

“Ang Ating Iisang Kuwento” our collective story: Migrant Filipino workers and participatory action research

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Abstract

Studies that utilize participatory action research (PAR) methods in immigrant communities draw on participatory methods to explore immigrant health and incorporation. Many of these studies have used PAR, mainly, to contact “hard-to-reach” immigrant populations who are oftentimes isolated from research and social services on the basis of language, status, and location. In this paper, I argue that PAR methodology and principles can be maximized in immigrant communities if it asserts migrants’ lived experiences as “expertise” on the global institutionalization of migration and low-wage migrant work in the US. I provide data on the Filipino migrant experience and a PAR project with Filipino domestic workers in New York City to show how PAR can capture the systematically organized Philippine labor export policy alongside the individual experience of Filipino immigrants in the US. I discuss *kuwentohan*, or talk story in Tagalog, and theater as forms of participatory collection and analysis that captures the complex dynamics of migration from macro to micro scales. Lastly, I argue that the political potential of PAR in migrant communities presents itself when migrant workers recount their own experience and begin to understand that those individual stories are part of a larger story of forced migration, labor export policy, and low-wage work. PAR allows for these structural critiques to emerge through the research process.

Keywords

Participatory action research, Filipino, Filipino migrants, domestic workers

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Introduction

The play called *Diwang Pinay: Kasaysayan sa Likod ng Kababaihang Migranteng Mangagawa* or *Spirit of the Filipina: The Story Behind the Woman Migrant Worker* (translated from the Philippine national language, Filipino) was a result of a two-year long participatory action research (PAR) project involving Filipino domestic workers and Filipino Americans in New York City. The group participated in data collection and analysis, collaborative writing and editing of scenes, and the production of the stage play. *Diwang Pinay* was an hour and a half play with seven scenes (see Appendix 1). It follows, Maria,¹ a Filipina migrant worker, in her transition as a new immigrant and inexperienced domestic worker in New York City. Maria's foil is an older and seasoned Filipina domestic worker in New York named Aida. In the second scene entitled, "Domestic Work is Real Work," the actress playing Maria silently acts out her confusion with operating an electric washer and dryer at her employer's home, downstage left (see Appendix 2). At the same time, upstage right, the actress playing Aida delivers a monolog about her first encounter with a washing machine when she first arrived to New York. As Aida narrates her confusion between dish soap and laundry detergent, Maria acts out the story in the background. The scene is comical as the washing machine prop starts to bubble up and shake uncontrollably while Maria, the novice, tried to control the machine through an embrace. Aida continues her monolog about her confusion with regard to operating the washer and dryer machines by recounting the moment when the adult clothes she had deposited into the dryer shrank! As Aida tells this part of her story, Maria pulls out shrunken clothes from the machine prop while emoting extreme anxiety about her utter confusion. Exasperated, Aida says to herself, "I'll just hand wash the clothes, it's all the same any way." When Aida ends her monolog, both she and Maria face the audience with unsure looks on their faces.

This play and the aforementioned scene illuminate two points that will be reflected in this paper; first, these scenes demonstrate that Filipino migrant workers' stories are often articulated as individual experiences and at the same time, as an intersubjective and collective experience. Maria's story is Aida's and vice versa. Migrant workers are always making connections between their experiences as new domestic workers or new subway riders or new transnational mothers (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). No one worker has the same experience as another, but connections come from raw emotions that are shared by workers in times of distress. In this project, each worker carried an intimate knowledge of the vulnerability of migration and together they pieced together a portrait of their collective dispossession through a process of solidarity. Although this washing machine scene drew from an individual's experience of deep shame, anxiety, and frustration, the participatory analysis and writing of the scene allowed for those moments of darkness to move into the light through collective discussion and performance. For these reasons, PAR, with a dimension of cultural production, offers immigrants a way to collectively carry the often heavy burdens of individual experiences to the US.

