Boundary work and social relations
of middle class Filipino transnationals in Indian cities

by

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Abstract

The occupations of overseas Filipino workers in the international labour market and their often marginal position in host societies generate classed, gendered and racial stereotypes. Such categorisations affect not only how overseas Filipino workers are regarded, but also how they reinforce class relations among Filipinos in the homeland and elsewhere. Acknowledging their marginality, scholars (e.g. Aguilar 2002) of Philippine migration call attention to the ways Filipino migrants exercise agency amid structures and representations that limit the identities and social relations open to them.

This ethnography responds to the task of investigating migrant agency within a Global South to South migration route by looking at Filipino transnationals who are in relatively privileged positions in the workplace and host society of urban India. They work as professionals, consultants or managers in the country’s expanding economic sectors such as manufacturing, service and retail. I focus on how they constitute themselves through boundary work, a relational and situational process of constructing similarity and difference through a particular set of socio-cultural criteria (Lamont 2002). From July 2010–June 2011, I conducted fieldwork in Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore and examined the boundary work between Filipino transnationals and Indian locals, and among Filipino transnational communities in the context of everyday life, work and mediated space.

Filipino transnationals and Indian locals are found to construct class boundaries with reference to notions of ability, morality and modernity. Ethnographic data further reveal how they perceive each other in gendered and racialised ways. The pattern of boundary work documented and analysed in the thesis suggests the middle class character of Filipino transnational identity in India. While the symbolic boundaries of middle class Filipinos act to include and exclude, they are also transgressed through interpersonal relations with local Indians and fellow Filipinos who maybe positioned outside the boundary.

Furthermore, Filipino research participants’ social relations (informal mentoring, patronage) in the workplace, or friendship with the locals, provide the means or motivations to achieve and transform themselves. By symbolising their achievements at work, or in their locality, Filipino transnationals exercise agency in producing identities
that challenge their common global stereotypes, for example as domestic workers and mail-order-brides. Moreover, the recognition of their ability and achievement through publicity in Indian and social media contributes to the signification of their middle class identity and privileged position in the host society.

I argue that middle class boundaries of achievement, morality and modernity constitute Filipino identities in India. Their privileged position enables them to create identities that conform to common middle class values or cultural criteria. Through their conduct of social relations and construction of symbolic boundaries, they are able to recast Filipino transnational identity in India as middle class in character. In arguing that Filipino transnationals’ collective identity is shaped mainly in classed terms, the thesis demonstrates how ethnic identity becomes a class phenomenon. Thus the thesis highlights how socio-economic position provides a basis for boundary work in the migration context. Through such boundary work, Filipino transnational migrants draw on shared middle class cultural criteria to negotiate, justify and symbolise their privileged position. Their middle class boundary work is also a conscious attempt to recast Filipino occupational stereotypes on the global stage. Indeed, beyond this particular case study, the thesis draws attention to the importance of positional, performative and interpersonal processes of boundary work in analyzing transnational migration.
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I dedicate this thesis to Filipinos in India whose friendship, stories and generosity embody human flourishing.
Lajpat Nagar Central Market in South Delhi is busy. People come in droves to look for suitable sari and *kurta* fabrics, *dupattas*, fashion accessories, shoes, linen, crockery or jewellery. At peak hours, cars and rickshaws honk while crawling out of its two main avenues. Bargain hunters ignore the ‘fixed price shop’ sign and haggle with shopkeepers. The smell and sight of deep-fried *pakoras* and *samosas* tempt shoppers to snack. On Mondays, most shops in the area close, except for 3Cs, a mid-size mall; Café Coffee Day, a local chain of cafés; McDonald’s and Kentucky Fried Chicken; and Twenty Four-Seven (hereafter 24/7), Delhi’s first modern convenience store.

Unlike the mall and food joints that close before midnight, 24/7 lives up to its tagline ‘open always’. At night, the store caters to residents of the vicinity who crave for snacks or need to top up their mobile phone credits. Early in the morning, call centre workers grab *chai* and sandwiches for breakfast. From noon until dusk, customers who enter its orderly and air-conditioned premises get some relief from the hustle and bustle of the market. Products are categorised and arranged on gondola shelves and inside coolers, a sharp contrast to the cluttered but colourful display of goods on the shop floor or vendors’ wooden platforms.

“We have a standard of hygiene here”, Sunil, a local employee, tells me. The store’s pricing remains under the cap set by Indian state regulators. This makes a modern Indian convenience store unique from those in other countries where products have a 20-30% price mark up. Along with the rise of shopping malls since India liberalised its economy in 1991, 24/7 not only inaugurates the practice of modern retailing, but also alludes to the nature of India’s globalising cities.

In 2005, a Delhi-based Indian conglomerate invested in the idea of a 24-hour convenience store. The group looked for talent in the Philippines where they found Lisa, a senior executive of a retail company. Though Lisa was one of this company’s pioneering employees, the new management wanted its own people on board and bypassed Lisa for promotion, deploying her elsewhere. Feeling that her decades of service were no longer valued, she was now prepared for new opportunities elsewhere. When the Indian company approached her, Lisa had already received a job offer in Papua New
Guinea, but was more impressed with the Indian position so resigned from her company in the Philippines.

The owner of the Indian company wanted Lisa for the job and had invited her to India to see the company and the city first before making a decision. Accompanied by her husband, Lisa flew to Delhi to check the place. Eventually, she decided to take on the challenge of setting up the city’s first chain of modern convenience stores. Lisa’s husband returned to Manila to look after their son, who was an undergraduate student. The 24/7 branch in Lajpat Nagar is the first store to open during her first year as consultant and operations manager. Six years later, under Lisa’s leadership, 24/7 has expanded to 27 stores.

“24/7 is my baby!” Lisa claimed midway through our interview at her flat in New Friends Colony, a leafy suburb in South Delhi. Recalling her six years with the company, she expressed both a sense of achievement and frustration at the work. While she felt recognised by her employer and satisfied by her accomplishment, she pointed out that she struggled with her co-workers’ lack of discipline and motivation. She often compared local workers with the situation in her homeland where she believed her Filipino staff demonstrated more responsibility. Moreover, local workers did not stay long with the company. As soon as they get better job offers, she said, they resigned. According to Lisa, being a shop assistant was seen as a temporary job for the locals, so Lisa always had to hire and re-train new people. However, she learned to accept the conditions of her workplace. She was still happy with her job in India because she enjoyed the confidence of the owner and was compensated well. Content with her family’s financial situation, she was in a position to help her kin in the homeland.

The story of Lisa resonates with the experiences of fellow Filipino transnationals in Indian cities, who include not only skilled workers (mostly professionals and managers) but also permanent residents and accompanying spouses of other transnationals. Their situation is different to that of migrant workers in stereotypical overseas Filipino occupations, such as domestic work, caregiving and entertainment in more affluent countries. They occupy a relatively privileged position in India, a host society that is, like the Philippines, more known to send migrant workers than to host them. India’s economic liberalisation has created the need for skills in emerging sectors such as retail and services with new opportunities for transnational workers. The labour migration
trajectory of Filipinos to India is termed by economists as the Global South-South route (Ratha & Shaw 2007). In studying the experiences of Filipinos in India, I aim to explore how they constitute themselves in a Global South destination.

As the vignette about Lisa shows, Filipino transnationals in India use their achievements to compare themselves with others as a way of defining and enhancing their identities. Lisa’s comparison between Filipinos and Indians based on work ethic also illustrates the
significance of ‘boundary work’, a process of defining ‘us’ and ‘them’ through a particular set of socio-cultural criteria (Bail 2008; Lamont 2002), a dynamic mode of constituting collective and individual identities (Lamont 1992). The following ethnography examines how Filipino transnational migrants do boundary work through their relatations with people in various situations, contexts and social spaces (workplace, social and traditional media, and everyday life). What makes their situation unique relative to most migrant workers, is that they do boundary work from a relatively privileged position in a host society that is undergoing intense social, cultural and economic transformations. India’s liberalising and modernising economy has ushered in a new consumer and work culture, a domain where the competencies and knowledge of Filipino workers are valued. Lisa’s pioneering work in establishing a 24-hour modern convenience store in Delhi illustrates such a condition.

The case of Filipinos in India, therefore, provides a counterpoint to prevailing discourses in Philippine migration literature that dwell on the marginal position of Filipino migrants, and thus also raises important new questions. How do Filipino transnationals in relatively privileged positions define themselves and relate to others? What criteria do they use? How are they perceived and regarded in the host society? What ethnic identity emerges from such a context? In pursuing these questions, the thesis traces how the boundary work of my research participants contests the usual discourses that reify the marginality and oppression of Filipino migrants (Choy 2000). Hence the study explores the ways in which Filipino overseas migrants exercise agency amid “the contradictory, complex, and changing structures and forces of global migration” (Aguilar 2002). The emerging markets of Global South countries, particularly India, provide an unusual context and opportunity to study how Filipino migrant agency is exercised from a position of relative advantage and privilege.

In the following chapters, I develop three interrelated themes about the boundary work and social relations of Filipino transnationals. First, ethnographic data reveal that the main set of criteria they use for evaluating themselves and others, namely morality, ability and modernity, which are consistent with middle class symbolic boundaries elsewhere (Lamont 1992). I will argue in this case study that middle class boundaries are the bases for constituting Filipino transnational identities and relations in the context of Indian cities. The emergent boundaries are not only situational but are also constructed in relation to the racial and gendered ways Indian locals perceive them, and
tellingly, the ways in which this particular group of Filipino migrants respond to the negative stereotypes commonly associated with Filipino migrants. The salience of morality, ability and modernity are shaped not only by Filipino middle class subjectivities, but also by macro processes, notably those entailed in the transformation of the Indian economy, as well as by the particular need to negotiate their positions as outsiders.

Second, boundary work also entails possibilities for connections and, indeed is as much about connection as separation, as evident in the ethnographic data presented on the conduct of interpersonal and interethnic communication. Thus, the thesis highlights the role of interpersonal relations, such as those in friendship and marriage, or in the bonds between guru and student, in triggering boundary crossings and transgressions. Thus, I will argue that interpersonal relations around and across conventional social boundaries may enable identity transformations. Since boundary work is studied at the level of micro or interpersonal interactions, the ethnography demonstrates how emotions, in particular, are crucial in revealing the nature of the social interactions being investigated.

Finally, the study will show the significance of new social and traditional media in the experience of migration, specifically the ways they create spaces for interpersonal social relations and become symbolic resources for boundary work. I describe how new media help to create a migrant community, provide a space for conversation and debate, and help generate intimate relations. Being part of my research participants’ social media network, especially Facebook, revealed how they symbolise their achievements, friendships and everyday experiences. The favourable representations of Filipino transnationals in Indian mainstream media and Filipino diasporic media suggest recognition of their value in the host society and beyond.

In examining how Filipinos in India constitute themselves in the context of transnational migration, this ethnography broadly tells us about how people exercise agency in transforming themselves and their relationships with others. It demonstrates the ways in which Filipino transnational migrants may be constructed and construct themselves as moral, modern and accomplished people. The following overview of chapters describes how the themes and arguments above unfold across the thesis.
Overview of the thesis

In the first chapter, I describe Filipino transnational migrants in Delhi as middle class and discuss assumptions about this socio-economic and cultural category. Chapter 1 also elaborates on India as a Global South destination and how it relates to contemporary Filipino transnational migration. It then proceeds to discuss the boundary approach and fieldwork methods that are adopted for the study. Following the introduction, I situate Filipino transnationals in Indian cities. By mapping out their occupations, residential patterns and media representations, Chapter 2 establishes their relative privilege in Indian society, with specific reference to Delhi. I also describe how Filipino transnationals sense the place and its people, and in turn how locals perceive them. Having established their status, material conditions and sensibilities, I look at how they make boundaries in the workplace by focusing on superior-subordinate relationships. Chapter 3 explores workplace relations constructed through the boundary of professionalism, a term that references both ability and work ethic. I trace how boundaries and relationships at work are negotiated through informal mentoring relationships and patronage. The following chapter deals with boundary work on mediated space. Chapter 4 describes the nature of interaction on the Filipinos in India newsgroup where the collective identity of Filipino transnationals are debated and contested along ethnic, gendered and moral terms. Continuing from the realm of mediated space, Chapter 5 focuses on peer relations among Filipino transnationals with particular attention to their moral boundary work. I explain how the barkada (peer group) is constituted not just by socio-economic status, but also by shared moralities. I will also point out that, in the context of Indian cities, peer groups are constituted by the temporary nature of transnational migration and the material conditions of the place. Chapter 6 develops the theme of how the self is transformed through social relations and symbolic practices using traditional, new and social media. Focusing on the practice of posting photos and media clippings on Facebook, I explore how the symbolisation of achievements constitutes the identities of Filipino transnationals in India. I also discuss how intimate relations exemplify the process of mutual recognition between Filipinos and Indians. In Chapter 7, I summarise my findings and make some arguments about the nature of the boundary work, identities and social relations of Filipino transnationals in India.
Chapter 1
Introduction:
Filipino transnationals in a Global South-South route

Who are Filipino transnational migrants?

1. Transnational migration of Filipino workers

   a. Economic, cultural and social dimensions of temporary labour migration

Filipino transnational migrants cross national or state borders to work temporarily or settle down permanently but maintain links with the homeland (Glick-Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Stanton 1992). Every year more than a million Filipinos leave the Philippines. There are 10,455,788 of them in 227 countries and territories: 47% (4,867,645) are permanent migrants; 43% (4,513,171) are temporary migrant workers; and 10% (1,074,972) are undocumented or overstaying Filipino citizens in other countries (Stock Estimate 2011). Generating sustained scholarly attention and media interest, contemporary migration of Filipinos is mainly a phenomenon stimulated by both global and local economic conditions.

The institutional deployment of Filipino labour overseas can be traced to the oil crisis in the 1970s and its local economic consequences. The Marcos regime started to deploy Filipino labourers to oil-rich countries to ensure a steady supply of the commodity from them and to ease unemployment in the homeland (David 2013). Since then, the remittances of Filipino labourers have contributed to the country’s dollar reserves and “shielded the economy from internal and external shocks” (Aguilar 2009). In 2012,

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1 Permanent and temporary migrations are intertwined processes. A Filipino migrant may start as a temporary worker but may become a permanent resident or citizen of a receiving country. Permanent migration is also facilitated by family reunification programs of receiving countries and marriages between Filipinos and other nationals. As will be demonstrated in the next chapters, these two paths shape the composition, relations and experiences of Filipino transnationals, communities or groups in a given host society. While these distinctions are important and elaborated in latter chapters, this introductory section will dwell initially on the occupational and economic dimension of migration to establish certain assumptions about the motivations, agency and social-economic conditions of both temporary and permanent migrants.

2 Filipino overseas work is not a recent phenomenon; it has historical precedents. In Spanish Philippines during the 19th century, Filipinos, then called Manilamen, worked alongside other ethnic groups in American and European merchant vessels (Aguilar 2003, p. 142). Also during the same period, Manilamen found their way in Broome, Australia as pearl divers who eventually became citizens (Ileto 1998, p. 122). Catherine Choy (2003) has also found links between US colonial education and health policies in the training of Filipino nurses and their eventual migration to the United States (and elsewhere).
overseas Filipinos sent home approximately USD 21.4 billion\(^3\). The Philippines and Mexico rank third among the top recipients of migrant remittances, which are led by India and China (World Bank 2012).

From the perspective of migrant workers and their kith and kin, remittances not only pay for day-to-day expenses, but also investments in education, property and business (Bagasao et al. 2004, p. 151–3 cited in Aguilar 2009). With the economic impact of remittances, the export of Filipino labour has evolved into a policy and strategy of the Philippine state. It created the term ‘overseas Filipino worker’ (OFW) as an official category that allows the state to exercise its gatekeeping and surveillance power over its citizens who cross the nation-state border for work. For this purpose, it set up the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) “to promote Filipino workers globally, to protect their rights as a worker and human being” (POEA 2013). In recognition of their contribution to the economy, the Philippine state has hailed overseas Filipinos as modern day heroes (Aguilar 1999, p. 105).

The literature on Filipino transnational migrants tends to examine and challenge their apparently marginal position in the international labour market and in their host societies. These studies focus on Filipinos’ gendered occupational identity as domestic workers, entertainers, caregivers, nurses, seafarers and construction workers in affluent countries of Asia, the Middle East, Europe and North America. A consistent theme in these works is the Filipino migrant workers’ struggle to negotiate identities and relations constructed in classed, gendered/sexed, ethnic, national, racialised and religious terms (e.g., Constable 1997; Margold 1995; Pinches 2001; Suzuki 2002). Recent thinking on Filipino migrants has emphasised their assertion of agency amid the structures and constraints of migration, global capitalism, the state and employers (Aguilar 2002, p. 11).

Various theoretical and empirical strategies have been deployed to account for Filipino migrant experiences in different occupations. Nicole Constable (1997) analyses the power relations between domestic workers and their employers in Hong Kong. Following Foucault, she argues that these workers “exert power and are simultaneously being dominated by it” (Constable 1997, p. 210), revealing the contradictory ways

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\(^3\) Figure based on Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (Central Bank of the Philippines) data (Overseas Filipinos’ Cash Remittances 2013).
power is exercised. Rhacel Parreñas (2001) examines the position of domestic workers in the global economy by comparing groups from Los Angeles and Rome. By looking at four key institutions of migration and their processes—the nation-state, family, labour market and the migrant community—Parreñas exposes various dislocations of Filipina domestic workers such as partial citizenship, pain of family separation, contradictory class mobility and social exclusion, and their attempts to resist or negotiate the effects of these dislocations. Catherine Choy (2003) investigates the nursing phenomenon in the Philippines by tracing its history back to US colonial practices in health, interviewing Filipino nurses in the US, and interacting with students and teachers of nursing schools in the Philippines. Choy (2000) finds that the migration of Filipino nurses to the US is linked to “the establishment of Americanised nursing training in the Philippines during the US colonial period that laid the professional, cultural, and social groundwork for a feminised, highly educated, exportable workforce” (Choy 2000, p. 121). Race, nationality, gender and class shape the experiences of these female professionals (Choy 2000, p. 123).

Ethnographies of Filipino migrants have focused on other dimensions of migrant life such as the domestic workspace (Lan 2003), migrant community life (Parreñas 2001), religious engagements (Liebelt 2008a), gender identities (Margold 1995; Manalansan 2006a), personal relationships (Faier 2007; Hilsdon 2007), transnational family relations (Parreñas 2005), new media and long-distance parent-child relations (Madianou & Miller 2012) and notions of return or homecoming (Constable 1999). These theoretical approaches and ethnographies have revealed the complex subjectivity and agency of Filipino migrants who simultaneously accept, resist, and challenge oppressive and exploitative global and local structures and processes (e.g., international labour market, the nation-state, employers). Indeed, by highlighting the complex agency of Filipino migrants, their marginal position and stereotypical portrayals are challenged. This ethnography focuses on and limits its scope to how Filipino transnationals contest and reconstitute categories that define their identities. Before reviewing related studies on the theme of identity contestation, I elaborate on recent thinking about the motivations of Filipino transnational migrants.

Overseas work among Filipino workers is not only seen as a means to earn more income (Lan 2003b, p. 134). Highlighting human agency and the symbolic meaning of migration, Filomeno Aguilar, Jr. (1999) argues that contemporary labour migration is
analogous to a rite of passage. Working overseas is understood as a secular pilgrimage or ‘journey of achievement’ that has its roots in pre-colonial maritime Southeast Asia, which includes the Philippine archipelago. Aguilar draws from the work of James Fox (1987), who notes journeys of achievement as recurring patterns in myths of the people in the region. A member of a community leaves, undergoes a process of transformation in her sojourn and returns to the community with proof of achievement (e.g. new knowledge, wealth), which results in elevated status (Aguilar 1999, p. 102). This practice is a process of defining oneself in the community. Following Geoffrey Benjamin (1987), Aguilar points out that the journey of achievement suggests a notion of individual autonomy that is in a dialectical relationship with the social world.

Indeed, a Filipino’s motivation to go overseas also has to do with her social world. Michael Pinches (2001) argues that a Filipino worker migrates to escape oppressive class relations in the homeland (pp. 195, 197). Migration is also motivated by a desire to be freed from unequal and constraining gender or family relations especially for women (Constable 1999; Lauser 2008) and gay men (Manalansan 2006a). This further complicates our understanding of the dialectical relation between self and the social world that animates migration. Social inequality propels the journey of achievement or the process of gaining status and respect elsewhere. However, as I will show in next section, Filipinos who desire to escape from oppressive relations in the homeland find themselves, ironically, subject to degrading treatment in the host society and among fellow Filipinos. The journey of achievement therefore entails an element of gamble (Aguilar 1999).

b. Filipino workers in the international labour market and their occupational stereotypes

A Filipino worker’s opportunities overseas are defined by the demands of the international labour market and the legal constraints on migrant workers in the host society. In 2011, out of the estimated 1,850,463 newly- and re-hired workers, 1,384,094 were land-based and 466,369 were sea-based⁴ (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration 2011). Most newly hired, land-based Filipino workers perform service and production work (see Table 1). Majority of them are employed as domestic workers, nurses, waiters, bartenders, caregivers, wiremen and electrical workers.

⁴ This study limits its scope to land-based workers.
(see Table 2). Professionals or managers are a minority. Filipino health workers such as nurses belong to this category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major occupational groups</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service workers</td>
<td>201,512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production workers</td>
<td>141,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, medical, technical and related workers</td>
<td>61,598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical workers</td>
<td>14,115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales workers</td>
<td>8,932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative and managerial workers</td>
<td>4,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural workers</td>
<td>1,757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>3,641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All categories</strong></td>
<td><strong>437,720</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data based on figures provided by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (2011). An inventory of job positions is enumerated under these general categories in another document, OFW Deployment per Skill and Country – New Hires (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (2010)).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Occupational category</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Household service workers</td>
<td>142,689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nurses (professional)</td>
<td>17,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Waiters, bartenders and related workers</td>
<td>12,238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Caregivers and caretakers</td>
<td>10,101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Wiremen and electrical workers</td>
<td>9,826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Plumbers and pipe fitters</td>
<td>9,177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Welders and flame-cutters</td>
<td>8,026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Labourers/Helpers general</td>
<td>7,010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Charworkers, cleaners and related workers</td>
<td>6,847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Cooks and related workers</td>
<td>5,287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All categories</strong></td>
<td><strong>437,720</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data based on figures provided by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (2011).

The Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia, remains the top destination for contractual work and the USA for settlement. Filipinos tend to choose countries where English is an official language or widely spoken (see Tables 3 and 4). This points to the practice of English as a medium of education in the Philippines, a colonial legacy of the US. Filipinos’ English language competency has facilitated living and working overseas, and has given them advantage over other nationalities in the labour market (see Lan 2003b, p. 138)

Statistics also indicate that the preferred destinations of Filipino transnational migrants are high-income countries of the Global North (Ratha & Shaw 2007), with high currency exchange value compared to the Philippine peso. However, the ubiquitous
presence of Filipino workers suggests not only the institutionalisation of overseas work as a national or global practice but, as will be discussed below, a major socio-cultural phenomenon (Aguilar 1999).

Table 3. Top destinations for land-based overseas Filipino workers: New and re-hires (2011)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>316,736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>235,775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>146,613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>129,575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>100,530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>65,603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>41,896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>31,704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>18,230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>16,797</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

aData based on figures provided by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (2011).

Table 4. Top ten countries of destination of Filipino emigrants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1,165,352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>284,663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>116,748</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>109,668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>17,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>13,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>12,585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>10,241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>8,755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>7,773</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

aData from Commission on Overseas Filipinos (2013).

Filipino transnational migrants are prevalent in domestic (including caregiving), seafaring and production (construction) work (Tables 1 and 2). Foreign employers tend to hire women for domestic service or care work and men for construction and seafaring jobs (POEA 2010). This pattern indicates the ethnic and gendered division of labour in the international job market. Moreover, this practice of ‘ethnic typification’ (Parreñas 2001, p. 4-5) is compounded by ethnic wage hierarchies (Pinches 2001, p. 192) that work in contradictory ways. For example, in Singapore, (mostly female) Filipino domestic workers are paid highest, while Sri Lankans lowest (Huang and Yeoh 1998 cited in Aguilar 2003, p. 149); in Saudi Arabia, (mostly male) Filipino engineers, construction workers and drivers “earn more than Bangladeshis but less than Koreans, who in turn earn less than American, British, French, Italian, and similar employees” (Gibson & Graham 2002, p. 48, cited in Aguilar 2003, p. 144). The demands and dictates of the global job market and government of host societies result in occupational
stereotypes, such as the Filipino maid or nanny (Aguilar 2003; Parreñas 2001). Other stereotypes also emerge from cross-national marriages, such as the mail order or ‘Asian/Filipina’ bride (Holt 1996; Tolentino 2001) that connotes class, gender and racial marginalisation and exploitation. The jobs allocated for Filipinos overseas and the stereotypes generated by such structure result in ‘contradictory class mobility’ (Parreñas 2001) and ‘transnational shame’ (Aguilar 1996).

Deriving from the experience Filipino domestic workers in Italy, Rhacel Parreñas (2001) proposes the term contradictory class mobility to describe the simultaneous experience of upward and downward mobility in migration. Specifically, a migrant worker undergoes a decline in social status and an increase in financial status (Parreñas 2001, p. 150). For example, a qualified teacher leaves a low paying job and becomes a domestic worker in Taiwan (Lan 2003b) or a registered nurse becomes a caregiver in Singapore (Amrith 2010). While such sacrifice is recognised by the migrant worker’s kin in the homeland, fellow transnationals they meet in the host society or elsewhere feel uncomfortable being associated with them.

Filomeno Aguilar, Jr. (1996) coins the term transnational shame to capture the “deep-seated and sense of shame and humiliation” felt by Filipino professionals (or middle/upper class) as a consequence of being identified with a stereotype or ethnic/racial category with low class/occupational status (p. 122, 124). Aguilar specifies the type of shame as the “uncomfortable feeling that accompanies awareness of being in a socially unacceptable position” (Lynch 1973 cited in Aguilar 1996, p. 123). Being lumped together with lower class Filipinos and treated with low respect, Filipino professionals “erect social and discursive boundaries that segregate them from the domestic workers” (Aguilar 1996, p. 122).

So far we have established that the ethnic and gendered division of labour in the international labour market have economic, social and affective consequences for Filipino workers. In the next section, I describe how migration scholars have described and depicted Filipino workers in a range of societies. The goal is to elaborate on how Filipinos, as temporary migrant workers or ethnic minorities in host societies, are treated in classed, gendered and racialised terms.
c. The marginal position of transnational Filipinos and their exercise of agency

In their countries of destination, Filipinos tend to be perceived and treated based on ethnic and occupational stereotypes or the dominant society’s views on migrants or strangers (Aguilar 1996; Parreñas 2001; Pinches 2001). The category Filipino, or the migrant workers’ national identity, is tied to ethnic/racial and occupational/class registers and are treated accordingly (Pinches 2001, p. 207; Margold 1995).

Societies that are xenophobic, e.g. Italy (Parreñas 2001, p. 6), racialised, e.g. Singapore (Aguilar 1996, p. 122-123), theocratic-capitalist, e.g. Saudi Arabia (Margold 1995; Johnson 2010, p. 9) and seemingly egalitarian like the US, draw boundaries against Filipinos based on race, ethnicity and gender. In the US, Catherine Choy (2003) argues that racialised social hierarchies still inform and shape the reception and incorporation of Filipino nurses (p. 6). Filipino workers in Rome experience a sense of non-belonging arising from their segregation in domestic service and restricted social integration (Parreñas 2001, p. 199-200). Parreñas (2001) observes that this segregation is reflected in Filipinos’ avoidance of public spaces of leisure. In Saudi Arabia, the racial constructions of dark-skinned Asians intersect with gender. Jane Margold (1995) points out that the treatment of Filipino men as “tools,” “slaves,” and “dogs” results in a crisis of Filipino (Ilocano) masculinity (p. 209-210). Mark Johnson (2010) also observes this form of racial/gender boundary in his study of middle class Muslim Filipinos in Saudi Arabia. He writes: “Though she was the pharmacist, the male Saudi clerks looked down on her and treated her with disrespect” (p. 8). In Hong Kong, female employers draw moral boundaries based on the threatening sexual behaviour of Filipina domestic workers (Constable 2002).

In turn, Filipino migrants draw moral and cultural boundaries as a way of asserting their sense of national and/or class identity, dignity and humanity. They draw on resources including cultural and linguistic capital. Filipino nurses in Singapore position themselves as virtuous and naturally caring, and question the commodification of and perceived lack of care among ethnic Chinese in Singaporean society (Amrith 2010). Domestic workers in Taiwan challenge the class and racial superiority of their employers through their cultural capital of higher education and competency in English (Lan 2003a). In Saudi Arabia, Filipino workers point out the locals’ lack of work ethic (Pinches 2001, p. 200) and highlight their efficiency, educational qualification and
ability to speak English (Margold 1995, p. 288). Filipino gay men in New York City challenge racialised notions of queerness through culturally specific performances of modernity in everyday life (Manalansan 2006a). For example, they articulate their identities and express their abject relationship with the American nation through a code switching practice called *swardspeak*, a play on words from vernacular languages in the Philippines, English and Spanish.

The examples mentioned suggest that Filipino workers, whether or not they experience contradictory class mobility, distinguish themselves by asserting their cultural distinctiveness, morality and competencies against the racial, ethnic, gender and class categories or stereotypes that host societies impose on them. The literature therefore indicates emergent identity formations in the transnational migration context where Filipino workers produce a sense of collective and individual identity in relation to their stereotypes in the host society or their classed, gendered and racial marginalisation.

d. Crossing boundaries, building connections and solidarities

Apart from redefining themselves, Filipino transnationals exercise agency through crossing boundaries. They form relations ranging from friendship, political solidarity to marriage under conditions of shared marginality, imagined affiliations, affective labour and the workplace. For example, the common experience of oppression of migrant labourers in Saudi Arabia breeds solidarity between Filipinos and Pakistanis and resulted in a workers’ strike (Pinches 2001, p. 204). Nicole Constable (1997) observes that Filipino and non-Filipino domestic workers participate in Hong Kong’s Asian Domestic Workers Union (Constable 1997, p. 158-159). In a follow up study, Constable (2009) finds an alliance between Filipino and Indonesian domestic workers in protesting beyond their concerns such as minimum wage and working conditions, but also global issues like the anti-World Trade Organisation protest in 2005. However, Aguilar (2003) points out solidarities between migrant/ethnic groups are marred by contradictory forces at work in global capitalism and the international labour market:

While creating multi-stranded transnational linkages, the global labour market simultaneously deepens the national sentiment of migrant and non-migrant populations. Remaining entrenched is the perception that class structures are national formations. Despite glimmers of cross-national alliances, state strictures and portable nationhood do not augur well for cosmopolitan solidarities (Aguilar 2003, p. 158)
Ethnographic studies, however, show modes of relationships that are not necessarily oriented toward political action, but nevertheless indicate ethnic boundary crossing. Recent studies on Filipino transnationals have begun to explore sociality emerging from work and everyday life in the host society. Filipino workers in Israel who are mostly caregivers and who have previous experience in Middle Eastern countries present an interesting possibility of how affective labour, or care giving, and imagined affiliations become conditions for interethnic affinities. Claudia Liebelt’s study of Filipino caregivers in Israel describes the kind of relationship developed between them and their elderly employers:

Sellina domestic workers may derive a sense of belonging and even right to being recognized as part of Israeli society from their daily roles as the managers of households and as not simply the caregivers, but the symbolic—and in some cases even material—heiresses of Israel’s sick and elderly. (Liebelt 2008a, p. 69)

Liebelt also finds that Christian Filipinos in Israel could claim affinity with the host society based on an identification with the diasporic experience of the Jews (Liebelt 2008a) and “acquisition of intimate and affective knowledge about the societies and cultures in which they work” (Liebelt 2008b, p. 580). She describes these Filipina domestic workers as:

… women who throughout their stay in Israel and other Middle Eastern countries have acquired much cultural knowledge. They often adopt local practices and beliefs that allow them to symbolically “claim” the land collectively, through domestic work or as Christians who engage in missionary work or pilgrimages. (Liebelt 2008b, p. 568)

Iris Acejo (2012) examines relations between Filipino and Indian seafarers aboard a container ship. She finds that in this work environment, attempts at sociality are constrained by a culture of hierarchy and formality, and the demands of professionalism. However, under conditions such as long voyages and isolation, Indian officers attempt to socialise with the Filipino crew through small talk and humour but maintain professional distance. Conversely, Filipino officers also mingle with their compatriots and Indian colleagues and partake in the latter’s food and film gatherings (Acejo 2012, pp. 78-81). The study, however, does not tell us much about the negotiations in the work relationship defined by hierarchy and professionalism. This
ethnography takes a step further by exploring other possible forms of relationships between Filipinos and Indians.

Finally, the intimate relations or marriage show that while boundaries are crossed, new types of boundary emerge. In her study of Filipina migrants in the nightlife industries in Sabah, Malaysia, Anne-Marie Hilsdon (2007) observes that Filipina women are able to upturn their employers’ control through friendship, sexual liaison and marriage with local men in ways that challenge both Malaysian and Philippine narratives of ethnicity, gender and sexuality. This relationship between Filipinas and East Malaysians is possible under the condition of religious marginalisation. Even in the context of marriage, boundaries are still negotiated by both parties. Describing the marital relationship between Filipino women and Japanese men, Nobue Suzuki (2004) observes that the home is not a “locus of utopian love but a site of intense exchange and negotiation between positions defined by class, gender and nation” (p. 502). Indeed, boundaries emerge in the context of everyday situations and changing conditions.

While studies on the forms of sociality of Filipino transnationals describe their nature, the role of these relationships in collective and individual identity formations is still inadequately explored. This ethnography seeks to investigate the possibility of identity formation or boundary process that considers forms of transnational migrant sociality. It builds on the notion that Filipino transnational migrants exercise their agency in contesting negative stereotypes or categories generated by or emanating from the international labour market or the host society. A new migration route, Filipino transnational workers in India, therefore presents the empirical context to test these assumptions. Moreover, the history of interethnic contact between Filipinos and Indians, especially the economic migration of Indians to the Philippines, presents an opportunity to investigate boundary processes in a reverse situation. Before elaborating on skilled migration into contemporary India, I shall describe the group of Filipino transnationals in India. Based on their occupations (principally as technical consultants, professionals or managers), they are part of the middle classes who do not necessarily experience contradictory class mobility, but have consistent or upgraded class positions or status in the host society. A background on Filipino middle classes is needed to serve as a reference point to account for an emerging Filipino transnational identity.
2. Filipino middle classes

Compared to the plethora of studies on middle classes in some non-Western societies, such as India (Baviskar & Ray 2011; Fernandes 2006; Joshi 2010; Saavala 2010), the Filipino middle classes “do not receive much scholarly attention” (Bautista 2001a), except when they participate in political processes (Kimura 2003; Rivera 2001)\(^5\). A few exceptions, however, describe the class/occupational profile and culture (lifestyle) of Filipino middle classes. One attempt to provide a broad account of Filipino middle classes is the work of Cynthia Bautista (2001a, 2001b) and her collaborators (Bautista et al. 1999). I draw from the findings of their survey on classes in Metro Manila\(^6\) to depict a provisional model of a Filipino middle class identity.

Using a Marxist-Weberian model, Bautista et al. (1999) identify five classes, namely, capitalist, new middle class, old middle class, marginal middle class and working class. I focus on the middle classes. Bautista (2001a) differentiates the middle classes according to their occupation. Members of the old middle class are small employers or self-employed who own small businesses in the service sector (such as pawnshops, and restaurants). The new middle class and marginal middle class are employees. However, members of the new middle class are also small employers or self-employed professionals. They tend to work in private companies or occupy management positions. People comprising marginal middle classes are employed in government bureaucracy (Bautista 2001a, p. 137).

Bautista (2001b) also characterises the middle classes according to their lifestyle and material possessions. The ownership of a house and car, in varying degrees of value, define and differentiate the middle classes. In terms of leisure activities, affluent members of the middle class converge with the capitalist class in their interest in golf and membership in social or sport clubs. They have a variety of tastes for music including classical, jazz and Filipino music. Middle classes tend to read the front pages, headlines and editorial of newspapers as well as watch public affairs and entertainment shows on TV (noon-time, soap and movies). Foreign travel is more associated with the

\(^5\) According to Bautista et al. (1999), more attention is given to class relations and experiences in the rural setting (e.g. Pertierra 1979) or the urban working class (e.g. Pinches 1991). The lack of attention to middle classes, especially in anthropology (whether in the Philippines or elsewhere, with India being one of the exceptions) is an outcome of the discipline’s preference for marginal groups (Heiman et al. 2012).

\(^6\) Metro Manila not only includes the capital city of the Philippines, Quezon City, but also several adjoining cities such as Manila, Caloocan, Muntinlupa, Makati, Mandaluyong, Navotas, San Juan, Pasay, Pasig, Taguig, Malabon, Marikina, Parañaque, Pateros and Valenzuela.
capitalist class; however, both middle classes and capitalist class engage in cultural and community centre activities (Bautista 2001b, p. 171-172).

In terms of values and orientations, middle classes prioritise education⁷ as demonstrated by their investment in developing skills of their children and ensuring their entry in private schools. For them, tertiary education is perceived as a critical means for social mobility (Bautista 2001b, p. 183). Middle class values are oriented towards the family, their relationship with children and spouses. They are conservative towards divorce and live in couples. While they are oriented towards democracy, their political leanings are ambivalent and contradictory as indicated by low levels of involvement in political and quasi political activities beyond voting (Bautista 2001b; Rivera 2001).

Bautista (2001c) reports that the number of middle classes in the Philippines is small (10-12% of the population) and still do not receive much scholarly attention. Unlike Indian middle classes who are conscious of their class identity (Saavala 2010), Filipinos tend not to identify with a particular class category because of their differential situations, especially migrants (Espiritu 2001, p. 418). I observed the same ‘silence’ during my fieldwork with Filipino transnationals in India. Scholars of middle classes explain that such hesitation can be traced to their precarious position (Heiman et al. 2012). However, certain practices and values are associated with being middle class that form a middle class identity. This aspect is what I explored in my ethnography.

