

WHY MOURNING MATTERS

The Politics of Grief in Southeast Asian Narratives of Women's Migration

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Abstract

This paper examines how migrant women's lives are politicized through the work of mourning by analyzing how grieving over their deaths becomes a way of also claiming accountability from a nation-state that deploys its citizen-breadwinners. I employ critical discussions on mourning by Vicente Rafael, Pheng Cheah, and Judith Butler to analyze an OFW film and two Southeast Asian novels that present different responses to deaths of Filipina and Indonesian domestic workers: Joel Lamangan's *The Flor Contemplacion Story* (1995), Jose Dalisay's *Soledad's Sister* (2008), and Rida Fitria's *Sebongkah Tanah Retak (A Lump of Cracked Land, 2010)*. While these texts are different—one is a melodrama, the second a faux-detective novel, the last one a *novel inspiratif* ("inspirational novel")—all three portray how grief becomes an affective economy, in that it reproduces and circulates feelings, like pity, sympathy, rage, and reproach, that forges a community to either foster or forestall political action. My reading maps out how the bereavement over migrant women's lives can lead to a more critical understanding of labor migration policies and discourses in the Philippines and Indonesia, opening the possibilities of social activism that not only transforms a national community but also transcends national boundaries among and between Filipina and Indonesian migrant women.

Keywords

Filipina and Indonesian Domestic Workers; gendered moral hierarchies; intersectionality; melodrama; sacrifice; transnational feminist activism; work of mourning

About the Author

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On March 2015, the shocking news of the impending execution of Mary Jane Veloso, a Filipina domestic worker in Indonesia, reached the Philippines. Mary Jane was convicted of smuggling drugs to Jogjakarta in 2010, a crime punishable by death in Indonesian laws. Amid the widespread outrage on Indonesia's unforgiving stance against drug traffickers and the global outpouring of sympathy toward the foreigners in the death row, Mary Jane stood out among the line of high-profile drug felons—the Bali-Nine—sentenced to die by firing squad. Her story circulated in mass and social media, depicting her not as a drug mule but a victim of human trafficking. In her testimony, she claimed that out of her desperation to provide for her two small sons, she was lured by a promise to work in Jogjakarta by an illegal recruiter just to be duped into carrying a luggage stashed with two kilos of heroin (Veloso). Her tale is familiar to many Filipinos, a story of a sacrificing mother who has to leave home for her family only to suffer abuse from employers or deception from recruiters.

In the months leading to her execution, activists and sympathizers in the Philippines poured out into the streets, protested their government's negligence and stayed through nights of vigil, lighting up candles and offering prayers to save Mary Jane from death. Mary Jane's case and the mass rallies that ensued reminded the country of a national event of mourning two decades ago. Flor Contemplacion, a Filipina domestic worker in Singapore was convicted of murdering a fellow Filipina helper and the latter's ten-year old ward, and was eventually executed by hanging. Both Mary Jane and Flor were perceived to be virtuous victims rather than hardened criminals and their punishment was seen as unjust and too severe. Just like Flor, Mary Jane languished in a cell in Jogjakarta for years and her case has only caught public attention a few months before her execution. Just like Flor, her story has spurred public outcry among thousands of Filipinos, targeting not only the Indonesian justice system, but also their own government's neglect and apparent apathy to the suffering and sacrifices of their own modern-day heroes.

While there have been resemblances to the 1995 execution of Flor, Mary Jane's case took an interesting turn of events. Unlike Flor's passing that had only spurred mourning on a national scale, the outpouring of grief for Mary Jane has exceeded national borders. It was not only Manila that mourned her imminent death as Indonesian activists and sympathizers have flocked to the streets of Jakarta and flooded their president and attorney general's social media accounts with messages tagged with #BiarkanHidup (#LetLive) to ask their own government to spare Mary Jane from the firing squad (Sorot Jogja Editors). Even migrant Indonesian women join their Filipina counterparts and led protest rallies in front of Indonesian embassies abroad. Eni Lestari, a domestic worker and activist in Hong Kong, questioned Indonesian President Joko Widodo's judgement by making an emotional statement: "How can our government appeal to save 279 Indonesians in the death row in

Middle East if we ourselves are executing innocent migrant workers?” (McBride). Erwiana Sulistyaningsih, an Indonesian helper who was maltreated and abused in Hong Kong, also spoke to the media in Jogjakarta and identified her own struggles with the Filipina maid, saying “I could have been Mary Jane....Like me, Mary Jane was forced to become a migrant domestic worker because of poverty, because of a commitment to support her family, because she had no other choice. Like me, she suffered abuse. Like me, she almost died” (Sulistyaningsih).

Unlike what happened to Flor, however, the strong showing of support and sympathy for Mary Jane was not unheeded. Mary Jane, handcuffed, blindfolded, and about to walk into the line of fire, was granted temporary reprieve at the eleventh hour and was escorted out of the execution fields. While Philippine President Aquino personally talked to the Indonesian leader to request for clemency, President Widodo himself maintained that it was the Indonesian women activists who convinced him of keeping Mary Jane alive for the time being (Kwok).

Mary Jane’s deliverance from death was received with celebration in Jakarta. Human rights advocates and migrant activists have promised to follow her case through and use it as a point of campaign to repeal the death penalty in the country. Mary Jane’s story not only mirrored the cruel fates of many Indonesian migrant women in death row abroad, victims of abuse and human trafficking, it has also revealed the pitfalls of the country’s inhumane approach to drug trafficking in Indonesia. Mary Jane’s death sentence, along with migrant women and activists’ mourning of her fate, has then shored up emotions that speak about how Indonesian women identify with the kind of suffering that Mary Jane went through and how her life and death matter in their own struggles at home and elsewhere in the world.

As of this writing, Mary Jane still languishes in an Indonesian cell, waiting for the resolution of her trial against her illegal recruiters in Manila that could potentially reverse her conviction (Galang and Philippine Daily Inquirer). This work of mourning continues to be deeply relevant in Indonesia today, not just because Mary Jane is still on death row, but also since another migrant woman—Merri Utami, an Indonesian no less—also has faced the same struggles. Utami was about to be executed in Nusakambangan for drug-related conviction more than a decade ago (Maryono). And just like Mary Jane, she was also spared at the last minute because of vigorous campaigns by human rights activists and migrant women advocates (Gutierrez, “What It Was Like Waiting for Death”). The various protest actions served as a work of mourning that politicizes the lives and fates of Mary Jane, Merri, and other trafficked women from Southeast Asia (Gutierrez, “Women on Death Row”).

It was a completely different story in Manila. There was a swift change of opinion from jubilation to hatred after Mary Jane's mother, Celia Veloso, made public her complaints against the Philippine government's negligence that put her daughter's life at risk. The mother's blaming of the Aquino administration became the center of a Twitter storm as the hashtag #SaveMaryJane turned into #BitayinNaYan (#ExecuteHerNow) and #FiringSquadforCeliaVeloso. This sudden mood swing showed how the Filipino public has lost sympathy for Veloso family's plight because of their apparent lack of *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) to the former President Aquino's efforts, who earlier claimed victory for having saved Mary Jane despite Widodo's statements in local and international media (Inquirer Social Media).

The pity and compassion of many Filipinos, who previously grieved for Mary Jane's fate and commiserated with her family's distress, have been displaced by hostility shown on how they shamed Veloso family's lack of appreciation and in the ways they blamed Mary Jane's own culpability for her dire situation. Some of the most vitriolic comments in social media even go as far as saying that she deserves to die because she is guilty anyway, either as a drug courier or as an illegal migrant. Consider, for example, a comment of an OFW on Carol Pagaduan-Araullo's column in *Business World*, entitled "Mary Jane is Flor Contemplacion 2":

How can you compare a drug mule to a legal domestic helper (Flor) falsely accused of murder? Mary Jane is not an OFW and to imply that she is one is an insult to all OFWs like myself who legally pay our dues to the government and who never complain that we have to leave our families behind while we work abroad. (xonxx)

This kind of retort, characterized by a deep disdain to alleged drug-related criminals and a blanket dismissal of their basic human rights, uncannily mirrored the disturbing mood in the Philippines a couple of months after, as the then newly minted administration of Rodrigo Duterte advanced its bloody drug war among the country's poor (Gavilan). According to the Commission on Human Rights, the anti-drug campaign's death toll could be as high 27,000, even though the Philippine National Police claims that there are only 5,000 cases of deaths connected to their operations (Maru). As the killings of suspected drug pushers and users surge, human rights activists lament how the majority of Filipinos are either silent or relieved about the piling bodies in the wake of Duterte's aggressive "Peace and Order" campaign against drugs (Sambalud). As one Filipino writer abroad frustratingly opines: "Who will mourn for those killed who have been similarly judged guilty without due process?" (Francia). The unsettling endorsement of Filipino netizens on "cardboard justice," and their incapacity to mourn the victims of extrajudicial

killings because they deserve their fate, reflects the cruel responses toward Mary Jane and her family's struggles.

Mary Jane's life, her death sentence, her narrow and temporary escape from mortality, and the contradictory responses among Filipino and Indonesian publics, illustrate the complex politics of mourning in labor migration in both countries. Her case and the reactions it generated show how death, or its possibility, among Southeast Asian migrant women animated feelings that may intervene into how their struggles and social movements are understood in the public sphere. The unfolding of events surrounding her fate and the feedback it spawned show how grief functions as an affective economy of labor migration. Mourning produces emotions that may sometimes question the nation-state's rhetoric of economic heroism by grieving over the loss of, or the possibility of losing, lives sacrificed in the name of home and homeland. In the face of death, mourning works to politicize the lives and feelings of migrant women like Mary Jane by calling forth the stakes of both of these countries' wager for development through their own labor export policies. As Mary Jane's case shows, mourning moves people to grieve as a community by binding them according to the collective pathos of national identity or shared suffering and sacrifice. The conflicting responses that Mary Jane's case has sparked among Filipino and Indonesian publics, however, also speak about the political limits and radical possibilities of mourning in Southeast Asian migration.

For many Filipinos, some of whom are OFWs themselves, mourning for migrant women like Mary Jane has to be premised on seeing her life worthy of public condolences. The nation has to see her virtues as an overseas Filipina within the gendered moral and national frames of labor migration. For pity and sympathy to turn into rage and reproach by implicating the nation-state for the kind of sacrifices these migrant women go through, the nation has to recognize her goodness and suffering. In short, Mary Jane has to prove that she deserves to be mourned. If she is morally suspect, disobeyed any rules, bypassed the proper channels of migration, or lacked gratitude, she is thus seen as deserving of her suffering and ill fate.

However, the kind of responses that Indonesian women and sympathizers have for Mary Jane's fate exceeds these national and gendered moral frames, as they identify with her mortality not on the basis of the morality of her sacrifice, but because of her suffering and the kind of struggles she faces as a migrant woman. They see in her a way of speaking about their own fates, their own woes and sorrows in the field of transnational labor migration. And their mourning for her is not contained by questions of the legitimacy of sacrifice nor her virtues as a woman and as a displaced citizen of her own country. They are not completely bounded by the national limits and politics of what Mary Jane represents, but instead imagined themselves outside these kinds of territorial identifications.

In this article, I focus on this particular problem of mourning in the politics of overseas work in the Philippines and Indonesia. I argue that mourning as an “affective economy” (Ahmed) serves to circulate contradictory discourses that maintain and challenge gendered moralistic and nationalistic assumptions on labor migration in Southeast Asia. First, I will discuss how mourning works as affective economy by discussing two critical readings of Pheng Cheah and Vicente Rafael on Flor Contemplacion’s death. Here, I center on their discussion on how grief reproduces and circulates particular emotions of pity and sympathy, or rage and reproach, as means of intervening into discourses of labor migration in the Philippines. Rafael’s account of Flor’s case shows how mourning allows dislocated subjects of labor migration to claim belonging to their nation through pity and sympathy, while Cheah demonstrates how that national community finds the language of blaming and anger to exact accountability from their government for the death of a migrant woman.

The kind of mourning that both Cheah and Rafael discuss is both bounded by gendered and moral discourses of nationalism, which in itself poses problems in understanding the complex politics of migration. As the case of Mary Jane shows, mourning for migrant women’s lives because of their sacrifice not only reaffirms some of the problematic expectations that we accord to migrant women but also effaces their suffering and struggles on the basis of whether or not they deserve their fate. To this, I look at how Judith Butler talks about mourning as a political resource in thinking about deaths that fall out of national self-recognition. Although Butler is considering a completely different context of global terrorism post-9/11, I find her provocation on identifying with suffering as grounds of grief a more radical conceptualization of the work of mourning as a political impulse.

I track the limits and possibilities that the work of mourning performs in narratives of Southeast Asian migration, particularly in a popular OFW film of Joel Lamangan, *The Flor Contemplacion Story* (1995), and in contemporary Filipino and Indonesian novels of Jose Dalisay, *Soledad’s Sister* (2008), and Rida Fitria, *Sebongkah Tanah Retak* (*A Lump of Cracked Soil*, 2010). Even though these three texts are different in genre and style—the film is a family melodrama that filmically stages the life and death of Flor Contemplacion; the Filipino novel is a faux-detective story where a woman, aided by a cop, follows the trail of her migrant sister’s mysterious death abroad; and the Indonesian novel is a *novel inspiratif* (“inspirational novel”) that, instead of a didactic or moralistic tale, presents a rousing story of a migrant women’s political awakening—they portray the deaths of Filipina and Indonesian domestic worker characters differently while also illustrating how such representations lead to very different responses to these deaths. In these ways, the film and the novels demonstrate the limits and possibilities of mourning the lives and struggles of Southeast Asian migrant women and its deeper implications in

depicting their struggles and social movements. Through these literary and visual texts, I argue that the limitations of grief work as politics reside in how it is framed within the gendered moral and national discourses of labor migration.