Second, Filipino migrant workers are able to take their individual and collective stories and produce creative actions to raise awareness about the issues they face through PAR methods combined with Theater of the Oppressed methodology. This scene above represents the ability of migrant workers to see one another not merely as people who can relate to their experiences but rather as allies in solidarity with the situations that they face. Scene Two and *Diwang Pinay* as products of PAR show that when migrant workers are engaged in research about their lives and experiences, they are able to transform that process into action.

In this paper, I provide evidence to show that PAR methodology and principles allow for migrants to assert their lived experiences as “expertise” on the Philippine’s institutionalization of migration (Koirala-Azad & Fuentes, 2009). The Philippine state and popular immigration rhetoric in the US describe migrants’ decisions to migrate as rational and individual decisions rather than the product of systemic inequality. PAR captures the individual narrative as it is situated in production of migrants as export, in other words systematic export of people for the purposes of profit for the Philippine state via remittances. The political potential in PAR presents itself when migrant workers recount their own experience and begin to understand that those individual stories are part of a larger story of forced migration and labor export policy (LEP). PAR allows for these structural critiques to emerge through the research process. Further, this political potential can be transformed into momentum for political organizing through the points of unity and conscientization emergent in the PAR process (Freire, 2000).

In what follows, I review the context of Philippine migration, which is key to defining methodology for this particular community. I review past studies that use PAR methods in immigrant communities to situate my argument about PAR’s transformational potential. Then, I describe the PAR methodology and methods in the project with Filipino domestic workers in New York City. Lastly, I discuss how the particular PAR methods developed in the project namely, *kuwentohan*, and the action component, theater, reflect the experiences of immigrant domestic workers. I argue that the research and action elements of PAR methodology can support the development of grassroots leadership in immigrant communities.

Literature review

The Philippine’s LEP and the Filipino labor diaspora

Most migrants describe their reasoning for migration as a personal decision based on familial needs. However, when those stories and logics of migration are aggregated and examined as a whole, a sophisticated and aggressive system of export of Filipinos begins to surface (Guevarra, 2009; Rodriguez, 2010). In the 1970s, the dictator Ferdinand Marcos passed Presidential Decree 442 institutionalizing the export of Filipino workers to countries that had high demands for migrant workers, which at that time were oil-rich countries. Not coincidentally, the LEP’s target included activists working to counter the dictatorial rule. The confluence of global

labor demand, increasing joblessness and poverty in the Philippines, and the dictator's power produced the first version of the Philippines LEP. Although Filipino labor migration has historic patterns with agricultural workers or *Sakadas* migrating to places like Hawaii and California (Mabalon, 2013), the Marcos-led LEP put in place a systematic program to induce labor migration from the Philippines to any country globally. As the LEP was adopted in subsequent administrations, the Philippine state has embraced labor migration as part of the rubric of national income generation. The profit from this migration industry amounted to over \$19 billion dollars in 2011 (Migration and Remittances Factbook 2011, n.d.) becoming the new strategy for national development (Rodriguez, 2010). This context is important to situate individual Filipino migrant workers' descriptions of reasoning to migrate because although they are internalizing and articulating an individuated story of migration, it is clear that the Filipino labor diaspora is engineered by state policies. These political and socio-historical conditions are key in informing the design of a methodology and research methods to capture the transnational stories of Filipino migrants. A study of Filipino migrant workers' lives must account for the dialectic between the production of individuated migrants alongside the production of migrant population in which they are embedded. This necessitates a methodology that captures individual narratives as well as the collective experience. I argue that PAR methodology allows for migrants to share individual trajectories of migration alongside the sharing of a collective story of induced migration. The PAR principle of collective inquiry puts migrant workers' at the center of the logic of inquiry where they can locate their personal story in a collective experience.