3. New media and migration

A significant aspect that I consider in studying Filipino transnational migrants is their use of media. New information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as the mobile phone and Internet have been integral to everyday life of migrants (Bakardjieva & Smith 2001; Madianou & Miller 2012; Nedelcu 2012). How they use and appropriate ICTs has been studied increasingly, with various foci such as long-distance mothering (Madianou & Miller 2012), collective ethnic identity constructions (Ignacio 2005) and community formations (Oiarzabal 2012). Anticipating how the everyday lives of migrants are documented through their use of media, Arjun Appadurai (2003) suggests the existence of a “migrant archive” that is formed by “the accretion of private communication in public circulation.” This archive is a “space of voice, agency, and

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⁷ The high literacy, 93.8% in 2010 (World Bank 2013) suggests, however, that education is valued among all classes.
debate, rather than of mere reading, reception, and interpellation” (Appadurai 2003, p 22). Drawing on Appadurai, I treat migrants’ presence and engagements on mediated spaces as constitutive of their experiences.

Thus, the study aims to ascertain the role of media, both new and traditional, in the lives of Filipino transnationals in India. Data from mediated spaces are not complementary but primary sources of knowledge (cf. Fechter 2007). In the literature on media and migration (Madianou 2005a, 2005b; Silverstone & Georgieou 2005; Silverstone 2005, 2007), the uses of media are related to practices of representation that either reinforce or challenge symbolic boundaries. Stereotypical representations of migrants in the host society’s mainstream media confirm boundaries but are contested by the migrants themselves through their own media (Lorenzana 2013; Madianou 2005a; Silverstone & Georgiou 2005). I thus link media practices such as taking and posting photographs online, participating in the migrant community’s newsgroup, as well as using social media (Facebook) and chat facilities, to the construction of identity and social formations.

A Global South destination: Post-liberalisation India

1. The Global South-South migration route of skilled workers

Transnational migrants are usually from the Global Southen route to the North. Recently, however, there is an increase in the number of migrants moving towards traditional ‘sending’ countries. The World Bank reports that Global South-South migration is nearly as large as South-North migration (Ratha & Shaw 2007). Studies on the South-South migration route have focused on unskilled labourers and the issues they encounter in destination countries (e.g., Crush & Ramachandran 2009; Sammadar 1999). However, the experiences of skilled migrants or professionals in the South-South

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8 In popular usage, ‘Global North and South’ has replaced the term ‘First and Third Worlds’. Scholars and policy makers have avoided ‘First World’ and ‘Third World’ because they are not only historically obsolete but also pejorative, portraying First World countries as best and Third World countries as poor and worst (Rigg 2007, p. 3). Jonathan Rigg (2007) explains that the term Global North and South “is not a strict geographical categorisation of the world but one based on economic inequalities which happens to have some cartographic continuity” (p. 3). Thus, the World Bank definition emphasises distinctions based on economic performance: the countries of the South are low-and middle-income countries and those of the ‘North’ are high-income ones (Ratha & Shaw 2007, p. 37). Such labelling only reinforces hierarchical differentiation between countries (Bratman 2011, p. 1544). However, the use of ‘First and Third World’ distinctions still exists at the empirical level and therefore needs to be accounted for (Bratman 2011). In the thesis, the terms ‘First World’ or ‘Third World’ would be used in the context of my research participants’ utterance of the term. My use of the terms Global North and Global South refers more to the changing dynamic of migration routes and a way of contextualising the experiences of Filipino transnationals in India.
route remain unexamined. This task has become relevant as scholars have expanded the meaning of migration to include temporary forms such as “migrants working abroad for shorter and more discontinuous time periods” (King 2002 cited in Williams 2007b, p. 363). This category would include expatriates and employees of corporate organisations on short- and long-term overseas assignments. Migration scholars like Anne-Meike Fechter (2007) have pointed out the need to generate more empirical details about this category of privileged migrants to challenge assumptions about their fluid and unbounded lives (p. 19). This direction in migration studies points to a growing interest in ‘transnationalism from above’ (Fechter 2007, p. 19), particularly the investigation of ‘an emerging transnational middle class’ (Weiss 2005, 2006, cited in Fechter 2007, p. 22).

South-South migration of skilled workers or professionals is important, as it is predicated on current practices in the international labour market, such as the “international mobility of expertise” (Millar & Salt 2008) and “knowledge transfer” between international migrants and local workers (Williams 2007). The practice of corporate expatriation or hiring professionals from overseas is usually premised on the concept of the ‘expat expert’, “the idea that corporate expatriates, per definition, are more skilled and qualified for the job they have been assigned than members of the local workforce…” (Fechter 2007, p. 4).

2. The expanding Indian economy and influx of transnational workers

In 1991, India began a process of economic liberalisation. During the same period, there was a development of India’s information technology (IT) and business process outsourcing (BPO) sectors, which have become the country’s showcase of modernity and competitiveness on the global stage (Radhakrishnan 2011). India’s economic growth also spurred large infrastructure projects such as the Delhi and Bangalore city railways and national roads across the subcontinent.

However, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), the main policy advocacy group of Indian businesses, claims that the expanding Indian economy still lacks a skilled workforce to sustain this process. While its information technology and business process outsourcing sectors are developed, those associated with the growing consumer market, such as manufacturing, organised retail and services
have expressed this need (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry 2010). The large-scale government-initiated infrastructure projects also require foreign contractors, which have a multinational workforce that work on their project sites.

This situation has created an outsourcing of global talent with specialised skills to manage new ventures and to deliver projects. Aware of this skills gap and still mindful of its local talents, the Indian state has adopted a selective approach to the recruitment of foreign workers. The Ministry of Home Affairs (2010) grants employment visas only to ‘highly skilled and/or qualified professionals (consultants or technical experts, senior executives or managers)’ appointed by a company registered in India or a foreign firm engaged in a local project. The Indian state is explicit in protecting the locals: “Employment visa shall not be granted for jobs for which qualified Indians are available” (Ministry of Home Affairs 2010).

In the last quarter of 2010, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued a circular setting a minimum cap for the salary of expatriates at USD 25,000. Exempted from this ruling are cooks, language teachers, translators and staff of diplomatic missions (Ministry of Home Affairs 2010). Indeed, the policy privileges the idea of attracting global talent who can impart skills to the local workforce. As a result of economic demand and state policy, India has opened up a migratory route for transnational workers.

In recent years, local and multinational companies in India engaged in retailing, manufacturing, and construction have been recruiting Filipino consultants or managers to “establish and build operations in emerging markets” (Millar & Salt 2008, p. 28). They are, in one way or another, engaged in standardisation, introducing rules or processes at work and ensuring their compliance9. On the basis of their skills, such migrants occupy positions of responsibility and authority in the workplace.

Acknowledging the crucial role one’s occupation plays in the experience of migration, this study finds that the occupational status of Filipino transnationals in Global South destinations is a significant point of departure. What does being a professional/skilled migrant worker mean in a country of the Global South? This ethnographic study presents a different perspective by looking at Filipino transnational migrants in higher

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9 According to Timmermans and Epstein (2010) standardisation is the process of constructing uniformities across time and space through the generation of agreed-upon rules (p. 71).
structural positions in the workplace and better material conditions in a host society akin to the homeland. In the next section, I elaborate on this similarity between Philippines and India and also highlight the assumption that Filipinos move to India with preconceived notions of the country and its people through their direct or mediated interactions with the Indian diaspora in the homeland and elsewhere.

3. India and the Philippines: Parallels and intersections

In this section, I aim to compare India and the Philippines in broad terms. Both countries share the same perceived identity and condition as ‘Third World’ or Global South countries. These labels also suggest their former status as colonies. However, the pre-colonial history of the Philippines, then maritime Southeast Asia, indicates trade links with people from the South Asian subcontinent (Ray 1989). Like other languages of peoples in the Southeast Asian region, Philippine languages have Sanskrit root words (Pardo de Tavera 1887), which suggest historical affinities between peoples of South and Southeast Asia (Bin Yahya & Kaur 2011).

Although the Philippines and India have unique histories, the common experience of colonisation and the process of constituting themselves as modern and developed nation-states provide a shared template for understanding each other’s contemporary (national) situation. I point out several similarities and disparities in terms of economic-political dimensions and argue that both countries have analogous situations.

Both countries had Anglophone colonisers before gaining independence (see Table 5). The colonial legacy of English language instruction has enabled their educated populations to engage other Anglophone speakers and to work overseas. India claims to be the world’s largest democracy; while the Philippines prides itself as Asia’s first democratic state. The Philippines had its first elected leader and assembly after independence from Spain in 1898. Filipinos have a higher gross national income (GNI) per capita at USD 2,210 compared to Indians at USD 1,410. Both countries are traditionally known as sources of international migrants. India has twice the number of overseas population as the Philippines and remits almost thrice (USD 70 billion) as much as Filipinos do (USD 24 billion).
While India is home to five faiths with a Hindu majority, the Philippines has the most number of Catholic Christians in the region. Both countries have a visible Muslim minority. Ethnic, urban-rural, class, gender and religious modes of identification are common to both. However, what differentiates the two is how Indian and Philippine societies are characterised or associated with a system of hierarchy. India is commonly associated with caste\(^{10}\), while the Philippines is usually characterised by class or status distinction\(^{11}\). Moreover, Philippine society has more equitable gender relations. According to the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report, the Philippines ranks 8\(^{\text{th}}\) and India 113\(^{\text{th}}\) in terms of closing the disparity between women and men (Hausmann et al. 2011). As will be discussed in the succeeding chapters, these differences, particularly gender, inform the experiences and social relations of Filipino transnationals in India.

The dynamics of global capitalism, through the international capital and labour markets, have made both countries competitors and collaborators. The English language capability, skills and the cheap cost of their labour have made Filipinos and Indians suitable workers for business process outsourcing. Because of India’s prominence in information technology, a sector overlapping with BPO, it has made a reputation as the world’s backroom office. However, in 2011, the Philippines overtook India in employing the most number of offshore call centre agents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Philippines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colonial legacy (language)</td>
<td>British English</td>
<td>American English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form of government</td>
<td>Democratic - Parliamentary (largest democracy in Asia)</td>
<td>Democratic – Presidential (first democracy in Asia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population(^{\text{a}})</td>
<td>1.2 billion</td>
<td>94.8 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNI per capita(^{\text{b}})</td>
<td>USD 1,410</td>
<td>USD 2,210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas population</td>
<td>21,909,875(^{\text{c}})</td>
<td>10,455,788(^{\text{d}})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant remittances(^{\text{e}})</td>
<td>USD 70 billion (Rank: 1)</td>
<td>USD 24 billion (Rank: 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currency</td>
<td>1 PhP = INR 1.33(^{\text{f}})</td>
<td>1 INR = PhP 0.753500(^{\text{g}})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism</td>
<td>Catholic Christianity, Islam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{\text{a}}\)(UN 2011); \(^{\text{b}}\)(World Bank 2011); \(^{\text{c}}\)(MOIA 2012); \(^{\text{d}}\)(Stock Estimate 2011); \(^{\text{e}}\)(World Bank 2012); \(^{\text{f}}\)Based on Citibank NA rates for 19 March 2013; \(^{\text{g}}\)Based on the Reference Rate Bulletin of the Central Bank of the Philippines dated 19 March 2013.

\(^{10}\) Caste is approached and defined in different ways (Berreman 1972). For the purpose of the thesis, “it is defined as a widely applied and frequently contested model for birth-ascribed rank. In India it refers to interdependent, hierarchically rank, birth-ascribed groups” (Berreman 1972, p. 389).

\(^{11}\) Class in the Philippines is usually described in terms of a two-class model of landlords and peasants, capitalist owners and workers (Bautista et al. 1999). The privileged classes are conceptualised as elites that exercise economic and political control (McCoy 1981) and cultural influence (Pinches 1999, p. 280).
According to a report from the *New York Times*, US, European and their affiliated Indian BPO companies moved their call centre operations to the Philippines because Filipinos not only spoke American English, but communicated with American clients better than Indian call centre agents (Bajaj 2011). Bajaj implies that being a former colony of the US and the popular consumption of US media among Filipinos give them an advantage over Indian call centre agents who generally encounter American popular culture in their job orientation sessions. Acknowledging this trend, Indian BPO companies like Aegis set up operations in the Philippines (Bajaj 2011). This example demonstrates competitive and collaborative relations between businesses and workers from these two countries. This ethnography finds ethnic identifications in the workplace among Filipino transnationals that result from this labour market rivalry.

Filipinos’ knowledge or expectations of Indians are already formed through their encounters with the Indian diaspora in the homeland. They tend to relate with and regard them on the basis of class and racial stereotypes (Lorenzana 2013; Thapan 2002). Indians in the Philippines find themselves contesting the low occupational status and pathological body ascribed to them by a class-based, postcolonial society. To what extent do these preconceived notions inform the lives and work of Filipino migrant workers in India? This invites an investigation into the theme of difference in anthropology: how Filipino transnational migrants relate to Indians, their Other, in the context of the latter’s society. I shall now discuss the framework used to examine the relations of Filipino transnationals in this South-South migration route.

A boundary approach to transnational middle class identities and relations

In the previous section, I have indicated that temporary migration is a classed, gendered and racialised experience for Filipino workers. This ethnography contributes to the work of understanding one of the largest transnational migrant labour workforces in terms of the ratio between overseas and left-behind populations. I have also pointed out that studying Filipino transnational migrants in India fills in one of gaps in migration literature by investigating the new middle class in the Global South skilled migration route. In order to understand their boundary work, the focus of the thesis, I first account for the ways the middle classes in general are conceptualised and characterised in class and migration literature. The review leads to a discussion of how a boundary approach is adopted as the theoretical framework of the study.
1. Understanding the middle classes

From an orthodox Marxist perspective, which focuses on how people are positioned in
relations of production in industrial capitalism, the middle class is neither the owners of
capital (bourgeoisie) nor the workers (proletariat) directly involved in the production of
goods. The new middle class (in relation to the old middle class composed of small
business owners and landlords) emerged from the expansion of the scale and size of
industrial, commercial, labour union and state bureaucracies (Vidich 1995, p. 2). The
occupations that comprised the new middle class were bureaucrats, administrators,
professionals, teachers, retail entrepreneurs and independent artisans. In industrial
settings, members of this class were managers or supervisors who controlled the labour
process (Burris 1986/1995). Managers and supervisors work on behalf of the interest of
capitalists by ensuring the efficiency of the workers; however, as employees
themselves, they are also dependent on their capitalist employers. Their contradictory
locations in relations of production predispose the middle class either to have
sympathies with the (exploitative conditions of the) working class or to side with the
capitalist interest of profit by extracting more labour from workers (Burris 1986/1995,
p. 23). Viewed in structural terms, the middle class position is inherently contradictory
(see also Wright 1978). It engenders a social disposition that is ambivalent (Heiman et
al. 2012), casting doubt on their potential to act as political agents of change or to
organise and align themselves with the interests of the working class (Burris 1986/1995,
p. 24).

Max Weber’s (1946, 1968) theory of class complements the Marxist orientation towards
situating the middle classes within their relations to the means of production. Weber
emphasises the relation of the middle class to the market or their ability to consume
(Liechty 2003, p. 17). In this social order, people are classified and stratified according
to status groups of varying lifestyles that depend on the consumption of goods.
Following Wright (1997), Liechty (2003, p. 17) suggests that Marxist and Weberian
conceptions of class do not substantially differ because they actually refer to the
question of access to “economically relevant assets or resources”. Hence, middle class
existence is contingent upon the “vagaries and instabilities of the market”. Weber
theorises that the middle class is engaged in status emulation and competition through
economic power. Status groups usurp each other’s honour to gain their own
characteristics and badges. Because the middle class in-between position in relations of production and dependence on an unpredictable market, this class “must constantly promote and justify their self-worth in the face of competing status claims” (Liechty 2003, p. 18). From a Weberian approach, the middle class is characterised as competitive, as well as status and consumption-oriented, a predisposition arising from their ambiguous, unstable and vulnerable economic position.

Another theorist who has influenced thinking about class is Pierre Bourdieu (1984). His ethnography of the class structure in France continues to be an influential framework in examining class processes. Reframing a Marxist conception of capital, Bourdieu defines capital as usable power and resource that includes not only economic (money and property), but also cultural (verbal facility, aesthetic preferences, educational credentials), social (social connections, honourability and respectability) and symbolic (legitimacy) forms (Bourdieu 1984). Bourdieu’s elaboration of capital provides an analytical frame to explain the cultural components of social inequality (Swartz 1997).

Social classes are structured configurations of the types of capital in a social space characterised by volume, composition and trajectory (Swartz 1997, p. 158). Bourdieu argues that individuals who share similar positions on all three dimensions also share the same conditions of existence or class condition (Swartz 1997, p. 162). Differences in total volume of capitals suggest interclass differences; while variations in composition indicate intra class divisions. For Bourdieu, the dominant class tends to have substantial possession of all types of capital; the middle class modest; and the working class least (Swartz 1997, p. 158-162). An important insight in Bourdieu’s reformulation of capital is the possibility of convertibility between capitals, e.g. from economic to cultural and vice versa (Swartz 1997, p. 75). A Bourdieusian approach asks how individuals or groups strategise to accumulate, invest and convert types of capital to enhance or maintain their positions in the social order (Ibid, p. 75).

Among Bourdieu’s conceptual contributions to account for class identities, processes and relations, cultural capital has been influential. For the new middle class and the new rich in the Asian region, cultural capital has become the group’s defining characteristic (Pinches 1999). Following Deshpande (2003), who argued that the middle class in India is the class that depends most on cultural capital, Carol Upadhya (2011) observes that the new middle class of information technology professionals have benefitted from
accumulated capital of knowledge and skills. In the context of transnational migration, cultural capital (or linguistic capital), especially the command of English, can be converted to economic and social capital. Pei Chia Lan’s (2003b) study of Filipino domestic workers, who have middle class backgrounds in the homeland, and their Taiwanese employers demonstrate the ways they enhance their social positions through linguistic capital. She finds that Taiwanese employers deploy economic capital to establish their middle class lifestyle through consumption of imported goods and hiring migrant labour. Employing English-speaking domestic workers is a way for the Taiwanese middle class to distinguish themselves from the upper and lower classes. Conversely, Filipina migrants use their linguistic capital and education (or cultural capital) to enhance their position in relation to their Taiwanese employers and other domestic workers (Lan 2003b, p. 156-157).

While Lan’s study perceptively analyses how Filipino domestic workers and Taiwanese employers negotiate their boundaries and relations based on English competency, her approach cannot account for the ways both parties also engage in ethical terms. She provides details about how educated employers tend to downplay the hierarchical distinction between them and their domestic employees, but does not say much about the moral dimension of classed relations (i.e. domestic employment). She interpreted such orientation as a way for educated Taiwanese middle classes to differentiate themselves from classes below and above them (Lan 2003b, p. 144). What about the moral agency of social actors? Indeed, a limitation of Bourdieu’s concept of capital is a tendency to assume and represent actors as strategising agents in pursuit of economic interest (Swartz 1997). His assumptions about human motivation and behaviour reduce people to economic and political interest (Lamont 1992; Sayer 1999). Moreover, actors are presumed to be acting solely within their habitus or embodied disposition (Lamont 1992). A Bourdieusian approach is inadequate to account for the ways people become reflexive in their engagements with others as evident in Pei Chia Lan’s (2003b) study of Taiwanese employers of Filipino domestic workers.

Michèle Lamont’s (1992, 2000) boundary approach to the study of class culture attempts to address the bias of a Bourdieusian perspective towards self-interest, instrumentalism and structurally defined behaviour. She reorients the way class culture is investigated by drawing out inductively how people of certain classes make symbolic distinctions or the ways members of a class categorise people based on a set of criteria.
In so doing, she identifies comparatively what people, from a specific class, define as worthy in terms of objective (economic position) and subjective categories (moral, cultural evaluations). In her study of the French and American upper middle classes, she finds socio-economic (occupation and wealth), moral (moral character) and cultural boundaries (intelligence, manners, tastes, command of high culture) as the mechanism through which members of a class include and exclude people, specifically in the workplace (Lamont 1992, Chapter 1). Through her comparative approach, she identifies the salience of particular boundaries from each national group. This strategy allows her to pinpoint the differences and similarities in national cultures of classes. However, Lamont’s framework focuses only on symbolic distinctions that are elicited in interview situations. How symbolic boundaries operate in the realm of everyday life or practice needs to be investigated empirically (Lamont 1992, p. 179).

An anthropological/ethnographic approach to the study of class reveals how symbolic distinctions occur in the realm of embodied social interactions and material existence. For example, Mark Liechty (2003) finds how the middle classes in Nepal constitute themselves by defining a moral and cultural space in relation to the lower and upper classes. Through performance, narrative and consumption practices they construct a suitable space that is distinct from the excesses and vulgarity of the rich and the poor, respectively. In his study of Filipino Muslim middle classes in Saudi Arabia, Mark Johnson (2010) finds that the precariousness of their situation as migrants shape their relations with their working class compatriots. Johnson observes that while middle class Filipinos help working class compatriots in need, they attribute their failure to live up social expectations to their morality. Such distinction is made because of their proximity to and anxiety of falling into the conditions of the working class (Johnson 2010, p. 445).

Drawing from and building on approaches outlined above, I apply a boundary perspective to the ethnographic study of transnational Filipino middle classes. What makes this study different from Lamont’s (1992, 2000) is the way in which symbolic boundaries are explored in the context of actual social interactions and relationships. Furthermore, the context of transnational migration assumes the distinction between migrant and local, where other axes of difference might come to play. A migrant’s social positionings change depending on the social hierarchies in the host society. Floya Anthias’ (2005) concept of ‘translocational positionality’ describes such condition where one is placed in different hierarchies across axes of difference. Thus, the study
assumes that class position intersects with social hierarchies of gender, ethnicity, race, and religion, among others.

Given these complexities, the boundary approach is appropriate to capture inductively specific identity and relationship formations in the transnational context. The relational and situational approach to such formations acknowledges the ways transnational migrants are positioned socially in and across place and time. Thus the study’s approach is attentive to the symbolic (Lamont 1992, 2000, 2002), corporeal-material and practical dimensions of transnational migrant experience. I will now discuss how the concept of boundary is defined and investigated empirically for the purpose of this study.

2. New middle class boundary work in the migration context

This study examines the lived experiences of Filipino transnationals in Indian cities by focusing on ways they compare and evaluate people. In current anthropological and sociological parlance, this practice is commonly associated with boundary work (Barth 1969; Cohen 1985; Lamont 1992; Lamont and Molnar 2002; Wimmer 2008). Indeed, how people classify, categorise and relate to one another accordingly has been one of social anthropology’s central questions. Thomas Hyland Eriksen (2002) argues that social classification is a process of ordering the world (p. 60-61). It is a basis for establishing hierarchies or ranking people according to criteria based on similarity or difference, and ways we include and exclude others, often in relation to the control or distribution of symbolic and material resources (Bourdieu 1984; Lamont 1992; Lamont & Molnar 2002; Lamont 2012). Hence, the social process of boundary work also results in differentiation and inequality. Drawing boundaries is also part of constituting self-identities, which provide a sense of security, dignity and honour (Lamont 1992).

In using boundary work as a process-oriented concept, scholars distinguish between its symbolic and social dimensions. Lamont and Molnar (2002, p. 168) define symbolic boundaries as “conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorise objects, people, practices, and even time and space”. Wimmer (2008) suggests that this categorical dimension implies not only to social classification but also to collective representation. Hence the boundary process involves simultaneous acts of evaluation and self-identification (Lamont and Molnar 2002). When these constructs used for classifying and evaluating people are objectified, they become social boundaries.
(Lamont & Molnar 2002, p. 168-169). Wimmer (2008, p. 975) explains that social boundaries exist when ways of classifying people into ‘us and them’ correspond to ways of relating with them, as acts of connecting and distancing. Furthermore, boundary processes derive from and are shaped by contexts, such as cultural repertoires, institutions or environment (Lamont & Molnar 2002).

Symbolic boundaries also move with people as in the case of immigrants (Lamont and Molnar 2002, p. 186). This assumption is crucial in interpreting the symbolic boundaries of transnational migrant workers, who tend to compare situations or experiences with respect to time (their past and present situation) and space (their current and previous location). Thus a ‘comparative perspective’ informs the symbolic boundaries of transnationals, and the boundary process in transnational workplaces becomes an interplay between the contexts and social evaluations or identifications of actors.

However, boundaries are dynamic and temporal processes; they can be contested, transgressed or transformed under certain conditions (Lamont & Molnar 2002; Wimmer 2008). Hence, a boundary is a paradox where a marker of difference can be a medium of connection (Fechter 2007, p. 25). One of the concept’s original proponents, Frederik Barth (2000) has argued that boundaries also enable the construction of social relations, especially if boundaries are considered in terms of their culturally specific meanings and uses (Barth 2000 in Cohen 2000, p. 6). Such a possibility can be explored and understood through micro-level ethnographic investigation (Cohen 2000, p. 7).

Hence, this study looks at the evaluations and identifications of social actors at the ‘micro level’ (Wimmer 2008, p. 1010), and how the symbolic boundary process translates into modes of connecting and distancing in a variety of contexts such as the workplace, everyday life, social media and community. In particular, I looked for the criteria used by Filipino transnationals and Indian locals to evaluate and relate to each other in and across different settings. Considering that boundary work presumes the possibility of relations (Barth 2000; Fechter 2007), the thesis takes into account the role of interpersonal relations or specific social formations in the ways boundaries are constructed and crossed.
Addressing the need to study boundary processes in migration (e.g. Faist 2010; Wimmer 2009), the study extends the application of boundaries to understand migrant experiences and relations. Here, I seek not only to analyse the workings of boundaries in the ways people talk, but also in the ways they behave and represent themselves. Thus, one of the study’s contributions is how it examines the social process of boundary work in different settings and situations (work, everyday life and mediated spaces). Such an approach allows comparisons to be made, an analytical practice common in social anthropology.

I look at how Filipino transnationals deploy boundaries in establishing different categories of people, which included the kinds of relationship that dealing with them engendered. For example, interactions with local colleagues or subordinates at work presumed not only their identities as locals, but also the relationship as fellow employees of a company and, perhaps, as superiors or subordinates within. Incorporating situational or emergent relationships in ways I analysed the boundary practices of my research participants, both Filipinos and Indians, highlights the assumption that people have multiple roles and relations that come to play even in the context of transnational migration (Glick Schiller 2009). In considering the macro structural constraints and factors, the theoretical framework of the study assumes a mutually constitutive relationship between symbolic practices and material-structural conditions. It is this mutual interplay that forms and informs human experiences.

I use the term ‘boundary work’ in this context to refer to the practices and processes of boundary production, maintenance, transgression, negotiation and transformation. Such terminology acknowledges the role of human agency and subjectivity in boundary work and consequently the notion that boundaries are constituted through social interactions and relations (Wimmer 2008).

Given the assumptions and definitions outlined above, the study asks: What criteria do Filipino transnationals and Indian locals use to mark differences and make connections in situations such as everyday life and work? What identities and relationships emerge from symbolic boundaries they make? Under what conditions are boundaries crossed or transgressed? In answering these questions, this ethnography of Filipino transnationals in India aims to describe and explain identity and relationship formations particular to the situation and conditions of their migration.
3. Boundaries at work: The emotional, sensory and practical dimensions

Examining boundary work in practice involved not only interviews, the common method of eliciting symbolic boundaries (e.g. Lamont 1992; Lyon 2007a, 2007b), but also paying close attention to the social interactions of research participants. Evaluative practices (Lamont 2012) that are discursive, such as gossip containing moral judgments, indicates symbolic boundaries. Such talk generated emotions that enabled connection or disconnection at work and in everyday life on- and offline. This brings us to the importance and role of emotions in boundary work and social relations. Emotion here is defined as the conscious perception of particular affects (e.g. fear, anger, disgust) with the naming and interpretation of such experiences mediated by specific vocabularies and cultural formations (Leavitt 1996 cited in Conradson & McKay 2007, p. 170). How people feel during interactions with strangers, acquaintances or friends, and when others talk about them indicate the nature of a relationship. As Lutz and White (1986) suggest, “emotions are sources of correct knowledge about the social world” (Lutz & White 1986, p. 409). They reveal evaluations of people (Sayer 2005b), place and situations (Svašek 2010).

The literature (e.g. Sayer 2005a, 2005b; Reay 2005) on the affective dimension of class suggests how emotions indicate moral responses to the experience of social class. Andrew Sayer (2005b) observes that “feelings associated with class such as envy, resentment, compassion, contempt, shame, pride, deference and condescension are evaluative responses to particular properties of class inequalities and relations” (p. 950). Diane Reay (2005), following Sayer (2005a), identifies predominant combinations of emotions deriving from particular class positions in the UK. She finds among the working class two orientations: on one hand is a set oriented towards solidarity (resentment, envy, pride and anger); on the other is an individualist mode characterized by a mix of deference, envy and shame (Reay 2005). For the middle class, she observes an economy of emotions that either suggests exclusivity (arrogance, satisfaction, contempt and pride) or egalitarianism (guilt, defensiveness, empathy and conciliation) (Reay 2005, p. 913-914). The works of Sayer (2005a, 2005b) and Reay (2005) suggest how the identification of emotions also reveals the moral dimension of human action and social relations.
Interpreting emotions can be problematic. Following Wierzbicka (2004, p. 579-80), Conradson and McKay (2007) remind us that emotions are expressed and understood in different vocabularies. They caution against the assumption that emotion terms from the English lexicon can adequately describe another culture’s categories of experience (Conradson & McKay 2007, p. 170). In addressing this issue, I paid attention to the language used by my research participants when they described their emotions. They are bilingual and tend to switch codes. If in Filipino or Hindi, I provide an English equivalent. Some emotion terms are metaphorical, in which case the nuance is easily lost in translation. However, I compensate by giving context to the emotion. There is also the possibility of misreading feelings especially in intercultural encounters, which are inherent in migration (Svašek 2010, p. 867). I addressed this issue through my long-term engagement with research participants, which allowed me to identify the conditions of the consistencies and inconsistencies of their actions and utterances.

Sensory perceptions overlap with the affective dimension (Wise & Chapman 2005) and together they constitute the embodied nature of evaluative practices. I also paid attention to how bodily perceptions (visual, olfactory, gustatory) of both Filipino transnationals and Indian locals contributed to their evaluations of and relations to each other.

Symbolic practices such as taking photographs, sharing news media clippings and publicising them on social media provide evidence of the ways groups and individuals represent themselves and their relations (Miller 2011). Material practices in the realm of fashion and food consumption not only point to differences in taste and style between Filipino transnationals and Indian locals but also similarities among Filipino transnationals. Finally spatial practices, both on- and off-line, suggest how Filipino transnationals and Indian locals mark their boundaries for insiders and outsiders. Spatial practices of Filipinos also intersect with consumption that reveal how they relate to the material possibilities of the place.

The symbolic boundaries between Filipino transnationals and Indian locals

The set of middle class criteria or symbolic boundaries that Filipino transnationals in India tend to use are morality, ability and modernity, but assume culturally and locally specific meanings. The situational and relational contexts - at work or during leisure
time with fellow Filipino transnationals or Indian locals, for example- shaped the kinds of symbolic distinctions that broadly fall under said boundaries. Middle class criteria are thus applied to people’s attitudes, behaviour, bodies, comportment, fashion, manners and speech. They are also used in evaluating objects and spaces (Lamont & Molnar 2002) such as food, clothing and neighbourhoods. In addition to middle class boundaries, gender, race and occupational distinctions are also evident in interactions between the people I worked with. Indeed, Indian locals relate, initially, with Filipino transnationals on the basis of assumed gender and race. Occupational identity is also used by both groups to gauge people and, to an extent, as a basis for association. Below I elaborate on the meanings of these criteria as they emerged from interviews and participant observation, and in relation to the conceptual literature.

1. Ability and achievement

In the literature, cultural capital encompasses education and other competencies, such as language (Bourdieu 1984; Lan 2003b). In Lamont’s (1992) formulation, intelligence and work competence fall under cultural and moral boundaries, respectively. Applying Lamont’s approach of deriving inductively the criteria for symbolic distinctions yielded a relational, context-specific rendering of cultural capital or cultural boundary. I use the term ‘ability’ not only to refer to demonstrable knowledge or skill in the domains of work (industrial and domestic spheres) and everyday life, which includes social situations and spaces, specifically new media environments. In the workplace, Filipino and Indian workers evaluated each other based on ability, as captured by the term ‘professional competence’. Among Filipinos, ability was judged more in terms of ’linguistic competence’ and ‘talent’.

Achievement, in the form of major accomplishments at work, provides proof one’s ability. The case of Filipino transnational migrants in India therefore extends the meaning of achievement in the Philippine migration context (cf. Aguilar 1999) to include not only financial and material rewards from migration, but also the realisation and development of their abilities through their accomplishments.
2. Morality

Moral boundary, as defined by Andrew Sayer (2005b), is the manner in which social groups distinguish themselves from others in terms of moral differences. Groups claim for themselves certain virtues that are lacking in others. Sayer points out that boundary making based on morality is strong among groups that are anxious about their position in terms of how they are regarded from above and the risk of falling into groups below them whom they fear and despise (Sayer 2005b, p. 953). Thus, moral boundary serves to define group membership (Prinz 2007, p.8). The literature in Philippine migration (e.g. Espiritu 2001; Johnson 2010; Amrith 2010) suggests that Filipino transnationals or members of the diaspora deploy morality as a way of defining ethnic and class belonging.

In her book *Money, Morals and Manners: The Culture of the French and the American Upper-Middle Class* on symbolic boundaries, Lamont (1992) uses the term ‘moral’ without distinguishing it from a related concept ‘ethical’. As I will discuss shortly, the terms overlap but have subtle differences, especially when applied to the realm of practice. Because this study is about boundary work in practice (the unpredictable and spontaneous realm of everyday interactions), distinguishing moral from ethical is necessary for clarity and analytical purposes. Morality refers to “a set of principles and judgments based on cultural concepts and beliefs by which humans determine whether given actions are right or wrong” (Heintz 2009, p. 3). Zigon (2008) further amplifies this definition by identifying forms and sources of morality, namely:

1) institutional – the moral codes provided by society’s institutions such as organised religion and state;

2) public discourse - the result of everyday dialogical interactions between persons and … public articulations of moral beliefs, conceptions, and hopes that are not directly articulated by an institution (e.g. media, arts, literature, philosophical discourse);

3) embodied disposition - is one’s everyday being in the world. It is neither a conscious reflection over a dilemma, a performance nor the following of a moral code. (Zigon 2008, p. 163-164)

Therefore, being moral (or immoral) is being consistent (or inconsistent) with any of the above forms. On the other hand, ethics is more reflective and deliberative and, unlike
morality that is akin to structure, is more concerned with agency (Stafford 2010). Zigon (2008) defines ethics as:

…stepping-away from…morality as embodied dispositions…[It] is a conscious acting on oneself either in isolation or with others so as to make oneself into a more morally appropriate and acceptable social person not only in the eyes of others but also for oneself. (Zigon 2008, p. 165)

In situations that involve people with different moralities, such as the encounter between transnational and local, social actors may experience incongruence between their own and the other’s moralities. Anthropologists observe that social conflicts in contemporary globalisation are characterised by competing and contested moral frames and visions (e.g. Heintz 2009; Howell 2009). Being ethical therefore becomes a practice constitutive of the migrant experience, which presumes a power relationship in which a certain morality is privileged over another depending on situation.

The other point in elaborating the definitions of being ethical and moral is to call attention to the pervasive role of morality in everyday life and how the experience of migration makes moral boundaries salient. Strong emotional responses, a significant observation among my research participants, indicate moral violations (Westermarck 1906 in Stafford 2010, p. 199). A sense of morality and ethics is constituted and indicated by emotions (Prinz 2007; Sayer 2005b).

Adopting these definitions, I use moral boundary or moral dimension to include both morality and ethics. The word ‘moral’ refers to evaluations of acts and character (Lamont 1992) according to a moral code (institutional or public). ‘Ethical’ calls attention to the conscious act of choosing appropriate actions (which presuppose a dilemma). Other specific uses of the terms would follow language conventions, e.g. work ethic, professional ethics. Etiquette, propriety (Yeung 2010) and work ethic fall under institutional or public discourse of morality.

The second assumption about the moral dimension concerns the tension between the plurality and universality of morals. Acknowledging culturally or locally specific moralities, I take the relativist view (Zigon 2008) but with caution. As a researcher my normative expectations play a role in my analysis, interpretation or critique. My sense
of ethics is guided by Aristotle’s principle of moderation and the avoidance of emotional or physical harm on others.

Ethnographic data reveal that moral boundaries are deployed to make distinctions and connections. In relation to Indian locals, Filipinos claim for themselves moral qualities such as egalitarianism, work ethic and propriety. Locals, in turn, question Filipino transnationals’ lack of tolerance. Filipinos evaluate each other based on virtues of egalitarianism, reciprocity, sexual restraint and economic independence. The tendency of Filipinos to evaluate the moral character of a person triggers conflict and the formation of groups that share similar moral frameworks.

3. Modernity

Modernity has multiple and contested meanings, including that of Weber’s formulation in which the term is contrasted with tradition (Scaff 2000) and the notion that it is equated with Western ideas and practices (Saavala 2010). Addressing criticisms about the primacy of Western modernity, scholars such as Aihwa Ong (1996) advance the idea of ‘alternative modernities’ to recognise modernity’s different local or geographical manifestations (Schein 1999, p.362). In the context of how the notion emerges from my ethnographic data, I define it in two ways. First, I use definitions from conceptual literature that approximates my informants’ understandings; second, I focus on how modernity becomes a criterion for evaluation or symbolic boundary.

In the context of my ethnography, modernity is a socio-cultural quality that is deployed for both vertical and horizontal differentiation. For example, middle classes in Nepal use it to differentiate themselves from the poor (Liechty 2003) and those in Hyderabad use it as a basis to claim middle class belonging (Saavala 2010). In the context of transnational migration, it is used to mark ethnic difference and to make distinctions among members of an ethnic group. Drawing from Weber’s view of rationalisation¹², modernity implies a standard, which is used for making an evaluation. Modernity as a criterion is commonly invoked when describing taste, consumption or style. The

¹² As a feature of modern life, rationalisation comes in various forms such as standardisation, commodification, measurement in terms of efficiency, cost-benefit analysis, legalistic administrative procedures, and bureaucratic coordination and rule (Scaff 2000, p. 104).
standard, which defines the modern\textsuperscript{13}, has a point of reference. For Global South-South migrants, it is in relation to either the homeland or elsewhere. In its temporal dimension, the modern refers to newness. ‘Modern’, in my Filipino and Indian research participants’ understanding, dwells more on the notion of the foreign and the current. What comes to mind is Arjun Appadurai’s (1996, p. 4.) definition of modernity as annexing the global into one’s practice of being modern. When applied to objects and practices, the modern finds expression in new technological forms and the practices emerging from their uses. As ‘modern’ refers both to standards that govern human conduct and a particular moral orientation to work and life (Weber 1958), it also features in the invocation of morality as a symbolic boundary marker, especially in the notion of a professional work ethic.

