea thought the bookcase and what it represented was interesting and decided to document it using the digital camera I had given her. She took thirty-nine photographs over the course of several months, with images that reflected her life at work, at school, in her house, at her parents' work, and around her neighbourhood.

Explaining why she took this particular photograph, she said, "People are so full of knowledge. It's just like they are locked in a bookcase. Like, I can see that they are locked inside. Sometimes they just need to open the cage and then let their knowledge be exposed to everyone, just for everyone to know. The knowledge is the books and then when someone shares the book, or someone shares their knowledge, then people can connect. Like, all of us can connect together." I paused to consider the ways in which I often think about the knowledge youths hold—forms of knowledge often subjugated in conventional frameworks.

"Do you see yourself as holding knowledge like that?" I asked her.

"I don't know. I don't know if I have any knowledge," she responded.

Many childhood studies scholars are critical of the ways that young people are often marginally included in research (James and Prout 1997; Mayall 2002; Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998). In an article written several decades ago, Lawrence A. Hirschfeld (2002) asks: "Why don't anthropologists like children?" He poses this question after surveying the lack of scholarship about young people, finding that despite anthropologists' interests in how culture is learned and practiced throughout life—from infancy to old age—there has been scant attention paid to how young people conceive of and live in their social worlds as they engage in cultural reproduction and transformation. He argues that this lacuna emerges from an overestimation of the roles adults play in reproducing culture and the lack of appreciation for young people's perspectives. Other scholars agree that anthropologists' inability to recognize young people as social, political, and economic actors means that they often show up only on the margins of ethnographic analyses—what Hirschfeld calls an "add children and stir" approach (*ibid.*, 613).<sup>16</sup> Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Carolyn Sargent make the point that attention towards young people's lives can be a valuable site of inquiry, whereby "everywhere children are actively involved in the construction of their lives and their worlds, and at the very least anthropologists

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<sup>16</sup> For more discussion on the scant inclusion of young people in anthropological research, see Elizabeth Chin (2001), Pia Christensen and Allison James (2008), Allison James and Alan Prout (1997), Allison James (2007), and Sharon Stephens (1995a).

should treat them of substance and not simply as receptacles of socialization and education by adults” (1998, 15).

Scholarship focusing on young people’s lives has grown over the past several decades. Yet remnants of older ways of thinking about children and youths seep into notions about their capacities to collaboratively produce knowledge. Young people’s presumed inferior status and need for protection is often codified through statutes including the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and corresponding national laws that assume a particular kind of life should be available to all children, regardless of more specific local interpretations, practices, and circumstances (Fonseca 2002; Parreñas 2005a). As well, young people’s frequent legal construction as “dependents” and “minors” means that decisions concerning their lives and “best interests” are made on their behalf by more powerful adults (James 2007; Leinaweaver 2013). Further, those living at the crux of geo-political tensions and socioeconomic inequalities such as racialized, migrant, refugee, and undocumented children and youths are often considered to be even more vulnerable, requiring more protections that can, ironically, hinder their involvement in research and action for positive social change (Hernandez et al. 2013; Nguyen et al. 2013; Suárez-Orozco and Yoshikawa 2013).

Child- and youth-focused researchers thus find themselves in a double bind of trying to cultivate spaces to learn from and amplify young people’s perspectives while simultaneously relying on adult gatekeepers to reach prospective participants. In recent decades, a large body of literature has emerged to address these methodological and ethical dilemmas, with two questions at stake: how to develop methodologies that are congruent with children’s and youths’ lives, yet resist the trap of unintentionally reproducing young people’s subordination and voicelessness (Hernandez et al. 2013; Leadbeater et al. 2006).

In this chapter I focus on the ways in which anthropologists have approached children and youths in research with a growing focus on their social worlds, political subjectivities, and agency. This discussion illuminates my approach towards working with young people by foregrounding their perspectives about their families and migrations. I then discuss my youth-focused ethnographic methodology and use of specific methods that included participant observation, ethnographic interviews, focus groups, and a participatory visual project. Drawing on questions that emerge in the current literature on the anthropology of children and youths, I explore issues of ethical relations in research including the tacit and dynamic forms of power that emerge in the process of working together. In doing so, I highlight how ethical attempts to maintain the privacy and safety of young people may work to reinforce existing power relations

and disengage them from research. I argue that in order for anthropologists to land on the side of supporting increased recognition for young people's perspectives, we must account for the oppressions that manifest in and through our projects, be attentive to the nuances of how young people engage with us, and be reflexive about the possibilities and limitations of how we generate knowledge.

### **3.1. Children and youths in anthropological research**

I learned to observe the world around me, and to note what I saw. — Margaret Mead (1972, 47), speaking of her of childhood in Pennsylvania and how her grandmother influenced her curiosity of the world.

The fields of psychoanalysis and developmental psychology have dominated the study of young people over the last century. Early influences by Sigmund Freud and later influences by Jean Piaget (1936), John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (1965), and Erik Erickson (1950) focused on cognitive and psychosexual stages of human development, theorizing the significance of parent-child attachments and linear stages of maturation (LeVine 2007). Problematically, many of these ideas emerged through observations of children in Western cultural contexts and were applied generally to all young people based on assumptions of an underlying cognitive and physiological structure, as well as the primacy of parent-child unit (Franklin and McKinnon 2001). Alternatively, anthropologists were more interested in how diverse sociocultural contexts shaped childhood differently, and how the categories of child and youth were differently understood, practiced, and experienced.

Margaret Mead and Bronislaw Malinowski were among some of the earliest anthropologists to ethnographically consider children in non-Western societies. Mead (1928, 1930) is best known for her work on childhood socialization in the South Pacific, showing that unlike Western children, Samoan children engaged in more “adult” tasks by the age of four or five, and Manus children were much more literal than imaginative in their expressions. Malinowski (1929) focused on sexuality among Melanesian children and argued that they experienced much more autonomy to play and explore without fear of discipline than what was observed among Western children. The aim of these anthropologists, and others who constituted the culture and personality paradigm of the early twentieth century (LeVine 2007), was to offer cross-cultural ethnographic accounts that refuted the Euronormativity of psychoanalytic claims.

The 1980s marked a turn in the anthropology of children and youths as researchers attended to the politics of childhood in an increasingly globalized and rapidly changing world. This literature, along with more recent studies, spans issues of inequality, violence, death, and questions of belonging as families and communities grapple with the uneven impacts of colonialism, capitalism, and neoliberalism. Topics include critical medical issues and children's embodiment (Bluebond-Langner 1978, 1996; Prout 2000); the ramifications of structural violence and how children are deeply implicated by global injustices (Briggs and Briggs 2016; Korbin 2003; Kovats-Bernat 2008; Scheper-Hughes 1993; Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998); the ways children and youths are targeted by and engage with forms of capitalism including labour and consumption (Allison 2009; Chin 2001; LaBennett 2011; Leinaweaver 2007); and intersections of young people's mobility, nationalisms, and state sovereignty as they are implicated by the uneven allocation of citizenship (Boehm 2012; Carneiro de Cunha 1995; Empez Vidal 2011; Hall 1995; James 2011; Mandel 1995). The literature on the politics of childhood is also often connected to arguments about the universality of child rights as debates are waged about the kinds of childhoods young people should be entitled to given such vast cultural diversity and unequal access to resources (Goddard, McNamee, and James 2005; Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998; Society for Medical Anthropology 2007; Stephens 1995a).

Amid on-going conversations about young people's place in the world, including in their communities, families, and nations, also comes discussion concerning their place in research. In other words, ontological questions about the nature of young people as social beings meet up with epistemological concerns about what they know and how they share knowledge. By epistemology, I draw from Russell Bernard's definition that it entails "the study of how we know things" (2006, 3). Who we include in our studies and the kinds of methods we employ to generate knowledge and render it valid is intimately tied to a critical constructivist epistemology whereby reality is constructed, interpreted, and made meaningful through people's subjectively lived experiences (Guba and Lincoln 1994; Schwandt 2000).

Epistemology is informed by the ways in which young people are approached by researchers and included in knowledge production. Child psychology often approaches young people as *objects* in quantitative research with little regard for the meaning they make of their worlds (Woodhead and Faulkner 2008). Scheper-Hughes and Sargent make this point when they state that "while children have been—indeed, sometimes relentlessly—tracked, observed, measured, and tested, rarely are they active participants in anthropological research, setting agendas, establishing boundaries, negotiating what may be said about them" (1998, 14-15).

Contemporary anthropological and sociological scholarship has importantly considered the ways in which children and youths should be considered *subjects* in research, that is, having their perspectives and active participation meaningfully considered (James 2007; Mayall 2002; James and Prout 1997). In order to address the oppression of young people's concerns, critical scholars advocate for participatory methodologies where children and youths become co-researchers and help direct research processes and outcomes (Alderson 2008; Burke 2008; Cahill 2009; Delgado 2006; Gallagher 2009; Jones 2004; Kaplan 2008; O'Kane 2008; Nieuwenhuys 2004; Schafer and Yarwood 2009). These participatory projects often involve visual methods that engage participants in dynamic modes of knowledge production and have the potential to impact positive social change by reaching a broader public (Johnson 2011; Leadbeater et al. 2006; Thomson 2008).

Vea's suggestion that people are so full of knowledge is precisely the epistemological stance of many anthropologists who seek to better understand sociocultural life by being with participants; we learn about the world by moving through it, talking to people, and oscillating between social theory and everyday life (Malkki 2007). It is imperative to include young people in these processes of coming to know and understand the world. Through paying attention to Vea and other youths, new windows open to better understand how social relations are generated, lived, and transformed. Young people's perspectives also clarify how global injustices implicate their everyday lives, shape their life trajectories, and wrench apart the intimacies of their families through ruptured social relations. It also reveals how they cope and persist, dreaming and manifesting a life otherwise. It is through these youths' stories and their knowledge of the world that we can, as Vea suggests, "connect together."

Vea's inability to see herself as knowledgeable—"I don't know if I have any knowledge"—reflects broader assumptions of her incompetence as a teenager. She was not sure if what she had to say mattered, but in an act of testimonial speaking, she and other youths told their complex stories of growing up across borders to convey the ordinariness, anguish, and hope of their lives to a listening audience. It is imperative that we challenge the on-going marginalization of her body, words, and being by holding her knowledge as true and worthy of our attention.

### **3.2. Research methodology**

A child-centered anthropology contains all the elements for a radical paradigm shift, similar to the salutary effects resulting from the feminist critique of the discipline. — Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Carolyn Sargent (1998, 15)

I sought to develop a youth-engaged ethnographic methodology that employed dynamic modes of storytelling, visual methods, and a participatory project. By ethnography I mean long-term immersion in a field of study where being with participants enables the researcher to subjectively and experientially learn about their everyday lives in relation to social, political, and economic processes (Madden 2010; Malkki 2007; Okley 2012; Ortner 2006). Though I aimed to have the participants highly engaged in the study, my experiences as a youth worker led me to understand that those with whom I might work are often busy with employment, school, and family obligations; thus, I knew the project needed both flexibility and structure so participants could be accommodated while also knowing what expect. I employed ethnographic interviews and focus groups in Phase I and a participatory project in Phase II with the hope that these more organized events would enable us to build rapport, generate rich conversations, and open the doors to less structured time together. In what follows, I detail my youth-focused approach and the kinds of data my participants and I created in the process.

### **Youth-focused recruitment**

When I embarked on the study I knew I would face challenges making initial contact with youths. Karen Fog Olwig and Eva Gulløv note how “children tend to be set aside in places separated from the rest of society—homes or various institutions—where their incorporation is closely supervised by adults” (2003, 2). In my previous research with children and youths (Shaw 2010, 2011), I recruited firstly through parents and depended on them to speak with their children. While this strategy allowed me to find interested mothers and fathers, I realize the child participants were highly influenced by their parents because it was only through them that they came to know about my study. While I always sought prior and informed consent from all of the participants in this earlier project, I often contemplated the ways my recruitment approach reproduced dominant parent-child relations and potentially disempowered young people from self-determining their involvement. In this study I wanted to better address this issue by reaching youths more directly in the recruitment phase.

I met youths through youth workers, community members, social media, and their peers. Youth workers were often people already connected to my social network and prior work in the youth settlement field—former colleagues, friends, or friends of friends. Others included acquaintances such as those I met at community events. In addition to providing people with

posters and brochures, I created online posts to reach a diverse audience through Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Although these recruitment methods did not allow me to entirely circumvent adult gatekeepers such as youth workers, I felt confident that I was speaking with youths in a more direct fashion than I had in my previous research and, importantly, I did not communicate with them *through* their parents.

I often spoke with the prospective participant on the phone, through text message, or in-person to review the information about the study. They had time to speak with their parents and consider any questions they wanted to ask me. Many youths came back with questions, for example: why I planned to keep the data for precisely twenty years, if they could opt in for the interviews but not commit to the focus groups, and who else would hear their voices on the audio recording (they were often self-conscious about the sounds of their voices). Their interesting and unexpected questions indicated to me that they were thinking critically about the project and their participation as they interrogated aspects of the project information and consent forms that seemed vague or curious to them. All the prospective participants took the initiative to speak to the parents, and, in cases of legal minors, brought me their parents' signed consent forms. Most of the time I spoke with a parent over the telephone or through text messages to confirm they understood the form and ensure they did not have any unanswered questions. Speaking with parents directly had a double edge; while it allowed me to build rapport with parents and ensure they were informed, I could also sense that youths felt it was an unnecessary step in the process of joining the study. In spite of my assurance to participants that I would not talk with their parents about the stories they shared with me, my early communication with parents may have raised doubt, as youths knew their parents' and I spoke on at least one occasion. My initial introduction to youths and the process of gaining informed consent was a delicate balance between respecting their desires, respecting parents' authority, and meeting my ethics protocol.

### **Participant profile and demographic challenges**

From January 2015 to March 2016, I worked with fifteen participants ages fourteen to twenty-two, which included twelve young women and three young men. While I anticipated mainly working with Filipina/o-Canadians in Greater Vancouver, I left open the possibility that people from other ethnic backgrounds may also want to join the project. In the end, fourteen participants identified as Filipina/o and one identified as Japanese. The predominance of Filipina/o-Canadian participants reflected the fact that they comprise the largest segment of those

who come to Canada through the caregiver programs and the TFWP (Kelly et al. 2011; Pratt 2012). Ten participants had a mother come to Canada through the LCP and the remaining five participants had a parent come to Canada to work, causing long-term family separation. Though each participant's stories carried important knowledge, I decided in the end to focus on the stories of the ten youths whose mothers came to Canada under the LCP. This allows me to narrow the discussion in this dissertation to a more specific circumstance that arises through this labour and immigration program. Further writing opportunities will provide the space to engage with the stories of the participants not mentioned in these pages.

The participants who joined the project reflected the kinds of relationships I had to certain communities, as many of my contacts were directly involved in labour and migrant justice or youth settlement work. When I approached youth workers about the study, I found two trends in how they responded; on the one hand, some were clearly aware of temporary migrant worker programs and their impacts on Filipina/o-Canadian families. These individuals quickly understood the premise of the study and had particular youths whom they knew in mind. On the other hand, youth workers who were more removed from the politics of migrant labour were perplexed by my focus; in these cases I explained what I meant by particular immigration routes and why my focus largely applied to Filipina/o-Canadian families, yet these individuals were not always clear if they knew of youths who came to Canada under such circumstances. As Farrales (2016) importantly notes, migration routes have direct impacts on youths' experiences in Canada such as entering and completing secondary school. By speaking with youth workers about my study, I came to realize that its outcomes need to reach not only policymakers but also those who engage directly with migrant youths in their everyday lives yet may not be aware of political-economic factors that shape how and when these youths arrive in Canada and the implications of those trajectories.

## **Interviews**

Throughout the year I conducted forty-one semi-structured interviews that included up to three interviews with each participant. For the most part, the youths determined the locations and times of these events. The youngest participants were often unaware of where to have a meeting, as they only knew very specific locations in their neighbourhoods—home, school, the grocery store, and the park, for example. They sometimes also knew about a local library, recreation centre, or community service centre, but were not always sure how to get there on their own. In

these cases I suggested a location close their houses or schools and would usually pick them up and then drive them home afterwards. On several occasions youths invited me to their houses for interviews—an offer I always graciously accepted knowing it would be convenient for them and a rich ethnographic setting of everyday life. In many cases, however, youths felt that their families would interrupt or eavesdrop, so they wanted to spend time with me away from their houses to ensure we could have more open conversations.

Interviews involved a storytelling approach for participants to share their perspectives and experiences orally and visually. While many anthropologists have examined the ways in which storytelling are culturally-specific practices, they also represent agentive reconstructions of the past, renegotiations of meaning, and resistance to oppression. Jackson (2002) argues that stories enable people to understand and order their lives by giving words to events that may otherwise be unnamable. He suggests that stories are not reflections of factual content but rather are the sensual, experiential negotiations, where “to reconstitute events in a story is no longer to live those events in positivity, but to actively rework them, both in dialogue with others and within one’s own imagination” (ibid., 15). Dossa (2004, 2009, 2013) argues that storytelling can be a means of resistance to structural violence as one draws upon an actively listening audience to make themselves known. Storytelling has the capacity to be an agentive, transformative, and intersubjective process between an orator and a listener.

First sets of interviews followed a life story method. By life story, I mean “an accounting of an individual’s movements through life—geographical, as well as social, economic, or cultural—in such a way that it portrays a sense of coherence reflective of the narrator’s sense of self” (Olwig 2007a, 17).<sup>17</sup> There is also a temporal element to life stories. The construction of a life story also involves eliciting, drawing upon, representing memories, which literary scholars Russell J.A. Kilbourn and Eleanor Ty (2014) defines as a process of remembering according to what is available in the present through words and images. According to Astrid Erll, memories “are subjective, highly selective reconstructions, dependent on the situation in which they are recalled. Re-remembering is an act of assembling available data that takes place in the present” (2011, 8). Ty (2017b) draws attention to how social media plays a large role in contemporary forms of memory, which is particularly pertinent among the youths I met whose histories are archived and social relations maintained through their online accounts. Youths shared their life

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<sup>17</sup> For more on life story methodologies, see L.L. Langness and Geyla Frank (1981), Charlotte Linde (1993), Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps (1996), Bonnie McElhinny et al. (2009), and James Peacock and Dorothy Holland (1993).

stories with me in ways that were at times chronologically ordered and at other times more fragmented as they oscillated between times, places, images, and storylines based on what was available to them in a given interview setting.

According to Olwig (2007a), life stories have the potential to reveal a person's geography and relationality as particular memories are saliently tied to places and people that constitute one's self of sense and belonging. Ty and Goellnicht (2004) also argue that people narrate their identities following transnational migrations in ways that extend beyond imagined homelands and hyphenation. They argue that there "are the complexities, the struggles and layering of various facets of one's identity, which are shaped by the history and the politics of one's imaginary and adopted homeland(s), as well as the importance of memory, myth, and art in the construction of self" (ibid., 2). Thus, narrating oneself can be a political project of situating the self in the world complexly, illustrating rejections and assertions of belonging. Jackson (2002) argues that storytelling is deeply political, showcasing how public events inform private lives and then how stories make private affairs visible through words and text. Finally, as much as life stories often "conform to certain norms concerning the sort of life deemed to be credible and socially acceptable" (Olwig 2007a, 17), youths also told me stories that were quite specific to them, informed by different constellations of events and meanings they made of them. As I will illustrate, and as Ty (2017a) argues elsewhere in regards to literature and drama, the youths I met often narrated themselves against neoliberal capitalism by asserting their memories, aspirations, and senses of happiness in ways that defied the logics of capitalism.

Second sets of interviews were place based and often involved walking and talking (Ingold and Vergunst 2008; Jung 2014; Yi'En 2013). In these conversations, participants and I focused on their lives after arriving in Canada. I selected walking because I thought it would be a feasible way of generating proximity to youths' everyday lives, as I hoped participants would choose places familiar and meaningful to them. Many participants walked me around their neighbourhoods or near their schools, and these images of buildings and landscapes elicited memories of their initial impressions of Vancouver, their first days of school, and meeting their classmates, for example.

Walking enabled me to sense and embody being in places that were connected to participants' everyday lives, which were elaborated on by the participants' narrations of specific memories that arose and their associated feelings (Edensor 2010; Jung 2014; O'Neill and Hubbard 2010; Pink 2008, 2009; Yi'En 2013). This follows what Yuha Jung calls an "emplaced experience" that can occur alongside another person in shared moment (2014, 623). Jung argues

that walking is not just an observational exercise, but a sensory one where “it is critical to capture the emerging feelings and spontaneous moments through faded memories and images of places are also part of the lived experience through walking” (ibid., 622). Jung advocates that researchers be mindful of what they observe through walking while also making note of the circumstances that give way to emotions. For us, walking was a more emergent experience than prior life story interviews, as bodily directions and conversations unfolded according to encounters that were and were not predictable; new topics of conversation about the differences between the Philippines and Canada often arose, comparing neighbourhoods, housing configurations, proximity of relatives, how one got to school, the weather, and more. There were also stark moments of reaction, for example, when one of us would stop walking and look at the other in moments of seriousness or surprise. These events stand out to me more than what happened during our seated interviews because the embodied aspect of that sudden shift in orientation, body language, eye contact, and emotion was remarkable. Finally, walking allowed for unexpected encounters with people as we casually passed by participants’ friends or family members in the neighbourhood. Despite the challenges of talking over traffic and navigating walking routes, participants often expressed how they liked the walking interviews for the informality and activity that they evoked.

Third sets of interviews involved photograph and journal elicitation (Clark-Ibáñez 2004; Mandleco 2013; Orellana 1999). At the onset of the project I gave participants a digital camera and journal to document different parts of their lives that they wanted to share with me. Through these media, participants captured aspects of their lives that I was not always privy to, such as time they spent at school, at work, and on outings with friends. What emerged through these visual methods was quite unexpected; one participant visited the Philippines where she spent time with family members, attended a wedding, and travelled to the countryside. She documented the trip for me visually and textually; she took 199 photographs, recorded three videos, and made twenty-one journal entries. Many participants also captured an abundance of metaphorical images such as exit signs, trees, or pathways to express certain feelings that accompanied their life experiences. Veal’s story about the community book exchange emerged as one example of how everyday objects in her neighbourhood elicited an interesting conversation about knowledge, experience, and her belief in the power of storytelling.

Most participants chose to use their cameras more than their journals, as they often considered photography to be an easier activity than writing. Because of their smartphones and extensive use of social media, snapping photographs was a familiar activity for most of the

participants. For some, journaling revealed their lack of confidence in articulating themselves in English and felt it was too similar to school assignments where they received criticism. Being made subject to competition, comparison, and critique in their English language classes at school rendered it difficult for them to not see themselves as deficient, in spite of my encouragement otherwise. Some youths wrote journal entries or took the time to collage and draw, thus adapting the methods I suggested to suit their desired modes of expression. I explore what emerged through these methods in more detail in chapter ten.

### **Focus groups**

Following the interviews, participants were invited to a series of two focus groups. I held two series of focus groups (two in one location and two in another, each following the same sets of themes and questions) in order to make the number of participants manageable and to provide location options. The focus groups took place at local community centres during the summertime, when most participants were out of school or only had a few summer classes. Each session lasted approximately two hours and fluctuated in numbers from three to six people. Those who did not attend were often unable to because the timing conflicted with summer school classes or work schedules, which reflects the educational and economic challenges that are particular to Filipina/o-Canadian youths (Farrales 2016). Some participants were also hesitant about sharing their stories with their peers present. I assured participants that we would review confidentiality agreements as a group before commencing each focus group, but also reinforced the fact that I did not have complete control over the information shared. Participants were reminded that they did not have to attend the focus groups at all. Participants were encouraged to decide for themselves, and seemingly did, which aspects of the project they wanted to be part of and how they wanted to express themselves.

First focus groups concentrated on the participants' experiences of migration and family, while second focus groups were directed towards issues to do with life in the present and in the future. Ethnographers observe how group settings can allow for a researcher to participate in and observe dialogue, revealing differences in opinions and generating conversations that are more participant driven. In her migration-focused research, Pratt finds that focus groups create more "open and ambiguous" relations between participants and the researcher, are less individualistic, and allow "the process of meaning-generation" (2000, 3-4) to unfold intersubjectively.

The richness of the conversations varied from group to group; in one case the participants were relatively quiet and offered very short answers, whereas in another focus group participants spoke among themselves at great length as they compared experiences and identified with each other's struggles. In the first instance, it was a larger mixed-gender group of younger participants who largely knew each other from school, whereas in the second instance it was a smaller group of all female participants who were slightly older in age and did not (for the most part) have pre-existing relationships. As other researchers suggest, group composition matters in how conversations unfold (Bushin 2009; Christenson and James 2008; Clark 2011; Gallagher 2009; Hernandez et al. 2013; Mahalingam and Rabelo 2013; Punch 2009). In spite of my desire to thoughtfully plan group composition, I found it challenging to pre-determine attendance and arrange accordingly since participants' primary concerns were logistical—location, date, and time of the event were the main factors that determined if they could attend.

It was at this point in the project that I employed a youth research assistant. Victor was a second-year sociology student from a neighbouring university. It was important to me that he similarly identified with the participants as Filipino-Canadian and spoke fluent Tagalog in order to create a more emic, peer-to-peer research experience. Victor's main role was assisting in planning and facilitating the focus groups, and helping to transcribe and analyze the focus group data. I found that while many of the focus group topics were similar to what I had already discussed with the participants in our earlier conversations, these dialogues unfolded in novel ways due to the presence of other youths and the new research assistant.

While participants carried on for the most part with re-telling stories as I had already heard, my pre-existing relationships with them stood out at notable times. Trish, for example, was telling the group about her struggles when she first arrived in Canada and her senses of homesickness. Knowing that I had already heard the story, she drew me into her re-telling of it as she said, "I told Jenny that I count the days that I've been living in Canada." She then looked at me as I nodded in affirmation that I remembered. She seemed to be seeking my reassurance that I remembered the story and to let the other participants know that we had an existing relationship, like "friends" Trish would often say to me. At times I was a part of participants' responses, figuring into their lives in ways that were beyond the research context. Victor asked the group if anyone regularly accessed a youth worker, to which Tiffany burst, "Ah, yeah! Youth workers? I do to Jenny, right? I do, right?" She turned to me and smiled widely, remembering times when we would stop an interview to talk about resumes, job searching, and the differences between college and university. I was not actually her youth worker, since I was not working for any organization

in that role at the time, but nonetheless she knew of my background as a youth worker and took these opportunities to garner my thoughts on certain questions she had about education and employment issues.

At other times, my disparate status in the group stood out, setting me apart from Victor and the participants. Veia was explaining the challenges she faced in Vancouver, saying, “My biggest challenge is still coping with Canada. Well, all of us, like the three of us [indicating the three youths present], the four of us [now including Victor]— and even you Jenny [turning to me]—try to cope.” Despite her knowledge that I had not migrated to Canada, she sought to include me by suggesting that I have also had to “cope” in life and could empathize with a shared experience of struggling through change. Though I do not take for granted that our life circumstances were quite different, I found it interesting that Veia tried to build both empathy and inclusion in the group by asking us to all identify with her experiences.

What emerged in the focus groups was shaped by the group composition including the presence of Victor and myself—the youths had a preexisting relationship with me, which seemed important to them, while they saw Victor as a new person but more able to understand their experiences of migration. It is notable that in spite of Victor’s ability to speak Tagalog, the participants spoke entirely in English. This likely reflects how they wanted to include me in the conversation and how speaking in English has become normalized for them at school, at home, and among their friends. Many participants expressed to me that they are strongly encouraged by their teachers, parents, and youth workers to speak in English in order to “improve” their language skills. Many felt that this practice would do them well educationally and functioned to include their English-speaking peers in their conversations. The perpetual push to speak English also reflects the long shadow of American imperialism and labour export in the Philippines that has worked to situate English as the lingua franca while attempting to erase rich cultural diversity tied to local dialects (Rafael 2016). My attempt to be more linguistically inclusive by involving Victor was not enough to challenge these language hegemonies. It is notable that several participants spoke little to no Tagalog, and thus there was not a common language among the participants other than English, and Victor would not have been able to communicate equally with all participants if they chose to speak in their first languages. The language hierarchy that emerged in the research—English, then Tagalog, followed by other Philippine dialects—reflects the longer analysis Vincent Rafael (2016) provides concerning language prominence and marginalization in the Philippines through pre-colonial and colonial histories. Finally, my perceived authority in the situation (the participants knew Victor was the “assistant”) may also

have encouraged participants to cater to and include me in particularly powerful ways. Victor and I sought to mediate this by having me ask very few questions as he facilitated the focus groups, but the conversations continued in English anyways.

### **Participatory photography project**

During the focus groups, participants and I spent time planning for Phase II of the research, which aimed to be a participatory project. The group generated an extensive amount of visual material through their photography and journaling, and so we brainstormed ways to turn this work into stories that would help educate a broader audience about the struggles and hopes that constitute these participants' lives. I offered the group a few suggestions for the kind of project we could undertake within our timeframe and budget, which included making digital stories, an exhibit, a 'zine, or a book. After some consideration, the participants thought that a book would be the most feasible since it allowed them to create their pieces on their own time, did not require them to show up at a particular place and time, and produced a professional-looking outcome. They also thought they might like the tangibility of a book—something they could keep for themselves, which I had not considered to be significant until I realized how important this outcome was to them upon wrapping up the research.

Ten participants carried on with Phase II, which took approximately four months to complete. Participants either attended group sessions or worked at home, producing one to four contributions each. I collected and collated the pages, checked back with participants for final revisions, and printed the books. I then met with these participants to provide them with at least two copies of the book. Providing them with extra copies meant they could decide who would receive it, including parents, teachers, or friends. I distributed the remaining copies to relevant stakeholders including community members, youth workers, teachers, colleagues, and scholars.

I will speak more about the book in chapter ten, but suffice it to say that the book provided participants with spaces to imaginatively and creatively tell their stories, determine a medium of dissemination, and at least partially inform who would be the audience. In doing so, they began to see themselves as knowledge producers and took the task quite seriously. It was not only an experience many participants expressed pleasure in doing but also provided them with a sense of pride in creating an informative and visually appealing document. We seemed to share the same sentiment that the book signified the closure to the research activities, an important marker as our relationships shifted and we started to see each other less frequently. This research

outcome was much more salient for the participants than this dissertation is likely to be, and offered a material finish to our work and time together.

### **Emergent events**

In addition to the organized interviews, focus groups, and book-making meetings, I always agreed to attend other events or locations to which I was invited. Upon invitation from participants, youth workers, and community members, I attended cultural festivals and program-based events. At these events I would help with particular tasks such as set-up, be part of the audience, and chat with youths and youth workers. I also took participants out for sushi or ice cream where we would talk about their day at school and upcoming exams. I taught one participant how to drive a car after she received her learner's license; we listened to top forty hits on the radio and laughed about how hard it was for her to stay to the right of the yellow centre line. I helped another participant find his first job after we went around to few local businesses inquiring about positions. Several participants asked me for help with their resumes and advice about life after high school, knowing that I had previously been an education and employment counsellor and settlement worker.

These unstructured activities were illuminating as I learned about youths' lives over food, witnessed firsthand how parents were often working and unavailable, and their need to find a job and earn money. As much as our time together offered rich ethnographic settings of everyday life, it also reflected the structurally-induced gaps migrant youths and their families face in meeting educational demands as they balance busy work schedules and attempt to make ends meet. My ability to respond to youths' requests was not only indicative of my ethnographic approach, but my broader commitment to support them in ways they needed me to. In the following section I elaborate on my engaged approach and the methodological constraints that emerged in the process.

### **3.3. Ethical issues and engaged anthropology**

In developing an ethics of the intersubjective, we need a method of study that avoids prejudgments as to what is right and wrong, good and bad, and thus draws us deeply into the complexity of everyday situations. — Michael Jackson (2013, 10)

Maria invited me to advertise my research at an after-school leadership program she ran once a week. In order to support her and build rapport with her group members, I offered to facilitate a few activities that day. I arrived at the program a few minutes early, but Maria was late and the door was locked. There were several youths waiting outside the room, hovering in the hallway and clearly about to leave. Seeking to keep them around long enough for Maria to get there, I asked the four guys and two girls to sit down on the floor with me for an activity. We formed a small circle and I facilitated a check in; I asked them their names and how school went that day. We then did a round of “two truths and a lie”—an ice-breaker where participants get to know each other by sharing two things that are true about themselves and one thing that is a lie. The group then has to guess the lie. We were almost done with the activity when Maria rushed down the hallway, out of breath and remorseful for being late. We finished guessing the last person’s lie and then moved ourselves into the room.

I ran the session as planned, leading the youths through body-focused improvisation and forum theatre activities. In the time that followed I told them about my project by outlining what it was about, the participant criteria, and the process the research entailed. I invited those who were interested to sit with me and talk more about the project after the program ended. Rodel was one of two youths who expressed interest. Honestly, I think it was the digital camera and fifty-dollar honourarium that caught his initial attention, like most youths whose faces brightened when they saw that they got to keep something after their participation ended.<sup>18</sup> I needed to tell him more about the project—that was clear, but I was mostly concerned with making sure that in

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<sup>18</sup> It is important to consider the ways in which our offerings to participants shape their involvement in research. I gave participants a digital camera and memory card, which was directly related to the research methods. They also received a fifty dollar honoraria for both Phases I and II, which I used to acknowledge their time and work. Giving the participants these gifts was both a pragmatic and ethical decision. It was pragmatic in the sense that many participants simply would not have been able to join if there had not been compensation since their lives are economically challenged; in some cases participants had to book themselves off of work to make a meeting with me. Ethically, a child- and youth-focused approach recognizes the work young participants put into research, and thus their time needs to be respected and valued. Of course prospective participants were excited about the camera and money when we first spoke about it, which was likely the reason the project caught their initial attention. However, the impetus for their involvement transformed and became much deeper over the course of our time together. Upon completing the interviews, focus groups, and participatory photography project, I spoke casually with them about their experiences doing the research with me and they all reflected that they did not really know what to expect initially but that it had been a rewarding process where they felt heard, valued, and affirmed. They often expressed how no one else had taken the time to sit and really talk with them, listening carefully and checking back to ensure understanding. Many participants openly expressed how the research was a special time for them to connect with someone who they knew cared about their lives and futures.

that moment he received all the necessary documents to get started. The bureaucracy that I knew was looming over my head in the form of my ethics protocol awkwardly interrupted the unfolding of our relationship and natural flow of conversation. I pulled out the stack of papers that included a two-page information sheet, a three-page youth consent form, a three-page parent consent form, and a one-page photography and journaling guide. Rodel stood there uneasily clutching the pile of papers I just gave him and looked at me with exasperation. I could tell he was burdened by what came across as a lot of homework.

Reflecting on points raised earlier in this chapter, what can these first encounters with prospective participants tell us about the ways in which we do and do not effectively engage young people in research? How do we balance the demands of procedural ethics with possibilities for emergent ethnographic relationships and situated ethical responses? In this section, I consider the tensions that emerge when highly regimented procedural ethics meet with and against projects that aim to engage young people in knowledge production and processes they find useful and enjoyable. I first discuss the arena of “engaged anthropology,” which is often public, collaborative, and oriented towards social justice (Low and Merry 2010). Despite these on-going and reflexive conversations about the intentions of engaged researchers, methods and ethics do not always reflect an engaged approach nor can they under certain procedural and institutional constraints. The challenges of working with children and youths in qualitative research speak to broader epistemological matters and relations of power between young people, adults, institutions, and knowledge production. I end this section by reflecting on the need for situated ethics and more nuanced consideration of young people’s complex and heterogeneous lives.

By engaged anthropology, I draw from Setha Low and Sally Merry’s discussion that it involves “finding a nonimperialist political stance” in order “to work collaboratively rather than hierarchically with communities” (2010, S203). Low and Merry note six overarching ways anthropologists have shaped research to cultivate an engaged approach. Firstly, engaged approaches often involve sharing and support through everyday forms of friendship, reciprocity, and care. Secondly, engaged scholars seek to extend learning to public realms through writing, teaching, and mentorship. Third, engaged anthropologists move towards a social critique of the power relations that impinge the lives of marginalized people, challenging the structural inequalities that perpetuate exclusion and suffering. Advocacy and activism are also part of an engaged orientation; through advocacy, anthropologists are witnesses to and name the structural and blatant violence they see through their work, and activism takes place when anthropologists affirm their political stance with people and actively work towards social justice. Lastly, engaged

anthropology is often characterized by collaborative and participatory approaches where partnerships with people and organizations work to transform practices and policies. At its core, engaged anthropology moves away from the extraction of knowledge for the sole gain of the researcher and academe, and instead critiques power relations, is open to public conversations, and helps drive positive social change.<sup>19</sup>

While anthropologists are increasingly orienting their projects to work with people and communities in ways relevant to their concerns, pressures of the academe make creative and emergent processes challenging. Returning to my initial encounter with Rodel, this moment reflects conversations that concern processes of informed consent with youths and the specific requirements of my research ethics board (REB). Age is often a determining factor in deciding on research participant criteria as well as in policies and practices that pertain to children and youths' capacity to consent (Christensen and James 2008; Mayall 2008). The age of majority in Canada depends on provincial jurisdictions, ranging between age eighteen and age nineteen (Chabot et al. 2012). Age of consent, however, varies from the age of majority in various circumstances such as making health care decisions, getting married, starting a job, and applying for a driver's licence that, depending on the jurisdiction, can occur before age eighteen or nineteen (Leadbeater et al. 2006, 11). These findings reveal how consent and the capacity to manage life-altering responsibilities may in fact occur at ages younger than the legal age of majority.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) asserts that young people should be enabled to participate in decisions that concern their own lives. Signatory states are required to “assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child,” (ibid., Article 12(1)) and that “the child shall have the right to freedom of expression” (ibid., Article 13(1)). According to Canada's governing body concerning research ethics, the capacity to make decisions rests on “the ability of prospective or actual participants to understand relevant information presented about a research project, and to appreciate the potential consequences of their decision to participate or not participate” (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Chapter 3(C)). Furthermore, it is understood that consent “is not a static determination” and that it “may change over time” (ibid.). Although it is recognized in these international, national, and provincial codes that consent is dynamic and contingent on more than age alone, legal definitions of the age of majority may be employed as

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<sup>19</sup> For an insightful discussion on how activist anthropology can work for and against social critique, see Charles Hale (2006).

the default criteria by some REBs that require parental consent for legal minors to participate in research (Chabot et al. 2012; Leaderbeater et al. 2006).

Yet, as I have already discussed, anthropologists have long been interested in the diverse ways people of different ages experience the world according to specific cultural practices. Pia Christensen and Allison James (2008) argue that attention to age as the sole determining factor in research with young people privileges assumptions of homogeneity among those of the same age, whereas an anthropological lens observes differences in their comprehension, understandings, and actions. Researchers take different approaches in regards to how to address issues of competence and informed consent with young people, reflected in conversations about how to meaningfully inform children and youths about studies (Bushin 2009); who should provide consent for legal minors (Aldgate and Bradley 2004; Riecken and Strong-Wilson 2006); and how consent is indicated and maintained in the course of research (Clark 2011; Kaplan 2008; Marshall and Shepard 2006; Sippola 2006). Many scholars debate the necessity of parental consent; some suggest that requiring it importantly shows respect for parents' roles as decision makers, yet others note that it can undermine youths' desire for self-determination (Fisher and Mastly 2006; Jansson and Benoit 2006).

Amid on-going scholarly discussions about how to appropriately engage with children and youths in research, institutions can also foreclose the conversation through their procedural ethics, or the processes approved by research ethics boards (REBs) prior to a study's commencement (Chabot et al. 2012; Guillemin and Gillam 2004). For example, in 2009 I was completing my master's degree at the University of Victoria (UVic) where I worked with children ages eight and up to explore their experiences of being transnationally adopted. UVic's REB generally only required parental consent for participant under thirteen, assuming that anyone older can consent for themselves (UVic 2013). This standardized procedure was made clear through a series of boxes on the application that simply required me to check mark the protocol I would follow and provide a brief rationale. The study was approved and I went on to only gather informed consent from parents for the youngest participants. Six years later as I embarked on my doctoral research, I learned that the policy at my current institution was much different; Ethics Review of Research Involving Human Participants Policy 5.18 indicates that "The age of majority in British Columbia is 19 years and parental consent is required for subjects younger than 19" (Simon Fraser University 2014), following a strict legal definition. In order to not delay the process, I conceded to the policy and agreed to obtain informed consent from parents in the case where my participants were age eighteen or younger. This process concerned me since I

anticipated that a blanket approach would hinder some youths from participating, which it did when two youths, ages sixteen and eighteen, could not join the project because their parents would not provide consent.

What is interesting here is the social situations that many of my participants came from, how that shaped the kinds of relationships they had with their parents, and how the consent process unfolded. In the Philippines, where most of my participants grew up, it was common for young people to graduate high school at age fifteen or sixteen, as many of my participants did. As I discuss in more length in other chapters, some youths went off to college, living in a dorm with friends and gaining autonomy away from home. Rodel graduated from high school about a year prior to moving to Canada. He lived with his father for most of his life as his mother worked overseas, but, as the eldest sibling, held much of the household responsibilities including getting his siblings up and ready for school, making meals, doing the dishes, doing the laundry, and cleaning the house. His father passed away several years ago and as a result his younger siblings went to live with extended family members while Rodel stayed at home alone, reliant on himself. He lived through the significant transition of completing high school, the parent-like responsibilities of caring for young children, and the lack of a physically-present parent.

In spite of Rodel's complex life experiences of self-determination and autonomy, he was rendered incompetent to decide on his participation in this project. This is ironic given that my university does provide one notable exception to their rule: "The REB considers minors attending University, who are 17 to 18 years of age, to be emancipated adults for the purposes of minimal-risk research" (Simon Fraser University 2014). Upon moving to Canada, Rodel was assessed between a grade ten and eleven level and put back in high school. He was seventeen years old at this time. His age in relation to his non-university status meant he had no choice but to request his mother's consent despite a life filled with adult-like responsibilities. If he had been in university rather than high school—a path often slowed for migrant youths due to immigration and credential recognition regimes that frequently set them back (Farrales and Pratt 2012, Farrales 2016)—the process of him joining the project would have been much different because his *competence* would have been viewed differently according to these REB policies.

Rodel often lamented how difficult it was to rely on his mother's consent for many things in his life, particularly because he is unused to the routine of having to ask her. He wanted, for example, to be able to go out with friends in the evenings, which his mother was not letting him do at the time even though it had been part of his regular routine before he migrated. The handful of consent forms I gave him had a rippled effect of reflecting his newly dependent relationship on

his mother's approval to do just about anything. He looked at me in annoyance each time I needed him to bring back another form signed by his mother, and I knew in those moments that I was undermining the self-determination he experienced in his life and nostalgically longed to retain. It was not that his mother's wishes were unimportant to him or me, but rather he felt that it was a moot point; his participation in my project was not something his mother would be concerned about, unlike the kinds of friends he was keeping and what they were doing together. Having to seek her consent was not going to unfold in a disagreement, but was rather an annoying task for both of them. In one instance his mother signed the form but forgot to circle "yes" indicating explicit consent to audio record his interviews. Upon seeing the incomplete form, I had to ask him to take it home again and have his mother circle "yes," then meet with me *again* the following day so that I could retrieve it. He was annoyed with me and said in exasperation, "But she's fine with it!"

In order to make the project information and consent forms more audience-friendly, I first generated a shorter name for my study—the "Storied Migrations Project" that I thought would prompt more interest than a long academic title. I then built a website to help audiences easily access and share the information, using social media and hashtags to engage people online. I tried to make the written materials not only informative but visually appealing and straightforward. While many researchers discuss the need to make consent forms applicable to particular audiences (Bushin 2009; Fisher and Mastay 2006; Hernandez et al. 2013; Riecken and Strong-Wilson 2006), there are few creative suggestions other than a clearly worded letter. I steered as far from the typical "letter" form as I could by making my materials attractive using colourful text boxes, bullet points, and images. The consent form design was not only an aesthetic choice but an ethical one; knowing that many readers would not find several pages of lone text interesting, I used visual cues to denote different sections and highlight the most important points. While these creative and visual choices helped me reach and engage youths initially, it took much more to enable them to stay engaged.

Many participants had limited time and several barriers to transportation. Rodell was in school full time and part way through the year found an after-school job. I would meet him at the fast food restaurant, Starbucks, and local community centre right after school, on weekends, or when there was a school closure. We were always within walking distance of his house, on his schedule, and often dependent on my car to get us to our next location. The constant shuffling around of meeting times and locations meant that I was on my phone perpetually rearranging my schedule in response to the participants' busy and complicated lives. My engaged approach was

not only a pragmatic response to my participants' circumstances but also revealed the ordinary challenges they face.

On one occasion I managed to book a room at a nearby community centre after Angel confirmed an interview time with me. The booking clerk required fifty dollars, proof of liability insurance, and a signed contract, which I organized and provided. Approximately an hour before the interview, Angel sent a text to inform me that she would be several hours late. At her request, I picked her up later from the pharmacy where she was running an errand. Since we had missed our room booking earlier that day, I drove her across town to SFU where I knew I could easily book a cost-free library space. The commute took as much time as the interview itself (and I still had to pay for the room we did not use). The car ride, however, was a candid moment that revealed the pains of separation from loved ones; Angel told me that she had a conflict with her friend who is still in the Philippines. It kept her up all night and that was the reason why she was unable to meet me earlier. She was tearful, stressed, and wanted to talk about it as we drove together. My initial frustration over the changed time was met with the sudden realization that what was happening that day was a reverberation of strain elsewhere in her life as she attempted to manage long-distance relationships and the hardships of migration. The stress she experienced impacted her ability to sleep, to get to places that day, and clearly aroused feelings of grief and sorrow as we talked in the car.

On another occasion, Trish texted to tell me she could not make our meeting time that afternoon because she did not have enough money for the bus. I told her I would give her a bus pass as soon as I saw her if she could scrape together enough change to meet me where we planned. She then confirmed that she really could not find four dollars and fifty cents to make the one-way trip, and so I offered to drive her instead—an offer she graciously accepted. When I got to her, I still offered her a few two-zone bus passes knowing that she had a difficult time sourcing bus fare. As I handed her the passes, she looked up at me hesitantly, then asked for the three-zone bus passes instead. I was perplexed by this request since she lived two zones from town and not three. It was then she told me that she was going to sell the more costly passes to her sister for five dollars each and put the money towards the dress she wanted for graduation. I paused and then agreed, realizing again how everyday concerns about time, transportation, and the ability to participate not only in this project but ordinary teenager activities was an on-going struggle for these young people.

My accommodating schedule and ability to pick up and drive these participants was not the kind of relationship they were used to with other adults. Vea once told me about the

challenges she experienced finding out about and attending youth settlement programs. This included meeting with her school-based tutor. She explained how she was saddened by the missed opportunity to enhance her learning since her and her tutor's schedules did not align well and they had not seen each other in months. I asked her if she would benefit from a tutor who had more time flexibility, and she responded, "If there's one that would be great. But then not all people have all the time in the world. Not like you! You are so very dedicated. You do everything for youths. Like, you take all the time." For the course of that year, I did make nearly all of my time available to the participants as I attempted to orbit their lives and respond to their requests. Yet there were certain aspects of the work that I simply could not adapt to better accommodate them or reflect their specific circumstances, such as the arduous back and forth about obtaining their parents' consent.

According to Low and Merry, engaged anthropology is not only about collaboration, sharing, and advocacy but also about social critique of the power that informs relationships. If Rodell or anyone else had become frustrated enough by the forms I needed completed, they may have very easily chosen to not participate at all—forgoing the paperwork to continue on with their lives as usual. Fionagh Thomson (2007) argues that methodologies developed for young people often keep them in their place, that is, in a marginalized social position that extends to the ways in which they are and are not engaged well in research. She argues that child- and youth-focused research can be better developed by taking the stance that children are not less competent or inherently different from adults but occupy a social position that marginalizes their perspectives. Social transformation is only possible when those who experience marginalization have certain resources to bring about change. The researcher's role can be to make the necessary resources available for young participants to meaningfully engage in social processes, and to challenge structures that render young people unable to participate and otherwise marginalized.

A first step in the context of my project and institution would be to reconsider the need for parental consent, as other universities and researchers have done. This is not to say that parents should be excluded from the process. It is important to respect social and familial relations that shape young people's lives, yet *requiring* parent consent for nearly *all* legal minors unfairly barricades their participation, assumes their incompetence, and homogenizes their life experiences. As psychologist Lorrie Sippola argues, "institutional REBs may rely too heavily on legalistic interpretations of ethical issues when making decisions" and that "seeking solutions to ethical issues through a single philosophical perspective, such as a legal lens, is dangerous" (2006, 112). As Jackson (2013, 199) suggests, ethics should not be viewed as sets of obligations

or codes for behaviour, but rather as morally informed responses to the unpredictability and contingencies that may appear in any interpersonal encounter. In a more applied sense, Marlene Moretti, Bonnie J. Ross Leadbeater, and Anne Marshall (2006) recommend that rather than forcing researchers to adhere to strict procedural ethics, graduate students should be trained to ask critical questions of themselves early in the research process, to be reflexive during the study, and able to problem solve as new issues arise. These are ultimately calls to invite more situated ethical responses, rather than procedural ones—a point that I illustrate through nuanced ethnographic observations throughout this dissertation of these young people’s complicated lives.