PAR methods also reflect the social reality of Filipino migrant workers' lives with respect to the Filipino cultural practices of *kuwentohan* or "talk story" which operates on an intersubjective communication style (Jocson, 2009). *Kuwentohan* incorporates other people's experiences as an individual conveys one's own story. Similar to the use of "talk story" in Hawai'ian culture, *kuwentohan* captures the way the Filipino linguistic formula often integrates the "other" with the "self." Furthermore, following Hawai'ian and indigenous researchers and scholars who use talk story, a cultural style of communication and meaning making (Kahakalau, 2004; Smith, 1999; Tuck, 2008), *kuwentohan* as a PAR method relies on the cultural wealth that many Filipinos already share with one another.

Further, I argue that the action component of PAR methodology makes room for migrant workers to analyze data with the perspective of developing consciousness and engaging in political organizing. PAR principles adhere to the democratization of the research process wherein migrant workers are centered as experts in their own lives which can result in migrants not only taking ownership of their daily struggles but also sharpening their analytical skills by critiquing the structures and situations they live and work in. The opportunity for migrant workers to step back and reflect on the structures of oppression that affect their lives then encourages workers to organize and mobilize together around the problems they identify through the PAR process.

PAR in immigrant communities

PAR's history has rendered groups that social scientists have before labeled "informants" or "research subjects" visible as leaders and decision makers in the research process. From teachers (Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009) to nurses (Glasson, Chang, & Bidewell, 2008), young people (Torre & Fine, 2006), and prisoners (Fine & Torre, 2006), PAR practitioners and collaborators have designed projects to research local issues and develop solutions or actions that address the issues identified. Generally, however, the studies published on PAR in immigrant communities are few and far between. For immigrant communities, PAR methods have often been effective for "hard-to-reach" immigrant populations where barriers of language and location keep those groups isolated from research studies (Choudhry et al., 2002; Meyer, Torres, Cermeño, MacLean, & Monzón, 2003; Patel, Rajpathak, & Karasz, 2012; Unger, 2012). PAR research with immigrant communities is often concerned with immigrants' health promotion, assessment of healthcare needs, and culturally relevant services. Studies often find that engaging immigrants in PAR methods not only yields data for the community's health needs but also results in an increased sense of empowerment and health-promoting practices within the community (Minkler et al., 2010). However, if the basis in engaging PAR is narrowly defined as a strategy to reach isolated communities, the potential of PAR to be transformative—instead of empowering—can be stunted.

Scholars, researchers, and potential participants must consider the embodied experiences of globalization, race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, citizenship, and migration when deciding to engage PAR methodology and methods in projects. PAR's ability to transform the capacity of communities to analyze and change the issues of marginalization they confront daily must not be seen simply as "empowerment." Rather, we must understand that the subjectivities and experiences of migrants are a valuable tool for research analysis and development of action strategies. PAR is an important method to be used with migrant populations because of its practical purposes of outreach and participation, but the methodology also has important epistemological resonance for migrant workers as it mirrors the collective way in which migrants already collect information and come up with solutions through their immigrant networks. PAR methods additionally allows for migrants to reflect on the very systems of power that have contributed to creating their experiences of migration.

Entering into PAR with a service orientation, instead of allowing PAR participants to decide the terms in which action will take place (whether that be introduction of a service program, an organizing project, or a hybrid of both), will constrict the ability of participants to collaboratively develop an action plan that is suitable for their community.

In fact, other PAR studies that have worked with immigrant communities that moved away from a service-orientation have found that the PAR process increases political and social justice capacities (Cahill, Quijada Cerecer, & Bradley, 2010; Chang, Salvatore, Lee, Liu, & Minkler, 2012; Grandea & Kerr,

1998; Koirala-Azad & Fuentes, 2009; Minkler et al., 2010). In a study with Latino and Latina young people, Cahill explores how PAR allowed for a discussion of anti-immigrant rhetoric in young people's lives (Cahill, 2010). Through the use of art and cultural production, PAR became a "construction site" for young people to analyze the dominant immigration discourse and generate political awareness around their daily experiences of oppression. In a PAR study with Chinese immigrants working as restaurant workers in San Francisco Chinatown, Chang et al. (2012) found that a PAR process that integrated popular education and community organizing components allowed for immigrant worker participants to identify the problems in the restaurant industry. But more importantly, the PAR process complemented with political education and organizing tools helped workers sustain an ongoing campaign for better work conditions and living wages in Chinatown (Chang et al., 2012).