My Filipino research participants, especially in the early stages of their deployment in Indian cities, tend to compare locals, their attitudes, living conditions, material culture (e.g. fashion) and working styles with the situation in the Philippine homeland or in their previous host society (e.g. Americas, Southeast Asia). Conversely, ethnographic data indicate that locals recognise the ‘modern’ ways and orientation of Filipino transnationals, especially their knowledge of new consumer cultures and work standards.

4. Occupation

Lamont (1992) uses the term socio-economic boundary to account for the ways the upper middle class evaluate people based on social position as indicated by wealth, power and economic success. I find that occupation among Filipino and Indian research participants was a meaningful indicator of social position. One’s work identity intersected with moral status or personal worth. As discussed in the previous section, occupational stereotypes of Filipinos in the international labour market result in contradictory class mobility and transnational shame. In the context of skilled migration into Indian cities, occupational identity also indicated social prestige, income, privileges (e.g. accommodation, transportation and benefits extended to accompanying family members) and access to exclusive and privileged spaces.

\textsuperscript{13} Lawrence Busch (2011, p. 1) equates the application of standards with being modern.
5. Gender and the racialised body

Boundaries were also drawn on the basis of gender and race. Indian Locals tend to discriminate on the basis of gender and give preferential treatment to men. Hence, patriarchal privilege in Indian society affects transnational migrants as well. Both Filipinos and locals pay attention to features or qualities of the body as criteria for evaluating people; however, they differ in emphasis. Aside from the locals’ preoccupation with skin colour, particularly whiteness (Parameswaran 2011), they are also concerned with one’s facial features and physical appearance. People are seen through a local lens of racial categories. Types of physical appearance are expressed in local terms such as firang (Caucasian/white) or chinki (slit-eyed) (see McDuie-Ra 2012b). For Filipinos, the body is appraised more in terms of hygiene through visual and olfactory cues. Hence, class, particularly the idea of being civilised, shapes Filipinos’ discourse of race (see Anderson 2007). Indian locals initially mistake Filipinos for Northeast people, a group of ethnic minorities coming from the northeast plank of the Indian subcontinent. In the Indian context, Northeast people are associated with East and Southeast Asians because of their similar physical features, most notably having less prominent eyes. Filipino transnationals, on the other hand, perceive locals on the basis of their perceived state of hygiene. Such orientation could be traced to an Indian stereotype in the Philippines homeland, where being Indian is equated with a pathological body (Lorenzana 2013).

One of my main findings is the way in which interpersonal relations enable boundary crossings and transgressions and, conversely, how symbolic boundaries cited above can also become a basis for association. Specific forms of sociality, namely tutelage, patronage, friendship and marriage, emerge from or influence the boundary process. I elaborate on how symbolic boundaries and social relations operate in different contexts and social situations in the succeeding chapters. A discussion on how I conducted fieldwork and data analysis concludes this introductory chapter.
Fieldwork and data analysis

1. Access and relationship with research participants

Doing fieldwork with Filipino transnationals and Indian locals was informed by the ways I was situated and positioned in relation to them (Narayan 1998). As a Filipino, I was an insider among members of the migrant community, and an outsider among the locals. Prior to fieldwork, I already had access to the Filipino community in Delhi. From 2004-06, I lived and worked in India as a development volunteer and participated in events of the Philippine embassy, where I became friends with Filipinos married to locals. At work, I established friendships with local colleagues, mostly in the development sector. During fieldwork, I became acquainted with local colleagues and friends of my research participants. Although they considered me as an outsider, my prior experience in India enabled instant connection with them.

Unlike fieldwork experiences in India where the ethnographer had material advantage (e.g. Mankekar 1999), I had quite the opposite. The people I worked with enjoyed privileged conditions on the basis of their visa status as skilled workers or their situation as middle to upper class families in India. I shared the same situation as Fechter (2007) who worked with corporate expatriates in Indonesia. The social and economic status of research participants became the medium through which they exercised their influence or power over me as a researcher. This dynamic manifested in two extreme situations: one was their openness and generosity, especially in paying for or sharing a meal; the other was their capability to define access to their time and terms of engagement. Both entailed an obligation on my part to reciprocate in different ways. Some groups or individuals were generous, and reciprocating by way of food and company was enough. Others needed my labour and presence in return to establish the relationship. Through these engagements, I learned about their expectations in relationships in the context of work and friendship.

My occupation as a researcher and teacher from a top university in the Philippines provided instant recognition among Filipino research participants. The same was true for Indian participants. Being affiliated with the Indian Institute of Technology in Delhi gave locals an assurance that I was associated with a credible organisation. My
experience shows the way in which education, valued both by Filipinos and Indians, was a means for establishing connection.

How I experienced fieldwork and my engagements with research participants are also shaped by my gay identity. Filipino and Indian women did not feel threatened by my presence. They were comfortable sharing their life stories and I easily became friends with them. Because they allowed access to their homes, I also came to learn about their everyday life. They took me to shopping and leisure trips, and social events. However, I received uneven reception from both Filipino and Indian men. Most were accommodating but some were intimidated. There were situations when I had to endure taunts or jokes about my sexuality, a situation similar to ways Filipino gay men are treated in the homeland. This experience provided me instant affinity with female informants who complained to me about men’s lewd behaviour. However, I am not suggesting that I did not develop rapport with male informants. In fact, most of them were as hospitable and candid as female informants. I was allowed to stay in their homes and also went out with them. In other words, my gender identity allowed more affinity than distance among my research participants. My involvement in and the ways I negotiated my position as a researcher and friend in various aspects of their lives are elaborated in the chapters that follow. I now describe how I selected participants for the study.

2. Selecting research participants

I interacted with 108 Filipino transnationals whom I met at house parties or during events organised by the Philippine Embassy, or online, through the community’s Yahoo-based newsgroup (here after newsgroup). I obtained basic information from them such as age, gender, occupation and organizational affiliation. This strategy was used to gather preliminary information about the general profile of Filipino transnationals in Delhi. Data from this list were supplementary but necessary to establish patterns in the composition of Filipino transnationals in India (see Table 6).
I was also given access to a partial list of Filipino nationals who registered with the Philippine embassy. In practice, not all Filipino citizens inform the embassy of their presence in India or are aware of this requirement for overseas workers. Moreover, many people in the list provided by the embassy had already left. Because of the transient nature of their stay, the number of Filipino workers is unstable. This has implications for this study. First it suggests the idea of the unpredictability of the transnational migrant condition. I had several research participants and informants who had to leave halfway through the period of my fieldwork. While I did not get the chance to sit with them for an in-depth interview, their farewell parties became a venue to learn about their experiences in India through other people’s testimony. Second, their transient status became a basis for including both newly arrived and settled transnationals. By having both types of research participants, I was able to compare their perspectives, which revealed the temporal dimension of their perceptions and experiences.

After getting acquainted or making friends with potential research participants, I discussed my research project with them and sought consent to participate in the study. Fifty-eight agreed to be interviewed and/or allowed me to participate in their mundane activities and see them at work. I selected the research participants based on their legal status in India and their occupation and industry (see Table 7). I had the opportunity to interact with 20 research participants over a period of time in different settings (home, public spaces and workplace) and considered them as informants. Two of them were local friends who had worked with transnationals, including Filipinos. Through referrals, I interviewed Indian locals and other transnationals who are colleagues, friends or spouses of informants. The same research protocol was applied in selecting research participants in Mumbai and Bangalore.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legal Status</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th></th>
<th>Subtotal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary worker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse / Partner of Indians</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locals (Indian)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accompanying spouse / partner of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino nationals</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other transnationals</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Composition of Filipino research participants
Table 7. Number of depth-interview respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality / Legal status</th>
<th>Subtotal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Filipinos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled worker</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic worker</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accompanying spouse of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Filipino national</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Others</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse of a local</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work colleague</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other transnationals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work colleague</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because of the prevalence of Filipino workers in the manufacturing, organised retail and service sectors, I focused on these groups. This gave me the opportunity to choose research participants in various professional/technical or managerial occupations from different types of company under each sector. For example, in manufacturing, I included participants who were in the garments or electronics business as quality checkers, designers, technical consultants or managers. This purposive sample allowed me to see different perspectives and also establish patterns and peculiarities across individuals, occupations and industries. I also sought Filipino skilled workers in other sectors such as aviation, banking, construction, development and domestic work as a basis of comparison.

The main challenge was access to their workplaces. Filipino workers who had decision-making authority in their respective companies were able to grant my request to observe them at work and interact with their colleagues. For example, one informant allowed me access to his workplace, a factory, for two weeks. Designers invited me to their company events that showcased their products. Quality inspectors took me along to their factory visits; visual merchandisers allowed me to visit them in their stores. Given the constraints of access to the workplace of other Filipino workers, they were still helpful by arranging interviews with their local colleagues.
3. Modes of data gathering

   a. Depth-interview

I conducted semi-structured depth interviews with research participants. Each audio-recorded interview lasted between 30 minutes to 4 hours or 84 minutes on average. Interviews were transcribed. To protect the privacy of research participants, they were given fictitious names.

Filipino transnationals were asked to describe how and why they came to India and their experiences at work and in everyday life. Such a line of questioning elicited autobiographical narratives, or life stories, and evaluations of their experiences in India, the people they met (locals, compatriots, other transnationals) and their situation. I also interviewed locals (superiors and subordinates at work including domestic workers) and other transnational workers and asked them to describe their experiences with Filipino workers and how they regarded them. Some were cautious but others were frank in their responses. I also included Indian friends and spouses of Filipino transnationals. My interviews with Indian-Filipino couples were done together in which both parties had the opportunity to clarify or challenge statements. For both Filipino and Indian informants, I had the opportunity to ask questions about their everyday life situations, including their dilemmas and issues with people we both knew.

Through long-term engagement with my informants, I was able to understand their orientations and how they made sense of their identities and social relations. The stories they provided during depth interviews were complemented by mundane activities and drama as they unfolded on- and offline. I followed their utterances and interactions on social media like Facebook and the Yahoo newsgroup. Both sets of data complement each other: interviews provide a sense of context and trajectory of one’s life story, while accounts on social media provide updates to this on-going life narrative.

Somers (1994) argues that people construct changing and multiple identities through stories and by locating themselves in them (pp. 613-614). Autobiographical narratives also provide insights into how social and structural forces affect lives and how people respond and negotiate these forces (Herbert 2006, p. 135). Their narratives of migration
which contain comparisons of situations provide details about their past and present conditions of existence.

b. Participant observation

How I participated in the lives of my informants was shaped by time and spatial constraints. Filipino transnationals worked 5-6 days a week and were only free at weekends. Several of my informants allowed access to their work, during which period (lasting between a day to a fortnight) I stayed with them. My interactions with Filipino workers occurred mostly at weekends when they gathered at homes or the Philippine embassy for sport and special occasions. The group of Filipinos in Delhi had a working committee that organised events such as sport competitions during the monsoon and spring seasons (August-September, March-April), and the Diwali Ball and Christmas Party during autumn and winter months (October-December).

I performed different roles for each peer group and individual. For example, I was always asked to help in birthday parties for their children. The preparation for the event, which includes a run through the checklist and guest list, allowed me to learn about their preferences and constraints in the choice of food, guests, venue, party theme and activities for the children. Participating in the larger Filipino community had me elected as the secretary of the organisation. As secretary, I was assigned to communicate to the larger community through the e-mail based newsgroup. My role as event organiser continued in the collective life of the community. In hindsight, I learned that my communication skill was needed to organise different activities. In the reciprocal nature of relations among the Filipino middle classes in India, sharing ability, skill or knowledge was a medium of exchange.

c. Online ethnography

Considering that everyday life of transnational migrants also occurs online, I observed and became involved in the Filipino community’s newsgroup and participated in Facebook activities of my research participants. Although online spaces can be regarded as distinct field sites (cf. Hine 2005), especially the newsgroup comprised of subscribers who are spatially dispersed, I considered them as places and spaces that are constitutive of transnational migrant experience. Hence, being present in these places was necessary
to observe continuities and discontinuities in my research participants’ interactions and sociality. I was already a member of the newsgroup before coming to India to do fieldwork. However, being an officer of the Filipino community increased my participation on the newsgroup as I was assigned to communicate with subscribers of the group. While most of the messages I sent were meant to coordinate activities, the experience of working together with the rest of the group provided insights into ways the community organised itself as a newsgroup.

On Facebook, I followed the status updates of research participants, concentrating on key informants. I commented on posts, ‘liked’ pictures and allowed myself to be tagged. I also took part in social events (parties, community gatherings) because they were talked about or publicised on Facebook. These interactions after the event were instructive; they included talk that contained evaluations of people, situations and relationships.

I treated Facebook data as part of everyday occurrence and observed my participants’ activities regularly during fieldwork and intermittently when I left the field. I focused on key informants and drew extensively from their Facebook pages. I used the screen capture technology of my computer to capture a post or conversation thread on Facebook. Knowing and interacting with them over a period of time allowed me to make connections between their interviews and Facebook activities. Following Quinn (2005), I looked for patterns in ways they understood, talked about or represented their lives on- and offline.

The mobile phone was also a mediated space where interactions took place. Migrant community gossip and emotional exchanges circulated in this space. Thus, by coincidence, the text messages from my research participants and my notes from conversations with them on the mobile phone became data. I decided to use data from these exchanges as part of my field notes or background information to protect the privacy of my informants.

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14 Facebook is a social media platform that allows a subscriber to display biographical information in the form of text, photos and videos. Status update refers to text utterances posted on one’s Facebook page.
15 The practice of ‘liking’ refers to the activation of the ‘like’ button below a status update, comment or any material posted on one’s Facebook page.
16 Tagging is the practice of alerting other people about a posted photograph with or without permission from people who may or may not appear in the image.
d. Traditional media

Traditional media content from magazines, newspapers and cinema also formed part of the data set. I collected news stories or essays from Filipino, Indian and international media that contained topics related to their experiences. I also included media coverage of my informants in local media and a movie that participants referenced in interviews.

4. Coding and data analysis

From the three modes of data gathering, I produced two sets of data: The first set, comprised of interview transcripts and field notes, was mainly in textual form; the second set, made up of Facebook comments and posts, newsgroup email threads, and photographs from both mediated spaces, was a combination of text and images. The difference in media forms necessitated different methods of analysis, especially Facebook pages. The initial coding for both data sets was meant to catalogue the available evidence. However, I did not treat on- and offline data separately when I started identifying and clustering themes based on the overarching research questions that guided my analysis. Thus, following O’Reilly (2009, p. 35), how I analysed the data to identify themes was suited to help answer the main research question of the thesis, what criteria do Filipino transnationals use to evaluate people or form connections with them? I looked for emergent themes among groups (Filipinos and Indians) and across contexts of interactions.

a. Initial coding

I read the interview transcripts and field notes, and labelled specific sections or passages topically. At the same time, I made notes of recurring topics that emerged as salient themes. The same principle of labelling was applied to e-mail threads from the newsgroup.

For data from the Yahoo-based newsgroup, this meant classifying conversation threads according to subject headings. Subject headings may be specific but can belong to wider categories such as gender, food or netiquette. I filed each conversation thread in one folder and labelled them. Following Ignacio (2005), I applied conversation analysis to the threads or treated email responses as utterances (pp. 16-18). I then combined all
threads with the same subject matter. Some conversation topics are frequent, such as netiquette, so I selected a thread with the most participation and intensity. In one case, such as the topic gender, I used more than one conversation thread because the comparisons between threads were instructive and the juxtaposition yielded insights into the dynamics of gender in the online space.

b. Thematic coding

In deriving the themes from the data, I was guided by my research questions and research design. Because I was exploring boundary work, I analysed separately the criteria through which Filipino transnationals and Indian locals evaluated and related to each other in the domains of work, everyday life and online environments. This process meant putting together the same topic labels of quotes or passages from interviews and field notes. I looked for key words and metaphors that they used in describing and explaining experiences, situations and sentiments (Quinn 2005). The terms were in Filipino, Hindi or English. I compared these notions with conceptual literature and popular media to provide a comprehensive account of the emergent themes.
Chapter 2
Situating transnational Filipinos in globalising Indian cities

As a destination and place to work and live, the city shapes the experiences and practices of migrants (Low 1996; Sassen 2005). How migrants are situated in the city and the ways they engage the place provide complementary macro and micro perspectives about the migrant experience. In the case of Filipino transnationals, the role of place is significant in constituting their identities and social relations. Filipino transnationals tend to live and work in metro cities of India: Delhi, the political capital; Mumbai, the financial centre; and Bangalore, the information technology hub.

I locate them in the economic and spatial structures of the city, media space and imaginations of the local and consider their embodied urban experience (Sennett 1994) and material practices. I describe how they engage the multiple facets of the city through their perceptions, feelings and senses. Transnational migration is a corporeal experience through which boundaries are made (Fechter 2007). Feelings and sense impressions of place indicate modes of being, connecting and disconnecting (Conradson & Latham 2007; Manalansan 2006b; Svašek 2010).

At the macro level, economic liberalisation and globalisation, and the resulting urban restructuring and socio-cultural transformations in Indian cities relate to the social positioning of Filipino transnationals. The development and expansion of consumer industries, i.e. retail and service, and vast infrastructure projects in Indian cities have required the skills of Filipino workers. On the level of everyday interactions, how local inhabitants perceive and treat Filipino transnationals suggest the social categories that are applied to them, such as gender, race and ethnicity. Conversely, migrants’ perceptions of the city and its people equally reveal how they constitute themselves in-place using class boundaries. By juxtaposing both local and transnational migrants’ perceptions of each other, I show the contradictory ways they are positioned in Indian cities and their ambivalent dispositions in the host society. Their occupations, residential pattern and media representation suggest that Filipino transnationals are part of the city’s middle and upper classes. However, in the eyes of the locals, their appearance consigns them to an ethnic minority, not as Filipinos but as people from the Northeast states of India, who are also migrants in the city of Delhi. Northeast peoples tend to resemble Southeast Asians in physical appearance, and are considered as
outsiders in Delhi (McDuie-Ra 2012b). They are treated based on negative gendered and racial stereotypes (McDuie-Ra 2012c). At the same time, Northeast migrants are economically integrated into Delhi’s retail and service industries because of their ‘exotic’ appearance (McDuie-Ra 2012a). One interesting finding in my fieldwork is the employment of Filipino workers in the same industries where Northeast migrants are employed.

In situating Filipino transnationals in Indian cities, I compare their situations with the conditions of Northeast migrants. Such comparison is helpful because it brings to fore the connections between the globalising process of Indian cities, the resulting patterns of labour recruitment and the experience of being a migrant in Indian cities. I argue that both Filipino skilled workers and Northeast migrants are implicated and included in these economic processes. While both experience similar forms of exclusion (gender and race), Filipino migrants use their class position and status as foreigners to control their situations in the city. Moreover, their perceptions of the place and people also reveal their modern and bourgeois sensibility, which they use to claim distinction and class in everyday life.

Globalising Indian cities

Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore share the same features as other major cities of the world, such as high population density; intense commercial, political and cultural activities (Low 1996); urban renewal and restructuring; and the spatial segregation of the population based on class, ethnicity, religion or race. The long history of settlement, conquest and rebuilding of Indian cities and their geographic locations have shaped their culturally specific and diverse social milieus. For example, the heritage sites of Delhi attest to the overlapping legacies of Buddhist and Hindu kingdoms, Mughal rule and British colonisation. Moreover, places of worship and sacred sites show different religious traditions that have shaped the material cultures and practices of the city from food, clothing, architecture to ornamentation, to name a few. Indeed, the city is multifaceted, a view that its citizens endorse. During fieldwork in 2010, the Delhi Urban Art Commission produced an exhibit titled Delhinama that portrayed Delhi as a heritage, colonial, imperial, migrant, capital and global city. A passage from the exhibit brochure reads: “Delhi is a city of incredible complexity, with immense developmental changes and progress alongside enormous concerns with respect to its environment, and
great opulence and grandeur beside abject poverty and squalor” (DUAC 2010). Contemporary Delhi is at another historical juncture where it comes to terms with the emergence of its identity as a “24/7 global city” (DUAC 2010), a phenomenon with economic foundations and socio-cultural consequences.

In 1991, the state liberalised the economy\(^1\). The partial deregulation of industries (e.g. utilities) and less restricted flow of capital have not only stimulated the economy through foreign investments and local entrepreneurship but also precipitated changes in Indian cities. Partha Chatterjee (2004) observes that Indian cities are shifting from a production to a finance- and service-oriented city economy. Such change has become evident in the development of information technology (IT) and business process outsourcing (BPO) industries. As a result, Indian cities that host IT-BPO companies have become visible connections to the global economy.

Chatterjee suggests that the high earning and spending service workers will drive new consumer industries, wherein new globally urban lifestyles and aesthetic sense will emerge. He also notes the influence of global city\(^2\) models in ways the urban middle classes and the elite of India imagine and envision their cities. In other words, Chatterjee suggests that the aesthetic sense and consumer lifestyle of India’s middle classes and elite are creating segregated and exclusive spaces in the form of shopping malls, high-end residential areas, restaurants, art and entertainment spaces. Chatterjee links the production of these clean and healthy environments to Indian cities “finally becoming bourgeois”.

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\(^1\) Scholars (e.g. Dupont 2011; McDuie-Ra 2012a) observe that India’s post-liberalisation period is characterised by neoliberal economic, social and cultural processes. Neoliberalism is “a theory of political-economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey 2005, p. 2). Dupont (2011) suggests that there is a dialectic relationship between neoliberalisation and globalisation in Indian cities: the global has strongly influenced the 1990s reforms and the setting of the new urban scene and, conversely, the implementation of a neoliberal agenda in Indian cities favoured the incorporation of metropolises into the larger global movement (p. 537).

\(^2\) Exemplified by New York, London and Tokyo, global cities “are strategic sites in the global economy because of their concentration of command functions and high-level producer-service firms oriented to world markets; more generally, cities with high level of internationalisation in their economy and in their broader social structure” (Sassen 1994, p. 154). Mayaram (2009, p. 5) problematises Sassen’s definition, which limits the idea of a global city to contemporary economic activity and (exclusive) transnational labour space and flows, and brings to fore the continuing existence of historically global cities (e.g. Beirut, Cairo, Delhi) that have been characterised by more diverse transactions, population flows and political and cultural exchange with other cities.
The strong economic performance of India’s economy (from the late 1990s until the global financial crisis of 2008) and the state’s ambition and public rhetoric for the country to become a global economic player have animated urban renewal in Delhi according to a vision of a global city (DDA 2007; Dupont 2011). Scholars use the term globalising cities to “describe the diverse processes of globalisation that affect cities throughout the world and restructure their spatial pattern” (Marcuse & van Kempen 2000 cited in Dupont 2011). Alongside the private construction of shopping malls, office and residential skyscrapers is the state’s development of modern infrastructure, which includes new domestic and international airport terminals, a city railway system, express toll ways, wider roads, overpasses and pedestrian lanes. A combination of (world) class aspiration and aesthetic has resulted in spatial alterations in Delhi (Ghertner 2011). Delhi’s hosting of the Commonwealth Games in 2010 served to hasten the city’s transformation and to show India’s readiness to take its place on the world stage. The preparation for the international event involved cleaning up the city, renovating public spaces, building sports venues, relocating informal settlers and clearing the street from beggars, vendors and the homeless. A project of the alignment of middle class, elite and state interests, Delhi’s urban restructuring has excluded and displaced the poor, and exacerbated social inequalities through spatial boundaries and segregation (Baviskar 2010; Dupont 2011; Ghertner 2011; McDuie-Ra 2012a; Rao 2010). McDuie-Ra (2012a) suggests that Delhi has become an ‘exclusionary city’. The poor has no place in the globalising city (Baviskar 2010).

While the Commonwealth Games catalysed Delhi’s urban transformation, it also negated this effort, specifically on the scale of global opinion. The media coverage prior to the event reveals the “gaze of modernity” (Chakrabarty 2002) that subjects one to appraisal. A couple of weeks before the opening ceremonies, Commonwealth Games officials expressed disappoint with local preparations, especially the poor hygiene in the games village (Scrutton 2010). Images of betel nut spit stains on toilet sinks, soiled bed sheets and filthy floors became breaking news and landed in the photo gallery of news websites with a global audience such as the BBC and The Australian. The coach of the Australian swimming team was quoted saying that hygiene at the Commonwealth Games village was a bigger threat than terrorism (Press Trust of India 2010). By pointing out the lack of hygiene in the games village, corruption and delayed construction work, the media reinforced the stereotypical portrayal of Delhi as a ‘Third
World’ city. More importantly, the controversial but successful event refracted the way in which Delhi is perceived and represented through the judgmental gaze of modernity.

**Locating Filipino transnationals at work, in the neighbourhood and in the media**

1. Occupational positions

In 2004, the year the Philippine Commission for Overseas Filipinos started recording the number of Filipino citizens in India, there were 776; in 2010, the year I started my fieldwork the number of Filipinos increased to 2,081. Filipino transnationals in Indian cities of Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore are comprised mainly of: skilled workers; women married to locals and their children; and accompanying spouses, partners or dependents (mostly Filipino domestic workers) of other transnationals (see Table 8). I provide a detailed profile of the skilled workers to establish the link between their jobs, types of industry employing them and the transformations in Indian cities brought by globalisation and liberalisation. Data from this section were limited to my purposive sample. The numbers here are not representative of the population of all Filipino workers in Indian cities but illustrative of certain patterns about the types of Filipino workers and industries that employ them.

The average age of the skilled workers was 39. The oldest man was 65 and oldest woman was 60. The youngest was 25 for both sexes. There were more male workers than (44) than females (14)\(^3\). Workers were more likely to be married (37) than single (21). Of those married, seven were accompanied by spouse and children. Most of them were employed by multinational companies that provided standard expatriation benefits (accommodation, transportation, children’s education, relocation allowance).

More than half of these skilled workers were hired by local companies in the retail and manufacturing businesses. This observation reflects the state policy’s attempt to lure global talent into India’s expanding and modernising industries, such as construction, retail and manufacturing (see Table 8). Several Filipinos who worked for multinational companies (MNCs) were connected with contractors responsible for the infrastructure projects of the Indian government. Moreover, those employed by MNCs were either

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\(^3\) However, in relation to the Filipino community, women (63) outnumbered men (45) because of the presence of female spouses of locals, Filipino and other nationalities (see Table 5).
assigned to India as part of the company’s practice to rotate its international workforce or to establish operations and look for customers. Foreign companies also recruit Filipino workers as quality checkers for Indian firms that manufacture garments for them.

Table 8. Profile of skilled workers (n=58)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (average)</th>
<th>39</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>Civil Status</td>
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<td>Single</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type of Company (Ownership)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multinational</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry Deployment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aviation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9. Occupations of skilled workers (n=58)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type / Job Title</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional / Technical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Development</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chef</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Adviser</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Designer</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources Officer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Systems Assistant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Systems Specialist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Assistant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Assurance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Consultant</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technician (Aviation)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainer (Sales)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Merchandisers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Manager</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Vice-President</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Operations Officer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurial</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Manager</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There were more Filipino workers in professional or technical posts (39) than in managerial posts (18). Foreign firms (12) hired more Filipino workers as managers than local ones (7). However it should be noted that local firms that hired Filipinos as managers were mostly in the retail industry. This detail suggests the expertise of Filipinos in this line of work, a point that will be elaborated in the interview data below. The variety of professional and technical jobs of Filipino workers (see Table 9) suggests the demand for skills associated with a growing consumer market and export industry. It also indicates the extent to which Filipino workers consider overseas work as a serious option, including finding a job or being assigned in India, a less popular destination among overseas Filipino workers. Graphic designers and quality inspectors worked mostly for manufacturing firms that produced consumer products for the locals and foreign market. The presence of Filipino chefs and visual merchandisers only highlight the growth of India’s consumer market.

On the basis of their skills and work experience, they occupy a high structural position in their respective companies. In comparing the interviews of informants in different jobs and companies, a cross-cutting observation was not only their task of performing their skills in accordance to the company’s expectations but also introducing, testing and implementing standards in the workplace. This role, which is not only confined to quality checkers, consigns them to a position of authority.

While more than half of the workers do not have prior overseas work experience, the rest of them had been to different destinations before coming to India. Most of them came from the Middle East, followed by Southeast Asia and East Asia. These are popular destinations for overseas Filipino workers. There was a significant number of Filipino transnationals from the Global North. They were accompanying spouses or partners of citizens of countries such as France, Germany, New Zealand, UK and the US who were also workers, diplomats or employees of development agencies.

Those who had worked in the Middle East had previous interactions with the Indian diaspora. This work experience and social ties were a factor in why they were assigned to or found employment in India. For example, a large Indian retail company hired a non-resident Indian (NRI), who was based in Dubai, to handle its retail operations. This NRI took with him his colleague, a Filipino, to handle visual merchandising, an essential component of organised retailing. Indeed, the friendship with a non-resident
Indian became the means for this to work and embark on a career in the growing Indian retail business.

The majority of those who came from Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam) worked for garment manufacturers as quality assurance officers. This specific group had similar roles in their previous and current destinations. The period when they worked in Southeast Asian countries was also a time when these growing economies needed to outsource skills. Indeed, this group of Filipino skilled workers has coasted along the wave of industrialisation among these economies in the Global South. Of note too are those who came from East Asia such as China or Japan, countries known for their workforce in manufacturing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Asia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Asia</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a result of these prior overseas experiences and for those embarking on their first overseas work in India, I identify what I call a ‘comparative perspective’⁴, which pervades in the way they talk about and understand their experiences in the host society. This orientation is constituted through the experience of being a ‘serial migrant’ or having worked from one country to another (Liebelt 2008b). A comparative perspective implies being able to compare and contrast one’s conditions of existence across place and through time.

One of my questions during depth interviews was to compare India and the Middle East or Manila, the capital of the Philippines, where most had worked previously. My research participants pointed out that India was a challenging place for work, but the privileges of their employment here outweighed the former. For example, most of those who came from the Middle East emphasised that they were able to save money in India and make investments in the homeland. Male research participants elaborated that there

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⁴ Nina Glick Schiller (2012) uses the same term but refers to migrants’ perceptions of place, particularly cities as host societies. I use this term in a more encompassing manner by including temporal, social, cultural and experiential comparisons. In so doing I relate this term to the concept of boundaries (Lamont 1992).
were few opportunities to squander their money on vices such as gambling and women. The benefits that they received from their company such as free accommodation in well-to-do neighbourhoods of Delhi, Mumbai or Bangalore, transportation and mobile phone connection helped them keep their salaries. Employees of both local and multinational companies have their own chauffer-driven cars that take them to and from work. Several informants admitted to me that they would not have the same benefits had they decided to stay as graphic designers or information systems specialists in the homeland or in the Middle East. India’s policy of making companies pay more to hire global talent was advantageous to Filipino workers whose skills were less valued in the homeland.

In theory, expatriates are paid a minimum of USD 25,000 annually. The minimum requirement was a recent provision (implemented during the last quarter of 2010). In practice, however, some companies did not pay the full amount in cash but declared the total compensation at USD 25,000 for tax purposes and provided expatriate workers with a combination of benefits (mentioned above) and compensation. Those who held technical or specialist jobs were prone to this treatment. According to my data, the salaries of Filipino workers who were not paid the minimum amount ranged from INR 15,000-50,000 (USD 274-915) monthly. The gap in salaries could be traced to employment visa rules that exempt Indian employers from paying the required minimum amount of USD 25,000 for certain occupations such as language teachers and cooks (Ministry of Home Affairs 2010). Managers were compensated according to law and their salaries ranged from the minimum of USD 25,000 to USD 96,000 annually. My informants, in general, claimed better conditions in India.

2. Residential patterns

Where Filipino transnationals are accommodated is a combination of their choice, company resources and segregation patterns in the city. Employers hiring expatriate workers are expected to provide or arrange their accommodation in suitable locations. This means living in gated communities in South Delhi (Waldrop 2004) or high-rise residential flats in the satellite cities of Gurgaon and Noida (See Table 11). In other words, it is seen as suitable that expatriates live side by side with the middle and upper
classes of the city\(^5\). Such areas are less congested, close to commercial centres and main arteries of the city. These neighbourhoods have better infrastructure compared to other colonies or enclaves in the sprawling city. Thus placing transnational workers in these areas that command rental rates ranging between INR 15,000 to 100,000 per month is meant to match the standard of living in their home countries. Expatriate accommodation in Delhi ranges from non-furnished to semi- and fully-furnished flats or houses. The financial resources of the employer usually determine the quality and prestige of their expatriate employee’s accommodation.

Filipino transnationals benefit from this employment practice and also from local expectations. One Indian informant, a former colleague of a Filipino consultant for a government corporation, confided to me that how they treat their foreign workers matters in the eyes of the locals. They need to show that they are not just ‘ordinary’ people, especially in the case of Filipinos who are perceived as people from the Northeast states. (This point will be discussed below.) Because they are in the business of advising local clients who are mostly well travelled and educated, they need to show the importance of the Filipino consultant. My Indian informant recalled that the consultant was accommodated in five star hotels during his initial visits. Eventually, he was given a flat in Vasant Kunj in South Delhi. Other Filipino consultants employed by this government corporation are housed in posh areas such as Hauz Khas Village, a colony known for its art market, specialised restaurants and monuments.

The type of accommodation and its location given to Filipino transnational migrants depend on their employer and visa status. Those employed by multinational corporations are either provided with company-rented flats or given a free hand to choose their housing. Those working in satellite cities of Gurgaon and Noida are accommodated in recently built high-rise buildings (see Figure 3). Filipinos working in Delhi city proper reside in flats in gated communities. The flats are in three to four storey buildings, with the landlord occupying the ground floor (see Figure 4). Filipino transnationals who are accompanying spouses or dependents of diplomats tend to live in detached housing in their respective embassy compounds or embassy-rented flats or bungalows in gated communities of the city. Filipino spouses of other transnational workers stay in similar gated communities and high rise buildings. However,

\(^5\) The expansion of colonial New Delhi from its planned limit to the south and west was due to the influx of migrants within the subcontinent since Independence in 1947 (Waldrop 2004, p. 94). South Delhi, now populated by the city’s middle and upper classes, came to being because of migration.
multinational companies with more generous benefits accommodate their expatriate employees in ‘farmhouses’ (see Figures 5 and 6). A farmhouse in the context of Delhi is a walled property with a detached house, spacious lawn or amenities such as a swimming pool and an outdoor lounge. During fieldwork, Filipinos who are accompanying spouses of European transnational workers tend to live in such prestigious addresses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Colony / Building Name</th>
<th>Type of Residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Delhi</td>
<td>Chanakyapuri*</td>
<td>Detached housing (embassy compound)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Delhi</td>
<td>Anand Niketan</td>
<td>Flat (gated community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chattarpur</td>
<td>Detached housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defence Colony</td>
<td>Flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Golf Links</td>
<td>Flat (gated community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hauz Khas Village</td>
<td>Flat, Detached housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greater Kailash</td>
<td>Flat (gated community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Green Park</td>
<td>Flat (gated community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kalkaji</td>
<td>Flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lajpat Nagar</td>
<td>Flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Friends Colony</td>
<td>Flat (gated community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vasant Kunj</td>
<td>Flat (gated community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vasant Vihar</td>
<td>Flat (gated community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pushpanjal</td>
<td>‘Farmhouse’ (gated community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>West End</td>
<td>‘Farmhouse’ (gated community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurgaon*</td>
<td>Central Park</td>
<td>High rise (gated community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DLF Phase 5</td>
<td>Detached housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Essel</td>
<td>High rise (gated community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lagoon</td>
<td>High rise (gated community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uniworld</td>
<td>High rise (gated community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noida*</td>
<td>Sector 15-A</td>
<td>Flat (gated community)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Diplomatic enclave. *Satellite city, west of the capital, part of the state of Haryana. *Satellite city, east of the capital, part of the state of Uttar Pradesh.
Figure 3. High-end residential tower in Gurgaon.

Figure 4. A flat in a gated community.

Figure 5. The Philippine flag painted on the gate of a farmhouse.
3. The place and image of Filipino skilled workers in mainstream English media

Having located Filipino transnationals in the workplace and where they reside in the locality, this chapter also describes how they are placed in the media or space of images and representations. How migrants are represented in the media indicates how they are regarded in the host society (Madianou 2005a, 2005b). Silverstone and Georgiou (2005) argue that media provide frameworks for social inclusion or exclusion through their portrayal of migrants or minority groups. Contrary to the stereotypical image of Filipino transnationals as ‘servants of globalisation’ (Parreñas 2001), their portrayal in mainstream Indian media reveals their identity as ‘experts’. Their media representations derive from their performance and reputation in their occupations in the burgeoning consumer industries (retail and services, including food and personal care). As Partha Chatterjee (2004) anticipated, the economic opportunities of India’s globalising cities and the desire and exposure of their inhabitants to non-local lifestyles through travel and the media have created new spaces for leisure and consumption, which includes shopping malls and specialised cuisines (p. 143-145). Filipino skilled workers have been hired for such ventures and have distinguished themselves in their craft. Each city (Delhi, Mumbai or Bangalore) has at least one Filipino talent or entrepreneur who appears in the city edition of a national newspaper, lifestyle magazine (GQ or Elle) or a company’s catalogue/newsletter. For example, Augusto Cabrera, an executive chef,
appears regularly in restaurant reviews; AJ Pantaleon, a visual merchandiser for a retail company, provides tips for home décor and interior design; and Ema Trinidad, an entrepreneur, gives beauty and skin care advice. For the middle and upper classes of these cities, their knowledge of non-local consumption practices are important to the globalising desires and tastes of the locals. To illustrate this point, I describe how a popular Filipino chef is talked about in food reviews.

Augusto Cabrera worked as a chef in five-star hotels in the Middle East before joining The Oberoi, an Indian chain of luxury hotels. In Delhi, he is a ‘sushi chef’ in the hotel’s Japanese-themed restaurant, Three Sixty Degrees. The presence of Japanese cuisine in Delhi society suggests not only the globalising tastes of the locals but also the challenge of producing sushi in the city. The remoteness of Delhi from the sea presupposes the high cost of procuring marine ingredients. Thus, the consumption of Japanese cuisine entails paying a premium for a rare commodity. Given this material constraint and the local consumer’s craving for authenticity and their cultural sensitivities (being vegetarian or non-vegetarian), the Filipino chef creates a range of dishes that caters to their varied demands. Augusto Cabrera’s attempts at authenticity and improvisation are recognised by restaurant reviewers and food critics. Vir Sanghvi (2012), a prominent food critic and political commentator for the *Hindustan Times*, writes:

> In my wilder moments I sometimes think of 360 as Augusto’s Sushi Bar. Ever since the restaurant first opened, Augusto Cabrera has been the restaurant’s sushi and sashimi chef and is, I guess, the man who introduced Japanese food to South Delhi’s high society. Though Augusto is from the Philippines, I’ll take his sushi over the stuff served up by many over-hyped Japanese masters.