Critically examining the ways in which procedural ethics can conflict with engaged anthropological and youth-centred approaches can push us to further consider the relevancy and urgency of situated ethics in ethnographic projects. Situated ethics is not only a matter of how we address ethically important moments as they unfold, but also how we ethically address each unique participant and their specific life circumstances, as well as the structural barriers that may marginalized their decision-making capacities. Through more nuanced and emergent ethical approaches, we can reduce the chances of reproducing these barriers and inequities in our own research. By considering the procedural ethics that shaped this study and what I learned along the way, these processes reveal how migration and role changes challenged my participants’ sense of autonomy and achievement, and how I inadvertently reproduced those impingements by involving their parents in ways that they did not always deem were necessary.

There is an intertwined relationship between youth-focused approaches and engaged anthropology. Both orientations seek to work with participants in collaborative, sharing, and meaningful ways where the process is a mutually rewarding experience with tangible, positive outcomes for individuals and communities. While both approaches are complementary and offer useful inquiry back and forth, they come up against rigid institutional assumptions about young people, which challenge researchers’ abilities to make the best choices for and with their participants. Creatively navigating and making time enabled my project to be successful, but more importantly, critiquing systems that keep young people in their place will potentially invite a more engaged anthropological and ethnographically-informed methodology that includes situated ethical capacities.

### 3.4. Researcher positionality and relations of power

Because knowledge is linked to power and, in turn, linked to the production of subjectivities and consciousness, the way we talk and think about subjects helps to produce and maintain social inequality. — Jo-Anne Lee and John Lutz (2005, 5)

My considerations about the social justice orientation of the project, engaged methodology, and situated ethics reflects broader concerns about relations of power in research. Many postcolonial, feminist, and anti-racist scholars call for heightened attention to the history of our disciplines' imperialist approaches and how these injustices seep into contemporary research and knowledge production. Subaltern studies have been influential in this regard, pointing to the subtle and blatant vestiges of colonialism in research practices (Bhabha and Comaroff 2002; Chatterjee 1995; Sivaramakrishnan 1995; Spivak 1988). Critical and reflexive researchers pursue important conversations about decolonizing theories and methodologies to challenge on-going marginalization and oppression of colonized and racialized peoples (Harrison 1997; Schmidt 2009; Tuhiwai Smith 1999). These concerns about power in research as well as anthropologists' attention to the intersubjectivity of encounters call for heightened attention to positionality and associated issues of power (Behar and Gordon 1996; Clifford and Marcus 1986; McClaurin 2001; McCorkel and Myers 2003). This conversation extends to child- and youth-focused research projects that are power laden and where adult researchers must mitigate the authority they hold *over* younger people by practicing more egalitarian relationships.

Some researchers point out, however, that this singular conceptualization of power negates more complex understandings of how social relations are dialectically influenced and the ways in which power can surface in unexpected ways (Barker 2009; Foucault 1977, 1983; Gallagher 2009; Thomson 2008). As I will discuss, systemic forms of power associated with my adulthood, whiteness, and class shaped my relationships with participants, but power also arose in less expected ways.

Michel Foucault (1977, 1983) argues that power is not imposed on people, but manifests more subtly as “it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action” (1983, 220). Foucault (1977) makes three important points about the omnipresence of power. First, he argues that power is not possessed by individuals or states, but is strategically employed based on position and context. Following this point, he suggests that those in less powerful positions are not outside of power but rather integral to it, as power “invests them, is transmitted by them and through them” (ibid., 27). Lastly, Foucault states that power is not unidirectional, but manifests as “innumerable points

of confrontation” (ibid.) or “matrices of transformations” (1978, 99). His work confounds straightforward notions of the ways in which power unfolds by suggesting that it exists in nuanced and dynamic ways amid every intersubjective encounter and is productive of society itself. Paying attention to power through its structural allocations and its nuanced formations is integral to understanding dynamic modes of working and being with people of any age. Malcolm Hill and his colleagues agree that “almost all discourse about ‘young people’s participation’ refers back at least implicitly to notions of power; less often, however, does that involve explicit identification, clarification, and deconstruction of what is meant by power and how power operates” (2004, 89).

Some scholars have problematized straightforward notions of child-adult power relations by showing how they can be disrupted amid the subtleties of complex interactions and young people’s agency. Geographer Michael Gallagher (2009) reflects on a study he conducted with children in a Scottish primary school. He augmented participant observation with participatory approaches to dislodge age hierarchies and create spaces for more emergent forms of expression. In doing so, other manifestations of power emerged in the process as the children tactically teased at his authority by providing subversive responses, restricting the involvement of some peers, and, at times, resisting cooperation altogether. Power in research may also be dispersed among other stakeholders; geographer John Barker (2009) reflects on his position navigating between the interests of his young participants, his own qualitative research agenda, and the school administration that demanded more quantifiable outcomes than what he planned for his participatory project. Barker was forced to carry out quantitative surveys to appease these gatekeepers, much to his own disappointment. Barker identifies himself in the precarious position of being considered an “expert” in some regards, yet feeling powerless to determine the course of his study in other regards. He insightfully suggests, “my experiences indicate the uncertainty and fluidity of power relations between researchers and participants, and once more how researchers can never be sure whether or how results may be used” (ibid., 179). The first example shows that young participants are not always entirely powerless. The second example shows that researchers are not always entirely powerful. Both cases show that power relations are relational and contextual, and thus require closer analysis of how they operate at structural and interpersonal levels.

Aspects of my positionality that surfaced in the course of the study included my race (a white settler), my gender (cis female), my age (early thirties), my marital status (married), my education (university-educated), class (middle class with access to a car and research funding),

citizenship (Canadian), and language (English-speaking). Apart from my gender, these aspects of my identity signify a privileged position that I experience in my everyday life. They were occasionally topics of conversation with the youths, and always shaped how we interacted with each other, which I had to be perpetually aware of in order to at least partially address the imbalances they created. For example, the participants clearly relied on me to hold together the structure of the project by taking care of scheduling and informing them of logistical issues; they saw me as the leader and organizer. At the same time, I also had to be keenly attentive to moments where I needed to follow their lead, such as when they shared their stories and needed me to carefully listen without interjection or judgment, or when they made requests for help with a resumes, driving instruction, or homework. The structural power I hold largely associated with my white identity and my position as the primary researcher made for an implicit imbalance in our relationships that I was continuously and contentiously navigating. Yet in the process, other forms of power emerged that signified the dynamic workings of power amid different expressions of willingness and agency between the participants and myself.

In the case of organizations and youth workers, I made it clear that I was willing to support them through volunteer work and small financial donations. Having worked for youth programs in the settlement sector for many years, I greatly appreciate how much labour is performed in this underpaid and underfunded sector. Yet as a white woman I also realize that my experiences as a youth settlement worker are quite different from many of my colleagues'; several scholars have shown how the settlement sector often relies on underemployed women of colour from migrant backgrounds. Feminist scholar Jo-Anne Lee finds that among the fifty workers she interviewed in Canada, they generally "perceive that agencies ignore and even promote occupational segregation by failing to challenge government funding policies for providing the framework that confines immigrant women to ethno specific, front-line settlement, and counselling jobs" (1999, n.p.). Further, Dossa (2004) observes how well educated migrant Iranian women in Greater Vancouver are often referred to volunteer positions in the settlement sector, thus working for free in order to build their "Canadian" work experience while their other qualifications are dismissed. I continuously attempted to maintain awareness of a complex constellation of issues in my relationships with youth workers including my hands-on knowledge and experience that could be useful for them, the overwhelming requests they receive from researchers throughout Vancouver, their positions as underpaid workers who are often also racialized migrants themselves, and my privileged position to be able to come, offer support, and leave again. It was imperative to me to engage in conversations with youth workers early on to ensure that I was orienting my study in a way they found relevant to their work. I also attempted

to fulfill their requests for support—which often meant helping with program facilitation, driving them to community events, transporting supplies, and doing dishes after events. As part of an engaged approach that was considerate of both my first-hand experience *and* privileged position, I sought to generate mutually beneficial relationships that often led to others holding the power to determine when and how I would show up and with whom I would engage.

The ways in which I engaged with participants also revealed surprising dynamics of power. Participants were often quite willing to do what I initiated, as I messaged them about interview times and locations. Many simply agreed to what I suggested, despite the fact that I reiterated how open I was to other possibilities of working together. I had to be extremely mindful of ensuring that I was accommodating the participants and not causing them to forego other activities or commitments. Some participants saw the potential I offered them and would turn my requests around to suit their needs. Trish asked me to review and edit her resume—time we often tacked onto the end of an interview. Upon his request, I went with Rodel after school to hand out his resume and he successfully obtained his first job from that occasion. Tiffany frequently paused our interviews to ask me about building her resume, what her post-secondary options were, and if I knew of any volunteer opportunities to meet her school requirements. In one case, a participant knew I wanted to arrange our third interview together; she would agree to meet but on the condition that we first worked on her resume, applied to a few jobs online, and practiced some driving. It was not until the eighth visit that we actually managed to get to the interview as she agentively redirected my attention to fit her needs and help accomplish her tasks. Each time participants made these kinds of requests, I happily obliged and in the process learned a great deal about what was going on for them. These moments revealed their challenges accessing certain kinds of information and resources as well as the limited support their parents could offer due to their busy work schedules.

Power also showed up between participants, particularly during focus groups. Gender proved to be not much of a concern since most of the participants were female. In fact, the mostly female grouping allowed for quite open conversations about daughters' roles in families, practices around dating, and parental expectations concerning education and careers. My gender helped with rapport among the girls, while my whiteness was the most crucial point of difference. Victor's gender seemed to be less of a concern than his perceived age; his university-student status made him seem older than most of the participants in spite of being very close in age to them. Participants' ages ranged significantly, which meant that on one occasion there was a fifteen-year-old participant with two nineteen-year-old participants. Older participants tended to

dominate the conversation. Careful moderation and deliberately asking certain participants for their thoughts helped mitigate the imbalances in these instances. Finally, social class was one of the most significant sites of difference among participants, defined according to place of origin in the Philippines, dialects spoken, and the kind of education they received. Upon meeting each other for the first time, I observed how they would quickly engage in conversations about their Philippine provinces and languages; being from Manila, speaking Tagalog, and having gone to a private school were all indications of wealth. For example, I overheard Victor casually talking with a few participants before one of the focus groups started as he explained that he was born and raised in Manila. He later told me that Trish, a young woman who came from a smaller city and working-class family, responded to him, “—Oh, you must be rich then!” and then laughed teasingly. He explained that it is an impression many people have of Manila residents, though Trish’s laugh indicated that she probably knew her assumption was untrue. The regional differences, participants told me, also mattered since they considered each part of the Philippines to be unique in terms of traditions, cuisines, arts, sports, and more. Thus, the specific place of birth and dialect spoken were indicators of class, cultural, and linguistic differences.

Power thus arose in overt and subtle forms to shape the actions of youths, youth workers, and myself. In many cases it was evident that my positionality was very much shaping how participants interacted with me. Yet, as I have shown, there were also instances where youth workers drew upon my past experience and willingness to benefit their own endeavors. Youths often recognized and drew from my privilege as they sought me out to proofread their resumes, help them build rapport with a prospective employer, and drive a car. They agentively made requests of me and turned our research activities into useful actions that would benefit their education and employment goals. Gallagher argues that this kind of nuanced attention to the complex and, at times, contradictory manifestations of power is necessary since “a revised model of power needs to account for the fact that, in general adults appear to be more powerful than children. On the other hand, there is need to recognize that this generalized domination does not preclude multiple points of resistance and confrontation at which children are able to exercise power over adults” (2009, 90). If the intention of child- and youth-focused research is to elucidate young people’s dynamic engagements in social life—the ways they are imposed upon but also act in and transform the world around them—then it is also imperative for researchers to consider how participants dynamically work to (re)shape research relationships.

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In this chapter, I detailed my youth-focused ethnographic approach that included semi-structured interviews, focus groups, a participatory photography book, and unstructured time “hanging out” together. I also considered the ethical implications of this study, assessing what an engaged anthropology with children and youths meant for me and the challenges of working within a procedural ethics framework. I argued that procedural ethics have a tendency to homogenize young people’s identities and experiences, as well as disable researchers from practicing more situated responses to emergent events. This calls for a nuanced understanding of how power and context shape research processes and relations. I complicate researchers’ tendencies to oversimplify the ways in which power informs research, particularly concerning research conducted with those positioned on the margins of decision-making and knowledge production. By employing a Foucauldian concept of power as “matrices of transformations” (1978, 99), I seek to reposition how child and youth participants are framed in research not as partially-knowing subjects in need of protection or empowerment, but as socially competent actors who, like all people, have to creatively negotiate their way through the complexities and contingencies of life. It is through the possibilities offered by the particularisms of ethnography that young people may be situated as having just as much to contribute to knowledge production and social reproduction as anyone else. Vea insightfully suggested that “people are so full of knowledge,” yet she struggled to see herself as a knowing subject. My project pushes against this epistemological position that young people often find themselves in and believe to be true; *Vea is full of knowledge and it is by making spaces to engage with her and witness her life that she offers us the possibilities to learn and “connect together.”*

If scholars are to critically address social inequalities within and beyond the research context, it is necessary to assess how such methods are underpinned by dominant beliefs about children’s and adults’ differing capabilities. It is imperative to think critically about how ontological assumptions concerning young people shape epistemology and methodology, since “the way we talk and think about subjects helps to produce and maintain social inequality” (Lee and Lutz 2005, 5). Geographer Fionagh Thomson (2007) illuminates the paradox that researchers engage in when they practice special methods for young people. She observes that on the one hand, researchers argue that young people are competent actors occupying a *culturally constructed* age category, yet, on the other hand, they require special methods to meet what some believe to be their *natural* developmental stage. Thomson poses the important question: if children are in fact competent social actors as many researchers assert, why do they require special methods and ethics, and do these differences in approach work to problematically promote their inferiority? I amplify her concern from an anthropological and ethnographic perspective as I

try to maintain a critical reflexivity concerning my own practice and positionality among youth participants. Critically considering the methods we choose, the ways in which youths may be dis/engaged in the process of research, and how identities, positionalities, and the dynamics of power underpin our relationships is integral to qualitative research with young people. Further, such research must seek to challenge the status quo and meaningfully advocate with young people to have their perspectives and concerns recognized as valuable knowledge.

## Chapter 4.

### **Precarious Childhoods: The tenuousness of sustenance and home**

What can youths' stories about their daily forms of care and subsistence during childhood tell us about the entrails of parental labour emigration and the broader conditions of precarity that instigate transnational family separation? What material and temporal forms does precarity take and how are these sensed by children through their bodies and social relations? In this first empirical chapter, I explore how young people who lived separated from their parents in the global labour market indexed their precarity and changing life conditions as a means to understand their families' migration decisions and trajectories. I consider the ways in which participants' stories of their everyday lives are powerful symbols of how their childhoods were profoundly shaped by the inequalities of global capitalism. I find that when precarity permeated daily life, it was most poignantly located in participants' tenuous ties to home, often associated with a stable place to live, having enough food to eat, and spending time with relatives. In what follows I illustrate how youths described the conditions surrounding the time their mothers left the Philippines and how this contributes to understandings of precarity as it is lived, felt, made sense of, and mitigated from the perspectives of young people.

As participants moved through their life stories, they often reflected on their childhood homes as registers of the kinds of precarity that led their families to seek betterment in Canada. My consideration of these parts of their stories is about the recognition of life in terms of how the limits are felt by children in the broader spectre of labour migration.<sup>20</sup> Butler (2009, 13) argues that an ethical recognition of life also implies recognition of precarity and here we can look to young people's stories of their precarious childhoods and precarious homes in order to bring their own recognition of their struggles into purview to better understand how insecurity and hope shape how they fashion a better life for themselves and their families. Ethnographic inquiry and listening closely to the life stories of those who persisted through difficult conditions is a means to illuminate the recesses of family life across borders. The impacts of structural violence are

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<sup>20</sup> cf. Michael Jackson (2011)

folded into daily life, surfacing in mundane and ordinary moments through the body, speech, and relationships. In considering families ruptured by histories of violence, Veena Das asks not how events are remembered as part of the past, but rather “how they came to be incorporated into the temporal structure of relationships” (2007, 75). In other words, Das asks us to consider how the broader conditions that inform a moment are folded into that moment through social relations. The participants in my study surfaced this point by telling me about how home, sustenance, and care reflected a broader fragility that both challenged and fortified their senses of kinship and home.

I first examine the kinds of material precarity that youths witnessed and felt as children, marking the conditions that led to their mothers’ difficult decisions to leave the Philippines and the emotions that surrounded that time. For those who remembered the time before their mothers left, everyday life was punctuated by insecure housing and a lack of food, which signified a larger crisis of survival. I then consider the moments when mothers left according to what their children remembered witnessing and what they learned later on, revealing how information circulated within the family and how that shifted meanings and relations. Lastly, I discuss the resurgence of precarity and reformation of care over time including the impact mothers’ remittances had on the household, the array of carers that contributed to children’s upbringing, and how the quality of participants’ lives during childhood shifted over time. In sum, I point to the materiality and temporality of precarity that were folded into the daily lives of these young people as home, food, and relations were registers of precarity. These registers provided children with a materially and emotionally grounded understanding of why their mothers *had* to leave and why children garnered the impetus to commit towards the familial plan of building a life otherwise.

#### **4.1. Precarity: “We need her to go away for us”**

Angel was born in a small but heavily populated city in the Central Luzon region of the Philippines. When I first met her she had just turned twenty. She had long, dark hair and was short—shorter than me I noticed. She was the second eldest among five siblings who spent their youngest years with their stay-at-home mom. Angel felt that most of her childhood was punctuated by poverty, as she explained, “We don’t really have our own house in the Philippines when we were there. Sometimes we’re just sleeping at my grandma’s. Like, you know, the Philippines is a poor country, right? So we were not really wealthy before. Like now we can eat every day. We can eat anything we want. But when I was in the Philippines, especially when I was a kid, I can say that we’re poor, we were one of the poor people there.”

Property ownership in the Philippines is embedded in histories of colonial dispossession and government-instituted land reform, making control over plots of land through permanent titles largely inaccessible to the majority of the population (Francia 2010; Pratt, Johnston, and Banta 2017). For many families I met, owning property was a sign of a middle-class status and rooted sense of home tied to stability and family histories. The families that did not own property—the vast majority of my participants—were subject to perpetual displacement as they navigated difficult landlords, expensive and rising rent, and fluctuating job opportunities. Like Angel’s family, living in rural regions or smaller cities posed particular challenges since more viable job opportunities were located in larger cities. Families often had to weigh the benefits of living more rurally and having the support of their natal communities against the need for a more urban location in order to find work.

Angel’s parents were married but her father lived away from home most of the time. He was a teacher and worked in Quezon, which was a four- or five-hour commute from his wife and children. It was too far to drive daily, so he had an apartment in the city and returned home for one or two weekends each month. Working away from home enabled Angel’s father to make more money because taking a job in their smaller city would have meant a much lower-paying teaching position in the public school. According to the Philippine Department of Budget and Management (2015), teachers make about US\$260 to US\$410 per month depending on their employment level and location in public or private sectors. This means that teachers at the low end of the spectrum earn just above the poverty line (Philippine Statistics Authority 2016b).<sup>21</sup> One must also take into account high levels of un- and underemployment in the Philippines, inflation, living costs, and lower-end wages in rural areas (United Nations Philippines 2016). While moving the family to the city may have remedied the challenges of living apart, it would have meant that Angel’s mother could no longer draw on the support of her family that lived close by.

During their time living apart, Angel did not feel close to her father. During his weekends at home, he was a strict disciplinarian concerning his children’s behaviours. Angel felt a sense of discomfort in his presence, fearing the scolding she might receive and lacking a sense of familiarity with her father. Angel’s mother, on the other hand, was the nurturer as she tended to the children’s daily material and emotional needs. Angel was adamant that her mother’s presence was significant and necessary because “we’re so little, so we need a full time mom,” she

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<sup>21</sup> The Philippine Statistics Authority (2016b) estimates that a family of five would need US\$180 USD per month to meet their basic needs.

explained. Supporting two households and a family of seven on a single income was hard for Angel's parents, as Angel reflected how "Dad's working full time but it's not enough." Her view of her parents follows what Parreñas identifies as gender-specific parental roles in Philippine households, as described to her by her adult-child participants. A father, she finds, is responsible for building the house, for "it is he who makes the home stand and must metaphorically build a home for his family" (2005a, 57). Parreñas goes on to describe how "the definition of fathering centers on the successful acquisition of a home for the family, whether it is a *nipa hut* for the working poor, a modest-sized cement structure for the struggling middle-class, or a multilevel unit for upper-income families." (ibid.). Angel's father's inability to ascertain a stable home for his family confounded his ability to meet his family's needs and fulfill his social role even as he attempted to maintain his position as the breadwinner and disciplinarian.

Having family close by helped buffer the insecurity of home at different points throughout Angel's childhood. At times, Angel's family lived with relatives including her wealthier aunt and her maternal grandmother. Her aunt was married to a "white guy" and was "rich," according to Angel. One image that punctuated Angel's memories of her aunt involved seeing her stockpile of gold coins—a sign of wealth and unlike any object Angel had seen before. Angel's knowledge of the coin's value, even as a young child, signified the economic inequality that existed in her own family and marked the specific struggles her parents faced. Family members, she insisted, were supposed to care for one another, especially when luck and wealth were unevenly distributed. Thus, it was all the more disappointing when her aunt failed to live up to her duty—"she didn't really help us," Angel explained. Turning elsewhere, the family moved to Angel's grandmother's house where they could garner more material support. Food was a marker of their heightened security during this time. Angel explained how "my mom's like, 'If you're hungry, just go to your grandma because she didn't have enough money to give us whatever we wanted, but my grandma's always helping her and she's taking care of us.'" Angel recalled running with her sisters, exclaiming, "Grandma! I'm hungry. I want food." Food not only provided them with their nourishment for the day, but also allowed them to bind their lives with others through caring acts.

Besides living with relatives, the family's lack of a secure and steady home was felt through their frequent moves to different apartments. Angel explained how she knew money was tight because "the apartments, they're so expensive, so we needed to move to get a cheaper one." Tenuous attachments to home, unanchored by property ownership and an uncertain ability to pay rent not only meant material and economic hardships but also emotional strife. Angel sorrowfully

remembered witnessing a confrontation between her mother and their landlord—a moment that would come to punctuate why her mother’s migration was the only option to ensure the family’s survival. She began the story by telling me about helping her mother with the laundry one afternoon, explaining, “We were so close. Before we didn’t have a washing machine. We’re just doing it with our hands, so I could see that my mom’s doing it and I’m helping her. I’m going to rinse the clothes, she’s going to wash them with the soap.” This moment of collaboratively caring for the family with her mother—notably *by hand* due to their lack of the appliance—was interrupted by an ensuing dispute: “We’re renting the house and I saw my mom crying with the owner,” Angel explained, “He’s so rude, like, ‘If you can’t pay, then leave!’ And then my mom’s like, ‘I just need a week because my husband’s not here.’ And then she was crying. I remember that. I was eight years old at that time but I still remember that.” By witnessing the physical and emotional burden her mother experienced in managing their home and care, Angel came to understand her family’s precarious circumstances and committed herself to participating their efforts to build another life: “That’s why now I’m not going to let my mom suffer again. I don’t want to see her cry again,” she attested.

Angel could feel her mother’s and grandmother’s efforts to care for the family and buffer the insecurity they felt in their daily lives. Kathleen Stewart suggests that precarity takes shape “as a composition, a recognition, a sensibility, some collection of materialities” (2012, 518) in small, almost unrecognizable moments where things come together or fall apart. Angel’s story reflects moments—seemingly small yet resonant—where the precarity that impinged their lives manifested into much more than a material uncertainty. Moments of strife were marked by Angel’s visceral pain as she watched her mother attempt to cope and care for her children. With a tenderness that is of a love and ache, Angel explained, “I understand it because even a month before she left I realize we need it, cuz in our life we need her to go away for us, right? To give us a nice life.”

According to Parreñas (2005a), mothers are perceived by their children to be far more reluctant to take on the breadwinning role, but do so when necessary. Parreñas’ participants identified their mothers as “the light of home,” not seeking to gain material goods for the family but rather providing nurturance. Though dual household incomes in the Philippines are increasingly common, it is conventionally believed that women should not out-rank men’s earnings (*ibid.*, 59). Thus, when mothers leave the Philippines to engage in higher-paying forms of work, it upsets commonplace gender boundaries (*ibid.*). Providing insight into what Angel described about her own living situation, Parreñas points to how children often justify their

mothers' departure as a move made out of desperation—"they say men leave to 'seek career advancements,' while mothers leave only in the absence of labour market opportunities'" (2005a, 56). According to Parreñas and revealed in Angel's reflections, a mother's move may be characterized, even justified, by their children's understanding that she needs "to provide for the family" and "escape poverty" (Ibid., 56). This belief likely also shaped how Angel saw her family's conditions—though they were able to garner enough capital to enable her mother move abroad, Angel perceived her family to be quite poor. This is not to suggest that her experiences of precarity are untrue, but rather that gender ideologies and parenting roles potentially shape young people's sense of their class status, especially when seeking to understand why their mothers had to go.

More than just delineating her parents' different roles in the household and how those were upset by the impingements of precarity on their relations, Angel's memories of her family's moves reveals how she registered and lived through uncertain times alongside her parents. Moving apartments, communities, and between family members' homes was how the family perpetually tried to mitigate uncertainty by reducing the costs of living and seeking the support of extended family members, especially when it concerned children's well-being. Yet these moves and makeshift forms of care offered little hope for Angel; reflecting on her family's many moves, Angel put it this way: "We're not growing. Our lives were not growing." Her mother's mobility, she understood, was a means of life-building, of overcoming the stagnation of perpetuated precarity. This follows what Jackson (2013) identifies as the struggle to live within limits, while at the same time attempting to redefine the contours of life by pushing the boundaries of possibility—taking action as a means of enacting hope. Emphasis is often placed on parents' choices including how they mitigate the confines of difficult life circumstances for their children in the hopes of carving out something better, but Angel also emphasized her contestation of these limits through her performance of care towards her mother, even when it was painfully difficult to offer that care in the forms of empathy, understanding, and acceptance of her mother's choices. The enactment of hope in Angel's family was not only engendered through the significant gesture of her mother's transnational migration but also through the commitment Angel had towards her mother's aims and her family's well-being.

Though Angel's is just one story, we will see these themes of registering and contending with precarity through other participants' stories, most notably in the following chapter. For now we can say that for youths whose mothers went to work abroad, the precarity that shaped their separations was a daily lived experience that they, as children, grappled with in the search for

security and sustenance alongside their loved ones. The feeling of security, Ghassan Hage argues, is one of the most basic aims we seek to create in “homely spaces” (1997, 2). The security that home should offer, he suggests, derives from one’s willfulness to be there, the habitus formed through bodily disposition and familiarity in the space, feelings of community among others who are present, and that the space is “open for opportunities and hope” (ibid., 3). Anne-Marie Fortier (2003) agrees that home often provides an ontological security through feelings of being at-home. She suggests, however, that for those who do not experience security at home, leaving home can be a coming-home as one seeks security elsewhere. She thus dislodges that idea that home is always about sanctity.

With my participants, home as a secure place to belong and thrive was often not possible since its physical location and social relations seemed to be always in flux. The insecurity of housing, irregularity of food, and emotional strains on mothers and fathers generated a precarity of home that these youths, as children, intimately witnessed and felt. Living through these times gave a reason for their mothers’ emigration and that their leaving was a means to care when other attempts to maintain a livable life fell short. In what follows I turn to youths’ memories of more precise times surrounding their mothers’ departures including what they knew then as well as how the meaning of the departure shifted over time.

## **4.2. Partings: “Where is Mom? I thought she’d go and come back”**

In *Families Apart* (2012), geographer Geraldine Pratt discussed the careful consideration migrant mothers invested in timing their departures and setting up care arrangements for their children.<sup>22</sup> She elaborates with the story of Marlana, a mother who left her son in the care of a close relative whom she knew would not only tend to his daily needs but also facilitate their mother-son connection through regular communication. Marlana’s departure to Canada, Pratt shows, was rife with emotion as she sorrowfully mourned leaving her child yet made the difficult decision to go in order to ensure his well-being through remittances and their eventual reunification in Canada. Ambivalence such as this—the mixture of grief with hope—

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<sup>22</sup> Also see the work of Cati Coe in Ghana (2008); María Claudia Duque-Páramo in Colombia (2012); Jessaca Leinaweaver in Peru (2007, 2008); Ken Fog Olwig on the island of Nevis (1999); Heather Rae-Espinoza in Ecuador (2011); and Kristin Yarris in Nicaragua (2014).

characterizes many migrant mothers' narratives of departure.<sup>23</sup> Jackson (2011) suggests that ambivalence is emblematic of life itself since there will always be a perpetual struggle between the pragmatic and the possible. While the focus on parents' struggles as they moved away from their children draws attention to the pain and suffering they experienced, it is imperative to also consider what sense children make of their situations through the long course of family separation and reunification. It is through their narratives that we can better understand how children are not just acted upon as passive participants in transnational migration but how they come to engage with the idea of betterment through mobility and imagine a life otherwise that can parallel but also diverge from their parents' hopes. While in the previous section I explored Angel's memories of the precarious circumstances surrounding housing and food preceding her mother's departure, in this section I explore other kinds of knowledge youths held surrounding their familial circumstances to show how they came to understand and contend with living apart from kin.

For several youths, the vagueness surrounding their mothers' departures prompted them to inquire about where she was going, and, in the absence of a clear explanation, surmise their own understandings. Tiffany was six years old when her mother moved from the Philippines to Canada. The uncertainty surrounding her mother's departure permeated many of our conversations as she repeatedly came back to the event, seemingly confused by it even in the present. Tiffany recalled going to the airport with her father to say good-bye to her mother, yet at the time she was unclear about what precisely was happening. In her attempt to make sense of the situation, she figured her mother was going on a vacation and would return home shortly. She explained to me how her emotions emerged from her misunderstanding: "I didn't really understand what I was feeling at that time because I was not sure where my mom was going, but I wanted her to be back again. So, I felt happy and curious as well." Tiffany's curiosity was sparked by the strangeness of watching her father and mother cry through their final embrace at the airport security gate. At the time, she wondered why she did not feel the same kind of strong emotions her parents were expressing, recalling how "I was the only one that didn't cry."

Tiffany's mother did not return home in spite of her anticipation. After several months without her mother's return, Tiffany attempted to gain more information from her father. In her own words, she said, "I asked my dad, 'Where is Mom? I thought she'd go and come back.' So, he said that 'I'm not sure cuz she's in Canada.' I said, 'What? What's she doing on her vacation?' 'No, she's working.' 'When is she coming back then?' He said that she's still saving money

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<sup>23</sup> For example, see the work of Deborah Boehm (2008), Joanna Dreby (2006), Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila (1997), and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2001).

because the airplane ticket is very expensive.” Tiffany’s revelation was followed by sudden and overwhelming feelings: “You know what I did? I ran to my bedroom, I slammed the door, and I cried.” The tears that failed to fall at the airport now seeped from her eyes as she realized the meaning of the moment when her mother left. She reiterated these memories to me on several more occasions, each time with the same visceral intensity in her voice that revealed the confusion surrounding what happened. With regret, she said, “I wasn’t able to hug her. I wasn’t able to kiss her because I thought she was just having a vacation.” The slight information she had at the time disallowed her from contending with her mother’s departure in the way she would have liked to, and prompted not only a sense of loss but also of regret.

Domic was three years old when his mother left for Canada. His parents deliberately sheltered him from knowing about her move because of his age. In spite of his young age, he was adamant that he was still cognizant of the sudden separation and remembered it vividly. He told me how “we were in the mall. I was with my sister and dad and we were in a restaurant and then she told my dad and my older sister that she was leaving but she didn’t tell me. She just told me that she was living somewhere else and that she was going to come back.” Following the meal, the family went to the airport where his mother said a tearful good-bye and boarded the airplane. On the way home Domic asked his father when his mother would return, to which his father provided the vague response, “She’s going to come back eventually.”

Domic’s mother returned home on several occasions, staying for a few weeks and then ending her visits by leaving quietly at night when her children were asleep. The impact of his mother’s absence was amplified over the years; seeing his mother during her return visits caused Domic more grief than her original departure since her occasional presence made her absence all the more apparent. He explained how her departures impacted him: “I was really scared for her to leave again. And I remember the last day after she stayed one month, it was really sad. The night before she was supposed to leave we were with her and we just hugged her and stuff and then when we woke up she was gone. That was it.” He went on to tell me about his confusion the following morning when he expected his mother to awaken him and then realized she had left. Not being able to say good-bye to his mother was difficult for him then and provoked a solemn memory now. In spite of his disappointment, he justified his mother’s choice by empathizing with the sadness she must have felt, explaining how “when I grew up more I understood why she did that. When I was young I was like ‘I don’t understand’.” Domic believed that her abrupt departure was her way of taming the emotions surrounding the separation, saving the family and herself from the further grief of a tearful good-bye. Yet for Domic, contending with the

ambiguous meaning of her initial departure and subsequent uncertainty surrounding her time at home provoked strife as he struggled to make sense of and persist through the relational insecurity he felt as his mother came and went over the years.

Literature suggests that those in positions of decision-making power often retain certain kinds of knowledge either to maintain their power or to shelter those who are perceived to be ill-equipped to contend with such information (Bluebond-Langer 1978, 1996; Feierman et al. 2010; Schwartzman 2001). Migration scholars have written about how parents often leave their children clandestinely while they are asleep or under the guise that they will return shortly. Kristin Yarris observes how Nicaraguan mothers who are intent on migrating abroad “often tell children their departures are temporary, saying, ‘*voy a volver pronto*’ (I’m coming back soon)” (2014, 295). Similarly to Tiffany’s experience, the children in Yarris’ study eventually came to learn that in fact they would live apart from their mothers for quite some time. Pratt (2012, 57-62) also observes how Filipina/o-Canadian youths in her Vancouver study had ambiguous and ambivalent sentiments towards their mothers’ departures because of when and how it occurred. She identifies the misrecognition that happens when children are unfamiliar with their mothers’ faces following lengthy times apart, and how mothers’ departures following return visits often generated strong emotions from their children. Both of these circumstances—misrecognition and the repeated strife of mothers’ departures—made it difficult for mothers to come and go. Leaving at night, like Domic’s mother did, was one strategy mothers employed to manage emotions. Drawing from literary scholar Cathy Caruth (1996), Pratt notes that this kind of sudden leaving can induce trauma from a psychological perspective; preparedness in the moment is key since “it is the lack of direct experience that leads to both the repetition in memory and the difficulty of retrieving memory in other than fragmentary form” (2012, 61). For my participants, events of the past were folded into our moments together as they relived the stories of their mothers’ partings and tried to justify the decision and make sense of the fragmented moments. For some, like Tiffany, the memory clearly surfaced senses of grief and regret that she continued to try to reconcile precisely what happened and why.

At twelve years old, Angel watched her mother depart the Philippines as she boarded a flight to Singapore. This memory surfaced frequently, she told me. As discussed earlier, she was deeply aware of the struggles her family faced as they continuously coped with financial insecurity. At the time, she knew her mother was preparing to leave but she was unable to fully grasp the significance of the impending change as she attempted to carry on with life ordinarily. Angel explained how she experienced the pace of the transition as her mother’s departure

approached: “it was slowly but for us it was so sudden because we were so young and we were not really thinking about it. Because at our age now, if your dad or your mom tells you, ‘Oh, I’m going to go here. I’m going to the other country.’ I’m going to think about it every day, right? So I’m going to prepare myself. But at that time maybe they told us but I can’t remember and I didn’t think about it.” When Angel’s mother left, the continuity that Angel was trying to maintain came to a abrupt end, as Angel explained, “then the day came and she needed to leave. Then it’s such a shock.”

Angel, her father, and her siblings took her mother to the airport. The moment then revealed itself: “That was so hard,” Angel lamented. She remembered watching her mother’s luggage get carried away on the conveyer belt and it was in that moment that she could feel herself physically parting from her mother. Angel’s little sister gripped her mother’s hand in agony and cried, “Where are you going?” Angel watched her siblings fall to tears as her mother solemnly walked towards the security area—“It’s so hard to see them like that,” she said.

As much as parents attempted to shelter their children from the impact of the separation, we can see from youths’ stories their cognizance leading up to the time of the departure as well as when it took place, whether or not they knew precisely what the change meant. Reliving that moment in the present continuously unveiled its emergent meanings and how youths contended with grief then and now. Namely, many participants were acutely aware of the precarity that shaped their lives and relationships as they lived through hardships that were material and social in nature. For Tiffany, Domic, and Angel, coping with the impending family separations was a joint effort that parents and children all engaged in, although from their very different positions. While the children had to contend with vagueness and uncertainty surrounding the event at the time, the undeniability of rupture became more apparent shortly after.

Cati Coe and her colleagues suggest that “migration is inherently characterized by rupture—break, change, distance, division—and it necessarily includes the everyday” (2011, 1). They go on to suggest that there is both “persistent and interrupted social fabric” (ibid.) that occurs in the long course of migration. The youths’ stories presented here tell us of both the continuities as they attempted to carry on and the surging moments that broke apart the consistency of their homes and families. As I will further discuss, the tensions between the two—ordinariness and rupture—are ambiguous spaces that youths attempted to make sense of in the interim in order to generate coherence. In the following section I consider youths’ memories of their mothers’ remittances including how life seemed to improve and how precarity resurfaced through new forms of material, temporal, and social uncertainty.

### **4.3. Remittances: “We feel that we’re growing”**

If financial crisis is a main driver for mothers to seek work abroad, what impacts do their departures have on the family according to these young people’s memories of care and life improvements? How do these memories reflect thin or thick holdings to family, home, and hope amid the rupture of family separation? Literature on remittances often focuses on the material improvements gained through overseas labour including the accumulation of capital. Anthropologist Robyn Eversole and political scientist Judith Shaw (2010) found that sixty-nine percent of Philippine households with a member working abroad indicate a rise in economic security, with median remittances being US\$299 per month. Researchers observe that remittances often go towards utility bills, investing in microbusinesses, and purchasing food, cars, telephones, televisions, and refrigerators (Eversole and Shaw 2010; Eversole and Johnson 2014; International Organization for Migration 2008). Other remittance outcomes include a higher investment in children’s education (Asis and Ruiz-Marave 2013; Eversole and Johnson 2014; International Organization for Migration 2008, Yang 2011). While survey-based research highlights the material and educational gains of remittances, my ethnography points to the meaning of these life improvements including whether or not children believe they were worth the sacrifices involved in long-term familial separation.

Josie, age eighteen, provided an insightful example of what conventional stories of remittances do not tell us about the struggles different family members face amid economic precarity and transnational separation. In spite of the fact that her mother sent home regular remittances from her work as a caregiver in Canada, Josie and her siblings sourced their own pocket money by collecting scrap pieces of metal. Josie’s explanation of these ventures arose during our third interview when we sat down to look through the photographs she took for me. We transferred the images from the camera to my computer. I then opened the photographs on the screen and turned the keyboard towards her so she could guide me through them. About midway through our time together, she opened the image shown in Figure 3.



*Figure 3 Rusty Nail. Photo by Josie, 2015*

The nail, she told me, caught her eye on her walk home from school several days prior. Its slender length and metallic composition stuck out to her on the gravel path. As a child she became familiar with finding these kinds of discarded objects because she knew she could sell them for a small profit. She explained, “Back in the Philippines we collected those nails and whatever was metal. We always collected them.” After she completed her household chores, she and her brother would go off on their tricycles to a garbage pit close to where they lived. In her words: “People threw trash there and then there’s also metal like cans that we collect, and we sell them to make money.” Even now, “whatever looks like a rusty nail” still catches her eye as her precarious past surfaces in the present through a bodily orientation towards that which is imbued with monetary value, much like Angel’s memory of aunt’s gold coins. Josie no longer collected these metal objects, but decided to pick up this nail to capture it on film for me and to tell this story that punctuates her memories of childhood and reveals how her pastimes were shaped by her family’s economic need.

As her story might suggest, Josie felt that her life conditions did not improve much during the course of her mother’s time away. Throughout her childhood she shuffled between her aunt’s and grandmother’s houses in the more mountainous and rural regions of Mindanao, and her father’s house in Davao City. Her mother’s remittances, she later learned, were dispersed among so many relatives that the sum allocated to each household was relatively small. In the

absence of pocket money, she resorted to picking garbage in order to purchase school lunches, snacks, and small toys. Josie told me about how this dispersal of money continued to impact her now as she spoke about her mother: “She is not only supporting us,” Josie explained, “she also supports her family back in Davao, which she has many, many cousins, and family members asking for her help and she’s the only member of her family living abroad.” Aware of how the money was dispersed and spent, Josie expressed anger at the rest of her family for what she perceived to be their misuse of the funds: “Sometimes I get mad at them because my mom also supports us and when she gives money to her family members they spend it on something that is not worth it and sometimes they lie that it was for my mom’s dad’s medicine but they bought something for themselves.” Tensions emerged through familial competition for her mother’s earnings. Josie felt not only sorry for herself upon reflecting on her precarious childhood, but also for her mother’s sacrifices that, in Josie’s opinion, were not well acknowledged by those who benefited from them. Josie told me about how all this recognition of her mother’s labour and care towards sending money home recently caused her to reflect on her own conditions growing up: “I hadn’t even thought about her hard work to provide us food.”

Vea was also too young to recall when she was first separated from her mother. She was also not aware until later how her mother’s remittances contributed towards her well-being, including how the remittances helped her family purchase food and pay for their housing costs. Vea explained it this way: “Back then I wasn’t really paying attention to Mama. It was like you weren’t here for nineteen or twenty years.” She went on to share how she felt when she came to the realization, just several years ago, of how her mother profoundly shaped her life even in her physical absence. She told me that in a moment of recognition, she said to herself: “Ah, but she’s still my mom—in my head I was like: she’s still my mom. Okay. She still supplies us with everyday needs.” This realization, which occurred in her early teenage years, sparked not only an understanding of how her life was made livable, but, at the same time, the paradoxical sense that something significant was always missing from her home—namely, a mother whom she barely knew because she was unable to be there to immediately and physically care for her daughter. For Vea, this newly emerging understanding of her relations and subjectivity vis-à-vis her away mother was startling and sorrowful as she started to see her childhood and herself as lacking the vital kinship of her mother, yet sustained through the goods of her mother’s remittances.

Despite Vea’s sense that she deeply missed her mother’s care as a child, she received intimate and diverse forms of care from close family members as she circulated between three houses. She explained how the first house belonged to *Tita*, her aunt, and was where she had her

meals. The second house belonged to *Nanay*, her other aunt, and was where she did her laundry. The third house belonged to Papa, her father, and was where she slept. She moved between them based on her needs, receiving meals, shelter, and clean clothing. Amid her desire to settle into the house where she felt the most *at home*, Vea recalled asking her father if she could move permanently to *Tita's* house. "I thought this should be my home," she explained, "She was the one who was washing clothes for me and when I was a child I always wanted to go there to her house and to sleep there, to eat there." Her father initially rejected the idea by telling her, "Don't sleep there. It's not your home. You have your home." In spite of her father's refusal, Vea eventually found herself living with *Tita* anyways, asserting for herself the kind of home and care she desired as she registered who and what she wanted and needed. Vea's sentiments about home reflect how Hage distinguishes between house and home when he says that house-building does not equate to home-making, for "home-building [is] *the building of the feeling of being 'at-home'*" (1997, 2). For the young people I spent time with, the security of a homely space was not a given, generated for them by parents, but rather it was an aspect of life-building that they also participated in cultivating. At times these practices extended beyond parents and the nuclear-family setting as youths participated in deciding what could foster their sense of well-being.

After moving so regularly, Angel's family was able to finally settle into a house for a longer period of time once her mother began sending remittances. Life beyond that, however, did not feel like much of an improvement in the first few years that her mother was gone. Angel's mother worked in Singapore for two years before coming to Canada. The low wages she garnered did not allow her to send much money home and did not generate the kind of life improvements that the family hoped for. Life, in other words, carried on much as it had before but now the family also contended with the absence of Angel's mother and the paucity of household care. Care is marked not by its presence but by its withdrawal. Amid the on-going financial struggles, Angel knew her mother was having a difficult time with her Singaporean employers.<sup>24</sup> From what Angel knew, they paid her very little, demanded she work long hours, restricted her access to the telephone, and generally treated her poorly. The limitations placed on their phone communication exacerbated the difficulties of the separation since the children could not speak with their mother regularly and thus the withdrawal of her care was doubly felt through her physical and communicative absence. Angel knew that the infrequency of their conversations was due to the restrictions placed on her mother, which left Angel in a state of constant worry about

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<sup>24</sup> Pauline Barber (2009, 1274) discusses the difficult conditions Filipina domestic workers face in these regional labour markets. Sally Yea (2015) researches the specific conditions of migrant Filipinas working in Singapore.

how her mother was fairing. Exchanging cards through the mail was their only means to connect and Angel recalled how the delay was slow and painful as they awaited each message. The insecurity of home that led her mother to leave the Philippines seemed to linger while the family grappled with the added stress of social strain. For Angel, the precarity of home was attenuated by a shattered hope in something better, as their lives, she thought, seemed suspended in a space of no possibility—“You can’t do anything like that,” she said. As life continued to stagnate, Angel’s mother made the decision to apply to Canada’s LCP. Angel explained her mother’s excitement when the news came: “I’m lucky because they approved me in Canada. They’re letting me go in,” and reflecting Angel’s senses of hopelessness otherwise, her mother similarly stated that without the prospect of coming to Canada “I’m going to stay in Singapore and we’re going to do nothing.”

After moving to Canada, Angel’s mother worked under the LCP for five years. The changes this move brought for the family were noticeable: “When my mom moved to Canada,” Angel explained, “we feel that we’re growing, you know? Our life is growing, life is getting better.” As compared to the family’s circumstances before, Angel described her life improving according to a heightened sense of a secure and steady home, her ability to attend private school, and eating fuller and more regular meals without having to rely on her grandmother. Life also improved through the children’s heightened connection to their mother in spite of a greater geographical divide as they spoke frequently over the phone and via the Internet. Angel burst with excitement as she remembered the daily text messages, frequent telephone calls, and novel video calls—“it’s so easy!” she exclaimed. The freedom to speak with and see their mother was a means to feel close to her and built upon the promise of a better life to come through patience and dedication to the long-term family plan of eventually reuniting in Canada.

In the Philippines, family members also took up caring responsibilities in Angel’s mother’s absence. Nourishing life through maintaining the house and preparing food reflected how care was redistributed in the family. When Angel’s mother moved abroad, her father quit his job to stay at home with his children. Having her father at home was strange for Angel who felt as though she did not really know or feel comfortable with him. She was, however, deeply committed to the family plan of making it through the years apart from her mother for the betterment that lay ahead. Angel recalled an early conversation with her older sister who told her, “Dad is here now. He’s here now. We need to build a relationship with him. It’s like that. You need to talk to him and be sweet to him. You need to be a daughter to him cuz he needs it.” Recognizing the effort she would need to inject to bond with their father and manage the

household, Angel worked to build a closer relationship with him. Her mother used to cook for the family, but in her absence the chore fell to the children. Angel saw the task of cooking—nourishing the family through food—as an opportunity to grow her relationship with her father, and the turning point came when her father offered to teach her some recipes. In the domestic space of the kitchen, bonding over steaming rice and simmering chicken, father and daughter tended to their relationship and to the care of the younger children, holding the household together in the interim. “That’s how we build our relationship,” she said.

Angel held the home together through other daily domestic tasks. She explained, “I need to go home early to cook dinner but in the morning my dad’s doing it. He’s cooking for us but I’m assigned to cook for dinner. That’s my responsibility. And my older sister, she can’t cook. Yeah, just frying, just the rice, that’s it. So her responsibilities are like the house; cleaning the house. Like that. Cleaning, the cleanliness, the laundry. And my two younger brothers, they’re too young. They don’t know how to do anything. Just sweeping the floor, wiping the cupboards and the drawers, right? Just like that. So we’re helping each other.” Angel laboured emotionally and materially to help build a more stable sense of home for herself, her father, and the younger children while her mother was away, revealing the ways in which family members performed a kind of living labour to mitigate precarity and generate life improvements through multiple means. This labour included securing a more stable sense of home in the Philippines, solidifying steadfast relationships with each other through care, and committing towards whatever it took to make that “nice life” of which Angel and her family dreamed.