Following these studies, I argue that the use of PAR methodology must take the role of migrant workers much more seriously than contacts for outreach. Engaging PAR with Filipino migrant workers must maintain principles of reciprocity, collaboration, and democracy between the participants (migrants, academics, organizers, advocates, etc.) to make room for the potential of transformative solutions and political organizing (Hall, 1992; Maiter, Simich, Jacobson, & Wise, 2008; Pain & Francis, 2003; Parrado, McQuiston, & Flippen, 2005; Torre, 2009; Torre, Fine, Stoudt, & Fox, 2012). Participatory data collection, data analysis, and production of findings reflect the epistemological realities of immigrants who are often trying to make sense of their migration experiences (i.e. long-term separation and difficulties in transitioning to destination countries) through their immigrant social networks and daily talk story (Brabeck, Lykes, & Hershberg, 2011; Madriz, 1998). Therefore, to maximize the action component of PAR, Filipino migrant workers themselves must participate in setting reciprocal goals, collaborative methods, and democratic decision making in the research process.

Kabalikat's PAR methods

I will be drawing from a PAR project conducted with an organization called *Kabalikat* (translated as "shoulder to shoulder" in Filipino) Domestic Workers Support Network based in New York City from 2008 to 2011. The larger project was a multi-sited ethnography between New York City and Manila collecting the family histories of transnational families with over 70 participants. In New York City, over 40 Filipino migrant narratives were collected. The majority of the migrants were women. The self-identified men in the study were often husbands of migrant women who also participated in the research. Eighty-five percent of both men and women participants left biological children in the Philippines upon their migration. They were all financially supporting family members in the Philippines. The median age of the migrant sample was 42 years old, the youngest participant at the age of 28 and the oldest at 67. Ninety-five percent of the participants in the study can be categorized as undocumented with no foreseeable

avenue of legalization under current immigration legislation. For this article, I will focus on the methods and data collected with Filipino domestic workers in New York City.

The PAR methods with Kabalikat manifested in domestic workers' participation in identifying research topics and design, constructing interview guides, facilitation of group interviews,² and analysis of collected interviews. Kabalikat explored conducting a PAR project as an organizational program after I conducted three interviews with leaders of Kabalikat for my dissertation. As a member of an allied organization, Filipinas for Rights and Empowerment (FiRE)-GABRIELA USA, I proposed to conduct a PAR project with current members of Kabalikat with a joint theater component that would be facilitated by Filipina American women members of FiRE. The terms of the project were discussed in terms of reciprocal outcomes, specifically that the project would collect interview narratives on the lives and transnational families of Filipina migrant workers and that the project would engage in a production of a play that reflected the narratives collected. The process would contribute to my research and the development of Kabalikat and FiRE members as leaders and organizers. The core committee consisted of myself as the academic researcher-community organizer, two lead Kabalikat organizers, Rita and Andrea, and two organizers from a Filipino American women's organization FiRE, Irma and Melanie. Our project was held in the Bayanihan Filipino Community Center-Philippine Forum in Queens, accessible to all of the domestic workers involved.

At the onset of the project, we began monthly educational workshops to demystify the scientific method, learn research methods, and explore topics like global migration and political economy. Through these workshops, we developed a set of themes to be covered in all individual and group interviews, namely family, migration, social justice awareness, the government, and work. Through our education workshops about research, these themes were identified as the recurring topics that domestic workers deemed important in constructing a representative, rich, and full story about their lives.

