# Metonymy and Sociological Imagination in the Narratives of Filipino Migrant Workers

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## Abstract

The study presents five narratives of Filipino migrant workers (FMWs) and examines their values and modes of adaptation in their receiving countries. In this regard, it refers to the Philippine ethno-epics *Lam-ang, Agyu,* and *Sandayo,* the source epics of the metonymic values articulated in the inquiry. The deployment of the metonyms *tinayobo* (multi-tasking servant), *bulawan* (kind-hearted disposition), *banga't caibaan* (faith in perpetual provision), *bolak sonday* (female assertiveness), and *sandayo* (generativity) facilitates the expository purpose of the study, that is, to articulate the salutary values inscribed in the Filipino ethno-epics mentioned and how they are instantiated in the FMWs' narratives. Using C. Wright Mills' concept of sociological imagination, the article likewise accounts for the personal troubles that drove FMWs to overseas employment, their responses to the problems and issues encountered, and the outcomes of their life journey. The FMWs' responses to their individual circumstances reflect culture-derived values as mentioned and an emergent sense of social responsibility.

## Keywords

Filipino migrant workers, ethno-epics, metonymy, sociological imagination and social responsibility

## Introduction

The five narratives included in the study were told in the radio program, *Serbisyong OFW*, aired live on the Philippine radio station DZAS AM every Wednesday and Friday morning. The narratives of the Filipino migrant workers (henceforth, FMWs) unfolded through a semi-structured interview with the radio program hosts. The interviews on which this study is based occurred within the last few years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, most of the internal narrative time goes back to the early years of the institutionalization of overseas employment intended to bolster the country's economy.

The aforesaid narratives share valuable qualities for study which include, but not limited to, human interest, rich data regarding FMWs' overseas work experience, and the narrators' willingness and spontaneity in sharing their stories. Moreover, they showcase FMWs' experiences that yield to the study framework and purposes.

DZAS recorded the live interviews with the guest FMWs and posted them in *Serbisyong* OFW in their former website (https://dzas.febc.ph/downloads/). This article is based on the interviews that DZAS saved as MP3 or MP4 files, either as live interviews conducted in the radio station or through overseas phone patches. Invariably, the FMW interviewees were asked about the nature of their work, their places of employment, and the challenges that they had encountered at work in the countries of deployment, including their response to those challenges.

The study explores the significant aspects of Philippine overseas migrant work. Specifically, it examines Filipino residual values represented in metonyms found in the ethno-epics *Lam-ang, Agyu,* and *Sandayo.* These metonymy represent values that the FMWs employ as a means to address their personal troubles (*banga't caibaan*), as personal traits and multi-tasking skills deployed in their receiving culture and occupation (*bulawan, tinayobo.*), as a pathway toward a responsive engagement with the plight of fellow FMWs (*bolak sonday*), and as a shared vision toward a secure retirement (*sandayo*).

Moreover, the study hinges on the meaning-making potentials of cultural metonymy and how they inter-relate with sociological imagination, a brainchild of C. Wright Mills. In Mills' conceptual equation, sociological imagination is a responsive engagement with a personal problem which, upon scrutiny, turns out to be an issue, or one that is widespread and must be addressed and countervailed. The concept is equated with social responsibility as a response to such issue/s. Its affective element can be likened to the Chinese concept of *ren* (人) which depicts two persons seated back-to-back. *Ren* signifies "consciousness- of- human-others" (Co 14). To be a person is to be attentive to another person's plight and welfare. In Philippine culture, it is contiguous with the Filipino value of *kapwa* (literally, a fellow human being), or a deep sense of fellowship with the person next to oneself, that is, "the unity of self with others" (Aquino 108). Sociological imagination enacts the value of fellowship and engagement with humanity.

## Metonymy and deployment

Metonymy is a poetic device, along with other creative elements or devices, which substitutes for a trait or a quality of something or someone else. Metonyms can either be proper or common nouns. Their importance lies in their origin or the time and the culture that birthed them and their context, nuanced with the ideals, values and socio-cultural dynamics obtained in such time.

There are several significant names that have gone to oblivion because they belong to a remote past. Despite their buried significance, they continue to have an effective presence. Such may be attributed to their deep cultural roots. This study introduces the following notable nouns originating from pre-colonial literature of the Philippines: *tinayobo, bulawan, banga't caibaan, sandayo*, and *bolak sonday*. They are deployed in the study as common nouns pertaining to human traits and values. An inquiry into what they mean and how they still play out in Filipino culture reconnects the readers to their importance and to a critical appreciation of their meaning-making potentials.

Metonymy involves renaming through association or substitution, not through similarity and transfer of traits, as in the case of metaphor. A few examples are: Hollywood, a location associated with people who work in the American movie industry; give the speaker a hand (the implied hands in such expression being associated with applause and approbation); and in literature, Emily Dickinson's description of the persona as being "Inebriate of air- and I-/ Debauchee of Dew …." as metonymic of the speaker's supreme delight in one particular summer's day (Betjemman).

Saje asserts that by virtue of their dated nature, metonyms demand research – not so much of those that belong to a recent past but of those that belong to a quite remote past, for appreciation of their full import and the nuances of their formation. She further explains:

> Metonyms access history. Some proper nouns such as Smith and Miller were originally metonyms standing for occupations; although they don't function that way anymore, they should remind us of a formation of metonyms and their historical importance. Is 9/11 a metonym for the "terror attacks that destroyed the World Trade Center towers and struck the Pentagon, etc.? The date and its pleasing rhythm make a convenient shorthand. One could also say "the 2001 terrorist attack" or "the events of September 11, 2001," but 9/11 also echoes the emergency telephone number 911, which I think is why, along with brevity, it became the preferred metonymy" (47- 48).

Aside from background research, an appreciation of metonymy also demands an encyclopedic knowledge or accretive understanding "acquired through daily experiences, evoked knowledge, and contextual factors" (Shinohara 88). Familiarity with Philippine ethno-epic literature enables one to read the death and rebirth of an epic hero precisely by referring to its epic context. *Lam-ang* dies and resurrects, so does *Sandayo.* The difference, however, is that *Sandayo* lives and dies, and lives and dies again. The knowledge of the life story of *Lam-ang* evokes that of *Sandayo,* providing a preliminary context toward further exploration of the significance of and the difference in the metonymic death and rebirth of these two ethno-epic heroes.

The metonyms used in this study are limited to proper and common nouns whose associations are dated, that is, their meanings refer to pre-colonial times, specifically evoked in Philippine ethno-epics as mentioned.

To use a proper noun metonymically is to single out a peculiar detail or aspect of a character's personality. In their deployment, metonymy highlight a prominent personality trait of a literary persona and, inevitably, its flat characterization. These three epic personae *Tinayobo, Sandayo,* and *Bolak Sonday* are deployed in this unidimensional context. The metonyms *bulawan* and *tinayobo* signify kindness and an ideal and multi-tasking domestic worker, respectively. The metonymic common noun *bulawan* - a person who exudes a golden sheen (Castro, et al. 368) is the pre-colonial Filipino concept of "a heart of gold," or the virtue of kindness. The metonym *banga't caibaan,* a magical pot that cooks food when water is poured into an empty earthen vessel (Demetrio 207), signifies perpetual provision from an acknowledged but unseen power. The two other metonyms included in the study - *bolak sonday* represents a woman's courage to confront and curb sexism, and *sandayo,* refers to generativity or the pursuit of a meaningful life and a worthy legacy.

Outside the domain of literature, metonymy is used in cultural studies in concrete and abstract forms and may express meanings steeped in cognitive-affective richness. For example, a Latvian dress can be suffused with a sense of displacement and, at the same time, become a poignant souvenir of one's country caught in war and unrelenting chaos. Similarly, the weather can represent the tangle of social lives and historical events in colonial Philippines.