In Lamangan's film, for example, grieving over the life of Flor Contemplacion only becomes possible because her suffering is represented as moral and virtuous, as she is portrayed as a sacrificing and self-renouncing mother. This is also why her death deserves to be mourned and her life can be a basis to reproach the nation-state that has sacrificed her for its own development and nation-building. The film's portrayal of a Filipina domestic worker in Singapore, and the days leading to her execution, shows how the work of mourning in the film transforms her life as a national subject who accommodates and provides according to the dominant script of OFW sacrifice, and thus worthy of the name *bagong bayani*.

The two novels, on the other hand, demonstrate the limits and the possibilities of mourning for migrant women's lives within and beyond the territorializing gendered moral and national discourses of migration. Dalisay's novel depicts how grief is suspended and effaced when an OFW transgresses the gendered moral codes of being a migrant woman. By portraying how Soledad's struggles are silenced and how her remains are completely lost in the narrative, Dalisay illustrates how these discourses disallow grieving over the deaths of overseas Filipinas because their moral transgressions make their lives unworthy of bereavement. Soledad's demise is devoid of mourning because her life of suffering is seen as her penance for her past indiscretions, nullifying her sacrifice for her sister and son, and making her just one of the casualties of overseas work's fate-playing. The novel rehearses this by depicting how Soledad's life literally disappears with her name and identity substituted, the cause of her death kept secret, and her body a subject of endless search by her sister throughout the novel.

Fitria's novel, on the other hand, opens up a completely different way of thinking about mourning by portraying how an Indonesian domestic worker, Ijah, who is morally suspect herself, begins to be unbounded by gendered moral and national expectations as a migrant woman. This allows her to see her fellow migrant women's struggles as a point of identification and a source of grief. The novel depicts the protagonist's political transformation, from someone who looks at her sorry fate as something she deserves because of her lack of virtues, to someone who identifies with other women's struggles as their shared fate in their precarious border-crossing. This transformation can be seen in how she articulates her grief over a fellow domestic worker whom she barely knew, but whose struggles she identifies as her own, and whose death she took as her own cause to advance their shared claims on human rights and worker's dignity.

THE WORK OF MOURNING

One of the most prominent cases where the death of an overseas Filipina has summoned a massive crowd into mourning to expose the cruel politics of the country's labor export policy was the hanging of Flor Contemplacion. Flor is a Filipina domestic worker in Singapore who was arrested in May 1991 and confessed to the murder of Delia Maga, another Filipina maid, and the latter's four-year old ward, Nicholas Huang. Although she retracted her earlier admission saying she confessed under duress, she was sentenced to death after the trial judge found her previous testimony credible. She languished in jail for more than four years with little to no support from the Philippine embassy in Singapore. The Philippine government only took an active interest in her case in the weeks leading to her execution, as a reaction to the growing public uproar in the country. After rejecting two new testimonies supporting Flor's innocence, and refusing to grant the then Philippine president Fidel Ramos's repeated personal pleas for clemency, the Singaporean government pushed through with Flor's hanging on March 17, 1995.

Her death drew thousands of Filipinos out to the streets and brought the whole nation into mourning. Hordes of people protested in front of the Singaporean embassy in the Philippines, some of them even went as far as burning Singapore's flag. Thousands more joined in a series of mass demonstrations decrying the Philippine state's criminal negligence, not only of Flor, but also of the millions of OFWs she represented. Flor has become an icon for the plight of OFWs who have been for years toiling and suffering silently from discrimination and abuse in foreign countries of their employment. She was elevated into a national symbol, being named alternately as "the flower of national rage," "national saint," and "national martyr" in Philippine dailies and local TV (Cheah 2006, 310). Her funeral wake pulsated with overflowing grief, pity, anger, and indignation from the droves of Filipinos who attended her funeral. This event has been a cornerstone of the discussions on Philippine labor migration, particularly on how it bared and contested the country's continued reliance on, but at the same time abandonment of, its own people abroad.

To understand how the "surge of nationalist identification" to Flor's remains came about, Vicente Rafael, in his essay "Your Grief is Our Gossip" (2000), focuses on how sacrifice is construed in nationalist discourses to explain how and why the whole nation mourned over Flor's death. By showing how heroism in the Philippines has been "predicated in the logic of suffering and sacrifice," Rafael claims that popular nationalism has projected a kind of patriotism upheld by the "power of pity" and "moral certainty" against external and more powerful forces (212). Flor's narrative of sacrifice performs the script of *bagong bayani* because it reiterates the nationalist motifs of the suffering martyr-leaders of the country. Rafael argues that

her life can be set against Ninoy Aquino, who can die for his country and, more importantly, the self-renunciation and virtue of the latter's widow, Cory, who can still accommodate and provide even while suffering for her country.

Rafael states that "the link between Contemplacion and the nation had to do with her innocence, presumed widely by Filipinos, and her suffering in the name of her family." Her innocence tied to her agony as OFW endows her with the moral ascendancy of a national hero even in, and precisely because of, her submission to her fate in the hands of foreign powers. "That Contemplacion was a woman, and that OFWs by virtue of their subordinate position to foreign employers come across as feminized within nation-state formations further reinforced the sense of public pity and outrage" (214). Flor was raised into the stature of a national hero because she is a good mother who has suffered for her family and her country. Her fate in the Singaporean gallows became the extent of what she can offer and has offered for her home and homeland.

Flor's death has "[opened] up a different kind of national wishfulness, one where the nation is founded on mourning rather than so-called development" (214). Through the grief of the nation, her body was welcomed and reclaimed by her homeland and her fate becomes the country's story in the time of uneven globalization and aggressive warm-body exportation. The Filipino public has also radically transformed her narrative of sacrifice away from the Philippine state's path dependency on migration. Flor's ultimate sacrifice became another kind of patriotism that served to contradict and challenge the very rhetoric of *bagong bayani* that the government uses to buttress its labor export policy. For the first time, a migrant in her death was able to speak for and in behalf of the nation in mourning. "The displays of anger and expressions of pity reproduced the sense and sensation of a nation in mourning as the labor specific to the engendering of nationhood.... Nationalist mourning sought to rescue (OFWs) from the realm of global capitalist production and resituate their bodies as the exilic incarnations of contemporary patriotism" (219).

Pity becomes the uniting affect in the nation's encounter of the marks of ordeal and torment on Flor's remains. Her body, seen in light of deference and submission to external forces, has become the testament to the pitfalls of sacrificing for the country and has drawn pity and sympathy from onlookers. Pity, for Rafael, is where reproach and blaming emanated from. As a way of giving voice to the dead, pity engenders outrage and indignation through the mourners' act of looking and speaking in behalf of the dead. "Expressing pity for the dead is heeding their call; but it also entails speaking in the dead's place, articulating the pain that is traced on their remains" (220). The pity of the Filipino public who have seen Flor's corpse was thus transformed into anger articulated through reproach and blaming. In

this public display of resentment and finger-pointing, the image of Flor's sacrifice corporealized in her mutilated body becomes a way of claiming accountability from the nation-state and its systematic overseas deployment.

Pheng Cheah, in *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights* (2006), emphasizes the power of blaming and reproach in the act of mourning over Flor in bringing forward important reforms in the country's previously inhumane approach of aggressive warm-body exportation of women. Focusing on issues of human rights of migrant domestic workers in Singapore, Cheah sees this mourning as a social movement that attempts to humanize the largely dehumanized field of overseas work. Cheah argues that because Flor has become a symbol for both the dehumanized migrant labor force and the victimized nation in the global process, mourning her has collectively inspired the Filipino community with the power of reproach or finger-pointing: "As the Filipino people became metamorphosed into a collective subject that demanded accountability from and sought to inspire the state, there was a scramble both within the state administration and in society to deflect responsibility by pointing a finger at the inhumanity of other parties.... The gesture of finger-pointing presented itself as a humanizing act that places the accuser firmly within the party of humanity" (236). Mourning is a humanizing pedagogy, since it not only reveals to the living their deplorable conditions, but also teaches them to blame the institutions of power that condition those suffering.

The accusatory gesture instigated by the grieving public has pushed the then President Fidel Ramos to establish the Gancayco Commission to investigate her case, assess accountabilities, and forward policy recommendations that would put a stop to such further incidence of death, violence, and abuse of OFWs. Couched in the language of blame, the commission criticized Singaporean society for treating Filipino migrant domestic workers "like machines and not as fellow human beings," while, at the same time, reprimanded government officials and fired Filipino diplomats in Singapore who failed to address and mitigate Flor's case (236). It is important to note that reproach here is not only directed toward Singapore. The public mourning of Filipinos has more importantly placed blame on and implicated their own government for its criminal negligence. Flor's case did not just awaken national sentiment but also pushed for concrete reforms for the protection of many OFWs. Her death has helped push for the passing of the 1999 Magna Carta for Domestic Workers, which paved the way for the 2011 International Labour Organization's Convention for Decent Work for Domestic Workers (Ofreneo and Samonte).

This humanizing effect of mourning, for Cheah, is also a nationalizing moment because it binds the Filipinos, overseas and at home, to rally around an appeal to humanize the labor that their community offers to the world. "Such humanizing

pedagogy is also a popular-nationalist counter-*Bildung* that asserts the humanity of ordinary Filipinos against the directives of official *Bildung*, especially its tactics of development through labor exportation, which are viewed as equally responsible for the plight of Filipino domestic workers abroad” (236-7). In this grief work, Flor’s sacrifice became not just the consequence of the demands of the Philippine state to suffer for the sake of family and nation. It has become a way of claiming back what the state should offer and provide for its OFWs in return.

The public anger that came about from this bereavement has compelled the Philippine government to hastily pass the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995 to appease the people, which is a testament to how the state was made to reassess their aggressive overseas deployment program out of people’s movement. The state started to have a more active role in looking after and managing their OFWs by instituting policies to safeguard the OFWs’ basic rights and protect their welfare like standardizing work contracts, accrediting recruitment agencies, and strengthening the institutional support from government agencies like the POEA and the OWWA.

The event of mourning has also produced humanizing effects for Singapore as a receiving state: it has vigorously prosecuted cases of abuse and violence against Filipino domestic workers and it has consciously attempted to project a less hostile, more hospitable, and appreciative image of hosts by holding cultural events and trainings to welcome guest workers. These positive outcomes can be seen as the work of mourning’s production of human effects: “In the public canonization of Flor as a national martyr, her body, utterly dehumanized by the global traffic in domestic labor, becomes rehumanized to the point that it inspires and forces a rehumanization of the Philippine state and this particular circuit of capital accumulation” (238).

In both of Rafael’s and Cheah’s accounts, the grief work brought about by Flor’s death is productive because it engendered and circulated emotions of pity and sympathy or of anger and reproach among the Filipinos. In these ways, the act of mourning becomes an affective economy that appropriates Flor’s life of misery and sacrifice; it also projects her death as a nation’s collective loss, a fatal casualty in the Philippine state’s ventures for development via labor migration. It has also compelled the nation-state to act upon that grief by responding to the calls of blaming by reforming certain policies and reasserting their concern toward the welfare of their citizen-breadwinners abroad.

However, both Rafael and Cheah also see the limits and the problems of this kind of mourning as a resource for political action and social change. For Cheah, this type of grief work is inherently inadequate because any attempt to humanize Flor

and the migrant women workers will only fall within the terms of global capitalism and development, which is fundamentally inhumane. For example, blaming the Philippine state for abandoning Flor in the hands of foreign powers is also demanding the state to deepen and expand their management on migrant women workers' lives. As Cheah points out, "far from breaking with the technologies of governmentality, such cries lament the fact that the Philippine state does not engage enough government and urge the intensification of biopolitics" (237).

Calling out the state to ensure the wellbeing of migrant Filipinas would also submit their lives to further control and disciplinary mechanisms. For one, the efficacy of the Philippine state's intensified governmentality is contingent upon its economic position and interest against those of the destination state's policies. The fact that most of their policies to protect overseas Filipinos remain mostly dismissed in many host states in the Middle East and Asia only attest to the Philippine state's weak standing against these countries. Moreover, urging the state to be more protective of their citizens abroad can also be problematic as those who fall out of the purview of this intensified biopolitics, like those who cross borders illegally or those who do not follow government regulations, will be deemed undeserving of protection and aid in times of distress. Women like Mary Jane cannot blame the government because, as many other OFWs argue, she chose to be trafficked in the first place.

Rafael, on the other hand, sees the problem in how claiming justice and human rights in mourning over Flor's death resides not in "abolition of external dependency," but rather in "rectifying the discrepancy" of pity's moral economy among the alleged parties: "If only Singapore had taken pity; if only the Ramos government had taken care" (215). The kind of politics that this grief work espouses then is constrained into appeasing the excess of emotions of pity and rage, thus its results are meant to contain these feelings that mourning produces more than offer long-term solutions: "other than the resignation of a number of officials, brief diplomatic breach between Singapore and the Philippines, and a flurry of popular demands for and official gestures at reforming policies meant to protect OFWs, Contemplacion's death has had relatively little effect in challenging the current order of things" (223). This was so because "both Singaporean and Philippine government[s] seemed inadequate referents of nationalist rage" (222) and Flor's death is clearly a consequence of a much deeper and systematic dilemma of uneven global flow of capital and bodies.