The participatory analysis component part of the PAR project integrated play writing and acting as the key form of analysis for domestic workers. Often, traditional analysis of qualitative data includes coding transcripts to find recurrent themes to then produce theory or analysis to explain the social phenomena in the data (Charmaz, 2006). For the domestic workers, time was the biggest obstacle to taking on the tedious task of coding. Since our monthly time together spanned only 4 h, the core committee designed a rigorous data analysis approach that integrated the same concepts of open coding—looking for recurring themes across domestic worker narratives—and then closed or selective coding—exploring one theme throughout all narratives collected. However, the analysis tool was not qualitative data coding software or highlighters on paper transcripts; the core committee designed an analysis sequence that was based on *kuwentohan* as open coding and writing scenes as selective coding.

***lisang Kuwento*, collective story**

During our monthly meetings, after our education component Kabalikat members would gather around the food brought to the meeting: steamed white rice, fried fish, pork or vegetable dishes Filipino style, and coffee. One would think this would be a break but it was a natural transition into *kuwentohan*. Around the table, domestic workers traded war stories about their work week, new developments from the Philippines, or the latest appliance. For example, Anne, a domestic worker of three years, told a story of her first confrontation with “Comet”:

In the Philippines, I never wash clothes or clean or anything. I was the one going to the office in my marriage. When I get here and my boss told me to clean the bathroom with the comet. I was so confused, almost crying when she left because I felt so stupid. The only comet I knew was in the sky. I never knew it was a cleaner!

Anne choked up as she recalled her shame about her lack of knowledge. After all, she was the head of the department of agrarian industry in her home city. She was a professional in the Philippines, a knowledgeable expert on important social and political issues. She had no experience in domestic work. Many of the workers around the table nodded as she expressed embarrassment, understanding the powerlessness of that moment. However, as Anne finished her story, a roar of laughter followed her comment about comets in the sky. Anne’s tears of shame quickly turned to tears of joy. She started to joke about why a toilet cleaner would ever be named after a celestial body. Rita, Andrea, Rose, and Helen, domestic workers and PAR researchers, offered their stories of confusion and embarrassment with first world appliances like automatic vacuums and smart washing machines. This *kuwentohan* lasted for 2 h because so many domestic workers had a version of confusion and they all needed the same amount of healing laughter that followed.

It was shocking to me as a researcher and organizer that such a tender moment turned into such a humorous and heart-warming experience. Shown here, the utility of participatory data collection like *kuwentohan* for migrants is that an individual experience that belongs to one domestic worker invites other domestic workers to connect to that experience or emotion. Unlike interviews where questions provoke answers, migrants are able to connect to an emotion and lived experience like embarrassment over the tasks of domestic work; then they can contribute their own experience. Further, the participatory style of *kuwentohan* allows each Filipina migrant to use their cultural value and skill of intersubjective communication to claim one another’s experiences as a collective story.

Additionally and perhaps more importantly, migrant workers found PAR methods like *kuwentohan* meaningful because of the social and collective nature of the method. Most of the domestic workers in this study were often cooped up in homes six days a week with babies, young children, youth, and parents who did not share their cultural and ethnic background. Many Filipina migrants cherished the days

they could eat fried fish and speak in Tagalog or Visaya or their Filipino dialect. During our workshops on their one day off in a week, migrant workers could vent about the stresses at work or the graduation of their children in the Philippines. PAR gave these *kuwentohans* a structure and a goal; therefore, migrant workers felt like they were doing something natural toward something cumulative and productive. Some PAR scholars would describe this dynamic as empowering, but I choose to call it transformative because the goals of this PAR project transformed individuals to recognize the power in collective action.