As a teenager, the young Guna Kinne (nee Klassons) fled from Riga in 1939 upon the Russian invasion of Latvia. She took with her the dress - the Latvian national dress for unmarried women - that she had started sewing in the early 1930s for a school project. Such meticulous dress requires painstaking assembly. It consists of a tower cap for unmarried women and layers of clothes consisting mainly of a long-sleeve white blouse, to indicate maidenhood, and a vest. The inner blouse is topped with profusely embroidered jacket as well as a toe length skirt, which was also similarly

decorated with dainty embroidery and strips of cloth with their distinct patterns sewn into the skirt (Figures 17.1-17.2, Schamburger, et al., 280 & 283).

Guna Kinne kept and continued working on the intricate bulky dress that reminded her of war and displacement and, finally, completed it while she was a Displaced Person in Germany. Her life history evoked the life history of the Latvian national dress that she painstakingly started sewing as a teenager, completed, and preserved for its value and for posterity. She wore it on many occasions in Australia, her receiving country. Nearing the end of her lifetime, Guna Kinne donated her dress to the National Museum of Australia in its original form with an embroidered crown cap (280). The metonymy of the Latvian national dress presents a complex of meanings: a mutual biography between Guna Kinne and the Latvian national dress (281), a deep-seated love for one's country of origin, and a memento of one's struggle for the preservation not only of oneself but also of one's cultural heritage.

Metonymy can likewise utilize an abstract imagery which Isa Lacuna exemplifies in the essay *Atmosfera Rizaliana*. The study gives the readers a glimpse of Jose Rizal's sojourn in Europe, among others. Lacuna presents a plurisignifying metonymy which she calls the "traveling weather" (189) in *Atmosfera Rizaliana*.

In August of 1882 the twenty-one-year-old Jose Rizal left the Philippines for Madrid to study ophthalmology. During his stay in Madrid, Rizal completed and published *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, wrote articles for *La Solidaridad*, and participated in the Reformist movement pursued by other renowned *ilustrados* (184). While in Madrid, the young Rizal exchanged letters with the members of his family. A month after he left the Philippines, his hometown and the rest of the archipelago were ravaged by an atypical destructive storm that flooded their place and nearby towns. The imagery of the storm and the aftermath was exchanged between Rizal and his family and next of kin in epistolary form.

Rizal's family, his siblings, and his father (through Rizal's sister, Maria) sent letters that vividly described the unprecedented storm that struck the

country just a month after Rizal's departure for Madrid and its aftermath. The letters contained news such as the death rate in their town due to cholera, the surge of flood waters ("*tubig na lumaqui,*" literally, a water grown tall, or unprecedented flooding), and the "cosmic-folkloric" inquiry into any possible sighting in Madrid of a comet and its portent of a severe calamity. The chain of catastrophes pressed Rizal's father to confirm with his son the association of the flood with a celestial phenomenon (184–185). Mariano Herbosa, Rizal's brother-in-law, further detailed the aftermath of the flood: the melting of the sugar in the warehouse, an infant fished out of the waters and hastily buried, and the rescuers imprisoned by the *Justicia* on the charge of "inhumation" for neglecting to report the incident (185-186).

While the imagery of rain and flood narrated by Rizal's family was disheartening, the young Rizal responded with a description of the rainy season in Madrid that was dramatically opposite to that in the Philippines.

> On the eighth, classes opened and we returned to our interrupted homework. It started to rain, which was a treat, but a fine shower, *ticatic*as we say there, for a week. The streets were full of dirty and thick mud, the floor slippery and between the gaps of the old and worn cobblestones, puddles of water like *lubluban ng calabao* [carabao pools] […] How ugly is Madrid… At least when it rains, it rains quite well so that it washes the streets and people find shelter beneath the house eaves, but here the rain is as fine as *matang tinapa* [smoked fish eyes]. Then the newspapers talk about a storm; but my God, what storm! (Rizal 1961a, 81-83 trans. Lacuna 118).

Juxtaposed epistolary extracts from Rizal and his family reveal layers of affective counterpoints. His family cited unprecedented, worrisome incidents about "waters that had grown big." He responded by lamenting the "ticatic" showers in Madrid. These exchanges belie complex affects that were present but never expressed. Nevertheless, Rizal, who would be his country's national hero, advised his sisters to help their neighbors in whatever manner that they could (187).

This inquiry uses metonymy in its singular form. Thus, in this study, there is a one-to-one correspondence between the metonyms and

their singular meaning sourced from the selected Philippine ethno-epics mentioned.

## Sociological imagination

C. Wright Mills defines sociological imagination as the "quality of the mind essential to grasp the interplay of man and society, of biography and history, of self and world" (4). This quality of the mind equates with the skill to see the interconnectedness of private trouble or problem and a larger public issue in the society to which people belong (8). Without a leap of imagination, it is impossible to see how a seemingly private individual problem could actually be a manifestation of a bigger public issue.

Kendall describes the magnitude of a situation that requires such a leap of imagination:

> How can we make a connection between our personal circumstances and what goes on in the larger society? Sociologist C. Wright Mills described the process of making this linkage the sociological imagination – the ability to see the relationship between individual experiences and the larger society… Personal troubles are private problems that affect individuals and the networks of people with which they regularly associate … Public issues are problems that affect large numbers of people and often require solutions at the societal level.

Sociological imagination, however, is more than a discernment of a private trouble and its link to a public issue. The recognition of such a link between a private trouble and a public issue is an entry point toward the exercise of sociological imagination. Its challenge and response are ideally a political action, such as organized activities intended to achieve a solution or sets of measures to address an issue. Professor Harvey Molotch sees sociological imagination as a form of a person's active participation beyond one's own personal and familial worlds. Such engagement requires agency through one's personal capacity, or in a collective form.

> Sociological imagination is a call for action and it means that if you have sociological imagination, whether you're a professional sociologist like I am

> or you're a citizen who is a plumber, a childcare worker or a physician, whatever that might be, you are engaged in the world. You are not just trying to understand the world. You're trying to change the world. And your efforts to understand the world are so that you can change it (Molotch).

Two cases may be cited to illustrate an ideal end-goal of sociological imagination, that is, a call for action and the realization of the end goal through a collective action. In 2003, Islamic extremists kidnapped and threatened to behead Filipino migrant worker Angel de la Cruz unless the Philippines withdrew a small contingent of troops that it sent to Iraq in support of the US cause. This gesture of friendship dates as far back as the Philippine commonwealth status of the country under US sovereignty to the Philippines' subscription to the "coalition of the willing" in the context of then raging US-Iraq war. Through the concerted efforts of Migrante International - Philippines and Filipino migrant groups all over the world, the Philippine government was pressed to act on behalf of the beleaguered Angel de la Cruz who was set free when the demands of his captors were satisfied. Further, the Philippines withdrew its gesture of participation in the US activities in Iraq (Rodriguez 49).

In September 2009, twenty-three female Filipino migrant workers stopped working to protest non-payment of their salaries stipulated in their contracts. They were employees recruited by the Annasban Group to work in a drug rehabilitation center in Saudi Arabia. These Filipino women decided to elevate their complaint to a wider public because it was unheeded. Shortly, Migrante-Middle East and the Migrante-International secretariat in the Philippines, among others, rallied behind the cause of these women by calling the attention of the Philippine government regarding the violation of the terms of the women's work contract. These joint efforts and the support of Filipino migrant workers in and out of the Philippines pressed the Philippine government to negotiate with Annasban to release the workers' clearance for repatriation and grant them their due remuneration. While the hunger-striking women did not receive their just compensation, they were successful in persuading the Philippine Overseas Employment

Administration to suspend agencies who were recruiting workers for Annasban (55-58).