Through these stories we see how youths lived in and through the fluctuating availability of secure housing and food as a measure of their families’ material conditions and economic well-being. As well, the ways in which food was made available, cooked, and eaten reflected the impingement of precarity on their kin relations, which concerned the materiality of sustenance as well as what constituted the safety and sanctity of a homely space. While youths often spoke to me directly about their feelings of kinship including love and loss, food was also a significant idiom. Food plays a central role in “everyday struggles for survival” (Dossa 2013, 438). As Jackson puts it, hunger is a metaphor often employed since it signifies “what is most difficult in life, and for the tenacity and strength of suffering” (2013, 59). Procuring, preparing, and consuming food are not only means to sustain oneself in a bodily sense, but also to care for others through ensuring their nourishment; to give under such circumstances is not only about meeting the needs of life in its barest form but reflects a social and ethical will to care for another (Dossa 2013; Jackson 2013). Jackson argues that bread alone is not enough to sustain life and goes on to

state how “well-being is never simply the satisfaction of biological needs, the possession of primary goods, or the attainment of personal fulfillment and happiness” (2013, 60); rather, it is a matter of managing life within the limits of possibility. For Angel these limits had a temporal dimension as the impingements of precarity and absence of her mother was a struggle that required a justifiable reason, endurance, and belief in another life that was coming.

Food and housing conditions anchored these youths’ understandings as to why their mothers had to leave to work abroad, how the conditions of their lives shifted over time, as well as the changing nature of precarity through economic hardship and gain, social rupture and reunion. By seeing their narratives of everyday life through the conceptual lens of precarity and care, we move beyond discussions of how remittances are sent and utilized by transnational families. These youths’ memories and conditions of home, eating, and living enable us to ethnographically consider the ways in which access to the daily needs, or lack thereof, not only implies a material insecurity but the broader fragility of life. Food and shelter in the context of these youths’ stories were socially binding agents through which precarity is mitigated by the care that goes into procuring, making, and eating food together, as well as finding a secure and steady place to live and be together.

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These young people’s memories reveal the ways in which different forms of care stitched their families together amid fragility and uncertainty, collectively labouring to secure money, food, shelter, and the possibility of life elsewhere. Butler observes that “precariousness implies living socially, that is, the fact that one’s life is always in some sense in the hands of another” (2009, 14). By hands, we can return back to our thinking around *ten-* and consider the ways in which hands do the work of holding on and holding together amid hardship. Holding the metal nail with the promise of its value, Josie reflected on how she and her brother picked metal out of the garbage to garner small sums of money for themselves. Angel washed the laundry by hand alongside her mother in their shared efforts to perform living labour together, a memory that also stirs the sense that home was tenuous amid the landlord’s threat of eviction. Later on, Angel and her father worked together to mitigate the precarity of home amid the absence of Angel’s mother through cooking and cleaning. In the process, Angel worked to grow love for her father and sought to support him through challenging times—turning a thin relationship with her distant father into a thick determination to support him and the younger children. Vea lived among many carers, weaving the family together through their commitment to her care and she carved for herself a sense of home among her kin.

Precarity thus sparked transformation within families, with parents responding to the lack of economic opportunities locally and taking a chance on a life elsewhere. In the process, certain forms of care were repudiated from the home and living labour took new forms. The participants I met responded dynamically to their emergent conditions as they received and registered what their loved ones could provide. What emerges through these youths' stories is a kind of tenuousness provoked by an existential uncertainty and we can see their attempts to hold their lifeworlds together. But the holding is hard. Holding on to that which is faltering—home, food, family, and a better life—amid precarity is a form of endurance as one clings to possibilities. Elizabeth Povinelli defines endurance as “strength, hardness, callousness; its continuity through space; its ability to suffer and yet persist” (2011, 32). She suggests that endurance, in this sense of pushing onwards through hard times, means “to embody an argument about what a good life is and how such a good life comes into being” (ibid., 160). These youths and their families believed a better life existed elsewhere and were willing to endure financial hardship, family separation, and loss of time together as they collectively cared for each other and laboured towards what they hoped was a “nice life.”

In what follows I examine the gendered and age-based impacts of parental labour emigration, focusing on what youths told me about the kinds of care they provided. I more specifically bring to the fore the ways in which youths laboured to care for their mothers from a distance as they struggled to perform domestic work and for their fathers more closely who they saw struggle amid their displacement in the home and labour market.

## Chapter 5.

### The Labour of Youths: Distant mothers and distraught fathers

I didn't enjoy my childhood that much because I took care of my siblings. My mom made me grow up, like with being very responsible, especially when my father was having a hard time and we didn't have a nanny. Yeah, so I was helping my mom a lot. — Grace, 19

Grace's mother initially moved to Canada under the LCP. She planned to send remittances home to her spouse and children, and eventually sponsor their immigrations to Canada where they could all reunite. In the end Grace's father did not join the family in Canada. He stayed in the Philippines after the relationship between Grace's parents broken down over the course of the five-year separation. The years apart were tumultuous, especially for Grace who was the oldest child and continuously buffered the effects of the family rupture for her siblings and parents. Cognizant of the struggles her parents were facing—her mother arduously working away from the family and her father unemployed, seeking solace with other women, and rarely around—meant that Grace not only had to contend with the emotional tribulations in her family but also had to hold the household together by performing domestic tasks including caring for her younger siblings. The social and economic precarity that Grace tried to mitigate for her mother, father, and siblings forced her to “grow up, like with being very responsible,” she explained.

This chapter considers the ways in which youths managed conflict and actively cared for their younger siblings *and* parents during and after transnational family separation. The image of the family often focuses on parents as the primary carers and labourers in local and transnational settings (Boehm 2008; Coe 2011; Forde 2011; Parreñas 2005a, 2010; Pratt, Philippine Women Centre, and Ugnayan ng Kabataang Pilipino sa Canada 2008), with migrant mothers enduring a double burden to care for their employers' domestic lives and their own (Colen 1995; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Parreñas 2001, 2005a). These perspectives tend to extrapolate how women work, materially and emotionally, to provide for their families and the families of others. While attention to parents' labour has importantly provided insight to how labour and

family are intertwined, it obscures a broader purview on the dynamics of care performed across generations and more specifically from the perspectives of children. It also implicitly holds to the idea that parents are the ones responsible for homemaking and childrearing, and that children are the receivers of that care, whether it is in the home or across borders. The focus, in this sense, has been towards the seemingly innate roles parents play in tending to the well-being of their children, reflecting a unilateral relationship that is, I argue, an oversimplification of complex and contested relations of care in the spectre of transnational migration. While some research focuses on the gendered nature of oldest daughters who take on household labour (Lee and Pacini-Ketchabaw 2011; Parreñas 2005a, 109; Valenzuela 1999), considerations of children's labour in the home is relatively absent from the literature (Dodson and Dickert 2004). Importantly, the life stories and ethnographic observations presented here point to the dispersion of care in transnational households. As I will show, youths' stories of their living labour also reveal the gendered dimensions of transnational labour markets that not only pull mothers away, but leave fathers and children to contend with the consequences of mother-away households.

This chapter concerns the labour youths injected into their families during times of transnational family separation. This labour emerges not only in relationship to their mothers' leaving to perform domestic labour abroad but also in relationship to their fathers who often struggled to establish their place in the family as workers, husbands, and parents. I consider the ways in which youths engage in labour for and with their parents to hold everyday life together and, more poignantly, through times of crisis and conflict. Anthropologists have contributed to the growing literature on forms of affective and living labour by considering how neoliberal emphasis on self-sufficiency relegates the production of social well-being to smaller units such as the individual or family, rather than the state (Allison 2013; McElhinny 2010; Muehlebach 2011, 2012). This puts a disproportionate burden on women, youths, and migrants of colour whose time and labour are often considered free, outside of capitalist labour-time (Tadiar 2009). As I will show, youths are intimately drawn into performing living labour as they witness their parents' hardships, persevere through difficult circumstances, and try to hold their families and worlds together in the meantime.

Youths' labour to maintain their families emerged not just in relation to their mothers who worked abroad but also in the financial, emotional, and marital strain experienced between their parents and, in immediate relation to their daily lives, by fathers who stayed with them. Drawing from my earlier discussion about thick and thin attachments, I maintain an interest in the ways youths hold their families together as a means of navigating through precarious times and

constructing a life otherwise. I am attentive to how they attempted to maintain their parents' relationships by mitigating conflict and repairing ruptures, often aggravated by financial hardship and family separation. A focus on youths' memories and feelings about their parents during times of separation and reunification illuminates the nuanced intersections of gender, race, class, and age in a global labour market. By drawing from their stories, I highlight the effort they instilled into their families as they witnessed and attempted to moderate not only their mothers' hardships but also their fathers' anguish in a gendered global labour scheme that pulled their families apart.

I first explicate the gendered nature of the global labour market, demonstrating why mothers are more often the ones who leave to work abroad and not fathers, at least in the case of Filipinas who immigrate to Canada to perform domestic work. I then draw on the literature that attends to how households are reconfigured via transnational mothering. This sets the context for understanding how children engaged with their away mothers. I then focus on another gendered dimension of how families are reconfigured in the global feminized labour market—namely, how youths lived in relation to their fathers whose roles were profoundly reconfigured in mother-away families. The stories of Grace and Rodel reveal the ways in which their fathers' comings and goings from the household and eventual breakdown of their parents' marriages transferred the domestic responsibilities to the eldest siblings. Grace and Rodel not only accomplished practical tasks like cooking and cleaning, but also emotionally cared for their fathers in spite of feeling abandoned by them. Though Grace's and Rodel's fathers did not come to Canada when the family reunited, this was not the case for other participants. The stories of Angel and Tiffany illuminate how their familial relationships were reconfigured when parents stayed together following reunification. Upon moving to Canada to reunite with their mothers, they witnessed their fathers struggle under a labour regime that propelled them into low-paying health care and service jobs. These economic hardships that continued to surface posed challenges for familial relations that daughters acutely witnessed and worked to buffer alongside their parents.

Though I did not include parents as participants in this research, youths' perspectives concerning their parents are important dimensions of these lived relations and offer insight into the conditions of transnational families according to those who are less often asked what they think and feel, a point made by McElhinny and colleagues who observe that “virtually all of the scholarship on Filipina/os in Canada has focused on adults” (2012, 32). As well, the seeming primacy of the mother-child bond often overshadows relationships with fathers; when we pay closer attention to youths' lives, we realize that their fathers were more central to their childhoods than the conventional literature suggests. What these stories show is how precarity and staggered

migrations reconfigure kinship and care in families that speak not only to generational impacts but also gendered effects. Youths' living labour, as I will show, emerges in a global labour market that differently effects mothers and fathers, and leaves children to contend with the impacts these effects have on their families.

## **5.1. Gendered dimensions of labour migration**

The global care chain represents a flow of women around the world as they fill the demand for domestic labour. In 2010, there were 52.2 million domestic workers around the world, a number that grew by sixty-two percent in fifteen years (International Labour Office 2013, 52). The gendered and racialized nature of this labour is demonstrated by the fact that eighty-three percent of domestic workers worldwide are women and that the majority of all domestic workers come from the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia (*ibid.*). Barber observes the shifting gendered nature of Philippine labour export as “male-dominated migration gives way to feminised streams; and, in the same period, the skill composition of migrant workers shifts from production, transport and construction to service workers, particularly domestic workers” (2009, 1270; also see Rodriguez 2010).

While the balance between male and female labour emigration from the Philippines has been fairly balanced for the past decade, in 2014 the amount of women slightly outnumbered men (Philippine Statistics Authority 2015), which is disproportionate to global trends (International Labour Organization 2015). More notably, statistics concerning land-based migrants reveal a larger gender disparity: the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) indicates that in 2006 nearly three thousand people left the Philippines per day with contracts to work abroad; 60 percent of those headed for land-based jobs were women (Barber 2009, 1267).

Filipino men face disproportionately high rates of unemployment, making up two-thirds of the unemployed population (Philippine Statistics Authority 2016a). Men in the Philippines are unemployed at rates of forty-eight percent for those ages fifteen to twenty-four, thirty percent for those ages twenty-five to thirty-four, and ten percent for those ages thirty-five to forty-four (Philippine Statistics Authority 2016a; also see Alipio 2013). Research also shows that some men disengage from regular employment when remittances become available—a point Parreñas makes when she suggests that wives' breadwinning status can significantly impact men's roles as they tend to contribute less when their wives contribute more (2005a, 58; also see Coltrane 1997; Hochschild 1997). Earlier research by economists Edgard Rodriguez and Erwin Tiongson (2001,

722) suggests that 27.7 percent of men with an immediate family member working abroad disengage from regular employment (also see Semyonov and Gorodzeisky 2008).

Work and masculinity are strongly intertwined in the Philippines, as they are elsewhere. McKay observes how, in this context, masculinity depends on “employment, providership, family-orientation, and community standing/respect” (2011, 5). The centrepiece, McKay stresses, is the providership aspect of a masculine household role. This follows Parreñas’ ethnographic findings that fathers are largely assigned the breadwinning role (2005a, 57). Among those who engage in overseas labour, Cheryl Alipio (2013) finds that young men firstly seek to grow their savings and distribute it to their family members, and secondly want to prepare themselves to marry, purchase a home, and support a spouse and children. McKay (2007) similarly finds that although Filipino seafaring men are often positioned marginally to other groups of men on their ships, they assert their masculinity back home by diligently sending remittances, conspicuously consuming, and highlighting their material well-being. In other words, McKay argues that these men turned their “marginalised and subordinate masculinity on the job into a model of exemplary masculinity at home, emphasising the ideals of fatherhood, economic provision, sacrifice for one’s family, and the ‘machismo of manual work’” (ibid., 630).

The masculine ideals illustrated above follow forms of hegemonic masculinity that derive at least partly from influences of the West where power, competition, emotional strength, and risk-taking are associated with men (Connell 1995; Connell 2005 and Messerschmidt 2005; McKay 2007; Pingol 2001). Parreñas (2005a) notes how the lasting history of Spanish colonization and the on-going influence of the Catholic Church in the Philippines positioned men as the heads of nuclear family households and that this further entrenched a patriarchal notion of masculinity where men are to provide for their families and women are to nurture. The drive towards male income earning was further perpetuated through nationalist orientations towards emigration that emerged in the 1970s. McKay notes how the Philippine state and recruitment agencies marketed a niche of Filipinos in the seafaring industry, while constructing “particular discourses of ‘Filipino-ness,’ national heroism and masculinity to help regulate seafarers and keep remittances flowing” (2007, 623). These gendered dimensions of national heroism discourse have shifted, however, with the increased global demand for feminized forms of labour. Constructions of gender thus exist in myriad of historical, local, political economic, and personal influences. This follows what Cathal Johnston and Todd Morrison argue when they say that “masculinity is neither immutable nor monolithic” (2007, 661). As Parreñas (2005a) points out, in spite of shifts in and alternative practices to how men and women perform work and care for their

families, ideologies that underpin gender roles are slow to change, which creates challenges for those who have to contend with the ways their families and their roles do not conform to dominant expectations.

Parreñas (2005a, 29) observes how the shifting reliance on women's earnings is recasting men's roles in their families. She argues that it is commonly accepted that women can participate in work outside the house, but not to the extent that it upsets the male-as-breadwinner ideal. As women increasingly become the breadwinners, they are doubly imposed on to earn money and continue their nurturing roles. In other words, the ideological construct that a mother is essential to a child's well-being not only demands extraordinary labour from her but often dissociates the father from the possibility that he could be an at-home carer for his children, though this position has been critiqued by scholars such as Martin F. Manalansan IV (2008). Parreñas (2001) documented the sense of helplessness, anxiety, loss, guilt, and loneliness that mothers often feel when they are unable to be with or connect to their children. These emotions, she suggests, are mediated through mothering acts including the commodification of love through remittances, repression and denial of feelings, and justification for the distance as an act of service. In order to reduce the impacts of the time apart, mothers attempt to maintain continuity in their relationships as they call and write letters to their family members approximately every two weeks (*ibid.*). As Angel suggested, the time between these messages can feel drawn out and painful, lacking the intimacy of instantaneous and face-to-face communication.

The growth in technology increasingly changes the mode and frequency of transnational parenting; Barber (2008, 29) points to the widespread use of cell phones and text messaging, noting the double bind created by these rapid forms of communication that enable mothers to better connect with their children, while also amplifying children's requests for more money and gifts—presenting what Barber calls a “mixed blessing” (*ibid.*). Similarly, Madianou and Miller observe how video calls allow for “mothering to be ‘more complete’” (2012, 70). Through cameras, mothers may watch their children grow, witness casual household moments, and play games with family members. Such technological advancements also “intensified” mothering by provoking stress; Madianou and Miller (*ibid.*) note that unlike letter-writing where conflict can be suppressed, video calls perpetuated conflict and sadness through less-filtered, real-time moments.

While the labour migrant mothers imbue into their family lives from afar has been extensively researched, less attention is paid to the physical and emotional labour performed by these women's children through the course of separation. Migration scholars who have included such children in their studies tend to focus on their feelings of care from and attachment to the

away parent or conduct research with adult children, but this is a limited scope in the dynamic sociality of these youths' everyday lives. Furthermore, it can maintain the problematic primacy of the maternal bond over a multitude of other kinship and care-based bonds. As I will show, children not only engaged in efforts to connect with their mothers, but more immediately laboured at home through ordinary acts of housework and extraordinary acts of maintaining family secrets and caring for terminally ill kin. While many of their stories are attenuated with feelings of grief, loss, sadness, and neglect, attention to the living labour youths performed to hold their families together demonstrates how they too laboured on the margins of capitalism.

## **5.2. Caring for the Household: “I was the mom”**

### **Grace**

Grace was born under precarious circumstances. Her mother and father were not married and had an on-and-off relationship. Grace's mother was one of two women with whom Grace's father was romantically involved at the time. Both women became pregnant with their first children around the same time—Grace's mother bearing a daughter (Grace) and the other woman bearing a son. Upon finding out about the pregnancies of both women, Grace's paternal grandparents demanded that her father marry the mother of his son, which he obligingly did, much to her mother's dismay. Grace's mother was thus left as an unwed teenage parent without the regular support of her baby's father, though they continued to see each other on occasion. Grace's mother would come to carry the disgrace of this pregnancy throughout her life as she was blamed for her own financial hardships, which her family insisted resulted from her earlier indiscretions. Grace's maternal family members felt that her mother had doomed herself to a difficult life because of Grace's birth, and Grace was well aware of this dynamic and her mother's struggles.

Grace lived with her paternal grandparents for several years while her mother and father continued their college educations and their love affair. Grace's father eventually left his wife and moved with Grace's mother to her natal community where they conceived more children. This shift enabled them to finally establish their family unit apart from the strain imposed on them by his family, but this move came with consequences. Grace's father had primarily relied on his family for money, having never worked a regular job nor financially supporting himself. When he moved, this financial support stopped and thus he faced the challenge of finding employment that could economically provide for his growing family. Grace explained how it impacted her father,

since “that is where my mom’s family is, in that province. So since my father and his siblings were depending all the time on their parents, my father had a hard time. He had a hard time taking care of us.” The situation became increasingly precarious as Grace’s father continued seeing other women and spent money elsewhere, leaving her mother without the emotional and financial support she needed to care for the household. “Well, I remember that when my dad didn’t come home. We don’t have anything, like we don’t have *anything*. We don’t have money to buy food or anything like that,” Grace recalled.

The emotional and financial hardship provoked by her father generated a crisis for the family that Grace’s mother was left to solve. Grace elaborated how “I guess that’s the thing that triggered my mom to work abroad, even though she doesn’t like it.” She further explained how the initial plan was for her father to find work as a seafarer, but when he failed to do so, the burden fell to her mother. Grace’s mother knew she would not be able to support her children on her low wages as a nurse and could not depend on her children’s father any longer.<sup>25</sup> Grace was aware of how her mother timed the move according to the age of the children and the care they required: “She just waited for my baby sister to turn three years old before she left us.” Grace’s mother had to contend with the challenges surrounding her relationship with her partner that created emotional and economic challenges for the family, while ensuring the maternal care of her youngest child and planning her move abroad.

Grace’s mother moved to Canada as a domestic worker and lived apart from her family for five years. Grace stayed with her father and younger siblings. Like many of the youths who were the oldest siblings in the home during the time their mothers were away, Grace was responsible for the domestic work including the care of her younger siblings. Grace’s work not only follows the gendered division of labour in Philippine households discussed by Parreñas (2005a), but also the specific circumstances surrounding her father’s regular absence from the home as he spent most of his time with other women. Grace remembered that although she knew her mother was sending regular remittances home, their lives were unchanging due to her father’s poor money management: “It was all his responsibility, so nothing changed in the house. The house still looks the same. Very the same. We don’t get to eat what we want and I don’t know

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<sup>25</sup> Nursing in the Philippines is a profession marked by competition, very low pay, and unemployment due to surplus workers. Nearly a quarter million nurses were unemployed according to recent reports (Badilla 2016). This excess results from what some suggest is a government orchestrated over-production of nursing graduates in the hopes that they may emigrate to fill health care paucities elsewhere and send back remittances (Lorenzo et al. 2007; McGeown 2012; Salami and Nelson 2014). See research by Catherine Ceniza Choy (2003) for more on the history of Philippine nurse education and emigration.

why because my mom is sending money to me, so how come we don't eat? How come we don't eat the food we want?"

Grace realized that her father was siphoning her mother's remittances as he spent the money elsewhere and gave away gifts for Grace to the women whom he was seeing. Grace received an allowance, but she handed most of it off to her siblings so they would have the pocket money for school. She recalled not only supporting the financial needs of the younger children, but also helping her father. She explained, "So there comes a point when he was like, 'Do you have money?' Then I was asking, 'Why? For what?' I gave my siblings their allowance from my money and what do you need the money for? He was like, 'Oh, this girl'—*the girl*—'she doesn't have her tuition fees. Maybe you can let her borrow money for a while, then she'll pay you back.'" Not only were the family earnings going towards her father's girlfriends, but the little money Grace had for herself was sometimes viewed as a reservoir from which her father could withdraw cash. Disappointed in her father, yet not wanting to disrespect him, she was unable to refuse his requests: "I don't know," she sighed, "I just don't know what to tell my dad. Since I'm just your child I don't have the right to say things that he should do, like, 'You should work double so that you can give everything to my siblings.' I can't tell him that, right? So, I don't know." Anger and helplessness were not the only emotions that Grace felt towards her father; she was also understanding and even forgiving of his actions: "Well, it's a good reason. I can't blame my dad, right? Like if I were in a relationship and I haven't seen him in five years, I think that's a good reason to find another guy, you know?" The sympathy Grace felt towards her father was met with her consideration for her mother, as she explained, "I understand my dad in a way but then when it comes to my mom, it's just unfair. My mom was loyal to you for five years and then this happens. It's like she worked, worked, and worked and then sent us money and then you're just going to hang out with other girls? It's just unfair." Grace was awkwardly positioned between her parents, feeling sympathy for both of them, yet disappointed about having to carry the burdens of managing the household and maintaining family secrets.

Grace struggled to keep the household together in the physical absence of her mother and philandering ways of her father. She was hesitant to tell her mother about their conditions, unable to find the right time to express her concerns. She knew her mother could not remit more money and, at one point, was jobless: "She's so stressed at that time," Grace explained, "I didn't tell her. I was waiting for the right time to call." The children pretended things were fine whenever they spoke with their mother over the phone but afterwards would tear up with sadness. Grace bemoaned how "the bad thing is that my siblings they were crying to me like, 'What's

happening?” She continued, “Then my mom would call through Skype and they were just like, ‘Hi Mom! We are so good!’ So nothing is happening in the family and I don’t know how my siblings—I mean *us*—how the children got that attitude. Nobody was asking us to lie but we are doing it voluntarily.” I asked Grace why she kept the secrets from her mother and she explained how she worried how her mother would cope with the information: “I’ve seen my mom faint in front on me. I’ve seen her cry. I’ve seen her not eat for days because of my dad and I don’t want her to do that again without me being by her side. Mom’s going to cry if she knows that this is happening to us—that we’re not eating everything we want and we don’t have food every day,” she explained. Like Angel’s concern for her mother’s emotional well-being, Grace could not bear to see her mother suffer and, as a result, attempted to mitigate familial hardships to save her mother from more grief.

At one point, Grace’s mother returned to the Philippines to visit her children. She was shocked when she saw the conditions her children lived in, as Grace recalled, “So, when she saw what our house looked like at that time she was *so, so, so, so* disappointed because she wasn’t expecting that.” Grace described what her mother then said to her father in a fit of rage: “I gave you all my money and now you can’t give my kids a better place for them? Where did all the money go?” Grace’s mother decided the younger children needed to live with relatives while they awaited their move to Canada. Grace was given the option to stay in the house or go live with relatives as well, but Grace was adamant that she could not move; she was in university and moving would have been too disruptive to her coursework. Shortly afterwards, her siblings abruptly left: “the bad thing is that I didn’t know that they were moving ‘til the morning, ‘til they were leaving. I saw bags were packed. Everything was packed. I mean the house was half empty,” she recalled.

Grace worked hard to keep the household and family together in the years her mother was abroad. She did the housework, managed what little money she had, and cared for her younger siblings—“I was the mom,” she said. She buffered the impacts of her father’s affairs and spared her mother from the heartbreaking truth of his actions and what the children endured in the meantime. In the end, however, what stability she was able to maintain was pulled apart by the compounding family ruptures of her mother leaving, her father rarely around, and siblings dispersed among relatives. Grace found herself alone in the home she had tried so hard to keep. It was clear to me that she felt her world disintegrating around her as she told me of her of despair and loneliness during that time: “I was so depressed. The bad thing is when my siblings left, so did my dad. He was around, like he was there but he’s not coming home. So, I have nothing. It

was just me. I get to wake up early in the morning *just me*, eat my meals *just me*. So, you know, I'm used to a very noisy house." Grace went on to describe the feeling of the empty spaces and obvious absence of her family: "It's lonely, like it's really lonely there." The corners of her eyes started to water as she carried on, "It's like every time I see my siblings' room and my dad's room, it's just that I remember what happened. It's just that I keep reminiscing about everything there." Grace attempted to maintain a routine by getting herself up in the morning, going to school, and then studying at a coffee shop until it closed late at night in order to avoid the painful isolation of her empty house. It was a particularly difficult time for her as she narrated it with an emotional depth that oscillated between an exuberant commitment to her family and the painful surfacing of her senses of abandonment and loneliness.

Grace continued to live alone for several months until she moved to Canada to reunite with her mother and younger siblings. Her father stayed in the Philippines. Since reuniting, Grace and her mother worked together to make a life for themselves in Canada as time and distance have reconfigured their labour, their family, and how they struggled to care for each other. She observed how her siblings' attitudes have changed, and associated this with the family conflicts, explaining how "the attitude of the children was affected from the family separation, of course, because they were seeing everyone fighting in front of them: me and my dad, me and my mom, my mom and my dad. So, it just—I don't know—had a bad effect on them." Grace and her mother tried to parent the children together, but Grace was often seen as the main authority figure. Speaking about her mother, Grace explained, "She can't tell them: 'Go take a bath.' And then my sister will go take a bath. You know? My sister, she won't just follow my mom because she's used to my dad. And funny thing is they're more scared of me than my mom." When Grace's siblings sought her permission to do things, Grace tried to redirect their request to their mother—"Ask mom! Why are you asking me stuff like that?"

While Grace reiterated her love for her siblings and her commitment towards their success, she also lamented the toll the parental responsibility had taken on her. Towards the end of our conversation, I could see that she was feeling the culmination of losses in her life as spoke about her childhood. "Well, just to think of it now," she told me, "you know, seeing kids playing and having no responsibilities when they go home, just like watch TV or something. I was a bit jealous because I didn't enjoy it that much, my childhood. Until now I'm taking care of the siblings. You know, even my mom says now, 'You can go shopping, you can go malling.' I just say no. I just say, 'No, I'll just stay here with them.' I felt how it is to be a mom. Especially when my mom left for Canada. She wasn't with us for five years and I was like that for five years."

I asked Grace about her relationship with her mother now, to which she responded, “It’s good. Better than ever.” Yet, there are still challenges, she described: “Of course since she left and my siblings were very young at that time, so she didn’t get to see them grow up. So, she’s still adjusting.” The adjusting is something that everyone in the family is working on, but in the end, she laboured to forge the bridge between her family members while also helping propel them through difficult times. Grace’s stories of loss, love, and care revealed how she attempted to maintain everyday functioning of the home and repair ruptured bonds among family members—forms of living labour to care for those around her as she tried to sustain the semblance of family stability in the meantime. It is in these slight and ordinary moments where the impacts of precarity manifest, revealing how her life has been one of trying to hold her faltering world together—an effort of solidarity for the sake of her family.

## **Rodel**

Rodel grew up in a rural part of the Philippines, a *barrio* where most people are farmers. His mother and father were from different communities and different class backgrounds; while his mother’s family was middle class, his father came from relative poverty. He was unable to finish college and instead worked odd jobs in the trades. Rodel described a strong rift between the families since his mother’s family never welcomed Rodel’s father—“They hated my dad,” he said bluntly. The family lived in Rodel’s mother’s community until she moved abroad to perform domestic work. She was trained as a teacher, but positions in their community paid too little to support the family, similarly to Angel’s father. As his parents’ income was unable to meet the needs of their growing family, Rodel described the hardship they faced, “And then we were three because she gave birth to my younger sister at that time. That’s why she decided to go across countries.” Rodel’s mother first worked in Hong Kong, but, like other stories I heard, their life conditions did not improve during the year she spent there. In order to improve their financial situation, his mother moved to Canada where she was able to earn more money and work towards sponsoring her children’s immigration.

When his mother first moved abroad, Rodel and his younger siblings continued living with their father but moved to be closer to his paternal relatives. Although Rodel’s father felt more comfortable with his own community, his family could not offer much help due to their own financial difficulties. The responsibilities of caring for the home and younger children fell to Rodel and his father, who continued working outside the home doing whatever he could to earn

extra income. Research suggests that fathers usually do not usually fill the paucity of care work that emerges in mother-away Philippine households. Parreñas notes how “generally, fathers do not increase their share of the household responsibilities in spite of the greater economic contributions of migrant women to the family” (2005a, 98). Similarly, Pratt found that “even when children stayed with their fathers, only rarely did their fathers take over their care” (2012, 62). While I found this to be the case for several youths—Grace, for example—Rodel’s story revealed a more nuanced household dynamic that shifted over time and according to family members’ changing circumstances and needs. His father defied how roles are described in the literature, but, as Rodel recalled, it was difficult for his active father to sustain his involvement in the household domestic labour without a broader network of support from extended kin.

Rodel was adamant that his father laboured arduously inside and outside of their home, especially during the initial years his mother was gone. “It was kinda different because my dad was so busy. Like he does *all* the work. Because I was little and then he used to do laundry and he cleaned the house. He cooked. He went to work to add more allowance. It’s like he did everything, like he’s my dad and he’s my mom,” Rodel exuberantly described, adding: “he even took care of my youngest sister. She was a baby before.” The work his father infused into the family and the refusal of other family members to support his father was a significant point for Rodel as he stressed to me how much his father did for the children—amplified in significance likely because it was so unusual for a father to take over the daily domestic tasks. At the same time, Rodel also witnessed how despite the extent his father tried to hold the household together, he could never get ahead financially or gain the respect of his wife’s family.

The class differences between the families were significant here—Rodel’s parents defied the common practice of hypergamy where women marry upwards in terms of class status (Constable 2003). Female hypergamy, according to heteronormative ideals, maintains a patriarchal order and continues credence towards a man’s social status, profession, and position of power. Women, in turn, come to depend and benefit from this upper status. Researchers Albert Esteve, Joan García-Román, and Iñaki Permanyer (2012) suggest that while the idea of female hypergamy remains prominent in many parts of the world, it is becoming less common in practice, especially as it pertains to educational hypergamy, meaning, wives carrying more formal education than their husbands. This is particularly relevant in the Philippines where women are increasingly exceeding their male partners’ education levels (*ibid.*), a point many of my participants stressed in identifying the class differences between their parents (Constable 2003). Rodel’s father challenged hegemonic masculinity through his working-class position that

prevented him from being the household breadwinner and, later on, through his participation in the household labour. The love and care performed by Rodel and his father reflect what Martin F. Manalansan IV argues is the problematic of the care chain paradigm, which he suggests is a “rather static formula that reads as follows: domestic = family = heterosexual woman = care and love” (2008). In “Queering the Chain of Care Paradigm” (2008), Manalansan IV calls for precisely this kind of attention to the ways in which the chain of care is not only a maternal one. As we will see, though Rodel greatly appreciated his father’s caring efforts, other family members failed to respect and support him, and the impacts of this rejection took their toll on his health and ability to perform the domestic labour.

As time passed, the care that shaped Rodel’s relationship with his father changed drastically. Several years into the family separation, Rodel’s father became terminally ill, which was compounded by depression and alcohol consumption. With his father unable to work at his job and perform domestic tasks at home, care for the younger children was allotted to Rodel and, to some extent, nearby relatives. Rodel explained how his youngest sibling went to live with an uncle, while the rest of the children stayed with their ailing father—“We have to live with my dad who was sick and I have to take care of him.” Rodel went on to describe what he did to hold the family together: “I wake up in the morning, I do dishes and then I cook for my siblings and then I wake them up and then we go to school and I go home, I do dishes again. And then we eat like after cooking. Do homework. Clean the house. Those stuff. And then my father was already sick.”

Rodel cared for his two younger siblings and his dad with little support from his extended family. Similarly to his father, Rodel felt like an outcast from his maternal kin, explaining, “That’s why I’m not that close to my mother’s side because they look at me like I was my dad. Like I’m bad or something.” Like Grace, he lamented the labour he was expected to provide as those around him abandoned the family, exclaiming, “It was different. Like, why did this have to happen? Why does it have to be like this? Because my mom was away. But before we were happy. But when my mom was away, we got problems. Family problems. It’s complicated.” Rodel told me about his ambivalence regarding his mother, sometimes expressed as apathy and sometimes expressed as a deep sense of loss concerning her daily care. The burden of caring for his sick father amplified this apathy as a way of coping with the grief. He explained the shift in his feelings over time as new emotions surface: “Because my years with my dad, family was like—when I was a kid it was like so special. Like *so, so* meaningful for me but when my dad was so sick it was like there’s nothing anymore. I don’t care anymore about family.”

As Rodel's father approached death, Rodel's siblings were separated and went to live with relatives. "My youngest sister was living with my uncle on my father's side. We didn't meet a lot. We didn't like being not intact. We're separated. And then my brother, he lives with my aunt in the other house. But it's like just three houses behind. And then I would go out a lot and then go home again, go out. I don't stay at home very often," Rodel explained in a manner similar to what Grace told earlier about her own family. He told me that despite his responsibility to care for the home and children, adults flexed their power by making decisions on the children's behalf. The family was broken apart, Rodel said, "because the family was making decisions, like I have to take good care of them, and you take care of them, and you take care of him. Like that."

Rodel told me about his attempt to escape the burden of care and reality of his father's impending death by hanging out with friends: "I need to find myself too. Like that. It was a hard time for me." His father eventually died at home. Rodel then had to live with the heartache of knowing the parent whom he was closest to was now gone, and his grief was amplified by his uncertainty about if he made the most of his time with his father. He mournfully told me, "I was looking for him and I felt sorry because he's gone and I couldn't do anything. It was like I realized that I need him more than my mom." He went on to express his grief, "When he was alive it was like I don't need him anymore because he's such a burden or something but when he passed away I realized it was different. I need my dad."

Rodel, like Grace, continued to live in the house alone without his father and siblings for whom he once cared. The family that Rodel tried to hold together was torn apart, not just by his mother's physical absence but by a series of events that crumbled his family and his sense of home. Shortly after his father's death, Rodel graduated secondary school and was supposed to start college, but due to his impending migration to reunite with his mother in Canada, he decided to not study further in the Philippines: "I need to go to school but I didn't because I thought we were moving already but it was like eight months more before we moved here. So I stayed by myself again."<sup>26</sup> During this time Rodel would "just hang out with friends," he explained. Though he was close with his friends, other aspects of life felt rather meaningless. He later wrote this poem for me about what he did to pass time through these more difficult periods of his life:

### **Meaningless things**

Write songs

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<sup>26</sup> This delay in schooling is a common result of the uncertainty surrounding migration times. For more on this, see chapter six in this dissertation as well as research by May Farrales (2016).

Compose lyrics  
Paint pictures  
Listen to music  
Capture the moments  
Stare at the sky  
Be at your best  
Don't be afraid to die  
Drink the finest wine  
Stare at the sun and dine

... these are few of the meaningless things in life.

Life without his father, mother, siblings, and now school felt rather meaningless to him but, in revealing the recesses of how he coped, he illustrates in his poem how music, art, and memories—largely connecting him to his artistic father and musically-inclined friends—became a means to grieve and persist in the impasse. While Rodel stayed at home alone, his mother worked to save money for the children's flights. He eventually came with his siblings to Canada, arriving just several months before I met him. It had taken some time to adjust to this new life, he said. He was not sure what to do with his time now in Vancouver, having few responsibilities and not much of a social life. When I asked him if he still takes care of his siblings like he used to, he shrugged, "Not really." Instead he spent his time in his room playing his guitar and chatting over the computer with his friends and his girlfriend in the Philippines. Part way through our time together he also found a part-time job after school.

Parreñas (2005a, 99) reflects how "the inability of men to do care work hurts children, especially if families are without much support from extended kin."<sup>27</sup> Rodel was clearly hurt by the nature of the care he felt he did not receive in his family. The hurt, however, is nuanced given the specific conditions that shaped his family's precarity and how it unfolded in their day-to-day lives, recasting their roles in unexpected ways. Class, gender, and labour dynamics intersected to shape his father's perpetual struggle to survive and care for his children. Abandoned by his wife's family for his lower-class status as well as exhausted from his day job and household duties, Rodel watched his father wither. The care his father could no longer provide defaulted to Rodel who took it up with both love and resentment. Their relationship inverted over time as Rodel went from being cared for by his father to doing the caring labour for his father.

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<sup>27</sup> Parreñas' reference to "inability" refers more to men's socially sanctioned roles as breadwinners and less so as caregivers. My reading of her work is that it is not meant to imply the innate inability of men but rather a socially mediated one based on ascribed gender roles.

While Rodel's story is a specific one, it must be situated within the broader conditions that shaped it. The narrative of familial strife reverberates through Rodel's story, starting with his mother's family not accepting his father, the lack of support they received, poorly paid local work opportunities, and his father's perpetual struggle as "he does everything." Amid this precarity, Rodel saw how his father could no longer cope and eventually fell ill—a slow deterioration induced by the surrounding circumstances of struggling to survive. Lauren Berlant calls the gradual decline of a population under precarious conditions a slow death, where there is a "mass physical attenuation under global/national regimes of capitalist structural subordination and governmentality" (2007, 754). Youths, as we see, are drawn into these biopolitics as they actively laboured to sustain the lives of those they loved.

Filipino men's altered place in the family following mother-led migrations can be linked to a broader social structures that deny recognition and place to some subjects. I draw from Povinelli's (2011, 13) interest in "forms of suffering and dying, enduring and expiring" when one is denied recognition as they toil under neoliberal capitalism. By understanding these narratives according to particular kinds of gendered and classed precarity, the stories of Grace and Rodel must not be viewed as an incapacity for men to care for their children because they are "bad" fathers nor because their wives "abandoned" them, but because they are simultaneously subject to particular expectations of a breadwinning role which may not be possible or desired in the contexts of their particular families. At times, fathers persisted to carve out novel spaces for themselves as parents and partners, but this was, as we see in Rodel's case, difficult to maintain when they fell short of being the breadwinner. Thus, gender and class dynamics at household, community, and global levels can deeply challenge the performance of parenting, leaving paucities of care that oldest children are then left to address.

### **5.3. Witnessing Anguish: "He can't adjust"**

Grace and Rodel's fathers did not join them in Canada. Other youths' parents similarly separated during their time apart or following their reunification in Canada. A few participants' parents stayed together and remain together now. In this section I discuss the stories of Angel and Tiffany whose fathers migrated to Canada with them. I pay particular attention to the ways these youths continued to see their parents struggle to define their roles in the family, often relying on their children's paid and unpaid labour to contribute towards the household. Their stories reveal the divergent outcomes for families separated by labour regimes and borders, yet show consistently the ways youths register their parents' difficulties and try to help. As we will see, the

living labour youths performed in the Philippines continued in Canada as they sought to support their families and, more specifically, their struggling fathers.

Many youths expressed to me that their mothers had relatively well-established lives in Vancouver prior to family reunification. Over the years, mothers formed friendships, became part of communities through work or church, were usually employed, had nearly perfected their English, and established a place of residence. While youths recognize that their mothers' labour and living conditions were at times very difficult, they knew that she held an important familiarity with the city including knowledge and relationships that would help them all settle into their new lives. This was clearly reflected by Domic who shrugged off the idea that settlement support would have been useful for him and his family, as he told me, "I think my mom would have been sufficient because she's been here really long."

Angel told me about the preparation her mother engaged in with her friends in Vancouver before the family's arrival. Angel explained, "She got an apartment before we arrived here. So her friends at church, who go to our church—the Filipinos are so close—they helped her, they helped clean the house and get the furniture done." Angel's mother joyously greeted them at the airport and then drove them to the apartment where they resided together. A crowd of people greeted them, as Angel described: "When we got home, there's a party at home! Yeah! A lot of food there, a lot of people there. Like, oh my God!" Angel and others told me stories about their tours around the city in the early months of their arrival. Led by their mothers, they went to places like Stanley Park, Playland, the seawall, Metrotown Shopping Centre, the local ski mountains, and the suspension bridges.

When Tiffany arrived at her new home, her mother had already prepared her room. Excitedly remembering the moment, she explained, "And in my grandma's house I don't have my own room, I have to share with my dad. But here I have my own room. My mom, she decorated it and it's so nice, I love the colours and everything. I don't know what happened—I feel like I win the Lotto or something because it's weird. It's really nice. My room is really nice because she decorated it." At the time, Tiffany's mother had a job, some money saved, and a rented suite.

Amid the transition, many youths told me that their fathers had the hardest time adjusting. The biggest struggles, they said, were their fathers' challenges with English, their difficulty in finding work, a lack of community, and on-going dependence on their wives' wages and local knowledge. Angel explained her father's situation: "He can't adjust because he's so worried before—'What's going to be my job here? I need to go to school but how can I go to school? You

need me to work.” Upon coming to Canada he gave up his career as a teacher. Scholars have shown how receiving credential recognition is a long and arduous process, often without success, for those trained outside of Canada, (Dossa 2004; Hawethorne 2007; Somerville and Walsworth 2009). This is especially the case for migrants of colour who are more often negatively impacted by these processes and required to upgrade or change careers (Li 2008; Pratt 2012; Salami and Nelson 2014; Stasiulis and Bakan 2005). Angel’s father did not see any viable avenue to pursue a career in education. Eventually Angel and her older sister found jobs, allowing her father to stop working his part-time minimum-wage job and take a short vocational course. Upon finishing the course, he started volunteering in his new health care profession and went back to work part time at a food-processing factory—“so he doesn’t need to ask for money from my mom,” Angel insisted.

I spoke with Angel’s father once on the phone. It was late one evening. My phone rang from a number I did not recognize. I answered and heard a blur of muffled noise followed by a man with a slightly panicked voice. He was trying to speak quickly over the background sounds. He told me he heard about my project from a friend and said he had two daughters who were interested in joining. Before I could respond, he asked: It is true that they would get something—cash and a camera—for participating? Struck by the blatancy of his inquiry, I confirmed that was true but before I could say anything else he told me he would give me his daughter’s number and then abruptly said he was at work and had to go. Click. Silence. Struck by the uncertainty of what just occurred, I was concerned. I sensed urgency, stress, and a hint of fear in his voice. Feeling the reverberation of his angst, I waited and stared at my phone contemplating what, if anything, I should do next—should I call him back? Is he going to call me back? About a minute later I received a text message containing a phone number and Angel’s name. I was relieved but still curious about what happened. After Angel told me the story of her father including his shift from being a professor at a private school in the Philippines to a part-time factory worker in Vancouver, I realized the culmination of conditions that led to that moment: his shortness of time, concern for finances, and the stress that resonated in his voice.

It is these instants in research that stick—small moments that we can see, upon taking a step back, are induced by a constellation of social, economic, and political conditions that shape not only those whose lives we encounter but also how those encounters unfold. Angel’s stories of her father filled the gaps of what I did not know in that moment on the phone, enabling a better understanding of what he went through for sake of his family, at least from the perspective of his daughter who saw what her father has given up in the course of coming to Canada.

Tiffany similarly told me about her father's struggle to find work and build a life in Canada. She blamed the language barrier—"I think his English," she said. She went on to say that it was "difficult. But my mom, she wants him to go to school, at least to learn English but he doesn't want to. He doesn't want to learn English." Tiffany hoped for more for her father because it pained her to see him struggle. She said, "Cuz I don't know. Seeing him working the whole day, just, I feel, I don't know. I feel bad. So I think it's better for my dad to go back to school so he just works in one place and that's it. He doesn't have to work the whole day." Researchers have shown that there is a shortage of English language classes available for migrants in Vancouver and that the demands of working double and inflexible jobs means that whatever classes are available are often too difficult to attend (Creese 2010; Dossa 2004; Dyck, Creese, and McLaren 2011). While time was an issue for Tiffany's father, she also spoke to his lack of desire to meet new people since he preferred to stay with his close-knit church community of Tagalog-speakers.

Tiffany's father was one of the most present fathers during her childhood compared to other youths' stories. She told me about his life: "So my dad, I feel bad for him because he was a working student. He wasn't able to finish going to school because he was a working student. He didn't come from a wealthy family and that's why he needed to work and help his parents. So he needed to work." I asked about the class background of her mother's family and she told me, "Oh yeah, they were wealthy but my dad is not. So no one is really supporting my dad during this time. Every morning he woke up at about five AM to feed the pigs, cook something. He'd just eat rice and soy sauce or something. Just rice because they didn't have enough money. Yeah, not a wealthy family." Like Rodel's parents, Tiffany's mother and father defied the convention of female hypergamy, and her father, of a lower social class status and with less education than her mother, was unable to be the primary breadwinner. Before her mother moved to work abroad, her parents ran a home-based business together. Her mother would manufacture different homemade goods and her father would deliver them to different retailers around the city. He always worked hard, Tiffany said, but in the end they relied on her mother's higher level of education and domestic labour opportunities abroad. In other words, the differences in class position that led her father to struggle for an income was leverage by her mother who held the human capital required to work abroad. Tiffany empathized with her father's difficult position financially and in the family; she grew particularly close with him over the years her mother worked away, once again defying the norms of hegemonic masculinity as the non-breadwinner while also providing daily care for his daughter. "I love my dad so much," she told me repeatedly.

Tiffany and her father patiently waited for five years before they reunited with Tiffany's mother in Canada. Tiffany remembered her parents' sense of joy being together—"they're close again," she said. Shortly after reuniting, her parents went out one afternoon to purchase a car. A car, Tiffany told me, is not something they had in the Philippines and signaled her family's growing financial success in Canada. Tiffany's mother continued in the care field for several years before quitting her job and returning to school. She recently completed an administrative course and was briefly employed as a clerk in the local municipal hall but was looking for work again after her brief contract finished. Tiffany's father worked two minimum-wage jobs to help support the family. His weekday job was at a gas station that was about an hour commute on the bus from their home. His other job involved cleaning office buildings in the evenings and on weekends. Tiffany told me how she rarely saw her father, which pained her after spending so much time with him when she was a child. She routinely told me that she preferred his company to that of her mother's since her mother tended to be the stricter parent.

Tiffany then explained precisely how time and labour conflated in their everyday lives. The only time she and her father spent together was when he cleaned buildings. She told me, "Whenever I don't have homework I ask my dad if I can help him. He said, 'Yeah, of course you can.' I feel bad, so I thought of helping him instead. If I finish all of my homework, why not help him, right?" I asked her why she does this, and she elaborated, "Cuz we're bonding together. I'm not seeing at home cuz he goes to work early in the morning when I'm still sleeping and when he gets home sometimes I already go to bed. So, yeah. At least we're bonding together when we're working." I asked about their time together as a whole family, and she explained that her mother sometimes helped out as well: "If she doesn't have any homework to do anymore, she's finished all of her projects, she helps." Cleaning while the businesses in the buildings were closed allowed the family flexibility to do the work collectively. Tiffany was resolute that this was her choice, her way of being able to be with her family amid the conditions that denied them time together otherwise. "They don't force me to work," she affirmed, "I just like it cuz I like to make money so I can buy the things that I want. So, yeah. I'm thinking of helping my dad." She repeated with emphasis, "I *want* to do it." Working was her family's only time to be together and she was committed to the work that allowed them to bond.