Kuwentohan and theater as coding

Open coding requires researchers to take notice of important themes or concepts across the data that maintain particular similarities or dissimilarities (Kvale, 1996). This systematic categorization to decipher “what’s happening in the data” makes broader themes visible. Researchers do this analysis individually to verify categories, but for our participatory research analysis, we verified the themes we found in our data collection through *kuwentohans*. The collective nature of this analysis allowed us to conduct real-time verification of themes emerging from interviews, ensuring themes were conceptually potent and relevant to migrant workers. We would ask migrants to analyze stories into recurring themes through journal writing or what social science researchers call, coding or analytical memos. As we discussed different workers’ journal entries, we clustered themes together into categories that described the scope of migrant workers’ experiences in our sample. The themes were family left behind, transition to living and working in the US, working as a domestic, and isolation in a foreign land. Through *kuwentohan* and journal writing, we began narrowing down a collective story about the lives and work of Filipina domestic workers in New York City.

To conduct what social science and PAR researchers call selective coding, the group chose to write a play that reflected the common narratives of Filipina migrant workers in New York. We took the themes we found in our *kuwentohan* sessions and systematically mined our data for stories that spoke to those themes. If open coding asks researchers to look at all of the data to find recurrent themes, selective coding (or closed coding) requires researchers to comb the data with one core concept (Strauss, 1987). The seven scenes produced for Diwang Pinay (see Appendix 1) revolved around the themes we found through *kuwentohans*, or our version of open coding. To do selective coding, we took each theme and used Theater of the Oppressed games to tease out the experiences of migrant women.

For instance, when discussing the theme of being away from the family, migrant workers played a game called “Complete the Image” (Figure 1) where they would sculpt a scene using other migrants about missing graduations, the desire to hug a child on their birthdays, or the shame of not being able to attend a sibling’s funeral.

Across these stories, women talked about replacing their physical absence by sending remittances whether money or “balikbayan box”—a package filled with material goods sent to families in the Philippines. Each migrant worker would relay



Figure 1. “Complete the Image” game.

the different consequences that made living away from home difficult, but all of them conveyed their pride in their ability to send financial or material goods home. This then became the content for one of the scenes in *Diwang Pinay* called “A Balikbayan Box.” This scene shows Maria, the protagonist of the play, packing a box for her family back home. The monolog begins with Maria’s relief about sending a big box back home. She describes each product she packs: a shirt for her son, some toys for her daughter, and foodstuffs for the rest of her family. But as she packs the box, Maria grows frustrated with the process because the only thing she wants to pack, but cannot, is herself. This scene was the product of the open coding; through *kuwentohan* the group chose the theme around migrant workers’ desire to be with their families. But to write the substance in the scene, we used Theater of the Oppressed games to capture the range of emotions migrant workers felt as they packed and sent back balikbayan boxes to their families. The scene represented a theme that emerged across all interviews, but the emotional contradictions within the monolog were stitched from different Filipina migrants’ stories.

These scenes gave Filipina migrant workers an opportunity to see their commonalities, but they built that bridge by telling their own individual stories. Theater as analysis allows for individual narratives that are often shameful and guilt-ridden

to be projected on to a collective stage. It invites acknowledgment from other Filipina migrants who have experienced similar feelings of isolation and urges a discussion of that experience collectively. I argue that this process holds transformative potential for migrants in PAR because of the intersubjective quality of theatrical sharing coupled with participatory analysis. Theater is a platform for sharing, but the discussion about why migration is so common for Filipinas provokes a critical conversation about the politics of globalization and systematic forced migration. This critical moment transforms individual stories of struggle into collective stories of survival. Through theater and *kuwentohan*, migrant workers can tell their stories and find connections with other migrant workers who have similar experiences. They connect with one another through these joints of marginalization and transform these moments of despair into a collective experience of survival.

Conclusion

If *kuwentohan* and theater as analysis are facilitated through the process of participatory action research, these exchanges give migrant workers a reason to engage with one another, both personally and politically. Because of these reasons, I urge researchers to design research *with* immigrant communities with PAR principles in mind because of the space it opens up for isolated immigrants to come together to share their experiences and activate cultural traditions of collectivity. PAR methods are not only epistemologically relevant to immigrant communities, as I have shown, but they also hold creative potential that invites migrant workers to engage in drama, art, and play. Many migrants in my research have described their ability to talk story or perform drama as a welcome break to the monotonous routines of their daily life. These interactions facilitated through PAR are cornerstones to building social immigrant networks.