The Filipino migrant workers' action on these issues, despite being incomplete in its results, inscribed a discourse on a typical form of injustice that Filipino migrant workers had sought to articulate and repel. The cases of Angel de la Cruz and the Annasban Filipino women workers and their documented struggle contribute to the literature on Philippine labor transnationalism and the potentials of transnational politics through organized labor.

## The narratives of Filipino migrant workers

### *Mara, a 21 st century Tinayobo*

Mara worked as a domestic worker in Qatar, Israel, and Kuwait. The nature of her work is presently categorized as Household Service Worker (HSW). Both types of work have a flexible nature – both similarly answer to the range of household chores that may include caregiving in a family where there are children. Her stint as a domestic worker in Qatar and Israel was short-lived compared to her term in Kuwait. Mara's work in her last deployment consisted of housekeeping and caring for the boys of her employer until their grown-up years. The multiple roles that Filipina domestic workers perform and their fabled industry are keen reminders of the pre-colonial female servant in the archipelago, the *Tinayobo,* who is known for her good work and fated life. The character is found in the ethno-epic *Sandayo* of Zamboanga del Sur.

> If you look closely
> At Tinayobo,
> You will see her one hand
> Holding a ladle,
> Stirring the pot,
> While the other hand,
> Swinging the hammock and
> Soothing the child to sleep. (Trans. lines 2882-2889 *Sandayo* 444 – 445)

*Tinayobo* is a proper name used to refer to a female chattel slave in pre-colonial Philippines. It is a proper noun and a generic one as well in the sense that all female slaves answered to this name call. In modern life, they may be likened to the live-in, all-around maids who respond to the beck and call of their masters. This female servant, *Tinayobo*, lived a precarious life. Notwithstanding her industry and faithfulness, her life was in danger at any time such as when her master ruled a human sacrifice in a thanksgiving blood rite (NCAA 418).

It is not difficult to identify shared traits between the *Tinayobo* and the contemporary Filipina domestic workers who are both known for their versatility and industry. Unfortunately, though, they are also inclined to share a similar fate. For instance, the story of Flor Contemplacion is indelibly etched in the Filipino consciousness as the symbol of toil and danger that characterize the lives of Filipino domestic workers (Asis 23).

Facing real danger in her first work in Qatar, Mara flew to her destination despite the Iraqi army invasion of the oil-rich Kuwait. For Mara it was a traumatic first overseas job experience that was difficult to live down. As she narrated:

> Many advised me against working in Qatar because of the war in neighboring Kuwait. But God gave me the determination to go ahead. When the plane landed and we got out, the sky beyond was dark from bombings… there was war in Kuwait!

*Tinayobo* is best remembered as an industrious servant. Like the pre-colonial servant, Mara was appreciated for her devotion to her tasks in the household of the Qatari couple who were residents of Kuwait at the time. This was Mara's third and last deployment as an all-around domestic worker. Like her previous job, she was both a housekeeper and nanny to the children of her master. Married but childless, Mara apparently enjoyed the company of her wards whom she taught English and polite expressions. Mara's parents were among the casualties of the infamous mishap in 1980 when MV Don Juan sank 10-15 minutes on impact from an oil tanker (Alojado). Their bodies were never found. Mara and her siblings were taken care of

by foreign missionaries and their exposure to English-speaking caretakers enabled them to use English with facility.

> When I joined the family, my wards were very young. One was 6 years old, the others, five, four and three. My mistress was also pregnant at the time. I appreciated my job, especially teaching the boys how to say the magic words. My employers were amazed at how their children were well-behaved and respectful. They learned to say 'please' and 'thank you' in daily conversation. My employers' compliment was music to my ears. I am happy that the boys all grew up well. I thank God because my employers appreciated me.

Mara attended to her employers' sons from infancy to late adolescence. In her phone interview with *Serbisyong* OFW, she shared that she and her grown up wards regularly exchange pictures and updates on Facebook. She sounded fulfilled and happy about the boys' deep sense of gratitude to their nanny who was also their favorite "teacher" in English.

Like many Filipino siblings, Mara volunteered to send their youngest to a nursing school which entailed, then and now, a huge expenditure. She was away from the Philippines and from her husband as she toiled for the money to pay for her sister's studies. Mara and her husband finally reunited in Israel, but their long separation created an irreversible estrangement. He had turned to another woman before their reunion in Israel. It is not rare that affective bonds between husband and wife in transnational families lose out to familism or the overwhelming kinship ties and extended familial responsibility (Lacar 43). Inadvertently, such values and other similar disparate priorities are deeply entrenched in Filipino culture.

Lee captures the dynamics of separation among family members, either on a short-term or a long-term basis, as akin to the process of slow death (2319). Similarly, Garcia cites cases that translate to specific social costs arising from the emergence of migrant work. These include infidelity, lack of nurturance, drug use and other forms of rebellion (262-264) in the family left behind. Unfortunately, at the time of Mara's deployment, there was a scarcity to almost nil of programs that aimed at preserving the integrity of the Filipino families and assisting them toward an unprecedented journey of

separation from a key family figure – the father and husband, or the mother and wife.

*Eli and the Metonymic Banga't Caibaan*

Eli comes from an impoverished family that subsisted on gold panning. At school and as a young boy, he was bright, industrious, and a believer in God's power to provide for anyone's needs. Eli's narrative underscores the Filipino value of faith in the divine provision which, in the pagan Philippine archipelago, corresponds to the metonymic clay pot, the *banga't caibaan*. In the ethno-epic *Lam-ang* of the Ilocanos, such a metonym is constituted as a magical and faithful provider.

The metonym consists of two nouns. The first noun *banga* refers to a clay pot for cooking rice and viands. The second noun, *caibaan*, refers to an elf who sometimes plays mischief by getting food from the pot. Thus, in its old usage, *banga't caibaan* connotes want or deprivation from an invisible mischief maker. There cannot be an explanation why the deployment of *banga't caibaan* in *Lam-ang* has come to mean a generous dispenser of food. Castro asserts that Christianity permeates the epic *Lam-ang* (69). Thus, the reversed signification may be explained as an accommodation of Christianity, and its concept of a beneficent giving spirit, a quality that imbues the Christian God. At the dawn of a new faith in colonial Philippines, the concept of *banga't caibaa*n was repurposed to mean a generous giver, a quality of the Christian God.

The epic hero Lam-ang encounters on the road a *banga't caibaan*, the magical pot that relieves anyone's hunger.

> He looks around
> And sees
> A three-pronged overgrowth.
> Famished and tired,
> Lam-ang sets his earthen pot -
> A wondrous pot
> That feeds
> Anyone on the road. (Trans. lines 160-168 *Lam-ang* 79)

The narrative of Eli from western Mindanao underscores the Filipino value of faith in divine provision which, in pagan Philippine archipelago, corresponds to the *banga't caibaan,* constituted as a magical provider.

As a boy going to school on foot, Eli would dream beyond his age. He was born to parents who subsisted on small-scale mining in their town. Shortly, their humble means of livelihood halted when a big corporation took over the mining activities in the site. Thereafter, his parents turned to subsistence farming. The youngest in the brood of nine, Eli's education did not matter in the pecking order. But at a tender age, Eli was a resolute dreamer. He would walk 10 kilometers to get to school and walk the same length toward home. While walking on the narrow trail of the rice paddies, the boy would wonder what lay beyond the mountain range that walled their village. He would toss in his mind recurring questions and wait patiently for answers that needed time to come together.