Both of these accounts point to how the politics of mourning is territorialized by nation-state discourses on migration. Rafael shows how grief in this context is bounded and negotiated within and between nation-states, and the act of blaming and reproaching the implicated governments can only assuage the "excess

of identification” to Flor’s body by consoling the living through limited gestures of reforms. This is also why the demand for the protection and safeguarding of human rights in the act of grieving over overseas Filipinas’ life, as Cheah claims, can only produce results that revolve around intensifying the nation-state’s claim and control toward women like Flor. While both of these readings are accurate, I argue that the problem in the political impulse of this kind of mourning also resides in how Flor’s death became grievable in their accounts through national self-recognition.

The very discourses that made Flor’s death a legible and legitimate source of national grief are also what contain the political possibilities of mourning. To this, I am using Judith Butler’s examination of the problems of discursive frames that make a life grievable in *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (2006). In her discussion of the aftershock of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US, she talks about how public mourning and obituary can become not just “an act of nation-building” but also a means of marking which lives are worth grieving and which lives are not. “Obituary can be the means by which life becomes, or fails to become, a publicly grievable life, an icon for national self-recognition, the means by which life becomes noteworthy” (34). Butler claims that while public mourning has allowed American citizens to grieve over their loss, that grieving would never account for the lives outside the frames of American self-recognition: “If 200,000 Iraqi children were killed during the Gulf War and its aftermath, do we have an image, a frame for any of those lives, singly or collectively? Is there a story we might find about those deaths in the media? Are there names attached to those children?” (34). Therefore, for her, the predominant practice of mourning is bounded by moral and national discourses that establish what lives are marked grievable and noteworthy. And for those deaths that exist outside these frames, their narratives are illegible and their lives become impossible to grieve: “It is not just that a death is poorly marked, but that it is unmarkable. Such a death vanishes, not into explicit discourse, but in the ellipses by which the public discourse proceeds” (35).

While Butler’s questions on the compass and confines of the power of public mourning are grounded on a very different context, I find her intervention into the politics of grief also productive in my discussion of what makes Flor’s death grievable and worthy of national self-recognition. Following these analytics, Flor’s life only becomes markable and remarkable because she was portrayed as a national martyr. This iconization of her suffering into a narrative of sacrifice makes her worthy of public mourning: she has died even though she followed the dominant script of a selfless mother and law-abiding overseas worker for her family and nation. This makes her not only deserving of pity, but also a source of indignation from the Filipino community in grief.

In making Flor's life grievable according to the frames of national self-recognition, her suffering can only be understood as a moral basis to reproach the Philippine state. While this is important, it also effaces the complex structures and conditions of labor migration that produce Flor's grievability. Her narrative of suffering only exists to legitimize her sacrifice and makes her worthy of public mourning. By containing Flor's life within the narrative of national sacrifice, public mourning does not just misrecognize suffering as a natural and necessary experience of labor migration instead of being a symptom of uneven global structures that condition her vulnerability as overseas Filipina worker. It also reinforces problematic discourses that delineate which migrant women's lives matter and deserve to be mourned by the nation. This mourning, which also acts as nation-building, is framed by gendered moral discourses; to be mourned, she must follow and perform the script of a self-renunciating woman for her family and for her country. Those whose mobility and morality does not subscribe to these frames of national self-recognition, like Mary Jane, become unmarkable and ungrievable.

In reconsidering other forms of grief work, Butler proposes an alternative way of thinking about mourning that lies not on the frames of public self-recognition but on one's fundamental tie to another through vulnerability. Developing her thesis on precariousness and precarity, she argues that mourning exposes us to our own dispossession and exposure to others. Grief reveals how we are "given over, beyond ourselves, implicated in the lives that are not our own" (28). She conceptualizes how grief dislocates one's subjectivity: because to grieve is to "*be beside oneself*" with rage or pity or passion (24), and, as such, puts the subject vulnerable to the other in a constitutive relationality or in that "primary tie, or primary way in which we are, as bodies, outside ourselves and for one another" (27). From this, Butler puts forward a different kind of politics of mourning: one that "tarries with grief" or "maintains grief as part of the framework of politics." The political work of mourning then means that "to make grief itself into a resource for politics is not to be resigned to inaction but to undergo "a slow process by which we develop a point of identification with suffering itself" (30).

This movement toward a form of mourning that identifies with suffering more than sacrifice is important in radicalizing narratives of grief in Southeast Asian migration. In my reading of *The Flor Contemplacion Story*, I argue that the film functions as a grief work that projects Flor's narrative of sacrifice within the frames of the gendered moral and national discourses of labor migration. Through the use of melodrama, the film reenacts the public mourning of Filipinos by memorializing Flor's life through excessive drama to fit the script of the sacrificing mother, while also erasing her actual everyday struggle as an overseas Filipina in Singapore.

The life and fate of those who do not fit the bill of a virtuous migrant woman like Soledad in Jose Dalisay's novel, *Soledad's Sister*, are rendered unmarked and ungrievable, because their stories are common and ubiquitous in the continued warm-body exportation of women in the Philippines. Ijah, the protagonist of Rida Fitria's *Sebongkah Tanah Retak*, disrupts this idea of public mourning through national self-recognition by showing how grief can also come from identifying with a stranger's suffering and seeing in another's death her own vulnerability and precarity. Outside the gendered moral and national frames that both the Filipino film and novel impose on the death of an overseas Filipina, this Indonesian novel demonstrates how tarrying with grief and identifying with other people's struggles can lead to a more transformative politics of mourning in migrant women workers' narratives.

PERFORMING PITY

To attest to how significant Flor's death is for Filipinos, three films depicting her life and the circumstances surrounding her case were released in the Philippines within the year of her execution. These were Joel Lamangan's biopic, *The Flor Contemplacion Story*, Tikoy Aguiluz' documentary drama, *Bagong Bayani*, and Carlos Caparas' murder-thriller, *Victim No.1: Delia Maga, Jesus Pray for Us! A Massacre in Singapore*. Of these three, it was Lamangan's film that became both a commercial and critical success. It became a blockbuster in 1995, one of the first few films of that decade that surpassed the PhP 100 million-mark, or approximately US\$ 3.8 million, in domestic ticket sales. It was awarded Best Film at the Cairo International Film Festival, with its lead actress, Nora Aunor, also scoring the Best Actress trophy. The film also garnered several more trophies in local film award-giving bodies. This film became so popular and acclaimed because it mounts and relives the eruption of pity and indignation of the viewers in the wake of Flor's death. As an iconic OFW film, it successfully stages the kind of grief its audience felt through the cinematic language of melodrama.

The Flor Contemplacion Story is part of an assemblage of movie productions in the Philippines subsumed under the genre of OFW Film. These are films that center on overseas Filipino/a workers and are catered to an audience that extends from the domestic market of the left-behind families of OFWs to an international viewers comprised mostly of OFWs themselves (Campos; Tan). Because OFW films visualize the experiences of migrants and the impact of labor migration to their families back home, most of the stories that these films portray are family-oriented and conform to melodramatic conventions. *The Flor Contemplacion Story* is no exception to this genre's tendencies as most critics lament its "unrestrained

melodramatics” even though the film is supposed to be based on the real life of its titular character (Levy). While it is true that the film’s over-sentimentalism undermines its authenticity and aesthetic merits as a biopic, this melodramatic excess is crucial in not only driving its narrative forward, but also in rendering how Flor’s life becomes grievable within the frames of national self-recognition.

Just like the function of melodrama in popular OFW films in representing the moral virtues of OFWs’ sacrifice, melodrama is also important in shaping the affective content of a national narrative founded in grief. Linda Williams, in “Melodrama Revised” (1998), claims that any story that “focuses on victim-heroes and the recognition of their virtue” operates around the mode of melodrama (53). Melodrama can be said to work in narratives that solicit tears to uphold the moral virtue and innocence of the protagonist. In the case of narratives projected as stories of nation-building, as Susan Denver claims in *Celluloid Nationalism and Other Melodramas* (2003), melodrama becomes a frame for national self-recognition where tales of upright heroes and heroines “legislate the regime of virtues in national contexts” (8). It is in melodramatic mode that questions of rightness and righteousness converged, depicting protagonists whose moral character defines and certifies acts that should belong to the national public sphere of life.

The generic mode of melodrama can then be considered as an affective translation of mourning in the OFW films that feature deaths of migrant protagonists. It is also in this mode of moral description that melodrama prescribes what the nation recognizes as grievable lives. Even though they mediate true-to-life stories that are already too public and too familiar for the audience, Alice Guillermo claims that melodrama “gives an artistic and emotional unity to a tragic experience with which many people empathize” (107). In other words, melodrama provides the moral unity and affirmation to these tragedies while also functioning as an emotional appeal for pity and indignation from the viewers.

The Flor Contemplacion Story is driven by this mode of melodrama especially in the way it centers on Flor’s moral virtues as a mother and displaced citizen of the nation. It does this by focusing on two aspects in her life that revolve around suffering: (1) as a sacrificing mother to her family each time she goes back home and (2) as a victim of injustice inside the Singaporean prison cell. Throughout its entirety, the film is silent about her life as a domestic worker inside and outside her employer’s home in Singapore. While the attention to her familial suffering and her torment inside the prison indicates the film’s investment on affirming her virtues and innocence as a protagonist, it however excludes the everyday pains that Flor has suffered as a migrant woman in Singapore. Her experiences as a migrant domestic helper are given very little portrayal in the whole film as if it was inconsequential in understanding why her fate ended up in the Singaporean gallows.

Highlighting Flor's suffering in the film's narrative follows the melodramatic mode where her suffering become the moral basis to call for justice in the wake of her eventual death, and not the deeper conditions of inequalities in transnational domestic work where her suffering came from. In this cinematic grief work, her virtue and endurance as an overseas Filipina worker and the spectacularization of her maternal sacrifice consolidate the gendered moral and national discourses of labor migration even as it critiques the country's labor export policy. In trying to dramatize Flor as a martyr-hero, her biopic omits portraying the complex conditions that support the kind of inequality and suffering she endures as a migrant woman worker. In this way, her death only becomes a referent to an order of injustice that is more moral and affective rather than structural and everyday in the mode of melodrama. This is why the melodramatic representation of her sacrifice that capitalizes on the legibility and legitimacy of her virtues only reiterates the problematic moral and national codes imposed on migrant women like Flor.

The film's investment on making Flor's life grievable can be seen in its narrative structure. Its plot is divided into two parts with the first half focusing on her relationship to her family every time she comes home, while the second half centers on her ordeal inside the Changi prison. The film starts with a sequence showing Flor being manhandled and thrown to the death row cell. The scene then shifts from Singapore to a province south of Manila where the viewers see Flor's family gathering to listen to the radio announcing the details of Flor's impending execution. After the revelation of the death sentence, the audience is presented with a meticulous handiwork of cinematic labor of memory through the use of flashbacks in the film's first half. Since the scenes in this part of the film are anchored in the narrative's present time, where the spectators see her family's efforts in finding help and talking about Flor with other people, flashbacks interject to give a glimpse of Flor's virtues as a self-renouncing wife and mother each time she goes home.

The film details her life of suffering in the face of many betrayals from her loved ones as a result of her leaving for work abroad. She suffers as a wife for being deceived by her husband whom she learns, during one of her returns, is already having an affair with another woman. She suffers from her children who do not live up to their promise of reciprocating her sacrifice: her oldest son quits school and got involved with troublemakers in their village while her only daughter got pregnant before finishing college. The poignancy of this series of Flor's suffering from infidelity and disappointment is told through various disconnected scenes that create the momentum of drama of her family breaking apart.

In one of her homecomings, she is shocked by the fact that she can no longer tell her twin sons apart. This estrangement would dramatically be followed by the

revelation of her husband, Efren, having a mistress. After a hysterical confrontation with her husband and his mistress, Flor calmly talks to Efren about leaving the mistress not for her but for their children's sake, since she is always out of the country anyway. When asked by her daughter, Russel, how she can still accept her husband despite his philandering, Flor answers: "I still love your father. I still love this family even though so much has changed." This growing rift within her family, to whom her suffering is solely dedicated, is further exemplified in her conversation with her oldest son, Zandrex. Over an argument on how her son is throwing away all that she has given him, her son asks her why she keeps on leaving them to work abroad even though they can try making ends meet if she stays in the country. Flor answers: "Everything has changed. This family I knew has already changed. And I know it is becoming stranger and more distant each time I come back."

The unfolding of this succession of letdowns from her family to whom she devoted all her life and suffering does not invalidate the morality of her sacrifice at all. If any, it all the more reveals the conviction of her virtue. Flor is perhaps pathetic for accepting her husband's infidelity and her sons' disaffection despite her sacrifices, but she is, at the end, virtuous. As Williams claims, the powerful moments of melodrama are those where the heroes and heroines are in their most pathetic state as they reveal "their moral goodness," which the viewers begin to "recognize and bear witness to a goodness that is inextricably linked to suffering" in these filmic moments (54). As such, her moral goodness as a wife and as a mother, in all its unconditionality, is uplifted in these instances. The virtue of this maternal love is powerfully depicted in a scene where she first receives a visit from all her children in the prison. Here, we have the eruption of pity and grief at the sight of Flor pressing the glass walls that separate her and her children inside the visitation cell. This is repeated again, a few days before her execution, where Flor is calmly begging her children to go home. This scene that dramatically depicts Flor's motherly love narratively ties the protagonist's familial sufferings to the other order of sufferings that she experiences inside the prison cell.