Augusto is also described as a ‘star’ and expert by the *The Telegraph* (Bhatia 2012), a Calcutta-based national newspaper. Finally, *The Hindu* (Pisharoty 2004), a highly respected national paper edited from Chennai, notes the buzz generated by the Filipino sushi chef: “Just three months old in Delhi, Augusto…is already a part of Delhi’s connoisseurs’ conversations”.


The reception of the Filipino chef’s cooking suggests not only recognition of his work but also indicates the host society’s capacity to provide a space to express his creativity and individuality. Vir Sanghvi’s comments also illustrate the role of Filipino transnationals in globalising the palate of South Delhi’s high society. Indeed, they are not only given space or visibility in Indian mainstream media but in their appearances they are cast as stars or experts.

‘Looking like people from the Northeast’: Gendered and racial perceptions of the locals

The images of Filipino transnationals in Indian media are accompanied by texts and labels that are consistent with their national, occupational and class identities. However, in everyday or initial encounters, the locals perceive Filipinos as part of a regional ethnic grouping. Most of the Filipino informants I encountered in Indian cities are told that they “look like people from the Northeast”. (See Figure 8 to compare how a Filipina looks in relation to Northeast people and the ‘typical’ appearance of Indians.) The ethnic category ‘Northeast people’ in Indian society refers to diverse ethnic groups from seven states in the northeast region of the country that borders Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma and China. The relationship of the northeast with the central government in Delhi is fraught with tensions. The historically informed separatist sentiments of the Northeast people are exacerbated by the lack of economic
development in this frontier region. In the popular imagination, the term ‘northeast people’ conjures racial and gendered stereotypes. Duncan McDuie-Ra’s (2012a, 2012b) poignant ethnography of northeast migrants in Delhi is instructive in explaining these stereotypes that apply to Filipino transnationals.

‘Chinky’, the epithet used by the locals for Northeasterners, calls attention to their physical features that make them distinct from most other ethnic groups in the subcontinent (McDuie-Ra 2012b, p. 89). My informants, both locals and Filipino transnationals, point out that people from the Northeast look more East and Southeast Asian, especially their relatively slanted eyes and less prominent facial features. Their appearance invokes stereotypes that become a basis for local discrimination, harassment, and violence (McDuie-Ra 2012b, p. 87-88). In his ethnography of Northeast migrants in Delhi, McDuie-Ra identified stereotypes that draw from overlapping categories of class,
gender, race, ethnicity and morality. They are misconstrued as ‘backward’ and ‘exotic’; anti-national and anti-assimilationist; loose and immoral. However, he also argues that these stereotypes, specifically their being exotic, have created a labour niche for them in retail and service industries of India’s globalising cities (McDuie-Ra 2012b, p. 91).

Of particular relevance to how Filipino transnationals are perceived by the locals is the immoral stereotype that constructs Northeast women’s sexuality as uncontrollable.\(^6\) McDuie-Ra also observes that Northeast women work in highly visible occupations where their sexuality is emphasised, thus reinforcing such image. Finally, he points out that Northeast women are aware of the similar ways Southeast and East Asian women are perceived by Indian society. Images and accounts of sexualised Asian women circulate in Indian society through traditional and Internet media, Indian diasporic networks and trips to Asian cities (McDuie-Ra 2012b, p. 96). McDuie-Ra’s observation implies that there is a conversely felt sentiment among Northeast migrants in relation to Filipino transnationals.

The coincidence that Filipino transnationals are perceived as Northeast people and employed in the same industries staffed mostly by Northeast migrants could be interpreted as ethnicised or racialised labour economy of globalising Indian cities. However, the expatriate status and managerial positions of Filipino workers become the bases of their distinction. In the remaining parts of this section, I elaborate how the Northeast appearance of Filipino transnationals intersect with their gendered and class experiences and engagements in the city.

Women claim that Delhi is a brutal or hostile city (Miller 2008, p. 163; Viswanath 2010, p. 57). The case of a gang-raped female student in December 2012 that sparked nation-wide protests is just one stark reminder of the problematic gender relations in Indian society. ‘Looking like northeast’ makes Filipino women in Delhi more vulnerable to different forms of harassment and mistreatment in private or public spaces, including the workplace. During fieldwork, female informants shared and asked advice about their ordeals with local men, known or unknown to them. I witnessed overt and subtle forms of sexual advance and disrespect of women in the city.

\(^6\) The control of women’s bodies and sexuality constitutes gender relations and their respectability in Indian society (see Manekar 1993).
One female informant, who lived alone in a flat, felt uncomfortable when the son of her landlord started sending her text messages with sexual innuendoes. The man also kept an eye on her every time she left for or arrived from work. She reported the matter to her employer and the latter obliged in providing her a safer place to live. As McDuie-Ra (2012b) observed among northeast migrants in Delhi, landlords often featured in their experiences of prejudice and harassment in the city. Because landlords were aware that Filipinos are foreigners, they were more cautious and gendered racism was more covert. For example, Dina, the accompanying spouse of a transnational worker from New Zealand, pointed out how she was “a different kind of foreigner”. She confided that the landlord ignored her and their daughter “as if we did not exist”. However, when Trevor, her husband, was around, the landlord acknowledged the presence of women in the house.

Differential treatment on the basis of appearance was evident in public spaces where Filipinos and northeast people converge, such as the beauty salon. Zara recalled being approached by a fellow customer, a local woman, who wanted a haircut and mistook her for being one of the staff. She also shared being bypassed in a queue at a café because she was mistaken for being the nursemaid of her son. The incident happened just before I met her for a meeting. She was fuming when she related the incident to me.

I also witnessed how female informants were undermined by Indian male subordinates at work or in the household. For example, local male drivers hardly took directions from their Filipino female employers. In such instances, women displayed fits of rage or feel frustrated and helpless. The following account from my field notes describes a typical encounter between Filipino women and local men in the domestic and industrial spheres. Amelia, 60, a representative of a multinational company, employed Sandeep, a driver and car owner, to provide transport service to get her to factories around the city.

Amelia always complained to me about Sandeep’s tardiness, incompetence and stubbornness: “He acts as if he is the boss!” One morning, I accompanied her to work. After a breakfast of tinapa (smoked fish), omelette and garlic rice at her place, we hit the road to visit a factory close to her vicinity. While we were chatting, she noticed that Sandeep took a wrong turn at an intersection. This meant a longer ride; and we had three more factories lined up for the day. “Where are you taking us? We have gone there many times and you still don’t know your way!” Amelia vented her frustration in Filipino: “…Binabayaran kita ayusin mo trabaho mo!” (I’m paying you; do your job!)
She calmed down when we reached the factory premises but lost her temper when a supervisor refused to listen to her suggestions. She cursed in her native tongue while inspecting a sample work and fending off several tailors who surrounded her and gazed at her arms and neckline. She slapped the hand of a quality control officer who brushed her arm. Unperturbed by the men’s behaviour, she wore her spectacles, inspected the product and pointed out errors that had to be rectified. “Ingat sila sa aking mga mata (They should be afraid of my eyes)”, she uttered as we stepped out of the factory.

The example above shows the difficulty and burden that being a woman entails, especially in the city of Delhi. Amelia’s emotional outburst is both an expression of frustration and assertion of her position in inhospitable places for women.

The rage of Filipino women suggests not only a transgression of their moral boundaries but also their capacity to protest or express such indignation. In the local context, a woman’s rage could be about a woman wronged (Mankekar 1993, p. 470). Filipino women in Indian cities assert their position as customers or employers and enforce their morality of such relations in response to the locals’ gendered and racial treatment. The courage of Filipino women to express their rage, in public or private spaces, runs in contrast to the seemingly passive resistance of local women.

Male informants experienced less gendered forms of discrimination. However, they admitted that their appearance elicited “rude” treatment from the locals. They were either looked down in public spaces or given little attention in business or mundane interactions. Observations and interviews reveal that Filipino male informants negotiate their positions by modifying their appearance and showing their abilities. The experience of Julian, a business development officer, exemplifies this kind of strategy to enhance one’s social position. I should point out, however, that my informant Julian was critically reflective of his experiences, in relation to other Filipino transnationals. Julian, a straight-acting gay man, described himself as “a social chameleon”. He worked for a Japanese packaging company and travelled around Asian cities to set up operations and look for clients. In his first few months in India, he was unaware of the reason why people tended to ignore him. He lamented:

When I was in Vietnam I could be Vietnamese. When I was in Thailand I could be Thai. When I was in Japan I could be Japanese. When I was in Singapore I could be Chinese. In Hong Kong they talk to me in Chinese. In India–this is another story–I could be Northeastern. So I have to
speak here in British accent. Kasi meron silang (because they have) colonial mentality. And I get a lot of raves kapag ganun (if I do so). I get a lot of attention.

Julian pointed out that looking like a Northeastern presented a dilemma, especially in the manner of dressing. Citing his experience in Delhi’s pubs, he observed that if he dressed in ordinary clothes (shirt, jeans and sneakers), people ignored him. However, if he overdressed (designer label shirts, skinny jeans and boots), locals hesitated to approach him because they thought he could be a prostitute. Indeed, Julian’s understanding of the way he was treated by locals suggests the extended effects of Northeastern stereotypes. His response was to modify his appearance and perform difference by speaking English with a British accent. In so doing, Julian’s strategy is emblematic of what other Filipino transnationals do to differentiate themselves from the perception of being Northeastern: they assert their difference through fashion. In the case of Julian such strategy works because he gets “a lot of attention”. My other informants observed that in order to deal with the locals, one must get their attention first. This involves performances ranging from a display of rage to one’s ability. Fortunately for these Filipino transnationals, calling attention to and asserting their difference are recognised by a host society accustomed to diversity.

Perceiving place and people

The previous section has established how Filipino transnationals are perceived and placed in ethnicised, gendered and classed ways by the host society and their responses to these perceptions. I have argued that research participants assert and perform their class positions to distinguish themselves from the ethnic label ‘Northeastern’. In this section, I describe how they relate to Indian cities, primarily Delhi, through their sensory experiences and evaluations. I focus on their visual and olfactory perceptions of city spaces and their experience of local food, to suggest that Filipino transnationals embody a bourgeois sensibility. Drawing on Mary Douglas (1966), Frykman and Lofgren (1987) argue that the bourgeois distinguishes herself from others through a principle of ordering the world based on “maintaining purity within and shutting out dirt”. This notion is applied in different ways: in the realm of the body it is the practice of hygiene. They argue that the bourgeois preoccupation with being moral in thought, word and deed derives from this notion of cleanliness (Frykman & Lofgren 1987, p. 160, 256). Being clean therefore has both corporal and psychic significance that
reinforce each other. The sensory perceptions of the bourgeoisie therefore discriminate on the basis of hygiene, i.e. looking, smelling, feeling clean.

Everyday life experiences of Filipino transnationals in India indicate an embodied sense of cleanliness, which manifests in their disgust for unsanitary practices, body and unfamiliar odours. The same visceral response applies to local food. Following Fischler (1988) and Lupton (1996), Fechter (2007) argues that food consumption is linked to the production of identities and cultural differentiation between groups. More specifically, food practices of migrants articulate their identities that are constructed between their homeland and host societies (Chakrabarti 2011, p. 146). Filipino transnational’s discomfort with the local cuisine and their preference for global fast food chains and home-cooked food using ingredients from the homeland suggest not only their embodied difference from the locals, but also the practice of hygiene that is integral to their embodiment.

While smell and taste draw attention to Filipino transnationals’ preoccupation with hygiene and cultural identity, visual perceptions of the city and its inhabitants indicate a tendency to compare, based on notions of modernity derived from the homeland or previous host societies. Moreover, they also make comparisons and draw similarities between places in the host society and homeland (or elsewhere) that share the same appearance. I observed that such visual comparisons also link to an urban aesthetic defined by modern infrastructure and clean spaces as exemplified by shopping malls, skyscrapers and gated residential communities. Thus, I also suggest that the ‘bourgeois’ or class sensibility Filipino transnationals informs their spatial practices in Indian cities. They tend to socialise in homes where they have control over hygiene, dine in restaurants that offer non-local cuisine and frequent sanitised environments, such as malls.

1. Visual comparisons

In the rest of the section, I detail how Filipino transnationals perceive Indian cities starting with visual impressions. Two themes emerge whenever research participants talked about place and people. One refers to a temporal dimension in which they invoke the criterion of modernity. I often heard the line “20 years behind” when describing the appearance of people’s fashion. Aware of the local practice of women wearing
traditional clothing, Filipino informants directed their comments toward Indian men who had more liberty in their fashion choice. They noticed that men tended to dress in the style of the 80s by wearing high waist trousers, aviator sunglasses and button down shirts.

The other theme that characterises their perception of the city is equating certain places in Delhi (neighbourhood or area) with similar looking vicinities in Metro Manila. Such comparisons were imbued with the class character or appearance of places. Their perceptions of place, including built environments (except heritage sites), were also evaluated in terms of their assumed modernity.

How Jackie, an informant, described her neighbourhood and other places in the city is illustrative of this pattern of talk. When her husband, a US diplomat, told her about where they would be accommodated in Delhi, he described the area, Defence Colony, as “upscale”. Jackie expected to reside in a neighbourhood similar to gated residential areas in Makati City, a central business district, where American diplomats and national elite families are housed. (Her husband was posted in Manila before moving to Delhi.) Gated communities in Metro Manila have detached houses on spacious lots. She told her husband that Defence Colony looked “like Kamias or Kamuning area”, a middle class neighbourhood in Quezon City. In Defence Colony, a gated community in South Delhi, residents tend to live in flats. When she saw Sarojini Market, a popular shopping area known for factory overruns, Jackie thought it was “like Divisoria”, a crowded market in Manila known for bargaining. These comparisons, I observed, provided Filipino transnationals a symbolic resource and sense of superiority, i.e. being more modern, to assert and constitute their class position in Indian society.

2. Dealing with body odours

Odours have social meanings (Largey & Watson 2006). Foul smells are associated with lower ranked beings and, by inference, pointing out such attribute on people is a claim of superiority (Dollard 1957 in Largey & Watson 2006, p. 35). In the context of migrant experience, Manalansan (2006b) suggests that olfaction is a political and cultural process that should be understood through emotions such as shame, fear, disgust and shock (p. 50). Over a century ago, inhabitants of the Philippine islands and Pacific Islanders were known to use smell to mark boundaries of belonging and non-belonging.
to a group (Spencer 1896 in Largey & Watson 2006, p. 34). One famous dictum of Jose Rizal (1861-1896), a pre-eminent national hero, links the stench of fish with being unpatriotic: “Ang hindi marunong magmahal sa sariling bansa ay mas mabaho pa sa malansang isda (Those who do not love their own country are worse than the stench of fish)”. Indeed, Filipinos associate odours with types of character as a manner of social distinction. Moreover, armpit odour generates low regard and social exclusion, as captured by the insulting term “kili-kili (armpit) power”. I observed that Filipino transnationals often used the words “malansa (stench)”, “amoy anglit (smell of armpits)” and “B.O. (body odour)” when describing people in public places or their domestic staff. Such boundary has racial and class meanings. The use of hygiene to distinguish between races and classes was reinforced during the American colonial period in the Philippines (1898-1946). Warwick Anderson (2007, pp. 192-193) notes that Filipino elites thought that the stigma of a pathological body was a question of social class rather than race.

One weekend, I went with a group of informants to see Akshardam Temple, a large and crowd-drawing Hindu temple complex, west of Delhi, along the Yamuna river. Owned by a sect of Hinduism, the place does not only have a main structure for worship but large courtyards, pools, gardens and cinema halls. As we waited for our turn to enter the cinema hall, a batch of people streamed out of the entrance. Two female informants took out their handkerchief and covered their noses. They looked helpless and could not verbalise their unpleasant experience because they were in the presence of other locals. However, given the authority over space, Filipino transnationals used their position to control odorous bodies. For example, one informant asked her local house help to take a bath before starting work. The former told me that because there was limited water supply in her domestic worker’s colony, she allowed her to bathe at her flat. Another illustrative practice is the way Filipinos deal with their local drivers. This situation was more pressing because Filipino transnationals had to endure an unpleasant experience in the enclosed space of a car. One female informant confided that she gave a supply of deodorant to her driver. Such interventions are not uncommon. Anne Meike-Fechter (2007) observes that privileged European expatriates in Indonesia train their household staff in hygiene. This similar practice between Filipinos and Europeans points to the ways in which they use their position of authority to control spaces to conform to their classed way of life.
If smells and scents have social meanings, then in the context of Filipino transnationals’ perceptions of locals, body odour becomes a criterion for making boundaries. I observed that Filipino informants subtly used odour as a criterion for inclusion and exclusion. A telling example was when Filipino transnationals talked among themselves and assured their peers that a local “does not smell”. A deodorised body is therefore the embodied way in which connection can be made.

I noticed, however, that the locals reacted to the smell of Filipino transnationals, especially their food. One weekend, I was invited by an informant for lunch and boasted that she would be preparing daing (smoked fish), which she brought with her from a holiday in the Philippines. She was frying the delicacy when I got to her place, a two-storey building. I was climbing the stairs when a waft of fried daing whetted my appetite. Suddenly, the neighbour, from the floor below, slammed the door and shattered the image of a sumptuous lunch in my head. Filipino transnationals also evoked olfactory responses from the locals as symbolised by the slamming of the door.

What further complicates this reaction is another story from an informant, a Filipina married to a local with three children. She shared that her son, who was born and brought up in Delhi, could not stand the odour of smoked fish. Her son locked himself in his room every time she fried daing. This example shows that even within a domestic space of Filipino-Indian families, boundaries are still existent. As shown by my informant’s son, olfactory sense is an embodied disposition shaped by place.

3. Delhi belly, hygiene and spatial practices

The different receptions of fish odour show that food is a marker of boundaries. In the case of food perceptions, the senses work in synchrony. Thus, in discussing the perception of local food including its provisioning, I consider its visual, olfactory and gustatory dimensions. Based on participant observation, I find that Filipino transnationals’ corporeal reaction to local food is constituted by the lack of hygiene. The term ‘Delhi belly’ captures the effect of place on the body. The combination of Indian spices, the lack of hygiene in the preparation of the food or contaminated water cause an upset stomach. The painful and unpleasant experience of a Delhi belly is a defining moment that reinforces perceptions of local hygiene. Sharing harrowing
experiences of a Delhi belly during social gatherings generates feelings of paranoia makes Filipino transnationals cautious about local food.

Witnessing how food is handled elicits strong emotional responses. An accompanying spouse of a Filipino chef confided that her husband got angry with his staff when the latter wiped a serving platter with a soiled rug. Informants cringe as they narrate their experiences at INA market, a popular place where imported products are available. I heard many informants talk about the image of a dressed chicken swarmed by flies and dipped in a bucket of murky water. “I’d rather not see it!” Seeing instances of unhygienic practices create impressions that inform my informants’ attitudes toward local food and consequently dictate where they eat. These observations do not entirely suggest that Filipino transnationals shun local food. The point I wish to make is that their sensory perceptions of odour and food are intimately tied to their spatial practices. Where they eat and socialise are places perceived to be odourless and hygienic. Aside from the homes of other transnationals or their local friends, Filipinos tend to eat in reputable restaurants, cafés or pubs in malls, hotels or upscale areas. The familiarity of McDonald’s or Kentucky Fried Chicken and the reputation of The Oberoi or Sheraton-Maurya provide a feeling of security. The same logic applies to where they buy ingredients, particularly meat. An informant told me emphatically, “I’d rather go Le Marche at DLF Mall and pay an extra 300 rupees than buy cheap but dodgy stuff at INA market!” The growth of modern retail in India, in which Filipino skilled workers are part of, has opened up grocery stores that have dedicated meat sections. Malls and modern grocery stores, including 24/7 (mentioned in the introduction), offer controlled and sanitised environments.

4. A modern taste

Finally, I describe how Filipino transnationals defined themselves and the locals in terms of taste. Taste extended to interior design, more specifically choice of style and furnishing for the home. My interview with DJ, a manager for a chain of retail stores and an interior designer, revealed how Filipino transnational workers in the retail industry constructed difference in taste through the criterion of modernity. The following interview excerpt shows not only how he describes local customers as either traditional or modern:
JAL: What about their taste? Can you explain more?

DJ: First thing, I ask them their favourite colours. ‘So ma’am what is your favourite colour when it comes to dress.’ From there you will understand what they like. You like bright colours? Neutral colours? Shocking colours? The way they respond from there you know what your customer wants. You can give their demands easily.

JAL: What’s your general observation? What’s the colour palette here?

DJ – Actually the locals who haven’t gone abroad, they love shocking colours! My God! Have you observed that? Haven’t you seen their saris? …But Indian expatriates, those who have come from overseas, they are modernised, more educated, so no problem. But usually our clients, in our line of business, are elderly people. So they still follow the old ways. So even their children who are abroad still follow them. So you have to understand both sides: you ask the children, you also ask their parents—like one whole village (parang isang barangay)!

DJ equated modern taste with having overseas experience and also associated the trait with being “more educated”. On the other hand, being traditional was equated with elderly people or a question of generational divide. Because DJ’s work is to promote modern products and designs for Indian customers, he educated them at the same time.

DJ – I ask them: …Sir, what kind of design do you like? Do you have any preference? And the customer says: ‘I like traditional!’ Or ‘I like classical!’ What kind? …Indian or European? I can help; I can give you a better design. ‘Very Indian!’ You will know, so give him a ‘very Indian’ [design]! That’s it! You also explain: ‘Sir, there is no problem I can give you ‘very Indian’ but the furniture will not suit: we will make it eclectic or modern contemporary or bohemian’. Then they will ask. ‘What is that?’ Bohemian is a mix of modern and traditional furniture and accessories. So if we stick to Indian, I cannot provide you the entire furniture. And if the customer tells you, ‘Ah ok I trust you, I give you everything and show it to me’, the way you present it [sample design] to the customer, should be slow, detail by detail. You can’t be too fast. They are slow to catch up. You have to give two options: A and B. Option A, classic, is more expensive; B is cheaper. That’s what they are. And there are those who don’t care about money. They want designs.

The quote shows an interaction characterised by learning about modern consumption. DJ told me that he learned from interacting with customers and he incorporates his insights into his designs. Mutual learning revolving around local and modern tastes characterise how Filipinos and Indians engage the realm of fashion.
**Conclusion**

Filipino transnational migrants are beneficiaries and complicit actors in the globalising and neoliberal social and economic processes and changes in Indian cities. They have become part of state-, citizen- and business- initiated transformations in Indian society. Their skills and labour are important to the consumer industries (retail and service) that are shaping the lifestyles and spaces of the city. Thus, Filipino transnationals in India are well integrated into its growing economy. However, their appearance and gender become the ways they experience discrimination in the city. The experience of Filipino transnational migrants in Delhi parallels that of Northeast migrants who are both beneficiaries of the globalising city and victims of racial and gender discrimination. Unlike majority of Northeast migrants, Filipino transnationals are in privileged position to negotiate their place in the city.

The perceptions of Filipino transnationals further reveal the boundaries through which they engage place and people. Modernity and class sensibility define their identities in Delhi. In this aspect, they are similar to outsiders who perceive the place from a modern outlook (Chakrabarty 2002). However, this sensibility that creates boundaries and defines their spatial and social practices are the very traits that the retail and service industries need from Filipino transnationals. Their role is therefore to introduce a new sense of order in a place that is ‘becoming bourgeois’ (Chatterjee 2004, p. 131). In the next chapter, I examine how the boundaries of class operate in the workplace.
Chapter 3
Negotiating boundaries in the workplace:
Professionalism, authority and local relations

One winter evening, a few members of the Filipino community, including myself, turned up at Pragati Maidan, Delhi’s exhibition complex, to watch a fashion show. The event featured the work of Rolando, a Filipino designer and consultant for a local agency that supported exporters. Along with several male junior designers from the Philippines, he had provided not only expert advice but also ideas and services to improve the agency’s work and reputation. Rani, a local staff, saw me walk down the red carpet and ushered me backstage.

Dressed in black, the Filipino designers and their local colleagues attended to their tasks, including Rolando who checked every model’s attire before they strutted out on the runway. He had a cushion of bobby pins attached to his left wrist and ordered his staff to hand him scissors, needles or safety pins while he fixed dresses on the spot and draped the fabric on the models. Intermittently, he reminded his assistants to remove loose threads from the seams and on the cloth, fix collars and close zips. I stayed backstage and assisted the crew.

After the curtain call, I congratulated Rolando. “Hihimatayin ako (I could have fainted)” he exclaimed. “We were only given two months to put up a show. Normally in the Philippines, it takes at least six months. The invitations were sent at the last minute!” I said his team mounted a successful show, nonetheless. He invited me to an after-show party at his flat in Vasant Kunj, a suburb in South Delhi.

The scene in Rolando’s place showed another dimension of his status among his co-workers. Perched on a cane chair by the window, he crossed his legs, lighted a cigarette and sipped from a mug of freshly brewed coffee. The local and Filipino staff sat comfortably around him and listened as he recalled incidents before and during the event. He praised each staff member for a job well done and pointed out what they did right. Addressing a group of mostly junior colleagues, he shared tips on how to stage a fashion show: “For the clothes to stand out, the ramp should be plain and the lighting precise. The focus is not the model but the dress. S/he should be like a hanger or
mannequin”. He then looked at me and said in a slightly condescending tone: “You don’t learn this in school!” I thought my identity as a privileged academic provoked this comment from an industry practitioner who worked hard to get to the top.

The party talk was also peppered with comments about the fashion models. Rolando talked about their attitudes towards work. He criticised a young applicant who had no experience and demanded INR 15,000 for his professional fee; and praised Malik, a starter, who listened and was open to learn. One of the guests during the party was Arjun, a former employee of the agency who worked closely with Rolando for several years. He started his own design and manufacturing business and considered the Filipino designer as his mentor.

Rolando’s story illustrates the boundaries that Filipino transnationals tend to make and negotiate in the workplace. Filipino workers evaluate the work ethic of local workers as shown by the demanding fashion model and the other who was willing to learn. They negotiate their intermediate position of authority and the boundary between being an outsider and an insider in the Indian workplace. A strategy used by Rolando is the demonstration of his ability and knowledge, as illustrated by the way he operated backstage and talked to his co-workers at a party, and his performance of authority by acting as a guru to his subordinates. In so doing, he crosses the ethnic boundary and makes a connection with his local co-workers.

In migration studies, the workplace is a common site where boundary making and negotiation processes are investigated (e.g. Moore 2004; Lan 2003). As Filipino transnational workers spend most of their time at work, usually 8-10 hours a day, 5-6 days a week, most of their social, and even cultural, experiences of India are in the context of interactions in their respective companies. This chapter looks at their experiences in Indian workplaces. It focuses on three interrelated themes or dimensions, namely: the process of making and transcending boundaries between Filipino and Indian workers in superior-subordinate roles; the ways in which the former negotiate their positions in the workplace; and the personal significance of overseas work and the role of transnational workers in globalising Indian workplaces. What boundaries and connections emerge between Filipino and Indian workers? What conditions enable and shape these processes? How do Filipino workers negotiate their positions?
Glick Schiller (2009) points out that transnational migrants have multiple roles and social relations. I will show that boundaries between Filipino transnationals and their local co-workers are negotiated and transcended through the performance of roles and relations, primarily but not entirely in local idioms and terms. Performance is the manner in which positions and relationships are negotiated in the workplace. To a large extent, the performative strategy of Filipino workers resonates with the notion of cultural negotiation: “how human patterns of activity are reinforced or changed within a culture and how they are adjusted when various different cultures interact” (Carlson 1996, p. 195). Furthermore, analysing the roles of transnational migrant workers in Indian workplaces reveals how they are connected to macro processes, specifically, the globalising Indian workplace. Glick Schiller (2009) suggests that transnational migrant workers, particularly professionals, contribute to neoliberal restructuring. While Filipino workers become agents of change in Indian workplaces, they do so in locally specific ways through their performance of roles as exemplified in the vignette above.

Through observations and depth interviews with Filipino workers, their local colleagues and subordinates and other transnational workers in Indian cities, I find that Filipino transnationals draw boundaries based on the notion of a good worker (being capable, industrious and ethical) that is captured by the concept professionalism (Fournier 1999). Conversely, local workers apply the same category of evaluation among Filipino transnationals who are simultaneously regarded as outsiders in the city or Indian society. In the context of globalising Indian workplaces, transnational workers are hired for their knowledge and skills that are needed in modernising and expanding industries such as retail, service and manufacturing. The boundary process between Filipino transnationals and local workers is informed by the value of knowledge and resources (e.g. financial) that the former possesses. Thus, the extent to which local workers cross the boundary to connect with Filipino outsiders is partly motivated by the benefit they can gain from a relationship with them. Mutually beneficial relationships become the condition through which boundaries are transcended in the workplace. Moreover, considering how Filipino transnational workers view overseas work as part of their self projects accounts for the motivations of their performances in the Indian workplace.

I develop the arguments above in six steps. First, I describe the motivations and work orientation of Filipino transnationals who can be considered part of the new middle class. Second, the chapter shall discuss changes in workplaces attributed to globalisation
in India and the role of transnational workers. In the third section, I compare how Filipino and Indian workers understand and use professionalism as a boundary. The fourth section examines performance as a strategy used by Filipino workers to negotiate their positions of authority in the workplace or to establish professional boundaries. The fifth and sixth sections continue the theme of performance; in particular, I discuss the roles of transnational workers as guru and patron and the relations engendered by such roles as a means of negotiating boundaries and establishing sociality in the workplace.

**Kina-career: Work as ‘self-project’**

*Kina-career* or simply *kinarir* is a blend of words where a prefix in Filipino is added to an English word career (job or work) to form a verb. It means working earnestly; it also connotes pursuing activities, things or persons. Filipino research participants used the term in informal gatherings, especially when they talk about other people’s behaviour and attitude. For instance, during a Halloween costume party where everyone was ‘required to dress up’, one guest came as a zombie and literally crawled her way from the entrance to the dance floor. One person quipped: “*Kinarir ang pagiging zombie* (she really took her zombie character [and the dress code] seriously)! I use *kinarir* as an idiom to suggest a work ethic based on a commitment, professionalism and the extent to which one performs to get the job done. Moreover, some industrial psychologists portray Filipino workers as self-determining individuals who see work as not only as a means to survive but also as a venue for individual growth and a way to express one’s abilities or talents (Hechanova *et al.* 2005, p. 6).

Describing Filipino transnationals in India in terms of their collective class identity extends the idea of *kinarir* and provides a theoretical explanation for their preoccupation with self making. The Filipino skilled workers in Indian cities, at least theoretically, are part of the new middle class (Martin 1998), which calls attention to their occupation as a professional or manager. According to Bill Martin (1998), knowledge is constitutive of the identity of the new middle class. They have made themselves relevant in the labour market through their possession of specific knowledge. Moreover, the identity of professionals and managers is understood as a life-long “project of the self” which involves “the construction or modification” of a life story (Giddens 1991 cited in Martin 1998, p. 656). According to Martin, professionals and managers choose a particular job because it is seen as a new experience that
contributes to the consciously authored ‘project of the self’ (Martin 1998, p. 672). Choosing to work overseas is consistent with the identity narratives of new middle class Filipinos in India.

The motivations of research participants show not only a desire to improve their financial and material conditions but also to advance in their career. The following excerpts from two informants of different ages and genders illustrate how a career in India is linked to their identity narratives:

Lisa and Carlo’s motivations illustrate the opportunity to craft better selves through overseas work. For members of the Filipino middle classes, overseas work is a project of the self. Filomeno Aguilar, Jr. (1999) argues that contemporary migration of Filipinos is a ‘journey of achievement’ aimed at defining oneself and improving one’s status. Akin to rites of passage, migration is about the transformation of the self through exposure to another world and learning new ways of being and doing (Aguilar 1999, p. 118). According to one Filipino informant, Filipinos who have gone abroad are expected to bring back not only fruits of their labour but also a better self. The latter is showed through physical appearance, possessions and stories. Both Lisa and Carlo narrate a story of achievement and ‘success’.
Conversely stories of failure are equally possible. I do not discount the possibility that some of my informants also encountered ‘failure’ or not being able to achieve the goals of their work placement. However, failure or even success is a relative term. I learned from my informants that the idea of failing depended on particular aspects of their job and the time period when they were asked about their work in India. Transnational workers can be new comers who are figuring out the challenges in a new environment or leavers who have gained a perspective of their work experience in India. Moreover, the complexity of their work situations defies a simplistic dichotomy between outright success and failure. In the contemporary period, the transformations in Indian cities have created unpredictable and contradictory conditions in the workplace.

**A changing work environment and the role of transnational workers**

Scholars have described the cultural and social impact of economic liberalisation and globalisation on Indian workplaces. They highlight the ways workers understand their conditions and the changing nature of work. Moreover, the categories through which change is characterised has constructed and reinforced distinctions between types of employers: the public and the private sector (Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase 2009); the multinational and local company (Vaidyanathan 2012); or the IT industry and old-economy companies (Upadhya 2011). For example, Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase (2009) report that Indian middle class workers in Kolkata respond in contradictory ways to neoliberal ideologies of efficiency and privatisation in the workplace. They find that workers are critical of privatisation of government enterprises but espouse the rhetoric of efficiency. Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase (2009) link the favourable attitude towards efficiency to earlier state discourse of modernisation and scientific rationality and the debates about government inefficiency. The critical view toward privatisation is influenced by perceptions regarding the insecure and exploitative nature of employment in the private sector and the stable and caring working conditions in government owned entities. While the difference in opinion is intergenerational, with older people sympathising with the public sector, there is a common agreement that government workers lack discipline (Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase 2009: 109-129).

Another sector where change in work culture is evident is the information technology (software) industry, where most members of India’s new middle class take root (Upadhaya 2011). Acknowledging the crucial role that higher education plays in the
formation of the new middle class, Upadhaya (2011) notes the emergence of an ideology of merit among the educated software professionals and entrepreneurs. They believe that “success in business or career is based on individual talent, effort and hard work”, an orientation that contrasts with the importance of “connections and bribes in job promotions in old-economy companies” (Ibid, p. 185). The success of India’s IT industry, which includes the business process outsourcing sector (call centres), is the face of India in the global economy (Hegde 2011). Radhakrishnan (2011) observes a changing work ethic: from the government bureaucrat’s orientation towards hierarchy and politics to the IT worker’s merit-based professionalism (p. 207). Indeed, Indian workplaces are commonly represented as being in a state of flux between traditional and modern ways of working. These observations also imply that the transformation of Indian workplaces is not total, especially in emerging sectors like retail, service and manufacturing. Transnational workers are implicated in the process of transforming Indian workplaces: they not only have the skills to develop emerging industries but also promote modern ways of working through their practices that shape work environments.

The practice of hiring transnational workers is premised on the notion of an ‘expat expert’ or “the idea that corporate expatriates are more skilled and qualified for the job than members of the local workforce” (Fechter 2007, p. 4). As discussed in earlier chapters, the retail, service and manufacturing industries are in need of skilled workers. Crucial to their work of building and operating businesses is the process of sharing skills and learning from local co-workers. Contrary to the ‘expat expert’ assumption, the case of Filipino transnationals shows that being an outsider does not automatically translate to recognition of one’s knowledge or skill and the authority that derives from it. Knowledge sharing is a social process (Williams 2006, 2007) mediated by the social positions and relations between actors (Williams 2006, p. 589). Hudson (2004) asserts that “positionality—whether in terms of class, gender or migration status—is important in determining what people are perceived to know and can do within firms” (cited in Williams 2006, p. 597). In the case of migrants to Indian cities, whether local or transnationals, their status as outsiders mattered.

1 Fredrik Barth’s definition of knowledge is close to how my informants, both Indian locals and Filipino workers, understood it. According to Barth (2002, p. 1), knowledge is “what a person employs to interpret and act on the world and includes feelings (attitudes), information, embodied skills, verbal taxonomies and concepts”.

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Local informants regard transnational workers as bringing new knowledge into the workplace, but also point out that they have “different levels and capacities”. Williams (2006) has described migrant workers as possessing different types and forms of knowledge. They bring different ways of doing and judging things (Allen 2000 in Williams 2006, p. 593) into the workplace. Indeed, transnationals are treated with ambivalence: while they are considered outsiders, they are imagined and placed in hierarchical terms based on gender and racial categories. As discussed in Chapter 2 being a woman and looking like ‘Northeast people’ influence how they are treated in the workplace. However, as will be discussed in the next section, the context of the workplace engenders professional boundaries that Filipino workers, in positions of authority, tend to make.

**Professional boundaries**

Among other possibilities, the salient boundary between Filipino and Indian workers is constituted by the notion of professionalism. Informants used this criterion as a mode of evaluation, a resource for self-identification and a basis for social relationships. Such distinctions are more prevalent in locally owned companies than in large multinational companies (MNCs) (outside the IT/BPO sectors) with established workplace norms and practices. I shall trace the meanings of professionalism in academic literature and in everyday discourse to illuminate how the term is understood by Filipino and Indian research participants.

1. Meanings of professionalism

In its common use, a ‘professional’ refers to a member of an occupational group with specialized knowledge, a code of ethical behaviour and a system of controlling membership and practices through exams and licensing (Evetts 2003). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines professionalism as the expected competence of professionals; however, certain characteristics such as self-responsibility, special skills and ethical behaviour are also bound up to this definition (Sanghera & Iliasov 2008). However, changes in work and employment practices, involving flexible forms of labour and employment terms demanded by advanced capitalism, triggered the deployment of professionalism in other occupational domains (Fournier 1999, p. 281). From an occupational value, professionalism has evolved into a discourse defined by
the logics of managerialism and commercialism (Evetts 2011). It is linked to neoliberal reforms that seek to make workers accountable, efficient and responsive to market conditions (Duhn 2011).

Indeed, being professional means that workers are expected to assume appropriate work identities prescribed by an organisation (Fournier 1999). Professionalism, Fournier argues, has turned into a disciplinary mechanism that shapes a worker’s conduct. The professional worker is autonomous, responsible and competent, and can be controlled from a distance through internalising these traits (Fournier 1999, pp. 284-290). In other words, professionalism has become a defining quality of an ideal worker. A worker who is ‘professional’ is not only qualified and competent, but also conforms to norms set by her terms of employment.