After completing the elementary level, Eli "worked" for his teacher by bringing the latter's goat to graze on native pastures in return for board and lodging. He graduated valedictorian from high school and, subsequently, earned a scholarship toward a university degree which he completed.

Often, Eli would look back at the hand-to-mouth subsistence of his family and how their faith in God had seen them through the hard times. In his youth he was certain that he would redeem his family from wretched poverty. He recounted:

> I think what's amazing in my journey is that it was very clear that God had better plans for me. That what we were going through was just a phase in our life, despite people saying that our lot would never improve. As for me, I have a strong faith in the Lord.

In 2006, Eli had a job, but he could hardly help his parents with his lean income. He was pressed to work abroad to support the needs of his ailing mother. A friend suggested a recruitment agency in Eastwood City. Indeed, there was an active recruitment based on the long queue of the hopefuls. Unfortunately, at the outset, Eli did not make it to the shortlist – he was lean and not tall enough for western standards. The agency

wanted brawn to lift heavy furniture and a height based on occidental norm. However, the first batches of applicants who were interviewed were rejected due to lack of related work experience. In contrast, Eli had completed an on-the-job (OJT) practicum during weekends in a Pasig City hotel in Metro Manila. Thus, he had prior work-related experience. Shortly, after the initial rejection, Eli was off to his dream destination, the USA. His English communication skills and experience made it for him.

In each phase of his becoming a better person and with a more lucrative means to provide for his parents, Eli's journey was on track, and he believed it was all a divine provision.

> When I went to the embassy, I realized it was difficult [to get a visa], but my turn was easy. I was into a long queue and they [the applicants] were weeping because they were all rejected. A guard from nowhere pulled me out of the line and advised me, *Try that window, kid. The interviewer is kind.* I went to the queue to which I was directed. The officer simply asked*, Do you really want to go there* [USA]? *Yes, I have an itinerary. Give me a visa and I am off to go.*

This opportunity to work in the USA brought out Eli's range of managerial talent and business skills. However, despite a flourishing USA career, Eli returned to the Philippines "to give back" and to fulfill his heart's desire to engage in a social enterprise. Presently, he has a thriving business that sells school backpacks. For each item sold, one bag is set aside for a poor pupil whose parents cannot afford to buy one. The project is deeply personal for Eli. It reminds him of his childhood bereft of the essentials of life. Eli never had a school bag.

### *Del and Mungan, the Bulawan*

Del flew to Japan as a *yome hideri* or a drought bride at the time when the rural areas of Japan were already depleted with women of reproductive age. Although it did not stir up public attention, bride matchmaking occurred in the Philippines. In the 1980s in Japan, the quest for women of child-bearing age occurred to address the phenomenon of *yome hideri*. The search for a

reproductive bride was meant as a stopgap measure to address the issue of bride shortage. The lure of modernization attracted young Japanese women to the cities resulting in the shortage of "child-bearers." The urgency of the issue of manpower shortage punctuated the appeal of a town official in Akita: "Unless there are children, villages and towns will collapse. It's a matter of supply and demand. Don't we need the importation of people as well…" (Suzuki 401).

It was in the context of a bride shortage crisis that sponsored interviews and match making parties were held in the Philippines to provide a venue for eligible Japanese men to meet with a prospective *hanayome* or bride. Del was a 30-year-old tourist guide when she presented herself in one of the interviews held in Manila for the drought bride quest. She did not mince words to explain her participation in the quest. It was an opportunity for a better life for her and her children from her common law husband. Del's mirth and goodwill resonated in her speech, and it was quite apparent that she had a resilient personality. The Japanese questor did not miss those important traits. The same resilience and adaptability facilitated her adaptation to Japanese culture, specifically her adjustment to an irate mother-in-law who never forgave the Filipinos for her husband's death in the Philippines in World War ll. Del was always sympathetic to the bereaved woman despite the latter's unpleasant disposition. In her mother-in-law's death bed, Del ministered to her with respect and affection. Her kindness and resilience may be likened to that of *Mungan* in the Manobo epic *Agyu. Mungan* reciprocated kindness to her tribe that sent her away to languish and die alone.

At the outset, the epic *Agyu* introduces *Mungan* who became a *bulawan,* a gilded and immortal being. At the behest of her tribe, *Mungan* left because she was stricken with leprosy. *Matilom,* a member of the tribe, sought out her exilic state. On *Matilom*'s visitation, the shunned *Mungan* gave *Matilom* her *ginintuang mamaen,* or golden betel chew (*Agyu* Line 355, 215) and *bulawang malagkit/ginintuang pinipig* (Lines 358-359 215) or flattened sticky rice to stave off hunger in the community. *Mungan* left her tribe to spare her people of a malevolent disease that struck her. Thereafter, she metamorphosed into a *bulawan* (a gilded being). *Matilom* was in awe when he saw that she

had turned into an immortal being. Based on this epic passage, the term *bulawan* connotes sterling kindness. In the Filipino language, the term *bulawan* metamorphosed into a literary expression, *may ginintuang puso*, or a person with a heart of gold. In everyday terms, it corresponds to *being* kind and considerate toward others. *Matilom* describes his last encounter with *Mungan* thus:

> The wife of Banlak
> Turned into gold.
> Indeed she gave us
> The golden betel chew,
> And the sticky rice,
> The flattened
> Yellow flakes. (Trans. lines 350-358 *Agyu* 215)

A single mother of two, Del presented herself in one of the interviews held in Manila for Japan's drought bride quest. Among many younger hopefuls, she was chosen by the Japanese questor. She adjusted well with her Japanese husband and the latter's brother who shared her Christian faith. A keen observer, Del has learned the ways of the ideal wife in Japanese culture and has no problem with her husband. They live with their biological son and Del's own son from a previous relationship in the Philippines. It should have been a problem-free integration into a new culture except that Del's mother-in-law abhorred her and her ethnicity. Unfortunately, through the many years of living with each other, the Japanese mother-in-law never treated her with affection. Even though Del was instrumental in the perpetuation of their farming activities with her sons working on the land, the old woman remained indifferent. Del's son from a previous relationship in the Philippines and her son with her Japanese husband have provided the assurance of sustainable farming, consistent food supply, and family income. Del herself had no green thumb. Instead, she engaged in a microenterprise and disregarded the traditional Japanese norm of the private sphere as the woman's proper place.

Del's difficulties at home came from her mother-in-law's indifference. The causes were verbalized and non-verbalized. The old woman's husband was a soldier who fought in World War II and lost his life in the Philippines. She would repeatedly insinuate Del's shared guilt over the death of her husband.

> My mother-in-law knew that I am a Filipina and she never liked me for that. I tried to win her over but she could not forget the memory of her husband's fate in the Philippines… It was difficult to touch her heart.

Despite the cold treatment she received, Del regarded her mother-in-law with deference and affection, heeding the advice of Japanese women who were both her neighbors and friends. Although she was a little uneasy in the company of an indifferent mother-in-law, she had to live by the norm of an extended Japanese family. Though married, her husband - the eldest son, had to stay with his mother until her death. Del attended to the needs of the old woman when the latter became ill and later died.