Precarity followed these participants and their families to Canada taking on new forms through emergent strains in family finances and time together. Statistics Canada reports that "Canadians of Filipino origin generally have lower incomes than the national average" (2006) in spite of being twice as likely to hold a university degree. Krishna Pendakur and Ravi Pendakur

more precisely find that “Filipino immigrant men may expect to earn at least twenty percent less than Canadian-born British men” (1998, 538). More recently, Pratt, Philippine Women Centre of BC, and Ugnayan ng Kabataang Pilipino sa Canada (2008, 50-55) point out the ways in which Filipino men are impacted by a lack of credential recognition through their deskilling and downward labour mobility in Canada.<sup>28</sup> Their research indicates that many of these fathers, whose wives came through the LCP, work in entry-level care positions, low-level trade labour, or cleaning positions that are similarly reflected in my participants’ stories. Parents’ struggles to redefine their roles in their families and the labour force amplified the strife that youths contended with before and after migrating, making it harder for youths to hold their families together not only as they aided and consoled their mothers, but also cared for their fathers and younger siblings.

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Amid literature on global domestic labour, the focus is mainly on parents’ roles in their families when they are no longer physically present, yet provide care in other kinds of ways. As well, focus is often centred on how “migrant women face dual responsibilities in the transnational family, as their economic provisions do not ease the care expectations that children have for them” (Parreñas 2005a, 60). In both cases, children’s living labour is obscured from analysis. By focusing mainly on mothers, literature has missed youths’ everyday acts of maintaining the household and their extraordinary efforts to keep their parents’ marriage secure. This outcome of contemporary labour regimes must be brought into purview in order to recognize not only the injustice of migrant mothers who labour under precarious and exploitative systems but also the labour their children perform before and after being apart from their mothers.

Through the course of labour-induced family separation, youths live in the struggle to create continuities of care for themselves, their siblings, and their parents. Holding the family together in the interim often required time, energy, and financial resources of older siblings to ensure the family’s survival as other sources of everyday support were inconsistent. The work of keeping things together is challenged by the amplification of conflict between parents sparked by classed and gendered differences in their roles and expectations, which youths also contended with in order to remedy the ruptures. As I have argued, much of youths’ need to perform the living labour of the day-to-day domestic tasks and emotional work comes from their parents’

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<sup>28</sup> The authors provide a glimpse into the deskilling of the fathers in their study through a chart, located in an appendix on page 50. Admittedly, they do not provide a deep analysis of fathers’ experiences yet note that it does warrant further attention.

changing roles in the family, especially when fathers are not breadwinners and not socially sanctioned to be primary carers. The burden of having a father who is not the breadwinner and a mother who attempts to make up the difference was something youths often witnessed and felt compelled to address in order to save their parents from further suffering and keep their families together.

Taking my lead from youths' stories, my analysis turns towards their perspectives of their mothers and fathers in terms of seeing their changing roles at home, in society, and abroad, and how this transition shaped novel forms of labour in terms of kinship and care. While capitalist and oppressive systems in the Global North benefit from the extraction of women's domestic labour, fathers also struggled in the eyes of their children who watch them be unable to attain or defy the ideals of their masculine roles. My focus on children's perspectives demonstrates how the gendered and classed impacts of precarity amid feminized global labour migration has generational implications, intimately drawing on kinship bonds to shape how children perform living labour for the sake of their parents.

## Chapter 6.

### In the Meantime: Living through the long course of migration

In 2015, the online magazine *Toronto Life* posted an article entitled, “The Nanny Diaries: Toronto’s Filipino Caregivers Talk about Low Wages, Long Days and Immigration Delays” (Gonzales 2015). The article features five women who were each photographed standing alone in a living room, kitchen, or bedroom. Beneath each image is the woman’s explanation about her life as it concerned work, family, and, most notably, living through the temporal experience of waiting. Their narratives are characterized by a lonely and prolonged waiting for permanent residency and family reunification—a promise made to them in exchange for their work under the LCP. Christina Gonzales, the author of the article, writes about the uncertainty these women endure: “for many, the wait, which now averages 50 months—and that’s after two years of employment—is torture. At home, their kids are growing up without them. And with rock-bottom wages in the Philippines, going back isn’t a viable option” (ibid.).

One of the women depicted in Gonzales’ (2015) article is Sheila. With a degree in industrial technology yet the inability to earn a decent wage in the Philippines, she came to Canada in 2008 as a caregiver. When she applied for permanent residency, she was told her application would take three years. “I thought about it all the time and counted down the days,” Sheila explained, “After 36 months, I called, and they told me that my application would now take a total of 39 months to process. The uncertainty worried me constantly” (ibid.). Another woman featured in the article, Janeth, arrived in Canada in 2012 and applied for permanent residency in 2014. While waiting for the paperwork to be processed and approved, one of her sons became too old for family sponsorship (ibid.). In this instance, time eliminated the possibility of family reunification as they waited, or rather were *made to wait*, too long. Finally, the article portrays Jesusana who first went to Hong Kong and then Canada after an unsuccessful farming venture with her husband in the Philippines (ibid.). Away from her family for fifteen years, she only returned home on one occasion (ibid.). Speaking of her family, Jesusana said, “They always ask about my application. In June, its status changed to ‘reviewing documents and waiting on final decision.’ I don’t know when that decision will be made” (ibid.).

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The stories in “The Nanny Diaries” reveal how waiting can paradoxically be felt as both ordinary disposition and an extraordinary obstacle. This chapter explores the parallel waiting experienced by children whose lives are configured by temporal regimes surrounding labour, migration, and family sponsorship. My findings illustrate how youths contend with the passing, halting, and reversal of time through the course of their migration trajectories, which were punctuated by embodied and relational shifts in how time was felt. The lingering embodiment of waiting met with the sudden affront of altered physicalities towards people and places reflect youths’ testaments to the phenomenology of time. That which was granted or gained over time such as educational accomplishments, autonomy from adult authority, and senses of responsibility shifted in meaning when youths arrived in Canada, which challenged what youths considered to be their temporal and age-based progressions in life.

To comprehend the complexities of time, I draw from Erik Harms (2013) who identifies the dual conceptualization of time as a social construct (Durkheim 1995; Evans-Pritchard 1969) and as a mode of power (Thompson 1967). In Harms’ consideration of a Ho Chi Minh City demolition project, he identifies “‘eviction time,’ [as the] the complex assortment of temporalities that arise when people are displaced from their land and homes” (2013, 346). Similarly, prolonged family separation in the course of migration is composed of a complex assortment of temporalities that are differently experienced by family members. Waiting is a notable occurrence in the process of chain migration. Pierre Bourdieu (2000), Ghassan Hage (2009), and Javier Auyero (2010) theorize how waiting is a phenomenological experience informed by relations of power. Hage identifies waiting as such a commonplace occurrence that it is “almost synonymous to social being” (2009, 1) and Auyero (2010, 852) observes that waiting lacks attention because it involves so little obvious action. Yet this seeming lack of action can be informative in speaking to the dynamic temporalities of migration and the effect of power on migrant subjectivities including how temporal regimes and discipline come to shape people’s lives (Bourdieu 2000; Thompson 1967) and, alternatively, how temporal spacing may become productive of other modes of doing, being, and becoming in the meantime (Harms 2013).

Attention to prolonged family separation in the course of migration not only reveals how waiting comes to punctuate adult migrants’ journeys but also how their children are impacted by and work within the time they have awaiting family reunification and migration, which, in many cases, constitutes some or all of their childhoods. When we look to youths’ experiences of temporality through the course of their families’ chain migrations, they are rife with ambiguities

and contradictions (Harms 2013, 346). Yet these uncertainties do not only represent a closing down, but also an opening up of alternative ways of being and becoming in the meantime as youths learn about the nature of their mothers' migrations, make sense of the time spent apart, pursue other goals that enhanced their human capital, gain autonomy, and live onwards. Thus, their stories of the years spent waiting in the Philippines reveal the multiple meanings and uses they make of time, revealing how waiting was not a fixed experience. Their understandings and experiences also diverged from their parents', illustrating the ways temporality is lived and made sense of by those differently positioned in the family.

In what follows, I explore youths' "complex assortment of temporalities" (Harms 2013, 346) in relation to their senses of learning, waiting, carrying on, and aging through the long course of migration. The long course of migration refers not only to the great distances these youths and their families traveled, but also their lengthy temporal journeys that span long before and after their actual moves. This orientation speaks to not just the geographical and cultural contexts of a changing life, but to the temporality of change. Extending from my earlier discussion of how youths remember their mothers' departures, the next section speaks to how their feelings shifted over time. Several participants felt apathetic towards their circumstances as they carried on with what they considered to be their normal lives. Yet time compounded the significance of the distance as mothers missed their children's important life course events, signalling to youths how time spent without their mothers was irrevocable. I then explore how older youths felt about the time apart, noting how older youths often felt time to be painfully slow as they witnessed, from a distance, their mothers' struggles. Lastly, I consider how youths experienced delays in their migrations that spanned months and sometimes years. This part of the waiting period most poignantly reflected how waiting is an instrument of power (Auyero 2010; Harms 2013; Hage 2009), where youths lived uncertainly and unable to precisely plan for or anticipate their futures, and feeling the consequences of that disempowerment for years to come.

### **6.1. Ambiguity: "I didn't care as much, until I was older"**

Reflecting on the time when her mother first moved from the Philippines, Julia bluntly stated, "I don't even remember. We just saw the same lady who is actually my aunt. She just took care of us when my mom was away." She sat across from me at a large boardroom table in the public library. Though her house was about twenty minutes away by bus, this part of town was a regular destination for her and her friends when they got off school or wanted to meet on weekends. Julia was eager to join the study, yet always seemed passive in tone when we spoke

about her mother. She, like several other participants, insisted that life carried on normally through much of her childhood as she felt unaware and unconcerned with their mothers' absence at the time. Julia went on to tell me about her life as a child, where "everyday life was just normal cuz we would just go out with my dad—we had chickens, like farm chickens—and we would just go out and feed them."

Domic expressed similar sentiments about the ordinariness of life; when I asked him how he felt at the time his mother lived away, he said, "I don't remember any emotions." This was in spite of the fact that he quite clearly remembered the day she left. I asked him about how his life changed after she departed the Philippines and he responded, "There's nothing really cuz when my mom left I was really little so I didn't care as much, until I was older cuz I got distracted by so many things, like there was so many things that I was doing when I was younger—playing and stuff. It was a lot. So it was basically all the same when my mom left. There was no difference for me." Reflecting back on this comment, he paused and then added, "But I still missed her though." I sensed that his earlier statement was partially true but that, upon reflecting now, he regretted his blatancy.

In thinking more about his everyday life as child, it was his grandfather and his grandfather's workplace that stood out to Domic. He described his memories of landscapes that punctuated his everyday life as a child. Keith Basso (1996) observes how places hold meaning through the ways they are imbued with memories through naming practices as well as the wanderings of those who transgress them and associate them with experiences. For migrants displaced from their homelands, the search for familiar terrain in less-than-familiar places can give way to a sense of nostalgic return; a moment when one is imaginatively transported to another place and another time. The path, in this sense, is not linear but rather oscillates between where one used to be and one's present context. For many of my participants, they often actively looked for and passively encountered moments that reminded them of their childhoods and their homes.



*Figure 4 Flatbed Truck. Photo by Domic, 2015*

“It reminds me of in the Philippines,” Domic said of the flatbed truck in the photograph [Figure 4], “cuz my grandpa has a business. He also delivers, they deliver the bricks and they also have logs and stuff. They deliver those too, so we had lots of those. We had lots of trucks.” He carried on recalling not only the places and objects of his childhood, but the people with whom he related, “And me and my cousins would just play in the back and jump around.” Now thinking more closely of his grandfather, he said, “My grandpa was very nice to us. We really liked him. We loved him. He was really nice. He lived a bit farther from where me and my cousins lived but he would come often and then whenever we see him, he would ask us to come over and he would give us twenty pesos.” Through these stories, Domic revealed to me how his mixed feelings towards his mother and present circumstances were folded into sentimental memories of people and places that constituted his childhood home.

Like Domic’s earlier statement, I encountered similar kinds of ambivalence with youths on several occasions—Tiffany and Josie, for example—when they made candidly apathetic statements about their mothers and then later corrected themselves to emphasize that they did care about them. Often these statements were made in anger, at times following a recent disagreement. Julia was often reprimanded for grades at school; Tiffany was denied time with her friends; and Josie often could not scrounge enough pocket money for lunches. As time passed—even just minutes—the participants sometimes wanted to correct their prior statements to me with more nuanced reflections on their complex feelings of time apart from their mothers. These corrections reflected honest negotiations with their ambivalence then and now, revealing on-going grappling with how their lives were shaped by their mothers’ physical absence and other carers’ presence.

In spite of these participants' apathy at the time their mothers departed, their feelings often shifted as they aged. This shift was often attributed to new knowledge that they gained about the circumstances surrounding their mothers' departures and what their mothers were enduring abroad. Time compounded the significance of a mother's absence when she was not around for birthdays, graduations, sports games, and more. Julia explained that when she entered school and started making friends she noticed how her family differed from her peers' since her mother was unable to attend school events. She went on to explain the impact of only having her father around, since "most of my friends have moms and then dads who are just out-of-the-way because it's all about their moms. And I have my dad. So I felt different, secluded in a way cuz my dad would go out with friends, with like other boys that I don't really like. And then when I have friends he doesn't really talk with them because they have their moms." Julia's feelings suggest that even when one parent stays with their children, they may not fill the gap left by the absent parent, as mothers and fathers fulfill different gendered roles in children lives. In Julia's case, the significance of her mother's absence grew over time as she increasingly saw mother-daughter relationships reflected around her, yet could not generate the same kind of connection with her father.

Tiffany also spent most of her childhood with her father, much to her enjoyment. She and her father most enjoyed playing music together. Like other participants, she played guitar and learned to do so from her father. Her father gave her his old guitar several years ago when they lived in the Philippines together. Proudly, she announced that he had taught himself how to play and in turn, he taught her. Eventually she caught up to his skill level and learned more by watching videos on the Internet. Their roles flipped as she started to teach him her new skills. Guitar, she told me, was a means for them to bond through her childhood. Along with a photograph of her guitar, Tiffany contributed the following paragraph to our Phase II participatory photography book:

Playing guitar and singing make me feel that I am not lonely. They remind me of my cousin in Philippines where we used to play guitar and sing together. My dad taught me to play the guitar when I was twelve years old. Ever since then, I am self-taught. Guitar and singing were the things that I could bring with me to Canada that are like pieces of home. They are my best friends that cheer me up when I am sad and down, and I feel happy when people enjoy hearing me play. My goal is to be able to share my talents.

Tiffany's guitar thus reflected her bond with her father, a hobby that she enjoyed, a connection to home, and outlet for her emotions. When she referred to what made her "sad and

down,” she often spoke of her mother’s intensity and pressure regarding her schoolwork. She described her mother as “strict” in comparison to her more lenient father. She went on to tell me, “To be honest, I don’t like my mom because she is so strict and I love my dad so much.” Tiffany later told me that she does love her mother, but often felt frustrated by her high expectations. This reflects the kind of ambivalence in kinship that Peletz (2001) speaks of when he suggests that the intimacy of family can often breed a wide array of contradictory feelings because family is not solely based on affection; it is also formed through particular expectations and obligations that may go unmet. In power-laden parent-child relationships, discipline can also breed resentment. With the thought that her mother was simply going on a vacation, Tiffany described herself as “happy and curious” since it meant quality time with her father and relief from her mother’s rigid demands. Her initial reprieve, however, was overshadowed by the grief she later experienced when she learned that her mother moved to Canada. Tiffany explained her array of emotions over time and as she gained new knowledge of the circumstances: “So I was just happy that she left because she’s so strict. I was so happy like, ‘Yay!’ I really thought she was going to have a vacation. I asked my dad and he said that she’s working.” She then expressed how her new understanding shifted her emotions: “I was crying in the room, inside my room. I was crying.”

Rodel also spoke of his changing feelings towards his mother. When reflecting on the time he spent apart from her, he told me, “I don’t know. I didn’t care. Because I was with my dad’s side at that time.” He then added, “I was a little angry. I felt bad about it. Yeah, that’s why I don’t care.” Through Rodel’s stories I learned that he felt abandoned by both of his parents—“I don’t have my dad. And I can’t see my mom. My friends, they can see their moms, they’re with their dads. I was kinda jealous before.” As the responsibility of the household fell to Rodel, he could not ignore the fact that his mother was so far away. As he grew older, the significance of his mother’s absence expanded when important life events came to pass. His mother, for example, did not attend his sixth-grade graduation since she could not afford the trip home. “Then I’ve got no one,” Rodel told me, “I’ve got no one. Like with my parents, I’ve got no parents at that time.” He went on to explain his lack of care compared to his classmates: “I was jealous because I didn’t have family things, like no one scolds me when I go out. No one scolds me when I drink. I was just jealous because they took good care their children. No one went for my meeting at school. No one went to get my report cards. That’s it. Before, no one asked me if I ate already.” Rodel’s mixed expressions of apathy towards his mother, jealousy towards his friends, and anger directed at his circumstances reflected the ways in which he coped with ambivalence during his time of waiting, revealing how the withdrawal of care can be felt as a form of violence, especially when it is prolonged by years and compounded by multiple life-rupturing events. The

irrevocable passing of time was marked by significant life-stage events and particular childhood desires for maternal care that were denied at certain times of amplified childhood strife or grief.

Grace similarly expressed a deep loneliness as she endured her mother's time away and her father's regular absence from the family home. Grace tended to the daily needs of her siblings and cared for herself while supporting her family members emotionally and financially. She longed to move to Canada where she could "have a new life," she explained. The waiting was almost unbearable; she buried herself in her schoolwork, sought solace in her romantic relationship, and slept over friends' houses in order to avoid the agony of being alone and unhappy. With exuberance she explained the culmination of emotion when her Canadian visa approval eventually arrived in the mail—"I became the centre of attention at that time. I just cried. It was tears of joy when I received my visa because I was waiting for that since I was twelve years old. I'm nineteen, you know." Reflecting on the time that passed painfully slowly, she told me sorrowfully, "My mom wasn't there when I graduated from high school, she wasn't there when I had my first period. She wasn't there when I first fell in love, my first heartbreak. She wasn't there when during my *debut*—eighteenth birthday. She wasn't there and then I received my visa. Like, I can catch up on everything with my mom now. It was just like full of tears of joy."

In spite of Rodel's and Grace's strong senses of loss and aloneness concerning the time they spent away from their mothers, reunification was a mixed experience for both of them. In the Philippines, they cared for their younger siblings, ran daily errands, and tended to the home. They graduated secondary school and lived alone, establishing senses of autonomy as they entered adulthood. Reunification aroused new ambivalences for them as they sought to make up for lost time with their mothers but were also propelled backwards—made to re-enter secondary school and live under the watchful eye of their family members, much unlike their lives in the Philippines. Although Rodel was glad to reconcile with his mother, he lamented how she was "overprotective" and constantly worried that he would hang out with "bad guys." He felt his mother's concerns were controlling "because I've never been that protected before because I just did other things that I'd like to do and no one would tell me what to do. Like, 'I'll control you!' No one ever told me that." He likened his situation with his mother to a "squeeze" and at times reminisced about returning to the Philippines where he had "the freedom of what I want to do."

Grace also insisted that the months just prior to her migration were enjoyable. "It's the best," she told me, "It's like no one's asking what time are you coming home blah, blah, blah. It's good that I felt like one time in my life that I'm independent." She went on to talk about the lack

of control she had in her life now, saying, “Well, first of all when I moved here I really can’t do what I want. For example, my end of work is 7:30 PM. At 7:40 PM my mom’s gonna call me. And then if I were to come home at 8 PM, my brother’s is gonna call me. It’s just different. I’m just not used to it because in the Philippines I used to be so free. Like, it’s okay if I don’t go home for two nights and then here, it’s just thirty minutes and everyone’s finding me. Everyone’s texting me and calling me.” She then added, “Well, it feels good because I know someone is caring for me, someone is concerned for me but sometimes I just can’t handle it. It’s just too much. It’s just—I’m nineteen and then you’re treating me like I’m eight.”

Youths’ feelings about the time they spent apart from their mothers were drastically different; while some felt apathetic, others felt relief, and many felt a strong sense of loss. Youths’ feelings also shifted over time as mothers’ absences took on new meanings through their changing life courses. What is evident though these stories is that life away from a parent does not necessarily get easier as one “adjusts”; rather the passing of time punctuated what was lost and could never be fully remediated upon reunification. This is especially evident when separation spanned into teen or young adult years, marking the end of childhood for many youths—a time when a mother’s care was most wanted. For older youths, there was a struggle upon reunification to balance being their mother’s child with a desire for autonomy. Time, in this sense, was irrevocable as mothers left young children, those children grew into young adults, and the differences between parents’ and children’s expectations were difficult to reconcile. What was left was a temporal gap and strained relations caused by prolonged waiting that were not only poignantly felt by mothers, as the opening vignette suggests, but also by their children who wrestled with the desires of their mothers, their own senses of loss concerning the time spent apart, and their search for autonomy in their new familial context.

## **6.2. Learning: Mothers’ labour and the changing meaning of time apart**

Youths’ growing knowledge about the kinds of work their mothers performed reshaped their experiences of waiting and time. Youths who were unaware of the details of their mothers’ labour largely felt as though life carried on routinely, absent of serious concern over their mothers’ well-being or the fact that she was so far away. Alternatively, youths who communicated with their mothers more regularly and openly were often concerned about their mothers’ living and working conditions, which aroused different meanings for them concerning the time they spent apart and awaiting their migrations. These youths often felt closer with their

mothers by sustaining a tighter bond, yet at times intensely worried about them and attempted to care for them from a distance. Among my participants, this latter situation impacted older youths and female children the most, as they often shared closer relationships with their mothers before the separation and then took over the housework, feeling her absence more poignantly, upon the departure. In what follows I continue to show how knowledge circulated in the family through the course of the separation and how this knowledge reshaped youths' perspectives about time, waiting, and growing older.

Youths often referred to their mothers as caregivers or nannies, describing work that entailed taking care of children, the elderly, or people with disabilities, and cleaning houses. As examples:

“She’s a nanny...she was taking care of two kids.” — Angel

“So she was doing nannyng, so she was taking care of kids and cleaning.” — Sophie

“She did caregiving and that was supposed to be just two years.” — Grace

“My mom was first here as a caregiver.” — Domic

“She works and cleans the house.” — Vea

“She’s away and doing work. I think it’s hard...babysitting.” — Rodel

“She was working as a cleaner, or taking care of old people.” — Josie

“My mom, she took care of seniors.” — Rosa

Domic knew very little about his mother’s work when he was a child. He knew she was a caregiver and worked for older people with disabilities. When I asked him if he ever spoke with his mother about her job, he promptly replied, “No.” Rosa similarly told me that she knew her mother took care of seniors but was unsure of further details. She then revealed that life for her mother in China was particularly difficult: “The only thing that I know is about their money. They don’t really share the money and if you work, you really need to work like so, so, so hard to earn the money. And my mom suffered a lot but sometimes enjoyed her time.” Tiffany knew her mother was a caregiver, which she explained as “like caring for old people.” She also remembered one salient detail that she learned in her childhood: “The worst thing is that my dad told that they wash their—you know what I mean?—and I feel so bad for my mom that she had to do that work.” These youths’ vague knowledge corresponded to their ages at the time their mothers departed; Domic was age three, Tiffany was age six, and Rosa was an infant. Their

young ages and positions in their families meant that they were often sheltered from the pains of sudden events. What little information they received and remembered was often polemic, focusing on a salient detail that indicated their mothers' challenges.

With time came new significations for what the years of living apart meant for the youths in regards to their own lives and their mothers. Those who lacked detailed knowledge about their mothers' lives learned more upon moving to Canada and hearing their mothers' stories. As well, youths' own work experiences informed how they understood their mothers' hardships. Domic explained how he sometimes accompanied his mother to work and could "see the hard stuff" including the heavy lifting and cleaning she performed as a care aide. Josie also learned more about her mother's work as she entered the workforce as a cleaner, a role that she understood to be similar to her mother's work. Josie told me about washing the floors, collecting garbage, sorting recycling, wiping down surfaces, cleaning the kitchen, sanitizing bathrooms, and refilling supplies. She found the work to be very physically demanding and emotionally stressful due to her employer's meticulous expectations. Revealing the connection between her work and her mother's work, Josie explained how "all those jobs that I did were part of my mom's work when she was in China and here in Canada. I never thought that this is a very hard job for my mom. Mostly she has been working as a cleaner for probably seven to eight years."

Learning more about the kinds of work mothers performed not only reconfigured youths' feelings towards their mothers but also how they regarded her earnings and revalued the remittances. Josie explained, "I came to realize how much my mom suffered to get us here in Canada. I have experienced little of her hardship throughout my life and I even thought when I was a kid that she was making money so easily, but I thought wrong." Like Josie, Veia only recently learned that Mama's main jobs included cleaning houses and taking care of children. In order to remit more money, Veia's mother limited her meals—"She's not really eating," Veia told me, "She's being thrifty just to prepare for our future. She eats whatever was there. I didn't realize that she eats whatever's there, goes to work, and then us spending the money." Now working at a grocery store, Veia connected her own job to her mother's experiences: "It made me realize that earning money is so very hard. It made me realize lots of things. Working isn't just a fun, fun, fun, fun. Like, working is pushing yourself to your limits too." Understanding what the time apart from mothers entailed not only enabled youths to grasp the circumstances of their mothers' labour but also to reconsider the meaning of that time including the kinds of physical, monetary, and temporal sacrifices their mothers made towards the betterment of their family members' lives then and now.

For youths who were older when their mothers moved abroad, their close contact meant that they often held much more detailed knowledge surrounding their mothers' living and working conditions. Angel knew her mother was having a particularly hard time in Singapore before she came to Canada. Angel described her mother's first employers as "so strict. She can't use the cell phone to call us. Like, why?" Angel continued, "That's why when she was in Singapore, she's always sending us cards because she can't talk to us. Like, just on the phone with my dad cuz not too much time, right? They don't let her." Angel's comments follow what other researchers have found to be the more challenging situations domestic workers experience in countries with less labour laws and that are harsher on temporary migrants. Constable (2007) illustrates the physical abuse and bodily regulations concerning hair length and make up that affect Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong. In Singapore, temporary domestic workers do not fall under the Employment Act, are banned from entering certain venues, and are sometimes assigned to elevators marked "for maids and dogs" (Yeoh 2006, 33). Along similar lines, Rodriguez (2011) reports on the employer abuse and state violence experienced by Filipina domestic workers in Saudi Arabia.<sup>29</sup> Angel knew her mother was kept inside her employers' home and under their watchful eye. She was required to work around the clock seven days a week. Her mother's isolation made the rupture in the family more apparent to Angel as she and her siblings could not communicate regularly with their mother. When they did speak, their conversations were filled with the strong emotions of sadness, loss, and homesickness. Because her mothers' struggles were so apparent through their (non-)communication, Angel felt that she lived through that difficult time her mother in her forethoughts as she worried about her and tried to console and reassure her. For Angel, the time her family spent waiting for her mother to find new employment in Canada and for the family to reunite was painful, and it was the attachment of pain to that time that made it feel slow.

Grace also knew specific details about her mother's work in Canada. She explained her mother's double load, saying, "I was aware that she had two jobs. I'm aware that she's having a hard time here. Yeah, especially she's working low paying jobs or something." She elaborated on how her mother's shifting employment prolonged her time of working and waiting under the LCP as two years turned into five—details very few of the younger participants were aware of when we spoke. Grace did not know exactly what happened between her mother and her former

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<sup>29</sup> As Nicole Constable (2007) argues, though strict employment conditions may limit the agency of women who work in domestic roles, it does not entirely eliminate their capacity to resist their subjugation. Robyn Magalit Rodriguez (2011) also illustrates this point by focusing on the activist work taking place in Saudi Arabia led by Migrant International.

employer, but that “something just went wrong and then they just leave her hanging around.” The hanging around meant more time awaiting their reunification combined with the economic difficulties associated with her lack of pay. Under the caregiver programs, any time spent between employers goes uncounted towards the 24-month labour requirement (Pratt 2012; Stasiulis and Bakan 2005). This has the effect of encouraging workers to stay with their employer or risk prolonging their time of working and waiting apart from their families. Grace knew that her mother was “so stressed at that time” and so she was careful to withhold information that may have caused further distress, including that fact that their father was rarely around, that he frivolously spent the remittances, and that she struggled to buy enough food for the children. Explaining why she did not divulge such worrisome information to her mother, Grace told me, “I know that my mom has been through lots of difficulties and I just don’t want to pile everything on.”

I later asked Grace what she thought about her mother’s work as a caregiver. She responded, “Oh! After I heard her stories all I can do is just cry because when I was in the Philippines, I just kept asking her, ‘How are you there? Are you eating enough food?’ You know? And then she was just like ‘I’m okay.’” As Grace spoke, her eyes welled up and she wiped her tears with the sleeve of her shirt. She continued, “And then after I heard her stories that—” She stopped and hung her head in her hands. “Just let me cry,” she said. I turned the tape recorder off and sat with her, letting the silence fill the space of what was ineffable in that moment.

Time moved slowly for Grace. She deeply felt her mother’s anguish throughout their long journey apart and experienced her own grief concerning her mother’s participation in the LCP. While their frequent communication allowed them to maintain a close and continuous relationship, it amplified the rupture in their lives as Grace laboured to care for her mother’s feelings and grieved alongside her for what it cost their family. Grace’s stories reflect the benefits of and trouble with newer forms of communication technology. For instance, Madianou and Miller (2012) point to the ambivalences children experienced with the heightened availability of digital technology since a mother “could reassert her role as mother” and this was “seen more negative than positive” by their children (2012, 87). For Grace, however, her communication with her mother did not make her feel infantilized as much as made evident the need for her to emotionally support her through their lengthy time apart. It caused Grace to feel her mother’s anguish, which had the propensity of making the time apart more agonizing and, like Angel, caused time to pass slowly. Harms argues “‘slowness’ is relative” to one’s position in a changing environment (2013, 348). For my participants, however, slowness was not only attached to their

positions vis-à-vis more powerful structures that largely determine their lives, but also to the emotions tied to their circumstances that made life seem variably normal, enjoyable, or anguishing.

Youths' awareness of their mothers' migrations and work, whether vague or acute, had a double edge. For those who were less aware of their mothers' work during their childhoods, their lack of knowledge granted them emotional distance as time just seemed to pass by. Growing older, however, reconfigured their relationship to the time spent apart from their mothers as life events compounded the ways in which time was felt as irrevocable. For older youths, the time surrounding mothers' departures was not only contended with then, but continuously relived as they made new meanings of the large and small events, garnering new and at-times difficult information about what living apart entailed. In other words, while some youths attested to carrying on rather ordinarily, their learning about mothers' sacrifices and realizing senses of loss concerning a mother's presence magnified the significance they attributed to the time that passed.

### **6.3. Delays: “There’s always something wrong with our papers”**

All of the participants I met were uncertain about when they would migrate to Canada. This uncertainty did not just concern which day they would leave the Philippines, but often spanned the many years they spent awaiting their journeys. What most concerned the participants was how their lack of knowledge hampered their ability to anticipate and plan for their futures, primary in terms of their educational trajectories (Farrales 2016). This concern about schooling was most poignant for older youths who were on the cusp of graduating secondary school and starting their post-secondary educations in the Philippines. The delays that these youths experienced was often unmarked, feeling like ordinary time that invisibly passed or escaped them. In retrospect, however, they tended to realize that those years were significant in terms of their educational and career paths, marking the relative ease or difficulty they would face entering the labour market in Canada.

While research tends to examine the waiting experienced by migrant parents, as revealed in the opening vignette, this section highlights my research findings as they pertain to youths' experiences of waiting amid uncertainty, lack of knowledge, and delays, revealing how the labour of waiting and what happens in the meantime has long-term consequences of those on the cusp of significant life course decisions and changes. While research with migrant parents often illustrates the emotional toil of being without children and how mothers and children may fail to

recognize each other after years apart (Pratt 2012), youths' narratives reveal how migration-related bureaucracy often sets them on a barrier-ridden path that disfavours them by demanding that they wait and then denying recognition of their achievements.

Domic told me that as a child he always knew he would move to Canada, but was uncertain as to when this would happen. It was the "hints" of paperwork and excursions to offices with his grandparents that led him to understand that his migration to Canada was impending. Sophie similarly recalled going to "the big city" around age seven where she had to wear "nice" but "uncomfortable" clothes for her passport photographs. She explained that she thought to herself: "Maybe I'm going somewhere to visit someone," aligning with Tiffany's initial belief that her mother was going on a vacation rather than moving to work abroad. Shorter vacations or visits seemed like a more comprehensible explanation for these younger participants. Sophie soon learned from her grandmother that she was in fact moving to Canada to be with her mother. Like Sophie and Dominic, Tiffany told me about the uncertainty of precisely when she and her father would move to join her mother in Vancouver. She explained what little she knew at the time: "Well, my dad told me that we're moving to a place. I didn't ask him where. I think he said something or maybe—I don't know." She told me that the wait was "oh, a long time, you know, because I was supposed to be here not in 2013 but maybe earlier than that. There's always something wrong with our papers and our medical thing. We repeated the medical exam six times."

For youths who were nearing the end of their secondary education or had recently graduated from high school in Philippines, the delay in their migrations occurred at a crucial time in their educational trajectories that would impact their life course. Anticipating that he would be coming to Canada immediately following his completion of secondary school, Rodel decided not to start college unlike his peers. Yet, like most participants, his immigration was delayed and he found himself waiting in the Philippines for eight months before he was finally able to join his mother. Under other circumstances Rodel would have furthered his education by studying engineering at the nearby university, but instead he hung out with friends and played music to pass the time. He explained, "I was just relaxed or something. I was not excited. I was just like, 'I will miss you guys.' That's it. Then we just hang out together." Rodel went on to tell me that although he was out of school for longer than he anticipated, he found this time to be significant in terms of grieving his father's death and entering adulthood as he worked, enjoyed his social time, and lived autonomously from adult supervision. He felt he had entered adulthood over this

period of time, which helps to explain why his present circumstances of constant surveillance at school and at home felt confining, spatially and socially.

Unlike Rodel, Angel started college even though she knew she would move to Canada at some point in the near future. She explained that continuing with school was her parents' requirement; they insisted that she continue studying regardless of their circumstances because her mother sacrificed to ensure her children would receive a quality education. "Just focus on your school right now cuz it will help you—the knowledge they give you," Angel's mother told her, "So, don't worry about the papers. We're going to take care of that." Upon finishing secondary school, her family had not yet received her visa, so she enrolled at the local college. When her mother received permanent residency status in Canada, she began the family sponsorship process. Angel explained her excitement when she learned that her paperwork was finally underway: "I was surprised, like, really? Like, I'm so happy cuz I've never been to other countries before. Then I was like, 'Yeah! We're going!'" The paperwork symbolized her impending mobility, yet also marked her lack of certainty and control over the timing of the move. "But maybe in a couple of years," Angel thought, "It's okay, at least there's a chance." Knowing that her college education would likely not be recognized in Canada, Angel anticipated what she would do next: "I'm preparing myself. I'm thinking what I'm going to do when I get there because I can't really just go right away to school because I know my younger siblings, they're going to go to school—high school and elementary. Like I'm going to go to college and it's going to be expensive and Mom can't afford that because we're gonna start our life again, right? And it's so hard!" There was a belief here that time needed to be occupied while waiting, not wasted, in order to build what was a temporary kind of cultural capital (Bourdieu 2000, 224). Bourdieu (2000, 225) suggests that this harnessing of time through capital exemplifies one's preemptive rights over the future, but for Angel the degree to which this capital would matter in the future was still to be determined when and if she eventually arrived in Canada. Thus, despite Angel's understanding that her paperwork would facilitate her move to Canada, she knew that there were certain pieces of her life—her educational accomplishments, for example—that would likely go unrecognized in spite of her diligent attempts to continue onwards.

Grace's visa process was also delayed, which altered the course of her education. Like Angel, she started college knowing that she would likely have to leave her program when she received her visa, but unsure of when that would happen, she continued her studies. She explained how "the plans were just messed up. I was planning to study my last year of high school in Canada but then it took longer so I couldn't study here anymore." Grace's siblings

received their visas first, several months before she did, and there was fear in the family that further delays may cause Grace to be unable to join them if she aged beyond the dependent child status. Grace explained how the process of waiting was punctuated by her repeated medical examinations. She insisted she was healthy, but she faced difficulty obtaining the medical certificate that verified her health for the Canadian government. During this time Grace was able to complete three out of four years of her college degree, believing her credits would transfer to a program in Canada. To her misfortune, she was later placed in an adult graduation program to complete grade twelve courses under the Province of British Columbia curriculum—equivalent, she insisted, to the studies she completed years prior in the Philippines.

This reflects what scholars have observed about the systemic downgrading that migrant students of colour experience in Canadian education systems (Farrales 2016; Farrales and Pratt 2012). Veal, Rodell, Grace, and Angel migrated to Canada shortly after completing secondary school. In Canada, they were placed into high school-level courses—an educational status that misaligned with their past achievements and senses of maturity. Researchers show that Filipina/o-Canadian youths are particularly disadvantaged in the British Columbia education system (Farrales and Pratt 2012; Pratt 2012). Farrales and Pratt (2012) found that these youths were often discouraged by racist systems that denied parents' credentials and deskilled them in low paying service jobs. Pratt (2012, 28) argues that Filipina/o youths' educational challenges in British Columbia are products of a broader system that barricades their families' capacity to succeed, with youths experiencing the consequences of those systemic barriers.

Further, migrant youths struggle in Canadian and American education systems due to the inherent racism that underlies English language requirements (Abada, Hou, and Ram 2009; Abada and Tenkorang 2009; Coutin 2016; Creese 2010; Farrales and Pratt 2012; Fresh Voices Youth Advisory Team 2013; Portes and MacLeod 1996; Suárez-Orozco 1987). Researchers show that migrant students are often inaccurately assessed due to factors that include the presence of an accent, then placed in language levels lower than their actual competence, and then are compelled to take language courses that do not count towards their graduation credits (*ibid.*). These delays, Farrales and Pratt find (2012), often cause Filipina/o-Canadian youths to be unable to graduate before they turn age nineteen and then must enter adult education streams. Farrales argues that understanding the issue these students face requires attention to both parents' migration routes and youths' "spaces of arrival" (2016, 2) in BC schools, holding the transnational and educational together to consider the broader contexts that inform their lives. Extending Farrales' argument, it is not only a geographical and institutional misalignment that these youths must contend with, but

also a temporal one where youths' time investments or "time discipline" (Thompson 1967) spent on building human capital and transitioning to adulthood fails to translate from the Philippines to Canada.

The erasure of this capital by Canadian education systems takes place as a result of waiting, annulling the ways in which these youths rendered their time meaningful in an otherwise disempowering and bureaucratic regime of control at pivotal moments in their life courses. Grace's delay "affected everything," she said, in the sense that it prevented what was most significant of all in setting her up for educational success—the possibility of entering secondary schooling at a younger age and enabling her to follow a similar trajectory as her Canadian-born counterparts. In hindsight she wished for an earlier arrival date and more accurate information about transferring her credentials. Thinking about classmates in the Philippines, she lamented, "When I heard my advisor's advice I just felt very sorry for all my classmates, like for all the students in the Philippines who are studying very hard and then they have no idea that when they move here, all of their hard work isn't enough."

"Papers," as youths generally referring to the paperwork and processes surrounding their Canadian immigration requirements, were important symbols of their mobility and immobility. Approved papers affirmed the labour that youths and their parents injected into their future lives in Canada, and delayed papers reflected the bureaucratic control to which these families and individual family members were subject. As Barbara Yngvesson and Susan Bibler Coutin argue, "papers literally enliven and extinguish persons in their search for or abduction from particular realities" (2006, 179). Papers generated senses of ambivalence by both dampening and vitalizing hope about the prospect of life elsewhere among those I met. For Bourdieu (2000, 225), time is indicative of power when assurances are denied and thus one cannot confront their futures actively; the uneven distribution of power is marked by unequal access to a universe of possibility and when "stable chances, capable of favouring and fulfilling stable expectations" are disallowed (ibid.). In other words, those who lack power face signposts—such as paperwork, medical exams, and denied credentials—of injunctions, prohibitions, exclusions, and barriers that are temporal in nature (ibid.).

As many youths learned, educational advancement in the Philippines and how they attempted to stay productive through times of waiting was of little value upon arriving in Canada. These young people were routinely sent back several grades or required to re-enter secondary school in spite their prior graduations in the Philippines. Though some may argue that this reflects differences in education systems, we must also attend to the how it impacts youths'

subjectivities—how they are called into being by certain social structures—and how it functions to segregate migrant youths of colour in particularly detrimental ways that sustain inequality in Canada. The non-recognition of their past achievements not only hampered their upward social mobility in Canada but had the effect of pulling them back into positions of institutional and parental authority that were particularly challenging for those who felt already accomplished and ready to move on in life.

As these stories reveal, the time youths spent waiting often felt ordinary and unmarked. Yet certain moments were punctuated materially by paperwork and medical examinations that were required by the Canadian government. These materialities not only marked certain moments in the passage of time but also illuminated the power of bureaucracy to withhold or enable processes, denying or allowing access and recognition. This follows Javier Auyero's argument that the state has an invisible elbow that nudges subjectivities into particular forms of compliance, often marked by a "sit and wait" kind of (in)action (2010, 855). Auyero goes on to describe the power behind this compliance—"the uncertainty and arbitrariness engenders one particular subjective effect among those who need the state to survive: they silently comply with the authorities often capricious demands" (2010, 857). For Bourdieu (2000) and Auyero (2010), the self-governing that is fashioned through state institutions' demands that people wait is a key to how power is exercised over populations. Though Auyero is interested in how the poor are made to wait arbitrarily for welfare, his argument concerning the structural inequities implicit in making people wait also speaks to immigration regimes where processes are obscured and arbitrary, disproportionately impacting migrant families.

Sociologist Sherene Razack points more explicitly to the racialization of these processes where white people have historically been positioned as the decision-makers and rule-enforcers in enacting Canadian law and policy, which "resembles a myriad of everyday imperial encounters in which white subjects presume to know, correct and discipline people of colour all the while maintaining that racism does not exist" (1999, 166). Pointing to how racist violence operates through Canadian governing today, Thobani suggests that the "maintenance of domination...manifest[s] itself in 'banal' and 'ordinary' situations" (2007, 41). Reflecting back on the signposts of exclusions and barriers that Rodel, Grace, and Angel faced, we can see how waiting is a temporal and phenomenological result of bureaucratic modes of governing. This waiting was both internalized as a subjective mode of being as youths came to expect to wait (Auyero 2010), though their lives were not idle in the meantime.

## **Waiting: The precarity of time**

Youths' narratives reveal their oscillations between a complex assortment of temporalities that were slow and painful, inactive and ordinary, as well as harnessed and productive. Their experiences of waiting reflect the ambivalence between being governed and acting otherwise. Though many youths expressed how they felt the uncertainty and bureaucracy associated with times of waiting, waiting is not necessarily always and only a time of abjection or loss. Hage argues that "agency oozes out of waiting. It is not surprising therefore that the question of agency in relation to waiting is a hotbed of ambivalence" (2009, 2). Harms (2013) also makes the point that while waiting may apprehend some in an ultimate form of oppression, it may also spark transformation through productivity, or allow for a temporal harnessing of other kinds of capital in the meantime.

Power and agency associated with time unfolded at multiple levels in youths' lives. Their relationships with their parents were an apparent site of power as youth depended on their parents to initiate their migrations. The participants in my study often felt that they had little choice in migrating as they were drawn into larger familial plans set out by their struggling parents and often felt committed to fulfill those aims for the sake of their parents. Rodel, for example, told me matter-of-factly: "I had no choice, I think. Because we were migrating." Sophie similarly told me how she listened to her mother's demands, as, "My mom decides that we should come to Canada to live with her." Trish affirmed that she trusted her parents' decisions, saying, "I understood cuz parents know best, right?"

Significantly, these young people were often aware of how their parents had few alternatives other than to migrate, work, save money, and wait. The ways in which these families were made to contend with time was deeply impactful as it reconstituted not only their familial lives and abilities to be together but reconfigured their subjectivities in regards to work, education, and familial roles. In spite of the multiple levels of power that impact youths' experiences of waiting, they tell us about the ways in which they carried on with life in the meantime, at times focusing on garnering human capital through education and at other times revelling in social enjoyment of hanging out with friends. As Susan Bibler Coutin suggests through her research with transnational Salvadoran youths, gaps in time, distance, and belonging are structurally orchestrated through the misalignment of policies and lived experiences, yet she also observes how youths dynamically take up these spaces by the ways "they make something of it" (2016, 57). Forging kin relations with distant mothers and nearer family members, continuing to commit to their educations, and generating senses of autonomy were ways in which the youths

I met transformed injunctions into capital and turned a sense of powerlessness and time killed into enjoyment. Absolute power, however, was maintained by the Canadian state that, in the end, denied these youths and their families any reasonable predictability to plan for their futures.

There are several other points I would like to make concerning youths' agency through times of waiting. First, youths' stories of waiting tell us that time was not experienced in a unidirectional or smooth manner. Rather, time was differently experienced as abrupt and disruptive at points, such as when mothers first left. It was also experienced as slow and ordinary at other points, as childhoods carried on through play and schooling. Interestingly, time was also felt in reverse through the return to a dependent social position as youths were made to re-enter high school and live with parents again following periods of independence and autonomy. In this sense, time was not always progressive but was also halted and even reversed as accomplishments and senses of adulthood were denied by authoritative adults and institutions.

Second, youths were not passive participants in familial migrations in spite of often having little say about their moves to Canada. Even when their capacity to act was limited by how decisions were made within their families, they agentively observed, participated in, made meaning of, and intimately felt the impact of separation and times of waiting. By looking to their stories of ordinary life in the years they waited to come to Canada, we can see how they committed themselves to school, to caring for their families, and to their friendships. Youths' modes of carrying on through the course of waiting were often practical responses to a structurally induced insecurity that permeated—yet did not completely define—their years apart from their mothers. It was, as Bourdieu (2000) suggests, a means to harness the unpredictability engendered in the course of waiting.

Thirdly, adjustment to family circumstances did not necessary get easier over time. My findings indicate a complex array of experiences that unfolded as youths entered elementary and secondary school and approached their teenage years. For those who were very young when their mothers departed, the care they received from multiple family members seemed to dampen the significance of their mothers' absence, but this was often not the case for older youths. Adolescence was, according to many youths, the most difficult time of the separation as important life events such graduations, birthdays, and puberty came to pass. These events marked, at least partly, the end of their childhoods—what many youths perceived to be the most significant time in the mother-child relationship. These moments caused youths such as Rodel and Grace to grieve the physical absence of their mothers as they increasingly felt the irrevocable loss of that immediate care. Further, delayed migrations confounded older youths' experiences of

moving to Canada as they neither fit into the role of a child that their parents expected them to be nor were they recognized as young adults, educationally accomplished and able to make decisions for themselves. Rather, they were forcefully regressed back into secondary school and back to a dependency on parents' permission to engage in certain activities. Youths in their latter teens and early twenties thus lived in an awkward in-between as they straddled life stages that were confounded by their lengthy times of waiting, geographical distance from the place where began to establish their human capital, and modes of being governed by ubiquitous state bureaucracies.

Youths' delayed migrations ultimately came with broader consequences that are an unjust product of Canadian state policies that promote family separation, leave children behind for prolonged periods of time, and then demand that they and their families contend with the very personal ramifications of lost time, credentials, and power upon moving to Canada. As I have suggested, drawing from the important work of Canadian scholars, these walls generate inequities for the lives of migrant women and their children who were never fully included in the first place.

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Much like Harms' (2013) notion of "eviction time," youths' experiences of time were constituted by a complex constellation of temporalities surrounding home, family, and migration. Though my participants were not facing eviction in the same way as were Harms' participants, they were living in the long course of migration and its associated displacements from home. I first examined the ambiguity youths sensed surrounding early migration events including when mothers departed. This ambiguity was often marked by a lack of acute knowledge concerning what was happening, and thus many participants, especially those who were very young at the time, recalled a sense of apathy as life carried on. However, their sense of temporality shifted as they gained knowledge about their families' circumstances and as significant life events came to pass. Over the course of time, the accomplishment of graduating secondary school, moments of transition that mothers were unable to witness, and the irrevocability of time spent apart shifted the meaning youths made of the years separated from their mothers and awaiting migration to Canada. Initial apathy or confusion often shifted to resentment, frustration, sadness, or loneliness concerning their familial circumstances, revealing how time, knowledge, and life course events can alter meaning and surface different emotions. Time, in this way, is felt through relations. Finally, every participant experienced a kind of delay as they awaited family reunification, feeling their lives acutely subject to the power of bureaucracies, nudging them to comply with state demands and, in the process, disadvantaging their futures in Canada.