More importantly, PAR is useful for immigrant communities as it democratizes science, research, and knowledge, the very fields that are used to quantify and make statistics about their effects on American society. PAR's process of demystifying science allows immigrants to shape the discourse about their lives at the scale of their local communities. Immigrants internalize that the "right to research" is not just for politicians or legislators, but it is also significant to building organizing power from immigrants themselves (Appadurai, 2006).

However, PAR is not always an easy task to do. This PAR project with Kabalikat stretched two and a half years. Migrant workers' demanding work schedules leave them with little time to commit to sustained and consistent meetings. Following up with migrant workers for attendance or reminding them to bring their journal to the workshop requires an acute sense of detail. Packing in different analysis segments in a 4-h window is often tiring for organizers, migrant workers, and researchers alike. PAR's time-consuming nature must mean that researchers or collaborative teams commit for a PAR process with an adjustable timeline (Koirala-Azad & Fuentes, 2009).

Still, as an organizer with Kabalikat and an academic, my insider-outsider positionality complicated my participation in this project. Alongside this theater

analysis, the scenes Filipina migrant workers laid out in their play later became chapters in my dissertation as their analysis informed my own academic work. Admittedly, my dissertation chapters, and this paper, were written individually and for academic audiences; thereby eclipsing a truly, fully participatory production of research from the community I am a part of. This relentless dynamic of “serving two masters” often requires PAR researchers to be honest about the limits of reciprocity of this methodology (Maiter et al., 2008; Sánchez, 2009).

In conclusion, I want to return to the opening scene of this chapter, the story told by both Maria the novice and Aida the seasoned domestic. The scene that you will view online or the transcript that you will read in the appendix below is a fictional representation of Filipina migrant workers. They are products of this PAR project, along with this chapter. But more importantly, these products are perhaps less important as they are just remnants of the PAR process that Filipina migrant workers in New York undertook between 2009 and 2011. The lasting victory of this PAR project is the existence of the blossoming organization that is *Kabalikat Domestic Workers Support Network* in Queens, New York. They have taught us that the use of PAR methods in immigrant communities can be more than an outreach tool for hard-to-reach communities; it can contribute to an increase in social cohesion between migrant workers who experience exploitation and isolation in low-wage industries in foreign lands. *Kuwentohan* as a PAR method capitalizes on Filipina migrant workers cultural values and maximizes their ability to relate to one another. They taught us to think about the context in which migration produces immigrant communities as a basis to design research projects with PAR principles. Given that labor export policies, like in the Philippines, overemphasize individual choice in migration while at the same time investing in a sophisticated system of exporting whole populations, we must consider the traumatizing quality and production of migration as a part of the rubric in designing research projects with immigrants.

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Notes

1. Maria is a common fictional name that not only describes, at once, a particular Filipina's story but also reflects the experience of Filipinas in general.
2. In what I'm calling "group interviews" here, I differentiate from "focus groups" (Madriz, 1998) with this label as the group discussion would have many leaders of the discussion instead of one interviewer as many focus groups have. Group interviews are interviews which questions come from all of the members participating. Instead of a semi-structured interview guide, group interviews would take up a theme like transnational families, migrant motherhood, or husband infidelity, and then participants would ask questions about that theme.

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Author biography

Valerie Francisco is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Portland in Oregon. Francisco received her Ph.D. from the Department of Sociology at City University of New York, The Graduate Center. Francisco's dissertation entitled, "Together But Apart: Dynamics of Filipino Transnational Families" examines the strategies of maintaining a transnational family from the perspectives of Filipino migrant women working as domestic workers in New York City and their families in the Philippines. Francisco's research fundamentally interrogates the implications of neoliberal globalization on intimate and micro relations such as those in the family. In her analysis of the hardships in transnational families, Francisco also pays attention to the ways in which migrants engage their experiences of dislocation and diaspora to craft resistance. In journals like *The Philippine Sociological Review* and *Critical Sociology*, Francisco writes about how families are changing under neoliberal immigration policies and what types of political subjectivities emerge from those conditions.