All throughout its first half, the film is silent about her version of the truth. Her revelation of what actually transpired, at least according to this biopic, signals the second half of the film that details the heroine's agony in the hands of the Singaporean state's police and judicial forces. The second half happens inside the various cells in which she was transferred. Here, the movie picks up from the testimony of another witness, Angie, Flor's cellmate in the hospital section of prison. Tied to a bedpost, she would then narrate to her the more popularly accepted version among Filipinos of what really happened between her and Delia Maga. Her revelation would begin with "they have already broken my spirit here in prison." This is a testament to an altogether different suffering that is no longer emotional, but rather too corporeal that it has become spiritual. From those words,

the viewers are given a sequence of graphic and brutal details of torture to make her confess. She was beaten, waterboarded, and electrocuted just to force her to sign a confession. While all these forms of physical violence are being filmically staged, the audience hears the voice-over of the protagonist saying:

My body is shaking with fear and cold, Angie. When they ask me questions, I find that my answers are not clear even to me. I am not myself, as if my feet are off the ground, as if I'm floating on air. All sounds that I hear are loud. Even the slightest tip of a touch brings me so much pain. Back in San Pablo, I once saw a dog slaughtered for food. That was what I felt. I was that dog grappling and begging for life. My face blasted with tears, spit, and urine.

The brutal acts that the spectators see on the screen are somehow set in contrast to the words and imagery of Flor narrating from her recollection. While one notices the physicality of suffering throughout the continuing sequence of torture, her voice would tell a different memory of a more sublime experience of physical pain. Like an out-of-body experience, she sees herself in this moment and sees her own state of dehumanization that, like her, the viewers are also witnessing on screen. She also sees herself in a different time, and remembers an image of brutality in a more distant past, of a dog struggling to live, that approximates her unfortunate state. This corporealization of pain, that is also sublime as part of the suffering narrative, is important especially in one particular shot that punctuated these scenes of torture. The viewers are given a brief glimpse of Flor held up by four men, handcuffed in gesture of a prayer, face bruised, mouth half crying and half angry from the torment, looking up to the ceiling. The heroine's tortured image was made cinematically to look like Christ's passion, from where her life laid bare by pain and agony is being redeemed by the visual economy of Flor's ultimate sacrifice.

The fact that the film waited for more than a half of its running time to reveal Flor's version has its own temporal logic to serve the melodramatic effect on mourning. The film proceeds uninterrupted from the moment Flor confessed to Angie, to her arrest, and down to her torture. The sequencing is pivotal as the film not only attempts to win the viewers over with its version of truth, but also tries to validate it through the brutal staging of torture. Flor's innocence is not confirmed by the veracity of her version of the crime; rather, the claim for innocence relies on her moral goodness that is testified by her utmost endurance and capacity to suffer. This validation does not come from Flor but from Angie to whom she confessed solely. In the face of almost certain death, the viewers hear the lines of redemptive assurance from Angie's words that transform and transubstantiate the protagonist's pain and misery into some form of a promise of moral justice: "You will be set free, Mama Flor. You are such a kind person. God will not allow them to just do this to you."

To Angie's words, Flor responds: "I am no longer wishing for that, Angie. The only thing I wish for is when you go back to the Philippines, I hope you'll find my children. Hold them for me. Make them feel the love I have failed to give them." In her reply, her agony is endured and done in the name of her family who, as the film reminds us, have already betrayed and let her down. This echoes how the pathetic quality of her suffering and sacrifice affirms the conviction of her morality. In Flor's next lines, the audience begins to see how the heroine does not only forgive her family from the betrayals and disappointments, but has in fact transcended these ill-feelings, along with the feeling of abandonment from the Philippine state, and her experience of merciless violence and undue punishment in the hands of Singapore's police and prison guards:

At first, I was angry with Efren, with his mistress, with the government, with Singapore, with life, with God. They have forsaken me. They have forgotten about me. Five years. I will die soon and I can't do anything about it. But I don't want to bring anger to my grave.

This portrayal of forgiveness and transcendence in submission to forces larger than her shapes the rationale of how Flor can be imagined as a martyr. It is in this long sequence that ended with her and Angie embracing each other in empathy that the viewers see the moral virtue of Flor ultimately affirmed. This is a moment of pure melodrama that Williams, quoting Moretti, terms as an "agnition": an instant in which "we cry when something is lost and cannot be regained" (70). The instant when Flor reveals not only her version of what happened, but also the torture that she endures after that event, establishes this moment. Agnition starts right at that point when the audience begins to realize that Flor is already lost and has submitted her suffering to a higher order of moral economy of sacrifice and martyrdom. The tears that are triggered by this moment reveal that the secret suffering is no longer just known to Flor; it has been shared to Angie and to the public as well. This moment of utmost pity, however, can only be accorded to the exemplariness of her virtue in the face of extreme suffering. This revelation demonstrates that the realization of Flor's innocence and victimhood comes at a time that is already too late; the spectators come to pity her because they know that they have already lost her. Her forgiveness of all the betrayals and abandonment, the violence she endured, and her deference to the death sentence also tell them that they can no longer save her from death. This moment of agnition is the start of mourning for Flor's death, which is already just being reanimated in this film. It is not just in the certainty of Flor's death but also in the transcendence from her sentence that the viewers begin to see her as a figure to be pitied and mourned for.

The film stages this virtuous transcendence of death in its visual rendition of Flor's execution. Flor's walk to the gallows is given special emphasis: the frame opens with Flor's hands, clasping a rosary, before going up to her face, which is

revealed to the spectators as a pure image of suffering—calm but tired and battered. Here, Guillermo's description of the film's version of Flor's procession to death is interesting:

Religion is her only and final consolation as she prays the rosary and walks down the long corridor with chained hands and feet. The light from the end room where the gallows stand is like a ray that beckons the darkness of death is transformed into the light of eternity. The directorial emphasis is on the dignity of her bearing, which strongly speaks of her innocence as she goes forward to her death. There is only a suggestion of surprise in her part as the hood is placed over her head followed by the image of her figure swinging in space. The intercutting between the long walk to the gallows leading to the hanging and the vigil outside the prison walls allows the voice-over from the praying rallyists to lend the scene a solemn measured cadence, thus raising it to an event of religious significance. (123-4)

This long description of the execution demonstrates the substitutive operation of film in visually rendering the last moments of Flor Contemplacion. Here, the spectators no longer see Flor, her life of suffering as an OFW, and her death as consequences of the cruel structure of globality. What the audience has now is Flor dying as a hero-martyr, whose death signals the restlessness of people who have rallied on the basis of her virtue and moral goodness as the sacrifice of Filipinos. This martyrdom and heroism take the shape of the religious-based idea of sacrifice that is now cast in the popular nationalist imagination.

Right after the spectators see the silhouette of Flor, suspended in the air and twitching for her last breath, they then witness the eruption of grief outside. The reenactment of the social movement founded in grief is shown in a quick succession of scenes: from the cries of those who have attended the vigil, to footage of her funeral where her coffin is being raised up by a sea of people, followed immediately by various scenes of mass protests where agitators speak on platforms with loudspeakers and placards decrying the government's negligence of OFWs, people burning a Singaporean flag, and Filipino diplomats and officials being relieved from their duty. It is important to note how, while mass demonstrations are portrayed, the audience barely sees the transformative effects of these protests—at least in the film. While this part of the story is public and familiar, it also shows how the melodramatic narrative excludes certain kinds of ideological and political struggles within the moral economy of pity. True to its melodramatic mode, as Williams asserts, it only attempts to "reconcile the irreconcilable—that is, its tendency to find solutions to problems that cannot really be solved without challenging the older ideologies of moral certainty" (75).

Hence, the melodrama of mourning can only narrate this story as a moral conflict between a virtuous heroine against cold and cruel agents of death and torture. The ideological problem that is the root of Flor's fate, the truncated global system that shapes the everydayness of vulnerability in the lives of women like her, is silenced. This is evident in how the quotidian suffering and everyday woes of OFWs are invisible in this film. The complex structures that condition Flor's highly precarious life—the ways in which she was socially excluded making her susceptible to abuse, and the gendered moral codes that she has to take on and uphold as a migrant woman for her home and homeland even in times of distress—are taken out of the story. What the film highlights is her virtue as an overseas Filipina, who accommodates, forgives, and still provides for her family and nation even if it pushes her to her own death. Since the film's narrative operates around Flor's exemplary virtues, her extreme sacrifices can only meet a fate that is just as extreme and violent. Her victimization in the end is portrayed via the almost pathological violence of individuals: employers are the actual criminals, prison wardens are arbitrarily cold and cruel, police are brutal torturers, and Filipino diplomats and attaches are heartless and uncaring.

The excess of grieving that the film translates resounds in the overture before the film finally closes. In the last moments of the film, the audience hears the actress herself singing the theme song in the melodramatic logic of words that ties the filmic narrative as one that is of national mourning. Here, the song's lyrics—"Who's glorious? Who's pitiful? Is it us who offered almost all our lives for the nation? New heroes whose only arms are their tears, can you spare us your pity at least"—swells while the figure of a hanged body of Flor Contemplacion grows smaller and smaller on frame as the camera moves away before finally closing. The juxtaposition of her suspended corpse to the words of the music rehearses how the public mourned for Flor in the Philippines. In this cinematic translation of grief work, the spectators see an overflowing of grief and pity that projects Flor's suffering as sacrifice, whose tears and solicitation of mercy attest to the kind of heroism that this grief work produces for her. What this melodramatic excess however fails to attend to is the very premise of this bereavement: the conditions that brought this dehumanization and death to Flor and those like her.

In the end, mourning within the frames of national self-recognition is politically limiting because it not only upholds problematic notions of what lives are grievable according to gendered moral discourses, but it also forecloses its political effect by projecting a pitiful life only as an emotional appeal. There is, after all, no amount of moral goodness that can erase the fact that Flor is living a bare life, and her labors are dehumanized in the first place. As Williams reminds us, "virtuous suffering is a pathetic weapon against injustice" (80). While it is important and it points us into the realization of violence, its excesses can also efface the understanding of

structures of violence and dehumanization that are in place. In the next section, I discuss how politically inhibiting the practice of mourning for a migrant woman's life based on her virtue is. In my reading of Jose Dalisay's *Soledad Sisters*, I will demonstrate the consequences of recounting a kind of life, like that of Soledad, that is not as grievable as Flor.

SUSPENDING SORROW

While there is a continued circulation of cinematic productions that chronicle the lives of OFWs, there are very few established literary writers who talk about this particular migrant experience as their main narrative. This is why Jose Dalisay's *Soledad's Sister* is important because it is one of the very few mainstream novels that writes on the subject of labor migration and its present effects in the country. The novel, shortlisted for the Man Asian Literary Prize in 2007, revolves around Aurora, or Rory, claiming the remains of her sister Soledad, or Soli, who is a domestic worker first in Hong Kong, then in Saudi Arabia. The book is a *faux* detective novel, setting up a quest for the protagonist to try to make sense of the mystery surrounding the death of her sister by enlisting the help of Walter, a police detective. The story ends without accomplishing this pursuit because the traces and clues that point to what really happened to Soli remain unsolved as her corpse stays missing until the novel's closing pages.

The novel begins with a wooden casket arriving in Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) with only a manifest marked with a name "Aurora Cabahug." A chapter through the novel, with the box unclaimed and languishing for days inside the airport's warehouse, a telegram in search of the nearest kin reaches Walter, a policeman stationed in the small town of Paez, miles away from the airport. The bearer of the name turns out to be very much alive, belting her heart out as a singer at a local karaoke-bar, *Flame Tree*. The woman in the box is her sister Soli, who has used Rory's name to get to Saudi Arabia to work as a domestic worker because her passport is blacklisted when she was in Hong Kong. This is where the main narrative arc of the novel starts. The dead body conjoins the fate of the two characters, Rory and Walter, in a long and lonely trip to claim the wrong Aurora Cabahug and finally grieve for her properly. On their travel from the countryside to Manila, the readers get to know Rory, the surviving sister claiming the remaining family who has long drifted away from her, and Walter, who is returning to the memories of the city that brought him so much misfortune. In between their almost uneventful journey are the novel's interludes and side trips to Hong Kong and Jeddah, where Soli's stories of flight and the mystery surrounding her death slowly unravel.

Against the melodrama of most OFW films like *The Flor Contemplacion Story*, *Soledad's Sister* displaces grief in the face of a migrant woman's death. The novel's style of "deceptive simplicity" and "breathless restraint" is a fresh take on OFW stories that are usually saturated with sentimental storytelling in popular movies (Lacuesta). However, the use of restraint here is more than just a literary device to portray OFW heroines in a new light. It also works in suspending grief and silencing Soli's life of suffering, which can be seen in how the novel evades confronting her dead body through this literary strategy. The moment tears are about to burst in the narrative, a plot twist is set up to dislodge them, dispersing sorrow and rendering Rory's mourning mute and deferred until the last pages. It is through this conscious deferral of bereavement that this novel offers a way of imagining how to deal with the loss of this kind of itinerants whose lives are not as virtuous and exemplary to merit a public mourning.

One of the ways into which mourning is repressed in this novel is through the theme of double displacement: of dislocating bodies and identities of the already uprooted subjects of labor migration. Early on in this novel, the readers realize that Soledad has used her sister's identity to secure another passport because hers was blacklisted because of something that she did as a domestic worker back in Hong Kong. This is why it took her body so long to be claimed because of the difficulty to trace the closest remaining kin whose name she has used as her own. Moreover, the reason why there was nobody in the tarmac to meet Soledad is because of another instance of cruel body switching: the vice consul in Riyadh, out of his annoyance from a failed sexual conquest of a distressed female OFW seeking refuge in the embassy the night before, unintentionally swapped the papers of Soledad with that of the scheduled homebound corpse of another OFW. It is because of how these corpses and identities become interchangeable, due to either bureaucratic ineptitude or the scheming/illegal tactics of migrants themselves, which makes those who were left behind—like Rory—unable to properly grieve for their loss. The novel thus shows how impossible it is for Rory and others to mourn if they cannot even identify their loved ones' remains, much more identify to the suffering of these itinerant bodies.