In the Indian context, professionalism is constitutive of a modern, merit-oriented work ethic, and contrasted with the hierarchical and bureaucratic culture of the Indian state and its subsidiaries (Radhakrishnan 2011). Perceived as India’s face of modernity, the IT and BPO sectors have become the sites where various dimensions of professionalism have been investigated. How the local workers embody and resist this disciplinary mechanism or even appropriate it for political goals is a common theme in these studies (e.g. D’Cruz and Noronha 2006; Vaidyanathan 2012). For example, Vaidyanathan’s (2012) interview-based study suggests that professionalism is used by BPO workers to thwart abusive power relationships in the workplace. In the same study, professionalism is a characteristic associated with expatriate workers. Therefore, it operates as a boundary to differentiate between workers.

As accounts of everyday life and public discourse, news stories and readers’ comments reveal nuances of professionalism. In the Indian context, the term is used to construct and reinforce collective identities. For example, professionalism is associated with a place, Mumbai, and its inhabitants, Mumbaikars. The Times of India reports the results of a survey on the quality of life in Indian cities, which include perceptions of work ethic (Rajadhyaksha 2011). Mumbai, the business capital of India, and its workforce ranked on top, followed by Bangalore and Pune. Quoting the head of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the news story reiterates the notion that people of Mumbai are ‘workaholics by choice’. The story also suggests that the professional character of Mumbaikars is attributed to the presence of multinational
companies. Hence, professionalism is a quality attached to (or claimed by) place and people. The implication is that an individual’s professionalism (or lack of it) may derive from her group affiliations or provenance.

In contrast to numerous studies on professionalism among Indian workers, the concept is rarely applied as an analytical lens to examine Filipino workers. However, scholars studying migration point out how overseas Filipino workers draw on professionalism as a symbolic resource for their self-identification. Amrith (2010) reveals how Filipino nurses, who work as caregivers in Singapore, emphasise their professional qualification to differentiate themselves from other Filipino caregivers with lesser credentials. In their study of Filipino seafarers, McKay and Lucero-Prisno (2012) find that professionalism on the job becomes an expression of masculinity to compensate for the sexual and racial marginalisation of Filipino men.

The importance given to professionalism as a mode of self-identification can be traced to its routine usage in the Philippine context. I observed that professionalism is a basis for evaluating not only a person’s work performance but also her character or conduct. The titles alone of several stories and letters from the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* illustrate this point: ‘Unchristian and unprofessional’ (Tolibas 2008); ‘…You talk too much, De Lima; So unprofessional’ (Calleja & Ramos 2011); and ‘Unprofessional behaviour of MRT [metro rail transit] drivers’ (Gualvez 2006). Filipino columnists, readers and political actors call attention to the unprofessional conduct of politicians, public service employees and media personalities. The common use of ‘unprofessional’ to describe individuals suggests the emphasis on the behavioural dimension of professionalism.

Being unprofessional is also understood as an attitude. A columnist opines: ‘Taking things personally means one has an insecure yet overblown ego and an unprofessional attitude’ (Tiglao 2011). The comment implies that taking personal matters or interest into the realm of work is considered inappropriate. From these meanings, the label has the potential to elicit shame. For example, the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* reports how a group of US-based Filipino transnationals lobbied against the nomination of a compatriot, a senator who screamed at prosecutors during a televised impeachment trial, for a seat in the International Criminal Court of Justice (Rodis 2012). The group said that it recognized the senator’s intellectual ability and forensic skills but thought she
was not suited for the job because of her unprofessional behaviour. This example reinforces the idea that successful Filipino transnationals value professionalism. In a racialised, gendered and competitive international labour market, professionalism is a trait that Filipino transnationals perform and police.

While both Filipinos and Indians use professionalism as a cultural resource for making boundaries, they differ in emphasizing certain aspects of it. Filipino transnationals tend to see it as constitutive of one’s character, and consequently use it as a criterion to evaluate conduct. Indian workers saw it more as a situational characteristic (Vaidyanathan 2012, p. 220). The difference is the extent to which Filipinos use professionalism as social censure. As D’Cruz and Noronha (2006) point out, Indian workers are capable of resisting its disciplinary effect. This observation means that professionalism has limited significance in the Indian context compared to the Philippines. These meanings of professionalism resonate in ways Filipino and Indian research participants talk about working together.

2. Professional boundaries in transnational social spaces

a. Evaluation and self-identification

When Filipino skilled workers in Indian cities learned that I was studying their experiences, they willingly talked about their work and local colleagues. I observed that boundaries were imagined, constructed and reinforced (Wimmer 2008, p. 986) in talk about work and even during the interview situation. The dynamics of boundary making in transnational social spaces show that evaluation and self-identification are processes enabled by a comparative perspective. Using criteria for evaluation deriving from the homeland and elsewhere, they compare between peoples and situations. In evaluating others, they also define themselves.

Filipino workers used the following criteria of professionalism when talking about their local colleagues: competency in the job, workplace conduct, and a sense of accountability and responsibility to the company. For my Indian informants, how they looked at Filipino workers focused more on competence and a sense of organisation: knowledge of the job, delivering tasks on time and being organised and systematic at work. Such manner of imagining, talking and relating highlights their unequal relations,
and the positions and conditions of being a Filipino skilled worker in India. The following comparison between Indian and Filipino workers comes from Manual, 32, a Filipino manager who worked previously in Dubai, exemplifies the simultaneous process of evaluation and identification:

They have the talent; but the important thing is execution. Good in verbal [communication], but in execution very poor. I give you an example. If you ask them the basics, they don’t know. If they know, they are very good in theory, but in actual [sic] they are very poor. That is a problem. Filipinos are very creative and innovative. We don’t care about time. If there is a task, we will finish it first before we go home. We make sure if there is a deadline, everything is finished.

(Manuel)

Manuel recognised the potential of his Indian co-workers but found their performance and conduct below his expectations. While he evaluated their level of professionalism, he differentiated himself by highlighting his national identity. As Williams (2006) points out, ‘nationality and ethnicity are strong referents for international migrants’ (pp. 597-598). Echoing other overseas Filipino workers, the conflation of professionalism and national identity is a way of distinguishing themselves in the international labour market. Manuel’s mode of differentiation is emblematic of an ethnic boundary process triggered by competition among ethnically defined labourers (Wimmer 2008, p. 977).

Professionalism is also internalised and manifests in the comparative perspective of Filipino informants. Leila, 25, a human resources staff of a multinational company in Delhi, narrated an incident and pointed out what she saw as the locals’ lack of initiative and sense of responsibility:

Hilda [a Filipino manager] approached an employee: ‘Why are you texting? Don’t you have anything else to do?’ ‘No, I’m waiting for the other to finish her part’, says the worker. ‘Look at her. She has a lot on her plate. Take some of her work!’ In the Philippines we ask, have you got more? Let me help you! I got nothing else to do. It’s voluntary…An employee in the Philippines feels shame if they sit idle and they get paid per hour while their boss sees them doing nothing.

Leila’s comment further reveals the capacity of professionalism as a norm to elicit shame and, simultaneously, to impose discipline or control. This norm is informed by a work ethic that demands reciprocal obligations of paid work.
A sense of frustration and resignation demonstrates the existence of this normative orientation. For example, Lisa, 55, a manager, lamented how local management disregarded employee attendance: “The division heads didn’t mind when employees asked for a leave at whim: ‘Can I not come to work tomorrow?’ They just said yes without any question. This kept going on. It shouldn’t be that way; I was shocked! It’s like the division heads didn’t care”.

Lisa’s reckoning of the incident highlights the expectations she brings into work. Unmet expectations inform one’s evaluations and therefore reinforce boundaries between Indian and Filipino workers.

Indian informants confirmed most of the Filipino workers’ observations and provided explanations for the locals’ orientation towards work. Sania, a human resources officer, told me that ‘employees with a positive work attitude were hard to find’. The locals have a range of choices, including BPO companies and the option to till their lands for those who come from rural areas. Sanjay, a manager in a Filipino-managed American company, elaborated that many of their local employees came from the rural areas and were ‘usually hard headed’ or undisciplined. His explanation is similar to the discourse in Indian media, which relates one’s conduct to one’s place or social location.

Consistent with this logic, Filipino workers were generally perceived by their local colleagues and subordinates as being competent, knowledgeable, hardworking and friendly, that is as ‘professional’. The description ‘friendly’ echoes Vaidyanathan’s (2012) findings in the BPO sector where being professional is associated with expatriate workers, a point I will return to below.

Indian workers recognised the abilities and work experience of Filipino expatriates. In the retail, manufacturing or service industries, locals regarded them as colleagues who shared their knowledge in organized retailing. This evaluation points to the superior structural positions of Filipino workers. Conversely, an expatriate worker who is seen as lacking knowledge is held in low regard. My interview with Gaurav, 28, a manager for a multinational company set up by Filipino expatriates, illustrates this observation.

When Gaurav joined the company, he was sent to the Philippines for a six-month training, where he worked with Filipino colleagues. Upon his return to Delhi, he gained
a comparative perspective, which was evident in his explanation of the local workers’ perceptions of Filipino expatriates. I was curious to know why his local subordinates regarded his Filipino general manager as lacking knowledge and unpopular. From Gaurav’s interview, it seemed that the issue was about the local Indian workers’ resistance to the notion of an autonomous, self-directed and accountable worker. The general manager wanted the technical staff to send e-mails themselves to the head office instead of mediating for them. However, local workers thought that she was passing on her work to them. Gaurav explained:

And when I asked her she said that’s a part of the training you need to have. But the other guys were not agreeing with that...I see in this thing she was trying to raise them [staff] up to be project managers by asking them to compose mail and to coordinate with each other and the Philippines office. But the way they are thinking was like she doesn’t want to do her work and she [is] putting her burden on them.

The locals expected direction or guidance from the expatriate worker. Telling them to do things on their own was seen as “having no knowledge”. Gaurav shared: ‘They keep saying, “She has no knowledge about the particular project we are working on. That’s why she keeps asking us to reply to the emails”. I told them that’s not true’.

Gaurav’s reading of the situation allows us to see divergent views on the issue of delegating tasks. For local workers, a person in a superior position who gives autonomy to workers to learn the job on their own is seen as “having no knowledge”. In their imagination, a person occupying a position of authority is supposed to direct action. However, the orientation that Filipino workers bring into the transnational workplace is a neoliberal notion of professionalism that constitutes a worker as self-directed and accountable. These different work orientations also became the basis for making professional boundaries.

b. Professional distance

Evaluations can be a basis for relating with others (Wimmer 2008). I observed that Filipino participants tended to create professional distance at work. Local and transnational work practices and politics of the workplace reinforce this social boundary. Filipino workers drew a line between their professional and personal lives. A Filipino dictum “Sa trabaho magkaaway; sa labas magkaibigan (At work, we are
enemies; but outside of it we are friends)” captures this work ethic. As discussed above, blurring the boundary between work and personal life is considered unprofessional. Creating professional distance was also a response to the politics based on the structure of the industry and the roles of the workers. For example, the relationship between quality checkers of a foreign buyer and local manufacturers is adversarial. Quality checkers enforce the requirements of the foreign buyer.

However, as mentioned previously, local subordinates and colleagues of Filipino supervisors saw them as friendly (approachable) compared to the local staff superiors. Gaurav, who knew the difference between Filipino and Indian workplaces, observed that Indian superiors were less likely to mingle with their local subordinates. At the same time, an expectation about sociality at work also existed. One of my local informants opined: “Like in India we have a very different work culture. There are many things apart from profession that also matters in the office. People tend to be personal like ‘How many kids do you have? What are they doing?’ There are also a lot of exchanges that keep going”.

Aware of local co-workers’ predilection for sociality, Filipino workers in India were approachable. For example, the local subordinates and colleagues of one Filipino informant said they found him to be cooperative. He had time to listen or help them sort out problems at work. However, Filipino transnationals were cautious of making friends. They explained that such relationships would compromise their authority in the workplace; consequently, the quality of work may suffer. They believed that the reciprocal obligations of friendship with the locals could result in an exchange of favours that could affect work standards and processes. Carmen, 60, a quality assurance officer, told me that she was posted in Delhi to replace another Filipino worker who became too close to the local manufacturers. Consequently, the officer she replaced could not enforce quality standards and the buyer ultimately rejected the shipment. Carmen revealed that the company wanted her in Delhi because they knew she could stand her ground.

Filipino workers maintain professional distance in order to enforce compliance among their subordinates. However, they are also aware of the need to engage local workers on a personal level. Indeed, the two overlapping tendencies call for a performance in order to negotiate their position of authority and status as outsiders. My observations and
interviews reveal that they perform authority through demonstrating ability and asserting their official position in the context of locally understood superior-subordinate relationships. Thus, in workplaces where local co-workers lacked professionalism, Filipino transnationals adapted to local ways of exercising authority in the workplace. Enacting the roles of a guru and patron at work, to some extent, not only allowed Filipino transnationals to cross the outsider/insider threshold but also enable them to persuade local co-workers to act professionally. Hence, professional boundaries were turned into working relationships through performance in a familiar relationship of power. In the next section, I describe how authority is performed.

**Performing authority and demonstrating knowledge**

The performance of authority is linked to the demonstration of knowledge or ability. How I use this elusive and contested concept (Carlson 1996; McKenzie 2001) to account for the ways Filipino workers negotiate their position in the Indian workplace is derived from my observations and informants’ experiences. As a consequence of this deductive approach, there are at least four interrelated ways performance is understood and used as an analytical concept.

First is the idea that performance is an activity with an aim to influence its observers (Goffman 1959/2007, p. 63). In this sense, performances are strategic. Another meaning of the term refers to how a performative act becomes a demonstration or public display of a skill (Carlson’s 1996, p. 3). Filipino workers find themselves performing their skills to demonstrate their authority and expertise. The third definition is based on Richard Schechner’s (1985) idea of a ‘restored behaviour’ or the performance of a “recognised and culturally coded pattern of behaviour” (Carlson 1996, pp. 4-5). To exercise authority at work, Filipino managers and consultants have to act in ways they are perceived by the locals as strong leaders who command power (Bailey 1970, p. 75). Finally, another usage of the term refers to the evaluative sense of a performance. Carlson (1996) defines it as “the general success of the activity in light of some standard of achievement that may not itself be precisely articulated” (p. 5). A Filipino worker compares her own or colleague’s performance with a certain model of action or level of achievement; conversely, local workers do the same with themselves and their colleagues, both local and foreign. The last definition overlaps with Jon McKenzie’s (2001) notion of organisational performance, the context in which the performative
actions of workers are evaluated according to their efficiency (p. 56). This last definition brings us back to the notion of a professional who is expected to perform in ways defined by an organisation (Fournier 1999; Evetts 2011).

How Filipino transnationals negotiate their position and relationship in the Indian workplace is a matter of strategic enactments of roles. I find three kinds of performance that address specific gaps in the expectations of locals. First is a performance of their professional competence or demonstration of skill or knowledge to establish their superior status and legitimacy. Second is the enactment of familiar styles of authority and power such as being autocratic or assuming the role of a patron. And third is performing as an employee whose performance is subject to evaluation by the local or multinational employer. The first and second kinds of performance become the means through which a Filipino transnational employee attempts to satisfy expectations defined by the goals of a company. In the context of India’s growing and modernising retail and manufacturing sectors, standardisation is one of these goals.

My ethnographic approach reveals that Filipino transnationals exercise agency when confronted with this challenge to perform in this superior-subordinate relationship. I find two typical responses in conforming to local expectations: reluctance or willingness. These responses are situational and in the following cases I specify the conditions of such performances.

1. A reluctant performer

Lisa, 56, came to Delhi in 2005 and set up the city’s first chain of 24-hour convenience stores. Her main reason for accepting a job offer in India was not only to help her son, the only child, finish his college education but also to prove to her previous company that ‘there are many opportunities outside’. She said she resigned because of office politics. She had two offers: one from a company in Papua New Guinea and another from an Indian business magnate who came to the Philippines to look for talent. She was initially coy about the prospect of setting up the business in Delhi, but accepted the offer after being assured of support from the owner. In a year’s time, Lisa opened the first store. Her career objective was achieved: ‘I’m very proud to say that I brought the concept and I started it here in India’. She recalled that she had a very supportive chief executive officer and she was given a free hand to do her job:
When I set up and started this business I developed all the processes. So I did everything, including recruitment. I introduced the standards of [my previous company] here…During my time as operations manager these were followed. I was the one interviewing applicants and training them myself. At the same time I was also handling operations and visiting the stores. I had to check if they were applying correctly what they had learned from their training.

However, Lisa said the unpredictability, high employee turnover rate, work ethic and attitude of the local workers complicated her work. In her five years with the company, leadership changed twice. As a consequence, her role shifted from operations management to training. She trained current and existing staff and conducted standard compliance audits in stores. Having lost direct control of operations, she said she could only do so much:

The difficulty here is that they feel they are all smart and they know everything. …It’s so simple to set-up the merchandise but they can’t. …In spite of their training or length of service, they still cannot do what we have back home. I have given them the rules; but they don’t follow… (Lisa)

The owner advised Lisa to ‘use your dandha (crack the whip)’ or assert her authority. However, she confided she was not confrontational or the bossy type. Her role as training manager also limited her control of employees and she respected the hierarchy and division of labour in the organisation. While she enjoyed the owner’s trust, she did not push her weight around or report negative feedback about local colleagues. She said she hesitated to be autocratic and maintained her subdued style of control and belief in empowering workers through training. Conscious of her status as an outsider, she avoided conflicts or tense confrontations with subordinates and colleagues.

2. Willing performers

In the next two examples, I demonstrate how Filipino transnationals in powerful structural work-based positions negotiate their marginal social positions (gender/nationality) through the performance of professional competence and an autocratic or assertive style of authority.

I notice that those Filipino workers whose explicit task is to monitor standards of things produced are more comfortable in performing authority that locals recognise. This is
evident among representatives of foreign buyers in the manufacturing sector. In this set up, foreign buyers provide manufacturing instructions and product standards to local manufacturers. The Filipino representatives inspect finished products, evaluate their quality and send a report of their findings to their head office. The report documents the type of (tolerable) errors in a batch of products which could mean profit or loss for the company.

Amelia, 60, was one of the several, mostly female, representatives I met. She worked for an American company that outsourced production from factories in Delhi. Before joining the company she had 20 years of experience in the garments industry starting as a sewer and, through talent and hard work, capping her career as a quality control manager in factories in Vietnam and Cambodia. Her assignment was to ensure that factories comply with the buyer’s product standards. The circumstance under which she was posted in Delhi is important to this discussion. She confided to me that the person she replaced, also a Filipino national, could not stand up to the local factory owners and agent, who insisted on their way of doing things. The former representative approved shipments that went beyond the level of tolerance for errors. The American buyer was not happy to pay for such quality. The company wanted her to work in Delhi because she could handle the people and situation.

Hanging out with Amelia and accompanying her on factory visits allowed me to verify this claim. She was comfortable asserting her authority. I also observed that such performance was necessary because men, who dominate the shop floor and own factories, tended to undermine women. In one of those visits, Amelia conducted an in-line inspection, a step in the production process where she checked whether or not a product had been made according to the specifications and sample. In this important stage before mass production, she gave feedback to the quality inspector of the agent and factory supervisor. As she was examining a piece of skirt, the men stood close to her. She slapped the arm of the quality inspector who made a pass at her. Though I felt awkward Amelia continued her task. She started giving suggestions to the factory supervisor on how to rectify the errors she spotted. They argued about a technique but she prevailed. She pulled out her pen and started listing down the errors. Realising he had not done his job, the quality inspector kept wiping sweat from his forehead. Amelia raised her eyebrow and started to make a move out of the factory. I trailed behind, still noting the interesting encounter.
This performance of authority was necessary to ensure the implementation of standards across distance. However, this authority also derived from a structural relationship of power between Amelia’s position and the factory owners. Her reports meant profit or loss for the owners and the workers’ employment status. She did not hesitate to use her power to get the work done.

Finally, I share the case of DJ, 32, to exemplify how one demonstrates knowledge, skill and authority to subordinates and customers. Here the process of negotiating relationships in the workplace involves learning about local culture. Unlike the work of quality inspectors like Amelia who impose external standards, the work of visual merchandisers depends on the adaptation of standards based on local market reality. DJ is a senior manager for visual merchandising at Desi Home, a leading chain of stores specialising in home furnishing. As head visual merchandiser, he looks after the work of junior visual merchandisers in every store. As a professional designer, he determines standards and plans for the stores’ visual merchandising requirements. What makes this case also significant is that he occupies a privileged gender position as male, but is undermined by colleagues because of his nationality and his status as an outsider. He confided that a colleague from the company’s human resources department told him “we don’t need you here”. Indeed, he said his performance of professional competence was an attempt to prove the worth of a Filipino worker among his colleagues and subordinates. Despite the words of his Indian colleague, he was (like other informants) trusted by the company owner and his superior. The pressure to perform, as defined by the organisation, (Fournier 1999; Mc Kenzie 2001) that is to attract customers and increase sales, was immense.

When DJ started, he was aggressive and tried to apply what he learned from working in Dubai to India. He admitted that it was not effective; so he began asking customers and consequently learned from them. Retail is dependent on consumer behaviour and preferences. He listened, made an effort to understand local beliefs and consumption practices, and used this knowledge to demonstrate his professional competence as an interior designer and visual merchandiser. He adopted specific approaches for different customers based on their background:
Here you have to respect their culture. ... You need to follow that! You ask the customer, “Ma’am are you still believing in vaastu?” “Yes! I want everything by vaastu!” You need everything—arrangement and design—to conform to vaastu. If not, nothing will happen. But those educated clients and customers who have been abroad “No problem, do as you like!” ... (DJ)

DJ learned vaastu through interacting with customers. Based on my observations and conversations, he interacted with customers to make them feel in control. However, among his junior visual merchandisers he deployed a more authoritative approach to enforce professional standards and conduct:

Before I implement new standards, I have to call the VMs [visual merchandisers] to the office for actual training for a week. I have to do [it] by myself; you need to feed them everything, such as how to fold. It should be detail by detail. And then I have a checklist. We call it audit report. The checklist will affect the increment of the VM and store manager. So since I’m not in the store all the time, I give the responsibility to area managers to monitor the VMs. There are some stores that are located very far and it’s difficult to maintain standards. But they are very clever. If they know I am going to Hyderabad [700 kilometres from Mumbai]—I don’t know maybe they have contacts in the office—four days before I arrive at the store, they make it ready! (DJ)

DJ’s hands-on approach was also contingent upon his awareness of the level of skills of his subordinates. He pointed out their ability to understand visual merchandising concepts but inadequacy in executing ideas. This situation called for close supervision and a system that rewarded good performance. Linking his subordinates’ quality of work to their salary was a way for DJ to motivate them and instil self-discipline. In delegating supervision of his staff to area managers, he exercised control from a distance. The quote above also illustrates how the local workers perform strategically or resist authority in this controlled or monitored environment.

The situation of transnational migrants as outsiders, especially in the context of Indian cities, necessitates a performance as a way of negotiating one’s position in the workplace. Demonstrating ability or knowledge is not only a performance of authority, but also a role that is enacted in a type of relationship in the workplace.

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2 Vaastu shastra is an architectural treatise of medieval India, which is based on a metaphysical design philosophy and applied to the construction of furniture, vehicles, building details, buildings, and settlements (Sinha 1998).
Informal mentoring relationships

One balmy evening, amid the honking of cars and auto-rickshaws in my street, I was checking the Facebook profile of Oscar, DJ’s friend who worked for rival company Ideal Home. I heard about him from other research participants who told me to include him in my study. The company transferred Oscar to Bangalore after almost three years in Delhi. I introduced myself on Facebook and immediately got a positive response. A month later, I finally met him as he was recalled to Delhi to open a store in the city’s newest mall. While browsing at his photo albums, a comment thread triggered by a photograph grabbed my attention.

The photograph showed a display corner with Oscar in the foreground and a cluster of repro prints on the wall in the background. He sat on a couch in a thinking position and looked directly at the camera. The following is an (unedited) exchange between Oscar and his former colleague, Sita, in the comments space below the picture:

Sita: Wat r u thinking [Oscar] after doing such a beautiful wall display ...... Gr8 idea!!

Oscar: Thats a collage way of displaying which i taught on you also..

Sita had resigned from Ideal Home and became a freelance design consultant. Her comment showed praise for her former boss. Tellingly, Oscar’s response intended more to instruct than to acknowledge Sita’s compliment; it revealed Oscar’s self-image as a ‘teacher’ and perhaps a reference to their teacher-student relationship in the workplace. Indeed, I noticed a general tendency among my research participants to act like teachers or mentors among their subordinates and customers. A ‘teaching’ mode was also evident in my informants’ didactic tone in interviews and interactions.

The lack of a skilled local workforce in the manufacturing, organised retail and service sectors creates a situation where workers from overseas are hired and presumed to have the expertise to execute tasks and/or impart their skills. In this context, workplace interactions are oriented toward introducing and learning work standards, systems and practices. The corporate expatriate trains a local counterpart who will eventually take on the former’s position. What this ethnography finds is the possibility of a ‘naturally occurring mentoring relationship’ (Dougherty et al. 2007) that coexists with this formal arrangement. Dougherty et al. (2007: 140) define this informal relationship as naturally
formed, mutually beneficial and maintained on a voluntary basis. These characteristics were evident in relations between Filipino workers and their local subordinates.

I observed this mode of relationship in the workplace and from both Filipino and Indian research participants themselves. During meetings or chats with subordinates, Filipino workers slipped into lecturing mode and delighted in sharing their knowledge. When I asked Filipino workers for local colleagues whom I could interview for this study, they always referred me to those they taught at work. These current or former subordinates constantly used the word guru, teacher or mentor when describing Filipino workers. The Sanskrit word guru is a common word Filipinos and Indians use to refer to a teacher. In the Indian context, guru is paired with shishya (disciple); this mentoring relationship implies intense ‘emotional involvement’ (Copley 2006, pp. 194, 197). As discussed above, Filipino workers create professional distance at work. Thus, ‘student’ is more appropriate as it conveys an authoritative distance in the learning relationship between a superior and subordinate. In being friendly and approachable, Filipino workers enable a space to learn for subordinate colleagues. A guru-student relationship is aligned with the expectations of local subordinates from their superior. It satisfies their need for motivation, authoritative guidance and a more friendly (as opposed to intimidating) relationship at work.

In this informal guru-student relationship, local subordinates see the value of the knowledge and skill that they could learn from transnational workers. They are convinced by the professional competence of a Filipino transnational, who in turn is willing to mentor subordinates at work. From this mutually beneficial arrangement, local workers acquire new skills and Filipino transnationals find personal fulfilment in sharing skills. Being the source of knowledge reinforces their authority in the workplace and status as expatriates in India.

While imparting skills is embedded in the work of Filipino workers, a willingness to share or take on a mentoring role is a condition for the relationship to take place (Dougherty et al. 2007, p. 146). My local informants told me that Filipino workers tended to share ideas compared to fellow local colleagues who tended to keep knowledge to themselves. For example, Arjun, 30, pointed out the qualities of Rolando, 50, his mentor:
He is a very nice person. And if you ask me, he has been more than a mentor to me. Whatever he knows, he doesn’t hesitate to share it with you. And that’s the biggest trait that all designers don’t have. Because it is a trade secret.

Conversely the attitude and potential of a student are crucial for a mentor. Filipino informants willingly taught workers who were open, motivated and had abilities that could be honed. A common pattern was the local’s interest in the job and openness to learn. Moreover, a key characteristic of this workplace relationship was the superior’s equal treatment of a subordinate.

The story of Oscar, a visual merchandising manager for an Indian multinational company, and his students, Gita and Puja, exemplify an ideal case of this guru-student relationship. Gita, 26, a staff member in the sales department, met the Filipino worker when he was new in the post and was starting to introduce visual merchandising standards to the stores. Oscar approached her and asked if she was keen to do visual merchandising. Gita took the offer and realised that it was what she liked to do. She described her mentor as ‘very friendly and not very bossy’ and open to suggestions and ideas: ‘Whatever I say it’s good, he’d do that; whatever he says it’s good, we do it’.

Another student, Puja, 28, described the Filipino worker as ‘hands on’ compared to local superiors who ‘just order things around’. She also said that Oscar treated her like his peer: ‘I don’t feel he is my boss; he is more like same level working together’.

This informal workplace relationship has a transformative potential. The acquisition of new skills and knowledge opens opportunities within and beyond the company. Gita told me that Oscar lobbied for her promotion. Having cultivated an interest in design by working as a visual merchandiser, she decided to leave the company and study interior design. At the time of the interview, she was working for a design firm, and according to her mentor, was getting a better salary. Oscar admitted that their company did not pay their workers well. Affluent employees like Gita can afford to change jobs and seek better employers. The skills or experience that they acquired from working with the Filipino transnational helped them in their careers. Puja, who came from the northeast state of Manipur to work in Delhi, remained in the company and rose up the ranks to become a supervisor. As discussed in Chapter 2, Northeast migrants in Delhi have benefitted from opportunities in the expanding retail market. In the case of Oscar and his students, their workplace relationship evolved into friendship. Gita remained in
touch even as she left the company. Oscar and Puja’s friendship indicates the ties between local and transnational migrants in Delhi that are forged by globalising workplaces.

A guru-student relationship also existed between Indian employers and Filipino workers. From the point of view of my Filipino informants, the nature of this relationship was more personal than professional. Indian business owners or work superiors not only mentored Filipino workers but also treated them like a family member. Such was the case with Manuel, the manager quoted above, and his mentor Anthony, a non-resident Indian from the state of Kerala who lived most of his adult life in the Middle East. They met in Dubai where they both worked for a retail company. The timing of their meeting was fortuitous. Manuel was duped by a previous employer and was not given the job he applied for. He left and found an entry-level job in a retail company where Anthony worked. The mentor saw his potential and taught him visual merchandising. When Anthony was recruited by a Mumbai-based Indian conglomerate to head the operations of its retail business, he took Manuel along to handle the stores’ visual merchandising. Under his continued guidance, the Filipino worker’s career flourished in India. He did not only win international awards for one of India’s home grown organised retail companies, but also contributed to the expansion of its stores from four to 22 in four years.

Manuel confided that he owed Anthony a debt of gratitude for giving him a career opportunity. He elaborated: ‘I am happy working with the company, the owner they are very good to me. And my boss [Anthony] he’s treating me like his family…You feel you are very important to them. Who are we? We are not even Indians’. Being treated as part of family indicates the personal importance of the relationship (Lakha 2005). Compared to the friendship between Oscar and his students, there was a paternal dimension in the way Anthony and Manuel related to each other.

In the last section, I describe another local form of superior-subordinate relationship that is imbued with a paternal quality. If the guru-student relationship is premised on the sharing of knowledge, the employer as patron arrangement in the workplace is based on providing money.
Employers as patrons

The last section discusses the role of a patron in the superior-subordinate work relationship. I observed that Filipino workers who manage multinational companies were expected to become patrons of their employees. In an ethnography of work relations in the textile industry in South India, De Neve (2001) finds that the authority of an employer draws from his ability to become a patron, that is to provide jobs and lend money (p. 160). From the pragmatic perspective of multinational employers, providing extra benefits and extending financial help to employees minimised the attrition rate and motivated employees to stay. Acting as patrons was a personal approach to the instrumental employer-employee relationship. In other words, professionalism was enacted by local employees under the condition that their performance was compensated. To demonstrate this claim, I describe the experiences of a main informant, Carlo, a factory operations manager, who gave me access to his workplace and permission to interview his co-workers.

Carlo, 32, and his Brazilian general manager, Rodrigo, 40, came to Delhi in 2006 and started the India operations of a European manufacturing company. In describing his experience in India, Carlo identified with the male protagonist of the film *Outsourced* (2006), a story about an American expatriate who works for a US firm selling kitsch items and sets up a call centre in India. Aside from depicting the mundane challenges of running a modern company under stereotypical local conditions of power cuts, flood and cows in the office premise, the film suggests the idea that doing business in India means consideration for the needs of employees. Todd, the main character, learns that his employees feel alienated from their job. He closes the professional distance and asks questions about how they can improve their work. The workers wonder if they can decorate their drab work stations and have actual samples of products they sell over the phone to US customers and not just their images on their computer screens. Todd gives in and the employees’ productivity increases.

Carlo and Rodrigo’s situation resembled the storyline of *Outsourced*. As a company that both manufactured and sold goods to the local market, the stakes are higher. Their mother company invested millions of euros to start a business and expected to recover and make a profit. In my interview with Carlo and Rodrigo, I learned that the main challenge was to keep good employees. As a multinational company, they offered
higher wages and salaries compared to local manufacturing firms. Carlo declared that many of the employees who were recruited when they started were still around. Two employees, one manager and one supervisor, who resigned, decided to come back after a short stint outside. At the same time, there were certain posts in the company that were perennially vacant because qualified employees were difficult to keep or find. The situation in Carlo’s company contrasts with the prevailing trend among Indian workers in the private sector who do not stay long in one firm. When Carlo introduced me to his superior, Rodrigo, the latter, having learned of my research, asked me, “What motivates the Indian worker? Is it money?”. He requested that I survey his employees because he was simply baffled or, as I found later, in need of validation for the strategy he and Carlo adopted to keep their good employees.

So I fulfilled my obligation to my hosts and came up with a report. In response to Rodrigo’s question, I found that employees felt satisfaction in a supportive and learning environment at work where they could also enjoy a stable job. The satisfaction in learning linked to Carlo and Rodrigo’s mentoring roles. Employees recognised their effort in “teaching each everything how to do our job”. However, what was not revealed in interviews with the local employees was the fact that Carlo and Rodrigo provided extra financial assistance to their employees. Carlo confided that they usually gave loans (payable by salary deduction) to help employees in their weddings, emergency situations and even securing a car loan. I witnessed Rodrigo approve a request for a salary loan, which, according to the employee, would be used for a relative’s wedding. Carlo himself helped Sunil, a security guard, get a permanent employment with the company. The latter was grateful and says he regarded Carlo as a ‘god’. Sunil told me that he displayed a picture of his boss alongside Hindu gods in the puja (shrine) corner of his house. As De Neve (2001) points out, authority is linked to one’s capacity to provide employment. Transnational employers acted as patrons and moneylenders, thereby securing goodwill and loyalty. As patrons, Carlo and Rodrigo became familiar and valuable people in the eyes of their employees. They were not outsiders who used their labour, but ‘gods’ who occupied puja space, the inner sanctum of the local’s home.
Conclusion

The process of making and transcending boundaries in the workplace reveals the ways Filipino transnational workers constitute themselves through professionalism, which expresses both their ability and work ethic. In so doing, they mirror how Indian workers distinguish between public and private firms (Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase 2009), IT and old company employees (Upadhya 2011), and local and expatriate workers (Vaidyanathan 2012). As Filipino workers become part of globalising workplaces in Indian cities, their boundary work is symptomatic of their role as agents of neoliberal ideologies of accountability and efficiency (Glick Schiller 2009). The standards, ethics and practices that they promote not only modernise the workplace, but also potentially transform their local co-workers.

However, as the ethnographic material presented in this chapter also demonstrates, they need to negotiate their position as outsiders through performance in order to justify their authority in the workplace. I find that demonstrating ability and performing in familiar roles as strong but nurturing leaders, gurus and patrons enabled them to become insiders whose authority is easily recognised. In so doing, they not only form connections at work, but also transform themselves in the process. Filipino workers claim a sense of achievement in their overseas sojourn (Aguilar 1999) by becoming mentors and patrons. In so doing they cross professional and ethnic boundaries and form connections with local co-workers. The outside agents of modernity and neoliberal work practices are made familiar and more humane through local relations.

In the next chapter, I explore boundary work in the context of a mediated space, a newsgroup for Filipinos in India. Filipino-Indian interactions beyond the workplace shall be explored in more detail.
Chapter 4
Filipinos in India newsgroup:
Spatial, symbolic and moral politics of an online community

Introduction

Filipino transnationals in different cities and localities in India are connected through an email-based newsgroup called ‘Filipinos in India’ (FII) (hereafter FII) hosted on Yahoo. The newsgroup or e-group is assumed here to be one of the ‘continuous social spaces’ (Miller & Slater 2000) where Filipino transnationals interact. This chapter examines how geographically dispersed Filipinos in India and their local kin (who also subscribe to the newsgroup) create a community and relate to each other in a relatively anonymous mediated space. It looks at two types of relationships: first, between kababayan (compatriots) or the “comradeship a citizen feels for a fellow national” (Anderson 1983 cited in Gupta 1992/2003, p. 321); and second, between Filipino and Indian nationals. Following Gupta and Ferguson (1992), I assume that national identity is a production and has an emotional dimension. While the chapter is primarily concerned with online boundary work and relations, it simultaneously addresses the parallel process of (re)producing national identity in a ‘symbolic space’ (Silverstone 2005, p. 197). Before proceeding, the terms kababayan and mediated social space need further elaboration.

Subscribers to the FII newsgroup usually address each other as kababayan or kabayan, its short form. The term provides an emic framework to understand how Filipinos regard each other. Ka is a prefix that suggests a relation. Bayan translates to locality and changes in meaning depending on scale. In the Philippine homeland, bayan usually means town; however, in the overseas context, the word refers to one’s country of origin, the Philippines. Therefore kababayan means being related on the basis of common local origins. Addressing a person as kabayan is a form of endearment. Hence, the relationship implies “a moral obligation to be hospitable” (Silverstone 2007). In the context of the mediated space of the newsgroup, the kabayan or non-kabayan in India is ‘relatively anonymous’ (O’Sullivan & Flanagin 2003). It is relatively anonymous because members of the newsgroup may live in the same city or locality or eventually meet face-to-face.
Providing a common platform that is accessible through an email account, a newsgroup is a text- and image-based interactive medium that enables instantaneous, asynchronous and one-to-many communication. It presumes access to and literacy of the medium (Livingstone 2004). Interaction on the newsgroup is a form of mediated communication. Roger Silverstone theorises, “all mediated communication is in one sense or another, political: seeking to persuade, seeking to define one reality as opposed to another, including and excluding while at the same time informing or entertaining” (Silverstone 2005, p. 190). Thus, engagement in a mediated space is primarily discursive. I examined boundary work on the FII newsgroup by focusing on discursive practices such as commenting, debating or making utterances. Recognising that feelings indicate evaluations of people, relationships and situations (Lutz & White 1986; Svašek 2010), I also paid attention to the emotional character of online interactions (O’Sullivan & Flanagin 2003).