Steeped in the value of the "good wife and ideal mother" *or ryosai-kenbo* (Shizuko 31), Japanese culture expected women in Japan to toe the line and be the normative good wife according to the pre-modern Japanese standard. Aside from the wife attending to the household chores, she was also expected to work in the farm of the parents-in-law, join her Japanese husband in raising crops – mostly vegetables, and attend to the needs of the elderly. When Del arrived in Japan, the *ryosai-kenbo* norm was drifting toward revision which began in post-World War l when women proved to be worthy volunteers in the war front and a force to reckon with outside the private sphere (32). Like the postwar Japanese women who began to engage in careers outside the house, Del trod the same novelty. Aside from her sharing with household duties, she made her life meaningful by engaging in a microenterprise, selling phone cards and sundries when these were fast selling items among the Filipino technical trainees in Gunma Prefecture. These Filipino trainees and Del herself mutually nourished themselves with small talk and a bit of serious conversations about faith and being frugal. In the training worksite, the relationship of the Filipino trainees with their

Japanese trainers was limited to working and learning per se (Ratyasake et al. 29-30); thus, interpersonal dynamics was limited to none. The trainers only spoke with the Filipino trainees, along with other ethnicities, within work hours.

Del made friends with these trainees and advised them about the wisdom of saving and cost-effective spending. In the chilly mountainous Gunma Prefecture, these Filipino trainees found a friend who shared with them her down-to-earth wisdom.

> There are many (Filipino) trainees here in Gunma. Some of them have come to our church here. We would advise them to save. But Filipinos spend money here and there, and they are attracted to jewelry. We advise them (to save). Their visa is renewed yearly. But one is lucky if the visa is renewed for another year.

Del's interaction with people exudes concern and affection. In their neighborhood, she has found fellow Filipino and Japanese women friends. One of the latter, who spoke English, taught her how to live cordially with others, particularly with an irate mother-in-law. She also advised Del to treat the old woman as if she were her own mother, a welcome advice that Del took to heart. After all, Del and her mother-in-law not only differ in ethnicities but have also lived in different times that define a woman's role quite differently.

### *Sheila and the Woman Warrior Bolak Sonday*

Sheila worked as Parts and Accessories Motor-clothes Manager (PAM) for Harley Davidson in Doha, Qatar. Her innate attraction to big bikes especially a Harley Davidson, including her riding experience in the Philippines, earned her the post. She joined a male-dominated industry and worked in a culture steeped in chauvinism at the time. Nevertheless, she proved equal to the challenge. Sheila's traits answer to the dauntless personality of the mythic *Bolak Sonday*.

*Bolak Sonday* is a woman warrior from the ethno-epic *Sandayo* of the Subanon of the Zamboanga Peninsula, western Mindanao. Endowed with

an attractive personality and the skills expected of her gender, she is both feminine and combative. *Bolak Sonday* can metamorphose into a skilled woman warrior when the situation demands it.

> Bolak Sonday
> Whirls her
> Wrap-around skirt,
> Alas, it becomes
> A pair of pants.
> She pulls out
> A knife and
> Turns it into
> A sword; and
> Then, she thrashes
> Her shield in
> The air… (Trans. lines 3641-3649 *Sandayo* 464)

The quotation depicts *Bolak Sonday* rising to the challenge that requires the strength of a warrior as she will embark on a quest that might entail fighting against obstacles. In Sheila's work, she found herself in a chauvinist culture, and there were situations when she had to contend with male aggression.

Sheila was compelled to work overseas to support her daughter's university course in medicine. She also wanted to continue her financial support extended to people who depended on her help for their day-to-day expenses and to achieve socio-economic mobility through education. In Doha, an opportunity for work came when her husband encouraged her to see his Portuguese friend who was looking for an assistant staff. The only requirement was that the person knew how to ride a motorbike. Fortunately, Sheila did. On the same day of her interview, Sheila was hired as Parts and Accessories Motor-clothes Manager (PAM) of Harley-Davidson, Qatar due to her attraction to big bikes and experience in riding a bike.

In Qatar, Sheila struggled against male chauvinism. She recalled that the men in Qatar had the perception that women could be bought. Sheila particularly remembered the time when an Arab man made a pass at her

inside the store. Tall and robust, she punched him so hard that he fell flat on the floor. In turn, he warned Sheila that he would bring the matter to justice. Against his threat, she cautioned him to weigh the consequences as it would be such a loss of face for a man to confess that he was manhandled by the fairer gender. Further, women of whatever ethnicity were protected by the law against male aggression. The offender walked away.

While in Qatar, Sheila embraced advocacy in the most modest way possible to help fellow Filipino women to guard their honor and personhood. Sheila was a warrior in her stand against instances of male prejudice and one-track mindedness. However, she was also aware that Filipino women were remiss at times. Sheila recalls some of their inappropriate gestures and behavior that have contributed to how they are perceived by men. She likewise decries acts unbecoming of a Filipino woman in Qatar.

> There are women who go to the night clubs, drink and dance a sultry dance. They're really asking for it.

Sheila then shifts to the unpleasant image of the Filipino women resulting from petty acts which take a toll on those who belong to the respectable league.

> Let's turn to those who are not okay. These are women who, we might say, acquired the material things that they had wanted but earned a bad reputation. It really hurts to hear, "Hey this girl," sorry, but this is the way they say it in English, Hey*, this girl, give her load, phone credits, give her KFC, Filipini, okay*. Can you imagine that we are called, 'KFC girls,' or 'phone load credits only.' It hurts. At times, I would like to fight back but, what can I do, the women I knew who went with them indeed turned out to be such women.

Sheila also encourages women to hone their skill in cultural reading of behavior.

> We caution our lady friends who are inclined to affectionate gesture. This is a reminder to fellow Filipino women - these men belong to a different race and thus think about such gesture differently. They are unlike Filipino men

who regard show of affection as a sisterly gesture. By putting an arm around a man's shoulder, you will soon realize what you have done!

To protect oneself in such a culture, Sheila encourages proactive learning about the cultural norms and relevant laws of the land. Filipino women and those of other ethnicities can invoke such laws to protect themselves and to demand justice due them if needed.

> One cannot deal with gender prejudice by a mere slap on the face. You need to have a strong will and presence of mind. First of all, you need to know your rights in order to invoke them. If you will lodge a complaint, make sure that you know what you're fighting for and your reason for seeking redress.

Sheila advises women working in Qatar to be aware of a deeply rooted norm of sexism in the Gulf state. It is handy to be alert and brave enough to withstand any form and degree of assault. Women can work out a reactive and, as much as possible, benign response to ward off male gestures that are deleterious to self-esteem and overall mental health. However, there may be some exceptions.

> My uncles taught me how to defend myself. I am not afraid. I can go out in Doha (even) in the evening… There was an incident when an Arab man tried to grab me. I gave him a series of punches until he fell flat on the floor. *I'll bring you to jail, (I'll) go tothe police. Watch out, you, Filipini*!

Such a threat by the male aggressor was not really threatening according to Sheila because women in Qatar are protected by relevant laws. To protect oneself, she suggests that overseas workers learn about the culture and laws of the land.

*Carmen and Sandayo, Pathways to Generativity*

Carmen metamorphosed from a laid-back teenager to a mature young adult after graduation when she joined her mother in Milan, Italy. The life

trajectory of the epic hero *Sandayo* mirrors Carmen's transition from an easy-going life to one that is imbued with a purpose.

The character of *Sandayo* is found in the Subanon ethno-epic titled in his namesake. *Sandayo*'s story starts when he is only a few days old, yet already capable of walking while his uncut umbilical cord dangles. He grows in the blink of an eye and attends a *buklog*, an inter-tribe thanksgiving occasion lasting for days. As a *datu* and heir to the chiefdom, *Sandayo*'s royal mandate is to secure the waters of Liyasan from the encroachment of invaders.

The epic *Sandayo* inscribes the hero's transition from a pleasurable life to one dedicated to duty, usually identified with youth and maturity, respectively. The term *Sandayo* is used herein as a metonym for the stage of generativity or purpose in maturity when a person aspires for a worthy legacy.