Power and agency shaped how youths waited for family reunification and migration. The power of the state to manage times of waiting were marked by long periods of uncertainty and more poignant moments of paperwork and medical examinations, reflecting the workings of bureaucracy that Auyero suggests are paramount forms of governing by softly pushing people into states of complicity. Yet, as Harms (2013) argues, waiting is not entirely oppressive since time may be harnessed to engage in building a life otherwise. Several youths did harness their time of waiting by starting college in pursuit of further education or enjoyably sharing time with their closest family members and friends. While these actions may have enhanced their capital and sense of well-being in the Philippines, it was only temporary since these investments were effectively erased upon moving to Canada. Thus, the Canadian state not only forced youths to wait for prolonged periods of time before immigrating but also denied them much of what they gained in the meantime, especially in terms of their educations. For the young people I met, the temporality of these setbacks, in school and other relations, impacted their subjectivities by challenging the accomplishments, autonomy, and adulthood they felt they gained through time. The implications of these setbacks stretch far beyond their past or present circumstances by complicating their family lives, their post-secondary studies, and their entry into the labour market in Canada. What youths' stories reveal are the ways in which they coped with systems that worked to disadvantage them materially and temporally in the process of extracting parental labour and promising family reunification.

## Chapter 7.

### Reunification as Separation: Shifting kinships

What does it mean when coming together is felt as another kind of coming apart? More precisely, what happens when family reunification intimately unfolds as a new kind of separation? For the youths I met, family reunification was always accompanied by other kinds of separation as youths not only *immigrated* to be with their parents, but *emigrated* away from caregivers, family, friends, and what they knew to be “home.” The youths I met were raised by grandmothers, aunts, older sisters, nannies, and fathers. They also spent much of their childhoods and some of their teenage years with cousins and friends who were their closest confidantes. Youths’ stories of their social worlds during time apart from their migrant mothers demonstrates how people other than biological mothers became vital kin for these young people in their daily lives even as they grew up in “globalized families” (Olwig 1999, 267). Youths’ stories of the fractures, fissures, and mending of their social relations also illustrate the effort they injected to create continuities of care and senses of home and kinship across transnational distance.

Ideologies concerning family reunification arise through news stories, in policy arenas, and in academic scholarship, often focusing on the impacts of transnational separation including the economic and psychosocial costs that living apart from a parent can have on children. According to the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, family reunification “refers to the situation where family members join another member of the family who is already living and working in another country in a regular situation” (2005, 1). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) plainly states the importance placed on family reunification, suggesting that facilitating family reunification is “one of the pathways with the greatest potential to contribute to regular and orderly migration” (2016, 2). In other words, creating government-orchestrated reunification channels can prevent undocumented migration, which might otherwise be considered *disorderly* forms of cross-border mobility. The IOM then suggests that family separation can lead to a “range of psychological, social and other adverse repercussions,” especially for children who live apart from one or both parents (2016, 1). They further emphasize the importance of maintaining and protecting “the integrity of family units” (*ibid.*) that are usually considered to be “all members of the immediate family (spouses, parents

and dependent children)” according to most national policies (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 2005, 1-2). This ideology not only reifies the nuclear family as the ideal social unit, but also takes biologism as the normative indicator of kinship rather than, as anthropologists have long illustrated, how kinship is diversely socially constructed through biological and non-biological means (Carsten 2001, 2011). Kinship ideologies centred on biological relations are codified in many national contexts where family sponsorship for immigration purposes requires confirmation of biological relatedness through a DNA test (IOM 2001).

Extending from the focus placed on the nuclear family and biological relatedness, researchers are attentive to the ramifications of parent-child separation when parents engage in labour abroad. These studies often reflect cost-benefit analyses of parent-child separation without questioning the constructed nature of kinship itself and the dynamic ways kinship is practiced and altered across cultural contexts and one’s life course. It is often agreed that remittances can help families cope with economic precarity by enabling family members to purchase household goods, secure land and better housing, invest in microbusiness, and support children’s education (Asis 2006; Asis and Ruiz-Marave 2013; Basa, Harcourt, and Zarro 2011; Eversole and Johnson 2014; Fuji 2015; Porio 2007; Semyonov and Gorodzeisky 2005). Researchers often emphasize the psychological costs children endure as they grow up without one or both parents, which can provoke unhappiness, loneliness, social isolation, and poor guardianship (Graham and Jordan 2011; Jordan and Graham 2012). As well, families must contend with the stigma associated with having a mother away, since mothers are ideologically positioned as essential to children’s proper rearing and well-being in Philippine society (Parreñas 2005a).

In spite of these different emphases on the potential gains of remittances or perceived losses of care for transnational families, studies often take several aspects of kinship and migration for granted. Three problematic assumptions arise in conventional migration policy and scholarship arenas: first, that migration is dichotomous and linear, characterized by “separation” on the one end and “reunification” on the other; second, that parents constitute the most significant social relationships for children and are inherently their primary kin; and third, that attaining a cohabitating nuclear family is and should be the ultimate goal in meeting children’s best interests. By placing these assumptions in conversation with anthropological understandings of the constructed nature of kinship as well as youths’ stories of their complex and shifting social worlds, we can better understand how these ideologies work to paradoxically propel and deny certain kinds of familial arrangements.

My research suggests that in spite of the seemingly temporary nature of children's lives in the care of others, the prolonged time children spent away from their mothers affirmed their social bonds to other kinds of carers and confounded their experiences of migration when those bonds were negated by distance. This is not to say mothers did not feel like mothers to their children, but rather I want to draw attention to the complexities of the time surrounding "reunification" as a significant moment that deeply complicates what we might think about stability and disjuncture in social relationships (Amit 2015, 33). Youths' memories and sentiments reflect the complexity of family life and feelings that fail to be fully addressed in reunification- and integration-focused ideology. They also reveal what Amit suggests when she says "disjuncture in social relationships that punctuate everyday routines do so, more often than not, in quiet ways that usually do not attract attention beyond the particular individual they involve...regularly navigating the boundaries between associates and roles" (2015, 33). The combination of stories I present in this chapter illuminate a pattern of intricacies surrounding families coming together and, at the same time, coming apart.

In what follows I explore how coming together becomes another kind of coming apart for youths whose lives straddled different times, places, and people. In doing so, I problematize the notion that family separation is preceded by family reunification as a linear, logical sequence of events. Rather, I demonstrate how the simultaneity of moving together (to be with parents) *and* apart (from other family members and senses of home) represent a paradoxical disjuncture in youths' social fields, with which they must emotionally contend and work to bridge as they attempt to bring their disparate worlds together. Bourdieu (1984) theorizes social fields to be the arrangement of social forces into self-contained fields. These fields are relatively coherent, with each member sharing an understanding of their roles and responsibilities, even as that field shifts and changes (Dyck 2012; Martin 2003). Olwig applies field theory to kinship among transnational Caribbean families when she states that "children constitute an important linchpin in the global networks of family relations which tie migrants and relatives at the point of origin together into coherent social fields of relations" (1999, 267). In other words, mutual investment in children's care and upbringing can bind distant kin in a transnational social field. Yet the question remains: who and what do children feel constitute their social fields and how do they navigate their globalized families?

I explore the stories of Sophie, age 14, and Tiffany, age 15, whose narratives juxtapose feelings of family and home in the Philippines with their initial and later experiences of being in Canada. While their stories are specific to the constellation of their individual experiences, they

reflect the common narrative among all the participants that coming to Canada implied a significant sense of departure from a familiar life including vital kin who constituted their primary carers. Sophie and Tiffany both remember their childhoods well—distinct times where they lived with grandparents, ate familiar foods at family dinners, lived in small yet homely dwellings, and played with nearby friends and cousins. Their stories reveal the joys of reuniting with their mothers yet also the despair of what they felt they lost in the process, as well as how they tried to generate coherence by remembering the past, connecting with loved ones, and enacting familiar family practices. Sophie’s and Tiffany’s stories tell us how the goal of joining their mothers and recreating their nuclear families are punctuated by much more than a reuniting of a divided whole, but rather that youths’ complex social fields exist far beyond their parents and present lives in Canada.

### **7.1. Reconfigured families: “My grandma, it feels like she’s my mother”**

#### **Sophie**

Sophie and I were introduced through a mutual friend. She was a petite fourteen-year-old with black hair that was about chin-length. She recently had her hair cut and the change bothered her; she fidgeted with the shortest strands that fell across her face. She told me about how she was upset because she could not pull her hair back into a ponytail when she played soccer. Her everyday life revolved around soccer as well as going between her house and school. I became privy to these adventures as I got to know Sophie, picking her up from school and going to her house when we spent time together. These kinds of interactions suited Sophie, as she did not have to carve out time to see me elsewhere and got a coveted ride home instead of walking. This arrangement also pleased Sophie’s mother who was concerned about her daughter venturing too far from home.

Sophie lived in a densely populated part of the city. Ethnically diverse businesses, recreation centres, and churches reflect the many migrant communities that settled in these neighbourhoods. While the main roads are hectic with constant traffic, the side streets are quieter with wide sidewalks and mature trees. Residences include small four-story apartment buildings and what appear to be single-family homes that are, in fact, often divided into many units. Gentrification means that as the demand for land and real estate in Greater Vancouver grows,

long-term residents in more affordable buildings are displaced in order to make room for larger condominium complexes, gourmet coffee shops, and trendy restaurants (Burnett 2014; Jones and Ley 2016). Dividing detached houses into multiple rental units is a way owners and residents grapple with—and profit from—the high demand for housing.

As I approached Sophie's house, I saw several newly built homes. I found her address and walked down a short flight of stairs to the side of the house and knocked on the basement door. Feet shuffled inside as someone approached the door. A moment later the door opened slightly as a young girl peered out cautiously. I greeted her warmly as I looked through the crack, at which point Sophie then flung the door open to invite me inside. She stood several inches shorter than me and was bare foot. She looked sleepy in her pajamas, like she had just gotten out of bed. We went into the main living space, which consisted of a small corner kitchen and the adjacent living room. There was a dining table pushed against the wall with the microwave perched on top, able to seat three people in its current configuration. Sophie and I sat on opposite ends of the couch as she squished into a pile of pillows. I could not tell who was home, as no one else was in this main space and the rest of the suite seemed quiet. It was not until about halfway through our conversation that her brother emerged, sleepily from down the hallway. Sophie and I talked casually for a few minutes about her classes at school and what she had planned for the weekend. She seemed excited to have someone over based on how chatty and energetic she became. She enthusiastically jumped into the interview, often beaming as she recalled fond memories of growing up on her grandparents' farm.

“We had goats before,” Sophie told me, “We usually go to the farm and feed them or something. And we have cows—everything! On our farm we have cows, goats, and we wanted to have a piggery but then it didn't happen. But my great grandma has a piggery but then they sold it, so we can't have piggery anymore.” Sophie's mother left the farm to work in Hong Kong when Sophie was very young, so her childhood memories largely include her grandparents. Her everyday life as a child revolved around tending to the farm animals alongside her grandfather and cultivating the garden with her grandmother. “We have kind of like a small house and it's really nice weather and the scenery is green and yellow and stuff. And there are a lot of trees, like mango trees. And then we have flowers. We have a flower garden there. Or sometimes we have fruits. All the fruits, like we have papaya, mango, and different—I forgot. There's a lot. And mostly coconut. And we have jackfruit. I usually eat jackfruit.” Among the many fruits and vegetables that Sophie named, tomatoes seemed to be the most nostalgic as they brought back memories of her grandmother. Together they picked the red fruit from the vines as it ripened,

selling half the harvest to neighbours and then making tomato jam with the rest. Tomato jam was her grandmother's specialty: "I don't even know how to make tomato jam," she laughed, "It's just my grandma who knows how to make tomato jam."

On our third interview, Sophie showed me two images she cut from a magazine at school and pasted into her research journal. They depicted farm scenes full of long green and yellow rows of grain crops. Both images also showed small farmhouses in the middle of the fields against a bright blue sky. The images were serene and tranquil, resonating a sense of calm in a rural country setting. Sophie cut them out of a magazine when she was working on an assignment for class. She took them home and pasted them into her journal because they reminded her of home and she wanted to share them with me. Sophie read me a journal entry that she handwrote below the images: "So it is nice to go to beautiful places, just like places with flowers and other things. This picture reminds me of going to the farm with a small house. I usually go farming with my family."

Food offered her rich memories of family time in the Philippines as her grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins convened at the dinner table every evening. Complicating straightforward theorizations of gender roles, it was Sophie's grandfather who prepared most of the family's meals; Sophie recalled the tangy adobo chicken that simmered in a marinade of vinegar, soy sauce, and spices. She also reminisced about *kaldereta*—a beef stew prepared with vegetables, pineapple, and tomato sauce. All of her nearby family came for dinner and ate around one large table. "Even if we're in the plaza, one of them—maybe my uncle—usually came to say it's dinnertime, so you have to go home. So if it's dinnertime you had to tell everyone so we eat together. Usually there's more than ten people at the table. We have a big table, so it's fine." Routines with her grandparents, often revolving around harvesting, making, and eating food, constituted most of Sophie's memories of her childhood.

It had been six years since Sophie was last in the Philippines, but she remembered it vividly and longed to experience the food, environment, and kinship that reminded her of home. The foods she most enjoyed were hard to find in Vancouver, making it difficult to replicate her grandfather's recipes. She explained how she could no longer eat jackfruit "cuz if we buy it here it's expensive. Even jackfruit, like half of it is six dollars or ten dollars. It's like, what? —It's expensive!" Her mother's cooking differed from her grandfather's meals. This follows what Dawn Bohulano Mabalon (2013) identifies as the cuisine improvisation that takes place among the Filipina/o diaspora. Though Mabalon is speaking of early Filipina/o-Americans when she states that "the lack of both elders and many ingredients gave women the burden—and also the

freedom—to adapt American ingredients to Filipino recipes and to use substitutions, creativity, and improvisation” (ibid., 166) the same can be seen in the smaller context of Sophie’s family where, without her grandfather or the precise ingredients, her mother’s recipes were not quite the same as Sophie grew used to in her childhood. It was a constant negotiation between Sophie and her mother over what she would eat based on the kinds of foods she desired. Sophie explained, “I just eat lots of broccoli. Most of the things I eat are broccoli. If my mom boils it and I’m like ‘Ok, I’ll just eat it with mayo,’ and she’s like, ‘You should eat more vegetables’ and I’m like, ‘Ok, but I don’t usually eat this vegetable because it’s not my favourite.’” When she realized that the kind of food her grandfather used to cook was squash, she started demanding that her mother include it in her dishes. She explained, “Sometimes we have adobo and then we have meat like chicken and I usually asked my grandpa to put potato or carrots into it, even if it’s not necessary to put it in, it’s an option if you want to put it in. I usually ask my mom—I say ‘Put it in.’ So I don’t eat a lot of meats, just some potatoes and carrots and meat. So sometimes I’m like ‘Ok, let’s eat these.’” Manalansan IV points to the significance of Filipina/o cuisine in terms of memories of home when he states that “a person need not be physically relocated in the homeland to enable a return. The sensual experiences of food often become events of both imagined and real diasporic homecomings” (2013, 292). He goes on to argue that the sensory experience of food can allow for a nostalgic return to a familiar place and time. By informing her mother’s cooking, Sophie was not just making idle demands about what she would or would not eat, but was expressing a desire to feel at-home through food memories since “food is often the most accessible medium of return” (Manalansan IV 2013, 298).

The configuration of mealtime had also changed for Sophie, reflecting a larger shift not only in who constitutes her closest family but also practices associated with home. Because it was mainly herself, her brother, and her mother now, “there’s less people to eat with.” The three of them, when they were home together, sometimes ate at the table but often ate on the couch and watched television. Her sense of closeness with her mother has grown over the years; in the Philippines she connected with her through Facebook and could see what Vancouver looked like through photographs on her mother’s profile. When Sophie arrived, her mother taught her about the laws and customs of Canada, she recalled. Sophie told me about how she and her mother “bonded” and became “closer” in recent years as they spent time together shopping, painting their nails, and putting on makeup. Yet “family,” she said, was the most challenging aspect of her life in Canada “because you don’t see them usually. Usually my mom works in the morning and at night because she has school. Sometimes me and my brother have to volunteer so we usually see

my mom not very often. Sometimes we don't come home that much and usually my mom has work, so we don't see each other a lot." She enjoyed opportunities to eat dinner with her mother, but longingly missed her larger family meals where they ate *kamayan* style—food laid out on banana leaves down the centre of a long table. They ate collectively from the spread of food, drawing it from the centre of the table with their hands as they communed not just by being together but by literally eating from the same large serving. "And I'm not used to eating with my hands now. I'm like 'Ok, I want to eat with my hands' to my mom sometimes. And she's like 'Oh—what the heck? Why would you?' And I was like 'Oh, come on. Can I do that?'," Sophie explained. The shift to eating off individual plates with utensils, and, at times, alone signify a disjuncture in how kinship and bodily nourishment were woven together in Sophie's everyday life, with Sophie taking on the task of attempting to bridge her disparate worlds.

On my last visit to Sophie's house, something was different about the way the main room was configured. I could not tell if there was something missing or if the room had been rearranged since my last visit. Sophie explained that her mother moved some furniture and temporarily took out the stove. They were currently using the microwave for their cooking needs. I asked Sophie more about why the stove was gone and she explained that it was because the "the inspector is coming." I then remembered a similar situation with a friend of mine; a home inspector had shown up at the front door of her rented dwelling and because her suite violated city bylaws, her landlord was given notice that he needed to make the suite unoccupiable. The inspector suggested that removing the stove was one way to do that. My friend had the stove removed in time for the next inspection, after which time she simply move the stove back in, hoping the inspector would not visit again. I figured Sophie's situation must have been similar judging by the number of units in the house, though I did not inquire further.

I tell this story because the stove came to represent much of the disjuncture Sophie endured through her migration and attempts to carve out continuities in care, taste, and practice. It reflected the profound shift in her living environments as she moved from the rural family farm to the urban city, as well as cooking and eating practices that were so intimately tied to senses of family, home, and security. While Sophie relished in her reunification with her mother, she also nostalgically longed for her grandparents and their company, farm life, and cooking. In her attempts to bridge the disjuncture she experienced, she sought to bring closer the sensory reminders of her childhood through foods as she worked to reconfigure her mother's methods—labour that was made harder through the lack of affordable and familiar foods, her mother's unfamiliarity with her grandfather's recipes, and, most recently, the absence of the stove. The

stove works as a metaphor for the precarity of home that shaped Sophie's life: the uncertainty of their clandestine living conditions, its use to remember and reconstruct her childhood, her attempts to inform her mother's ways of caring, and her mother's practical and emotional labour to nourish her children.

## **Tiffany**

Tiffany had recently been part of a youth program that ended and was eager to get involved in another activity in order to spend more time out in the community. Her mother pressured her to do her homework, practice her English, read books, and finish her meals, which frustrated her. She longed for more trust and freedom in their relationship. She explained, "She wants me to study *'til now!* She wants me to study and every time I don't want to finish my food, she forces me to. It takes me like three hours to finish everything when I was little because she doesn't want me to throw it out. She wants me to finish the food." After school Tiffany would stop quickly at Starbucks or McDonald's with her friends, sometimes not buying anything but enjoying this extra time out. The group also sometimes hung out at the local pier where they looked through the small shops and sat on the wharf. "Yeah, that's usually our hangout place," she told me, "And the good thing is that my mom allows it cuz if I go out, every day she's just gonna start yelling at me."

Tiffany explained that her mother primarily wanted her to focus on activities that would improve her chances of getting into university and completing a degree. Because of my prior role as a youth worker and current graduate student status, her mother believed I was a good influence on Tiffany's educational and employment endeavors. Furthermore, both Tiffany and her mother thought that talking for lengthy amounts of times in English with me would help Tiffany improve her language skills.<sup>30</sup> These factors helped encourage Tiffany's mother's support for our research relationship. Over the course of several months, Tiffany eagerly met me for interviews, walks, and sushi, and I also saw her parents in passing on several occasions. Like with most participants, Tiffany's life stories were not chronological but oscillated between life in the Philippines and life in Canada, showing how the past surfaced in the present as her social fields converged and diverged in emergent moments filled with mixed emotions.

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<sup>30</sup> Though not my objective, this was an important factor to several participants and demonstrates the ways in which participants found unintended benefits from the project.

Tiffany grew up in a large city on the island of Mindanao, a relatively poor southern region of the Philippines. It was a hot and humid place, she recalled. Her immediate and extended family all lived close by and routinely gathered for meals and celebrations. She knew all of her neighbours, most of whom were her cousins. Children would run back and forth between the homes of aunts, uncles, and grandparents as they played together in the communal yards that blended the boundaries between households. This sense of community and family among neighbours as well as casual playing outside was something many youths expressed missing upon moving to Canada. For example, Rosa told me, “When we came here to Canada I didn’t see any kids play near their houses.” Rodel similarly said, “Our neighbours here, I don’t know them. But in the Philippines I know them all.” Julia also felt the difference: “I had friends to play with after school but here I barely play cuz we’d usually go outside in the Philippines but here we’re just in the house and it’s so boring.”

Moving to Canada not only shifted youths’ relations with their family members, but also friendships with their peers. For many youths, moving to Canada meant they abandoned play altogether simply because it was no longer available to them. Lia Karsten (2003) notes that in Western contexts, children rarely play outside, especially in urban environments that are deemed unattractive or dangerous. Increased fear concerning predatory strangers means that parents insist on chaperoning their children and, as Karsten found, restricts girls from playing outside more often than boys. My participants often explained to me that there were more dangers to playing outside in the Philippines such as “snatchers,” as Tiffany put it, who would pickpocket or even abduct young children. This fear over children’s safety in the Philippines yet freedom to run and play outside was something I frequently heard among those I met. My participants’ felt that their limitations in Canada had less to do with suspicious people than with the fact that it was so uncommon for neighbours to know each other and for children to play on the streets. Participants as old as fifteen and sixteen lamented this stark contrast and told me they still wanted to play but could not find the opportunities in their neighbourhoods to do it.

From birth until age six, Tiffany lived with her mother and father in a small house that her grandfather built. When Tiffany’s mother moved to work in Canada, Tiffany and her father went to live with Tiffany’s maternal grandmother “because I don’t think my dad can take care of me because he has work to do. So we went to my grandma’s house.” She insisted that her grandmother’s house was the perfect size for herself, her father, her grandmother, and her cousin who also lived with them. She explained her nightly sleeping arrangements: “I don’t sleep in my room because I’m scared. In the Philippines I always need air conditioning because it’s so, so hot.

I cannot sleep without air con. So, yeah. So, in my room I just keep my toys but I sleep in my parents' room. It's just a normal house. But it's a very nice house too." When she moved to Canada, Tiffany was given her own room and fondly remembered how her mother decorated it with teal blue and raspberry accents—her favourite colours, she described. While she enjoyed having her own space, she also feared sleeping alone at night and often left a light on.

Tiffany had several nannies in the Philippines who were distantly related to her through her grandmother. This reflects what Parreñas (2015) and Hochschild (2001) identified as the nanny care chain, where women hand domestic labour down to order to perform it elsewhere. Reflecting the care chain, Tiffany explained her favourite nanny to me as she tried to figure out how she was related to her, eventually defaulting back to “nanny” when she could not find the right kin idiom to describe their distantly-connected relationship. How domestic responsibilities associated with care get handed down to younger (or older) and often-poorer women reveals how Tiffany's family mitigated the paucity of care available to her when her mother departed by hiring a less-well-off relative to help with the domestic tasks, especially since her father insisted on working in spite of his relatively small contribution to the household.

Tiffany was close with her father and nannies, but it was her grandmother with whom she was closest. “Well, my grandma, it feels like she's my mother because she's the one who took care of me. So over protective. Actually my mom, my dad, and my grandma are so over protective of me. And my grandma, she's like my mom,” she explained. Tiffany did not have siblings and often played with her cousins, especially the cousin with whom she lived, and considered them to be like brothers and sisters. “My cousins, every weekend they always came over to my grandma's house,” she explained, “I'm the only—I mean me and also my older cousin—we are the only children in that house, so they had to come over to our house. Sometimes we do some stuff like that. They were so much fun. I miss them so much.” Living in her mother's community and with her father's relatives close by, they regularly convened over meals much like Sophie's family.

Upon learning from her father that they were coming to Canada to reunite with her mother, Tiffany prepared to leave the Philippines through farewell parties with her family members. She looked forward to finally being with her mother again, but also struggled with the hard task of saying good-bye, especially to her aging grandparents. As she explained it: “We just have a—what do you call it? Like a party when you're about to leave. I don't know what you call that thing but we invited all our relatives. We had a party and said good-bye.” She went on to share memories of her grandparents' sorrow: “Okay, my grandmother, not my grandma on my

mom's side but on my dad's side, she cried so much. Whenever we chat on Skype or something we always talk about that time when she cried so much," and then added, "My granddad on my dad's side, when we were about to leave he hid. He never showed up." I asked her why she thought her grandfather did not attend her farewell events, and she explained that it was "maybe cuz he doesn't want to cry or something like that. He just pretended that he was sleeping." I asked Tiffany how she felt in these moments, to which she responded that she was grateful for her family and explained, "I don't know. Because I have so, so many relatives who love me. They told me that I shouldn't forget about them and of course I will never forget about them. And I'm so happy because there's so many cousins. I don't know. I just love my cousins so much. I don't have any siblings, right? I have so many cousins." She elaborated more on the sense of loss she was expecting upon her departure, saying that she was sad because "I'm going to miss them, the fun there. The place, I'll also miss the place. My grandma." As Tiffany prepared to leave the Philippines, her long-awaited reunification with her mother conflicted with the separation she was about to undergo from the people and places most familiar to her. Her story reflects how she contended with ambivalence surrounding the implications of family "reunification" as she confronted the grief of leaving her elderly grandparents.

Tiffany explained how in a perfect world she would have stayed in the Philippines and had her mother return home. She told me, "I didn't want to leave at all. I think why can't my mom live with us in General Santos and not here in Canada? Cuz we don't have any family here in Canada. But I miss everyone so much." Since reuniting with her mother, she faced both struggles and joys in their relationship. Initially the reunion was a very positive experience for Tiffany, as she explained how in the beginning "we're close. Right? Cuz we went from years apart to being close. But now, not anymore." The initial closeness that Tiffany described was cultivated through the care her mother put into designing an ideal bedroom for Tiffany and their frequent trips to the mall where Tiffany picked out new clothes. These were things that Tiffany was not able to do before since her parents were saving money in anticipation of reuniting and living in Canada. As the positivity surrounding the early stages of their reunion began to fade away, new struggles emerged as Tiffany entered her teenage years. Like Grace and Rodel, she yearned for more independence from her over-protective mother. Her longing to return to the Philippines was shaped by nostalgic memories of an idealized past, absent of the current challenges she faced with her mother and the loneliness of not having her larger family nearby.

Tiffany and I would often meet in her quiet suburban neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city. It was located in a part of Greater Vancouver that is surrounded by the pleasant sight of

cascading mountains, lush green forests, and quiet streets that lead to quaint cul-de-sacs. For many people, it would be a lovely place to live but for Tiffany it felt lonely, isolated, and, at times, quite boring. The academic pressure that her mother imposed on her meant that she could not leave the house as much as she wanted to, heightening her senses of disconnection from her peers and provoking her longing for the care and the freedom that she came to know in her childhood. Together we would walk around her school, go to the local shopping centre, and spend time at the library. As she chatted to me about her life, I noticed how we would often go for blocks without seeing another person with the exception of a car or two driving by. During breaks in her stories we could hear the tussle of the leaves in the trees as the wind blew through. What was present here—more solitude and natural landscapes than elsewhere in the city—also marked what was absent. Tiffany no longer heard the sounds of her cousins playing, the laughter of her neighbours who mingled between houses, and calls from her grandmother as dinner was being served, nor did she feel that she had the capacity to define and evolve her social life under the watchful eye of her mother. All these circumstances have complicated the idealized vision of reunification for Tiffany and other participants who similarly grappled with senses of loss when they moved to Canada.

## **7.2. Crafting Continuities: “It’s good there’s Facebook”**

Communication with her grandparents was a central theme in my interviews with Sophie. Much like Barber’s (2008) observation that mobile phones changed the communicative dynamic between distant households, especially with the unparalleled growth of cell phone usage in the Philippines, Sophie relied on calls to connect with her beloved grandparents. While Barber speaks from the perspectives of overseas workers who use their phones to call home, Sophie illuminates another dimension in this transnational exchange—namely, how children who migrated elsewhere use their mobile phones to call the Philippines. Madianou and Miller (2012) are attentive to (young adult) children’s perspectives on cross-border communication when they live apart from a working parent. They characterize half their participants’ perspectives as ambivalent or negative when it comes to speaking with their away parent. This was because some participants considered the communication to be long, boring, awkward, or phatic (cf. Malinowski 1923). By phatic, they mean small talk that seems to be about nothing, yet plays an important function in maintaining the ordinariness of relationships (Madianou and Miller 2012, 88).

Sophie, however, complicated this understanding of transnational communication when she reflected on the differences between communicating with her mother then and communicating with her grandparents now. A page in Sophie's research journal revealed a mobile phone she drew and then explained: "A phone is important to other people and me too. We need phones to call our family in other countries." Sophie did not recall talking with her mother much during their time apart, especially in her youngest years. Her experiences of this communication were indeed very phatic as they seemed routine, banal, and unmemorable. Later on, however, she created a Facebook account and was able to witness parts of her mother's life through status updates, photographs, and online messages. This social media platform, Sophie told me, was not only how she became more familiar with the Vancouver area but also how she learned more about her mother whom she felt she barely knew—a relative stranger.

Conversely, she now spoke with her grandparents regularly and associated more significance with their interaction. Sophie and her family members had large data packages on their current mobile phone plans, which enabled them to connect with each other regularly. She described how "we usually call home once a week, sometimes more than once," and then elaborated on what these calls entailed: "Oh, my mom usually calls my grandparents and then she calls her parents or my dad's parents. So usually we call before nighttime. Usually we call them and it takes two hours because everyone is talking to each other." I asked her what they talk about: "My grandma's like 'How was school?' And I'm like 'It's bad.' I usually say it's bad because they usually ask 'How are your grades?' And I'm like 'Oh, my grades are fine except math.' Of course, math." Sophie was particularly pleased with her grandmother's recent advice since she gave her tips on how to better memorize her multiplication tables to improve her math scores.

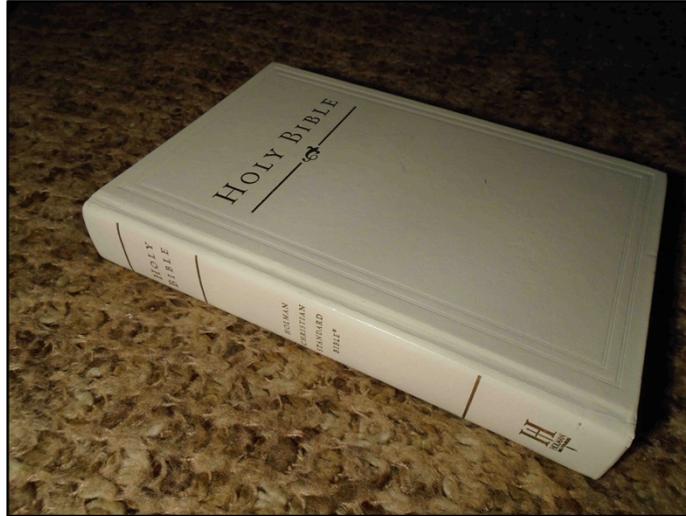
Sophie was adamant that this advice was not intended to be pressure from her grandmother to produce better grades but rather was meant to genuinely help Sophie mitigate the stress of exams. Her grandmother's emotional support and gentle encouragement was a welcome relief from her mother's obvious disappointment when she did not attain high grades at school. The pressure that Sophie's mother imposed was mitigated by the reassurance her grandmother provided. She recognized, however, that her mother's concerns were well intended, as she hoped her children would have a better life: "My mom always told me that her work now, it's totally different from what we are going to do in the future. If you have a good future, you might save money for yourself and other things. So you don't have to be worried about things that are happening in the future. Just get a better education."

Communication through digital technology was also a key way that Tiffany maintained familial relationships, especially at Christmas time. While she used to talk with her mother through Yahoo Messenger, the newer technology of Skype allowed her to better connect with her family in the Philippines. She had her own laptop, which was broken and, as a result, she had not called her family for several weeks. When her laptop was working, she often spoke her cousins who were able to set up the video call and then bring her grandmother over to the computer. She also connected with her family members through Facebook, which she explained was vital to her continued relationships because “Facebook, if you don’t have that you won’t be able to connect with each other, right? You won’t be able to interact with each other. It’s good there’s Facebook. I had Facebook when I was seven years old.” She explained to me that it was important to stay connected to her family members in order to reduce feelings of estrangement, “because if I don’t communicate with them, when I visit the Philippines again I might not—I don’t know. It will be so awkward because if we don’t talk very much, for a long time, it’s going to be so awkward for me to visit them, right?” Regular communication was important for creating continuity in their relationships and as a means to bridge distance through seeing, talking, and supporting each other. What was different here from that represented in other research, however, were the ways in which these young people facilitated the communication with those “back home.” Although they were older than when their mothers were away and newer technology made calling and sending messages easier, the content of the communication was also more significant since it reflected what was familiar and supportive to these youths.

Faith also signified the lasting bond of family for both of these young women. Sophie told me that she felt a sense of home and family among her church community. She always believed in God, she said, as she grew up in a Christian family that was devoted to their faith. She used to attend church with her grandparents weekly, and now went to a local Filipina/o church with her mother and brother on Sundays. Her faith was an important and regular part of her life that stayed consistent throughout her life changes. “I just feel at home, because church is like—oh, I feel very at home because they’re like my family,” she told me. She went on to say: “Ah, church we usually go Sunday, *of course*. We’re Christian, so usually we have to sing three songs and then prayers, and then we study and read the bible, and then give offerings.” Sophie took pride helping with the Sunday school activities as she taught the children Biblical lessons and shared her love of Christian music: “I play guitar. At one of the services there, I had to play guitar to everyone.” When I asked her what her faith meant to her, she responded by telling me about God’s unconditional love, “God will love you. That will never change.”

For Tiffany, faith allowed her to find some continuity through her life changes. On our walks around her neighbourhood, we passed a church she had recently attended with a friend from school. Since moving to Canada she struggled to find a church that felt like the right fit for her—somewhere where she did not feel judged, could make friends, and practice her faith in the way that was right for her. Her parents, she told me, preferred to go to a Filipina/o church further from their house, approximately a twenty-minute drive away. While Tiffany obligingly attended alongside her parents, she did not feel as though she belonged there. She explained her discontent: “Well, I like the other church too because the adults are really nice, the adult Filipinos. But the teens, the teenagers, I don’t really get along with them. We don’t really get along.” Tiffany felt the youths at her parents’ church judged her for the way she spoke English, mocking her thicker accent and laughing at her grammatical errors. In an attempt to find a better place to practice her faith, she once went to a church quite far from her house and closer to the centre of the city. Though she loved attending this church, its distance made her weekly attendance unfeasible. Her newest church, just several blocks from her house, revived her excitement as she began to settle into this new faith community. This church had a special youth program one evening per week where a youth pastor conducted a sermon and the group sang some contemporary Christian songs. This was followed by small group activities and discussions, in which Tiffany felt she could equally participate without fearing ridicule from her peers. I asked her why it was so important to find the right church and she explained, “Because I want to be closer to God, you know? A little bit closer to Him. I don’t know, like that. And also it’s nice to see other youth who go to church for God. Yeah, like that. Also I can make friends.”

Faith not only connected Tiffany to new friends with similar values, but intimately tied her to her distant family members and their shared values. Earlier in our interviews she explained: “I’m really religious. I come from a religious family because of my grandma.” The significance of her faith through the course of family separation was made more apparent to me through the visual methods of the project. Tiffany took two photographs reflecting her thoughts on family separation. The first photograph was of the Bible [Figure 5] and was accompanied by the following words:



*Figure 5 Bible. Photo by Tiffany, 2015*

I was born in a Christian family. While my mom was in Canada to work, I was in Philippines. My mom always reminded me to pray and have faith in God that someday we would be together. So I did. Whenever I am upset, I usually go to church and pray. God finally answered our prayers to be here in Canada together. In Canada I found a new church to go to. Everyone in the church is nice and makes me feel welcome. Even though I don't have my whole family in Canada, I know that we all share the same faith and that I have a family at my church.

Tiffany believed it was her faith in God and daily prayers that enabled her to endure time apart from her mother, giving her a sense of hope that it was a temporary situation. Coming to Canada to reunite with her mother did not appease all of Tiffany's desires, however. Though she finally attained what she had prayed for, the migration engendered longings that sprung from the new separations she was undergoing from those she loved. In another photograph she provided [Figure 6], Tiffany revealed how coming to be with her mother ran alongside other kinds of separations from family members in the Philippines:



*Figure 6 Canadian Flag. Photo by Tiffany, 2015*

I finally feel complete living with my mom and dad in Canada because I got split with my mom since I was seven years old. It feels really great seeing her every day after so long of living apart from her. I believe that there's no such thing as a perfect life because I know that there's still something missing, like my relatives in Philippines. Unfortunately I can't bring all of them here to Canada but by chatting with them lessens my thoughts of missing them.

Through her active pursuit of faith and maintaining communication with her family members in the Philippines, Tiffany laboured to bridge the disjuncture induced by her migration. Disjuncture was not just something she endured in moments of sudden change, but was an on-going condition she faced from the time her mother left through the course of coming to Canada. Although she appreciated reuniting with her mother, she also contended with feeling a growing sense of loss concerning kinship and company in her everyday life. For Tiffany, life was punctuated by disjuncture surrounding her family, reflecting what Amit suggests when she argues that such fissures can be “an ongoing feature of everyday life” (2015, 26). Social media, phone and video calls, and practices of faith were often tools employed by youths to bridge the gap in their familial lives by actively engaging with distant kin to overcome the grief of having to live apart.

### **7.3. Disjuncture: “Trapped in my own loneliness”**

In her research among Caribbean transnational families, Olwig argues that kinship is fostered through a combination of shared family values and everyday practices. She suggests that

it is in these social fields that interpersonal relationships and obligations are shaped, and that they can intimately come to inform young people's subjectivities. Interactions with people in these social fields render places meaningful as surroundings become associated with oneself, memories, and home. Olwig states that "from the point of view of the logic of social fields, family and kinship as well as places—regarded as the bedrock of social life—therefore do not exist in and of themselves. Rather, they become defined and attain meaning as individuals' lives take form and place within specific networks of social relations" (2007a, 12).

In this chapter I have sought to challenge the uni-dimensionality of reunification literature from a nuanced ethnographic perspective. This serves to: a) demonstrate that initial migration with certain family members is important for many youths who are denied the chance to build senses of family and home with their mothers, and b) acknowledge how the social fields that children and youths come to occupy extend far beyond their nuclear families. Through Sophie's and Tiffany's stories we see that youths' social fields are constituted by much more than their nuclear family units and their relationships with their mothers, which complicates here/there, together/apart contrasts. While Sophie's and Tiffany's stories are particular to their circumstances, they reflect how these youths navigated between people and places of multiple significance in their lives in spite of feeling more or less empowered to make decisions and engage with loved ones across borders. As I have shown, straightforward notions of reunification and an emphasis on the end result of chain migration ignore youths' very salient feelings of being pulled away from other kinds of carers and homes when they are asked—or made—to come to Canada after such long durations of waiting that span almost the entirety of their childhoods.

Beyond youths' concerns for their family members, they also spoke extendedly about their peers and classmates. Their school friends represented so much of the contention they experienced in their social fields, revealing how their sociality extended beyond their parents and other family members and into the realm of their everyday lives at school. Because so much of the family migration and reunification literature focuses on the family, it can obscure other kinds of relations that young people have, conventionally associating childhood and youth with mothers, fathers, and siblings, but lacking attention beyond those relations. As result, friendships—or lack thereof—can disappear from analysis. This follows what Amit argues to be "the more mundane disjunctures that are integral to the generation of everyday social routines, interactions and engagements" (2015, 9), such as what migrant youths experience at school, in their neighbourhoods, or at work.

Julia had a particularly difficult time making friends at school during her first years in Canada. She explained that she enjoyed her classes as long as she had a friend or two with whom she could sit. Without a friend in the class, she felt incredibly uncomfortable. She explained, “In my social studies class I sit with this really tall guy and doesn’t talk with me and he talks with everyone else except for me.” She was also left out of group problem solving in her math class. The class was divided into groups of four or five based on the desk configurations. The groups would solve a math problem and then send a group member to the board to illustrate their method of problem solving and the answer. Julia disliked this because “in my math class,” she explained, “I barely do anything because everyone in my group, they prefer—they want to do the thing because they don’t want me to do it. So I don’t really do anything.” I sensed her dismay through this story since it contrasted so much with how she described her commitment to schoolwork and her assertion of her intelligence. She took pride in her academic successes in the Philippines, explaining, “Apparently cuz I was smart I was in Section One, but in Section One there’s also a division; the smarter and the less smarter, which is called ‘the fast learners’ and then s-, s-something—I don’t know. Something about science.” Telling me more about her schooling, she said, “I had lots of homework when I was in the Philippines. More than here. We had tests every week.” She went on to explain that she always attained honours, which meant that she received eighty-five percent or higher in her courses. She enjoyed the competition between students, which encouraged her to strive harder for higher grades. In Canada, however, she felt that she was rarely included by her classmates and sat disparaged on the sidelines. Her experiences of trying to make friends were painfully difficult and most of the time she felt isolated from her peers. When she created her contributions for the participatory photography book, she explained these experiences through images and words, shown in Figures 7 and 8:



*Figure 7 Lily Pad. Photo by Julia, 2015*

If the water reflected my thoughts, would they understand me better? If only they knew what I was thinking, we could've been close friends.

She wanted her classmates to recognize her ability to contribute to their mathematical problem-solving tasks, especially since she thoroughly enjoyed academic challenges. She also wanted them to see that she was talkative, funny, and friendly as she explained to me how she used to be full of enthusiasm among her friends in the Philippines, especially when she was able to communicate in her first language. Without the ability to express herself comfortably among her new peers at school, she felt unfairly marked as shy and reserved. Julia felt alone, misunderstood, and constrained much of the time until she finally began to form friendships. She explained,



*Figure 8 Fish in a Jar. Photo by Julia, 2015*

Just like this lonely fish in jar, I was trapped in my own loneliness of not having friends. But a jar is a glass that can be broken and when I worked hard, I broke through that cage and found friends that I can trust.

Like Julia, Tiffany faced moments of exclusion at school. During her first day of secondary school, she felt that the white girls were bullying her. She explained, “Well, you know we’re Asians? At first they just say ‘hi’ but in the back they just laugh at us. ‘Hahahaha,’” she imitated, “I don’t know,” she sighed, “It makes me feel like it’s bullying because they’re saying ‘hi’ to me but then behind my back they laugh at me.” Tiffany’s friend group was largely made up of other Asian-decent teenagers. Tiffany and her friend Hana along with two other friends recently formed a band because of their mutual interest in pop music, songwriting, and playing the guitar. Hana explained to me that it was difficult for the four of them to meet regularly, but she and Tiffany spent time together nearly every day after choir practicing in the band room. Hana was also in another band and deciding whether or not to leave them in order spend more time playing with Tiffany. Tiffany was excited at this prospect of forming a duo with Hana. They had their first gig the following month which would be a short performance at a youth open mic night.

In her analysis of West Indian girls in Brooklyn, Oneka LaBennett suggests that youth migration scholars are often attentive to realms of education and labour since these are the “more acceptable sites of inquiry” (2011, 13). Educational attainments and entrance into the labour force are often measures of integration, which privileges the perspectives of receiving countries and foregrounds whom youths will become rather than who they already are in the present. An ethnographic approach that takes youths’ lives as a central focus will necessarily include leisure and consumption. For LaBennett, this means taking seriously young people’s readings of and engagements with music and pop culture to better understand the broader conditions that shape their experiences as well as their agentic and critical engagements with their youthly worlds. Along with other scholars like Elizabeth Chin (2001), LaBennett puts forward a call to take the leisure and consumption aspects of young people’s lives seriously for a fuller account of the spaces and practices that actually constitute youths’ daily lives.

Playing music and affirming friendships were both aspects of life that Rodel struggled with when he moved to Vancouver. These challenges particularly came to light during our time walking together as we circumnavigated his school and the surrounding neighbourhood. As we walked down a street adjacent to his school, I asked him about his classes. He ran through the list

unexcitedly, telling me about career planning, biology, and social studies. He had already completed secondary school in the Philippines and was now struggling with the fact that he was placed into grade ten courses, meaning he had at least two more years of high school to complete before moving onto college. Knowing he was also taking a music class, I asked him about it:

“And so what about music? Music composition?” I asked.

“I don’t know, It’s kinda boring. A little boring. Because I play guitar but I don’t play keyboards. And I was on keyboards,” he told me begrudgingly.

“So why did they put you on keyboards when you have this other musical interest?” I questioned.

“I don’t know. Because—I didn’t know. In career Planning, when I first came to my school, I didn’t know about guitars. I didn’t know they *had* guitar classes. That’s why I just said ‘yes’ when they put me in music composition,” he explained.

He had not realized at the time, nor had anyone explained to him, that guitar was in fact an option in terms of credit courses. So instead of being able to spend time each day doing something he enjoyed, he was good at, and was an integral aspect of his identity, he was placed in the uncomfortable position of having to learn a new and less interesting instrument alongside the multitude of other academic and social struggles he faced at school. Though this incident might seem mundane, understanding it contextually within the broader scope of his life story reveals just how unfortunate it is for a young person who has experienced so many life challenges and educational setbacks. This misstep, I suggest, represents a broader failure to meaningfully include his voice and to make space for him in his academic and migratory trajectory, leaving him to contend with the consequences of yet another unnecessary social, educational, and leisurely disjuncture.

Labour goes into contending with disjuncture. Youths attempted to mitigate rupture in their social fields by engaging in the living labour of remembering and reconstituting the past in the present in order to garner some sense of comfort in the familiar. By bringing recipes and techniques of cooking to their mothers in Canada, engaging in faith practices that were instilled in them by their grandmothers, forming friendships with youths of similar backgrounds, and continuing their leisurely hobbies of play music, the youths I met attempted to bridge the disjuncture of their social fields through practices that continued from the Philippines to Canada. Youths strived to create senses of connectedness to those near and far, and upon moving away from primary carers and close friends, they still engaged with memories and practices that

maintained continuities between people and places of belonging. My attention to the ways in which reunification is lived as another form of separation amplifies the need to take seriously youths' perspectives on whom constitutes their closest kin and friends as well as what places and practices reflect senses of home. It also provides a critical perspective on immigration practices and policies that privilege the nuclear family while simultaneously prolonging reunification and challenging mother-child bonds.

Disrupting social fields that were most familiar to these young people meant that while some were able to piece together one part of their ruptured lives, namely their relationships with their mothers, other aspects of their lives were pulled apart in the process. They then had to contend with an affectual oscillation between the better life they hoped for with their parents in Canada and a familiar, comfortable life at home in the Philippines. The disjuncture occurs when certain people or places fail to register as familiar. Jeanette Edwards and Marilyn Strathern argue that closeness among kin “summon affective ties, the obligations and duties such ties entail, and the warmth and mutual care with which relationships are sustained” (2000, 160-161). They contrast this to relatives who are perceived as distanced when they do not interact as much, obligations are few or go unmet, and confidences are not shared. Olwig (2007a) argues that the longer this distance goes on, the more those relationships fade as others move the forefront. For Sophie, Tiffany, and other participants, it was the routines of everyday life among their closest kin and confidantes that enables us to see why grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, cousins, and even friends became vital kin, that is, vital to youths' sense of survival and care through the course of growing up. Their stories also allow us to see how reunification with their mothers led to profound senses of loss concerning family and home—why Tiffany so plainly lamented how “I don't have any family here.”

The material, spiritual, and communicative connections that these youths elaborated on through their stories of food, faith, phone calls, music, and friendship demonstrate how they actively worked to bridge the separations they endured from their families and friends in the Philippines due to their reunifications with their mothers in Canada. If reunification discourse tells us that children and parents long to be together and that this is the final result of chain migration journeys for transnational families, then Sophie's, Tiffany's, Julia's, and Rodell's daily engagements with fostering their relatedness and senses of home through other means tell us otherwise. Their efforts to bridge their disparate social fields point to the living labour they engaged in to cope with the disjuncture of migration and the new kinds of separations that emerge in the course of family reunification.

## Conclusion

As I have argued, these youths' multiple social attachments confound straightforward notions of family migration and reunification, as well as what constitutes home. While juncture can signify a meeting or crossing as two or more social fields merge, *dis-* signifies how such merging easily slips into misalignment. Many participants anticipated and awaited their journeys to reunite with a parent in Canada, but upon family reunification, what seemed to be the ultimate goal, they quickly realized that the new presence of their parents in their everyday lives was accompanied by what was at times a stronger sense of loss concerning other family members, daily routines, close friends, autonomy, places associated with home and, ultimately, what they felt constituted their sense of self. Thus, the juncture of coming together through long-awaited reunions also unfolded as profound disconnections that youths varying tried to mend. Sophie tried to create congruence between her disparate lives when and where she could as she informed her mother's practices of cooking; Tiffany continued attending church and praying as she devoutly maintained the spirituality that her grandmother imparted; Julia contended with the emotional labour of being excluded and trying to prove her intelligence and friendliness at school; and Rodolphe accepted his misplacement on the keyboards in music composition class.