Acknowledging the spatial character of the online community, I examined how subscribers described and regarded the newsgroup as a place (see Couldry & McCarthy 2004) and how they made sense of their (non-)participation. The problematic nature of anonymous online interactions also called for an appropriate framework for analysis. Hence, I adopted O’Sullivan and Flanagin’s (2003) approach, which considers the intentions, perspectives and norms of interlocutors.

This ethnography of an online community in ‘transnational space’ (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003, p. 25) finds two intertwined social processes: on one hand, is a tendency towards sociality and mediation; and, on the other, is a spatial and symbolic politics of inclusion and exclusion based on evaluations of the Other. Fellow kababayan connect on the newsgroup for social support but, intentionally or unintentionally, evaluate each other on the basis of ability and propriety. This dynamic generates feelings of belonging and non-belonging, which shape how the online collective and space is construed. Interactions with the Indian members reveal a tendency to reproduce national identities and boundaries. This symbolic differentiation informs the parallel process of reterritorialising the mediated social space, on the part of Filipino transnationals; and asserting the grounding of Filipino transnationals in Indian territory and their connections with Indian nationals, on the part of locals.
The chapter will demonstrate how subscribers of FII newsgroup debate and argue as much as they seek sociality and share sentiments. In so doing, Filipino transnationals create a symbolic space where identities such as nationality is (re)produced or constructed (Silverstone 2005, p. 198). This discursive process is enabled by the medium’s interactive capacity to connect interlocutors (Ibid, p. 202). Its interactive potential, according to Silverstone: “raises the question of the moral status of those who communicate with each other, and of the ethical status of the kind of communications that are generated online” (Silverstone 2005, p. 202). Drawing moral boundary was evident in the interactions on the newsgroup of Filipino transnationals in India.

Filipinos and Indians exchange moral perspectives, which could be interpreted as a politics of claiming moral ascendancy over one another. Concurrently, such debates, albeit their emotionality, become a means to learn about the Other and offers opportunities for mediation, a situation where actors become intermediaries between adversaries (Williams 1983 cited in Livingstone 2009, p.12).

These interrelated arguments are elaborated in the following six sections. I begin with a brief history of the newsgroup and the ways it is appropriated by its users. The following two sections focus on how fellow kababayans relate to and evaluate each other on the basis of ability and propriety. I then proceed to analyse Filipino and Indian interactions and establish their shared emotionality and preoccupation with morality. The last section explores the possibility of turning misunderstandings (arising the from the group’s politics) into opportunities to deconstruct notions of the Other. It offers the idea that online spaces of transnationals are places of and for mediation (Livingstone 2009), where social distance and symbolic differences are negotiated.

**How subscribers appropriate the newsgroup**

Before discussing the nature of interactions in the newsgroup, I describe how the online community started and what it meant for the subscribers. In so doing, I provide the context from which to understand the significance of the newsgroup in everyday life of transnational Filipinos in India.

The Filipinos in India (FII) newsgroup was formed in June 2006 at an Independence Day dinner organised by the Philippine Embassy in Delhi for the Filipino community. I
was present during that gathering. As part of its work to document Filipino nationals in India, the embassy passed around a form to collect contact information from the guests. Amid the chatter, a guest suggested to form a newsgroup. An employee of a multinational IT company volunteered to set up and moderate the online collective and named it Filipinos in India group.

In its early existence, members of the online community organised to meet social gatherings and eventually formed an organisation based in Delhi. The membership has increased through word of mouth. For example, subscribers who run into other kababayan in airports, hotels or malls refer them to the newsgroup. The embassy also encourages newly arrived Filipinos to be part of the online community. This facility has not only connected spatially dispersed Filipinos in India but has also become the medium through which the Philippine embassy disseminates information to its current and former citizens who include (according to their migrant status in India) overseas Filipino workers, accompanying spouses of others nationals and spouses of locals. In hindsight, I saw the efforts of the embassy (or the Philippine state), such as organising parties, to build and maintain a community of Filipinos in India. Thus this ethnography also highlights the assumption that the state also initiates the formation of communities of its citizens overseas.

The newsgroup brings together Filipino transnationals of diverse social and ethnic backgrounds who live and work in Indian cities and remote areas. Because most members are located in the capital, including the embassy, the events that are organised through the newsgroup happen in Delhi. However, the interactions between kababayan online transcend their locations. Some Indian locals who are related (by marriage or friendship) to Filipino subscribers are also part of the group.

Interactions or posts usually alternate between Filipino and English. In general, participants communicate in Filipino, the national language that is primarily based on Tagalog. Taglish or code switching between Filipino and English is also common. Regional languages such as Ilocano and Visayan are also used, especially in spontaneous interactions among speakers of the language. However, the use of languages other than Filipino and English became an issue during the early days of the e-group. The issue was framed in terms of being inclusive in the use of language so as not to isolate non-Filipino subscribers.
As declared in its profile on Yahoo, the FII newsgroup aims “to create a virtual community that will help Filipinos and friends living in India or about to live in India through discussions, insights, recommendations, advice, and support about living in India”. Beyond information dissemination and exchange, the online facility has become a space where subscribers engage in spontaneous interactions, seek help beyond information (e.g. financial assistance) and share sentiments. It has also been used to mobilise members in the same locality for events and emergency situations. My content analysis of the messages from 2006 until 2012 reveals that how participants appropriated the medium are contingent upon their migrant status, geographical or social isolation, and the material constraints or demands of everyday life in their respective Indian localities.

How the newsgroup is appropriated by its subscribers can be described, for the purpose of analysis, in terms of its communicative intents (Madianou & Miller 2012, p. 125) and contents, which I summarise in Table 1. Intents mean a specific goal (Knapp & Daly 2011) of a communicative act, which takes the form of replying or posting a message through one’s email address. Contents refer to the topic or theme of a message. In practice, a subscriber may post or reply with more than one intention. There is the possibility that communicative goals overlap or change in the course of interactions (Knapp & Daly 2011, p. 16). One may post to inquire about where to buy sinigang mix (powdered tamarind combined with other spices). The subsequent replies to such query may not only answer the question but also spur a conversation aiming at sociality. In classifying and describing the messages according to this scheme, we are able to understand what Filipinos in India do in this space or how they use this medium in everyday life.

My participation in and observations of the topic threads of the e-group reveal several intentions. The FII newsgroup is not only used as a medium for inquiry or information exchange but also as a way of organising activities of the community, initiating sociality, debating issues in the community and beyond, and helping or mobilising different forms of support to fellow kababayan. In their own words, participants reveal how the newsgroup is meaningful to them. A female subscriber shared: “For me, a Filipino
married to an Indian and living in India, this e-group helped me and made me feel that I was not alone. In fact, I met my only Filipina friend in Hyderabad through this newsgroup”.

A skilled worker employed by a multinational company saw it as “an outlet for stress and homesickness, etc. for us who are away from our family”. Another Filipino who worked in a remote place in the subcontinent pointed out the importance of the email facility for both the embassy and its citizens, especially in times of emergency situations. He recalled that when India and Pakistan almost declared war on each other in 2002, the embassy had no means to contact Filipino citizens who were stationed far from major cities. He said the embassy was grateful that Filipinos in India set up the newsgroup, which became a way to reach out to Filipinos who were not registered with them. Finally, another member opined that the FII Yahoo group was an “advocacy” to build a community of Filipinos in India.

Table 12. Communicative intents and contents of newsgroup messages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intents</th>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| 1. Inquiry (seeking/sharing information and advice) | 1.1. Indian visa requirements or policies (application for extension, spouse’s visa)  
1.2. Philippine legal requirements or consular services (passport renewal, overseas voting, document authentication)  
1.3. Remittance services  
1.4. Parcel services  
1.5. Food ingredients (where to find Filipino-made spice mix) |
| 2. Sociality (seeking company, initiating conversations) | 2.1. Kababayan in the locality/online (coffee meet-up)  
2.2. Jokes/anecdotes/news  
2.3. Banters  
2.4. Welcome message to / reply from new members  
2.5. Good news about members and Filipinos in general  
2.6. Invitations to events involving kababayan  
2.7. Requests for prayers |
| 3. Help (seeking assistance) | 3.1. Financial assistance (medical or repatriation)  
3.2. Emergency situation (domestic violence) |
| 4. Expression (complaints, grievances and sentiments) | 4.1. Responses to offensive posts  
4.2. Behaviour of subscribers |
| 5. Coordination and organisation (seeking suggestions, votes or pledges; disseminating event information; updating status on initiatives) | 5.1. Community events (parties, sport)  
5.2. Official functions of the Philippine embassy (election, embassy official visits to Indian cities, official visits and ceremonies)  
5.3. Local events  
5.4. Out-of-town trips  
5.5. Nomination of community officers |
| 6. Stating opinion and positions / criticising | 6.1. Proposals of the community  
6.2. Posts of members |
| 7. Control / discipline | 7.1. Reminders from the moderator |
Clearly, the modes of involvement of the subscribers indicate more than just exchange of information. The utterances and interactions of members in this online space suggest a sociality that is shaped by their migrant conditions in India. Before I analyse and discuss the social dynamic in the newsgroup, it is necessary to point out that Filipino transnationals use other new information and communication technologies (i.e. the mobile phone and social media (i.e. Facebook)). What needs to be emphasised here are two observations: First, interactions from the e-group continue on social media. Second, the mobile phone is used in conjunction with the newsgroup, especially when members organise activities such as mobilising help or social gatherings. The migration and cross-referencing of interactions across media, as well as unmediated forms of communication (i.e. community meetings), make visible and audible the affective and normative dimensions of relations between kababayan.

**Spontaneity and propriety in the online community**

Three years ago, a series of threads or interactions triggered a response from the newsgroup’s moderator and a subsequent debate among its members. The case exemplifies the tension that generally characterises the online community: spontaneity and propriety. The perspectives, assumptions and emotions that members brought into the debate also indicated their reflexive and critical understanding of their relationships online. The passionately reasoned posts or carefully composed responses from the participants provided evidence of boundary making based on ability, particularly one’s level of literacy or intellect. Literacy in the context of the newsgroup assumes a familiarity with the rules of online communication or netiquette. Hence, ability overlaps with propriety or etiquette. Shirley Young (2010) links etiquette with the regulation of the self and social order based on specific virtues (p. 246). Moreover, etiquette (embodying/displaying etiquette) was a means for the middle classes to define

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1 The availability of other media gives rise to a situation of polymedia where the choice of a specific medium for social interactions is a social and moral question (Madianou & Miller 2012). One of the conditions of polymedia, according to Madianou and Miller, is access to a range of media. Majority of my informants, especially those in the cities, have a situation of polymedia because of the cheap cost of communication in India. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to compare my informants’ uses of other media.

2 In fact, by the time I physically left the field site, two Facebook accounts catering to Filipinos in Delhi and Bangalore, respectively, have been created. I have also monitored the proceedings in those sites and find striking similarities in the social dynamic.
themselves in relation to the lower classes in 19th century America (Young 2010, p. 237). Evaluating people based on propriety therefore suggests the classed nature of the tension and boundary process in the FII online community.

What started as an attempt at sociality ended in a debate about the proper use of the newsgroup. A subscriber posted an invitation for coffee that evolved into a lively interaction among several people. The replies to each other’s banter generated a “deluge of messages” in the inbox of subscribers. One expressed her shock at the large quantity of messages from the FII newsgroup; another complained that they drowned “more important” messages in her inbox. The moderator intervened and proposed to screen all messages and check whether or not they were “beneficial to the community”. He reasoned on the basis of propriety: “I know that we are all excited to hear comments, responses, jokes and your thoughts on matters. But there is a time and a place for everything; and we need to rethink whether it is appropriate to address them in this e-group”.

The moderator’s directive elicited a dozen of responses that opposed, critiqued or supported his reading of the situation and proposed action. I find three perspectives about the proposal to ban “messages that are not beneficial to the community” or the moderator’s call for propriety.

Those who supported the suggestion highlighted the value of consideration for others:

Not that we do not encourage people interact with one another that makes any e-group vibrant, but we should think and be sensitive with our other members that may not be able relate on your postings. (Participant 1)

The opposing viewpoint made an appeal for equal treatment by providing a relativist critique of what constituted as “important” messages:

I just think that having the emails moderated is not fair to the subscribers (is this censorship?) if one subscriber feels his/her post is “important”, who are we to say that it is not and choose not to post it on the e-group? (Participant 2)
Moreover, another participant saw the moderator’s reminder as unnecessary and demoralising for members, especially those who were geographically isolated and whose only means of connecting with other kababayan was through the newsgroup.

Finally there was a view that called for tolerance and sought to balance the need for sociality and sensitivity in building an online community:

One can always choose to see life as either half-empty or half-full. Take this Yahoo group, for instance. You can see it as half-empty: Full of mail whose topics you do not relate to, messages written in a language you cannot understand at all, an annoyance in your ever-busy day. Or you can see it as half-full: A way for Filipinos living in Delhi (and those related to them) to get-together, even virtually, exchange information, pleasantries, and perhaps some advice occasionally, and always with the eventual hope of actually spending time together physically, while on a journey to building a genuine community.

I therefore think that it would help all of us if we become a little more patient with everyone. I will draw the line with sexist jokes, with messages that will prejudice against other people based on gender, sex, race, or religion. I will draw the line with crude, coarse, unkind language.

But, otherwise, can we not be more tolerant? (Participant 3)

The debate that ensued from an attempt to control the spontaneous sociality or interactions in the FII e-group revealed not only their different expectations of the online community but also how they regarded their fellow kababayan. Aside from stating their perspectives on the debate, members gave suggestions on proper ways of using the email facility or dealing with a “deluge of messages”:

Create a new email account solely for this e-group. (Participant 4)

I also got bombarded by a lot of emails on the same subjects…but since they were not relevant to me, I just deleted them. Others who feel bothered with this can choose to just get a daily digest… (Participant 5)

Sa mga kababayan ko, pakiusap din po, kung may mga personal na usapin (To my compatriots, if you have personal concerns) addressed only to a few persons, wag na natin ilagay sa (let’s not channel them to the) e-group, simply copy, paste their email addresses and send them an email. (Participant 6)
The comments assumed different levels of media literacy (Livingstone 2004) among kababayan. A line from one of the posts illustrates this observation:

> Maybe…those individuals who have been sending messages through this group which are actually only intended for specific people—maybe they're not that well-versed with the dynamics of a mailing list, to begin with. (Participant 3)

Participant 3’s response indicated an evaluation of other subscribers’ media literacy (Livingstone 2004), suggesting their inability to anticipate the social consequences of a one-to-many interactive medium.

Some members who participated in the debate further commented on the nature of the trivial exchanges, which were viewed otherwise as important in building a migrant community. While tolerating the triviality of talk in the online community, they did not hide their dissatisfaction and expected a discursive engagement that was consistent with their expectation of a more ‘aware’ kababayan.

> Whether the information that we pass to all our kababayans through this e-group is important/relevant or not may be difficult to determine most of the time. But exercising some discretion and a bit of logic wouldn't hurt much. While I somehow appreciated being informed about where to buy pansigang mix [broth in powder form], boy bawang [a corn snack], or where to meet for coffee, etc. etc., I began to get exasperated when so many emails kept coming on same topic without necessarily offering new and more meaningful information or insight. (Participant 7)

> I just kept on reading messages which it seems to me “represent” the common consciousness of the Filipino here in India. Pray that I’m wrong that this is not the truly Filipino level of awareness, or perhaps these are only the members who are actively involved in networking and has all the free time and space. (Participant 8)

The awareness alluded to the intellectual ability of the subscribers. In a medium where one communicates primarily through written language, one’s level of literacy becomes evident through her utterances or posts. A kababayan was indeed evaluated in such terms. The call for propriety was an attempt to enforce a definition of a kababayan who was sensible, respectful and literate.

> Not surprisingly those who participated in the debate were college-educated or professionally qualified members of the online community. It is important to note that
some members were both in the ‘trivial’ and ‘serious’ threads of conversations. They were not as critical as those who found the ‘invitation for coffee’ banters irrelevant. Because they also indulged in spontaneous conversations, they were equally sympathetic to subscribers who sought personal rather than intellectual engagement.

Regardless of their position in the debate, most participants recognised the feelings of others. The sensitivity points to the participants’ awareness of the unequal levels of literacy among the members of the community. The ethical response that the situation called for was tolerance, according to Participant 3. Moreover, controlling the spontaneity of talk was not only antithetical to the efforts in building a community but also presumed the devaluation of the personhood of members on the basis of their intelligence.

…We’re not kids anymore. The members of this e-group think and have common sense and don’t need to be reminded repeatedly of what to do or to have our speech screened or moderated. It’s demoralising.

The debate ended with a call for unity and a didactic encore or ‘moral lesson’ (a recurring motif in every contentious discussion of this Filipino online community) from the moderator: “I believe the best thing that we can get from this situation is to learn. Past is past, we move on! This is once again, time for us to be united”. However, the above exchanges show that the notion of building a unified community of Filipinos and Indians with diverse abilities and agenda is tenuous. As Participant 3 pointed out: “Whoever said building a community is easy? It’s messy. And that, my friends, is why it’s fun!”

Comments as ‘emotional violence’

The previous section has established that the online community is a social space of spontaneity and propriety where members are subject to evaluations based on their intellectual ability, etiquette and sensitivity towards others. I now turn to the perspective of subscribers and examine how they felt and thought about their experiences on the newsgroup. Based on interviews and a close reading of discussion threads, I found that the practice of commenting may alienate members from the online collective. The
experiences of Risa and Aurora illustrate the emotional dimension of online community participation.

The organisation of Filipinos in India requested ideas for its logo on the e-group. Members gave sample designs and some replied with feedback on them. Risa made a suggestion. In the following interview excerpt, she described how she felt about comments from other members and the social dynamic in the online community. The way in which she talked about these comments also indicated her tendency to evaluate based on intellectual ability.

I observed that Filipinos on the Yahoo group, who are professionals, act like uneducated people! When I made a suggestion, the comments were insulting. [The e-group] should be a venue for exchange of ideas. They are asking for comments so they should respect people’s ideas. They act like uneducated people and their attempt to philosophise is out of place. We are judgmental and we don’t see where the other is coming from.

For example, I suggested that why don’t we have an image of Gandhi holding the Philippine flag? It’s a matter of the artist’s execution of the idea. I consulted a [local] lawyer if there is any legal implication and I got a favourable response. Then one commented that s/he could not imagine Rizal (the national hero of the Philippines) holding the flag of another nation. That person should see where I am coming from. Gandhi is every land’s man because of his philosophical perspective about non-violence adopted by the Philippines. Cory Aquino [a former Philippine president] herself the mother of democracy adopted the concept of non-violence and civil disobedience. That person’s perspective is limited. S/he should see first where a person is coming from before commenting. Anyway you cannot blame them because their knowledge is limited.

Risa recalled a similar experience involving another member, Aurora, who made a suggestion to the process of nominating and electing officers of the community. The following is an excerpt from Aurora’s query and the consequent comments and exchange with another member, Roberto:

Aurora: Is it possible to have an assistant secretary and assistant treasurer to ensure someone takes over a post in case the incumbent has to leave the country? And is there no auditor?

Roberto: Regarding your proposal for additional officers. It is enough to have a coordinator or moderator who will disseminate information about our next gathering or party. …We don’t need

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3 For example, one subscriber responded to Risa and suggested that instead of Gandhi, a bumhoy on a motor cycle carrying the Philippine flag might be a better idea. Bumhoy (from Bombay, the old name of Mumbai) is a pejorative term Filipinos use for Indians in the Philippines.
too many officers because we don’t have much lofty goals as an organisation aside from partying or play sport every weekend. Let’s just keep it simple! I am an advocate of KISS. Keep It Simple Stupid.

Aurora: …It is just a suggestion. Are you sure the next line up of officers only wants to do social gatherings? So please! …if my suggestion is not good for you, it's fine. Everyone has his/her own opinion. It just comes as insulting, if you don't mind.

Risa thought Roberto’s comments were disrespectful. She wanted to react but she did not want to be seen as interfering. She thought he did not understand the meaning of participation in a discursive space such as the e-group.

I asked Aurora about this exchange and she pointed out the tendency on the e-group to make judgments about people:

They judge you even though they don't know what you really want to do. They're asking suggestions, right? So you suggest. But the others they want to show right away that ‘look at me I am smart’. Lacking attention as they say....ha ha but when others explained to me that I was not the only one who got the same treatment [from Roberto] I understood...

Aurora’s reading of the situation reinforced the observation that members of the e-group tended to evaluate based on ability. She also interpreted such comments as a way of asserting status in this discursive space.

In making sense of her experience with the FII e-group, Risa thought about the character of that social space:

The environment that is created on the Yahoo group limits the participation of others, how you relate with others. You hesitate to comment because you are conscious that others will say bad things. So it’s establishing a culture of violence through the Internet. Saying stupid to a person is violence! It’s a violence to his personality and well being. You think about it all night. What did I say wrong? That’s harassment. Calling you stupid.

Risa felt hesitant to be a member of the group. This hesitation came from a dislike of the environment that is created by the nature of social interactions. “I don’t like the environment; I don’t like to belong to them. You cannot change them”.

The perspectives of members, like Risa and Aurora, of the FII e-group illustrate how the emotionality of commenting influences processes of sociality. While the e-group is conceived as both a mediating technology or a virtual communal space for spatially dispersed Filipino transnationals, the comments that evaluate one’s ability only produces social distance. The emotions generated by judgmental comments become attached to the space that is the newsgroup and may create feelings of alienation or belonging. In the following sections, I will analyse interactions between Filipinos and Indians and how they evaluate each other in the online community.

**A bad joke: The sensitive line between Filipinos and Indians**

While jokes or funny comments establish sociality or diffuse tensions in heated debates among Filipinos (Ignacio 2005, p. 113), they can also trigger the symbolic construction of boundaries between Filipinos and Indians. John Carty and Yasmine Musharbash point out that laughter can be implicated in processes of social inclusion and exclusion through demarcating difference between those sharing the joke and the object of laughter, or identifying collectively against an Other (Carty & Musharbash 2008, p. 214). They suggest that laughter might be linked to discrimination, domination and power imbalances (Ibid, p. 213). This anthropological perspective is appropriate in understanding a case where a news photo clipping shared by a Filipino subscriber evolved into a sarcastic exchange about the meanings of the participants’ national identities. Following O’Sullivan and Flanagin (2003), I consider not only the meanings that can be understood from the interactions but also the communicative intentions of participants which are evident in the interactions. Finally I also provide the context of the participants’ utterances, a layer of meaning that I derived from my ethnographic fieldwork or ‘being there’ when it happened. In the following case, I reveal the shared emotional sensitivity of Filipinos and Indians to their national identifications, and how attempts to devalue this deeply felt identity generates the production of symbolic boundaries.
Eduardo shared with the group a news photo clipping (see Figure 9) where an Indian man, half-submerged in a manhole, is held upside down by two fellow workers, each grabbing a leg. The title of the photo reads “Aspiring superpower at work”, and its caption states “Labourers find an innovative–and dangerous–way to install underground electric cables on a roadside in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, on Friday”. The image was taken by Reuters photographer Parivartan Sharma, a local, and was syndicated to local newspapers. Eduardo took time to cut out the photo from a broadsheet, scan and save it as a portable document file (PDF), and upload the image on the newsgroup. The circulation (Silverstone 1999, p. 13) of the image from the photographer, to the newspaper and to the newsgroup has assumed different meanings. At least from the broadsheet’s framing of the photo, the title already suggests a subtle commentary on the contemporary rhetoric of the Indian state’s desire to achieve super power status. The title ‘Aspiring superpower at work’ is the broadsheet’s humorous attempt to taper such aspirations and get the audience—the Indian public—to see the reality on the ground, that is the welfare of workers left out by this vision.

The immediate concern here is Eduardo’s attempt to reinforce the social commentary of the news image (and perhaps to seek validation of his own observations, a point I will return to below) and the newsgroup’s responses to his intention to share meaning. He accompanied this photo attachment with a note describing the situation as ‘Incredible
India’, a reference to the tagline of India’s international tourism campaign. His post reads:

Just want to share a very nice newspaper clipping why they call it "INCREdiBLE INdia".
Ngayon ko lang mas naunaawan kaya binansagan ang bansang ito 'INCREdiBLE INdia' (It’s only now that I have come to understand why this country is called Incredible India).

In re-labeling the news photo ‘Incredible India’, Eduardo turned a supposedly positive spin about the nation for a global audience into a commentary consistent with the reflexive critique of the newspaper. However, as a participant-observer I understood Eduardo’s use of ‘Incredible India’ in the context of how Filipino transnationals in India actually used the term in jest to comment on their unusual encounters with the locals or frustrating experiences in everyday life. What is meant to be a (sarcastic) joke among Filipinos was clearly perceived and taken negatively by an Indian member of the group, Subhir:

Hi Eduardo this is not a called INCREdiBLE INdia. Every country have a two faces. Moreover you have no right to say like this abt india if it is like that then why you are in India? Better go back to Philippines. We (INDIAN) have lots to say about your country too, but we respect all. And I am very sorry to say this to you I’m not into …hurting any one’s feeling but you forced me to write you. And don’t forget recent incident happen in Philippines, 9 tourist killed. Rest u can understand it…. Hope next time you think 100 times before say something wrong about anyone. Better check yourself first where you stand.

In this situation a local took offence at an outsider’s comment. What Subhir’s comments reveal is not just the local’s emotional sensitivity, but also a similar tendency among Filipinos to moralise. First, he stated his moral perspective, that is recognising simultaneous (dual) possibilities (a country has “two faces”) and then questioned the moral ascendancy of Eduardo. He reminded him of a recent incident in Manila where Philippine officials failed to avert a hostage crisis that claimed the lives of several Chinese tourists. However, in his attempt to give a moral evaluation of Eduardo’s post, he himself committed the very same act he found offensive.

Subhir’s moralising and exclusionary comment ‘if you only have bad things to say, then go back to the Philippines’ prompted other Filipino members of the newsgroup to defend Eduardo. Several of those who responded to Subhir’s comment were Filipinos married to locals. They explained to him the concept behind ‘Incredible India’ and
Eduardo’s intention. Stella, who is married to a local, posted an emphatic response:

…there was nothing insulting about the email at all. Even the news clipping was highlighting how innovative and hardworking those Indian workers were given that they have work to do but no equipment at hand. Which is why I think [Eduardo] said this is why they call India, ‘incredible’ -- I think the FILIPINOS who read his post understood that it's all about admiration for India and not to make fun of it.

This e-group is mainly for Filipinos in India, we do welcome non-Filipinos who wish to be part of this online community if in some way or another they have or want to have a link to the Philippines and the Filipino community, but i think everyone has to respect what this e-group is really for—FOR FILIPINOS who wish to communicate with fellow kababayans.

We do not promote insult or racist comments here, [Subhir]. This e-group is meant to provide support and assistance to Filipinos where necessary and a virtual 'home' where Filipinos living in India can feel they are amongst family.

I strongly suggest that before anyone sends a hurtful, violent or angry accusation or reaction to someone else's post in the future, please pause and really think first if your reaction even has any basis, because most probably, the other person only means well.

Angry email messages have no place in this e-group. It just ruins the ‘family’ atmosphere we have here. Anybody who feels they are not part of this virtual family or has anything against Filipinos can always leave the e-group.

In explaining the ‘joke’ and calling attention to Subhir’s insulting comments, Stella defined the boundaries and norms of belonging and non-belonging in the FII online community. The idea that jokes potentially exacerbate social rupture (Carty & Musharbash 2008, p. 214) rings true in this situation. The boundary between those who understood the joke and those who misread it has mutated into a division on the basis of nationality. Stella reinforced the meaning of this symbolic boundary (Cohen 1985) by invoking the norms of the discursive space (“angry email messages have no place in this e-group”) and evaluating Subhir’s comments on the basis of such desired conduct in the group. In using ‘family’ as a metaphor for the FII e-group, she gave the social space more symbolic value and thus made the feeling of belonging and non-belonging more palpable. Her threat of exclusion only mirrored Subhir’s comment. The exchange between Subhir and Stella demonstrated attempts to claim space, and therefore the power of exclusion and inclusion in their respective ‘territories’.
The symbolic construction of boundary (Cohen 1985) or the process of producing difference (Gupta & Ferguson 1992) based on nationality continued in this discursive space. Subscribers used news stories or journalistic narratives as symbolic resources to construct/deconstruct notions of the Filipino and Indian. I reiterate the observation that emotions are integral to the process of identity production, which informs the politics of inclusion and exclusion in online social formations. In such situation, it becomes more evident that, news stories, as narratives and representations of national identity, generate emotions such as hurt, pride or shame.

Filipino members started posting essays or news articles about achievements of their fellow citizens. Not to be outdone, Subhir shared an Indian version of such narrative. The essay lists the accomplishments of ‘Indians’ starting from the Indus Valley civilization up to the contemporary period. Such narratives highlight the achievements of the nation’s citizens and therefore generate a sense of pride. In the popular press or everyday language, this genre of writing is called a ‘feel-good story’, which, from the term itself, is supposed to generate a positive disposition. Sharing feel-good stories (and even bad news about the nation) could be a way of communicating or channeling feelings or sentiments. It was also the means to diffuse tension and initiate sociality in the online community.

These narratives circulate on- and offline, especially when the ‘nation’ is (symbolically) threatened or shamed. I recall that these articles were largely circulated or forwarded on email or social media after a hostage crisis in Manila in August 2010. The failure of Philippine authorities to rescue Chinese tourists from a disaffected police officer unfolded before a global media audience. Filipinos in the diaspora, including my informants, felt shame and humiliation. Mirca Madianou’s (2012) proposition about the potential of news to shame is made evident here. Synthesising various meanings of shame, Madianou defines it as “a negative feeling about the self which usually involves the exposure of a vulnerability and sense of inadequacy” (Madianou 2012, p. 4). She points to the symbolic power of news to expose one’s vulnerability and therefore generate a feeling of shame. This process of shaming indicates asymmetrical relations of power (Ibid, p. 5).

I interpret that the shame felt by Filipino transnationals refers to an exposure of their compatriots’ incompetency. As overseas workers who strive to perform competently
and create a positive image in the international labour market, this news portrayal contradicts the image they wish to show as a collective. As Madianou points out: “Shame arises when the self perceives itself as unable to control its own image, or the exposure of its image” (Madianou 2012, p. 5). In same vein, Eduardo’s relabeling of the news photo from ‘aspiring superpower’ to ‘Incredible India’ might have stirred a feeling of inadequacy or vulnerability in Subhir and his compatriots. Indeed both experiences of shame shows the affinity felt with a fellow national of kababayan. As the way Filipino subscribers of the group expressed solidarity with Eduardo showed, such form of relationship is apparent in this transnational social space. A group that has emotional investments in its collective image responds to attempts to devalue it by infusing it with more meaningful representations.

This incident of joking highlights not only symbolic boundaries but the emotions that fuel its construction. Eduardo might have intended to share his amusement with other kababayan but his joke triggered a process of inclusion and exclusion (Carty & Musharbash 2008) in a discursive space between Filipinos and Indians. A joke such as ‘Incredible India’ or a story of national failure hurt sentiments and heightened a sense of shame associated with the inconsistency between a desired or projected image of a nation and the unpredictable realities on the ground. This conflict simultaneously exposed the emotional and moral sensitivities of both Filipinos and Indians. While the joke resulted in solidarity based on nationality, it also exposed the common vulnerability of Filipinos and Indians to national shame. The discussion spurred by Eduardo’s joke demonstrates the struggle for symbolic value of one’s identity in a transnational space and the resulting politics of inclusion and exclusion that the discursive space engenders.

**A strange request: A gay man’s sentiments and his kababayan’s homophobia**

While the previous section examined the construction of difference based on nationality, this section focuses on processes of inclusion and exclusion on account of a kababayan’s gender. I compare the moral perspectives that frame the responses of members. In so doing, I highlight the struggle to claim moral status in this transnational space, a process that simultaneously challenges the territorial tendencies of members.
One controversial thread on the FII newsgroup is the story of Sammy, a self-identified straight-acting gay man. Sometime in January, he introduced himself to the group and claimed to be a government clerk in a town in Southern Philippines and, previously, a “professional singer and stage performer in Manila”. The reason why he signed up was his Indian “chatmate, friend, buddy and lover rolled into one” Suneet. Sammy met his Indian friend in a chat room and they continued communicating on the mobile phone. He described him as “a true guy but he loves gays, especially Filipino gays”. Sammy shared with the group: “I love him very, very much! And even we have not met each other but the love is still burning like a fire. I want to visit him in his place but my problem is at present, my income from my job is only up to my daily needs”. Sammy hoped that a fellow Filipino “with a golden heart” would help him realise his dream of meeting Suneet.

Sammy’s message appeared unusual and suspect. I observed that only male members of the newsgroup responded to the thread. The succeeding responses reveal homophobic reactions among Filipinos and a friendlier reception among the local members.

Praveen, a local, replied first and wished him well. He gave Sammy an unsolicited advice that if they decide to live together, the Philippines would be a better place to settle because Indian society is still not open to such relationships. Using propriety to justify their responses, two Filipino subscribers politely told Sammy that his request was out of place:

I dont mean to be rude (pardon me) but I believe this is not the right forum for you to burden us with whatever relationship you may have to somebody simply because he happens to be in India. Perhaps some members in this group can direct you to an appropriate website where your emotional pursuits and aspirations can be better attained. (Ryan)

There is always a place and a time for everything. Clear enough, this group is not a place for this kind of information. As [Ryan] said, you can go to other sites. Sites like, Friendster, Facebook, among others, which I suppose you already have, to be able to connect with your “honey pie”. Your first email is enough for all of us to understand your situation. Should there be any Pinoys in India willing to extend their hand to you, they will do as they please. Personal feelings must be done in a personal way. (Edward)

Both responses assume that the newsgroup is a public space with norms and limitations. In evaluating Sammy’s request as inappropriate and out of bounds, they excluded him
from the social space. In confronting Sammy, Filipino male members defined the boundaries of the online community. Personal and intimate concerns were beyond its scope, echoing the tension between spontaneity and propriety.

Sammy replied to both Ryan and Edward’s points and apologised. He explained himself: “I only feel as a Filipino that this group of Filipinos in India is deserving to know my beautiful experience meeting an Indian guy through the help of new technology”. Sammy continued: “I know that you also know that most Filipinos are romantic, sweet and emotional when it comes to falling in love”. He mentioned that he was also trying to make friends with kababayan in India by sharing his situation. In another message, he thanked the moderator for admitting him to the group and expressed his desire: “I am praying to our GOD the Almighty that in the near future I can visit India, the place where my ‘INFINITE LOVE’ is residing (…)”.

From this point, the exchange of responses became heated and revealed issues of tolerance and homophobia. It also showed competing moral perspectives and evaluations that intersected with the (re)construction of a collective Filipino identity. The following response from Phil, a self-identified Filipino-Canadian, suggests a counter perspective to the previous view of limiting the expression of feelings in the community’s online space.

Some of the members here are opposing his sentiments but my question is: Why we don’t just spare him a space here? first; the one he loves is an Indian citizen, second, he is a Filipino, third we, all human beings are subject to fall in love. As I read the heading message of this group, this group is open to various discussions as long as it is not against our law, not pornographic items. It is more worst if this person shares his experience to other e-groups like Filipinos_In_Australia group, Filipinos_In_U.S.A. group. (LOL [laughing out loud]) Because his main objective is to go India because of his infinite love-and that is not violating the rules and regulations of this group. Because this group aims to gather various discussions regarding Filipinos people living in India and Filipinos about to live India. To the members who oppose this person, try to investigate yourself. Are you a true Filipino? Or have you not able to fall in love in your entire life?

Phil tried to grapple with the FII e-group’s claim of being a helpful and supportive virtual community in India. His critique of the group’s rules pointed out a contradiction between what FII claims to be, along with the assumption of Philippine hospitality compared to other national cultures, and their treatment of Sammy.
This contradiction became starker in a curt reply from Leo, another Filipino member: “I think you should start an e-group ‘gay filipinos in India’. That would understand and help you and your friend's predicament. am personally not interested with your ‘intimate love’ and possible solicitations”. Leo ended his message by quoting verbatim the purpose of the e-group and a note reminding members “to post only relevant messages” and “to avoid forwarded messages, jokes, political contents, chain letters, and any sexual content”. He set in bold face the phrase ‘sexual content’, implying that Sammy’s request fell under that category. In so doing, Leo moralised Sammy’s intentions and suggested banishment for his seemingly sexual advances. Rajiv, a local, directly challenged Leo’s assumptions and presented a counter moral perspective:

I don’t understand the reason for the sarcasm and the scarce quotes. No one was making any personal solicitations towards you. [Sammy] lives in the Philippines, has a friend in India and moreover, is new to the group. All he did was introduce himself, speak about his situation and expressed his desire to meet people who are in the same boat as he (Long Distance Relationship). So why is it that all of a sudden people have a problem? Why should he start a separate community? Aren’t there Filipinos in India who are married to Indians? …And I thought that Filipinos were more accommodating. Also, shouldn't the Filipino flag be smaller? After all it’s Filipinos IN India.

Like others who supported Sammy, Rajiv called for the group to be more inclusive and sensitive to Sammy’s predicament, which he understood as sociality: to connect with (potentially) sympathetic Filipinos in India. In pointing out the existence of Filipino-Indian marriages, Rajiv suggested to acknowledge connections or relations that transcend national boundaries. He imagined the same possibility for Sammy, a gay man. He also used the incident to question the notion that “Filipinos were more accommodating”. Rajiv therefore exposed the gendered bias of Filipino hospitality. He challenged how some members sexualised Sammy’s personhood and recast the moral argument of the situation as an issue of tolerance or hospitality. In so doing, he emphasised Sammy’s common humanity with the rest: the capacity for relationships.

The leader of the Filipino community posted a message saying he appreciated different opinions from the members. He called to end the talk and informed the group that Sammy already unsubscribed. However, a harsh comment (“you are an indiot [idiot], baliw [lunatic], makitid ang utak [narrow-minded]) from an unidentified subscriber,
prompted the moderator of the newsgroup to issue a warning. He reminded the members of the group’s purpose and imposed a gag order on anyone replying back to responses related to Sammy:

We recognize the various differences, upbringing and personalities of everyone. But in this group, we will **PRACTICE RESPECT** of each and everyone's feelings & idiosyncrasies.

In regards to the email below, personally, I do not tolerate this kind of behavior in this e-group [referring to the harsh comment above].

As it is very easy for all of us to behave like animals and focus on the things that divide us, rather on the things that unite as one family and as one country.

However, some details revealed more. His closing salutation and electronic signature in his post read: “I remain, owner/moderator”. (The e-group was opened through his e-mail account). In so doing he asserted authority over the space and legitimated his attempt to police and discipline. His use of the metaphor ‘animals’ to describe the possible behaviour of subscribers in the group only added credence to the territorial tendency of Filipino transnationals in India.