At the beginning, the ethno-epic describes *Sandayo* as an extraordinary being (Lines 460-467, *Sandayo* 383) who knows his royal mandate by heart owing to his royal status and extraordinary personhood (Lines 95–98; 459-471; 492-496 *Sandayo*, 383-384). His paramount duty is to guard the waters that sustain their tribe – Liyasan, Gwalo Leyo, Lumanay, among others. The epic does not name the threat explicitly but may be inferred (Lines 700-707, 740-745 *Sandayo* 389-390) and theorized by extended research. As the vanguard of the waters that sustain their tribe, *Sandayo* halts and first attends a *buklog*, a festive gathering where he sees the woman of his dream, *Bolak Sonday*. Thereafter, he returns to his parents' house, experiences weakness, but pursues his main goal of watching over their tribe's revered waters. He returns home and dies. The only key to the cause of his death is the recurrent set of references: eight layers of mosquito nets (Lines 3154-3159 *Sandayo* 451), the omnipresent house fly (Lines 3160-3167 *Sandayo* 451-452), the value of their waters, and the threat of "encroachment" (Lines 4334-4351 *Sandayo* 481) from an unidentified force.

The path of *Sandayo*'s life corresponds to the normative stages of human development, albeit, in a form of a time warp in the hero's case. Briefly, *Sandayo* finds himself in the phase of generativity and will give his all to ensure the safety of the waters from which his people draw their existence.

The height of human life is the stage of generativity when a person achieves "the capacity to provide for the next generation" (Erikson 18) according to the norm of one's cultural affiliation. On the part of *Sandayo*, it was his people's expectation and the corresponding duty that he performed. His heroism was foretold in his childhood.

> You will be renowned …
> When you become
> A man,
> You will watch
> All the rivers.
> You will guard
> All the springs (Trans. lines 490-496, *Sandayo* 384).

*Sandayo* fulfilled his duty as the vanguard of the waters that sustained his people. In the worst stage of his illness, he returned home to die. Although *Sandayo*'s life expectancy was short-lived, he attained the stage of generativity.

In the same manner, Carmen led a life of ease, epiphany, and a turnaround path towards generativity. She is a daughter of OFW parents. Her late father worked as a welder in Saudi Arabia. When he got sick, Carmen's mother replaced him as the family breadwinner. Her mother worked as a house cleaner in Milan. After her graduation from an elite exclusive school, Carmen joined her mother in the latter's house cleaning job in Milan. This experience substantially contributed to her maturity and a growing sense of purpose.

As a typical youth whose parents are migrant workers, Carmen regards the *balikbayan* boxes as symbols of status and munificence. Through the years, these huge cardboard boxes have acquired multiple signifieds in the lives of migrant workers and their families (Dewitt Freight Company), the most important of which is economic security. For the teenage Carmen, however, these *balikbayan* boxes equate with things to flaunt and never-ending munificence.

> At a young age I knew my parents were OFWs. But I did not realize then how difficult their work was. I was still a student at that time and what mattered most to me were the *balikbayan* boxes that they would send. Every week I sported Giordano shirts. At the end of the month, I would receive a hefty five thousand pesos. And every time my mother or my father would come home for a vacation, we had a feast! I knew that they were working but I never thought that their work was a difficult one.

On her graduation day, when Carmen decided to go to Italy to find a job for herself, her mother warned her that she would become a house cleaner, too. Language barriers limited job opportunities for aspirants like her who did not speak Italian. True to her mother's forecast, Carmen indeed became a house cleaner.

In a faltering voice, Carmen recalled her realization of her mother's deplorable job condition, which had never crossed her mind until she joined her in Milan.

> I was shocked when I realized the nature of my mother's work. She would kneel on the toilet floor to scrub the tiles. What really hit me hard was the fact that she would clean three huge houses every day, and that the only meal that she would have at work consisted of biscuits and a glass of juice. I also found out that she had turned her own place into a boarding house in order to save much and to be able to send home a big amount of money. Each week I wore new clothes while my mother wore hand-me-down sweaters from her employer.

Carmen recounts her transition from a materialistic orientation to an appreciation of her parents' toil overseas. She also shares her personal yearning to inspire Filipino migrant workers to wrest free from the clutches of a lifetime overseas employment since they can shorten it through foresight and planning, wise savings, and investment. For Carmen, the reward that the OFWs must aim at is to return home earlier than the age of seniority to reap the rewards of their labor.

Carmen joined an international real estate company for which she worked in a managerial capacity for its global sales and promotion. When she visits countries with Filipino migrant workers, she would speak to them

about the proper management of one's earnings and the wisdom of savings and investment so that their toil and sacrifices would yield returns on their behalf towards a secure and comfortable retirement.

Mara, Eli, Del, Sheila, and Carmen who shared their stories have reached the stage of generativity when a person hungers for engagement with humanity, using one's experience, gifts, and skills to contribute to the pool of efforts aimed at the greater good (Weiland 180).

## Sociological Imagination in FMWs' Narratives

C. Wright Mills coined the term sociological imagination, a concept that he explained in the 10-chapter book *The Sociological Imagination* (TSI) published in 1959. Its first chapter, "The Promise," is a regular reading in a sociology class as it encapsulates Mills' succinct explanation of important concepts toward an understanding of TSI. "The Promise" was translated into Filipino to facilitate freshman students' appreciation of introductory sociology. Google N-gram Viewer shows that the TSI remains to be a relevant concept based on the consistent high frequency in the use of the term *sociological imagination* in various languages within the period 1959 to 2018, an indicator of relevance of Mills' TSI concept in the 21st century (Sapalo 101, 103-104).

Mills asserts that people do not perceive their troubles and their state of well-being beyond the ambit of personal matter. Neither do they see the connection between their troubles and the transformations that society and the world undergo as they live out their lives. For him, people need to cultivate a certain nature of awareness to understand the interplay between their lives, history, and the society they identify with. Mills refers to such awareness as sociological imagination.

> Seldom aware of the intricate connection between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history, ordinary people do not usually know what this connection means for the kinds of people they are becoming and for the kind of history-making in which they might take part. They do not possess the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of individuals and society, of biography and history, of self and world. They cannot

> cope with their personal troubles in such ways as to control the structural transformations that usually lie behind them (3-4).

The key concepts in Mills' TSI theory include trouble and issue. He defines these concepts thus:

> Troubles occur within the character of the individual and within the range of his or her immediate relations with others; they have to do with one's self and with those limited areas of social life of which one is directly and personally aware. Accordingly, the statement and the resolution of troubles properly lie within the individual as a biographical entity and within the scope of one's immediate milieu – the social setting that is directly open to her personal experience and to some extent her willful activity. A trouble is a private matter. Issues have to do with matters that transcend these local environments of the individual and the range of her inner life… An issue is a public matter… (8).

Sociological imagination makes sense out of one's private trouble or problem and enables one to see its connection to the same problem affecting other people. The person becomes aware that they are in fact in the same boat as others. Hence, the exercise of sociological imagination inspires an inquiry into the nature of the issue affecting a group of people and how it might be addressed collaboratively between the people and the state.

Another staple in Mills' TSI is the concept of social structure delineated in the context of socio-political dynamics in America in his time. In its stead, however, the study adapts Martin and Lee as regards the meaning of the term social structure applicable to the current study. In their article, structure as a role "emphasized culture and see structure as an equilibrium, a non-problematic objectification of cultural patterns (714)."

It is in the latter context that this study uses the term structure as a denotative of culture, specifically of Filipino migrant workers' value of familism that emphasizes strong family connectedness prominent in the narratives of Del and Mara. The same culture is evident in the FMWs' engagement as well with non-familial issues and in the practice of *kapwa*,

or sense of fellowship with others, a value rooted in Filipino culture (Eli, Sheila, and Carmen).