In the novel's opening chapter, the author describes how these unfortunate cases of misidentification had affected how families become unable to mourn for their dead by focusing on the security officer, Al Viduya, in charge of the airport cargo warehouse. Al has been used to ostentatious display of grief from family members claiming their loved ones' coffins. The regularity of this kind of encounter with death has allowed him to overcome grief, as the officer in charge of signing the release of the hearses and facilitating the families with their beloved's remains on a daily basis. His ideas on the reality of death go against the clichés of cinematic mourning:

It was strange how outside of the movies, grief could be so particular... And, Al was convinced, you could grieve only so much. He had lost his only brother to tuberculosis five years earlier; he shed tears at the hospital for three minutes, then took a jeepney back to work. (8-9)

The everydayness of death for Al has made him immune even to his own loss and this imperviousness to melodrama has made him detached and efficient in his job. By imposing the reality of death and the refusal to console, he is helping the family move on: “They usually whined when he said ‘the body’ but he believed that it did them good to come to terms with the terrible facts, the better to prompt their faith in another life” (10).

Death becomes routinary in the ways these casualties become both unmarkable and unremarkable. The arbitrariness of death can be seen in how the novel illustrates not just the replaceability of bodies and identities, but also the uneventfulness of their obituaries. The family that Al receives, for example, only learns about their father’s demise when it was mentioned in passing in a radio program: “They had learned of his death the way many others did—after it happened, from a routine news report on DZXL, between an involved discussion of a movie star’s rumored abortion and a commercial for a new and more potent livestock dewormer” (13).

Al as a minor character and the accumulated coffins in his care in the novel’s first pages establish the story’s approach to mourning. Al’s encounter with this family not only sets up the fact of ordinariness of OFW deaths, but also effectively reinforces how its mundaneness have rendered the act of bereavement almost impossible. As it is, there are around 600 OFW deaths a year or three to five coffins landing everyday on the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (Migrante International). Most of these cases are classified as deaths due to mysterious and unknown circumstances. As the novel also describes in the first chapter, it is impossible for someone like Al, and the other diplomats, attaches, clerks, and pen pushers that facilitate these homecomings, to mourn each and every one of them together with their hysterical families, much more feel sorrow for their mysterious casualties.

It was worse for Soledad as the only person who can grieve for her could not even bring herself to tears. In the novel, the readers are given enough details on how Rory is unable to properly cry for her loss, from the moment she heard the news, to the time they pick up the hearse, and even after traveling back with her dead sister’s remains in a van for a few hours. The narrator’s description of her reaction to the news Walter delivered is worth noting. After finishing a set of Carpenters standards, Walter approaches her with the telegram:

The news he bore had stunned her, could have driven her to her knees, but that was still her territory and she had barely come down from her performance, and while Mama Merry had opened her arms wide to receive her grief, Rory has simply hung her head, touched a hand to her brow and said, “Oh my sister, oh my sister” before turning aside and stepping briskly into the shadows—as if she would turn again and break into an unbidden, heartrending encore. (137)

The narrative goes on to describe Rory’s self-consciousness and how it prevents her from acting out several clichés of mourning. While her sister’s death all the more gives Rory the license to break out into a heart-wrenching song of sorrow for the spectators in the karaoke bar, she seems incapable of carrying out an outburst. She is aware of this as she steps back and tries another melodramatic formula in front of the mirror which also does not pan out: “Back into her dressing room she had tried to force the tears but couldn’t” (137). Still unable to tear up, even when they are picking up Soli’s body at the airport warehouse, she is made aware of others’ expectation of her to perform this spectacle of bereavement:

The thought crossed her mind: that’s my sister in there, and she’s very, very dead.... [She] slid into her seat, still tracked by what she felt were many-fingered eyes. Then she thought she understood what they had been looking for: they wanted to see her cry, to throw herself on the coffin, to demand that the boards be ripped off with a crowbar so that she could see her dear sister’s blackened face and cringe in horror before wailing and thrashing about like a stuck pig. (121)

Tears would only come to Rory much later, when she and Walter are eating at the stop over on their way back to Paez. However, this is not triggered by Soli’s death or even her memory of her sister. She weeps because she realizes that she is now alone. When Walter asks her where her other family members are:

A flood of hot tears welled quickly in her eyes, and Rory realized how those wet emotions had been gathering all day just millimeters below the surface of her skin, waiting to be summoned by the slightest provocation or excuse. She felt a sudden need to run out to the van and touch the crate, to reconnect with Soledad in some tangible and physical way; it was the show that she had denied those roughshod men just a while back but no longer could. (136-7)

But the awaited moment of grief does not happen. As soon as she steps out of the restaurant, she finds out that the service van where her dead sister is in was robbed. What Rory has been summoning up all this time, the drama of an outburst, has been erased by this clever cruel plot twist. By the time Rory was able to cry, it was no longer about her sister or her general loss but because of the ludicrousness

of the situation she finds herself in. And Soli's body by this time would be sinking deep in a river somewhere in the city.

Until the book's end, Rory is neither able to cry nor grieve for a sister. This deferral of mourning is not just because of these series of unfortunate events in the narrative. As the reader gets through the novel, they realize that Rory's incapacity to mourn for her Soli comes from the fact that she has never really knew her sister. As Rory herself would say, "Soli had, if truth be told, always been more of a maid than a sister to her" (107). The only thing that she knows about her sister is her natural capacity for care and domestic duties, as she shares to Walter why her sister kept on going abroad to work: "It was all she did—take care of people—although she was very smart, certainly more than I was, except that she didn't go to school, and I did" (74).

To understand Rory's incapacity to cry for her sister, one must also know why Soli's life is ungrievable in the first place. The novel not only sets up situations that refuse to melodramatize death and its victim, but also portrays Soledad as a woman whose death would never have summoned mourning nor move people, much less her younger sister, to weep for her wasted life. In the chapters that reveal Soli's life abroad, the readers will get to know that it was not just her fate that is anomalous but also her morality. Aside from faking her passport just to be able to get out of the country, Soli is morally suspect and the choices that she made in her transnational passages made her somehow deserving of her fate.

In the novel, Soledad is portrayed so much unlike the typical cinematic OFW heroines who hold exemplary moral virtues. Yet interestingly, her character is still depicted against ideas of morality as an overseas Filipina, not out of her sacrifice and martyrdom, but from her guilt and penance. Through flashbacks, the readers learn about the tragic fire that killed the sisters' parents and little brother, an event from which Soli has silently blamed herself after she forgot to turn off their gas stove. This remorse is all the more aggravated by the fact that Soli was left unscathed by the fire, while Rory who saved and dragged her out of it, suffered a minor burn:

Soli wished, in an anguished prayer beyond words, that she had suffered more, that she had died instead of them and so would not have had to account for every fraction of every second that it took for her parents and her brother to burn and blacken beyond recognition.... "Why not me?" she would cry for years afterwards, "Why not me?," injuring herself in so many ways, seeking something more palpably painful than the throbbing within her chest. (95)

This overpowering guilt negates any virtue that can be accorded to Soli's suffering or even her fated death. But what is more interesting is how this self-reproach

conditions not only her capacity for suffering, but also her desire to suffer more in forms that are corporeal and violent. It is as if her tragic past that animates her deep-seated guilt is a form of conditioning for further suffering, driven by sado-masochistic desire for pain, discipline, and submission.

Her profound guilt is disciplinary as it orders her life of piety and devotion. As Rory observes, Soli leads a “compulsive and crippling piety:” “She never complained and took everything that came her way... she was happy and content with her uncomplicated life, spent in service and daily rosaries and litanies and sundry devotions to saints” (104-5). Although both sisters share the tragedy for both surviving, only Soli would accept its penance. She would stop schooling to let Rory continue hers, and she would lead an obscure life dedicated to household chores and looking after the sister that have both saved her from the fire and constantly reminded her of her guilt.

It is this same moral logic of guilt that renders Soledad’s motivation to suffer further by leaving as a domestic worker. Her labor then is a way to exact forgiveness for herself, which renders her suffering not as a sacrifice, but a lifelong penance that she has to pay, not out of virtue but out of sin:

It was God, after all, who had driven her to Hong Kong, on the promise that two years of uncomplaining labor would suffice to pay for all her sins up to that point, if she saved all she could and sent the money home, four-fifths of it to her sister and the rest to the village priest, Fr. Kureishi, the same man who had seen their parents’ gathered ashes to their graves and who had given her his private blessing on her departure. (99)

The novel also depicts maltreatment of a domestic worker in the household, but only to highlight Soli’s piety, and even efficiency, in taking in suffering as a way of her atonement. In Hong Kong, she was hired to take care of an elderly whom she calls Nai Nai. Part of her work efficiency is being able to take in abuse from her ward: “Nai Nai mewled and hissed when they left, and then she took her anger out on Soledad—who, as ever, merely wiped the spittle off her arm and hummed her songs of praise while she tugged at Nai Nai’s soiled sheets and blankets” (108).

Although Soli was not caught up in an extremely abusive working environment, the novel describes how she was dehumanized precisely because of the efficiency of labor she developed out of her bodily conditioning for suffering. The readers get to see this from how the teenager Hedison, her employers’ only son, perceive Soli’s strangeness: “her pudgy fingers and short forearms suggested a pesky terrier, but she was not unpleasant to look at. Sometimes Hedison imagined that there was something wicked or even demonic in the brown woman’s distracted look, in the soldierly efficiency with which she cleaned up after Nai Nai” (110). It was, of course,

Hedison's strange fascination to this foreigner in their apartment that narratively sets up Soledad's surprising transgression.

More than her proclivity to suffer because of guilt, what makes Soledad morally ineligible as an OFW heroine is her openness toward, and even anticipation of, Hedison's sexual advances. What makes this detail in the novel problematic is that these encounters are pervasive because there are conditions, like the mandatory live-in arrangement, that make female domestic workers vulnerable to sexual abuse from their employers, or any physical abuse or harassment from any family member of the household for that matter. Interestingly, these very same conditions are used in the novel as circumstances for Soledad's ambivalent freedom from her lifelong guilt. While Soli, who has no previous sexual or romantic relations, does not exactly lure Hedison into doing it one night when his parents are out, the prose made it sound like she does so. More than that, Soli is still able to find a religious justification for the act:

Soledad listened, and began hearing other things—her own heartbeat, the rush of blood to her extremities, Hedison's pacing, the exhalation of the living room sofa as he sat on it, and again his rising and pacing, his lingering at her door. She could hear the questions in his mind, the half-spoken answers in hers: "I saw you in your room. I saw what you do in there. I think about it sometimes, but I don't know what to think about it... God makes everything happen, that I'm sure of..." She lay in her bunk, her coarse breath drawing itself out like a thread on the point of breaking. When the door opened and she could feel his feline presence at her feet, she inhaled just sharply enough for him to know that she knew he was there, without sending him away. (112-3)

It is only in a few chapters later that readers would learn that Soli did not just let Hedison do it, but she was, for the first time, liberated out of her burden of guilt: "Years later, Soledad would remember that moment, and she would marvel at her boldness and the complete absence of guilt on her part. Hedison could not look at her for days afterwards, but Soledad herself had felt released from an inner bondage" (153). This sexual tryst with Hedison would repeat in the novel. Soli gets pregnant and she will be sent home because of her promiscuity. Soli returns to Paez with a blacklisted passport and a baby in her womb as consequences of her daring act of freedom from guilt. After delivering her baby, she tries to get out of the country again using Rory's identity to work in Saudi Arabia. She departs leaving her baby with Rory. She dies mysteriously of drowning in Jeddah after going out with Menakshee, an Indian domestic worker she works with inside a Saudi prince's household. The novel completely leaves out the details of what really happened with Soli and Menakshee after they went out of their employers' house to meet men in the park during their day off. What it shows though is Soli's reaction when Menakshee invited her:

A hot flush rose to Soledad's cheeks. Of course she had thought of men, and sometimes the memory of the boy Hedison's palms on her haunches stirred her in her half-sleep, but that episode has served its purpose.... But then again, like the sand that periodically rose into a raging cloud above the desert heat, Soledad's vagrant longings lifted her up above that corner, that room, that walled compound..." (190).

And this desire to sin again, or commit the same transgression as she did with Hedison, is what would lead her to death. In the novel, her and Menakshee's deaths are classified as a mystery. In Jeddah, as the witnesses suggest, they could have been just runaways fleeing from their employers to flirt with strangers, or they could have easily been working as prostitutes on the side, or rape victims. In any case, the talk about their deaths would be concluded with a note that they should have never been out in the public anyway. It is in the mystery of what they were doing there in the first place, more than the fact of murder and foul play, that renders their death regrettable, but also probably well-deserved and not worth pursuing for authorities. It is in this unknowability of what really happens that all the more leaves doubt to Soledad's morality, making her death in the end ungrievable in Manila, as it was in Jeddah.

Soli does not follow the usual gendered scripts of migrant women whose role as *ilaw ng tahanan* ("light of the home") is shaped by social and moral expectations of becoming the "martyr mother, dutiful daughter, or sacrificial sister" of their families back home (Asis, Huang, and Yeoh). The moral ascendancy of migrant women as *bagong bayani* requires her to perform gendered and sexualized sacrifice even if she is abroad. Therefore, she is constantly bargaining her absence at home through overcompensation and constant self-renunciation in the name of the family (Limpangog). However, Soledad's morality is compromised because her acts of sacrifice for Rory and for her son are not driven by her moral sense of duty to provide for her family but by her own guilt: first from causing the death of her parents and, later on, from giving in to her "vagrant longings."