Appendix I

Scene Synopsis

Scene 1: Pandemonium at Central Park

Maria, a newly migrated Filipino domestic worker, walks into the East 96th Street Playground at Central Park with her charge. She encounters other Filipino nannies and their charges. Seated on a bench while her charge is at play, Aida, a seasoned Filipino nanny, acknowledges Maria, but does not speak to her. Maria attempts to join the other nannies, but they shut her out. In the commotion, a disoriented Maria seems to lose her baby and screams in frustration.

Scene 2: Domestic Work is Real Work

As Aida recounts her first comical experiences using a washing machine and American cleaning products, Maria learns the very same tasks for the first time. Maria's confusion has much to do with getting used to domestic duties in the US and colloquial English.

Aida compares her rigid, monotonous schedule to her past factory job in the Philippines.

Scene 3: A Day In The Life Of Maria

Maria cannot help but think about her own children in the Philippines as she cares for her charge. Maria's family is always present in her mind throughout her long day. She describes the wide range of work she performs in her daily routine. Maria's job as a domestic worker requires her to master many chores and multi-task at all times. In spite of constant loneliness and homesickness, Maria stays focused by keeping herself busy with work.

Scene 4: The Balikbayan Box

Maria returns from shopping to begin packing a large Balikbayan Box. She stores a Balikbayan Box, a box that Filipinos often send back home to their families filled with goods, in her apartment at all times. Despite not making much money, she saves enough to send her children gifts. She places the gifts in the box, one for each of her children: a dress for her eldest daughter, Nene; a cap for her eldest son, Totoy; a pink backpack for her gay son, Peaches; and because she is unsure of his size now, three t-shirts for her *bunso*, or youngest, Bong. Maria becomes frustrated while packing and feels the pressure of sending material possessions to her children as a substitute for her presence.

Aida contemplates her own Balikbayan Box. She recalls the many items that she has sent back home, holidays and celebrations missed, and the one thing that cannot be packaged in a box, herself.

Scene 5: Shopping for a Connection

While shopping for their employers at a supermarket, Maria and Aida recognize each other from nannying in Central Park and strike up a conversation. They begin talking about missing their respective families and how they must push their loved ones out of their thoughts and focus on the task at hand. Suddenly, Maria thinks she sees Piolo, a famous Filipino movie star, who transports them to the fantasy world of working abroad as presented in common Filipino commercials starring himself. Maria imagines starring in her own commercials with Piolo, carrying on a long-distance romance via the tried and true methods of overseas Filipino workers: letter writing, phone card calls, e-mail, and most recently Skype. A phone call jolts Maria back to reality. The call is from her husband in the Philippines who says her son, Totoy, is sick and in the hospital.

Scene 6: Hard Reality

Late for work and upset after her husband's phone call, Maria is confronted by her angry boss, a UN diplomat. She is tense and apologetic as she is worried about losing her job and the ability to send money home. The tension escalates and Maria exclaims that she is willing to do whatever it takes to keep her job. Her boss, knowing her compromised situation, takes full advantage.

Scene 7: Ok Lang Ako (I'm Okay)

Maria returns to the pain and frustration she felt once at Central Park, but now she is surrounded by friends and fellow nannies in her domestic workers' support network. Maria tries to tell her family of the hardship she is going through, but chooses instead to reassure them. Aida and the other nannies of her support network also reassure their families that they are okay, despite the challenges of being a migrant worker and having missed important moments in the lives of the ones they love most.

Appendix 2 – YouTube video of “Domestic Work is Real Work”

<http://youtu.be/4xoRwGiDtRU>