While family reunification, and reuniting with a mother in particular, was important to all of my participants, their stories reveal more nuances in how they navigated and felt their social worlds change amid the constellation of many carers and confidantes that filled their lives. Their migration journeys were thus composed of many simultaneous kinds of coming together and moving apart that draw our attention to complex social worlds that extend beyond the social aims implicit in family reunification discourse.

What this all suggests is not that youths should stay with their other carers or never reunite with parents abroad, but rather that the prolonged time families spend apart engenders multiple heartaches by perpetuating the dominant assumption that children are best reared by their parents, then denying children and parents their ability to be together, then rupturing youths' intimate bonds with others when they finally, after years of waiting, are authorized to come to Canada. In other words, disjuncture is amplified by Canadian state policies that prolong times of liminality so much that they no longer become liminal (Amit 2015, 28-29)—rather, they become life itself. Attention to the stability that these youths formed throughout their childhoods in relation to significant others reveals their creative responses to “slippages and gaps” (ibid.) that

emerge from systems that draw on their parents' labour and require children to wait and live on in the meantime, forming lives otherwise.

## **Chapter 8.**

### **The Resurgence of Precarity: Life in Canada**

Although the youths I met held different and dynamic feelings about their lives in the Philippines and journeys to Canada, their hopes all revolved around garnering more stability and security for their families. Their desires and efforts to contribute towards their family projects of building a better life centred not solely around their own lives, but around their intergenerational sense of responsibility and care towards their siblings, parents, and grandparents. Youths' dreams for better educations, better housing, and better income to help support their family members were not grand, but they were ambitious given the nature of parents' entrances into Canada and the kinds of socioeconomic conditions they faced upon settling in Greater Vancouver. As we will see, precarity clung to these families in ways that were hard to shake, yet youths' tenacity towards ascertaining a better life for those they loved drove their commitment to the larger family plan in spite of emerging hardships, finding the means to persist through precarious times.

Extending from chapter seven, I continue my discussion of how migrating to Canada was an ambivalent experience for the youths I met not only in terms of kin relations but also socioeconomic position and emergent forms of precarity. Although the moments surrounding first arrivals to Vancouver were joyous for some youths who long awaited to be with their mothers and start their lives in Canada, it also came with senses of loss concerning people, places, and routines most closely associated with home. In this chapter I continue exploring youths' stories of arriving in Canada by more specifically pointing to how their lives unfolded in the months and years that followed. Here I argue that along with family reunification, precarity persisted in unexpected and enduring ways. I provide several vignettes to illustrate how coming together through the process of immigration was met with other kinds of pulling apart as family members were drawn away from one another due to misaligned work schedules and the demands of double shifts. The space of their houses and surrounding neighbourhood also punctuated the precarity of home for some participants. Lastly, I examine how lives in Canada were punctuated by two emerging tensions that included, on the one hand, the tug of nostalgia to an idealized past, and, on the other hand, the hope that the better life they envisioned was just over the horizon. I ultimately argue that the resurgence of precarity upon moving to Canada caused those I met to re-evaluate

what being at-home meant in terms of the home they left behind and the home they hoped to create.

### **8.1. (Not) At Home: “I don’t have any family here”**

The contrast from the Philippines to Canada was stark for both Sophie and Tiffany. Settling into their new lives, new homes, and new family configurations did not always go smoothly as they straddled memories and longings for home with what was supposed to be a better life in Canada. Sophie remembered her shock as she moved from her grandparents’ rural farm to the big Canadian city where her mother lived. “When I came here I was like, ‘Oh my gosh! There’s a lot of cars!’ because in my province we don’t see a lot of cars on the street,” she compared. She then sought to find out about nearby farms:

“Do they have a farm here?” Sophie asked her mother.

“They do, but it’s really far away,” her mother replied.

“Okay. I was kinda sad that there’s no farms anymore,” Sophie said.

I asked Sophie if she visited any farms since she moved to Canada. She had, she told me: “Last year I volunteered and we went blueberry picking and it was fun because I like the picking. It’s just kinda the same as picking, like tomato picking and blueberry picking.” She also told me about the nearby park where she sometimes walked with her mother—they watched the birds, had picnics, and enjoyed the “peace,” as Sophie described it. This, she told me, was the closest sense of home she could find.

While Sophie lamented the absence of her grandparents and farms in her daily life in Canada, Tiffany found Christmas to be the loneliest time. She explained, “Well, if you compare it, it’s always fun to have Christmas in the Philippines because all of us gather, the cousins. We have cake, we eat, cuz you know when it comes to eating we have this lunch thing. I’m so happy. We do games, we perform, we act, we open Christmas stuff. It’s very fun. Especially opening gifts. It’s so fun. Like there’s wrapping everywhere in the house. It’s so fun, so nice.” She compared her memories of past holidays filled with family activities to life now: “But here, my first Christmas—“ she signed deeply, “—it’s so new. Everyone and everything is so new to me. Cuz the Christmas after all of us came here we all just sat on the couch and socialized and went on the phone or something like that. We just made phone calls, went on the computer, but then we still had to wait until tomorrow to open the gifts.” Reflecting on a Christmas dinner in New

York, Manalansan IV notes how such an event shared among Filipina/o-Americans may not cultivate “comfort, warmth, or other positive feelings” because it may stir unwanted reminders of what was intentionally or unintentionally left behind (2013, 294). Thus food and celebration among the diaspora can be uncomfortable, as it was for Tiffany.

As much as the phone and Internet became important means for Tiffany to connect with her relatives in the Philippines, the reliance on this technology throughout the Christmas festivities amplified the absence of most of her family members and compounded the differences in how she celebrated her favourite holiday. The paradox was that using their phones while sitting around the living room created barriers between those in the same room while at the same time facilitating connection to those further away. Gifts also did the work of connecting distant family members while at the same time working to remind Tiffany that her family members were not present. Tiffany explained the labour she imbued into trying to bridge the divide: “Every December it’s so hard because we have to send them a gift, right?” The lack of her family members’ physical presence during the holidays and the stark change in routines around eating, games, performances, and opening presents reminded Tiffany of what she left in the Philippines—a separation from family members and traditions that made her feel the most at-home.

Tiffany would often tell me how Canada did not feel like home because she did not have most her family with her. More poignantly she told me, “I don’t have any family here. Only my dad and my mom.” In response to my later question about whether Canada felt like home, she repeated the earlier sentiment, “I don’t know really because we don’t have any family here in Canada,” and then added, “I just enjoyed life while I am there in the Philippines. I just enjoyed it with my grandma, with my cousins.” She then struggled to list those whom she felt were her family members in Canada, naming a distant uncle as one person other than her parents whom she saw regularly. She tried to name more people but could not, and I could sense her dismay as her face sunk in sadness. I asked Tiffany what was the hardest part about living in Canada, to which she responded, “Being away from my relatives. My family. Yeah. But if they’re here, if they were here of course I’d feel, you know, different or like *that*”—more at-home, I think is what she meant.

At the same time, Tiffany was appreciative of the things she now had access to—a new sense of financial security that she was unused to during her childhood. She explained how she noticed the difference in her living conditions even before coming to Canada: “I feel wealthy cuz you know what? Without my mom I didn’t eat in the restaurants, I didn’t eat in the buffet or

something like that. I didn't have any new clothes. I waited for her to send my clothes and that's it. I didn't go shopping. So whenever my mom came back I felt wealthy because she bought me something I wanted. You know kids in the Philippines, they cannot buy the things they want cuz we are not really wealthy. So yeah, my mom, this is why she went to Canada, to be able to support us financially." Upon moving to Canada, she was taken aback by the size of their more spacious home and her own new room. The family of three lived in a small detached home, renting one floor that consisted of two bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen, and a bathroom. Several months later her parents went to purchase a new car much to Tiffany's excitement. "I was so happy because in the Philippines we didn't have our own car, but my grandma does," she exclaimed, "the three of us, we never had a car. I feel wealthy." Tiffany not only reveled in their ability to go out to eat, purchase clothes at the mall, and buy a car, but these consumption practices enabled her to spend long await time with her mother: "Because before I was not able to," she said.

Though Tiffany felt that her family experienced better financial prosperity in Canada, they still struggled to find time to be together. Tiffany occasional went to work with her father where they cleaned an office building on the weekends "cuz we're bonding together," she insisted. His two jobs made it difficult for them to see each other during the week, so it was Tiffany that decided this was a way to spend meaningful time with her father whom she grew close to over their years together. She told me more of how her family time is tugged at by the demands of her parents' work and educational upgrading. When they first reunited, Tiffany told me, the three family members made a diligent effort to share a meal together once a week. After church they would go to a nearby restaurant and have breakfast together, as Tiffany explained, "Last year me and my parents, every Sunday, we used to have breakfast in this restaurant." She pointed towards a quaint diner in the nearby plaza as we walked together one day.

"Sausages, eggs. Oh, I like the what? The potatoes?" she asked, trying to find the word.

"Hashbrowns?" I asked.

"Yeah, hashbrowns! Oh my God, hashbrowns. I *love* hashbrowns. Yeah, that's what I always ordered," she replied.

I asked Tiffany why they no longer eat together on Sunday mornings, to which she responded that it was because of her mother's busy school schedule. When her mother finished working as a caregiver she wanted to pursue other career options and undertook a short vocational course at the local college. Tiffany explained that they did not eat together because

they were “busy, because my mom goes to school and she studies a lot. She does—I don’t know—she studies a lot. She has so many projects to do, to finish up because she’s graduating this year and she’s really busy so we’re unable to do breakfast at this restaurant anymore.” I asked her if they still ate together sometimes, to which she replied, “not brunch but dinner we do sometimes.” Eating at the diner in the plaza reflected the double-edge impact that migration and reunification had on Tiffany and her parents. To her, eating in restaurants signified her family’s financial stability “because before, in the Philippines, we don’t eat in a restaurant because it’s really expensive but here I feel like I can afford everything. I can eat all I want, what I want. Yeah, and I don’t have to think about the money anymore cuz I know that we can afford that.” She also explained that it was important to her to be able to eat with her mother “because before I was not able to cuz my mom would only come home every two years. And now I’m really happy that I have my mom, that we eat together.” Her hope was that she and her parents would resume their Sunday brunches: “I think it will come back after my mom graduates,” she said, “Yeah. Everything will be normal then.”

## **8.2. Means of Living: “In Canada it’s like eat, work, sleep”**

Angel also experienced new kinds of precarity upon reuniting with her mother in Canada. Angel’s family was having a difficult time financially as new forms of precarity surged through their lives upon their reunification in Canada. Angel, her siblings, and her father packed up their belongings and flew to Canada following their visa approvals approximately a year before I first met them. Tired from the long journey, Angel remembered her disoriented excitement at the airport when she reunited with her mother. The first thing she wanted to do with her mother was cook, exclaiming, “Mom, want to cook? Let’s go. Help me.” It was the time, care, and bond over food that allowed her to feel at home with her mother again—“Like that: mom-daughter relationship is so normal,” Angel explained. Sustenance bound the family, nourishing their bodies and relationships through familiar forms of care that had been paused and reconfigured over their many years apart.

The excitement of their initial reunification, however, was tempered by the realities of life in Vancouver, one of the most unaffordable cities in the world (Pawson 2017), compounded by the systematic relegation of many new migrants to low-paying sectors of the labour market—low-level health care, service industry, and manual labour positions (Pendakur and Pendakur 1998; Sharma 2006; Stasiulis and Bakan 2005; Zaman 2012). According to the Real Estate Board of Greater Vancouver, the benchmark cost of a detached home in 2014 was 1.4 million dollars

(CBC News 2016) and according to the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2016), the average rental unit ranges from 1,268 to 2,105 Canadian dollars depending on the number of bedrooms. Angel's family of seven have lived in the same three-bedroom apartment since they reunited—a basement suite in an older two-storey home. The conditions were cramped with everyone and everything packed into this small, dark, and crowded basement. This kind of living situation was common among the participants I worked with—living in minimal spaces, usually basements, and sometimes moving frequently or subletting a room to another tenant to offset the cost of rent.

When Josie arrived in Canada several years ago, her family lived in a small apartment in a neighbouring city. She has since attended two different elementary schools and three different high schools following the family's moves throughout the metropolis. When I asked why they moved so much, she explained that it was to avoid the increased cost of rent: "I think we're going to move this year because of the money, like the rent is too high." She also explained that her parents changed jobs frequently and needed to be closer to their workplaces—her father cleaned office buildings and her mother worked as a care attendant in a nursing home. The family's current three-bedroom apartment was located on the eastside of the city. Unlike other apartments, it had a balcony that overlooked a neighbouring yard, adjacent roadway, and older homes across the street. As I thought of the stories Josie told me about her childhood memories of playing outside with her cousins and friends, I asked her if she spent much time on the balcony:

"No, cuz it's dirty and we have our bike there and no space. There's also a slaughterhouse beside us. They slaughter the chickens," she responded.

"Do you hear that?" I asked.

"No, it's just the smell. I think the blood, I think. It's really smelly. And that's why we don't open our windows. Cuz of the smell."

In spite of family reunification in their destination country of Canada, home remained precarious. The material uncertainty of life continued to penetrate their household on a daily basis not only economically through the high costs of rent, but also through the enclosure caused by the stink of dead and dying chickens. Precarity for Josie was a material and social experience, as well as a sensory one, impacting where she could comfortably go within the vicinity of her apartment and neighbourhood without being put off by the rancid smell.

Angel spoke of how things have unfolded for her over the past several months: “What I thought that first two weeks, like ‘Oh, I love it here!’ But when I started working, we didn’t have really much time for each other to bond, like just the weekend. And sometimes my dad and my mom have to work on weekends, so it’s difficult too cuz you need to work, right?” For Angel, the hardest part of life in Canada is “just the financial. And our time. The time with each other is the hardest thing.” The family tried to be together, mostly during meals, yet Angel was discouraged over their continually conflicting schedules. She explained, “Sometimes I say, ‘Hey, let’s go eat somewhere together.’ And then my older sister says, ‘Oh, I have work.’ ‘Oh. Ok. We’re just going to go the six of us.’ So, she’s not there and sometimes I’m not there. Sometimes my dad or my mom is not there.” Their time and relationships were stressed by the emerging challenges of a precarious life in Canada, felt through meals that failed to offer them the time to convene together that they had long awaited. The life that was supposed to bring them together, perhaps by communing together over homemade meals, continued to pull them apart in ways Angel had not predicted.

Yet hope is an enigmatic force. Angel clutched tenaciously to the idea that the future held promise. She ended her laments about her present conditions by uttering her unrelenting hope, “But I think in the future it will be better. When we get a good job or something, it will be better.”

Angel explained to me that each of the members of her family take their turns at building their individual and collective lives. While Angel, her older sister, and her father all have college-level educations, they needed to begin post-secondary schooling again since their credentials were not adequately recognized in Canada. Angel’s father, once a teacher, very recently completed a trades program. Amid his attempt to start his new career, he was still working part-time at a food-processing factory. Angel, her older sister, and their mother financially supported him and the family while he was in school and, for the most part, continued to do so as his minimum-wage, part-time earnings were meager. Angel recently started working less in order to study in a hospitality program at a community college, so she was contributing comparatively less to the household bills than she had before. In the meantime, other family members were covering more of the financial costs to make up for her loss of income.

Angel knew money was tight and was stressed about the pressure everyone was feeling, especially her father who was the one, she said, struggling the most upon moving to Canada. Soon Angel’s older sister was also going to start college to receive a technology certification, not unlike the degree she completed in the Philippines. Her younger siblings would need to find after-school jobs in order to help pay the bills. Angel told me that it was a constant give-and-take as her

family members negotiated their time to study and work. They each took calculated turns supporting each other by working, paying for the bills, and doing the housework while others upgraded their educations and volunteered to gain the kind of credentials and experience Canadian employers were looking for. As Angel described it, “It’s like, one-by-one, right?”

Vea’s sense of home was also precarious since she arrived in Vancouver less than a year before I met her. Like Angel, Vea was also excited to see her mother at the Vancouver airport. Excitement was not her only emotion though. She hovered in a sense of hesitation, unsure how to act towards someone who was so vital to her life yet also felt strangely unfamiliar. She described, “When we came here I wasn’t even near her but I can already see her smiling and then, ‘Wow! This was my mom. I didn’t see for how many years? This is how she really looks.’” Vea went on to explain how “I only saw her on Facebook and my actual memory was still fuzzy of her. So at that time, ‘Wow! So this is my mom!’” She bursts into a small laugh and carried on, “For the first time I’m realizing that I have a mom.” Her laughter turned to tears and I sat silently as she continued through her watering eyes. She repeated, “So, this is my mom” nine more times fluctuating her utterances between high-rise terminals that reflected her senses of relief, joy, and surprise and low falls that vocally uncover her overwhelming feelings of estrangement and loss. She ended with a tenth utterance: “There’s my mom!” and then asked herself, “So what should I feel? Should I feel happy?” She paused and ended, “I don’t know.” As vital as her mother was to her life, Vea felt the tenuousness of their relationship through her uncertain feelings at the moment of their reunion.

Vea told me about how her material world changed upon arriving at Mama’s Vancouver apartment. She exclaimed, “Wow! So this is what houses look like?” She told me about the carpets and big screen television—things she did not have in her home(s) in the Philippines. But having more things was not necessarily good, as Vea felt these were unnecessary. “Back in the Philippines,” she said, “I still remember everything is just fine, like you don’t have to have big screen TV cuz that’s our perspective...Make something or be resourceful or do whatever.” She was taken aback by her new surroundings, explaining how “it scared me because digesting it from the first moment I stepped into the house, it was so much to digest and what if I stepped out tomorrow morning and then see all those things? I don’t know what I feel but I felt at first happy because of the luxuries here. What else can you wish for?” As much as Vea tried to convince herself that everything was good about her new life in Canada, she sensed uncertainty as new hardships surfaced in her family and home life.

The house that Veá described is an apartment, and ironically it is not the house that Mama lives in most of the week. Veá's mother continued to work as a caregiver following the completion of her time in the LCP and did some upgrading afterwards to become a care aide. She decided, however, to not pursue this role and instead took a job on the outskirts of the city to work as a farm labourer alongside Veá's father. Until recently, Mama and Papa worked and lived on the farm during the week and came home on weekends to spend time with Veá and prepare her next week's meals. Realizing Veá was lonely, Papa recently changed his shifts in order to spend several weekdays with her, returning to the farm on weekends. Although Veá now had one parent at home with her most of the time, Mama's and Papa's days off rarely overlapped and sadly for Veá she still spent more time away from Mama than with her. She spoke of her loneliness when she said, "In Canada it's like eat, work, sleep but in the Philippines it's like eat, have some fun, fun in your life, and then work if you want, and then go to school, like there's still some fun. But here I'm on my own." Veá realized the important financial contributions her mother, and now both of her parents, made towards her present and future security, but this was not the good life she hoped for. Instead, her vision of what a good life entailed was slowly shifting as she began to value family members' presence over work and material things. Her lived experiences of family separation, migration, and reunification caused her to re-evaluate what she believed was most important to her own and others' well-being. Veá's valorization of family over work defied the capitalist logic that her parents so tightly clung to in their search for work and that neoliberal capitalism depends on; Veá wanted to live a life otherwise.

Admittedly, learning about this new form of family separation that Veá experienced *in* Canada surprised me. Materially, Veá had more now than she did before as she explained the differences in household electronics and the availability of food. Her Vancouver apartment had cushy carpets and a big television that still seemed to astonish her when she thought about their lavishness. She had prepared food waiting for her in the refrigerator—"meat every day!" she told me as her mother prepared a week's worth of meals each Sunday afternoon. She attended a local high school and looked forward to graduating soon. She worked and had money saved for college. But in spite of better economic security, the precarity of home was evident in the tearful ways she told me about her living situation and loneliness. I did not understand this context until Veá and I sat down towards the end of our time together. She showed me photographs she had taken with her research camera and scrolled to an image of small log cabin that sat on a flat of grass surrounded by a few rose bushes. It looked out-of-place in Vancouver and so I asked her to tell me more about the building. It was then that I learned in more detail about her parents' work

and living situation—this was her parents’ work accommodation when they spent time at the farm.

When her mother could no longer endure the conditions of caregiving, she left her job in order to join Veá’s father working on the farm. Veá did not have an explanation for her mother’s decision to change jobs other than the fact that her mother no longer wanted to be a caregiver; she had been so for more than twenty years. I can only speculate that the conditions she faced were difficult to bear or that she wanted to be nearer to her husband who likely faced great difficulty finding work elsewhere. Through research on garbage picking in Brazil, Kathleen Millar (2014) observes how seemingly less desirable forms of employment are actually carefully negotiated choices within a limited realm of possibility. She suggests that although such forms of work can be arduous and highly stigmatized, they may offer more favorable conditions in other ways, such as time, money, and autonomy. In the instance of farm labour, getting paid a piece rate may allow workers more flexibility than caregiving in terms of work hours and earnings (Government of British Columbia 2016). As Millar (2014, 35) points out, those whose earnings are contingent on what they produce or collect can garner “relational autonomy” as they gain control over when and how much they work. According to the Government of Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2014d), employers must be willing to pay their caregivers “prevailing wage,” that is, the median hour wage being offered for that work in the local region. A quick search of the Job Bank ([www.jobbank.gc.ca](http://www.jobbank.gc.ca)) reveals most positions pay CDN\$11.00 per hour, which is conducive with other researchers’ findings that caregivers often earn just above minimum wage (Arat-Koç with INTERCEDE 2001; Pratt 2012; Stasiulis and Bakan 2005). All this is not to glorify agricultural labour or suggest that it is lucrative by any means. Rather, it suggests that people make choices for themselves based on a limited array of possibilities and in relation to other kinds of precarity that permeate life beyond labour, which Millar illustrates through her argument that such labour strategies can “be conceived as an art of living through the precarious present, as that which makes possible a continued, shared existence in delicate times” (2014, 48).

Though Mama’s and Papa’s choices might reflect an art of living based on their options in the Canadian labour market, Veá imagined another kind of life. Her perspectives reveal her different engagements with the art of living that deviated from the life her parents crafted. She felt a strong pull elsewhere. “I just want to go back to the Philippines and then be in my home with my normal family—not ‘normal family’ but my aunt, with my *kuya*, with my *ate*, with Papa and Mama and we can go to this one house and then we get to eat dinner together, which I haven’t experienced even in my seventeen years of my life.” Pointing to the photograph of her

parents' accommodations on the farm, she said, "I just want to feel like everything is complete again. Yeah, in one house we are all gathered together." The irony of this moment was not lost on me as she looked longingly at her parents' work accommodations—the place where they resided away from her much of the time—and thought of her own home in the Philippines, a home that never quite existed as such because of Mama's physical absence. Through a collection of memories and images, she imagined her whole family eating dinner together. This, she thought, was what her life should have been.

### **8.3. Feeling Time: The Temporality of a Better Life**

The youths I met often experienced tensions between two idealized lives. These imagined lives were interestingly located in different geographical and temporal locations. The first idealized life was a nostalgic one situated in the past, while the second idealized life was a hopeful and future-oriented one yet to come. Both kinds of imaginings were tenacious—persistent and determined—attachments to visions of what family, home, and well-being could entail.

Nostalgia can be defined as the "longing for what is lacking in a changed present... a yearning for what is now unattainable, simply because of the irreversibility of time" (Pickering and Keightley 2006, 920). Michael Herzfeld argues even more poignantly that nostalgia is the connection to a non-existent time by suggesting that nostalgia is part of "an edenic order—a time before time—in which the balanced perfection of social relations has not yet suffered the decay that affects everything human" (2014, 147). While Herzfeld is concerned with nostalgia as it relates to and is employed by nation-states, his idea can also enable us to understand youths' longings to return to a time before time with their families in a state of familial and homely perfection. Sara Ahmed and her colleagues argue that nostalgia can be intimately tied to notions of home amid the rupture of migration, whereby "the affectivity of home is bound up with the temporality of home, with the past, the present and the future. It takes time to feel home. For those who have left their home, a nostalgic relation to both the past and home might become part of the lived reality of the present" (2003, 9). Nostalgia, according to these authors, is felt as a sorrowful inability to return to a home that never existed, at least not in this life. It also signifies the precariousness of never feeling at home since this time before time is inevitably irretrievable.

Vea knew that it was unlikely she would ever go back to the Philippines and if she did, she would probably never be with her "whole" family again since *Ate* now worked in Qatar as a

nurse and *Kuya* was a seafarer far from home. Upon second thought, Vea also realized that the family context she considered “normal” never existed in her lifetime since she could not recall a time when Mama was at home eating dinner with the “whole” family. Her nostalgic idealization of her “normal family” was suspended by her sudden recollection that it was not normal at all because it was something she had never experienced. As far as Vea’s memories were concerned, Mama was never at home eating dinner with the “whole” family.

Nostalgia not only gripped Vea’s interest in her life before Mama left the Philippines or a life in which Mama never left, but also as it concerned her relationships with her aunts. Nostalgia surged in the small moments such as scrolling through the television shows in her apartment and passing *The Filipino Channel*. Here, she would think of herself beside *Tita* on the couch eating popcorn. Her longing to be with her aunt again was not so much for herself as it was for her aunt, whom she imagined was now alone: “*Tita* is back in the Philippines waiting for us to be together again,” Vea contemplated, “waiting for us to be at her dining table and sometimes I’m reminding myself, ‘How is *Tita* eating her dinner without us with her? Is she eating dinner alone? Is she eating her dinner watching TV or is she alone at the dinner table?’ It’s hard. It’s really hard. I don’t know.” For Vea, the grip of a nostalgic past not just concerns her own desires, but is also tied to her yearning to comfort her loved ones who have been left behind. Worrying about them, caring for them, and contending with the heartache of distance became part of the living labour Vea endured through the course of having her home—and *Tita*’s home—wretched apart.

Similarly to the struggles of Angel, Tiffany, and Vea, Pratt with the Ugnayan Ng Kabataang Pilipino Sa Canada (2003) recognize the challenges of feeling at home in Canada for Filipina/o youths. The youths in their earlier study reveal yearnings to return to the Philippines as they engage in home-making practices across borders, maintaining an emotional connection to the people and places that constitute home. Home, they argue, “exceeds Canada in ways that they are successfully mobilizing in order to claim belonging” (ibid., 64). These authors view this form of home-making as a political endeavour that resists the kinds of social exclusions these youths and their parents face in Canada including the alienations of racist education and labour systems. It also, according to these authors, reflects a means for youths to generate coherence to the disarray of their lives across borders (ibid.).

Pratt, a geographer, is concerned with the locational and spatial aspects of these home-making practices vis-à-vis the politics of migration between the Philippines and Canada. I similarly found that the participants I met did not feel at home in the here and now, and that this was a geographically- and relationally-formed sentiment tied to the alienation they experienced

and lack of familiarity they felt to people and places in their everyday lives. But it was also something else: I argue that there was a deeply temporal aspect to their ambivalence about home that was connected to the resurgence of precarity over time, their nostalgia for the past, and their hope for the future. Home-making was not only a practice they engaged in across borders, but a practice they engaged in through the forwards and backwards consideration of their lifetimes.

My participants do not reject the possibility of feeling at-home in Canada. Rather, they lived at the crux of a difficult present situated between the imagined perfection of a nostalgic past and the better future that awaited them—both representing a better life than the present. Many participants I met wanted to make a life and home in Canada and believed it was possible, but struggled, like Pratt et al.'s participants, against the structural forces that shaped their exclusions and emergent forms of precarity. The ambivalence that emerged through competing times, geographies, and valorizations of home was revealed by Vea who expressed that one form of her “happiness” existed in the Philippines among her perfect “normal family,” with another form of her “happiness” laying ahead as she continued earning money, fulfilling her parents’ dreams to attend university, and working to support them in their retirement. Grace similarly hoped to supplement her mother’s income and pay for her siblings’ post-secondary education while she simultaneously longed to be with her father and ailing grandparents who now lived relatively alone in the Philippines. Angel also believed her life lay ahead of her in Canada as she continued to help care for her father and younger siblings alongside her older sister and mother, but in the meantime was uncertain if her present life was better than the one they left behind. These participants’ thick attachments to the future was a driving force that underpinned their living labour, which became a mode to apprehend the harsh realities they continued to face. Part of the art of living, for them, was the belief that a good life was possible because this was precisely how they were able to rationalize their life conditions and, most agonizingly, their grief surrounding their mothers’ absence during their childhoods. Home was thus folded into a complex constellation of lived and imagined kinship relations that concerned mutual forms of well-being across geography *and time*.

Hope was significant in terms of youths’ sense of what was and what could become home. Cultivating a home in a material sense and feeling at home in a sentimental sense was part of what youths envisioned in their life-building projects—what they hoped would come to fruition through their labour and endurance. Philosopher Ernst Bloch (1954) conceptualizes hope as a not-yet-conscious. This not-yet-conscious of hope implies its unknowability, lacking concrete form in its imaginative state. Without a concrete manifestation, hope is also a not-yet-

become or a not-yet-manifested as the future is always impending. It lingers just out of grasp yet is still close enough in the mind's eye to see. Teetering on the edge of the possibilities that hope offers opens up one's world to what could come and, as Bloch argues, counters the closure provoked by uncertainty or despair. It gives us a horizon to dream upon—a not-yet state of a better life that awaits. While nostalgia implies an attachment to an idealized past, hope, in Bloch's sense, implies attachment to the future as “the world is full of propensity towards something, tendency towards something, latency of something, and this intended something means fulfillment of the intending” (ibid.,18).

Hope, Lisa Davidson (2012) writes, is also a means to engage people in governmentality, that is, governing themselves through a structured field of what seems possible (Foucault 1983, 1991). Drawing from a Foucauldian perspective, she argues that “governmentality is tied to a concept of freedom” (2012, 145) where freedom is not any and all possibilities but a specific scope of possibilities that shapes and constrains what choices are available to people. Davidson stresses that although hope can be creatively and continuously recrafted, analyses of hope must go alongside analyses of the power, critically considering the hegemonies of capitalism that propel people forward by enduring and labouring in the present for a future that may be perpetually just out of reach (also see Berlant 2011). For those whom I met, hope was tenacious attachment to the life they *will* have, that “life that is supposed to be for me,” as Veia told us. It is both a neoliberal and capitalist attachment to the sense that money will bring happiness, yet that is not all it is. Veia simultaneously defied this capitalist logic by recognizing its failures in her own life and imagining a (re)turn to something else composed of kinship, company, and companionship. The kind of lives awaiting these youths and their families, I argue, was not only dreamt of but laboured towards in the course of everyday forms of remembering, persisting, hoping, and, at times, resisting. How youths clung to their senses of hope and imaginings of a good life were vital to how they engaged in the art of living, as it enabled them to understand why their mothers left, why life was hard, and that the heartaches, financial challenges, and labour they continued to exude would one day be worth the reward in the form of togetherness and mutual well-being.

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In this chapter, I elucidated the ways in which youths lived in and through the resurgence of precarity amid their changing lives in Canada. I have illustrated how this resurgence of precarity causes them to question and re-envision home through multiple temporalities as they imagined their lives forwards and backwards. Although precarious conditions including financial insecurity, the instability of home, and a lack of food were driving forces to migrate, youths were

often not convinced that life was better in Canada upon arrival. This realization was tied to the continued instability of their housing in Vancouver, their parents' precarious labour, and most poignantly, the lack of time to be together as a family. These emergent struggles were met with youths' strong senses of loss and loneliness that made the present particularly difficult to endure. Confronting these realities caused many of my participants to reexamine what a good life entailed, often coming to valorize family over work and at times wishing for a return to the ways things were in a nostalgic past. Youths also casted their sights forward towards an impending future, representing the possibility that they may feel at-home in Canada one day. Committing to the future was part of the living labour youths performed as they contended with the allure of the past and difficulties in the present.

These findings contribute towards understandings that migrant youths live between homes (Pratt with the Ugnayan Ng Kabataang Pilipino Sa Canada 2003), adding that this *betweenness* is not only relative to borders and geographies but also to time. I have theorized the role of nostalgia and hope vis-à-vis youths' tension-filled narratives to reveal the tug of competing temporalities, the play of their imaginations, and, ultimately, their active engagements in envisioning and labouring towards what they believe will be a better life.

## Chapter 9.

### Sacrifice and Reciprocity: Reimagining care

“I went to pay the bills. And then what else? I go out when my mom asks me to buy this thing, if my brother asks me to return a movie. I don't know. Stuff like that.” Grace told me about a typical day of running errands for her family, which was reflected in the events leading up to this moment. This meeting, along with most of our meetings, was difficult for Grace to schedule, not because she was a gallivanting 19-year-old living life in a big city but because she had a tremendous amount of responsibility as the eldest daughter to a single migrant mother who found it hard to make ends meet: “My mom can't pay all the bills because we're three, right? Single mom and then three children.”

After finally reuniting with her children in Canada just several months prior, Grace's mother was having a difficult time financially. The credentials she earned as a health practitioner in the Philippines were not recognized in Canada and so she continued to work in a low-paying caregiver role.<sup>31</sup> The draw towards Filipina/os entering health care professions emerged from colonial relations when the U.S. encouraged nursing education as it imposed Americanized public health and hospitalization in the Philippines (Choy 2003; Rodriguez 2010). Subsequently, the combined pushed by Philippine governments for labour emigration, the demand for nurses abroad, and labour brokers and private institutions seeking to profit from labour mobility meant that nursing schools were, and continue to be, abundant in the Philippines, producing more graduates than can be employed domestically (Badilla 2016; Choy 2003; Rodriguez 2010). The choice for a nursing graduate may be un- or under-employment in the Philippines or seeking work abroad in receiving countries that face nursing shortage such as Canada, the U.S., the UK, or Australia (Choy 2003; Damasco 2012; Stasiulis and Bakan 2005). In spite of the prospect of remaining under-employed as a nanny or health care aide (Pratt 1999; Stasiulis and Bakan 2005), such a move may offer a family more financial stability through remittances, as was the case with Grace's mother, though she still faced significant financial hardships in Canada. Knowing that

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<sup>31</sup> See Daiva Stasiulis and Abigail Bakan (2005) for more on the labour outcomes of women who entered Canada via the LCP.

their economic precarity threatened her younger siblings' futures, Grace knew she needed to work to ensure the family could pay their rent and utility bills, and that her younger siblings could eventually attend college or university. Having witnessed her mother's anguish over the years, Grace felt the pressing need to also alleviate her mother's stress and fulfill the hopes she had for the children—the hope that their lives would be better than her own.

The weight of the responsibilities Grace carried and her desire to care for her family through difficult times was palpable when we spoke. She carved out time to be with me between her work shifts, attending classes, running errands for her family members, caring for her siblings, studying, and sleeping. Following two of our meetings, she ran to the bank to pay bills for her mother, signalling how she and her mother navigated the daily demands of life together, with Grace taking on much of the household labour. The first time, she rushed off to pay a past-due utility bill for her family's apartment by cashing the pay cheque she just received from work. On the next occasion she graciously took the research honourarium I offered her and immediately went to pay her mother's phone bill before service was disconnected. "Somehow I get to pay all of the phone bills. I get to pay the rent," she told me.

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How does Grace's relationship with her mother and siblings reflect the ways in which relations of care are reconfigured over time as new forms of precarity emerge? What forms does care take in these complex circumstances where migration, gender, and generation intersect? In this chapter, I consider how paid and unpaid labour involved in familial care is not only the struggle of parents who seek better lives for their children, but also the struggle of children who see their parents' happiness as integral to their own. I draw from anthropological literature that considers the relationship between care and precarity, whereby the means to survive through difficult times demand that individuals, families, and neighbours respond through redistributions of labour, reformations of households, reimagining the possible, and self-sacrifice. The findings presented in this chapter emerge according to how the participants in my study imagined and enacted senses of care and reciprocity towards parents as part of recognizing and repaying their parents' sacrifices and building better futures that were contingent on each other's prosperity.

For Filipina/o youths who migrated to Canada and reunited with their mothers after many years apart, youths' narratives of parental "sacrifice" and "happiness" perhaps best capture their desire to reciprocate the care their parents infused into their lives. Many youths I met described

what they considered to be their mothers' suffering during her time working away from home. Their notions of suffering emerged from what they learned of how their mothers gave up sleep, food, and proximity to vital kin to generate the possibility of their children's well-being at home in the Philippines and later upon migrating to Canada. In this chapter I explore youths' understandings of the quality of their mothers' lives and how this knowledge reconfigured their imaginings for their own lives as they engaged in a relational will to care for their parents in return for their sacrifices. Drawing on the stories of Veal, Grace, and several other youths, I follow how they employed discourses of debt and happiness to describe the relations of care they felt towards their parents, and how this informed the ways they took up labour with and for their family members.

Precarity is tied to the reconfiguration of care, whether precarity emerges from the withdrawal of care or is mitigated when care is exerted. As Allison and Piot (2014) suggest, the ways in which precarity emerges not only from precarious work but also from the precarity of life more broadly demands different kinds of responses, including what they suggest are novel forms of work. Arguably it also demands the reconfiguration of social relations including kinship, friendship, and neighbourliness as people labour to care for themselves and others when life has been made fragile. The desire to reciprocate the labour involved in generating a better life was at times referenced by youths as a monetary debt they felt towards their mothers but also a grief-stricken act of love as they came to see their mothers' choices and lives as ones of sacrifice.

There are many examples of reciprocity in kinship whereby interpersonal relationships rely on "complex sets of moral obligations and rights" (Olwig 2007a, 11). Scholars of East Asia often discuss the Confucian value of filial piety where children's respect and care for their parents is a central feature of kinship ideologies and practices (Ikels 2004; Jing 2004; Lieber, Nihira, and Mink 2004; Yan 2016; Zhang 2004). Notions of filial piety and indebtedness have been explored in the context of the Philippines and specifically in the Tagalog tradition. In Tagalog, *utang* refers to debt while *loób* translates to "inside"—what Jeremiah Reyes defines as a "relational will" towards one's *kapwa* or "shared self," "shared identity," "self-in-the-other," or "together with the person" (2015, 149). In their study of transnational relationships among Filipina/o families, Madianou and Miller discuss how *utang na loób* "is generally regarded as a positive trait, and refers to a particular kind of debt (*utang*) that is felt to be deep and interiorised...It also corresponds to a debt that all children owe to their parents for the gift of their birth" (2012, 99). Because *utang na loób* is such a personal feeling of indebtedness, it "is returned 'with interest',

that is more than what is due” (Reyes 2015, 149) and can never fully be repaid (Madianao and Miller 2012, 99).

Scholars of kinship in the Philippines argue that *utang na loób* underpins the ways in which children who live apart from their parents may feel an obligation to abide by them, converse with them, and send money to them if requested (Alipio 2015; Miller and Madianou 2012). Conversely, Reyes identifies the kind of Tagalog values that generate a sense of indebtedness for parents in the form of *kagandahang-loób*, which translates to “beauty-of-will” (2015, 149). According to him, this speaks to “a mother’s love and concern for her child, most especially during the child’s weakness in infancy” (2015, 149). Reyes highlights the mutual care involved in Tagalog kinship values where there is “a circular dynamic between two persons where the one who previously showed *kagandahang-loób* is now the one with *utang-na-loób*, and then vice versa; it continues to alternate and strengthen the relationship in the process” (2015, 149). He stresses that *kapwa* is characterized by these mutually sacrificial bonds. While Madianao and Miller (2012) point to the obligatory responses youths enacted towards their parents’ expectations and requests, my findings point to not just the communicative and financial exchanges, but rather how the relational will to care for one another can become an encompassing force in youths’ lives as they learned how much their mothers’ lives were altered for their sake—evoking sorrow, guilt, and the driving desire to generate the quality life their parents seemed to relinquish for the sake of their children.

Situating youths’ narratives of sacrifice alongside notions of *loób* and *kapwa* helps to make sense of how the impetus to care for another is generated through culturally-specific ethical relations and notions of kinship, as I will further discuss. Though the participants did not use these emic terms to describe their familial relations and obligations to me, scholars of and from the Philippines emphasize the significance of these sentiments in shaping relations, and thus they cannot be ignored in elucidating how youths’ feelings of kinship are shaped by cultural logics (Alipio 2015; Cannell 1999; Kaut 1961; Reyes 2015). Their stories reveal not only how they feel about their families, but how those feelings shape imaginings and actions. At the same time, the forms of care youths engaged in must also be placed according to the specific kinds of precarity that rendered some families unable to purchase enough food, pay rent, or send money home to ailing relatives. Acts of sacrifice and feelings of indebtedness were responses to the ways in which youths and their families lived through precarity, witnessing each other’s hardships and hoping for something better as a kind of destiny that could be manifested through relational forms of labour and care. This witnessing and responding is a facet of youths’ lives that I explored in

previous chapters and will elaborate on more in what follows. What I suggest is that youths' relational will to care for their parents was part of a structure of feeling (Coe 2008; Williams 1977) that was drawn out and amplified amid the insecurity of a precarious life. In other words, the fragility evoked by extraordinary situations draws upon the cultural logics of relatedness and love that inform ethical relations.

In what follows I explore how youths experienced a sense of debt towards their parents that emerged through the recognition of what and how their parents “sacrificed” in order to bring their children to Canada. Drawing from my ethnographic findings, I elucidate the dynamic ways youths engaged in labour in their workplaces and at home *in order to give their parents a better life*. What is significant about these youths' perspectives and actions is the inversion of the typical migration narrative that tends to focus on parents' efforts directed towards their children;<sup>32</sup> as I will show, youths came to orient their lives and labour towards fulfilling their parents' aspirations for what their children would accomplish while also reimagining and remaking their parents' futures. Ultimately I argue that the labouring for and imagining of a better life is not just the work of migrant parents on behalf of their children, but also the work of their children who co-construct the possible and redirect the will to care back to their parents as they age.

### **Forms of life and narratives of sacrifice**

Parreñas (2005a) examines how discourses pertaining to sacrifice circulate in the Philippines as a means to make sense of mothers' departures. The state, Parreñas argues, perpetuates a dominant understanding that women's primary role is to care for their families, yet caring for children can be particularly difficult when local economic conditions make it nearly impossible to earn enough money. Mothers thus struggle to perform their roles as carers without the financial means to make ends meet. Moving abroad, Parreñas finds, is one way mothers fulfill their roles, but then they also face the stigma of being physically absent in their children's lives. Discourses of motherly sacrifice for children and the nation become a way to make sense of mothers' decisions to move abroad and suggest that in doing so they are still performing care (Alipio 2015; Parreñas 2005a; Rodriguez 2010).

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<sup>32</sup> For example, see research by Deborah Boehm (2008).

As Parreñas (2005a) and Alipio (2015) find, children are often aware of their mothers' struggles while working away from the family, rationalizing their mothers' difficult experiences as sacrifices for the family. The adult children in Parreñas' study (2005) and the younger children Alipio's research (2015) often sought to repay their mothers' sacrifices through fulfilling education and financial opportunities that resulted from the remittances. For many of Parreñas' participants (2005a, 107-116), this meant studying harder at school to build their human capital. For Alipio's participants (2015), this often meant being careful in how they spent and saved what their parents remitted. Alipio (2015) observes how a Philippine NGO that aims to encourage children to save their remittances draws on sentiments of *hiya* or shame, which can powerfully instil fear among those who do not meet their obligations to reciprocate gifts. Pratt (2012) and Jenny Edkins (2003) argue that these sentiments of reciprocity tied to the gendered expectations of mothers can also distract from the structural violence that draws families apart in the first place by emphasizing what is gained rather than why such was needed and difficult to obtain.

While this literature points to the ways in which the discourse of parental sacrifice is taken up at state and familial levels to justify the relocation of some mothers, it does not address the ways in which youths come to understand what life is, how it can be sacrificed, and how their lives are intimately linked with others. At the broadest level, the participants I met understood that their mothers moved and worked away from home *for their children*. Mothers worked in order to send remittances home to ensure daily meals, pay the rent, improve the house, and make children's tuition payments. These youths often also understood that their mothers' labour in Canada was part of the requirement to reunite the family and live there permanently. As I explain further, youths came to believe that their mothers sacrificed on a daily basis as they endured the difficulties of: 1) separation from vital kin such as children, spouses, and aging parents; 2) physically demanding work that drew upon and constrained their bodies and freedoms; and 3) going without basic needs such as food and sleep to assure more remittances. I explore each of these sacrifices in turn.

By vital kin I mean the ways in which particular people are seen as a vital part of oneself, whereby lives are inextricably linked through relatedness, reciprocity, and care (Jackson 2013). This interdependency of life is reflected in what I have already discussed as the notion of *kapwa* or, drawing from Reyes' interpretation, "together with the person" (2015, 149). More generally it also speaks to the mutuality of all life as we live together with others as intersubjective beings (Jackson 2013), though how that is understood and enacted is defined by more specific cultural logics. Angel expressed how difficult the initial separation was from her mother as she watched

her youngest sister clutch her mother's hand in an emotional moment of parting. The lack of communication that followed and the lack of freedom Angel's mother experienced while working in Singapore made her life away from the family all the more agonizing. Angel recalled her mother's words: "I can't do this because I need to talk to you guys." Vea also recalled the moment she realized how difficult the separation was for her mother, explaining, "I remember her saying, 'As a mom far away from her children it was the hardest thing a mom can possibly do—leaving your loved ones behind.' That's the thing that really stuck in my mind and at that time I realized that she really loves us." For Vea, living apart from her mother meant living without a vital piece of herself and believed this sentiment was similarly experienced by her mother who she imagined suffering through her separation from family members.

The work mothers did, youths came to realize, was also a means through which mothers sacrificed for their children. Youths often associated the job of caregiving with physically demanding work that burdened and confined their mothers' bodies. The participants often reflected on how their mothers had to maintain people's personal hygiene and move them, which required arduous bodily labour. Josie explained how her mother was also required to clean, which she understood to be a physically taxing job now that she was also doing a similar kind of work. She explained "I came to realize how much my mom suffered a lot to get us here in Canada, to get a brighter future...I never thought that this is a very hard job for my mom." Caring for people, she thought, was also physically taxing since "it would probably break your back." Josie, like many other youths I spoke with, expressed how this kind of job was not desirable—"my mom's suffering so much"—but that it was a means to secure a better life for the children because "she earns the money for our education."

Mothers' lack of basic necessities also signalled to youths how their mothers' quality of life was stripped by a lack of food and sleep. Tiffany explained, "Sometimes she doesn't get any sleep because she's working." Vea and Grace both told me about how their mothers went without food in order to save money. In both cases, the girls were moved to tears as they reflected on the ways in which their mothers endured hunger to save a few more dollars each day. Grace told me how her mother would purchase the most inexpensive meals from the local food court. Knowing her mother was eating so little at the time, she would call her mother to check in about her meals, asking "How are you there? Are you eating enough food?" to make sure she was surviving. Vea similarly knew that her mother only ate minimally—just enough to sustain her energy to work, but nothing more "because she's being thrifty just to prepare our future."

For the youths I met, mothers' sacrifices entailed relinquishing qualities of their own lives for the sake of her children. Unlike work, which according to Arendt (1958) has a beginning and end, youths knew that their mothers laboured in a way that penetrated their well-being as their jobs called upon their bodies through physical tasks as well as challenged their ability to sleep and eat. In other words, participants often believed that their mothers suffered. Scholars are attentive to the ways in which this image of martyr mothers is produced through national narratives tied to Christian and gendered overtones of heroism in the Philippines (Alipio 2015, 231; Parreñas 2005a, 103, Pratt, Johnson, and Banta 2017; Rafael 1997, 273-276). Alipio connects this national narrative of heroism to the need to "do good," linked to Jesus Christ's sacrifice as well as that of the famous Filipino writer and nationalist Jose Rizal, "whose life and death fighting and perishing at the hands of Spanish colonial rulers" is likened to the death of Christ (2015, 231). Alipio argues that this masculine hero narrative has increasingly become feminized in the wake of global labour demands for domestic workers. Because heroism is ideologically tied to the sacrifice of life itself, "the construction of domestic workers as heroes is subject to their suffering" (Parreñas 2005a, 109). While these narratives of maternal suffering are constructed at multiple levels, several youths I met heard about and even witnessed the hardships their mothers faced. So in addition to deconstructing the grand narratives of mothers' sacrifices, we must also make space to hear what youths witnessed because it was these sentimental, intersubjective moments of compassion that considerably shaped their will to cultivate quality lives for their mothers.

Having situated the ways in which youths came to understand their mothers' suffering and sacrifice, I further explore the ways in which youths felt a sense of debt, enacted reciprocity, and reimagined the future in relationship to their parents. In doing so, I discuss how care is reconfigured as youths responded to parents' sacrifices.