Obviously, she has suffered continuously until her death. But because her suffering is seen as not just her reparation of her past sins but also a fate she deserves for the sins she commits again and again, her miseries cannot be recognized as something worthy to be mourned for. Her suffering in the end is effaced in the novel; instead of virtue, her labors are pleas for forgiveness and her death is destined by her moral lapses, of slipping back to sinning all over again. It seems finally that only death can redeem her from her severe self-atonement, which reminds the readers of her fervent wish to suffer earlier on in her life. But even her death could not be redeemed by any form of grieving. By the time we reach the chapter detailing the

mystery of her drowning, it becomes as inconsequential as the life of suffering she has led.

We can see this dissolution of identity of suffering even in Soledad's corpse. Her body that holds testament to suffering from the marks it sustained before dying in water are effectively erased "by the damage that seawater, sun, and scores of little fish teeth had done to this woman's face. If anyone had known her, they would not know her now. If she had a name, they would need to find it somewhere else" (192). And the little that was saved from Soli's body completely disintegrates and disappears with water in her second drowning, when the car thief accidentally drives the van off the bridge.

"In the agitated water of a creek in the northern Pasig, the bubbles began to form around the sunken wreckage, anchored by another weight. It would take another three days for the bodies to rise among the reeds.... And then, connected by umbilical nylon, arose the gas-leavened casket of a woman's body, broken free of its wooden cage of the fine primordial mud" (179). Thus, the mourning for Soledad is effectively deferred ad infinitum even right after the last pages of the novel.

In *Soledad's Sister*, one can see how the novel suspends grief through the use of restraint. By trying to depict something other than the melodrama of most OFW films, the novel consciously attempts to defer the work of mourning for Soli. More importantly, by trying to restrain the excess of melodrama, the novel also consciously depicts a different OFW heroine whose suffering is not carried out through the moral economy of sacrifice and pity, but within a different moral economy of guilt and penance. In short, Soli's life becomes ungrievable because she deserves her suffering.

What results from this inability to mourn can be seen in Rory's uncritical embrace of the promise of labor migration despite her sister's fate. She still clings on her dream of making it big abroad, upgrading from singing in a lowly karaoke bar in Paez, to performing for the G.I.s in Saipan. The problem with Rory's dream is not so much her determination to become an overseas Filipina herself, but her inability to grieve for her sister that has made her incapable of thinking about the dangers and the highly contingent life that will come with that choice. Knowing Soledad's suffering and struggles both in Hong Kong and Jeddah could have helped her understand what awaits for her in Saipan. But she never learns this lesson because she never mourns. Instead, she clings to her "cruel optimism" (Berlant) that perhaps if she does it right, unlike Soledad, she will not end up in a coffin like her sister.

In the novel's attempt to dispel grief work, what it ultimately effaces is the suffering embedded in Filipina lives overseas. The problem that restraint exposes as a device is its capacity to contain and repress the telling of structures of suffering that these itinerant women endure as subjects of uneven globality and transnational labor. *Soledad's Sister* is a testament to how the ubiquity of OFW deaths can render a nation incapable of grieving. This poses problematic ways of imagining particular experiences and fates of OFWs. After all, the structures that condition these deaths and suffering exist and that these cases are everywhere and everyday is part of this reality. These facts, however, must never numb the nation from grief nor alienate its people from other migrant women's suffering even though their stories of flight are not as exemplary or virtuous as Flor Contemplacion. Ultimately, identifying with suffering is still important in transforming the cruel conditions that cause these losses.

The novel exposes the ways in which mourning becomes deferred for overseas Filipinas like Soledad who transgress the gendered moral and national codes of their roles as OFWs. It shows, through its portrayal of Soli's moral lapses, how the politics of mourning in the Philippines is, in essence, problematic: it will never account for the kind of suffering that women like Soledad have gone through because they are not worth telling. In the end, grief will only come to those who earn it. Unfortunately, women like Soledad who chose to migrate illegally and disregard their moral regimes as mothers, wives, daughters, and citizen-breadwinners do not count for grieving. Since nobody identifies with the suffering of those who deserve death, women like Soledad, who cannot even make her own sister cry for her passing, will not move the nation into mourning.

The gendered moral and national frames of mourning are politically inhibiting as it both erases suffering and reinforces problematic conditions on what makes Filipina lives grievable and moving enough to inspire social movements in the Philippines. In the next section, I discuss how identifying with suffering as a basis for mourning opens up the political promise of grief work for migrant women workers. In my reading of Rida Fitria's *Sebongkah Tanah Retak*, I will illustrate how Ijah's experiences have allowed her to find a different way of understanding her and others' grievable lives. By identifying with the suffering and vulnerability of a fellow Indonesian domestic worker whom she barely knew, the protagonist in the novel offers a more radical politics of mourning.

SHARED SUFFERING

Sebongkah Tanah Retak (*A Lump of Cracked Land*, 2010) is part of the growing cultural production of *Sastra Buruh Migran Indonesia* or Indonesian Migrant Worker's Literature. The novel was written by Rida Fitria, a writer and an activist. She is the wife of Aak Abdullah Al Kudus, founder of *Serikat Buruh Migran Indonesia* (Union of Indonesian Migrant Workers) in East Java. As the author explains in her introduction of the book, their involvement in migrant workers' advocacy is crucial in the inception of the novel. Narrating how their family life has been at first disrupted but then later on changed by their activism, Fitria shares that:

Rumah kami seketika beralih fungsi menjadi tempat para relawan berkumpul dan berdiskusi, juga menjadi tempat berlindung sementara bagi korban atau keluarga korban. Di antara guliran banyak cerita menyedihkan, tak bias begitu saja meninggalkan pikiran saya, dan sebaliknya malah melahirkan kegeraman-kegeraman yang harus saya tumpahkan dengan cara dan sikap saya. Sejak itulah, saya mulai menulis novel "Sebongkah Tanah Retak."

Our house at once turned into a space where volunteers gather and discuss, it has also become a shelter for victims and their families. Their sad stories have been impressed on my mind ever since, and has spawned in me a rage that moved me to express it in a form that I know. Since then, I started writing the novel, *A Lump of Cracked Land*. (iv)

The author's experience in organizing and social justice work inspired the story of Khadijah, or Ijah, an Indonesian domestic worker in Saudi Arabia and Hong Kong. Through Ijah's struggles, Fitria not only tracks the transformation of an Indonesian migrant woman from being a powerless and self-blaming victim to an empowered and compassionate advocate of her fellow domestic workers. She also presents how the protagonist's understanding of her own suffering is linked to the precarious lives of her fellow migrant women, which become an important political impulse in advancing their claims. Toward the end, Ijah's grieving for a fellow domestic worker whom she barely knew becomes her and other activists' platform to forward their fight for social justice and migrant workers' dignity. Through this, *Sebongkah Tanah Retak* offers an alternative politics of mourning for Southeast Asian migrant women.

The novel at first portrays Ijah like how Soledad was depicted by Dalisay in his novel. Ijah is as morally questionable as a woman, she was expelled from a household in East Java where she was working as a maid because she had an affair and bore the child of her male employer, Wiro. This moral lapse has become both a sin that she would be punished for and a sign of her weakness and vulnerability. When her mother chastised her for committing adultery: "*Kowe iso opo? Bahkan*

kau tak mampu menjaga kehormatanmu sendiri. Kebanggaanmu sendiri” (“What can you do? You yourself are incapable of keeping your own honour. Your own pride,” 15), she realizes how her whole being was reduced to her past mistake: *“Tak tahu bagaimana hancur harga dirinya karena keperawanan yang disesapnya buah ranum keremajaan yang manis dan segar”* (“She did not know that her self-worth has now been completely destroyed just because she lost her virginity and bore a child,” 15).

In an attempt to redeem herself from her disgraceful life in her village in Gunung Lemongan and provide for a son she now has to raise on her own, she went to Saudi Arabia to work as a domestic helper. But she soon discovers that the struggle to prove her worth to her family and neighbors back home is never easy. For one, her duty as the only all-around helper for a three-storey mansion in Ta’if is demanding and exhausting:

Enam bulan keberadaan Ijah di rumah besar Baba Khalid, adalah masa bekerja keras tanpa henti. Tak bias mengeluh ataupun sakit. Bagi seorang pembantu seperti Ijah, kedua hal tersebut tak berlaku dan dilarang keras di tempat ini.

The six months of Ijah’s life working inside Baba Khalid’s big house was filled with non-stop, backbreaking labor. She could not complain nor allow herself to get sick. For a maid like Ijah, both of these are forbidden in this place. (29)

Aside from these hardships, her female employer would also constantly berate and physically harm her each time she fails to do what her lady boss wants. During these times, Ijah is made aware of her weakness: *“Ijah hanya bias menangis tanpa mampu menggugat ketidakadilan yang menelikungnya”* (“Ijah can only cry, unable to fight against this injustice,” 28). Her powerlessness inside the house can also be seen in how she becomes an easy prey to her employers’ sexual advances. In the story, Ijah is sexually assaulted and almost raped by her employers’ son, Majid. She is only able to ward off the young boy by threatening to humiliate him in front of his mother and father. While she has successfully resisted Majid’s attempts, it is interesting to note what she felt after the incident:

Bayangan dosa di masa lalu kian menambah buruk perasaan dan entah mengapa melintas di saat yang tidak tepat. Lebih sakit lagi kala Ijah merasa dibayang-bayangi karma untuk sebuah kesalahan yang harus dibayarnya karena aib yang pernah ia toehkan bersama Wiro. Masa lalu itu senantiasa menjadi mimpi buruk justru pada saat Ijah bertekad untuk taubat.

Why does her past come to haunt her now, in that very moment when she is already feeling down and sorry for herself? She thought she has already paid for the sin of being

with Wiro by suffering a disgrace back home. That past keeps on coming back like a nightmare even if she has already atoned for it. (35)

In her mind, her past moral transgression is still haunting her and the young boy's attack is only part of that punishment that she still has to carry out to be forgiven. Ijah's shame from her past is so powerful even though it was only borne out of her naïve faith to a married man's promise that she would become his second wife, right next to her lady employer. Yet because of that unfulfilled vow, she ended up living a life of disgrace back in their hometown and that sin still defines her being even if she is now miles away from their village. What is worse is that she perceives this young boy's attempted rape as karma, as penance for the shame she has brought to herself. Her suffering in Saudi Arabia is thus part of the moral order from which she not only has no power to overcome but also something she deserves. Isolated, vulnerable and wracked with guilt: "*Ijah merasa begitu sendirian, begitu lemah, tak berdaya, dan kesepian*" ("Ijah felt so alone, so weak, helpless and lonely," 36).

It is important to contextualize the kind of shame that haunts not just Ijah in the novel, but also the pervasive gendered moral discourses imposed on Indonesian migrant women. Several anthropologists have already pointed out the power of shame or *malu* in shaping Indonesian culture in general, but also more specifically as a highly gendered emotion that delineates women's subjectivity (Geertz; Rosaldo; Collins and Bahar). Shame as moral discourse becomes even more forceful and apparent for Indonesian migrant women workers. Outside the optics of the state, community, and even one's own family, the Indonesian domestic workers' absence in their traditional social spaces shores up moral anxieties, particularly centered on their body and sexuality (Lindquist). Representations of migrant women in mass media and popular culture as *wanita jalang* (bad woman) or *wanita tuna susila* (woman without morals)—terms that are used to label prostitutes and single mothers—cast them as dodgy and disgraceful women who have forsaken the values of their family and nation once they get out of their *kampung* (home/village) and *tanah air* (homeland) (Constable, *Born out of Place*; Ford; Silvey).

This rhetoric of shame on Indonesian women's body and sexuality are even deployed by their former head of overseas labor ministry, Jumhur Hidayat, in one of his pep talks with migrant women applicants in Central Java: "*Tadi dibilangin kalau digenitin sama majikan enggak boleh lawan tapi juga jangan mau. Bilang saja kalau di sana maksudnya buat kerja. Kalau di sana baik-baik dan kalau pulang bawa uang buat bikin usaha*" ("If your boss is flirting with you, refuse, but also don't be tempted. Just say you are only there to work. If everything is fine over there, then bring money home and start a business") (Purbaya). These kinds of statements are symptomatic of the general unease of the Indonesian state and

society with what they interpret as morally ambiguous cases of sexual victimhood where women are suspected and presumed to have instigated it to happen, just like in the case of Ijah in the novel.

Carol Chan describes this as “gendered moral hierarchies” in the representation of Indonesian migrant victims. As Chan argues, “the dangers of physical or sexual abuse of female migrant domestic workers, most of whom are required by laws in destination countries to live with their employers, are represented mostly in terms of female promiscuity and moral weakness, in allowing themselves to be tempted or seduced” (6956). In these ways, *malu* or “shame” for Ijah and many other Indonesian migrant women are both moral and disciplinary: the woman is always constantly bound to the gendered ideals of womanhood drawn by cultural, national, and moral scripts of being a good woman even if, and precisely because, she is not at home.