In the Filipino tradition, the older sibling becomes the substitute parent of the younger one/s upon the demise of their parents. Orphaned early in life, Mara took upon herself the duty of sending her younger sister to a nursing school as the latter dreamt of hospital-related work. Mara herself did not have a college education, but she deeply shared her sister's aspiration. Bereft of parents at a young age, Mara and her siblings grew up in the care of foreign missionary workers in their town from whom she learned to speak good English, a skill which became favorable when she worked for different foreign employers as an all-around domestic worker and caregiver. Despite being lauded by her employers and loved by the boys she raised up to young adulthood, Mara experienced a kind of death (figuratively akin to the fate of the *tinayobo* of old) when she discovered that her husband already had taken another partner in life. Their long separation led to the disintegration of their marriage. The occurrence of a compromised marriage when one spouse leaves for a temporary work abroad lasting for many years is not rare. Asis shortlists the social costs of labor export in this order: infidelity on the part of spouses, early marriages, adolescent pregnancy, and estrangement on the part of growing children (17).

In the early years of work-related out migration, the concept of family integrity and programs of resilience were not in place. They appeared later as the phenomenon of family breakdown became recurrent. The study of Garabiles et al. proposes an adaptive intervention for the migrant worker and the family left behind that addresses resilience in both parties – the one who leaves and those who are left behind. The study proposes a model of resilience for a transnational family, where the earning parent leaves the family behind for migrant work and the whole family subscribes to the enabling elements of resilience. The study qualifies the meaning of family resilience (with an OFW member) as constitutive of "interactional processes that enable families to overcome adversities and prolonged hardships." This strength-based approach, through aforesaid interactional approaches, toward a healthy equilibrium will enable both the migrant workers and their

families to successfully hurdle the challenges and the stress of leaving and being left behind (2). Garabiles et al. propose five relational processes which resilient families undertake to overcome resentment and alienation.

> They engage in family communication across space to bridge the relational distance. They also undergo family structuring and role validation across space. Family restructuring involves role sharing, wherein all of the members make contributions based on their capacities to fulfill essential family roles. Resilient families rebuild ties through temporary family reunification, which occurs during family visits when the mother returns home after long periods of separation. This process entails bridging both physical and relational distance to create moments when space is no longer a factor. These families also share the goal of permanent family reunification. They have a collective goal of ending their migration story so that they can be a complete family again in the future. Finally, resilient families strive to commit to family. The abovementioned relational processes are not easy because these happen amidst various difficulties. However, they strive to commit to their families by putting their family first through their sacrifice and collective problem solving (8).

In Mara's time, however, when out-migration for work was a novelty, a resilience intervention program for involved Filipino families –the children and the spouse – was unheard-of. The concept emerged from the issues of family separation due to migrant work and the need for maintaining family integrity against estrangement and breakdown. Asis' study alludes to the urgency of such an intervention program in the early years of Filipino migration for work. She notes that "a reintegration and adjustment processes wi1l have to be worked out by workers and their families" (18) to address hurt, alienation and breakdown of a migrant worker's family.

Like Mara who needed financial resources to fund her sister's nursing education, Del wanted a secure means of livelihood beyond mere subsistence for herself and her children with her common law husband. When the opportunity came, Del resolved to marry-up with a Japanese drought bride searcher. It was the period of the drought bride (*yome hideri*) phenomenon. Rural villages in Japan ran out of marriageable Japanese women due to the lure of migration to modern cities and job opportunities. The Japanese

women at the time had already embraced emancipation and wanted to have a career outside domesticity. This occurred gradually through the years from after WW1 when women showed their mettle amid global chaos. Further, the influence of the Western concept of women's liberation, the concept of *Atarashii onna* (the new woman) in Japan, and the increasing number of women migrating to the cities for work, among others, advanced the idea of the new woman (Shizuko 33-34). This phenomenon necessitated quests for marriageable young women from the outside to address the crisis of bride shortage.

Del's pursuit of a better life came to reality when she was handpicked by a Japanese questor who visited the Philippines to scout around for a bride. Although rejected by her mother-in-law, Del was treated well by her Japanese husband and welcomed by the latter's Japanese community in Gunma. Kind and resilient like the *bulawan* of old, Del attended to her mother-in-law on her deathbed, made friends with Japanese neighbors, and welcomed Filipino exchange workers in their church in Gunma, counselling them to perform their best, be frugal, and wise in spending their money. Del's personality traits and adaptability facilitated her integration into her new culture. The union of Del and her Japanese husband might be characterized as successful because they each achieved their goal, and their union endured despite her in-law's prejudice and rejection.

The narratives of Eli, Sheila, and Carmen are likewise based on their situations at the time of their decision to embrace migrant work. Eli wanted to rise above poverty initially to redeem his family of origin from a life of want and hard labor. Sheila needed more cash to finance her daughter's medical studies and the needs of her relatives who looked up to her for monetary assistance and mobility through the pursuit of education. The daughter of overseas workers herself, Carmen trod the same route that her parents took to live a life of ease and comfort. Her close encounter with the life of a cleaner in Italy, no less than her mother, awakened her to the toil and sacrifices of Filipino migrant workers to be able to meet the needs of the family left behind. In each of these three migrant workers, Eli, Sheila, and Carmen, there was a realization that the end goal in life should go beyond

the pursuit of one's own welfare. People can contribute to the common good according to their gifts and resources in the exercise of their sense of social responsibility.

Eli came from a dirt-poor family who could not afford to send all children to school for want of resources. Eli was the last in the pecking order. The older siblings had the priority to education, a family value that Eli surmounted. He found ways to get himself to school on to a college education by faith and dint of hard work. Eli achieved freedom from poverty through a college education and a successful executive career in the USA.

Recalling his impoverished childhood and uncertainty of higher education, Eli felt the burden to go back to the Philippines to grow a social enterprise that would enable him to help children from poor families through a startup enterprise - the buy one, give one backpack bag. Eli looks at this project as a personal response to his childhood when he would ask daily from a *sari-sari* store for a see-through disposable plastic bag to hold his paper and pencils as he walked his way to school. Based on the radio interview with Eli and the newspaper articles of his life journey, the project took off successfully. As an insightful young social entrepreneur who turned his back on the fabled American dream, Eli has set his eyes on a scholarship program in order to help bright and industrious youth to achieve university education and, hopefully, instill in them the vision that inspired Eli to return to the Philippines. His is an enabling strategy against poverty and hopelessness that goes against the conventional piecemeal and dole-out assistance to the needy. His confidence in accomplishing all his dreams is powered by his belief in a giver of good things. In the radio interview, Eli referred to the God of the Christian faith as the good provider. The study refers to a similar concept contiguous to the idea of a good provider sourced from the pre-colonial concept of *banga't caibaan* in the Christianized context as observed in the epic *Lam-ang*. Eli himself has metamorphosed into the *banga't caibaan*, the giving pot or vessel that pours out hope and assistance to the Filipino youth.

Sheila battled against chauvinism in Qatar. She fought against male bias and disrespect toward women, including Filipina workers in Doha, Qatar.

Aside from parrying sexism in Qatari culture, Sheila engaged herself in a pro-woman advocacy on the streets to orient Filipina workers new to the culture to be modest, to know their rights and how to defend such rights, and to be mindful of local practices and laws. Her resolute will is reminiscent of *Bolak Sonday*, a pre-colonial epic character who exhibits combative courage against male enemies and a steadfast will to pursue her quest. In her time in Doha, Sheila similarly strove to curb sexism through her street advocacy that involved themed speeches on matters about respectable behavior, speech, and countenance. Sheila ministered to Filipina migrant workers who exhibited behavior that invited disrespect and abuse on the part of the opposite gender. She also gave solicited advice on how to file a complaint against male assault.