### **9.1. Labour as Love: "To make them feel loved by me"**

Vea recently started working at a grocery store deli. It was her first job and she was still adjusting to the responsibility. "I take orders and work the till and stuff, running," she told me, "Yeah, at first it was so very hard because I wasn't used to it. I wasn't used to their jobs, so at first I wasn't really that good, but then as it goes on and on you get used to it." Though she only earned minimum wage, she was piling her money away as she spent nearly nothing from her pay cheques that were automatically deposited into her bank account. She never went to the bank to

check her account or withdraw money—“I don’t even know if they’re putting money in it,” she laughed as we walked around her neighbourhood.

Earning her own money was a new experience for Vea. Growing up in the Philippines with her father and aunts, the adults took care of the finances as they received and spent what her mother remitted. Reflecting on her younger years, Vea felt that she had failed to fully appreciate the value of the remittances, especially now that she had witnessed how hard her mother worked to earn and save each dollar. She admitted that earning money was much more difficult than she imagined as she explained how her job “made me realize—*WOW!*—earning money is so very hard! Whereas in the Philippines I’m just spending money. I just spend, spend, spend, and then I didn’t realize my mom was working much harder there than I am in the store here and I’m just spending what she’s earning for me.”

Vea wanted to take advantage of the opportunity she had to work and save money now: “I just want to earn money at first,” she said, “You have all this fortune to earn money here in Canada, so why not just go for it? When I started working, well it was good. I get to earn money and it made me experience work for in the future. It made me realize that earning money is so very hard. It made me realize lots of things. Like working isn’t just fun, fun, fun, fun; working is pushing yourself to your limits too.” Vea hoped to save enough to finance her university education and not have to rely on her parents, whom she hoped would retire. Saving money to care for herself, she thought, was a way she could alleviate the burden she felt was always placed on her parents. She explained, “I don’t really want my parents to worry about my tuition fee for college or for university, and so I just keep putting it in the bank for times when I need it, like for college.”

Working meant new forms of independence for Vea. “It’s so, so very fulfilling because I have this money already. If I’m in the Philippines I would still be getting money from my mom but right now I have money and I earned it myself” she explained. The work, however, also came with heightened responsibilities, which she struggled with as she attempted to balance the many demands she faced: she felt the pressure to do well in school by attaining high grades to assure her entrance into a university program. She also felt the need to volunteer to earn the credit she required for her high school graduation (though most students can apply their paid working hours to meet this requirement). Finally, she wanted to engage in more social activities because she was often very lonely and longed to make friends. She articulated the double-edge of the responsibilities and freedoms she was experiencing: “Working, I realize that it is hard. It’s hard

being independent cuz when you work you sometimes feel like you are independent cuz you're earning money and then it's where things start to make sense; you start working to earn money and live life and not to be dependent on your parents.”

What little money Veia spent was often put towards small gifts for her parents. “I just want to give them something,” she explained, “They're always giving me things. They don't even buy things for themselves but they give things to me, so what if I try to give you things too because it just feels right to give them back their sacrifices. I know it's just a little thing but they don't believe that I can give them what they've given me.” She did not buy them expensive items, but rather imbued small objects with love and gratitude: “at least it's the thought. It's the thought that counts, right?” Veia's words reflect what Alipio (2015, 232) argues is not the value of the gift itself that matters but the circulation of love, care, and obligation that underpins the exchange. Drawing from Marcel Mauss (1966), Alipio argues that “gifts link people together through the ‘spirit of the gift’” (2015, 243) and that, in the context of the Philippines, people become particularly bonded through the strengthening of *loób* (ibid., 232, also see Ileto 1979, 230). As an example, Veia recently purchased t-shirts for her parents imagining that they could wear the shirts and feel her love. She also frequently reminded them how much she cared for them—“I give them letters and then text them sweet messages,” Veia laughed bashfully and continued, “Yeah. I just love my parents so much. I just want to give them love. *Love*,” she sighed. She explained more about what the t-shirts meant: “Memories are unforgettable but sometimes material things too can be useful. Like they can keep it and then they can see it, not just feel it. They can see it. I put my love in it. So when I'm earning money though my job, it's a way to make them happy and to make them feel loved by me.”



Figure 9 Shipping Boxes for Sale at Pinoy Fiesta Vancouver. Photo by author, 2015

Gifts are a common way transnational Filipina/o family members connect with their loved ones. *Balikbayan* boxes, for example, emerged under the Philippines 1973 labour export program that allowed overseas workers to return with two duty-free, tax-free boxes of gifts (Rodriguez 2010, 81). Bringing *balikbayan* boxes upon return or sending them home through the mail remains a common practice, as I heard through youths' stories and witnessed at local Filipina/o cultural events [Figure 9].

Youths described to me the excitement of opening the boxes and retrieving the *pasalubong* or gifts inside. Julia showed me a photograph of herself, her mother, and her sister packing a large box of gifts for their relatives whom they would soon see on their return trip to the Philippines. She explained what they packed: "Like makeup and then some chocolates cuz they really want chocolates cuz they don't have much of those in the Philippines. And Nutella—it's sooo good! And hot chocolate. And basically food and then soap and those daily needs. And clothes." She stressed the importance of bringing small items because it was necessary to give each person their own gifts. Shrugging her shoulders she explained why giving gifts was important: "It's kind of a tradition to give something to them, so it's always been like that when we go home. My mom just feels that if we don't bring a gift that they will get mad or something. I don't know the reason why we have to bring gifts but that happens *all the time*." Domic similarly reflected on how he anticipated his mother's return to the Philippines during his childhood because "I really, really missed her and *pasalubong*." Like Julia, he explained, "Yeah, that's common in the Philippines when people from another country come back to their family. They would bring lots of gifts."

Parreñas notes how mothers attempt to mitigate the emotional hardship of their displacement by "commodifying love" (2001, 372). These expressions include remittances and gifts as material and mobile enactments of love. Having spent little time with her mother throughout her childhood, Veá frequently reminded herself how "she's still my mom. Ok. She still supplies us with everyday needs." It was not only that her mother commodified her love, but also that Veá learned to read the remittances and gifts as love. Referring to the items she had recently purchased for her parents, Veá explained, "it's not just a t-shirt, it's not about money. I put my love in it to make them happy. So whenever they see it, they can say, 'Oh, Veá bought it for me. She loves me so much that she bought me a t-shirt.'" Veá flips the narrative we so commonly see in remittances literature—instead of only receiving care, nurturance, and gifts from her mother, she longed to return her love in commodified forms and did so by working and purchasing small items to give in return, notably imbued with Veá's love. Even though Veá

reunited with her mother, supplying for each other's material needs through commodified forms remained a pragmatic and spiritual expression of care—a practice that continued in spite of their changed circumstances. It was also a means to reciprocate the ways in which she felt loved by her mother and could now show her mother she loved her too.

## **9.2. Returns: “To go back to the Philippines to make up time”**

Vea struggled seeing her parents work so hard in Canada, especially because she knew they worked with her future in mind. She did not witness or hear about her mother's work until they reunited last year and her father worked far less in the Philippines than he does now. “It's really hard for me to see my parents working, my father working. It's really different then back in the Philippines,” she said. She later continued, “I don't like seeing them working like that. Right now they're really working hard and they're old already and I don't want to see them working as much because they've done a lot of sacrificing already.” Since her parents recently took different shifts on the farm in order to be at home with Vea more, they now rarely see each other. Vea lamented how “I just want them to spend time together.” Yet she was also aware of how precarity impinged their lives in ways that gave her parents few alternatives, as she questioned, “But if they don't work, what is life going to be for us?” The concern for her parents and the burden of the financial pressures the family faced generated a bodily stress for Vea as she pointed to her chest, “It's so affecting me. It's affecting me here.” With her palm flat against the left side of her chest, she continued, “cuz I don't want to see them struggling any more but I know that they're working because of me and because they want me to finish school and achieve the things in the future that I really want to have.”

Just as her parents had laboured for her life, Vea had plans for them as well. She explained, “I'm thinking if they're retired I want them to return to the Philippines because there they can really find real happiness. They've been here for about how many years? —But then I want them to go back to the Philippines to experience the very long time that they weren't with their relatives because they were working for their future and for me.” She then expressed the reciprocity she hoped to offer: “I'm working for their future too. I'll be working for their future too. So it's kind of a mutual relationship. They're preparing for my future and then I'll be preparing for their future too.” She further explained that along with *Ate*, they would work and send remittances home, allowing Mama and Papa to enjoy their retirement. “That's what I'm looking forward to in the future,” Vea told me, “Letting them go again, to go back to the Philippines to make up time with the people that they've missed and bringing back the life they

had. *Ate* and me giving them what they have given us when we were still kids and just reciprocate their sacrifices.” After all the labour that went into bringing the family to Canada for that better life, Vea envisioned the reverse scenario as she imagined sending her parents home to at long last find happiness. To her, a better life was not imagined as upward class mobility, financial security, or a stable home in Canada, but rather was about enjoying time with family. Ironically, fulfilling this good life for her parents meant another separation for Vea—one she was willing to endure for their sake of their well-being.

Sophie also imagined that her mother would one day return to the Philippines, though in this case it was her mother’s idea. Her mother maintained a plot of land in her family’s community and planned to build a house there. Sophie told me: “My mom wants to go back. She’s telling me, ‘Study hard and if you study hard you’re going to have a better future.’” She continued, “So now she’s telling me to study harder to get a better future and then she told us that when I’ve got a lot of money, she’s going to move back to the Philippines and she says me and my brother will just give her money there cuz she doesn’t want to stay here.”

Several participants’ families maintained ownership of property in the Philippines. In these cases it was often not because parents had purchased the land on their own, but rather because they inherited a plot from their families. Occasionally youths also spoke of their parents saving small amounts of money now to eventually buy land or build a home in the Philippines in the future. As Luis A. Francia suggests, “land has always been central to the lives of the rural folk” in the Philippines (2010, 244). With so much land dedicated to large-scale agriculture like cash-cropping, rural people’s ability to obtain and maintain even small plots of land is challenging, Francia notes. Even when the Marcos administration attempted land reform under Martial Law in the 1970s, Francia argues that it largely failed due to its lack of implementation and participation, thus further entrenching those who were landless and ravaging the productivity of larger plots through monoculture and cash crops. Garnering a plot of land not only anchors a family through the security of a place to return to, but also offers the potential to be turned into a subsistence-producing venture. Both of these aims were reflected in the stories told to me by participants—that their parents held on to or wished to purchase land in order to “return” home or to be utilized to support other family members through crop production.

As Olwig (2007a) suggests, situatedness in place—through home and land—can be significant for feeling relatedness and belonging to others, especially for transnational families. According to Olwig, land becomes meaningfully tied to family as it is imbued with the

significance of births, ancestral histories, memories, and claims to belonging. Olwig finds among transnational Caribbean families that rootedness to countries of origin through land ownership combined with upward social mobility attained through education in Europe or North America were values that produced senses of relatedness among family members who did not always live in proximity to one another. In my own research, I find that home and land ownership for youths and their families not only had to the potential to affirm their upward class mobility, but also their ties to kin communities and belonging in the Philippines. Such places were imagined as sites where parents could go to reclaim the lives they sacrificed by labouring in Canada—a quality life and a life at home.



*Figure 10 Land on Mindanao Owned by Julia's Mother. Photo by Julia, 2015*

Following her recent trip to visit her family in a rural part of Mindanao, Julia showed me two photographs of property owned by her mother and her mother's family. The first photograph revealed a dilapidated wooden house with a corrugated tin roof. The surrounding vegetation was overgrown and there were remnants of old construction materials blocking the entrance to the small dwelling. Julia explained that this was the house her mother grew up in, though no one lived there anymore. The property, however, was still owned by her mother's family. The second photograph [Figure 10] captured a large green field that was framed by trees in the background. She explained that this was a plot of land that her mother owned and was holding on to in order to generate income for other family members who continued to live in the Philippines—"She said that she wanted to have something to give to my grandma cuz she's old and she doesn't know

how to keep her money and her land. She bought her own land to have some people work on it and she wants the money to give to her, I think.”

Julia's statements hint to the upward class mobility her family experienced in the Philippines since moving to Canada. After finishing the LCP, Julia's mother began working as a care aide and her father washed cars. Neither of them earned much money based on standards of living in Greater Vancouver, but their class status improved among their families in the Philippines as they were able to send remittances and *pasalubong*, take the occasional return trip, maintain the land Julia's mother owned, and potentially invest in making the land productive. What is significant here is how the small economic capital garnered in Canada as a working-class migrant family translated to more stability and productivity back home. This reflects the argument made by McKay (2007, 2011, 2015) who notes how the subordinate and marginalized treatment experienced by Filipino seaman aboard ships is mitigated as they invest and consume upon return to the Philippines, performing a higher class status for their family members and peers.

Julia revealed how the generational investments in land in the Philippines would eventually get passed down to herself and her sister, since it “would be given to us,” she said. Thus, in spite of her permanent migration to Canada, Julia's mother maintained material and relational ties to her family home in the Philippines as a means to continue to secure her connection to their natal community and harness the upward class mobility her capital could develop there. For Julia's and Sophie's families, land ownership and its potential productivity was a way family members could care for one another financially and maintain a transnational sense of home while still seeking opportunities such as education and employment elsewhere that could potentially benefit future generations.

For Veal, making her parents happy not only meant sending them back to the Philippines and supporting them, but also fulfilling her parents' hopes for her life. Veal understood that her parents laboured and sacrificed to provide her with a particular kind of life—not necessarily one she subscribed or consented to, but an imagined life that she was obliged to fulfill. In order to secure her parents' happiness, she was committed to ensuring her parents witnessed the fruits of their labour in their daughters' lives. Veal's dream was “for them to succeed and for them to see how successful I will be in the future. And we're going to have a better life then. After working so very hard I want them to be relaxed and doing something while me working hard for them. That's what I really want.”

Ahmed argues that the promise of happiness often manifests as a deferral, signalled through utterances such as “I am happy if you are happy” (2010, 91). Ahmed argues, “happiness itself can become a shared object. Or to be more precise, if one person’s happiness is made conditional on another person’s happiness, such that the other person’s happiness comes first, *then the other person’s happiness becomes a shared object*” (ibid., 56). Ahmed speaks of this deferral as what parents often make towards their children as they labour under oppressive neoliberal regimes to ensure their children’s well-being. They live a life lacking certain enjoyable qualities to redirect the possibility of prosperity towards their children. Children thus become a “happy object” upon which parents direct their attention and make their own happiness contingent (ibid.). Yet Ve and Sophie flip both the narrative and action to suggest that children too are engaged in this deferral of happiness that is redirected towards their parents’ futures. They both expressed the will to work for their parents and send their parents home, which, to them, signified how they can return their parents’ labour and live a shared, relationally good life. In what follows, I similarly explore how Grace oriented her life towards the care of mother and younger siblings.

### **9.3. Indebtedness: “I would do anything”**

While some youths desired to send their parents’ home to the Philippines, others were committed to caring for them in Canada. Domic planned to find a job soon and looked forward to gaining work experience and meeting new people. He did not initially mention anything about earning money, but as we walked around his school one weekend afternoon, I asked him what he would do with his first paycheque. He responded, “I would save it just in case I need it. Like if one of my family members needs money.” A few weeks later, he took a photograph of his family’s piggy bank that was actually made of a coconut and painted with the word “Philippines” [Figure 11]. He told me that he, his mother, and his siblings used this item to deposit their extra coins. They would only crack it open when it was full and use the money towards a return trip to the Philippines to visit his aging grandparents.



*Figure 11 Savings. Photo by Domic, 2015*

Josie was already lending money to mother who then sent it to family members in the Philippines. Knowing that her family members were struggling financially, Josie was anticipating what to do next now that she was finished secondary school. Most importantly, she wanted to ease the burden her mother experienced as she explained her sense of indebtedness: “I’m really thankful for my mom for bringing us here to Canada and I don’t know how to repay her.”

The feeling that she had to somehow repay her mother was weighing on her as she experienced the compounded stress of educational and financial pressures. Her grade twelve marks were not high, which she felt compromised her chances of being accepted into a nursing program. In spite of graduating, she knew she needed to enrol in an adult education program to upgrade her marks. Josie expressed dissatisfaction with herself, as she knew her mother was disappointed “because she expects us to be successful through everything but sometimes I don’t try to be successful and I am not even trying to study for the career that I am taking.” I sensed that Josie was not feeling enthusiastic about her future career as a nurse, yet in spite of her hesitation she knew for certain that she wanted to earn money to give to her mother. In particular, she wanted to send her mother on a return trip to the Philippines to visit with her ailing grandparents. Josie also wanted to contribute to the remittances her mother sent back to the Philippines to ensure her grandparents could purchase their medications and receive their hospital treatments.

Grace felt a similar pressure to care for family members in Canada and the Philippines while trying to work and attend school. With her secondary school and college credentials not recognized in Canada, she was busy upgrading her grade twelve courses in the evenings while working full time during the day. Finding it difficult to earn enough money, she worked as much as she could at the fast food restaurant and was looking for another part-time job. While Grace enjoyed the autonomy of earning her own money, she found it difficult to save since she had to

supplement her mother's income to ensure the monthly bills were paid. Grace watched her bank account rise and fall each month as she deposited her paycheque and then withdrew cash for the household. Grace was used to this, as she had once managed the small allowance she received from her mother's remittances and then allocated it to her siblings when they lived in the Philippines. Economic precarity was thus something Grace had always contended with as part of her role in caring for her family. She explained that her financial responsibilities were not an "obligation" but rather part of an implied relationship: "that's what happens when you're Filipino, you're not obliged to give money to your family but then somehow I pay all of the phone bills. I pay the rent."

Grace understood that her mother moved to Canada to secure a better life for her children—a life that would be better than her own in terms of attaining a post-secondary education, entering a stable career, and earning enough money to live comfortably. Grace repeatedly told me about how her mother's family felt that her mother had failed to live up to her potential because she had her first child at such a young age. She went on to explain the impact of her mother's early pregnancy: "I just hate it when my other relatives look down on my mom. They look down on my mom because she hasn't been successful in life. It's just hurting me that behind my mom's back they're making fun of my mom." I asked Grace why her relatives felt that way about her mother, to which she responded, "Well, I think the reason that my mom hasn't been successful is because she became a rebel when her parents separated." Grace's mother insisted, however, that she made the right decisions: "She just says to everyone, 'Just keep talking, but if I were given a chance to have a daughter or not, I'd still choose my daughter.'" Grace paused and then reflected, "And that is *me*. She got pregnant with me and at very young age. That's why she didn't get to be successful." Grace knew the underlying sentiment was that her existence cost her mother the chance at having a better life. She was also frequently reminded not to repeat her mother's poor choices: "Don't do what Mom did—the pregnant thing," was a routine reminder she heard from her relatives. Not getting pregnant at a young age was thus one of Grace's goals, as she explained, "I will not get pregnant like my mom when I am eighteen and I will not have a child like my dad at sixteen. So that was very well planned."

Grace's future was imagined for her and by her as one that improved upon her mother's actions and would be gauged by the choices she would make to focus on her education and career. Like Grace, Sophie similarly felt that she was obliged to succeed in school as part of repaying what she owed her mother for her sacrifices. She showed me a drawing in her research journal of a school building with a raised Canadian flag. Sophie explained, "School is important

to me and other people. I always dreamed to finish school and get a good education and work in the future. I promised my mom that I would study hard.” Sophie’s mother was a promising student, excelling in mathematics and eventually attaining a college degree as a teacher in the Philippines. Like Rodel’s and Angel’s mothers, the salary was not enough to support her young family. Sophie’s mother then turned to caregiving first in China and then subsequently in Canada, while Sophie’s father took contracts working in the Middle East.

Already aware of how important a college education was to her family, Sophie witnessed her mother’s anguish last year when she learned she would need to upgrade her education in order to continue her new career in the medical field. “She’s crying because here she has to upgrade,” Sophie explained of her mother’s situation, “You have to upgrade to get better work. So, the only thing is money again to pay for it. So it’s hard.” Sophie expressed sentiments that were similar to Grace’s, whereby she needed to accomplish in life what her mother could not: “Mom wanted us to get a good education because her dream didn’t come true. So she wants our dreams to be on the right track.” She continued, “I don’t want my mom saying, ‘I don’t want you to be like me.’ My mom says that. Just like her.” Sophie’s and Grace’s better lives were measured against what their mothers could not attain—an improvement from one generation to the next.

Not repeating the errors and misfortunes of mothers’ lives was a common narrative among the youths I spoke with, as if their mothers’ personal circumstances and choices were to blame for their precarity. Not only was Grace frequently told not to repeat her mother’s early pregnancy but, in the process, was also reminded that she was the cause of mother’s misfortunes. Grace’s mother’s life thus became a sacrificial one not only because she was indebted to care for her child, but also because she had failed to live up to her family’s expectations. Perpetuating the stigma that Grace’s mother was failing the family, she was also unable to send money home to the Philippines for several months, which contravened the common expectation that overseas family members will send remittances home. Grace knew this bred more tension in the family and impacted her grandparents’ health, as she explained, “there’s this one day when I called my grandpa and he was dividing his medicine into two to save money because he can’t buy his medicine. All I can do at that time is just cry. I just feel sorry and I don’t want that anymore.” She then expressed her desire to send money to her grandparents, not only to ensure their well-being but to also save her mother from the added grief of not meeting their needs. Grace felt indebted not only to her sacrificial mother, but to those for whom her mother could not provide care.

Grace felt the pressure of time weighing on her as she hoped to finish her studies and embark on her career as a nurse before her siblings completed secondary school. She explained the urgency: “I have plans for my siblings. Like, I must finish studying very, very early so that I can help my mom with her bills.” She went on to explain, “I just want to finish my studies so that I can give my mom and my siblings a better life. That’s just what I want. I just don’t want my sibling to work hard, like at a very young age they’re going to work hard for their studies. I don’t want that to happen to them. So if I can finish my studies before they go to college that would be really perfect for me so I can help them with their college life.” Caring for her siblings in this way would allow them to gain the human capital of a university education and alleviate some of her mother’s financial burdens. Grace’s desire to take on this caring responsibility was also amplified by witnessing her mother’s anguish: “At night when my mom is checking her bills, it’s hard for me, it’s hard for me to just listen to her mumbles, to her stories that she owes the bank this amount. She can’t pay this bill. It’s just hard to listen. Like if I can do anything about that, I would do *anything*. So now I’m helping her, just the help that I can give to her.” Grace’s sense of urgency to work and care for her family emerged through a “relational will” (Reyes 2015, 149) towards her family members as part of her sense of relatedness and obligation. This relational will took particular form in response to a complex set of circumstances concerning the nature of Grace’s birth, her mother’s sacrificial labour, unmet expectations that circulated in the family, and now their economic precarity that impinged the potential for her siblings to attend university and ascertain the good life Grace’s mother hoped for them.

The effort Grace’s mother invested into building a better life for her children in Canada was in many ways not a better life for Grace. A good life meant seeing her mother relieved of the financial pressures she faced each day, as well as relieved of the burden and stigma she faced from her family in the Philippines—hardships she endured because she chose to give birth to Grace, so she was told. For Grace, a good life also meant seeing her younger siblings thrive in university and not have to face the same hardships that punctuated her difficult journey through this world. In the end, her happiness, Grace said, was dependent on making her mother proud and holding her family together: “I think just seeing my mom happy or that she’s proud of me, I think that’s more than enough for me.” She added, “And then my siblings, at the end of the night when I get home from work they’re waiting for me at home and they’re like, ‘We’re waiting for you for dinner.’ You know? And that’s just enough for me.”

## Reformations of care and reciprocated imaginings

The kinds of futures these youths imagined for themselves were inseparable from their relational will towards their parents. Just as their parents made the decision to move to Canada to work for their children's better futures, their children felt indebted to reciprocate those sacrifices and dedicated their own labour towards those efforts. But what did a better life mean? Ultimately a better life depended on what aspects of life youths felt brought a heightened sense of well-being, based on their own lived experiences of very different contexts. Though one might argue that parents are better situated to know the kinds of qualities that make life good, arguably these young people also consciously and critically reflected on their worlds to define what a good life could entail—often differently from their parents. While parents tended to value educations, careers, and financial stability, youths longed for enjoyment, kinship, and senses of a familiar and stable home. These were not a selfish longing of escapism, but rather something youths hoped their parents would obtain as the result of their lifetimes of labour and sacrifice. The good life, in these senses, were not unidirectionally oriented towards the destination country of Canada, nor directed only from parents towards their children. Rather, notions of a good life were co-constructed across generations, circulated between parents and children who differentially witnessed each other's struggles, and were reimagined by what different families and family members thought was possible.

These narratives signify how care and imagination circulate among kin. Tagalog understandings of intersubjectivity are important for comprehending the relationality that drives the desire to care for one another in such sacrificial ways—what scholars of the Philippines have discussed as *loób* and *kapwa*. Reyes (2015) points out that when *loób* is translated to “inside” it is often then taken as a bifurcation of inside/outside. He argues that this is a misreading since the Tagalog concept does not distinguish between oneself and the outer world: “*loób* is not a disembodied, subjective view of the self, such as in Descartes, but it is a will always directed towards something, especially towards other people” (ibid., 154). *Loób* thus comes to represent the intersubjective will to care generated through intimate connections between one and one's other. Both Veá and Grace expressed their relational will to care for their parents because their mothers' pain became their own, something I could visibly see them grapple with as we sat, talked, and wiped away the tears. The pain they felt for their mothers was palpable in their words and bodies. Veá and Grace did not just express indebtedness to their mothers because it was a value they felt obliged to uphold, but because the will to care was amplified through their knowledge that the sustenance that made their comforts of home and family possible was

transmitted by their mothers—“just to make us live,” as Vea put it. They *lived* because their mothers laboured and now they felt it was their turn to do the work. Like Al-Mohammad (2012) argues of his friend Jabar whose life depended on others for survival, the kind of lives these youths led and hoped to lead were never isolated from vital kin, but rather the quality of one life was relational and contingent upon the quality of another—those whom they considered vital to their happiness and well-being.

While *loób* and *kapwa* may inform the will to care, how care is performed and towards what end must be situated in what youths believe is possible to attain. Sherry Ortner argues that action is always shaped by context, where “every culture, every subculture, every historical moment, constructs its own form of agency, its own mode of enacting the process of reflecting on the self and the world and of acting simultaneously within and upon what one finds there” (2006, 57). This follows Laura Ahearn’s argument that “all action is socioculturally mediated, both in its production and in its interpretation” (2001, 112). De León (2015, 40) widens the frame by asking us to also consider broader environmental contexts that are entangled in action. In this sense, how youths responded with care towards their parents and reimagine their worlds emerged out of what they thought they could do and what came to be to remedy the difficulties they and their parents faced. For Vea it meant holding down two part-time jobs in customer service to save for college. It also meant showing her parents her love through small gifts that materialized her affection and gratitude. It also meant imagining that her parents would no longer have to labour on the farm because they could go back to Philippines to enjoy the life they left behind. For Grace it meant working double shifts at the fast food restaurant and speedily working through her courses before her siblings finished grade twelve. It meant giving her mother whatever money she needed to pay the bills and maintain their rented apartment. It also meant fulfilling her hopes that she would be successful in life so that her mother could be “proud” of her. These were the kinds of pragmatic responses these youths felt they could accomplish to ease their mothers’ suffering. Like Han (2011) suggests for poorer Chilean families, people contend with precarity and work towards “the possible” by actively labouring and caring for loved ones through the impasse of the present. These are the means through which hope is enacted.

Jackson (2007) and Yarris (2014) discuss the ways in which migrants reimagine their worlds and lives through mobility. For Jackson, imaginaries are an “expression of the human condition that everywhere entails a perplexing indeterminacy between our confused longings, imaginings, and desires, on the one hand, and the external world, on the other, that affords us ways and means of realizing these longings and integrating them with the longings of others”

(ibid., 134). Part of Jackson's work concerns the experiences of migrant men who came from Sierra Leon to London. He learned of the tensions they endured as they longed for home, yet believed in the possibilities for their betterment in their destination city. Jackson observes that "it was neither complete success nor complete failure that characterized the lives of the Sierra Leoneans I met in London, but rather compromise—a balance struck between the gains one hoped to make for oneself and one's children and the losses one would sustain in doing so" (ibid., 127). Migration comes with gains and set-backs that are relational, weighed against past experiences and future hopes as well as between implications for one's own life and the lives of those for whom one cares.

Drawing from Jackson (2007), Yarris (2014) explores the worlds of children in transnational Nicaraguan families. She argues that children's migrant imaginaries are different from their parents'; rather than being shaped by the ambiguities and ambivalences that happen upon migration, children experience ambiguities and ambivalences about the forms of care they receive from distant mothers and regarding the prospect of leaving their primary carers, often grandparents, in order to reunite with mothers. Yarris' and Jackson's theorizations of migrant imaginaries are insightful for demonstrating the compromises, ambiguities, and ambivalences that surface through transnational migration, yet maintain a focus on how parents care for their children and, conversely, how children receive and interpret that care. My findings point to something else: a reversal of labour in terms of how children witnessed their parents' difficulties, cared and provided for their parents, and engaged in compromises to make their parents' lives better. In the process, parents and children co-constructed different imaginings of what a good life entailed and laboured towards what they believed was possible not only for themselves but for each other.

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In this chapter, I further drew on the narratives of youths concerning their active contributions towards their parents once they reunited in Canada. In doing so, I have explored the ways youths come to understand and act upon their mothers, believing their mothers suffered and sacrificed in order to secure children's well-being. Though the details of children's knowledge about their mothers' lives may not have been precise, they are telling. The sustenance and freedoms of their lives, youths learned, were generated at their mothers' expense because it was precisely these kinds of qualities that mothers went without while working away from home. This knowledge evoked a sense of debt for youths, as if their mothers' suffering had buffered their

own, and their responses were to repay their mothers emotionally and financially. Through the possibility of their own contributions to the family, youths reimagined their futures where their happiness was contingent on their mothers being happy, proud, retired, and, in some cases, sent home to retrieve a life that was lost.

Youths' knowledge, actions, and imaginings surrounding their parents' lives illuminate what migration scholars have tended to miss. Scholarly attention tends to be anchored in how parents' "motivations to migrate almost always center on children" (Boehm 2008, 780). While this points to how parents contend with global injustices that render their families precarious, I observe how children's lives and motivations are also drawn into these physical, emotional, and imaginative circulations of what a good life entails. I argue that senses of pain, indebtedness, love, and sacrifice circulated in these families as family members confronted the hardships of a fragile life across borders and generations. This draws attention to how youths registered their parents' suffering, sacrifices, and precarity, and responded through the means available to them. This suggests that it is not only parents who centre their lives on their children, but also children who reconfigure their lives in response to the perceived needs of their parents, grandparents, and siblings. It also suggests that a good life is not a shared utopic idea within these families, but rather emerges pragmatically through different perspectives, positions, and imaginings of what is possible for one and one's other.

## Chapter 10.

### The Poetics of Storytelling: Lyrics, prose, and images



*Figure 12 Trees and Sunset. Photo by Vea, 2015*

“The sunset. I really like the sunset. The trees are obstacles to seeing the sunset well. This is how my life works; there are many obstacles to seeing the beautiful sunset.” — Vea

Vea expressed ambivalence about her life experiences to me repeatedly through the course of our time together, usually trying to find the words to convey her contradictory, shifting, and emergent feelings and experiences. Like many participants, she most enjoyed the photographic elements of this study as she evoked metaphors of sunsets, shoes, withering trees, and cacti to ground her stories in objects and images when words alone were insufficient. As she moved from image to story and back again, I heard and felt her struggle to make sense of what she endured and the kind of life she hoped for herself and her family members. Feeling as though she could not quite find the right words to express something to me, she would blame herself for her story’s incoherence: “I don’t know if I make sense, Jenny” and “I’m really weird. Sorry Jenny.” Through the openness that anthropological listening entails, I would sit with her attentively through this uncertainty, reflecting back her words and affirming her illustrative ways of narrating. As we searched together for the means to tell and hear complex stories, we moved

between words, text, images, and places as layered facets of her attempt to make sense of and give voice to her world.

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Working with Veja and other participants over the course of a year reflected both the possibilities and challenges of a youth-focused approach to ethnography and storytelling. Talking about the complexities of one's life was a tall task for youths who were not used to their stories being the centre of attention. They often struggled to put their experiences into words. This struggle emerged not only because English was not their first language but also because conventional forms of storytelling did not easily capture their ambivalent and contradictory experiences, as Pratt (2010) illustratively reveals elsewhere. What I found through the course of this study was that more sensory-based modes of storytelling were invitations to speak through other means, each time diving deeper into fluctuations of feelings and thoughts about complex lifeworlds. It also allowed the participants to anchor their stories in aspects of their lives that were most relevant to them—often referring to music and relationships with people other than their parents. The complexities of storytelling and voice required a different kind of listening in order to grapple with the fragments, partialities, sharp turns, and uncertainties—what Stevenson calls “anthropological listening” (2014, 2). This kind of listening “makes room for hesitation—a way of listening for that which persistently disrupts the security of what is known for sure” (ibid.).

In this chapter I explore the storytelling methodologies of this project, which included oral, embodied, and visual methods that invited multiple modalities of voice. I also explore the emergent themes of music and poetry that explicate more about youths' experiences of relationships including friendships and love. In terms of voice, I draw from anthropologists such as Veena Das (2007), Liisa Malkki (1996), and Amanda Weidman (2014) who assert that voice is the means through which we express ourselves in relation to personal agency and structural forces. According to Weidman, voice is “both a set of sonic, material, and literary practices shaped by culturally and historically specific moments and a category invoked in discourse about personal agency, cultural authenticity, and political power” (2014, 38). Das (2007) makes the argument that voice is not always clear oral speech but is also constituted by more subtle means of expression in ordinary life. Like Das' attention to voice in moments of silence, Malkki (1996) importantly points to how voices can be hierarchically organized to erase certain knowledges. She urges researchers to be attentive to when and how people want to speak for themselves. These works suggest that human agency, structures of power, and modes of expression beyond text are

integral to theoretically and methodologically working with voice. They also suggest that it is imperative to work with the smaller voices—those ill-attended to, yet that have much to say about structural forces that impact some of their quietest and most intimate moments of the everyday life.

These scholarly insights about voice can lead us to think more critically about the forms voice can take as well as the spaces youths carve and claim for themselves in their effort to make sense of their lives and be heard. In thinking about the multiple modalities of storytelling that youths drew on and the emergent themes that surfaced through sensory methods, I ask: how can we draw our attention to the sonic, material, and literary practices through which voice emerges? How do we listen anthropologically as we follow narrative paths with uncertain destinations? How can an image as a representation beyond words and text stir storytelling and illuminate otherwise ineffable experiences? Lastly, how do we grasp and convey these images—figuratively and metaphorically—when our knowledge production relies so heavily on text?

This chapter explores these questions while illuminating the more emergent themes from youths' stories that extend beyond, but also say much about, transnational family separation and reunification. I focus on the stories youths told me about music, friendships, and love that parallel and help explicate their experiences of migration and family separation through a fuller and more complex account of their lives. As LaBennett demonstrates in her work with youths of migrant and transnational backgrounds in Brooklyn, there is “a hazy divide between play and labor” where “form[s] of play [are] neither idle nor easy” (2011, 9; also see Kelley 1997). As I will show, the youths I met engaged in music and poetry, and relied on friendships and romantic relationships not solely as forms of leisure or play, but also as the means to cope with multiple losses through companionship and creative expression. These outlets reflected the participants' emotional labour of trying to make sense of and find solace in their lives. By taking these participants' “youthful subjectivities” (LaBennett 2011, 25) and dynamic modes of voice seriously—their music and photographs, stories of friendship and love—they tell us more about how they negotiated their transnational lives not only as sons and daughters, but as people whose confront, challenge, and carve out alternatives modes of living.

### **Image and voice**

Some youths talked more easily and openly than others. For several participants, Grace, Angel, and Veal for example, I nodded occasionally, listened carefully, and rarely interjected. They did not need questions to prompt them as words poured until our time together ended. Grace would have to run off to her English class or Veal needed to get to work for her evening shift. The next time we met, they would pick up their stories right where we left off almost seamlessly and bursting with more to tell. In spite of having so much to say, the precise words were sometimes hard to find—at times likely due to some language barriers and at other times reflecting the challenges of articulating an experience. So together we would explore places, images, and memories as each participant tried to piece together fragments and metaphors of what this life was like for them.

For other participants, Rodel, for example, words were fewer and more difficult to find. I asked more questions and received briefer responses, though we should not mistake this for a qualitative difference. Silence, according to Das (2007), is also a powerful reflection of how events come to occupy ordinary moments. As Pratt (2010) argues in her research with Filipina/o-Canadian youths, their sparse responses might require a different kind of listening as we undo expectations for a neoliberally defined chronological personal account. Like McElhinny and her colleagues (2009) suggest, chronological storytelling is often considered part of what makes a story coherent, yet such tellings may not be possible when life circumstances lack clear-cut explanations of why things are the way they are. They argue that coherence is not a property of an individual but rather of situations tied to social structures that may or not make sense *in* one's life. These authors note how "actions, including speech, can be understood as incoherent, contradictory, or poorly articulated, at best, or as deceptive or prevaricating, at worst, when judged from certain hegemonic positions" (ibid., 93).

Listening under such circumstances, Pratt argues, becomes a matter of paying attention to the fragments of stories and seeing those fragments across multiple stories as "a means to build a more coherent community narrative" (2010, 349). Stevenson's call for anthropological listening is particularly useful here, as "this entails taking the uncertain, the confused—that which is not clearly understood—as a legitimate ethnographic object" (2014, 2). Like Pratt's work with Filipina/o-Canadian youths and Stevenson's work with Inuit youths, I also found that my participants expressed themselves through means that did not always conform to a conventional interview. We also veered from the specific thematic paths of the research, especially in the final participatory photography project as the participants decided to tell me about themselves—their music, friendships, and heartbreaks—in other ways. Thus, ethnographic methods and

anthropological listening that are embodied, sonic, and visual invited more dynamic modes of voice for participants when words faltered.

Within a few days of doing a semi-formal interview with a participant, I would transcribe the audio recording, listening again to each word that moved between us captured by the recorder, my fieldnotes, and whatever I could remember. To deepen my record of those moments, I tried to remember the specific details of each utterance: voice intonations, emotions, facial expressions, body posture, and the sometimes-ineffable feelings that circulated between us. I wanted to remember the feeling of hearing—not only the so-called “facts” of people, places, and dates, but the images, both literally and figuratively, of our time together. Images make us feel, perhaps rather imprecisely—which in itself is an illuminating means to grasp complex worlds. As Stevenson writes, “fieldwork in anthropology often occurs in the shadow of discursive certainties—ways of knowing and acting in the world that keep doubt or uncertainty from emerging. [...] Ethnography, as I have come to practice it, entails being attentive to—even opening oneself to—those moments when facts falter (and selves) become, even just slightly, unhinged” (2014, 2). In other words, research processes shift what we think we know and who we think we are, and this was nowhere clearer to me than through processes of storytelling among the participants, between a participant and myself, and in the process of generating the images that both shaped and were shaped by their stories.

Anthropologists have often used images as part of their ethnographic methodology, understanding the ways in which descriptions, drawings, and photographs reveal profound meanings about lifeworlds. Margaret Mead (1930), for example, asked Manus children in her New Guinea study to draw images. The children, however, were unfamiliar with drawing, so Mead showed them how to hold a pencil to paper and illustrate (Francis 2001). Their images revealed what Mead considered to be the absence of animism, countering Jean Piaget’s theory that all children in the preoperational stage of development personify objects and imagine beings in inanimate things. Manus children’s representations of their world, Mead suggests, were far more factual and logical than children’s make-believe worlds that Western psychologists theorized at the time. These drawings, however, did not make it into Mead’s academic work, signifying the lack of perceived value that they had for readers. Though they can be found

elsewhere, it is curious that they were not viewed as empirically significant and worthy of inclusion in her main texts.<sup>33</sup>

Images are more than facts. They are about creativity and its ambivalences, uncertainties, and ineffable reckonings of the world. Or, as Stevenson suggests by drawing from Walter Benjamin, an image “is the precipitate of an experience rather than a factual account of events and physiognomies” (2014, 41). Drawing and photography are common visual methods employed with young people (Clark 2011; Mitchell 2006; Orellana 1999; Stephens 1995b). Photography is a particularly valuable method of conveying the everyday in relation to space and place as photographs capture environments and landscapes that often constitute ordinary life (Orellana 1999). Education scholar Catherine Burke (2008) and sociologist Marisol Clark-Ibáñez (2004) demonstrated how methods involving photography can reveal the ways in which young people critically evaluate their worlds and selectively decide on the kinds of images they want to capture and share. Much like other visual methods, photographs are most telling when participants have the opportunity to describe their meanings, such as through photo-elicitation interviews (Moss 2008; Orellana 1999).

Participatory photography has its roots in the work of Paulo Freire (1979) and Augusto Boal (1979) who utilized cameras with residents of a Peruvian neighbourhood to try to see their worlds through their eyes (Gubrium and Harper 2013, 70). Following this, they provided cameras to the local children to produce participant-driven images of living in impoverished and exploitative conditions (ibid.). Freire and Boal saw the value of participatory photography when the child participants revealed much more meaning in the images than either researcher first interpreted upon looking at them (ibid.). What is significant here is how initial readings of images by an audience, in this case, the researchers, may obscure the intents of the person who produced them. Oral and textual representations alongside images can help elucidate the encoded meaning, allowing for the one who generated the image to maintain control over the visual space and tell his or her story accordingly (Hall 1980).

Nearly two decades after Freire and Boal’s work, Caroline C. Wang and Mary Ann Burris (1997) drew inspiration to craft the photovoice method as they worked on health issues with rural women. They saw the potential to combine images with narratives as a means to turn knowledge produced in research into more comprehensible materials for broader audiences that

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<sup>33</sup> See writing by Elizabeth Chin (2001) for a longer discussion about Mead’s work with children and how it has been archived in the anthropological record.

could potentially impact change (Gubrium and Harper 2013, 70). By presenting photographs and narratives generated by participants to policymakers, for example, voice is transferred out of the more insular domain of academic knowledge and into actualizing decisions and policies that have the potential to benefit communities, though it is important to note that this is a complex and contested endeavor (Kendon, Pain, and Kresby 2007; Leadbeater et al. 2006). In what follows, I explore youths' creative forms of storytelling through embodied, visual, and sonic means, which includes the production of a participatory photography book. More specifically, I focus on their stories about music, poetry, and photographs, which they imbued with metaphors to help themselves and other audiences better understand the complexities of navigating their transnational lives.

### **10.1. Music: “It helps you escape the craziness of life”**

During my first interview with Rodel, we sat somewhat awkwardly across the corner of a large table. I rented a room in the basement of a local service agency—a place that Rodel was familiar with because it offered settlement, employment, and youth services for those who had recently arrived in Vancouver. Unfortunately he was unable to attend their programs because they conflicted with his work and school schedules. The room was quiet and dimly lit by the small rays of sun that made it past the trees outside and into the room. We did not turn the overhead lights on because we both agreed the natural light was better.

Rodel was one participant who often found it more difficult than others to put his experiences into words. He was less comfortable speaking in English than many of the others I met, having only arrived in Vancouver about three months ago. Similarly to several other male participants, he seemed slightly less comfortable in my presence than the girls did likely because of our gender differences and the fact that it disrupted his somewhat tough persona.<sup>34</sup> I was, after all, asking a teenage boy to talk to me about his feelings, and our specific focus on his life seemed to make him somewhat bashful. In spite of these barriers, Rodel was intentional with the stories he chose to share and though his transcripts were not as voluminous as others, he was one of the participants whom I felt I got to know the most based on the kinds of stories he chose to share with me—about his father's passing, his loneliness as a child, and his love of writing and playing music.

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<sup>34</sup> See work by Jane Reeves (2009) for a nuanced discussion about doing research with young men and the ways in which her positionality in terms of gender, age, and class status shaped her interactions.

Rodel seemed to be most at ease when we talked about music. I learned of his passion when we were walking around his school one day and discussing what he liked to do with his friends. He expressly told me he liked walking better than sitting down for an interview—it felt more causal, which I also heard from other participants. As we walked he told me about the rock band that he used to be part of when he lived in the Philippines. He liked songs by Nirvana and Green Day, which was music that punctuated my own teenage years in spite of the fact that I was nearly twice his age. He mimicked the sound of the low, distorted guitar that characterized these bands’ grungy sound—“dj dj dj dj dj.” He pretended to strum imaginary strings as if holding an electric guitar. I knew the sound he was referring to and it was a novel point of connection between us, in spite of our differences in age, gender, geography, and ethnicity. I could see his relief when I told him that I knew of this music well and proved it by making some references to a couple of songs and other similar bands. Realizing that I actually *did* know what he was talking about, he stopped walking for a moment, looked straight into my eyes and said, “Really?” He was, I think, astonished and excited. He then explained how “it’s so trashy for some people but we really like it. They say it’s anti-Christ but I’m Catholic—it’s not anti-Christ, it’s music! It’s how we express ourselves.” I agreed with him.



*Figure 13 Rodel's Acoustic Guitar. Photo by Rodel, 2015*

Music was more than a pastime for Rodel. It was also a deeply emotional connection he had to his late father. He learned to play the guitar from his dad who taught him at a young age how to strum the strings and hold down certain chords by pressing his fingers against the fretboard. His father was a musician and, like Rodel, played in a rock band—something Rodel

told me was looked down upon by his more well-to-do mother's family. Revealing more of the friction he and his father faced with his maternal kin, Rodel told me how "they looked at me like I was my dad. Like I'm bad or something." In spite of the stigma, he found solace in music during those most difficult years. When his father passed away, Rodel kept playing and found himself spending more time with his bandmates who became like his family. "We often skip classes just to play. Yeah, that's it. We're so bad," he laughed.

Later on we were talking more about music and his friendships as we scrolled through the photographs he took of his guitar [Figure 13]. He seemed to be having a hard time telling me precisely what his friends meant to him and how they were so intertwined with his love of music and the time just following his father's death. He then thought of a song he wanted to share with me and pulled his phone out of his pocket. He found the song on YouTube and played it for me over his phone speakers, which were overwhelmed by the sound as they crackled. We listened anyways. The song was in Tagalog and though I could make out some words, I had no idea what it meant. Near the end of the song, he turned down the volume and said, "It's Sponge Cola, a Filipino band." He then started explaining what the vocalist was singing about: "They say everything started at school. All of them were friends. It's like for better or for worse, they're still friends. They're always in the cafeteria, peers, a group of friends. They play guitars and they sing along. They live simple lives. They don't have lots of problems. They don't think about it. Their problem is just money. That's it. Where are those years now?" He went on to explain how the friends in the song grew older and went their separate ways, but still frequently thought of each other and missed those earlier times together. Rodel continued, "The vocalist was missing his friends. It's like when he called the girl, they were together. Personal secrets that they hide, they'll be friends forever. So good. Then they leave one another in college and they follow different paths and they just see each other sometimes but friendship never ends." The song—both its lyrics and its thick, melodic guitar sounds—seemed to capture what Rodel wanted to tell me.

My research assistant Victor was familiar with the song and its connotations. He told me that the song is about a *barkada* and walked me through his translation of the lyrics, which was fairly close to Rodel's version. Writers of Filipino male friendship discuss the formation and significance of *barkadas*, or a group of friends that bond early in life (Andres 1989, Dumont 1992, 1993; Tejon 1986). Jean-Paul Dumont (1993) discusses the origins and gendered nature of the word *barcada*, which refers to boat in Spanish. He notes that during the 1950s it was common for criminally convicted men to be shipped via boat to other parts of the Philippines for

imprisonment. These men, Dumont says, would grow incredibly close during their transportation, becoming a *barkada* that would continue their close friendships even upon their release from prison. According to Dumont, the word then spread through mass media and popular culture into street slang and was taken up to identify youth cultures, especially among young Filipino men. He notes that it continues to carry a mix of positive and negative connotations, sometimes embraced and sometimes rejected as a means to describe the relationship with one's closest friends. In sum, it signifies a relationship that is "usually indestructible for it is based on pure and genuine friendship" (Andres 1989, 156).

I asked Rodel if the song also related to his feelings about migrating, as he referenced the different paths taken by the men in the group. He responded, "Yeah, it relates cuz whenever I listen to it, I want to go back. I want to sing the song again together with them." His loneliness in his new Vancouver home and his longing to return to a place of love and acceptance was palpable when we spoke of his friendships in the Philippines. Reflecting on these relationships, he later wrote these lyrics for the participatory photography book, which were accompanied by photographs of his guitar:

Photos of laughters, Memories of a friend  
You'll always be my brother, until the end  
And no matter how far it is  
I'll never give up on us  
And no matter how hard it may seem  
I'm sure it won't last

We'll get drunk all night and laugh at the stars  
We'll have a walk and begin from the start  
We'll eat a lot and share everything  
We'll watch movies and talk 'bout anything

These were few of the things I wanna do  
With my old friends and also with you  
These were few of the things I miss  
And memories I used to reminisce  
And still, I miss everything about you

Still misses everything about it  
The view of the place, the air we used to breathe  
The places we used to go, the people we used to know  
And misses everything about it still

After all nothing could change what family means to me  
Nothing could change what you really mean to me  
And I thank you for everything

Despite the distance and times changing

I thank you for being an idiot  
and my buddy in many ways  
I thank you for being there for me  
In my ups and darkest days  
I thank you for being a friend  
And I love you always

Rodel's relationship to music has changed since he arrived in Canada. His guitar was one of his most prized possessions. His father gave him his first one, but Rodel sadly had to leave it behind when he moved to Canada because he was unable to transport it with him due to the cost for additional luggage. The fact that it was an electric guitar also meant that he would need his heavy amplifier. He thus went for several months without a means to play music when he first arrived in Canada until his uncle purchased an inexpensive acoustic guitar for him that past Christmas. Though it was not quite the same as his electric guitar, it sufficed, he told me. He now often played alone in the solitude of his room—"It helps me express how I feel. When I'm happy, when I'm upset, I play. I play," he told me. He went on to say that "music is important cuz it helps you escape the craziness of life. It's like if you're bored, you're playing guitar and then that's it."