The following exchange between Leo and Siddhartha highlights contrasting views on the moderator’s idea to talk about “things that unite” and the problem of limiting speech in a discursive space. Leo seconded the moderator’s plea. His view represents the avoidance of controversial topics in a public space that is the FII e-group:

Can this topic on gay tolerance & infinite love be put to rest? As the moderator already stated, keep the topics within the context of what has been described in our e-group website. Too personal topics such as sex (& behaviours), religion and politics should not be discussed since there are too many differing opinions on the matter. If you need to discuss the topic, do it privately

Siddhartha replied and presented a more pluralist conception of what the e-group could be:

Lets keep this forum as open platform, though we may have our personnel beliefs as regards to Religion, politics, and sexual behaviour, I see no harm if the same is openly discussed, and gives us an insight to others views on life overall, moreover we both come from democratic countries, where the other’s view point is always respected, and lets not get uptight about others view point, and learn to accept, though personally we may approve or not approve of the same, i see no harm to hear them out.
Siddharta presented a way out of the problem of divisive topics. He saw the potential of the FII newsgroup as a discursive space to learn from the Other. In other words, might dialogue, which the space can provide, facilitate understanding of differences? He urged the group to look at ‘divisive topics’ as an opportunity to learn how to be tolerant and respectful.

The case of Sammy was not only about the proper place of sentiments or expression of desires but also their connection with the deeper issue of relating with an Other, in this case the gay and sexualised kababayan. It is significant to point out that the interactions I described above indicate the common tendencies of both Filipinos and Indians to frame their comments in moral or normative terms. In the context of a transnational space, the outsiders of an online community were able to introduce a broader moral framework that liberated a Filipino gay man from the narrow view of his kababayan. The moral support given by the locals and the Filipino-Canadian guy demonstrates hospitality in transnational space.

A space of mediation

In this section I share a discussion thread that demonstrates the potential of the newsgroup to mediate and create a platform for understanding differences. I examine how members of the group reflect on the practice of commenting in the context of the locals’ sensitivities to the category ‘Indian’. Majority of the participants in the discussion were Filipinos married to Indian locals and sympathetic Filipino transnationals. Having gained a comparative perspective, they were capable of seeing both sides of the ethnic boundary and therefore in a position to mediate. The discussion demonstrates their role of women and in mediating differences or revising assumptions that Filipinos and Indians have of one another.

The thread started with an innocent question from a female subscriber of the newsgroup, Elsa, a Philippine police officer on a six-month training course in India:

Are Indian's by nature rude? I've been here for almost 5 months as a trainee and I find it hard to be understood if I talked nicely. So I shifted to other mode and talked rudely then they listen! But I feel guilty afterwards because most often than not I need to talk to older men. Should I really feel guilty or it's just the way it is here?
Elsa’s reply triggered three kinds of responses: Filipino subscribers who agreed with her, locals who felt slighted by her comment and members of the group who attempted to explain each side to one another. Those who agreed even provided anecdotal and verifiable information, such as links to surveys on how different nationalities fared in politeness. Indian subscribers felt offended. The leader of the Filipino community in Delhi came to Elsa’s defence:

I think Elsa’s question is legit and she has all the right to ask it. being new here, she will be exposed to behaviour which we Filipinos are not accustomed to. like people asking for road directions and leaving without even saying thank you after getting the information…i mean just step up outside and all you can hear are the different sounds of car honking. tooooooottt. ....beeeeppppp pp......hhhhoooooo oootttttttt! !!!!!!! If that is not rude enough, I don’t know what to call it.

Navin, a local who lived in the Philippines, expressed his sentiment and undermined Elsa’s point about rudeness. He interpreted Elsa’s experience as a dynamic between locals and foreigners, and admitted that Filipinos in the capital city were better than Indians in dealing with foreigners:

I am pained by your assumptions that we Indians are rude, hindi na maan tutoo yoon (that’s not really true), we may be aloof, and some of may have a problem of interacting with foreigners, but never be rude, until and unless, we are provoked. We may not be as open and as spontaneous, as the Pinoy (colloquial term for Filipinos), that may be due to the reason, we have not exposed to foreigners, as much as an average Pinoy in Metro Manila, and I do agree many still do have an hang up about foreigners.

Another response was a criticism against making generalisations about Indians, a tendency among outsiders, which the locals were quick to pounce on:

I dont know from where you have this notion of telling the Indian people rude. in every country there are exceptions not only in India. India is not a small country. to know India and its people you have know the entire country and reach out the mass. just because you have met some rude people that doesn’t mean Indians are rude. You have rude natured people in Philippines also. you have also stated in your posting that you are here just for 5 months. Don’t you think so 5 months is just too little time for you to know about India considering its vastness. think again.
Having lived and worked in India before doing fieldwork, I noticed that the above statement was a formulaic response. It is premised on diversity and the time and effort needed to understand the people. Such critique ends with a moral exhortation to look at oneself first before commenting about the Other. The same reasoning was used in defending Indian identity as discussed previously.

In response to the reactions she got from the locals, Elsa explained herself:

Review my e-mail. You might be just too upset you misunderstood it, I was asking, that was a question, not a statement. I don't mean to hurt your feelings, you only got hurt when there's some truth in it I believe. I wanted to get the opinion of people who are here for me to have a clearer picture of the people here. Of course in every aspect there are always exemptions.

I got a clearer picture by the way. Thanks

Elsa’s response is symptomatic of misunderstandings between Filipinos and Indians in communicative encounters. A question and its premise could be taken as a slight especially in the context of the emotional sensitivities of interlocutors. A Filipino married to a local commented that “rude” was too strong a word to use. The third set of reactions, mostly from those who have spent more time in India, not only explain the local culture but also suggest ways to deal with the sensitivities of the locals:

But, yes I think we have to understand that here, women are not treated the way we are treated in the Philippines. It is difficult as we are naturally friendly and like to chat to people, but for most Indians that is taken as a come on. But being foreigners here, we just need to be careful with how we conduct ourselves and how we dress especially…

The following response from Chita considers the sentiments of both sides. It not only makes a reflexive critique of the practice of commenting but also changes the course of the discussion. Here she admonishes the locals to stop moralising and makes an effort to explain their culture. Chita brings out the e-group’s potential as a venue where people can achieve mutual understanding through dialogue:

first I do agree with [Elsa’s] justification that it was just a mere clarification/ question coz I understand that she don’t want to have a bad impression about Indians nor she don’t want to misjudge people by handful encounters. anyways, lots of things have been said regarding this issue but I dont think we have to make a big fuzz out of this. we need to understand each others
differences and give clarifications to new comers as definitely people from different places and cultures will have culture shock lucky for those who don’t.

I am a Filipina married to an Indian and stayed in India for 2.5 years now and have seen and encountered different faces of Indians. just like anywhere around the world all of us has flaws and let us not judge nor misjudge anyone of us according to our own standards and cultures. let us be understanding with one another as this group aims to help each one of us here to cope up with this new environment/society and we expect insiders/Indians in India as members of this group to help us Filipinos to enlighten us with the various cultures and traditions of India.

Chita’s opinion expands the newsgroup’s definition of help and support by emphasising its dialogic potential. She also called on Indian members to make an effort to explain their culture. Navin, who joined the discussion before Chita, already made such an attempt and has been known in the group to provide the local’s perspective. Elsa’s concern became an opportunity for this group to talk about the inevitable misunderstandings that arise from encounters between migrant and local. In line with Chita’s suggestion, the leader of the Filipino community, Gabby, elaborated on the circumstances of Elsa:

…I wud just like to add 1 more thought which could maybe explain, I hope, why we have these kinds of circumstances. Elsa is actually a policewoman who is training in forensic here together with her colleague, Lisa. they travel to different parts of India during the course of the training. so imagine this set-up, two young Filipina/policewoman dealing with older Indian policemen. so most probably the local policemen will not take these 2 Filipinas seriously. the Indians being brought up in a typical Indian family which is pretty much dominated by the male members may not be used in dealing with the opposite gender and especially those involved in this very macho job, if I may say so. and the Filipinas, who grew up in a typical Filipino family where the mother has a very big say (that's why we call them ‘commander-in-chief’) and sisters treated equally as their brothers, will surely raise hell when ignored by their male peers.

Gabby cited differences in gender and generational relations between Filipinos and Indians in the hope of explaining to the local members of the group the context of Elsa’s ‘rude’ comment.

The previous sections have shown how evaluative comments create boundaries and conflict. However, the FII newsgroup could also be a space for mediation. Members of the online community shared their knowledge of the people and the place. In so doing they revised misconceptions between Filipino and Indian members. This process
depended on the voluntary participation of subscribers. I observed that posts offering to mediate were carefully crafted to accommodate rather than exclude different opinions or sentiments. In the space of debate between Filipinos and Indians, spouses of Indian nationals offered ways to negotiate contrasting or even competing moral orientations. More specifically, Chita, a Filipina married to a local, proposed to rethink one’s criteria of evaluation to accommodate the idiosyncrasies of the Other.

**Conclusion**

The Filipinos in India newsgroup is not only a mediated space where Filipino transnationals from various cities and localities converge, seek and offer social support, but is also a discursive space where a Filipino community constitutes itself through boundary making in relation to and in relationship with members from the host society. I asked how Filipino transnationals constituted themselves on the FII newsgroup and what criteria they used to include and exclude members. In answering these questions, I selected several discussion threads that contained self-evident themes (dimensions) of class, gender and ethnic/national identity, or topics about the ways members of the newsgroup defined themselves and the terms of their interactions and relations. I analysed the boundary work and relations across the said dimensions in the online community.

Based on my online ethnography of the FII newsgroup and interviews with subscribers, I find a pattern of boundary work based on ability and morality that is consistent with the workplace. However, such boundaries take on specific forms according to the characteristics and possibilities of the FII newsgroup as a mediated and discursive space. Apart from the capacity to engage intellectually, ability manifested in media literacy or knowledge of the proper use of and participation in new media platforms. Propriety was linked to ability in the context of a mediated social space. Demands for propriety tended to constrain spontaneous sociality. Boundaries based on ability and propriety indicate the classed nature of the relations between *kababayan* and the online community’s spatial politics of inclusion and exclusion. Literacy and intellectual ability are linked to educational attainment, a middle class value in the Philippines (Bautista 2001b).

Compared to fleeting encounters in everyday life as described in Chapter 2, interactions between Filipinos and Indians on the newsgroup assume a degree of familiarity with
each other’s ethnicity. As evidenced by the discussion on national identities, mediated discursive spaces enable the (re)production of ethnic boundaries. Hence, the newsgroup becomes the means through which the nation is (re)produced in symbolic space. Based on the criteria used by members evident in comments or evaluations of online behaviour, membership to the virtual national space is defined by boundaries of ability and propriety. Boundary work is countered by attempts to be inclusive as evident in altruistic behaviour and social support. Non-Filipino members are included in the reterritorialised space that is the Filipinos in India newsgroup on the conditions of the symbolic boundaries.

The emotionality of interactions and debates between Filipino and Indian participants reveals the salience of moral boundary making. Moreover, moral perspectives concerning ethnic and gender relations from both sides of the boundary intersect and diverge. Discussion threads reveal how Filipino and Indian participants share a common sensitivity to incidents of national shame. Indian participants and their sympathisers tend to claim tolerance and inclusivity as a moral position. On the other hand, Filipino participants assert their morality through propriety and (relatively) egalitarian gender relations. As Silverstone (2005) points out, communication in transnational encounters brings out moral assumptions that are contested and debated. Hence, moral politics also intersect with the class, gender and ethnic relations in the transnational community. The salience of moral politics makes the Filipinos in India newsgroup different from a US-based newsgroup, soc.culture.filipino, that Ignacio (2005). While sharing the same role in creating an online community for Filipino migrants or diaspora, soc.culture.filipino was more preoccupied with race and colonialism (Ignacio 2005, p. 4), a reflection of the newsgroup subscribers’ place-specific concerns.

What this ethnography also finds significant is the way in which subscribers, particularly women married to locals, take the initiative to mediate between one another. Through debates and discussion, they clarify differences and attempt to challenge comments that demean one’s collective and individual identities.
Chapter 5

Food, talk and group photos: 
Barkada formations in a Filipino community

“We are both Filipinas but I can’t relate to her!”
- female informant

“What I will remember about my stint in India are the friendships I made.”
- male informant

In the previous chapter, I examined the boundary work of Filipino transnationals and Indian nationals in the context of an online community. The relative anonymity of the mediated space renders propriety (i.e. etiquette) and ability (i.e. media literacy) as the salient criteria for evaluation. The content and pattern of interactions are also shaped by the ways members define and understand the nature and purpose of the newsgroup. I pointed out that while boundary-making was evident, efforts at making a sense of community and mediating differences and conflict were also present. What about the nature of boundary work and relations in face-to-face interactions? My starting point is the Philippine Independence Day, a communal event marked by state and religious ritual, and feasting.

A contradiction in relations among Filipinos

Organised by the Philippine Embassy, the celebration of Independence Day every 12th of June is an important event in the social calendar of transnational Filipinos in Delhi. Lita, a Filipina who met her Indian partner in the Middle East, came to settle here in the early 80s. She recalled that they used to celebrate in banquet halls of the city’s five star hotels such as the Maurya-Sheraton. They planned what to wear months before and had their Filipino costumes tailor-made or ordered from the homeland. Lita bragged that the occasion was a catered affair. The embassy also sent formal invitations, with the embossed seal of the Philippine Republic, to their homes. She reminisced about the past when the yearly event was grander (dati mas bongga), and Filipinos felt a greater sense of community.
In recent years, due to budget cuts imposed by the Philippine government, the embassy has opted to host the event in its green and spacious premises in Chanakyapuri, the area designated for diplomatic missions in the capital. Food was still part of the celebration but was prepared by Puja, a local who worked for the ambassador’s residence and learned how to cook Filipino food. Since the Filipino community created a Yahoo group account, the embassy has preferred to disseminate information through the email facility. Confirmations of attendance could easily be tracked to estimate the number of guests. Lita’s accounts made me think that the Independence Day celebration in Delhi had seen better days.

In 2011, the year I conducted fieldwork, the program started at 8 o’clock in the morning to avoid the heat of the Indian summer. I arrived early at the embassy with my friend Jackie and her partner Andrew, an American diplomat, in a blue plated car. It was only 7:40 AM but we felt the intensity of the sun’s rays. Guests waited and chatted under towering acacia trees. In one corner of the sprawling compound, Pankaj, a local caterer, was roasting a whole pig in an open pit fire. We anticipated a Filipino feast after the program.

The program started outdoors with the flag ceremony and continued in the reception hall of the ambassador’s residence, where a priest from Kerala who served in the Philippines led the congregation in celebrating mass. Speeches followed: the ambassador read the Philippine president’s address to the Filipino diaspora and the first secretary echoed the foreign affairs secretary’s message. The ambassador, a career diplomat, invited guests to have food and drinks. People stood from their seats and started looking around for friends or to greet acquaintances. Chatter and laughter filled the hall. Kids ran around and adults started to queue at the buffet table. Madam Rosa, the ambassador’s secretary, made sure the kitchen staff kept the serving platters and bowls filled with Filipino dishes such as *puto* (rice cake), *pansit* (fried noodles), *menudo* (stew of meat and vegetables in tomato sauce), *lumpia* (spring rolls), *adobo* (pork cooked in palm vinegar, soy sauce and garlic) and crispy, succulent slices of *lechon* (whole pig roasted in open pit fire), the main attraction.

When they had their serving, people sat with their friends and occupied corners in the ambassador’s residence. Some went out to the balcony and appeared to have their own party; others stayed in the hall and rearranged the chairs so they could face each other.
Jackie, Andrew and I were looking for a corner when an embassy official approached and invited us to the high table, where the ambassador, priest and ‘special’ guests were seated. I thought it was a privilege to be with my friend who was married to an American diplomat. Officers of the Filipino community, Carlo and Pedro, both managers of companies in Delhi, joined us.

People posed beside the Philippine and Indian flags and started taking pictures that soon got publicised on Facebook. Some went around to mix with other groups; but the majority remained in their places and only stood up to get more food or drinks. What was moments ago a solid mass of people later fragmented into peer groups, like the islands that comprise the Philippine archipelago. The Independence Day party scene alluded to the factional nature of relations in the community. People identified with groups, and as the presence of a high table showed, certain cliques were more privileged than others.

Lita, a naturalised Indian citizen, belonged to a group of Filipino-Indian couples. During fieldwork, I learned that research participants took their barkada (peer group) seriously. In a house party organised by Lita, she only invited friends “who were not fussy about formalities”. Later she told me to avoid some people because “masama ang kanilang mga ugali (they have bad character)”, and that I may end up “writing negative things about Filipinos in Delhi”. My informant’s remark suggested not only a consciousness of a Filipino collective in India, but also how peer groups assume certain identities or characterisations through their boundary work.

Social events simultaneously reveal the mode of social organisation of the Filipino community and the contradictory nature of relations between members. For an outsider, the conviviality of the gathering appears to project a hospitable space. Informants who had worked in other countries confirmed the impression, but principally in contrast to larger Filipino overseas communities, which were less cohesive. However, one informant opined, “the amity is superficial”. Another lamented that the group is full of envious people outdoing each other. Individuals like Clara, who worked for a European expatriate household, still participated in community life and described the experience as “masayang nakakaloka (driving me mad but fun)”. Elsewhere, Yen Le Espiritu has observed “progressive collective endeavours and horrific interpersonal fights” among Filipinos in India.
Filipinos in San Diego, California (Espiritu 2008, p. 126). Espiritu uses Doreen Massey’s (1999) notion that communities are temporary constellations of social relations that are open, porous, invented and particularised as a product of interaction. Communities change over time as they cohere, splinter or dissolve (Espiritu 2008, p. 99). I adopt this assumption in describing the relations in the Filipino migrant community in Delhi.

In this chapter, I extend Espiritu’s understanding of Filipino migrant communities as fragmented social entities by identifying the criteria through which members form their peer groups. I tease out the symbolic boundaries or evaluations that result in social closure or the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of people. In studying the formation of peer groups, my empirical bases were their most popular activities, namely, sharing a meal, chatting and taking group photos in the context of house parties. The chapter also demonstrates how Filipino peer groups are constituted by the material conditions and constraints of the host society. By looking at the barkada more closely, this ethnography furthers our understanding of a transportable form of sociality. The barkada is a common and visible form of social organisation among Filipino transnationals that is already explored in the US context (e.g. Alaysabar 2002) but rarely examined elsewhere. Hence, the following ethnography of barkada formations in India simultaneously highlights generic patterns evident in this form of sociality elsewhere, as well as the specificities of place in the constitution of the barkada in India.

I joined several peer groups and paid attention to interpersonal and group interactions—focusing on how members described their feelings for and relations with others. As a way of making social connections, transnational Filipinos participated in or organised activities that were generally labelled ‘partying’, such as cocktails or themed events, a night-out in the city’s clubs, or gatherings to celebrate personal occasions (e.g. birthdays and farewells). The chapter focuses on house parties organised by peer groups, families or individuals. I chose activities organised in the homes of my research participants because of the significance of the house as a space where kinship or relatedness is established (Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1995), and where women play a key role in establishing such social space (Aguilar 2009, p. 92). The ethnographic examples below show the gendered pattern of sociality among Filipino transnationals in Indian cities. Women are largely responsible for creating peer groups through their effort in organising social gatherings. I do not suggest, however, that men do not take initiative
in forming a barkada. While most peer groups I observed were comprised mostly of women, there were also mixed groups and a few all-male barkadas. The formation of all-male groups is a matter of circumstance in which members are usually employed by the same company.

I examine the paradoxical roles of (1) talk in ways Filipino transnationals make moral and occupational boundaries and create hospitable spaces; (2) food as medium of reciprocal exchange and indication of ability to reciprocate; and (3) photographs as symbolisation of group identity. In so doing, this chapter not only indicates the consistency and continuity of evaluation based on ability and moral criteria, but also teases out the moral dimension that characterises the sociality of Filipino transnationals. Considering the normative dimension of sociality helps explain the tensions and contradictions in the Filipino transnational community.

Relations between Filipino transnationals in Indian cities were defined and constituted by evaluations of self and others (Smith 1759 cited in Sayer 1999, p. 413). Actors in normative social spaces engage in ‘evaluative practices’, i.e. they “assess how an entity attains a certain type of worth” (Lamont 2012, p. 205). Among Filipino transnationals, the worth of a person is contested and valued in different terms; which include abilities, occupational and socio-economic status and background. However, the (reputed) moral worth or character (Lamont 1992) of a person tended to prevail as the most important criterion. Filipino transnationals were preoccupied with ethical conduct, which encompassed not only the notion of a moral self, but also the manner in which individuals conducted their interpersonal relations: how they related to others and the sort of relationships they made. As Lamont points out, the worth of a person affects one’s status (Lamont 2012, p. 206) and, in turn, how others regard or treat her/him. I found that stereotypes, to a certain extent, informed these evaluations and relations between Filipino transnationals in contradictory ways. However, it is equally important to recognise and examine how Filipino transnationals come to be seen and see themselves as ethical, through their practices of friendship in the context of peer groups.

Ethnographic data reveal that contradictory relations between Filipino transnationals in Indian cities are underpinned by the tension between the tendency to make class boundaries, and the ethical demands of sociality and shared ethnicity. In arguing that Filipino transnationals strive to be ethical in their relations with one another, I
demonstrate the possibility of class boundary transgressions in the context of transnational migration, and in the particular conditions and material constraints (i.e. food provisioning) of the host society. Indeed, the chapter describes the simultaneous ways boundaries are made and crossed through making friends. The argument will be elaborated in five sections. First, I describe how social interactions in the community are characterised by evaluative comments and the ways members respond ethically. Second, I discuss the notion of friendship in relation to the migration context and the social form barkada. The criteria for selecting friends or members of a barkada among Filipino transnationals will also be elaborated upon. In the third and fourth sections, the roles of food and talk are examined respectively in terms of the ways in which they shape the boundary making and sociality of barkadas within the Filipino community. The fifth section describes how the symbolic practice of taking group photos relates to group identity formation. I conclude by describing the nature and significance of the barkada in the transnational migrant experience.

**Emotional and ethical responses to a judgmental community**

Morality is a mode of identification or distinction among middle classes (Johnson 2010; Lamont 1992; Liechty 2003; Saavala 2010). For example, Mark Liechty describes the middle class in Nepal as a moral community that uses stories and gossip to distinguish itself from classes below and above it (Liechty 2003, p. 67). In the case of transnational Filipino middle classes in Indian cities, morality is not the only set of criteria for making boundaries; one’s occupation or socio-economic status and practical abilities are also of crucial importance. My engagements with members of the community further revealed how the criteria for evaluation were communicated through comments or utterances in interpersonal interactions, usually in the context of social gatherings. Such evaluative comments often elicited emotions that suggested degradation, non-belonging and disrespect.

Clara, one of my informants, told me that not all members of her barkada were keen to join larger gatherings of the Filipino community. She said that on one occasion, her friends brought a dish to a potluck party but afterwards heard disparaging comments (“may naririning ka pa”) about the food they contributed. I interpreted such comments as referring to Clara’s friends’ ability in food preparation, though they may also have
concerned her friends’ imputed moral disposition to the gathering. The experience made them reluctant (“nag-aalangan”) to attend future such get-togethers.

Some members also felt ilang (uneasy) with other people because of perceived differences in socio-economic status. A male informant said he felt uncomfortable approaching or befriending visibly well-off members of the Filipino community. His job required him to visit other major Indian cities where he got the chance to meet different Filipino groups. I asked if he attended parties of the expatriate community in a South Indian city where a particular Filipina was an active officer. He said that she was “sosyal” (posh) and preferred to be with a group of Filipinos he described as koboys (cowboys) or down-to-earth. I noticed that his feeling of ilang also came from a certain discomfort in dealing with transnationals from Europe or North America. Ilang is not usually deliberately provoked by others, but is a subtle feeling that evokes and suggests non-belonging or difference.

These feelings of discomfort and hence reluctance to socialise in Filipino parties also had a gendered dimension. For example, one Filipina said that she often felt she was disrespected (nababastusan) by drunken men in such gatherings. Female informants, who were single or unaccompanied by their spouses, admitted that they had received “indecent proposals” from either single or married men. Given that this practice was likely to happen in large gatherings, women were extra cautious of their behaviour, lest they be subjected to moral scrutiny.

The crowd in social gatherings of the Filipino community could be unwelcoming, especially for newcomers. A year ago Clara, and her first set of friends who worked for expatriate households, noticed that Filipino transnationals, who were most likely skilled workers or spouses of locals and other transnationals, were generally cordial. However, Clara and her friends also noticed that when Filipino transnationals found out their occupations were as a domestic workers, they would lose interest in them and end the conversation. As with the Filipino community in host societies such as the US, where Filipino professionals are integrated into different industry sectors, the grouping in Delhi is primarily a middle class space that makes domestic workers feel unwelcome (Parreñas 2001, p. 229). But even some professionals themselves felt the same. I remember a vivid incident narrated to me by Sylvia, a volunteer with a charity in Delhi, and previously a government employee in Manila. The first time she attended a Filipino
gathering in Delhi, she said she received a rather cold reception. A guest at the party looked at her from head to toe and asked her occupation. “I answered back in English. I didn’t want to come across as someone eager to impress, but I wanted to let her know that while I was not well dressed like her, I’m educated. It’s so insulting. Maybe it’s my pride. But it shouldn’t be. It’s instinct that you don’t want to be put down. I wish I did not answer her back. But it happened.”

Sylvia’s remark indicates an ethical status consciousness where social actors simultaneously evaluate their own actions, as well as those of others. While Sylvia was someone capable of this double consciousness or self-other awareness, others appeared to be more one-sided or unaware of their actions that might offend others. Moreover, Sylvia’s case also shows that Filipino transnationals commonly evaluate each other based on appearance, particularly dress. In the context of fleeting interactions in social gatherings of transient members in a transnational community, it is not surprising that appearance matters. However, as I will point out below, appearance is also subject to scrutiny among those known to each other.

As the examples above suggest, questions about a person’s background, comments about one’s food contributions, and the possible experience of being degraded, made many social gatherings inhospitable spaces. “Full of intrigues!” described an informant. There was an awareness of the possibility of being talked about, and hence having one’s identity judged or evaluated. Moreover, the tensions generated by judgments were exacerbated by intergroup conflicts or factional politics.

I recall an incident. Exactly a year after the Independence Day party, I called up Clara to find out how she was going. She just arrived from the celebration in the embassy and had an unpleasant experience earlier that day. Male members of her group were in a dilemma because Allan, a friend they could not refuse, invited them to another party that was happening at the same time. Clara was annoyed with Allan, who knew that her barkada had already confirmed their attendance. However, Allan still insisted on inviting them in the presence of other people. Moreover, during fieldwork, Allan and a prominent figure of the peer group that invited Clara’s barkada, had been in a hostile relationship. Clara told her friends that Allan’s behaviour was unethical because they already confirmed their attendance to the other peer group that invited them first. “Where is our conviction? Allan’s our friend but he should know (maipamukha sa
*kanya*) that if he’s wrong, we won’t side with him!” Clara said that ‘neutral’ people such as their group were caught in between (*naipit kami*).

My research participants dealt with such situations through various ethical responses, and justified their actions accordingly. These ethical responses ultimately aimed at avoiding conflict, easing tensions, but unintentionally reinforcing divisions or differences between individuals or groups. I identify two patterns of response that are either based on moral principle, or represent an ethical response to the particular context or situation of Filipino transnationals in Indian cities. The small number of Filipino transnationals in Indian cities created a situation where almost everyone knew each other, and being identified with a group communicated one’s association with a particular socio-economic status. Interviews and conversations revealed that Filipino transnationals either engaged with or distanced themselves from each other. Engagement may mean taking sides or staying neutral in the context of the community’s factional politics.

Informants who deliberately kept a distance from gatherings of Filipinos told me that they were being consistent or honest with themselves and others. “*Ayaw kong makipag-plastikan* (I don’t want to be a hypocrite)”. They justified themselves by invoking a moral code, or ‘Golden Rule’. As one informant explained: “I don’t want a damper in my party; so why should I attend their party and be a damper?”

Those who were embedded in the life of the community like Clara, maintained a neutral position (neutral *lang kami*). This was their way of dealing with enmity between individuals or peer groups that polarised the community. By being neutral, one avoided conflict or becoming the object of intrigue. Some informants went as far as tolerating the company of controversial personalities in the community. “*Sakyan mo lang* (just ride on)” they said. They justified such a position by arguing that these people were good (*mabait naman eh*) and were just misunderstood. Tolerance even for judgmental members of the community, whom they themselves despised, demonstrated a contradiction in the moral migrant community. Based on interviews and observations, I offer three explanations that could account for the inconsistency that is evident in befriending people one morally despises. Here I assume that certain moral positions clash and that the actions taken reflect the respective positions valued by each social actor. Hence, in practice, the choice or application of moral standards is situational.
Certain conditions and practical considerations, such as the context of migration and the need for social support, shape the actions of transnational Filipinos.

First, they valued personal relationships over consistency in their moral positions and they applied different moral standards to people, according to the nature of their relationship with them (Lyon 2007b). The closer they were to a person, the less judgmental and more tolerant they were. Second, the need for social support in a foreign place compelled most Filipino transnationals to be more tolerant of each other. The ability of a person to reciprocate favours was more valued than other aspects of her or his moral character. For example, an informant confided to me that her friendship with a controversial personality was mutually beneficial. She thought the person just needed some attention and company, and in return the latter looked after her children when she could not fetch them in school. And finally, I observed an ethic of relations in the context of inequality in material conditions, status or ability. My research participants were acutely aware of such inequalities and at the same time they were conscious of treating others with kindness and respect. This involved an effort to adjust to persons below or above their social status (pakikibagay). Indeed, being ethical is constitutive of friendship or peer relations.

The texture of relations in the community can be described as a tension between making boundaries and connections. I suggest that peer groups emerge from this social dynamic. They sought people on the basis of commonality because such company understood their situation or background. When I asked why they hang out with a certain group, informants cited the absence of intrigues (dito walang intriga). Indeed being part of a group meant being insulated from the emotional strain in dealing with a judgmental community. Peer groups offered social acceptance and belonging.

**Barkada formations in Indian cities**

1. *Barkada* friendship in a transnational migration context

Transnational migrants are linked to their kith and kin through new information and communication technologies (Madianou & Miller 2012), but they also form new friendships that are shaped by their transient situation (Walsh 2009). Drawing on the idea that contemporary friendships share similar characteristics as familial relations
(Allan 1996), Katie Walsh (2009) finds that friendships of British transnational migrants in Dubai are formed through mutual favours such as helping each other in mundane routines (p. 439). She observes that friends take the place of familial support in times of emergency. While also acknowledging that her informants find friendships and intimate relations difficult to form and maintain in a transient environment, Walsh (2009) argues that British transnational migrants put effort into creating sociality (p. 443). I observed the same practice among Filipino transnational migrants.

Killick and Desai’s (2009) synthesis of ethnographic studies on friendship provides relevant arguments that resonate in the meanings and practices of friendship among my research participants. One set of arguments relates to the nature of the relationship. First is the notion of whether or not the parties are on equal or unequal terms. Ideal friendship, according to Killick and Desai, is premised on the idea of equality; however, the practice of friendship reveals hierarchy in the ways friends relate to each other. Second is the extent to which the friendship is instrumental or not. Killick and Desai imply that the relationship becomes problematic when instrumentality defines it. Hence, the place and value of sentiment, or feelings that constitute the friendship, are brought into the equation. How persons feel for each other becomes a basis for constructing friendship and determining its character. Connected with the instrumental nature of relationships is the reciprocity between parties. The manner in which friends practice and regard reciprocal exchanges makes and undoes friendships. Killick and Desai point out that voluntary and delayed repayment in an exchange is the norm. They also extend the argument by linking the mutual exchange of desired objects to the facilitation and constitution of both persons and friends (Killick & Desai 2009, pp. 3-12). Hence, another point about the nature of friendship that Killick and Desai develop is the idea that persons create themselves through constant engagement with others (2009, p. 3). Friendship, as a relationship, becomes a medium for self-making or transformation.

Insights from sociological and psychological literature provide elaboration on identity construction through peer groups. Nigel Sheriff (2007) argues that “the group or social category to which one belongs provides a (self) definition of who one is in terms of the defining characteristics of the group” (Sheriff 2007, p. 350). Members of a group (or ingroup) “not only strive for differentiation from out-groups, but also for positive distinctiveness” (Turner 1975 cited in Sheriff 2007, p. 361). The propensity for distinction, Sheriff notes, is more apparent in intergroup settings. Hence, peer groups
provide “social identities” (Sheriff 2007) through processes of inclusion and exclusion (Stuber et al. 2011). While such groups form spontaneously, based on individuals spending time together or sharing activities or interest (Sheriff 2007, p. 352), the admission of peers into a group involves evaluation based on common or desired characteristics of a group. The criteria and practice of evaluation therefore produce and reproduce boundaries and social status. Before I discuss the criteria, conditions and process of peer group formation among Filipino transnationals, I shall trace the origins and meanings of barkada based on Jean Paul Dumont’s (1993) pioneering ethnography of this social form among Visayan males.

Barkada is synonymous with kaibigan, the Filipino (Tagalog) word for friend. The distinction between kaibigan and barkada is scale, in which the latter is about the experience and practice of friendship in the context of a group. Barkada is “a group of intimate friends who spend time regularly” (Dumont 1993, p. 403). It originates from the Spanish word barcada, which means “boat load” or “passage in a boat”. As a social form, the term was first used to describe groups of heavy offenders from the provinces who had to be transported by boat to be incarcerated in the National Penitentiary in Manila during the Spanish colonial period. The group of men usually came from the same locality and spoke the same language. Being together in a boat voyage created bonds among the men, which continued during and after their incarceration. Dumont continues:

Looking for the company and support of others having had the same life trajectory, they regrouped according to ethnic and linguistic origins, by what had been at one point barcadas…The word barkada therefore came to designate gangs made up of ex-cons who had been thrown into the same boat together, at first literally by the action of Philippine justice and later metaphorically by fate and inertia (Dumont 1993, p. 404).

Hence, in the original meaning of barkada, friendship is based on shared experience, situation or life trajectory. Subsequent use of the term, especially in the post-World War II period, emphasised male grouping and friendship, i.e. a ‘gang’. In the present, barkada is a general term referring to a group of intimate friends, especially among young people. Dumont finds that this form of friendship facilitates socialisation among Visayan young men and the construction of their male identity. He observes that the barkada is formed on the basis of commonality in terms of age, gender and class. Relations among members are expected to be egalitarian, caring, loyal and harmonious
(Alsaybar 2002; Dumont 1993). Dumont (1993) finds that the social form barkada serves as “an ideology that hid, absorbed and silenced tensions or interpersonal conflicts” (p. 432). While barkada friendship generally means bonding, tensions between members are equally possible.

One of the first attempts to investigate barkada in the migration context is Bangele Alsaybar’s (2002) study of Filipino American youth gangs in Los Angeles. She examines how a social institution from the homeland becomes a vehicle for youth culture and ethnic identity construction. Filipino American gangs distinguished themselves from other groups by ascribing values to their ethnicity and using Filipino language (Alsaybar 2002, p. 143).

Unlike Dumont’s observation that barkada members tend to share the same class or ethnic origin, Alsaybar (2002) finds that membership among Filipino American youth gangs cuts across “spatial, ethnic and class boundaries”. Common interest and the pursuit of excitement and leisure activities become the basis for association. Alsaybar’s study demonstrates that the migrant situation shows how commonality can be established outside sociological boundaries.

As the works of Dumont and Alsaybar imply, the formation of group identity, which creates a sense of belonging, is an inextricable aspect of barkada friendship. Commonality is the basis for connection and association. The history and ethnography of barkada suggests how such grouping is contrasted against normative behaviour and how its identity, either ascribed by others or its members, is cast in moral terms (e.g. Alsaybar 2002). For example, the original barkada is associated with ex-convicts and Filipino American gangs defined themselves as a caring group. In other words, barkada as a form of association has moral valence.

To synthesise, I raise three points of intersection between the literature on friendship and transnational migration, on one hand, and barkada, on the other. First, shared situations among strangers facilitate friendship. Transnational migrants and ex-convicts share a common outsider predicament that becomes a source of affinity. Second, friendship as an egalitarian, reciprocal and supportive relationship finds resonance in the ideals of barkada. Third, the social identity process in peer group dynamics is also evident in barkada friendship. The uniqueness of barkada friendship is the way
morality becomes a mode of identification and criterion for boundary work. What is significant to note is that while the Visayan case exemplifies how the social form reinforces sociological boundaries (class and gender), its transplanted form (Alsaybar 2002) in the migration context shows the potential for boundary crossing. The formation of *barkadas* in India demonstrates the possibility of class boundary transgressions. Ethnographic fieldwork reveals how its formation is shaped by ethical responses to the social situations and material conditions of Indian cities. Through activities centring on gatherings around food, I explain how the *barkada* is shaped materially and morally.

In the following sections, I describe how *barkadas* in India initially organise themselves through the objective and subjective criteria members deploy.

2. Objective criteria

Peer group formation has an objective basis, particularly in how Filipino transnationals sort themselves according to migration or occupational status, each of which also displays a certain gendered pattern. In my list of Filipino research participants, women (63) outnumbered men (45). Migration status referred to their situation as either permanent or temporary residents in India. I included persons identified as Indian origin cardholders (or Filipinos who became naturalised Indian citizens) in the category permanent resident. Temporary residents included employment, dependent and diplomatic visa holders. Dependent visa holders were usually accompanying spouses and children of diplomats or skilled workers (employment visa holders). Occupations ranged from being a housewife, accompanying spouse, domestic worker or professional/manager in a company, regardless of one’s formal migration status. The conditions of employment, including the benefits and salary provided by an employer (a local or foreign company, a foreign government or international organisation), intersected with occupation. Thus, different levels of privilege are attached to different occupations.

Filipino transnationals in Indian cities tend to form peer groups based on a combination of occupation and migration status, but tend to differ in the type of occupation and gender (e.g. exclusively accompanying spouses, housewives or domestic workers). The gendered pattern in peer groups reflects the dominance of women in certain occupations or roles, such as being spouses of Indian locals, Filipino and other transnationals.
However, in practice, peer groups did not follow rigid distinctions based on such objective categories. Skilled workers did not rigidly differentiate according to specific occupation or gender. However, I observed that levels of privilege also affected peer grouping. Less privileged workers tended not to form peer groups with their well-compensated compatriots. Such a pattern is in part legal-bureaucratic because the Indian state allows exceptions to its USD 25,000 minimum cap for transnational workers (Ministry of Home Affairs 2010). Some Filipino skilled workers were not covered by the employment visa rule and are paid less than the minimum salary.