In all of her tribulations, Ijah is still able to last through her first tour of duty in Saudi Arabia. She goes back home hoping that her two years’ worth of savings will permanently lift her family from poverty. But she soon realizes that the money she earned in Ta’if cannot cover their daily needs, much more secure a better future for her three-year old son. Thus, she is forced to go back to being a domestic worker, only this time, in Hong Kong. Choosing a different destination does not however change her situation. Her life with her lady employer in Causeway Bay is much like the one she had in Ta’if, if not worse, as she is overworked and subjected to harsher physical harm by her female boss:

Ijah bekerja terlalu: keras dan berkompromi dengan bagian dari dirinya yang kerap menolak, tetapi harus dilakukannya supaya ia bisa mengambil hari para majikan. Namun, alih-alih memperoleh simpati, perlakuan kejam menimpanya lebih brutal... Terkadang Ijah salah mengambil barang karena keterbatasan bahasa atau lupa tempat meletakkannya. Dalam sekejap sang majikan meledak, lalu-tubuh Ijah akan menjadi sasaran gigitan, tendangan, pukulan di wajah sampai bibirnya berdarah, dan tubuhnya lebam-lebam. Karena dituntut bekerja kelewat keras dengan bayang-bayang kekerasan fisik dan mental, istirahat Ijah pun tak pernah cukup. Dalam putaran waktu dua puluh empat jam, tidurnya hanya berkisar antara tiga atau empat jam. Dalam dua bulan kemudian, Ijah kehilangan berat badan sebanyak delapan kilogram. Wajah Ijah menjadi tirus, kulit kering dan tampak lebih gelap. Perempuan yang tidak pernah gemuk itu terlihat makin kerempeng dengan tatapan murung dan layu.

Ijah worked so hard it is already taking toll on her health just so she could follow her employer’s orders. However, instead of gaining sympathy, more brutal abuse befell on her....There are times that Ijah would give her a wrong item only because of misunderstanding or forget where she had put the thing she requested. Her employer

would easily get enraged and would bite, kick, and punch Ijah until her lips bleed and her body gets bruised. Because she was required to work hard under constant threat of physical and verbal abuse, Ijah could not rest well. She sleeps for only three to four hours. Ijah has already lost eight pounds in just two months. Ijah's face became thin and her skin became drier and darker. This woman who has never been fat all her life became fully emaciated with gloomy and withered eyes. (139)

She is only able to get out of this vicious cycle of torture and torment when she fainted in her young ward's school as she is picking the boy up. When another Indonesian domestic worker helps her up and senses that she is in trouble, she offers her a way out. But because Ijah feels trapped in her situation, the prospect of escape and freedom from her employer seems impossible to her: "*Tampak sekali jika peristiwa yang menyakitinyah telah habis kepercayaan dirinya*" ("It seems like the suffering she endured had robbed her of her self-confidence and dignity," 146). But her newfound friend, Dinah, an Indonesian helper like her, is resolved in rescuing her, as she promises Ijah her support in getting away of her employer's house, finding a temporary shelter and seeking redress. On the day of the rescue, "*Ijah melihat dirinya serupa tahanan yang ketakutan karena harus melarikan diri*" ("Ijah saw herself as a terrified prisoner who was given a chance to run away," 147).

This moment of escape signals a critical turn for Ijah. The once timid and self-blaming helper slowly transforms into an assertive migrant worker because of her exposure to and friendship with her fellow Indonesian domestic workers who rescued and supported her through her legal battle with her employer and recruiter. At first, she would marvel at how strong her other friends are even though they are practically the same as her, just a foreigner, a woman, and a maid in Hong Kong. Ijah would be awed at how, for example, Dinah would shoot back at her recruiter or how Intan would aggressively demand her lending agency to return her passport despite her outstanding debts. Through these women and other Indonesian domestic workers who also has become her comrades in Indonesian Migrant Workers Union, Ijah becomes aware of another possibility for a migrant woman like herself, one where their dignity is not just defined by their moral virtues but also by their courage to fight for their cause.

Ijah's rescue has also revealed another world to her. While waiting for her case to be resolved, she stays at a shelter with other domestic workers who, like her, were victims of abuse and exploitation. Ijah not only finds kinship with fellow migrant workers but also, through various activities inside the halfway house and in Victoria Park where they join other members of the organization, she discovers an impetus to develop herself:

Untuk pertama kalinya Ijah menyadari bahwa seorang seperti dirinya yang miskin serta tak berpendidikan tetap berhak mendapatkan kemerdekaan yang utuh. Tetap pantas memutuskan apa pun yang diyakini sebagai pilihan terbaik untuk hidup dan masa depannya. Di awal kesadaran untuk berdaya, Ijah memahami wawasannya yang terbatas. Dan, melihat kawan BMI lain yang lebih parah daripada dirinya saja berjuang keras sehingga memiliki pengetahuan dan keterampilan yang lebih baik, seolah-olah mereka ingin berteriak: biar berprofesi sebagai PRT yang penting bisakomputer, menulis puisi, cerpen, juga main teater, semangat Ijah pun terlecut.

For the first time, Ijah realized that the poor and uneducated are also entitled to freedom. Free to decide what they deem is best for their own lives and future. In that instant, Ijah recognized how little of the world she knows. She saw how hard her fellow migrant workers fight to gain more knowledge and better their skills, as if they were saying: let me work as a domestic worker so that I will learn to use a computer to write poetry, short stories, and also plays. Ijah was inspired. (152)

Through this experience of *kesadaran* or awakening, Ijah is moved to improve her own knowledge by reading books and acquiring new skills while also learning about her rights as a migrant worker in Hong Kong. In this scene, the migrant women workers no longer see themselves merely as unskilled, ignorant, and hopeless household maids. They see the many other possibilities that their identity and experience as domestic workers can give to them. Like Ijah, most of them did not finish more than secondary schooling, yet their excursion and experiences abroad have imbued in them with the prospect of becoming someone much more than their designations as household helpers. Later on, when Ijah finds herself in a much amenable working and living conditions with a good employer and generous family, she pushes to cultivate her skills through her continuous involvement with her organization.

Because of Ijah's membership and participation in her Indonesian migrant women's group in Victoria Park, she has created social networks that transformed her identity as a woman and as a migrant worker. She is no longer the diminutive, docile, and ultimately vulnerable domestic worker in foreign shores. She has gained a newfound agency in also identifying herself as an organizer and advocate of her fellow Indonesian migrant women workers in Hong Kong. This transformative experience of "bounded solidarity" (Curran and Saguy) to a larger cause furnishes her with a new moral imperative to not just follow problematic gender ideologies of shame and self-blaming but help and support victimized and vulnerable women like her.

This transformation can be seen not just in how Ijah has become more active and embedded in her own social network but also in her personality. She has become

more articulate and confident not only inside her new employer's home but also outside. Her fears and insecurities are slowly peeled off along with the shame and guilt of her past that has defined her former self. She begins to be unbound by the gendered moral codes of innocence and blind obedience imposed on her and other Indonesian women overseas. Instead, she learns from her own suffering and uses her knowledge not just to improve herself but also to help others. In her off days, she immerses herself with their organization's activities and assists her fellow Indonesian domestic workers in their troubles. What Intan and Dinah did to her when she felt helpless and afraid, she also does with distressed fellow domestic helpers she meets along the way. In fact, she has been called a "provocateur" after she threatened a recruitment agency with a labor complaint for keeping the passport of Yani, a fellow Indonesian domestic worker she met in her group, for the latter's debts.

However, Ijah realizes that there is so much more that needs to be done in her organizing work. She becomes aware of this when she is at a car park where she meets two other domestic helpers working in their building, one an Indonesian and the other a Filipina. After Vivian, the Filipina helper, asks her about what happened with the suicide incident of an Indonesian maid a few days before, she tells Ijah:

"Kasihani sekali kalian para buruh dari Indonesia," katanya setengah prihatin setengah mengejek. "Kasus kalian lebih banyak daripada kami, tapi asosiasi kalian hanya, sejumlah jari. Kami memiliki asosiasi sekitar 2,000 buah. Jika majikan Hong Kong tak bisa menghargai kami, maka pemerintah kami akan berurusan dengan pemerintah Hong Kong. Sedang kalian, konsulat saja bahkan tak banyak membantu selain menambah masalah yang semakin rumit saja."

"Poor girls, all of you who came from Indonesia," she said half-mockingly and half concerned. "Even if you are more than us, your organizations can be counted by fingers. We have about 2,000 organizations. If Hong Kong employers cannot appreciate us, then our government will deal with Hong Kong government. In your case, your consulate cannot even help you, other than add to the already complicated problem" (181).

Even though Ijah feels slighted by Vivian's comments, she understands the truth in her words. She only needs to look at her own experiences and comprehend how her own government has done nothing to help her. From this scene, the readers also get to observe the tensions created by the labor export policies of two nation-states (Indonesia and the Philippines) in Hong Kong, which affects the kind of lives these migrant women live in their host state. The Filipina helper's statement describes not only how better protected they are by their government but also their significantly wider support network in Hong Kong. Instead of being compassionate,

this has made Vivian feel invulnerable and immune to the kinds of suffering that her Indonesian counterparts endure.

Through the difference between the nation-states' management of their own citizens overseas, feelings and discourses of which one is better off than the other become a source of tension and estrangement between migrant women of different ethnicities in their destination states. Vivian's observation demonstrates how one's feelings over their transnational conditions are also territorialized by nation-states' discourses on governmentality. These discourses create fissures among migrant women who, in many ways, inhabit and thus share the same conditions of vulnerability and suffering, even though they feel their effects differently.

The Filipina maid's remarks are further affirmed when Ijah confronts the Indonesian domestic worker who has only been silently listening to the conversation. After Vivian left, Ijah notices that the Indonesian helper is deliberately hiding her bruises from her when she tries engaging her for a casual talk. She learns that she is Atin from Ponorogo and she is working in the flat next to theirs. Ijah no longer needs to ask her about the bruises and instead goes straight to advising her to get out of her employers' house and report them to the police. But Atin refuses, fearing that she will lose her only source of income and would be forcibly repatriated by her agency to Indonesia.

As Atin cries, Ijah sees herself in her situation a few months ago. If it were not for her chance meeting with Dinah and the others, she would still be trapped in her previous employer's cruel household, weeping helplessly like Atin. Because Ijah identifies with what Atin is going through, she fears that the troubled woman, like her back then, would not seek help until her body and spirit are completely broken down. This is why she advises Atin to report to police while she still can: "How can I help you if you yourself do not have the courage to report this to the authorities. Until when are you going to survive like this? Do not let things get worse until you can't bear it anymore," (*"Bagaimana aku membantamu kalau kau sendiri tak punya keberanian untuk melaporkan penderitaanmu pada pihak yang berwajib. Sampai kapan kau akan bertahan? Jangan sampai keadaan menjadi lebih buruk dan kau tak bisa menanggungnya lagi,"* 183).

Ijah's help does not stop with this advice as she constantly makes her presence felt to Atin. When she hears a commotion next door, for example, she tries checking up on Atin by pretending to return a hairpin she borrowed from the latter in front of her employer. She also constantly stops Atin whenever she sees her in the hallway just to see if she is okay. Her efforts, however, were in vain when she sees Atin's body lying bloodied on their building's courtyard in what looks like another case of an Indonesian maid jumping to her death.

Ijah's suspicion that Atin did not commit suicide, and that there was foul play involved in her death, only becomes stronger when she reads the employer's alibi from a newspaper: Atin was so depressed because all her loved ones back home died from a fatal tsunami that hit Aceh triggering her to jump from the nineteenth floor of their building. From the very little that she knows about Atin—her name, where she came from, and the marks on her skin—she knows that Atin's employer's alibi is not true. This compels her to convince her organization to investigate. When Ijah learns that the Filipina helper whom she has met earlier might have witnessed what happened to Atin, she convinces Vivian into helping her build up Atin's case. But Vivian has already made contact with the Indonesian embassy and was turned down, dissuading her from testifying for a possible foul play that could have reopened the case and compelled the police to reinvestigate Atin's death:

"Kalian tahu kau... Konsul kalian bikin kami muak. Niat baikku sama sekali tak dianggap, lebih parah lagi mereka tuduh kami yang bukan-bukan... Aku bukan tak mau menolong, tapi aku terlanjur sakit hati dengan perlakuan konsul kalian yang sungguh tak masuk akal itu. Maaf, aku harus bergegas. Aku ada janji dengan teman Filipinaku."

"You know... Your consul makes me sick. My good intentions were ignored. What's worse, they accused me of causing more trouble... I do want to help, but I was already insulted by how your consulate treated me. Sorry, I have to hurry. I have to meet my Filipina friend." (195)

Vivian's reply illustrates the vicious results of the nation-state's territorializing discourse on migration by not only suppressing stories of suffering of their migrant women but also repressing the radical politics that these stories may inspire. On the one hand, Vivian's account of how the Indonesian consulate treated her shows how the nation-state's governmentality through their embassies overseas not only manages the migrant women's bodies, but also contains their narratives. After all, news detailing the abuse and exploitation of their citizen-breadwinners, like that of Atin, would only expose the anxieties of their government's aggressive warm-body exportation. This is why these biopolitical extensions of the state, like the Indonesian embassy, would most of the time choose the less troubling versions of "mysterious death" and "suicide" because they obscure and mask their accountability for these fatal casualties. On the other hand, Vivian's response to how she was treated by the Indonesian consulate also reflects how detached she is to Atin's life that she does not feel responsible in pursuing the truth behind her death. Because she is incapable of both identifying with Atin's suffering and perceiving her life as grievable, Vivian is easily deterred from doing the right thing in testifying for Atin's justice.

Even if there is no witness to account for Atin's death, Ijah and her fellow migrant activists push on to find justice in her behalf. What unfolds toward the last few pages of the novel is a work of mourning over Atin's life. Several Indonesian domestic workers' organizations gathered and held prayer rallies in front of the building where Atin fell. In between these solemn prayers, activists speak up and condemn Indonesian and Hong Kong authorities for not conducting a more thorough investigation on Atin's case. This series of indignation and prayer demonstrations lead to a bigger march where Ijah and her fellow protestors stage a symbolic funeral march from Victoria Park to the Indonesian Embassy in Causeway Bay:

Sejumlah BMI yang tidak masuk long march, tetapi kebetulan melihat arak-arakan tersebut segera berlari ke lintasan aksi. Mereka malah mengira kalau di dalam keranda tengah terbaring jenazah almarhumah Atin. Dengan sedih mereka pun bergabung dalam barisan sebagai wujud simpati terhadap kawan mereka yang bernasib tragis.