In the latter situation, however, given the dominant chauvinism in Qatar and the legal system, such complaints might not have prospered at the time or even at this time. The country has been impervious to legal reforms including, but not limited to, matters involving women and their human rights that are acknowledged in western democracies but, unfortunately, denied in the Gulf state. To cite an example, Ana, a domestic worker, became pregnant with her boyfriend, and it was discovered by her mistress. Although sympathetic to Ana, her employer had to turn her in to the authorities because of *zina* laws that criminalize sex outside of a legal marriage. Had her employer reneged on her obligation, she herself would be charged with complicity. Ann served her sentence in jail until the delivery of her 'love' child. Sympathetic and grateful to Ana, her employer endeavored to find Ana's boyfriend and asked him to marry her, or he himself would have to serve prison term for committing *zina.* They got married to evade imprisonment and, in a while, divorced on the heels of Ana's return flight to the Philippines (Santos). Although the concept of portable justice for migrant workers has been around for some time, it appears that it would take a long while before it finds robust articulation and support.

A second-generation migrant worker, Carmen knew about the sacrifice and hardship that went with leaving one's family such as that of her parents who toiled for many years to provide their children a tertiary education and

her father who returned home for good after a handicap. When Carmen joined her mother in a house cleaning job in Milan, she was distraught to find out how quick and little her mother's food intake was to be able to clean huge houses and earn much for her children who were then still studying. Carmen wept at her discovery.

It was this experience that inspired her to devote time, when opportunities came, to speak to Filipino migrant workers in all the countries that she and her husband visited. She would talk about the wisdom behind frugality and investment, among others. Likewise, Carmen encouraged her FMW audience to prepare for retirement with funds to grow, to maintain their health and overall welfare, and to enjoy life upon their return to the Philippines. Like *Sandayo*, the vanguard of his people's waters and lifeline, Carmen endeavored to engage Filipino migrant workers at their peak of employment to encourage them to plan for their retirement, invest their savings, and learn how to make their investment work for their upkeep, maintenance, and leisure in what should be some enjoyable twilight years.

Carmen and her husband, who was with her in the radio interview, recalled a poignant encounter with a Filipino migrant worker who worked in Milan from his youth on to old age, consistently sending money and *balikbayan* boxes to his family and sharing the same with his relatives, friends, and neighbors. His scheduled homecomings were grand and festive. There were jeepneys decked with trimmings and loaded with kin and kith, including a welcome tarpaulin to boot. If the jeepneys were sacks, they would burst at the seams. The occasion was like a hero's homecoming.

When asked why he was delaying his return to the Philippines, the old man expressed his random thoughts that eventually shed off their veneer as he confessed his qualms. In his recent homecomings, the people who welcomed him got fewer each time until only one member of the family fetched him from the airport. His days were over. This encounter with the old man in Milan fueled Carmen's passion to speak to Filipino migrant workers about the wisdom of investment and sound financial management.

## Conclusion

The study explored the meaning-making potentials of metonymy in three Filipino ethno-epics. *Lam-ang*, *Agyu,* and *Sandayo.* The aforesaid metonyms were deployed as values in the narratives of Filipino migrant workers, preserving the meanings from their source ethno-epics on to their deployment in contemporary contexts. In retrospect, related studies on values derived from literature, the dynamics behind their life continuity, and their instantiations may be considered as an area of inquiry worth pursuing. Such an affective approach to the study of ethno-epics leverages appreciation and interest in one's literary heritage. Further, at the time when modernity is associated with erosion of values, the articulation of the history and contextualization of values will be better appreciated by locating their instantia-tion, preservation, mutation, or death in contemporary contexts.

The exercise of sociological imagination, the ability to grasp the undercurrent dynamics between personal problems and societal issues, opens the door for the youth's initiation to a deepening grasp of their place in their ever-expanding world toward maturation and engagement. Similarly, the exercise of sociological imagination enables everyone to appreciate their purpose and responsibility in the wider scheme of one's life journey. The Filipino migrant workers who shared their stories through a radio interview program illustrate engagement and purpose in life toward generativity.

## Notes

1. The ethno-epics Lam-*ang*, *Agyu,* and *Sandayo* referred to in the article are included in the *Antolohiya ng mga Panitikang ASEAN: Mga Epiko ng Pilipinas* (*Anthology of ASEAN Literature: The Epics of the Philippines* ) published by Nalandangan Inc. in 1983.

   The epic *Lam-ang* belongs to the Ilocanos of northern Luzon, Philippines. The narrative centers on *Lam-ang*'s desire to avenge his father's murder in the hands of the Igorots. The metonymic character, *tinayobo,* deployed in this study is a minor character in the epic. She is portrayed as an all-around, capable housekeeper. The metonym *banga't caibaan* is a magical pot that simply appears from nowhere and provides food for the famished.

   The epic *Agyu* comes from the Manobo tribe of North Cotabato and Bukidnon in southern Mindanao. The narrative recounts the search for another land to settle in when the people of Agyu fled from their enemies. *Mungan,* a minor character, is found in this epic. Sick with leprosy, she was banished by her tribe. Prepared to languish and die, she gave away her beeswax to her tribe. For her kindness, *Mungan* became a *bulawan*, a gilded immortal being.

   The epic *Sandayo* belongs to the Suban-on, a group of indigenous people living in small barangays in both the northern and southern parts of Zamboanga. The narrative centers on *Sandayo*'s resolve to guard the Liyasan river, among others, against "foreign" encroachment. The main characters of this ethno-epic, *Sandayo* and *Bolak Sonday*, are both deployed as metonymic signs in the study. *Sandayo* stands for generativity by protecting their rivers for the welfare of his people and the next generation. As a metonymic expression, *Bolak Sonday*, on the other hand, corresponds to female assertiveness when faced with sexism and male prejudice.
2. The term Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) refers to Filipinos who work in the countries of destination on contract basis and are expected to return to the Philippines according to the stipulations in their job contract. Filipino migrant workers (FMWs) is an inclusive term that refers to Filipino citizens who worked abroad such as the OFWS and those who acquired citizenship in the countries of destination. (See usage in *Empowering Filipino Migrant Workers: Policy Issues and Challenges* by Rene Ofreneo and Isabelo A. Samonte (*https://ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms_201588.pdf)*.
3. The terms metonymy and metonym refer to the following: metonymy refers to a type of figure of speech along with metaphor and simile, etc. It has two types - metonymy and metonym. Metonymy is the type that carries dual or multiple meanings (either concrete or abstract). Metonym, in contrast, denotes a singular

meaning in its deployment. (See Saje, N. *The American Poetry Review*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2009, pp. 47–50.)

4. J. M. Martin and M. Lee co-authored a comprehensive history of the concept of structure which may be accessed at https://home.uchicago.edu/jlmartin/Papers/Social%20Structures.pdf.
5. As of this writing, Eli's "buy one, give one bag" project has developed into a social enterprise which allocates funds to help school children with their basic needs (such as a school bag, among others) and assist rural communities to have access to clean potable water, among others.
6. The concept of portable justice which adheres to the universal legal principles and values has been around for some time; however, there appears to be scarce documentation and /or related studies toward a robust articulation of the concept. Its pursuit and acceptance specifically in Gulf countries and other states which are popular destinations of Filipino migrant workers will improve the leverage of migrant workers in conflict with the law of their countries of deployment. (See https://migrationnetwork.un.org/events/portable-justice-and-access-justice-gcm)
7. FEBC programs, including "Serbisyong OFW" migrated to Facebook https://www.facebook.com/702DZAS/. The new container shows the 2024 edition of the station's regular programs.

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