In spite of enjoying his time alone with his guitar, Rodel also longed to make friends who similarly loved this style of music. Music, he told me, was his means to make friends: "It's like even though I don't know that guy, we battle with our guitars, and it's like 'Yo—that's good! You played good!' And then we're friends, we talk, and then that's it." He hoped to eventually find another group so that they could form a band: "I want to play with a band. We can play in public or in schools and then we can have jams and we can talk about it. And, yeah—build a band," he told me. He often asked me if I knew of any open mic nights happening around town. I searched for some a couple of times on the Internet and asked some of my friends and colleagues, but it was difficult to find ones that were open to minors and that were near his house. In the end, we were sadly unsuccessful at finding a venue for him.

Scholars who work with urban youths have demonstrated the ways in which leisure and labour can collide in everyday life. Historian Robin Kelley coined the term "play-labor" to denote how "the pursuit of leisure, pleasure and creative expression is labor" (1997, 45). Kelley (1997) and LaBennett (2011) demonstrate how urban youths of colour who lack resources such as money and jobs often engage in forms of leisure that also have the potential to generate an income.

Kelley observes this among child performers who danced or sang for street audiences. LaBennett similarly discusses this form of work among urban youths in New York subways. It is interesting to also consider how forms of leisure may be also intertwined with living labour. Rodel's story of playing his guitar and spending time with bandmates illustrates how his preferred form of leisure was also his means of coping with the loss of his father and loneliness at home. Without kin in his immediate and everyday life, he formulated a tightly knit group of peers who became his closest confidantes, his *barkada*. This observation extends Kelley's concept of play-labour to the realm of living labour as youths grappled with the hardships of living apart from family members, the uncertainty of impending migrations, and finding the creative means to express their frustrations and ambivalences about life. By contextualizing Rodel's musical preferences and friendships—his “badness”—within the longer trajectory of his losses and loneliness, perhaps there is more room to appreciate his creative perseverance.

## **10.2. Connections: “We just sing along and then we’re so happy”**

Similarly to Rodel, Vea also loved playing music. I did not know about this interest and talent of hers until our third interview. She did not mention it before nor had I asked, but as we scrolled through the photographs she had taken for the study, her numerous images of her acoustic guitar [Figure 14] gave rise to a new conversation and more stories of her relationships to family members near and far. As we talked about music and her guitar, tears crept into the corners of her eyes, as they often did, because this conversation arose bittersweet memories and reflected her relationships with her mother, sister, aunts, and friends. Like most times, talking about her life revealed ambivalent emotions of both joy and sadness, and music was another space where she sought to express these tensions and contradictions.

She arrived in Canada less than a year before I met her and was on the cusp of finishing high school, though she had already graduated and started college in the Philippines prior to moving. Her initial excitement to be in Canada had passed and she was starting to question the optimism that had initially propelled her here. Now that she was back in high school, working part time, and trying to prepare her college applications, the future was murkier. This uncertainty seemed to be chipping away at her as she became increasingly pessimistic over the time I knew her and as her graduation inched closer. The very little time she spent with her busily working parents was also disappointing to her, and most of the time she was immensely lonely as she missed the bustle of *Tita's* house and the intimacy of her closest friendships in the Philippines.



Figure 14 *Vea's Guitar*. Photo by *Vea*, 2015

Music was something that routinely brought Vea's family together. "My mom and my sister and I play the guitar," Vea told me. "My mom didn't have any actual education in guitar. She just learned by herself. And it's so amazing that *Ate* plays the guitar and that was the start of me playing the guitar. When I was in the Philippines, I used to play with my sister even though—yeah, we play even though we don't sing well. It's so fun." With her sister now living in the Middle East, Vea clung to these memories of the time they spent together. Looking at the photographs of her guitar, the object extended beyond itself by evoking recollections of the past and emphasizing absences in the present. She expressed how "I bonded with my sister and it just brings back memories. And I don't get to see her until—I don't know when, but I last saw her a year ago—ah, two years ago," she corrected herself. Her story about playing the guitar quickly shifted into recounting her time apart from her sister and how she longed to see her again: "And I so miss the times when we played the guitar together, when we don't care whoever hears it and then here comes my aunt and we sing altogether. And then if *Kuya* is home, like if he's not working at sea, he can come with us. And then—I don't know. We just sing along and then we're so happy. I just felt so happy. Guitar is one of the things that I love. I used to play it a lot. So, it's a one representation of me."

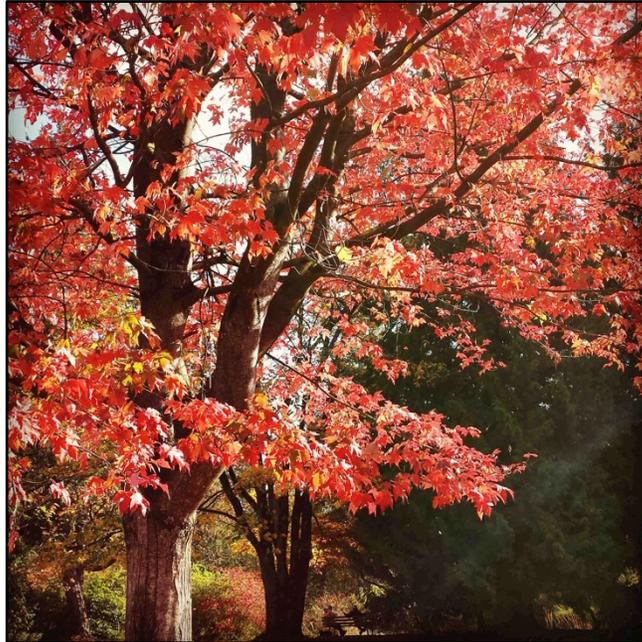
Vea's sentiments about her guitar reflected an ambivalence of simultaneously missing *Ate* and *Kuya* as well as rekindling her relationship with her mother. Since coming to Canada, Vea and her mother drew on their shared talent to catalyze their relationship—"We play a lot," she told me. Vea lightheartedly reflected on their different tastes in music and how they

reconciled that by playing music of different genres. “We compromise. I play country for her and then she’ll sing along with me to Pink. And then I just love them. I just love guitar cuz it connects us three. Yeah. It’s the most significant symbol that connects us three. And my dad, well, he doesn’t play anything but I still love him. I still love him so very much.” Her father did not play the guitar, but he occasionally danced to their music. Vea laughed as she thought of a recent memory of her father’s dancing—“Papa! Stop it! Just come sing with us,” she exclaimed as she mimicked the moment. Like Rodel with his father, music provided the means for Vea to connect with her loved ones, express her feelings, and to feel *like herself*.

Though playing guitar helped to connect Vea and her mother, she had a difficult time incorporating music into her social life, as she was afraid of judgment by her classmates. She refused to play publically. Vea used to play guitar with her friends in the Philippines, describing how she regularly showed off her talent at school. Proud of what set her apart and allowed her to take centre stage, she explained, “In the Philippines at school, it’s usually my symbol cuz they know that I do play guitar and so whenever I bring my guitar, me and my classmates play together and I just miss those times with my friends and my classmates and then bonding together. Yeah, I just miss Philippines.” At her new Vancouver school many of her classmates played the guitar well, so she did not feel so special and rarely offered to play. Her fear of performing in front of her classmates was amplified by the fact that she felt new and out-of-place: “I just can’t really bring myself up yet. Unlike in the Philippines, they know me so very well and they know what I like. Here, it’s just by a little bit that you introduce yourself, but even a little bit is sometimes so very hard to introduce yourself once again. Like getting to know people again. So, I don’t play so much guitar here.” Her sense of having something special to offer her peers dimensioned, as she explained, “Maybe they have more education in guitar, so I just back off a little bit and then see how things are going.” I asked her what would help her feel more confident in playing for her peers, to which she responded, “Maybe if they just discovered that I know how to play guitar. But I don’t usually want to introduce myself as, ‘Hey! I’m Vea. I know how to play the guitar!’ because they might say, ‘Oh! I play the guitar and I play the piano too. How does that sound?’” Negotiating when and with whom to play the guitar was something Vea grappled with—playing guitar was a means to creatively connect with her mother but also symbolized the potential to be rejected by her peers. Thus, this leisurely part of her life and something so integral to her sense of identity and creativity was continuously navigated, and at times negated, through her relationships to others.

Vea told me about how she often felt invisible at school. Having been in the same classes as her peers for almost a year, she was astonished when her teacher would return students' papers, calling out Vea's name which would be followed by whispers from classmates: "Who's Vea?" Vea explained how she felt in these instances, "Like Wow! Am I incognito or something?" More recently she found a fairly close group of friends whom she called her "gang." She told me she was reluctant at first to make friends, uncertain if she really wanted to stay in Canada or return home to the Philippines. Realizing that she needed to put in more effort to settle herself in her school she decided to actively seek out a friend group. She described how her gang is mostly Filipina/o and that they hold similar values to herself—focused on school and studying, though open to having fun. In spite of finding a friend group, she did not quite feel like herself amongst her new crowd: "In the Philippines I'm really social," she explained, "I'm a very sociable person back in the Philippines. I just don't know what happened to me here." She described herself as more outgoing in the Philippines, noisy and at times narrowly escaping getting in trouble for talking too much in class. She described herself as a "good girl" with a bit of a rebellious streak, though still very committed to her studies and respectful of her teachers. "I'm very noisy and like all of the things you can say about a negative student," she laughed at herself, "like good girls are bad girls that haven't been caught, they say." Her new friends were similar to how she saw herself and she felt comfortable with them, but she was still trying to find her confidence to once again become her chatty and sociable self. "We have the same attitudes towards how we see everything around us and we have these principles that are the same too and that's how I know that these kids are my gang," she explained.

As Vea formed new friendships at school, she felt her older ones start to drift away. Using the metaphor of a tree losing its leaves in the autumn, she captured a photograph of a maple tree [Figure 15] with its leaves turning bright orange and red just before they dropped for the winter. For the participatory photography book, she wrote about how she felt her relationships in the Philippines were withering away.



*Figure 15 Autumn Tree. Photo by Vea, 2015*

Seasons change. Same with people. By the time you are enjoying the rays of the sun touching your very core, you wouldn't anticipate that with just one whoosh of a breeze from the shore the summer will be over. You will experience the sadness of the withering leaves of a tree in the fall and shiver in the coldness of the wind in the winter. Though after all of this, trees will grow their leaves back and flowers will bloom until you will go back to the same process again.

Experiencing loneliness, hopelessness, and despair of the seasons, I also get to experience the happiness it brings. Even though I experience the feeling of being forgotten by friends that I care so dearly, or fear that I am always left out, or even feel that they have established their own lives and that I am not a part of it, it is still good to know that after all of this struggles, I can be stronger and more mature enough to build a life where I can have people around me again.

You cannot expect that people you care about will stay by your side forever. You need to know that people come and go - that teaches you lessons, but as long as the seasons change, you can have more chances to find people that will become important in your life.

Seasons change. Same with people.

Vea lived with her best friend in the Philippines for about a month before she moved to Canada. In spite of knowing that she would soon leave the country to reunite with her mother in Canada, Vea desperately wanted the experience of starting university and living on her own. She

and her friend moved into a dorm a couple of hours away from her father's and aunts' homes. Reflecting on this time, she reminisced about their independence and constant cravings for fast food late at night. "She's crazy like me," Vea sighed as she thought of her best friend, "like it's so very cliché cuz we always say that best friends are crazy." She then shifted to reflect on how their relationship changed: "She's crazy. She's doing everything for us to be connected in some ways. She applies for a phone plan. Like me—I don't even call her! No, not really. Well that makes me feel bad! She's always doing these things to make me connect with her in some sort of way." Vea and her best friend were not talking as frequently as they used to; she guessed that it had probably been a couple of months since their last phone call. In spite of the temporal gap, they spent hours chatting together when they did talk and during these times it felt as though nothing had changed between them.

Things are not quite as certain with her other friends. "My other friends—I don't know," Vea pondered, "Maybe everything's changed. Maybe—no, not everything but some things have changed. Ah, they've maybe—I'm thinking what if I go back to the Philippines and meet with my gang again, would it be the same? Would they still treat me like the same Vea or have they already created a life without me?" Continuing this line of thought, she said,

I'm just curious and kind of worried too because it's like I'm not alone here but then they spend time together for several months without me and then it makes their bond stronger, whereas for me it kind of drifted away. So I'm worried if I go back to the Philippines what if the bond between me and my friends has already disappeared and it's gone? I hope they still remember me when I get back home. But it won't be the same anymore because, if I think about it, I won't be living in the Philippines any more. I will be establishing my life here in Canada where it's very hard to stay connected.

The conversations—about music and family, and the changing nature of friendships—were ignited through the medium of the visual. The photographic aspects of the project allowed Vea to invite me into the recesses of her memories, family, and social life that otherwise were not so accessible to us in more conventional interviews. Marjorie Faulstich Orellana (1999) argues that children and youths' photography may be bounded by their spatial limitations, and thus researchers should remain critical of what is left out of such images. In my research, however, photography opened up possibilities more than it delimited them. It was the space of the interview that was, in some respects, more restrictive as we relied so heavily on oral storytelling and verbal representations of voice. Images, on the other hand, allowed for representations of spaces and objects that were both of material and metaphorical significance. Thus, in spite of the spatial

limitations these youths faced in their daily lives, their memories and imaginings evoked by the images they captured extended far beyond the precise, literal place depicted through the camera.

Veá's use of imagery to convey her experiences also illuminated the contradictions of her social and familial lives. While much of the migration and reunification literature importantly focuses on migrant children's education and career trajectories (Abada and Lin 2014; Farrales 2016; Farrales and Pratt 2012; Kelly 2014), parenting practices (Qin 2006), and identity formation (Portes and Zhou 1993; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001), little research accounts for the most intimate moments of how these young people and their parents reclaim their relationships after years apart or cherish memories of family members and friends whom they no longer see. For Veá, her guitar not only created a space to reclaim her relationship with her mother, but was also an image that reflects more than its factual existence as it stirred memories and emotions towards other places, people, and times. Its image triggers, as Stevenson argues, "the precipitate of an experience" (2014, 41) beyond itself. The image of the guitar along with withering trees and other metaphors facilitated Veá's voice through a multitude of modes and directions as she explored her life story not only for me, but seemingly for herself in an attempt to think through what her life has so far entailed.

### **10.3. Poetics: Love and its losses**

Leaving the Philippines was bittersweet for so many of the participants in this study. As I have already discussed in chapters seven and eight, a focus on family reunification can obscure other kinds of relationships that are ruptured through the course of migration. As Rodel and Veá have suggested, leaving their closest friends to start anew was not only challenging socially but also deeply impacted their youth subjectivities, splintering their senses of selves according to everything that was familiar. They often told me stories of awkwardly avoiding their friends during the days before they departed in order to skirt around an uncomfortable amount of attention they might have received and the pains of saying good-bye.

Several of the younger participants had little control over the extent of how and to whom they said good-bye. Tiffany and Julia, for example, followed their fathers to family dinners where they had final meals with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins before their departures. Older participants expressed a greater degree of control and, in particular, avoidance in the days leading up to their flights to Canada. Veá, for example, refused to tell her classmates about her impending departure—"I don't want to be the centre of attention or something." So in the end, she said, "I

didn't get the chance to say good-bye to my new friends," including those whom she had recently met in college, "because I really don't want them to know that I'm going to Canada. I wanted to be private and not make a fuss about it." She told them that she wanted to take a short break from school and was not going to enroll in courses the following term. They accepted this explanation until Veal's tricycle driver, the man who regularly took her to and from school, divulged to her friends that she left.

Grace similarly avoided telling her friends precisely when she was leaving. As she swiped through her photo album on her tablet she stopped on an image of herself standing outside the departure doors of the Manila Ninoy Aquino International Airport. She explained, "So this is the picture of an hour before I left the Philippines." She continued to tell me about her discussion with her friends via phone calls in those last few minutes: "After my dad took that picture I started calling all my friends because everyone's texting me, 'Where are you? We're having—' There's a school activity and everyone's just texting me, 'Where are you? We're waiting for you.' And then I started calling them and I'm just like, 'I'm going to leave now.' And then some of my friends just started crying and then I heard someone laughing. Yeah, it's just mixed emotions." Grace explained how one of her friends put his cell phone on speaker mode and yelled to the crowd of classmates: "Okay, now say what you want to say," to which her classmates responded with questions about why she did not attend the event to say good-bye to them. Grace explained how "the truth is I really didn't show up because I think I can't handle the pain, you know? I'm going to leave the Philippines."

Grace paused and then began telling me more deeply about the pains of leaving in that moment. Though her friends were a concern for her, Grace had been most distraught about leaving her boyfriend, with whom she had a tumultuous relationship, explaining, "I'm blaming my ex-boyfriend because really I can't stand the stress, like going to say good-bye to everyone. I didn't get the chance to just say good-bye because I don't have closure with my ex." Grace's difficult relationship with her boyfriend began several months before she left for Canada. Desperate for affection, she explained how "that's the peak of my life when I became so very, very lonely and I have no choice but to entertain the guy that was in front of me. So, 'Okay I'm lonely and you're here, so okay.'" She explained how this boyfriend "used to be my outlet for my problems and then it's just during that time that I felt complete. Yeah, it's just the time I forgot all about my stress, my problems because he's always there. He keeps me company."

The company that her boyfriend provided and newfound sense of joy in having friendships meant that her social life started to turn around as she became less recluse: “I finally slowly started to accept new people in my life. Everyone I meet I’m trying to get inside my life.” She felt herself begin to change, even heal from the heartbreak of her family separation, the turmoil in her parents’ relationship, and her loneliness. Sadly, however, Grace came to learn that her boyfriend and father were much alike: “He left me hanging. I just don’t know where to start.” She then explained her boyfriend’s repeated cheating: “So within the span of seven months, four girls.” She knew about several of the girls along the way, but each time chose to forgive him and tried to carry on the relationship. The last girl, however, was someone whom she knew and it was difficult to bear the pain of that final infidelity. They tried to break off their relationship, but avoiding him was hard for Grace as their lives had become so intertwined: “I saw him every day at school, right? So I didn’t want to go home. I didn’t want to go to school. So there’s a time that I didn’t go to school for like two weeks. Sometimes I just meet new friends and ask them, ‘Can I sleep here?’ So, I really don’t know where I am.” Hurt and disoriented, she ached for a different life, telling me how she begged God to “please send me to Canada! Send me to Canada, please!” I am going to church everyday, answer all my prayers.”

Both Grace’s father and mother connected her difficult romantic relationship with her family life. Early on in the relationship, Grace introduced her boyfriend to her father. His immediate reaction was not positive, as Grace recalled how he told her: “I think he’s going to hurt you.” Reflecting on her father’s reaction, Grace said, “He sensed it. Cuz he’s like, ‘Believe me, we’re the same.’ That’s what my dad said and I just laughed. Yeah, and then that happened.” Grace’s mother similarly blamed Grace’s father for the situation, as Grace explained, “When my mom heard what happened she just cried. And then there’s a time that my dad left, he just packed all his bags and I don’t know. He was so depressed. It’s because my mom told my dad, ‘It’s all your fault! It’s all your fault. Maybe if you weren’t that asshole when you were younger, this wouldn’t happen to your daughter.’ That’s what my mom said.”

As anthropologists note elsewhere, romantic relationships among youths form amid broader conditions that shape gender, sexuality, and life stage transitions. Jennifer Cole (2005), for example, discusses how the impacts of globalization among the youth of Tamatave (Madagascar) are reshaping intimate relationships for young men and women who are unable to enter the workforce and attain stable careers akin to the ideals of the generation prior. Cole shows how intimate relationships are shaped by broader conditions that catalyze senses of commitment, reliance, and love between people. For Grace, her relationship with her boyfriend formed through

her need for affection, attention, and care as she sought to mend her brokenhearted loneliness generated by a global political economy of migration and labour that helped tear her family and sense of security apart. Seeking solace in another, she was devastated when the history between her father and mother repeated itself in her own relationship through her boyfriend's unfaithfulness. In her contribution to the participatory photography book, she dived deeper into the significance of this experience as she critically reflected on how her fears and vulnerability as a child resurfaced. Providing an image [Figure 16] and poem, she wrote:



*Figure 16 Sunset. Photo by Grace, date unknown*

When I was 6, I never let my parents out of my sight  
Never because I was scared of whatever's inside my closet or under my bed  
I was scared that a monster might grab me so tight that I wouldn't be able to run and save myself.

Then I became scared of sleeping while the lights are off, under my pillows and sheets.

Years passed and I grew up.

I was 17 when I looked into the eyes of what I've been scared of  
You said our love was the realest thing ever.

But why wasn't I good enough? Why her?

Is it the way she laughed? Or the way her skin glows under the sun?

Did she make you feel alive more than I ever did?

You said you never meant to hurt me. But my blood were on the floor and the knife was in your hand

I told myself you were never worth it but I cried ocean for you

I still tried running after you but you didn't stop walking away from me

I just want to take back what's mine.

How dare you steal my soul and take everything from me  
I wasn't afraid of losing you, I was afraid of losing myself.  
Now my voice keeps quivering as I'm talking and trying my best not to cry for you had  
drained me.  
I'm empty.  
Locking myself in a dark room, crying myself out under my pillows and sheets so nobody  
can hear me

Then I realize, the monster already got me.  
He grabbed me so tight that I forgot how to breathe.  
All this time, the monster I've been scared of has just been fooling me around  
And disguising himself with brown eyes like my soulmate.  
I finally gave up, dropped my fake smile as a tear ran down my cheek  
For I know there's more monsters coming after me.

As a young child Grace relied on the security and safety of her parents to protect her from the monster beneath her bed. Years later, however, she found herself utterly alone amidst the disbanding of her family and the hurt that penetrated so many of her closest relationships. The pain she narrated through her poem is not only the pain of heartbreak caused by her ex-boyfriend but also of the insecurity and desperation she felt for care and companionship during her loneliest and most uncertain times apart from her parents.

Monsters, David D. Gilmore notes, are figures that are often in opposition to and call forth the need for heroes—a “hero’s constant and inevitable foil” (2009, 11). Gilmore goes on to suggest “the monster is a metaphor for all that must be repudiated by the human spirit. It embodies the existential threat to human life, the chaos, atavism, and negativism that symbolizes destructiveness and all other obstacles to order and progress, all that which defeats, destroys, draws back, undermines, subverts the human project” (ibid., 12). Monsters tend to live in the borderlands—places that are less desired and occupied by humans such as underground or, in Grace’s case, under the bed. The general monster cycle, according to Gilmore, goes as follows: the monster emerges from whatever dark and destitute place it lives in, and then it causes destruction, which is followed by some heroic event and the reformation of community in collaboration against the monster. Monsters are common in many cultural contexts where myths are focused on the uncertainty and threat to an ordered life and ways of containing those threats through heroism and community. The *aswang* is a common shapeshifting monster, usually depicted as female, in Philippine mythology (Nadeau 2011; Ramos 1969). Though the *aswang* takes on different regional names, shapes, and meanings, they are generally thought to live among people, like people, but at night transform into a kind of animal monster (ibid.). These animal

monsters are said to eat infants or children and are thus sometimes evoked by parents in order to manage children's behaviour through fear (ibid.).

Imagining a monster beneath her bed as a six-year-old child revealed the ways in which Grace felt the fragility of her life and depended on her parents for their security and care. Evoking notions of heroism that, according to national discourses, encompasses the hegemonic masculinity of a father and selflessness of a mother, Grace felt safe from uncertain threats through her parents' presence and their formation of a more secure family unit and home. However, their heroism and her sense of familial protection was starkly challenged when her mother moved away, her father became unavailable, and she was left to live alone and fend for herself. She later felt captured then fooled by her boyfriend whom she likens to the monster in her poem. The disenchantment of her parents' ability to protect and save her left her feeling vulnerable—"For I know there's more monsters coming after me," revealing a sense of hopelessness in the prospect of a safe and fulfilling kind of love and family life. Furthermore, the haunting pain that Grace's ex-boyfriend inflicted on her consumed her social life more broadly. She was unable to face the emotionality of parting from friends and classmates, and thus neglected to say good-bye to them at all, something she later regretted. Explaining her remorse, she said, "Sometimes I think that if I wasn't so immature at that time—like I have problems with my boyfriend and not with everything else, so you know, it's just not right. Because until now everyone's bringing up the issue that I didn't say good-bye."

Returning to Rodel's story, he accepted the fact that he was leaving—"I have no choice," he said—and made the most of his time with his friends as he carried on as normally as possible. He told me, "I was just relaxed or something. I was not excited. I was just like, 'I will miss you guys.' That's it. Then we just hung out together." In addition to leaving his closest friendships, what was most difficult for Rodel was saying good-bye to his girlfriend whom he had grown close to in the months he spent living alone following his father's death. She occupied much of his thoughts, which he poured into his songwriting and poetry. He contributed the following song lyrics about his relationship with her to the participatory photography book:

Pieces of me and pieces of you:  
As I open up my eyes I see you there  
Asking why you have to go away  
And I'm staring at the ceiling in the darkness of my room  
Wondering why you're so far away  
I know we're miles apart  
and your love is all that I had

Chorus:

As I turn out the lights off into my room  
Thinking about me being with you  
And my heart is torn into  
Pieces of me and pieces of you

Rodel's life was punctuated by absences and ruptured relationships: first with his mother leaving, and then with his father passing away. These events were followed by the rupture of relationships with his bandmates and closest friends, and moving far away from his girlfriend. It was this latter piece about his girlfriend that he spoke of the least to me but I could tell through our other interactions that she was always in on his mind. It was as if speaking about her was too hard, too painful to articulate because he missed her the most. He wanted to include her initials alongside the song he wrote for her to indicate that it was for her. I had to remove the initials for the sake of confidentiality. I could see his disappointment when I told him about this and wondered if this signified to him yet another denial of who he was, and a failure to give space to what he wanted to say and do about his own life.

Nonetheless, when Rodel received the printed participatory photography book his sense of excitement and pride could not be contained. As we stood outside his house on a freezing cold December day, he immediately pulled the book out from its plastic cover and flipped to his two-page contribution. He read each of his pieces intently, word-for-word, in spite of the fact that he already knew what they said. Beaming with a smile, he looked at me and said, "Thank you" as he tucked the book carefully back into the plastic wrapper. Though those two pages were rather small, I think that for him they were quite large in terms of what he chose to say within them.

### **Claimed spaces and creative voices**

In this chapter, I have examined how voice and storytelling unfolded through the course of the study. Though I often relied on interviews and more casual conversations, I was also open to the more dynamic methods through which participants could express themselves. These sensory methods included embodied experiences of walking through their neighbourhoods, sonic methods of listening to music, and visual methods of taking, looking at, and interpreting photographs. Through the course of youths' storytelling, these methods also illuminated more emergent themes that I had failed to adequately consider and ask about earlier in the study. These

themes, as I have explored here, included music and guitar, poetry and prose, and friendships and love relationships. What they revealed was quite different from the forms of precarity youths experience elsewhere. Allison (2013), for example, focuses on the loneliness, reclusion, solitude, and suicidality of Japanese youths who have been disenfranchised from work opportunities, home ownership, and the prospect of having a family amid their country's challenged economy. She finds that these youths seek comfort in commodified forms of sociality such as Internet and pet cafes because their social isolation repudiates a livable life. Among my participants, the precarity that they experienced did not result from social disenfranchisement in their local and everyday lives, but rather emerged from a labour-migration nexus that challenged their families' capacity to survive locally and then pulled their families apart. These youths' social lives in the Philippines, however, were fortified in the meantime by their will to live amid other significant relations—to enjoy life with friends, romantic partners, cousins, and bandmates. What was also precarious was the ways in which these modes of surviving, of performing living labour through social bonds, were ruptured once again by the labour-migration nexus that called them, eventually, to Canada.

What is interesting here is how voice takes shape in emergent spaces. By emergent spaces I am referring to the sensory spaces of walking, talking, listening, drawing, and photographing within the study but also the claimed spaces in youths' everyday lives where they find creative means to engage with significant others and express themselves without necessarily needing to tell a coherent or complete story. What this chapter suggests is that youth-focused research can benefit greatly from what Thomson refers to as “claimed/created” spaces, which allow youths to gain greater control not only over the outcomes of a research study, but over the kinds of stories and themes that most concern them. Drawing from Andrea Cornwall (2004), Thomson defines created/claimed spaces as “spaces [that] are ‘organic’ in nature, difficult to plan and are the most difficult to achieve. For while closed and invited spaces are directed by the researcher, this third space requires participants to engage with and, as labelled, claim the space for themselves” (2007, 210). These kinds of research approaches are intended to be participatory in that they are largely participant-driven and reduce, to some degree, the power imbalance between (adult) researchers and (younger) participants. My findings extend this inquiry not only into the kinds of claimed/created spaces in research but also the spaces youths create and claim for themselves in their everyday lives through music, poetry, and imagery in an attempt to make sense of their lives, express their ambivalences, and cope with hardships. Making music, building friendships, and even falling in love are not only leisurely activities but also forms of living labour intimately tied to familial ruptures, uncertain futures, and the desire for companionship.

The participatory photography phase of this study was a complex space that was, as it turned out, quite a claimed space. Though I, the researcher, created the space, participants claimed it by defining their own forms of engagement in ways that were unexpected, telling us about cheating boyfriends, hanging out with bandmates, and insecurities about friendships. The notion of claimed/created spaces not only enables us to critically think through how the participants engaged in the study and what they made of the study, but also what they revealed about their own transnational and local lives. Rodel turned to music and his *barkada* following the passing of his father in the Philippines. Seeking to cope with his new and uncomfortable life in Vancouver, he found solace with his guitar in his bedroom writing love songs to his distant girlfriend. Vea drew on her and her mother's shared love of the guitar to bond after a decade and half apart. At the same time, she struggled with where and when to play for her peers who were unfamiliar with that part of her identity and failed to fully recognize Vea. Her guitar also represented the painful realization of never quite knowing if and when she would see her sister again—her childhood musical companion. Grace told us of her fears as a child and her desire for company and protection through the poetic metaphor of monsters under her bed in a bid to explain the parallels of her fractured family and love life. These youths' realms of "leisure" and their use of photographic, lyrical, and poetic means reveal layers of memories, emotions, and desires that seemed to escape coherent narratives. By claiming the space of the camera, our time together, and participatory photography book, they revealed the spaces they have claimed for themselves—as musicians, poets, artists, lovers, and friends.

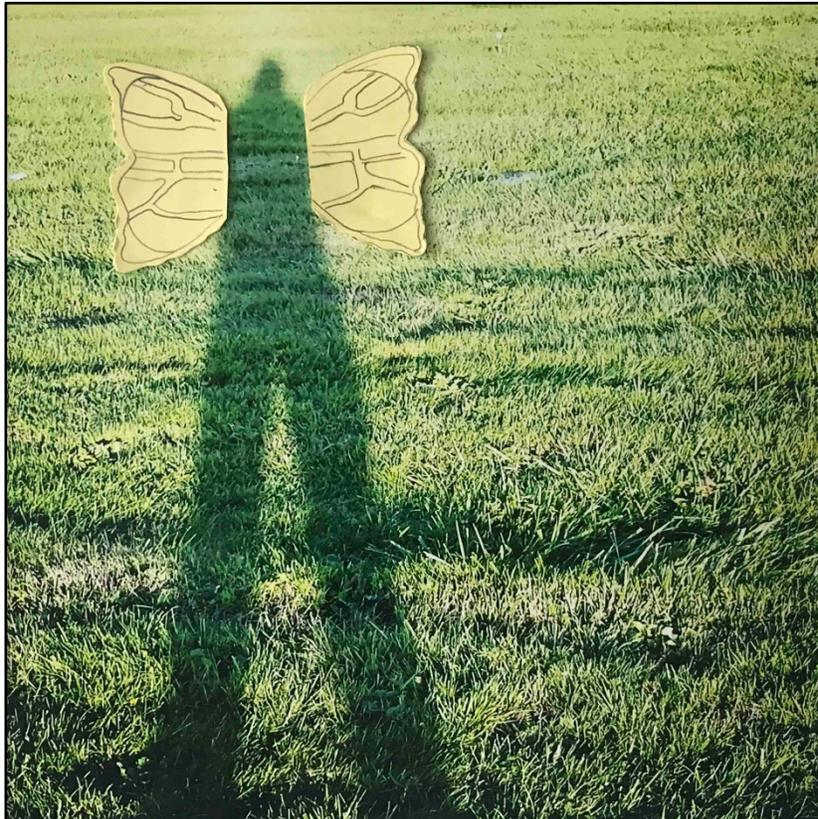
As I have discussed, it is not just a matter of including youths' voices in research but also asking questions about the means through which these young people express themselves in ordinary life. It is also a matter of paying close attention to youthful subjectivities, as LaBennett (2011, 25) suggests, that may include what is otherwise ill-attended to in adult-centric research—how young people engage in popular culture and with their peers in ways that are meaningful to them, yet are so often bypassed by adults in their lives. These emergent themes not only reveal the complexity of their social lives but also the pains of displacement beyond the scope of the nuclear family. They reveal the living labour the goes into coping with the stress of loss and holding relationships together over time and distance.

Because this chapter focuses on more emergent themes in the research, it adds another nuanced avenue stemming out of my original inquiry into family and migration. Though I never perceived the themes presented in this chapter to be separate from other facets of youths' lives, my interview questions, carefully crafted in relationship to my dominant themes, inadvertently

precluded other kinds of stories youths might want to share with me. Multiple modes of storytelling not only facilitated my ability to learn about youths' lives through effable and ineffable expressions, but also allowed the participants to invite me to listen beyond my assumptions of what most concerned them. Accounting for the dynamic means through which youths make their worlds known requires a different kind of engagement—encountering the spaces they claim for themselves and listening to what they say there, even if it “entails taking the uncertain, the confused—that which is not clearly understood—as a legitimate ethnographic object” (Stevenson 2014, 2).

## Chapter 11.

### Conclusion: To live my life



*Figure 17 Shadow and Wings. Image by Vea, 2015*

Stepping into a foreign land, a myriad of things can happen. Starting a fresh new life means risking one's comfort zone to face the dangers of what is to come. Being in Canada, I learned that I am living my life more like a butterfly. I'm like a pupa ready to be free from being cocooned. I am perfectly secured in my own cocoon, but there will come a time that I will need to peel myself from where I am cocooned and emerge as one beautiful, fluttery girl. I intend to face the trials that life has to throw at me.

At some point, I realized that I have to be independent and step out of the shadows of my parents and my friends to follow my own true path. I believe that in order for me to live my life, I must be able to see what is ahead of me rather than being obscured by someone's shadow or wrapped too tightly in their cocoon.

Like butterflies, I went through a metamorphic process. I was born naive and always follow what anyone tells me to. But as I grow older, I become more mature and realize that I can step out from the shadows, develop wings and fly. These wings I will trust to lead me to whatever my heart truly desires. These wings I will trust to make good judgements to decide whatever is best for me. This way, I don't have to live as someone else's shadow again.

I need to live my own life and in order for me to do that I need to free myself from anyone's shadow and make judgements that I know will do me well.

When the time came for the participants to send me their contributions for the participatory photography book, Vea emailed me the original photograph portrayed in Figure 17. At the time it did not have its yellow wings, revealing only the shadow cast on the grassy field. Vea was not satisfied with her original image because she felt that it did not quite capture the dynamics she wrote about in her caption. In her email to me she explained, “I feel like I should've taken a picture of a butterfly instead of a shadow because I think I am focusing more on the butterfly part rather than the shadow.” I suggested that she add the wings, not doing away with the image but rather adding to it. She liked the idea, and so we met at a coffee shop near her house to adapt it. She carefully crafted the wings from the array of supplies I brought from home and then glued the yellow cut-outs onto the printed photograph. I then photographed the new image, as it is now shown here.

I tell this story not only to be transparent about the collaborative nature of the image, and of the research process more generally, but also because it is emblematic of the paradoxical ways Vea and others I met experienced their lives. Both shadows and wings are apt metaphors, as Vea described in her caption and sought to convey in her visual representation. The shadows, she suggested, were cast by the social and economic expectations of what her migratory journey should entail: expectations set upon her by her parents and national discourses that migrants are to study hard, work a lot, save money, send remittances, and attain a stable career. The impetus to do so was also part of a more intimate sense of obligation Vea and others had to return the sacrifices of their labouring parents. Prosperity in Canada was the life cast ahead of her—a life that was supposed to be for her shaped by temporal regimes of time discipline, work discipline, and financial discipline. While Vea at times subscribed to this neoliberal and capitalist doctrine, she also struggled with the ways in which this shadow of her future life had the potential to eclipse her memories, relations, identity, passions, and shifting dreams.

Vea's reference to wings points to the struggle of tensions and potential for liberation. While precariousness can breed isolation, destitution, and abandonment, it can also lead to other kinds of significations and elaborations of a dignified life (Barchiesi 2011, 11). In spite of the challenges Vea faced, she was not abject under a suffocating struggle to survive in either the Philippines or Canada. Rather, her stories and the others' presented in this dissertation direct attention to the slippages and gaps in the work-migration nexus where memories of the past, moments in the present, and images of the future protrude light upon which to critically evaluate what brings and could bring pleasure, happiness, and intersubjective well-being. In doing so, she reimagines the possible through a constellation of experiences that fall within but also outside of neoliberal capitalism. Through Vea's "metaphoric process" of migrating, labouring, and acting towards the kind of life she is supposed to have, new significations of a good life arise that focus on her distant relatives, returning to the Philippines, loving her parents, and being happy. Thus, although she is enmeshed in a capitalist system that draws upon her and her parents' labour, she finds spaces to dream of a life otherwise. She makes wings.

\* \* \*

This dissertation has engaged with the life stories and visual representations of ten young people who lived apart from their migrant mothers through the course of their childhoods. I want to draw attention not to the generalizability of these narratives but rather to the particular nuances global inequalities and labour extraction have in their transnational lives and the ways in which they persist in living. What these stories and ethnographic observations reveal are not a singular experience, but how intimate familial life is wretched apart and reconfigured across borders. Holding families together through precarious times and carving out the possibilities of new lives in expected and unexpected ways is not only the labour of working parents, but the living labour of their children who must contend with the daily consequences of social and economic precarity as they care for their loved ones and reimagine the contours of a livable life.

My empirical findings suggest that youths often apprehended uncertainty and instability in their lives at early ages as they witnessed their parents struggle to care for their family members. Precarity manifested as a lack of material resources in the forms of food and housing, making home itself precarious. The precarity of home was punctuated by frequent moving, living with relatives, and disputes over rent. Mothers, youths told me, often

had to leave in order to provide their families with stability in the short term through remittances and in the long through the prospect of a better life in Canada. Moving and labouring away from home was a sacrifice mothers made for the sake of their children, as children came to believe and often narrated to me. Yet the struggles families experienced were not always remedied through remittances. As I also discussed, the precarity of home was marked by a mother's absence. Although there may have been more material securities for the children upon mothers' emigration, these gains did not always reconcile the emergent senses of loss youths felt in the absence of vital kin. In spite of all the hardships and sacrifices these young people endured in the long course of family migration, they were often dismayed, even disenchanted, when they came to see the conditions of life in Canada and the new forms of precarity that surged through their living situations, new relationships, and among those who they left in the Philippines. Precarity recurringly surfaced for those I met, taking new forms before mothers' departures, during separations, and after reunifications. This is significant because it highlights the long shadow of global injustices that shape migration and life trajectories for parents, youths, and generations to come.

What these participants also revealed is the living labour they invest in maintaining and creating their lives alongside their family members. As mothers' labour is withdrawn from the household and commoditized in the global demand for domestic workers, youths often make up the difference and then some. They participate in doing what is necessary to hold their families and households together while also contending with the emotional and relational tribulations experienced by and between their mothers and fathers. The patterns of care that emerge through youths' narratives thus signify how the capitalist extraction of parents' labour calls upon young people to perform on the margins of global labour systems. I have shown how relations of care are reconfigured in the course of familial change and amid the extraction of a mother's care from the home. These circumstances confound not only the daily lives of mothers, but also of fathers and children who, at times, poignantly feel the paucity of care. They responded in ways shaped by their different positions and willingness to take on caregiving roles. While each youth I met expressed a different constellation of actions and reactions surrounding their familial circumstances, what was clear was that coming to terms with a mother's absence and grappling with the long duration of separation required living labour to make life possible in the meantime—to maintain a tenacious attachment to each other and to a sense of hope by living through uncertain times.

What is significant here is that the care youths invested towards their mothers, fathers, siblings, and themselves reveals how they too are actors in the global labour market, yet so obscured from purview that their labour barely registers at all. This is the significance of a youth-focused methodology towards understanding contemporary problems of capitalism and its labour demands. It is not only a means to better elucidate the politics of childhood but also reveals the inner workings of capitalist extractions from the crevices of people's most intimate familial and homely lives. By listening to these youths' stories of their unpaid and paid labour, there is no denying how the intimate recesses of their lives are profoundly impacted by Canada's labour and immigration regimes and the broader global demand for and commodification of living labour. What I have presented here not only concerns these youths' challenged experiences of waiting to come and then arriving in Canada, but about the lived and felt conditions that shape their mothers' need to go and their exceptionally long time apart before reunification is fulfilled, which amplifies the emotional and physical labour that youths exuded as they came to increasingly labour, often alone.

Finally, what I have pointed to is also how hope emerges from the ruins of rupture. The tenuous ties to a livable life that so many of these youths experienced are generative of responses that are both tender and tenacious. In the midst of precarity and all its uncertainties, these youths held on to their loved ones and held to the hope that the conditions they endured would be meaningful to some positive end, manifested in the unfolding of a better life. These youths conveyed how hope enabled endurance, and the ways in which they signify and hope for a good life was a means to reconcile why life was so difficult and that this world is good, moral, and just. In an effort to stand alongside Vea and the other youths I met, I have aimed to carve out space for their dreams to be known.

I have suggested that analytical possibilities emerge when anthropologists are attentive to these spaces of struggle—sites where young people may experience injustice through discrimination and exclusion but also express intention and actively labour towards building a better life that they envision for themselves and their family members. Herein lay new possibilities for what anthropology can offer to discussions on the politics of difference; the first being immanent critique of social injustice in the moments it takes place, because, as Povinelli suggests, “to bracket the harm until the impasse has been resolved and the account given” (2011, 190) is to merely maintain the status quo, and the second being how attention to people's responses—active and imaginative—to injustice directs attention not just to the “suffering subject” but towards the practical, lateral politics of surviving and thriving, what

Joel Robbins suggests should be studies of “the cultural constructions of the good” (2013, 457) The “cultural” here lies in how kinship, reciprocity, and homely practices provide a sense of fulfillment, happiness, and well-being for young people, even if they do not entail monetary wealth or neoliberal, capitalist success. This, in some ways, is a refusal of capitalist ideologies and a reconfiguration of the significations of a good life. Veá and others I met believe that the goodness of a good life comes not from work alone, but from being with and caring for loved ones in ways that affirm kinship bonds and demonstrate affection. Though other emotions may work to enforce senses of obligation—shame or *hiya* (Alipio 2015), for example—these kinds of emotional and monetary impositions were not the foremost motivations that my participants spoke of when they considered their driving desires. Rather, family, friends, home, and creative expressions constituted what was, and could be, good in their lives. Work and money were secondary to these desires, serving only to fulfill these desires rather than becoming the means to define all that a good life could be. Investigating what migrant youths perceive to be the difficult and the hopeful aspects of life as well as what they do and believe can be done highlights alternative ways of understanding, being in, and belonging to a profoundly contradictory world.

In her book *Born Out of Place* (2014), Constable identifies how studies of migrant domestic workers tend to take one of two approaches. The first, she suggests, is a “focus primarily on the exploitation and abuse of migrant workers, providing analysis of structural constraints, inequality, and oppression within global capitalism” (ibid., 23). The second approach entails “attention to how migration [is] a resource—a source of agency, pleasure, desire, and new subjectivities for migrants” (ibid.). Constable suggests that these seemingly opposed orientations are in fact “two sides of the same coin” and that both can serve political purposes (ibid., 24). I think Veá also wants us to see both sides of her life. She does not negate the hardships she has faced and like many other participants, narrated them with a visceral depth surrounding what this unfair world has done to her and her family. Yet she also suggests that to dwell in that loss is not a livable life—she and others I met persevered through a tenacious holding to loved ones and to the hope that there is a destiny worth manifesting. Where this life can lead is a matter of both imagining and labouring, dreaming and working to redefine the contours of living well. It is, I think, our work to hear and respond to the struggles as well as to leave space for emergent subjectivities and enactments.

Constable similarly makes the point that “as a politically engaged humanist, anthropologist, and feminist, deeply sympathetic to migrant workers and the struggle for

justice, I think it does migrant workers a disservice to deny the depth and richness, pathos as well as the pleasure, of their lives. This is meant not to romanticize them or to deny the exploitation and discrimination they face but to see them as people, not just as workers” (2014, 24). The same could be said for their children who are bracketed beyond recognition because of their status as “child” and their non-status in Canada for many years. They are often doubly silenced. This is in spite of how they are intimately tied to this economy and this place that they believe holds “a life that is supposed to be for me.” If this place and this life are supposed to be for Veia and her family—as she thinks and as the caregiver programs suggest following her mother’s labour, then the conditions of her life must be known. They must count for something in our will to care for people in spite of borders.

What I have argued in this dissertation is relatively straightforward but significant: that the labour of living is disproportionately allocated to some more than others. While the affective labour of migrant domestic workers is an important case in point in terms of how care gets handed down the chain, the labour is also offset onto children—systemically, poorer children of colour. I have shown that it is also migrant workers’ children who must contend with the long-term impacts of how precarity shakes the foundations of life and mitigate the consequences of global inequalities that impinge their daily subsistence, care, and access to family. Yet, as Anna Tsing suggests, these young people also engage in “the imaginative challenge of living without those handrails, which once made us think we knew, collectively, where we were going” (2015, 2). Veia took her casted shadow and imagined herself reborn with a sense of autonomy and freedom—the possibility to fulfill her destiny through different terms than the ones ascribed to her.

\* \* \*

Amid global labour markets that separate families across borders, migrant mothers and their children engage in the continuous struggle to hold their families together through necessary materialities as well as intimate senses of love and hope for each other. Global labour markets and the intimacy of kinship and care simultaneously pull families apart and hold them together, with youths living at the crux of these tensions. Home as a localized and everyday space is made precarious by conditions that confound the security of a stable place to live, regular access to food, and the ability for families to live together. For those whom I met in the course of this research, the future is an unrealized culmination of labour injected into the family’s life-building project and they cling to it with a tenacious force because it is

a primary means to rationalize the present. The precarity of home yet the intensity of hope for these young people are products of a world that has shaped the differential ways families are valued, labour is extracted, and everyday life is made bearable. Yet these youths also show us that it is not only a life of suffering, but a life harnessed through the holding on and holding together of family through love, labour, endurance, and an active life-building hope.

In Canada there is on-going public debate about the ways in which temporary migrant labour programs should work and whom they should benefit; nationalist and racist rhetoric persists with emphasis on controlling borders, benefitting employers, and growing Canada's economy. The stories of migrant youths separated from their mothers in the global labour market demand that we pay attention to how they live in and through precarity and clarifies how youths' lives are implicated in these labour and migration systems. Their stories of economic hardship, ruptured family relationships, and sustained hope brings to the fore not only their lived experiences of economic and social precarity in the Philippines, but also the cruelty of on-going marginalization once they arrive in Canada. As Pratt suggests, "the border continues—in an *enduring* way—to follow them inside" (2012, 16).

Significantly, there is also a harnessing of life taking place that involves a tender care for each other across distance and on the shaky ground of an uncertain home. It is both the tenderness of love and the tenacity of life-building projects that enable these youths to make sense of their circumstances, withstand the hardship, and move forward in their lives. For these youths, the future of their families' well-being and happiness are in each other's hands and they hold tight to the future even as they are pulled to other places, other times, and other competing demands. Hands not only hold and care, they also reach and seize. It is through both the active reaching, performed through love and labour, as well as the seizing to hope that enables survival and persistence through this precarious life.

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