There were a number of Indonesian domestic workers who did not participate in the long march, but immediately ran to join the procession when they saw the made-up coffin. They even thought that Atin's body was inside it. They joined the procession as an expression of sympathy for the tragic fate of their fellow. (197)

This symbolic ceremony simulating a funeral procession while also holding a protest action presents a different frame by which grief is enacted. Even if they know very little about Atin's life and the details surrounding her death, fellow Indonesian migrant women who fell in line and participated in the demonstration show how they are able to imagine and identify with her suffering. The fact that they do not really know Atin but still mourn for her attests to how their grief is no longer bounded by the question of whether she deserves to die or not according to gendered moral codes or a nation-state's discourses of migration. Their expressions of sympathy and solidarity come from perceiving how Atin's death matters in their own transnational experiences. They see in Atin the story of their lives, a narrative that speaks about them because they are still part of that structure that has conditioned Atin's vulnerability and highly contingent fate, even if many of them have overcome some of its more fatal effects.

This form of identification is all the more manifest in Ijah. Even though all she knows about Atin is her name, where she came from, and the bruises on her arms, she sees herself and her past experiences in Atin's fate. This feeling of grieving for Atin is also grieving for herself, as recognizing Atin's vulnerability and suffering has attuned her to also acknowledge her own precariousness. For her, Atin does not need to testify for her innocence and virtue as a migrant woman to deserve grieving. The torment that she went through is already enough to claim social

justice on her behalf. This form of radical grief from Ijah is encapsulated in the novel's closing passages:

Di tempatnya, Ijah terdiam haru. Matanya mengerjap sembari menatap cakrawala. Lirih ia berbisik, "Tidurlah dengan tenang Atin. Kami tak kan pernah melupakanmu. Kami akan meneruskan perjuanganmu hingga martabat buruh migran tegak menjulang ke langit biru."

Ijah fell silent. She looked up and stared at the sky. Then, she softly whispered, "Go to sleep calmly Atin. We will never forget you. We will continue your struggle until the dignity of migrant workers stand towering into the blue sky." (200)

In her silent invocation, Ijah demonstrates an alternative politics for mourning that makes Atin's life grievable not because she is exemplary but precisely because her travails are ordinary. Atin is like Ijah and other domestic workers and the suffering that she endured when she was alive comes from the same conditions that has structured why she, Ijah, and the others are socially excluded and living a highly contingent life as foreigners, women, and domestic workers in Hong Kong and elsewhere in the world. Grieving for Atin is thus no longer about redeeming her honor as a migrant woman following gendered moral scripts of their transnational passages but has become a way of claiming for her rights and social justice as worker. Ijah knows that this kind of grief work takes time, as Atin's death can only be truly resolved in the long and drawn-out struggle to achieve their dignity as migrant domestic workers. In this way, Ijah's passionate attachment to Atin's death illustrates how one carries with grief as a radical impulse for political and collective action.

In the end, *Sebongkah Tanah Retak* opens up a new way of thinking about grief and its deeper implications in understanding and forwarding migrant women's claims for social justice. Lamangan's *The Flor Contemplacion Story* and Dalisay's *Soledad's Sister* demonstrate how the gendered moral and national discourses that recognize Flor's life as grievable also relegate Soledad's death as ungrievable. This understanding of grief undermines and even effaces the kinds of suffering that migrant women endure because they fall out of the frames of national mourning. This has grave consequences in alienating and detaching the public to the kinds of agony that migrant women go through in their transnational passages, as well as in making their deaths mere numbers in the narrative of the nation-state's path dependency on labor exportation. In choosing which lives deserved mourning and which lives do not, this grief work is limited and limiting because it can never thoroughly challenge the very conditions that allow for these deaths to happen in the first place. In this Indonesian novel, on the other hand, Ijah offers a different understanding of grief in which suffering becomes the very locus of migrant

women's struggles. Atin's dead body, for Ijah, does not just inspire pity but also inspirit their calls for their rights and dignity. In these ways, Ijah maintains grief as part of her political impulse to affect social change. And this kind of political mourning remains to be an important affective resource for migrant women's social movement.

MOURNING AND MOVEMENT

The Flor Contemplacion Story, *Soledad's Sister*, and *Sebongkah Tanah Retak* represent the various political implications in understanding how the life of a migrant woman matters for her homeland. The prospects of advocating for migrant women's lives that these texts present particularly resonate in the case of Mary Jane Veloso, as the discrepant responses between her fellow Filipinos against her fellow migrant women of other nationalities illustrate both the pitfalls of nationalist grief and the possibilities of transnational mourning. The shocking reaction of many Filipinos, many of whom are OFWs themselves, in shaming Mary Jane and her family for her grim fate of almost being executed in Indonesia instead of blaming the Philippine government for its incapacity to protect its migrant citizens, reveals the problems of confining the activists' campaign within the rhetoric of nationalist grief. It uncovers how the nationalist position of critiquing nation-state policies over the deplorable life of a migrant Filipina may not just be insufficient but is also deeply problematic as it relies on moral and gendered assumptions of which lives and which acts of OFW sacrifice deserve to be mourned. Mary Jane is not like Flor Contemplacion, as many Filipinos and OFWs argue. Instead, her fate mirrors that of Soledad in Dalisay's novel, whose death does not account for the nation's tears and indignation because she does not follow the script of a good Filipina migrant. This is why Filipino migrant activists in the Philippines and overseas have to constantly rethink and reframe the narrative of OFWs' struggle through transnational lens.

This is a possibility that Indonesian activists have opened up in their political response toward Mary Jane's case. Their activists' dynamic campaigns within Indonesia's public sphere and their transnational perspective of making Mary Jane a symbol of their own migrant women's woes and suffering abroad attest to an alternative and much more progressive form of grief. Just like Atin in Fitria's novel, Mary Jane's grievable life has become a potent point of identification that inspirited a movement that transcends and transforms the geopolitical borders of mourning. By looking at connections and intersections of migrant women's struggles beyond national borders, the Indonesian activists are able to present a political campaign that narrates how women from the Global South bear the shared fate of vulnerability

and victimhood that comes out from the system of uneven globalization and labor migration.

In these ways, these visual and literary texts intervene into the politics of labor migration by drawing out the themes and tropes reflected in the real-life struggles and campaigns of migrant activism for Filipina and Indonesian domestic workers. The film and novels discussed here can be seen to be interrogating the same issues that are also platforms from which NGOs, civil support groups, and activist formations of migrant worker themselves organize and rally around to represent the advocacy for Southeast Asian migrant women's rights and welfare. As such, these stories not only complicate how these social issues are being discussed in public spheres of home and host countries, but also push for ways of transcending and transforming the territorializing limits of both the nation-state's labor migration discourses and nationalist activism that, most of the time, confine the scope and compass of migrant women's social movements.

At present, the promise of transnational politics among migrant women's formation have already emerged. In Hong Kong, migrant women from the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Nepal have forged solidarity under the umbrella organization Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (AMCB) to challenge both Hong Kong's and their own home countries' policies toward migrant domestic workers (Hsia). The inclusion of various nationalities of migrant worker organizers and activists under common unities and advocacies represents how these organizations and their constituents "negotiate the effects of transnational migration and strategize their solidarity" in advancing shared political claims to their origin and destination countries (Law 219). In Singapore, where democratic rights of foreign workers to join organizations and participate in political assemblies do not apply as in Hong Kong, civil and non-profit groups organized by Singaporean activists have been leading the mobilizing work for migrant women. Even if organizations in Singapore are bound by local level activism, the work of TWC2 and HOME, for example, can still be considered transnational as they address the problems of labor migration by connecting not just the struggles of foreign domestic workers across different nationalities but also of other foreign workers in Singapore (Lyons 99). By focusing on similarities of working conditions of not just one group of nationality and not just one group of migrant workers, these NGOs transcend borders by forging trans-ethnic and transnational solidarity around foreign workers' social exclusion in Singapore.

In their home countries, migrant activist organizations from Indonesia and the Philippines have been working to create transnational networks and affiliations. In Indonesia, organizations like the Jakarta-based *Migrant Care* have advocated and addressed migrant women's issues by exploring the intersection of women's

rights and workers' rights not just in their country but also abroad, while religious-based organizations of Indonesian women's groups, like *Solidaritas Perempuan* (SP, "Women's Solidarity for Human Rights") have constantly challenged anti-women policies and ideologies in Indonesia by promoting a hybrid framework of transnational feminism and gender-progressive Islamic values to advocate for migrant women's rights (Robinson 109; Rinaldo 10).

In the Philippines, *Migrante International* is the country's largest transnational grassroots migrant organization that has been leading migrant advocacy in the past three decades. *Migrante International* is an umbrella network that links former OFWs based in the Philippines to their chapters in the Middle East, Asia Pacific, Europe, and North America where there is a high concentration of Filipino im/migrants and OFWs (Rodriguez). *Migrante* was formed in 1996 by human rights and women's rights activists who were active during Flor Contemplacion's case. Throughout the years, they have been active not only in campaigning for high-profile cases of OFWs like Flor, Sarah Balabagan, Joselito Zapanta, Angelo Dela Cruz, and, most recently, Mary Jane Veloso, but also in their daily campaigns for the welfare and migrant rights of Filipinos abroad.

These transnational formations of activist movements among migrant women workers are crucial in highlighting how migrant domestic workers' issues challenge and reconstruct the "domestic/public, private/political dichotomies" to offer a progressive politics where "the domestic *transcends* and *transforms* the public, political, transnational, and global" (Constable, "Migrant Workers" 143). The work of mourning of transnational activism linking the struggles of Indonesian and Filipina domestic workers, as seen in the case of Mary Jane Veloso, can inspire a cultural shift in the gender ideologies that shape both Philippine and Indonesian migration industries, especially in understanding the grievable lives of women.

These changing political movements and realities reveal the need for Filipino and Indonesian migrant, women, and human rights activists to reframe their campaigns within a transnational framework, connecting the struggles of migrant women with those from the Global South and forming new alliances and solidarity with grassroots feminist and migrant movements of other nationalities and ethnicities. Such transnational reframing also calls forth the rethinking of nationalist rhetoric that only serves to perpetrate problematic gendered ideals of migration aligned with state-sponsored development and nation-building projects. Women's rights and human rights activists in Indonesia need to continually challenge the cultural logic of morality and womanhood sustained by their religion and enforced by their state to their migrant women. Transnational activism can transform the public discourse of gender and migration by challenging the culture of shaming and victim-blaming of migrant women's bodies and sexuality, and putting focus on

and cultivating empathy toward the struggles and suffering of not just their fellow Indonesian women abroad, but also those of another nationality or ethnicity like Mary Jane.

In the Philippines, migrant and women's rights activists should start challenging the pervasive use of the nationalist rhetoric of *bagong bayani*. The *bagong bayani* label works because of the discourse of sacrifice that sutures and bridges the state's problematic nation-building efforts to deploy its citizens as workers abroad even with limited capacity to protect them. In these ways, OFWs are seen as heroes because they can commit to a life of agony and danger for their families, even when the state cannot and will not protect them once they leave the country, which only fortifies the dimension of sacrifice in their transnational contexts (Bautista). *Bagong bayani* is sustained by problematic notions of moral ascendancy as OFWs are framed to become self-renouncing mothers, daughters, or sisters. This may have worked in the case of Flor Contemplacion but it becomes a sore point in Mary Jane's case as her initial conviction for drug trafficking has rendered her unfit for the underpinnings of the OFW hero-martyr imaginary. A transnational reframing of Mary Jane's campaign not only transcends the limits of this nationalist rhetoric but also finds an intersection for her struggles to weave through the network of suffering of precarious subjects of globalization.

While the lessons of transnational mourning invoke intersectionality for these feminist social movements to constantly connect and politicize the lives of migrant women across the Global South, the impulse of grief also evokes new directions and linkages for struggles back at home. The public discourses that make Filipina and Indonesian migrant women's lives and deaths political are also deeply relevant in thinking about the contemporary political impasse facing the social movements in Southeast Asia. As it is, both the Indonesian and Philippine states' populist policies of death penalty and extrajudicial killings and their citizens' endorsement of these forms of state violence and necropolitics (Mbembe) have continuously drawn on whose lives are grievable and whose deaths are deserving. Recent events have shown that Philippine President Duterte has deferred to Indonesia President Widodo to decide on the fate of Mary Jane, as pleading for her case would contradict his own tough stance against drug trafficking (Harvey). At the same time, Widodo has been said to be "taking cues" from Duterte's "playbook" on the war on drugs, announcing a "narcotics emergency" in Indonesia and ordering the police to shoot-to-kill suspected drug dealers (Hutton).

The issues brought forth by these texts that draw on the political impulse of transnational mourning can offer new ways of imagining how fighting for migrant women's lives and welfare can intersect with various struggles of advancing labor rights, women's rights, and human rights. This transnational activism can

find a language and resource from grief that sees the network of suffering and vulnerabilities of people at home and abroad, a social movement that laments the precarious fates of Flor, Mary Jane, Soledad, and Ijah in their border-crossing while also grieving for the bare lives (Agamben) of those who are excluded from the moral and economic frames of their country's narrative of development and nation-building. This work of mourning can advocate even for the deaths of those who fall out of national obituaries, especially those whose passing are deprived of public condolences and outcry.

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