Except for housewives and accompanying female spouses, peer groups had mixed genders. The gendered pattern or the tendency for women, especially for housewives or accompanying spouses to form exclusive groups will be explained in the following section where I discuss the subjective criteria or symbolic boundaries they used. As will be discussed below, how they were regarded by other Filipino transnationals depended on the moral judgments embedded in occupational stereotypes. The following list describes the peer groups in terms of overlapping categories of migration status and occupation.

a. Spouses of Indian nationals

Filipinos in this group were mostly women who met their partners while working overseas (e.g. Middle East, US) or studying in the Philippines. Indian nationals come to regional institutions of higher learning, such as the Asian Institute of Management in Metro Manila and the University of the Philippines in Los Baños. Filipinas married to them generally possess high educational qualifications and privileged work experience. While in India, they either continue to work or become fulltime housewives. Their local husbands are either entrepreneurs or professionals/managers in local or multinational companies. For the group that I followed, members were in their late forties and early fifties. Having settled in their locality, they had knowledge of the place and the locals. Transient Filipinos sought them out for information on provisioning and help in emergency situations.

In recent years, cases of domestic violence involving Filipino women married to local men increased. They tend to involve women who met their partners through online dating sites. From my conversations with them and the staff of the Philippine embassy, I
learned that they experienced physical and emotional abuse from their husbands and in-laws. The Philippine embassy and Filipino groups (comprised mostly of Filipino-Indian couples) in Indian cities have given them refuge and assistance. Their situation has influenced how Filipino women married to local men are perceived. The Filipina bride stereotype, which is premised on sexual objectification and exploitation (Holt 1996; Tolentino 2001), is reinforced. The label ‘asawa ng mga Indiano’ (married to Indian men) has thus acquired a negative connotation. New Filipino-Indian couples, especially those who met online, were prone to such attribution. The older cohort of Filipino-Indian couples, the group I was affiliated with, has provided social support to young couples.

b. Accompanying spouses of transnational workers

They were wives and husbands of transnationals from other countries. The group I knew was composed of women married to citizens from the European Union and English-speaking countries, and former Filipino citizens who have acquired citizenship in the US. Although they changed citizenships, they still identified with a Filipino cultural identity. The members of this group have varied occupational backgrounds: there were former professional singers, a diplomat, a chef, an architect, a psychologist, an entrepreneur, a manager and a medical doctor. Upon marriage, they gave up their careers to be with their spouses. Their partners either work as diplomats or professionals/managers in local or multinational companies. Most had been posted elsewhere before coming to India. Their ages ranged between early thirties to late sixties.

Filipino transnationals married to citizens of Global North countries (or ‘First World’, a term they themselves used) generally lived in privileged and exclusive spaces, including embassy compounds in Chanakyapuri, the official diplomatic enclave of the capital. While their material privileges and access to exclusive spaces were acknowledged, they were usually misconstrued as dependent women of their white husbands. The epithet ‘asawa ng mga puti’ (wives of ‘white men’)

² was understood in classed, gendered and racialised terms. The connotations of a Filipina bride (Holt 1996) and expatriate wife or ‘women of leisure’ (Fechter 2010) made them morally suspect in the eyes of other

² I use the term ‘white men’ (asawa ng mga puti) with reference to how Filipino transnationals actually used the term in ordinary speech. ‘Puti’ (‘white’) connoted the socio-economic privileges of citizens of Global North countries.
Filipino transnationals. The negative stereotype of a Filipina bride also extended to her 'white' partner who was construed as an exploiting a racial other.

c. Filipino skilled workers

They were either single or married; some were accompanied by their (Filipino) spouses and children. There were many peer groups of this type, but I observed two closely. The first group that I spent time with was comprised of workers, their Filipino spouses and some Filipino-Indian couples. Members, including the spouses, are educated up to college level or have professional qualifications. The accompanying spouses were fulltime housewives. Their ages ranged from late twenties to mid-fifties. The privileges of this group depended on their employers. I noticed that Filipino workers employed by multinational corporations tended to live in the same exclusive and privileged spaces as other transnationals described above.

As overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), they are represented by the Philippine state as the ‘modern day heroes’ of the nation (Aguilar 2003). Their hard work, sacrifices, and remittance money have benefitted their kith, kin and the Philippine economy. Their status as expatriates in the host society gave them prestige.

d. Domestic workers

They were all women, aged between late-twenties to about fifty, who were employed by either diplomats or transnational workers. There were also a few who worked for affluent local households. Prior to coming to India, they worked for their employers wherever they were posted. Most of them had qualifications up to college and worked for companies in the Philippines before becoming domestic workers. As they worked for transnational personnel from Global North countries, they lived in privileged spaces.

Their presence created unease in the predominantly middle class Filipino community because their occupation is a global stereotype attached to Filipino workers (Aguilar 1996). The awkwardness in referring to their occupation, especially in their presence or upon introduction, indicates the ambivalence generated by the occupational stereotype. On the one hand, people have low regard for the occupation; on the other, they recognise their plight as migrant workers. However, I observed that, in practice, they
were treated well by fellow Filipino transnationals. I discuss more about this mode of relation below.

e. Diplomats and staff of the Philippine embassy

While they tended to form their own group, they also joined other peer groups mentioned above. Their presence in parties was considered a status symbol, particularly in the case of the ambassador, who at the time of my fieldwork supported activities of the community.

While occupation or migration status was a common basis for making friends, the actual composition of peer groups revealed heterogeneity. For example, Filipino spouses of locals were also allied with accompanying spouses of Filipino workers. In Bangalore, for example, a Filipino spouse of a European transnational made friends with Filipina spouses of locals. And in Mumbai, a Filipino worker tended to befriend compatriots married to transnationals from other countries, a rare pattern among peer groups in Delhi. Thus, I also explored the subjective criteria or symbolic boundaries that peer groups applied to each other.

3. Subjective criteria for choosing friends

Being part of different peer groups allowed me to understand the subjective basis of their sociality. They were aware of my status as a researcher in the community and accommodated me in their gatherings. I reserved certain days of the week for a particular barkada. On weekdays, I spent time with the groups of women married to either locals or transnationals. At weekends, I was with Filipino workers (domestic and skilled workers). How they talked about other people and their reasons for inviting guests to house parties revealed important social and symbolic boundaries.

The language that Filipino transnationals used to describe people they invited to their parties was instructive. They used English words prefixed with the Filipino syllable ka, which, among its various inflections, according to the UP Filipino Dictionary, means a relationship, membership or similarity. For example the Filipino word for friend is kaibigan, ka + ibig (love) or for a peer member is kabarkada, ka + barkada (peer group). Added to a word, ka emphasises a characteristic or quality of a person. When
asked what their basis was for inviting guests, they said they favoured people they liked and were close to them or “yung mga ka-friendship-an (those we consider as friends)”. My interview data revealed a connection and overlap between choice of friends and people invited to parties. Who were these people they liked or considered as barkada or friends?

I observed that the criteria for peer inclusion and exclusion not only included occupation and migration status, but also ability and moral disposition. These criteria were the same mechanisms for evaluation that caused emotional strain among research participants, a point I discussed earlier. My interviews and observations suggested that peer groups formed on the principle of commonality, specifically sharing the same morality and gender, and having the ability to converse or socialise.

a. Moral boundary

Moral boundary is the way in which social groups distinguish themselves from others by claiming for themselves certain virtues that are lacking in others (Sayer 2005b). Among Filipino transnationals in Delhi, peer groups use moral evaluations of one’s occupation and interpersonal conduct. Such appraisals also refer to norms concerning the sexuality of men and women. I will show that the gendered morality that preoccupies my research participants is a reaction to negative stereotypes that are morally and sexually degrading. During fieldwork, moral boundary making was best exemplified by two rival barkadas: one group was comprised of wives of transnationals from Europe and North America and the other was composed of Filipino skilled workers, some accompanying spouses of the workers, and working Filipinas married to locals. The first group claimed a morality of merit (“we work for our income”) to differentiate themselves from the other group who were perceived as financially dependent. In turn, the latter claimed to be respectful and non-judgmental. How moral boundaries work will be explored further in the section on ‘moral talk’.

b. Ability to converse and socialise

People who could conduct a ‘good’ conversation, primarily based on common interests and concerns, were regarded highly. As will be discussed below, talk is a constitutive element in parties or social gatherings. A female informant from Bangalore looked for
people she could relate to, especially in terms of their quality of conversation. She says she could not engage people who conversed in “shallow terms” (“nabababawan ako [I find it too shallow]”). She looked for what she regarded as effortless interactions where she did not need to adjust to a person below or above her status (“hindi kailangan magbaba, mag-angat whatever”). “I can just be what I am”. I observed that sharing common situations or experiences usually facilitated such conversations. However, without a common basis for interaction, the ability to socialise with people who are “above or below” (lower or higher socio-economic status) was a quality valued among Filipino transnationals. Being able to socialise, for my research participants, meant not only making an effort to reach out, but also having the capacity to listen or empathise. I discuss the role of conversation and social skills in the section below titled: ‘Comforting conversations’.

c. Gender

As a basis for choosing friends or members of a barkada, gender appears to be an important consideration. Gender choice is influenced by moral conduct appropriate to one’s civil status and situation in India. Women, especially those married to locals and other transnationals, tended to form exclusive groups. However, I also observed that gender composition of a barkada changes according to the situations of members. Barkadas comprised of male skilled workers morphed into mixed groups as their wives joined them in India. Within the mixed gender barkada, I noticed that men and women tended to interact separately, especially if the group was composed of married couples. During fieldwork groupings of women were more visible. While moral constraints shape the gendered practice of associating with each other, shared situations and concerns centred on being a Filipino woman in India, provided a stronger basis for affinity. I provide a more detailed discussion of female barkada friendship that emerges from gendered predicaments and moralities in the latter sections.

The above criteria are by no means exhaustive. My analysis reveals that they are the usual basis for establishing affinity. Peers tended to stick to their groupings, but some moved around in other circles or had multiple associations with others in and outside of the Filipino community (e.g. locals and other transnationals). I observed that the loyalty of members who associated with others, especially a rival barkada, was questioned or even sanctioned. Disassociating from a barkada was attributed to the restrictive
demands of loyalty or misunderstandings between members. The transient nature of their stay in India was also a factor explaining why shifting alliances were rare. As one group member said, “we have no time for intrigues”. Tolerance and conflict avoidance were valued in the small migrant community.

In the following section, I discuss how food practices create sociality based on reciprocity.

**Food, ability and moral exchange**

Food is both substance and symbol (Counihan & Van Esterik 1997 cited in Wilk 2008, p. 308). As a source of nourishment and pleasure, it establishes relationships through everyday and festive consumption (Janowski 2007, p. 4). However, food practices also indicate power relations, distinction and exclusion (Appadurai 2008; Bourdieu 1984; Goody 1982). The analysis of experiences relating to food therefore cuts across multiple dimensions: the social, political, corporeal, material and moral.

In the context of Philippine migration, a starting point is Lisa Law’s (2001) understanding of what eating home-cooked meals in public spaces means for Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong. Appropriating the idea that “food acquires its meaning through the place it is assembled and eaten” (Bell & Valentine 1997), she argues that food is entangled with three aspects of material and corporeal relations between Filipinos and Chinese. First, Filipino food is a contested matter in the politics of the household where its preparation and consumption is controlled by the employers. The smell of Filipino food is infused with ethnic stereotypes and unsettles Chinese employers. Second, ideas and feelings of cultural difference, or a heightened sense of national identity, emerge from this oppressive relationship. Third, food materialises this sentiment and also evokes a sense of home in homes where they are felt not to belong (Law 2001, p. 278). Food, in the context of migration, is commonly about identity politics and relations between migrants and locals. Unlike domestic workers in Hong Kong, privileged Filipino transnationals in Indian cities, including domestic workers employed by expatriates, consume food freely in their homes or private spaces.

For Filipino transnationals in India, food was a matter of survival and taste, where personal preferences and wellbeing intersect. There is a stark difference in food
practices between Filipino transnationals and locals. Aside from geographical and ethnic considerations, religions shape the kinds of food available and eating practices of Indian peoples. Vegetarian and non-vegetarian diets are practiced. Strong spices, especially chilli and masala, generally characterise the flavour of dishes in the subcontinent. Specifically in Delhi, beef, pork and seafood are scarce. Chicken, goat or lamb, the only acceptable types of meat for both non-vegetarian Hindus and Muslims, are available. However Filipinos, in general, rarely eat goat or lamb. They prefer pork, beef and seafood and use them to flavour their vegetables. As a vegetarian diet is acceptable to all peoples of the subcontinent, there is a wide range of choices, including vegetables in everyday Filipino dishes. Filipino food is mildly spiced and therefore the intensity of Indian dishes is usually unpalatable for Filipinos.

Many Filipino transnationals had a strong visceral reaction to the local food. The inconsistency of hygienic practices in food outlets made them also vulnerable to a Delhi belly or stomach infection. The sight of stray cows and pigs in garbage dumps of the city or the bare hands that touched the food made them hesitant to dine in local or ordinary food joints, or buy pork or beef in unknown markets. Stories of food poisoning or unhygienic food practices (experienced or witnessed first-hand by my informants including Filipino chefs in local hotels) were swapped during parties or in chance encounters between Filipinos, thus reinforcing this fear of local food. Some people I knew adjusted, but the majority struggled. While alternative foods were available in the city, such as through restaurants that served international cuisine and global franchises (e.g. McDonalds and Kentucky Fried Chicken), Filipinos still reacted to the local flavour of such global food. Food provisioning or access to hygienic produce, including condiments and ingredients (e.g. fish sauce) used for Filipino cuisine, was an important concern, especially for newly arrived transnational migrants. As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the main queries on the Filipinos in India newsgroup is information about access to preferred food ingredients.

As this chapter is primarily concerned with peer relations, I describe how food constitutes friendship in the context of transnational migration experiences in Indian cities. Aside from bringing people together, I observed that food was one of the desired objects for mutual exchange that both contributed to personal reprutation and facilitated friendship (Killick & Desai 2009) among Filipino transnationals. My analysis also reveals that provisioning, which includes information about, or access to, hygienic food,
and the talent to cook are common media for exchange. In the absence of ‘authentic’ Filipino ingredients, the ability to adapt and work with available produce is valued by Filipino transnationals. For educated transnationals, the knowledge of food production or procurement is also part of the exchange. How one produced the food in the context of the host society’s material constraints becomes meaningful. My research participants asked each other how they cooked up a dish from scratch or how they used alternative ingredients. Prepared food is also subject to evaluation. As ability manifests in the quality of food, the evaluation of the product reflects a person’s level of skill. In case of purchased food, the ability and effort to procure produce are appraised. My research participants, regardless of peer groups, recognised the effort invested in organising house parties. Food then becomes an expression of one’s self and relation to others. Relations mediated by food are about reciprocity and collective identity. Filipino transnationals’ participation in house parties or social gatherings was evaluated based on a morality of mutual and equal exchange. In the next two subsections, I illustrate how food practices, in the context of house parties, both constitute the persons and the friendship they enter into.

1. Hosting and social status

The format of a party sets the terms of exchange. At the heart of it is the alternating role of being a host or a guest, with tacitly understood obligations and expectations. Peer groups tended to adopt a particular style of partying. The group of mostly workers and their families organised potluck parties in a fixed venue, usually at the home of a member who was considered a patron and had the crucial resource of space. The other format was rotation in which members of the group, comprised of accompanying spouses, took turns in hosting lunch, which included providing venue, food and drinks. For potluck parties, the host was expected to provide the place, dinnerware and something to eat and or drink. The expectation for food was minimal: the host provided drinks and boiled rice, a staple food paired with most Filipino dishes. However hosts tended to exceed expectations and prepared some main dish and dessert. Guests were expected to bring a dish that they had committed to during the planning stage. For rotation parties, the host provided everything, but guests also went beyond expectations and brought additional food and drinks. In certain cases where a host needed assistance (e.g., elderly members without house help), peers provided help in the kitchen. In other
words, one could go beyond the agreed terms, but was likely to do or give less than the hosts. Generosity was the norm.

Hosting and bringing food became a means to establish identity and status based on the ability to provide a comfortable venue and to cook Filipino or other dishes. A place to organise house parties was not always available for peer groups of workers. Given the temporary state of their employment and differential privileges and demands of work, only few individuals could provide the space that could accommodate a minimum of 20 people. Indeed the patron model, where a more privileged individual volunteered her/his place, was conducive for this group. I observed this pattern of venue patrons when I traced the formation of the migrant community through my interviews with two past presidents of its organising body. A venue patron was therefore regarded well in the community and as a collective other members were indebted to him/her. As hosts, the venue patrons quickly established their status through their ability to provide a comfortable and private space, a crucial element in social gatherings and a rare resource for transnational Filipino workers in Indian cities. When venue patrons left India for good, tributes on their Facebook wall explicitly acknowledged their generosity in offering their houses where Filipino transnationals could catch up, meet newcomers and savour Filipino food.

In contrast, more privileged peer groups, like those made up of Filipino wives married to transnationals from the Europe and North America, did not have problems with party venues. Their living spaces, similar to the venue patrons of the Filipino workers, tended to be more spacious and furnished. They met every week for lunch and the party venue shifted from one member’s house to another. There were other variations to these patterns of hosting. For example, the peer group of domestic workers organised their weekend parties in their foreign employer’s house, especially when they were away. It should be noted that Filipino domestic workers in Delhi were privileged because they lived in the same place as their employers. I observed that they acted as venue patrons or party hosts to other Filipino workers with no access to such spaces. Filipinos married to locals also hosted parties for Filipino transnationals and for their peers. Thus to a large extent, they were considered as venue patrons.
2. Food as medium of reciprocity

Guests and hosts made an effort to procure food ingredients and come up with a special preparation. A certain dish was one’s speciality, thus reinforcing the relationship between the output and one’s ability to cook. Parties were planned around the potential food one was likely to contribute. Both guests and hosts anticipated the food one was likely to bring or prepare. Interestingly the Filipino word used to describe social gatherings around food is *handaan*, which literally means ‘a preparation’. *Handaan* already implies effort, and such labour does not escape the propensity of this group of transnationals to evaluate each other.

Food as the medium of exchange, was subject to scrutiny for both quality and quantity. Standards against which the object of reciprocity was appreciated or valued operated tacitly and varied according to individuals or peer groups. What I found in my field notes and interviews was a double appraisal of both effort and its product. The quality and popularity of a dish were also an indication of skill levels. The evaluation and impact of food is a bodily experience with sensory and affective registers. Therefore, satisfaction and approval or otherwise is concrete and immediate. Once a dish was tasted and savoured, praises were immediately given, but negative evaluations of food were usually held back. Food therefore represented the performance of a skill, the willingness of an individual to put in effort, and by extension, the importance allocated by that individual or group to others. The evaluation of food thus constituted and affected social relations through tacit moral judgments. Criticisms relating to food were not only comments about one’s ability or status, but also one’s character. In the context of the Filipino migrant community, generosity was a particularly valued virtue.

The quantity of food also mattered and depended on the purpose or format of the party. The rule of thumb is to provide excess food as a sign of generosity. I observed that when individuals hosted parties, there was more than enough food on the table for everyone. However, unless there was a system of rotation, people were conscious of not abusing the generosity of individuals or being perceived as dependent. For the Filipino migrant community potluck parties signified collective participation and were intended to distribute the burden of preparation. Members were conscious of bringing an acceptable amount of food or, as I will discuss below, becoming subject to criticism.
Participation in these parties or social exchanges was through the consistent performance of labour and delivery of goods and space. Such reciprocal acts of labour constituted membership of the peer group and consequently shaped one’s status. It was an effort to be on a par with peers or to demonstrate one’s capacity to belong.

I recall a post-party chat with Samantha, the wife of an American diplomat. When all the other ladies left to fetch their children or to prepare dinner before their husbands arrived, we sat on a couch and enjoyed a bottle of red wine. Smiling cheek to cheek, Samantha declared: “Ganap na ako (I am now fulfilled)!” She felt satisfied that she finally hosted a meal and therefore earned her membership of the group. Her peers had low expectations when she invited everyone to a *flores de Mayo* [flowers of May]-themed lunch. Samantha was a medical doctor in the Philippines and lived a privileged life, and thus was not expected to be a good cook. However, she pulled a surprise and prepared a buffet table of beef spare ribs, stir fry vegetables (broccoli, carrots and mushrooms) and steamed prawns. For dessert, she whipped some cream and prepared a platter of strawberries and grapes. Her china, silver and crystal dinnerware added an elegant touch. Italian wine flowed and kept the ladies in floral print frocks blooming and beaming as they posed before the camera. Elizabeth, the most senior member of the group and a retired architect who practiced in the US, told Samantha: “Akala ko ikaw yung tipo na di marunong sa kusina. Yun pala ang galing mo (I thought you were the type who didn’t know anything in the kitchen. But you’re so good)!”

Samantha told me that she was aware that members of the group had high standards when it came to food. She mentioned two members, Gilda and Katrina, who cooked Filipino dishes well. Gilda was known for her improvisation skills, particularly using local produce and imported products from the US Embassy commissary, to come up with rice-based desserts such as *palitaw, suman at latik* and *biko*. The week before, Katrina hosted lunch at her flat and prepared simple Filipino dishes (*tortang talong* [roasted aubergine dipped in egg batter and pan-fried], *munggo* [mung bean soup], stir fry spinach leaves in fish sauce and *patatim* [pork shank stewed in soy sauce, cloves and garlic]) that were paired with pinot noir from Oyster Bay, New Zealand. The *tortang talong* was all devoured by the time I went for a second serving. As soon as she went online on the same day, the most opinionated member of the group, the wife of an executive chef, posted a thank you note on the Facebook wall of the peer group and heaped praise on Katrina’s *handaan* (preparation). With this precedent, Samantha
decided to cook non-Filipino dishes to avoid being assessed on the standard of taste for Filipino cooking. She shared how she meticulously selected the ingredients (smelling the fruits and checking their colour and ripeness) and prepared the meals (cooking the meat under pressure to drain the fat). “I feed others the sort of food I myself would eat”. Her explanation alluded to the ethic of reciprocity. In making herself distinct and applying her high standards, Samantha demonstrated effort and exceeded expectations of the group.

The inability to reciprocate was equated with dependency and could elicit contempt or low regard. Filipino transnationals avoided being construed as such, especially those who were in low status occupations. An informant, who frequently organises house parties, explains the norm and practice in potluck parties:

I appreciate them so much [referring to domestic workers]. During potluck parties many people complain. Food is not enough. Why? They want to come but they don’t bring food. And do you know who brings a lot of food? The house-helpers(kasambahay). Sad to say. They bring more food [comparing them to skilled workers]. If you didn’t bring anything, you shouldn’t complain. I don’t think they are scrimping. I would rule that out. Maybe some people. I don’t see them [professionals] that way. Maybe they are just lazy. They start to be dependent because people would be bringing food anyway.

House parties were social gatherings where food, and the ability and effort to produce it, became the media of reciprocity. One’s participation required an ability to reciprocate according to expectations. Giving something of equal value or more was the norm against which one was appraised. In other words, who we are is not just what we eat (Bakhtin 1984) or where we eat (Bell and Valentine 1997), but also what we feed others.

Talk, boundary making and transgression

In house parties or social gatherings, Filipino transnationals chatted most of the time with their peers. Talk enables sociality (e.g. Coupland 2003); however, as pointed out above, it is also a medium through which boundaries are articulated and constructed. Boundary making through evaluative talk was evident in gossiping among Filipino transnationals. It contained evaluations of people on the basis of their socio-economic status, ability and moral disposition. The occupational stereotype attached to a peer
group became a reference point in sizing up strangers, acquaintances and friends. Often Filipino transnationals engaged each other in evaluative talk on “questions about moral worthiness of oneself and others” (Bird et al. 1989, p. 86). Through my participation in the community’s gossip, I learned that such ‘moral talk’ not only included moral judgments of the character of people, but also moral evaluations of their own conduct.

The other form of talk is conversation that is emotionally supportive (MacGeorge et al. 2011). Here, communication is dialogic and highlights the act of listening. The nature of messages is “comforting” with the goal of “alleviating or lessening the emotional distress experienced by others” (Burleson 1984 cited in MacGeorge et al. 2011, p. 333). Labelling it as comforting conversation, the process is person-centred where the listener offers sympathy and helps the other articulate her feelings and understand her situation (MacGeorge et al. 2011, p. 333). I observed that rather than judging the act or character of the person based on a moral standard, my informants, both men and women, engaged in comforting conversations with aggrieved parties. Thus, they were acting ethically rather than invoking an abstract moral code.

1. Moral talk

Evaluative talk, such as scrutinising someone’s background or gossiping about them, created discord in the community and reinforced status differences. As cited above, evaluation was central to the process of knowing people. However, the moral judgments that came out of such mental, emotional and social processes made evaluation problematic. Such evaluations were not only intended or unintended judgments of character, but also of personal worth. While Filipino transnationals knew the need to evaluate people, they were conscious of how it might affect them. Such talk was not limited to introductory conversations in parties, but also in subsequent encounters and interactions. The experience of being sized up verbally and non-verbally, as exemplified by Clara, the domestic worker, and Sylvia, the volunteer worker, stirred feelings of alienation.

People who asked questions about a person’s background to establish one’s status gave an unpleasant impression. One informant confided to me that she had stopped asking Filipino transnationals about their occupation and the school where they obtained their qualification. She pointed out that these questions, along with others concerning their
place of residence in the homeland or their kin (family origins give clues to possible relations), were intended to place a person in the social hierarchy of the homeland. Being an alumnus of an educational institution, especially elite ones, immediately established one’s privileged background. A person of similar background can further inquire about common friends or acquaintances or even relatives who studied in the same institution. Being asked questions that probe into one’s occupation, education and personal relationships could be an ordeal or an opportunity to establish commonality.

What often ignited conflict between Filipino transnationals was the spread of rumours or negative judgments of others or assaults on one’s character. People pried into personal lives and behaviour. Claims about one’s background were scrutinised. In the context of unequal privileges and status differences in Filipino migrant communities in India, luxurious’ lifestyles were suspected and put through a virtual dressing down. Filipina wives of privileged transnationals from Europe and North America were subjected to this treatment. In embassy events or public spaces, the sight of a well-dressed, young lady and her ‘white’ male partner invited attention and speculation. There was an immediate burden on the part of the Filipina to disprove stereotypes attached to such unions, such as the maid-turned-wife, the mail-order bride or the entertainer-turned-partner.

Claims by Filipinas married to transnationals from Europe and North America, especially in introductory conversations, were ascertained. My research participants pointed out that envy motivated attempts to find out the story behind the fortune of being the spouse/partner of a privileged ‘white man’ (“suwerte nakapangasawa ng puti”). One incident narrated to me was a rumour that a Filipina used to be a domestic worker in her husband’s household. When she became aware of the gossip, she posted a message on the email-based discussion group of the community defending her background and pointing out that she had a college education. Gossip of such a nature, especially in a status conscious community, usually represented an attempt to devalue or dress down the person. I heard one lady say “Dinamitan lang yang mga yan. Pinulot lang yan sa kangkungan (They were just dressed up to look rich, but they were only picked up from the paddocks)”. While being truthful about one’s background was the norm, choosing what to tell and not tell people about one’s past was a way of avoiding the degrading treatment arising from stereotypes. In this normative space, one assumed a defensive posture. “Wala akong tinatago (I’m not hiding anything)” was an utterance,
usually made after self-disclosure, which alludes to and mocks this norm at the same time. However, I observed that women whose backgrounds conformed to the middle class values of meritocracy and legitimacy were likely to be more open about their past. Women whose social status improved because of or derived from their privileged spouses unsettled such values and hence were often subjected to harsh moral judgments.

Rodrigo, who preferred to hang out with the diverse expatriate crowd of the city, confided to me that he was a gossip item among members of the Filipino community. The following quote illustrates his contempt for and critique of such moral talk:

…the problem with us Filipinos is we destroy each other’s reputation. Because [they are] so insecure! …[F]or example, we have an attitude the first time you meet a person. [You ask] Why are you here in India? What’s your job? How much is your salary? Those are the stuff that come out of their mouths. You have no right to ask salary! At least you have to be happy that you saw a Filipino who is working here…They don’t know when to stop (walang preno)!

There are some Filipinos who say: “Does his wife know what he’s doing here?” For me that is just for fun! You will observe tomorrow all the women will kiss and hug me even in the presence of their [‘white’] husbands. They don’t put any malice into it. If Filipinos see me, especially older women, they ask, “What are these women doing—hugging and kissing another guy in the presence of their husbands?” I hate it! I’m the type who doesn’t care about what people say. I’m a liberated person as long as I am not doing any harm to them. Don’t interfere with me, I’m not meddling into your affairs!

Rodrigo’s ethical position called for respect for personal boundaries. However, it also clashed with notions of propriety. This tension suggested different moral standards at work. The example of Rodrigo demonstrates that such conflicts were attempts to claim a higher moral ground or defend one’s ethical stance. Such acts of rationalising one’s behaviour are ways to counter the devaluing effect of gossip.

Gossip in the Filipino migrant communities in Indian cities was both loathed and loved. Controversial personalities were fodder for conversations among peer groups. As a group activity, it strengthened cohesiveness and reinforced shared moralities. In this context, such evaluations of personalities also established who was in or out of the group. It was a process of identifying desirable and undesirable traits or attitudes and thus defining the characteristics that the group desires for its members. One memorable gossip moment was about why a barkada discontinued associating with a fellow
accompanying spouse, Maita. The reason was said to be about her being judgmental. Maita asked Gemma to accompany her to buy meat and fish at a market in a South Delhi suburb. The latter refused to go back there because she found it too unsanitary. Maita reacted and said: “As if you don’t go to the same public wet markets in the Philippines!” When Gemma narrated this incident, she explained herself to the group: “We were not well off but I did not come from a dirt poor background”. The barkada found Maita’s attempt to degrade or keep Gemma in place insensitive and provocative, traits that didn’t sit well with the supportive and positive environment the group wanted to keep.

Gossiping was also an excuse for individuals to meet for coffee or call someone for a chat. In my stay with or visits to my informants’ homes, our conversations were often interrupted by mobile phone calls from their friends who shared updates in a developing story about people in the migrant community. Such moments were awkward, especially if the person on the other end of the line gossiped about common friends or acquaintances. However if my interlocutor was a friend, the news from such calls immediately became the talking point.

As a fieldworker embedded in the social life of the community and a frequent witness to gossip moments, I experienced the difficulty of being caught in a bind: to show solidarity with the person who gossips or to state disagreement with her. One informant, a Filipina married to a local, shared her way out of such situations: “Um-o na lang ako at di ko na ginagatungan (I just nod and don’t add to what is said)”. By pretending to agree, one did not embarrass the instigator. This act of neutrality diffused the negative impact of gossip in the presence of others. Such an ethical response was expected in a moral migrant community.

2. The comfort of conversations

Comforting conversations were common among peer groups. Members supported each other by listening or sorting out problems or issues through talk. Serious conversations, which could be highly emotional, were possible with people with whom they were at ease. Thus, commonality was a main consideration in choosing company. Members of this heterogeneous migrant community sought friends or people who understood their situations, or had been through the same circumstances. The unusual situation of
Filipino transnationals (e.g. being away from their family or being married to a foreigner, including Indian locals), and the complications arising from it, required moral support.

When all of her female friends left India for good, Clara had only her set of male friends to hang out with. She confided to me that she could only talk to them about her situation back home. While others in the community suspected her closeness to all-male company, she explained that she was like an elder sister to them. She was particularly close to one member who was also married. Clara said that only another married person could relate to what she was going through. I thought that by confiding in a man who respected her, Clara’s secrets were safe. She also benefitted from the perspective of the opposite gender in her conversations with this man.

Peer groups comprised of Filipina women married to locals existed primarily to help each other. Teresita, who met her local husband while he was studying in the Philippines, said her group would give support to Filipinas who were starting their married lives in Delhi. She and other older women would listen to younger women’s concerns about dealing with a joint-family household, the in-laws and food practices. When I visited Bangalore, the peer group of Filipinos married to locals invited me to their Sunday lunch at a restaurant where I saw them in action. Younger members shared their marital or domestic problems, and older members gave assurance, advice and encouragement to persevere in their marriage.

The peer group, comprised of accompanying spouses of transnationals from North America and Europe, demonstrates a pattern of social support through comforting conversations. As mentioned above, their status as dependent partners was morally suspect. Moreover, group members, who had humble origins in the homeland, were scrutinised and labelled as “naka-jackpot” or free riders. By forming a peer group, these dependent spouses were insulated from moral talk about their occupation and conduct. One group I spent time with in Delhi was interesting because its members came from different social and economic background in the Philippines. Their situation as accompanying spouses in Delhi was an initial basis for establishing links. Their privileged lifestyle, i.e. living in bourgeois spaces in the city, was also a common denominator. However, given the issue of food provisioning in Indian cities and the practicalities of organising the household and children, the need for a support group
became apparent. Weekly lunches or house parties became a means to nurture the friendship. The ability of the members to host or prepare a meal facilitated sociality. My participation, observation and interviews, also suggested that talk during lunches was crucial in cementing friendships within this group that called itself the Lunching Ladies.

After a hearty meal, an exchange of banter and bursts of laughter, the 14-member group started to break into dyads and triads. While the gracious host served coffee or tea, conversations deepened between the ladies. The jovial expression on some of the ladies’ faces suddenly turned serious or melancholic. One-on-one talk was common in this group.

Sophia, the ‘mother hen’ of the barkada, described the Lunching Ladies as “a motley crowd of women from different backgrounds but shared the same experience of living in First World countries”. Having been posted to many cities, she admitted that the Lunching Ladies was one of the best peer groups she ever had ever belonged to.

“What makes the [...] group special is because we accept each one unconditionally - warts and all! Very rare to find a group where we can be honest and frank and not take it personally. We acknowledge each individual’s weaknesses and strengths without making judgment calls. It is not yet time for tears. Let us make the most of the time left for us to be together.

When I interviewed Sophia, she acknowledged that the group was still new and members kept changing. “We’re still new; we haven’t known each other that well. There’s really no time for intriga (intrigue). We just want to enjoy”. While the group often met for lunch every week, she said that some people met separately to confide in each other. She explained: “I mean, you don’t tell everyone your problems, hindi ba (Do you)? That’s understandable. You know people go out with someone because they feel more comfortable with that person and they could tell their problems”. However, I noticed that on many occasions all listened to help a particular member in distress or to learn from the wisdom and experiences of older peers.
One member of the group was Lani, aged 40, a mother of four children and the partner of a European transnational who worked as a senior officer in a multinational company. Lani typified the privileged spouse of an expatriate worker. Her family was accommodated in a huge farmhouse and had a staff of local and Filipino domestic workers. The children went to Delhi’s top international schools. Lani’s impeccable fashion sense frequently drew attention among Filipinos in Delhi, but also made her vulnerable to scrutiny. Her background, privileged lifestyle and association with a highly paid corporate executive were dissected. She rarely associated with fellow Filipinos, except with the Young Ladies and a Filipino couple. Occasionally, she would host a party for her compatriots. The event was held in the spacious lawn of the farmhouse and she would prepare Filipino dishes herself. Her generosity trumped her reputation. For the Young Ladies, she would always volunteer to host lunches and the meals she prepared satisfied her peers’ nostalgia for home-cooked Filipino food.

However, Lani’s domestic troubles inevitably reinforced the stereotype attached to her status as an expatriate’s wife. The Young Ladies were aware of her situation, but respected her privacy. She was close to another member, Katrina who was her confidant. In gatherings where the partners of the Young Ladies were present, Lani and Julian appeared to be on good terms. But as months went by, she could no longer contain her burden. On Facebook, she would express her frustration at a person she would not name. Katrina revealed that Lani called and sought her company. The two would meet at Katrina’s place to drink. Members of the Young Ladies became increasingly concerned and started to think of ways to help her. During lunches, we checked on signs that might show her readiness to unburden herself. She remained elusive until one afternoon in February. After a hearty feast of goulash, Lani shared her strained relations with her adolescent children and partner. She did not reveal much about the reasons, but the point she emphasised was that her domestic problems were complicated by their move to Delhi. Her Filipino domestic worker’s visa could not be renewed. She was left with a local staff that she found too difficult to manage, especially the family driver, who only listened to her husband. She lamented about her rebellious teenage children. The Young Ladies listened intently. We noticed at certain points that she held back details but we did not ask more than what she was comfortable to share. I observed that her friends had good intentions to help, but were still respectful. They were glad she started to reach out. Even at the time Lani left Delhi, the ladies only had a vague idea of her domestic troubles. I observed that throughout the
difficult period, members of the group, who were fully aware of Lani’s predicament stood by her side. They organised meet-ups to have an excuse to comfort her with food, wine and their warm company.

Indeed, the barkada often offers a non-judgmental social space where individual differences, circumstances and preferences are respected. Being sociable in the context of barkada friendship implies the capacity to understand, listen and relate to others who are different. Lani and her barkada illustrate how transnational Filipino migrants exercise agency in becoming ethical in their relations with co-ethnics who are otherwise divided by class (cf. Parreñas 2001). In the next section, I explain how the barkada as a social form facilitates class boundary transgression and enables inclusion of peers from diverse socio-economic classes.

3. The barkada and class boundary transgressions

Alsaybar (2002) and Dumont (1993) find that barkada friendship is egalitarian, caring, loyal and harmonious. The same qualities are evident, including reciprocity, in the peer groups I observed. Dumont (1993) points out that the ‘ideology’ of the barkada, which is shaped by the set of the qualities mentioned, becomes the framework of relations among its members. To be part of a barkada therefore presupposes a group identity and norm that are relationally constructed, as evident in both Visayan and American contexts. In the context of India, the demands and specificities of the migrant situation and Indian cities reinforce the ideals of barkada friendship. While barkadas grouped according to moral identifications, the relations within tend to be egalitarian and reciprocal. The nature of barkada relations or sociality has the potential to “deactivate” boundaries (Tilly 2004), or motivate social actors to transgress boundaries. The diverse class backgrounds of members of the Lunching Ladies group, for example, demonstrate such a possibility. Members cross class boundaries through the social form barkada. In the following example, I show how barkada expectations supplant one’s class boundary.

My interview with Barbra, a member of the Lunching Ladies, sheds light on how boundary transgression occurs in the context of barkada friendship. In the following quotes, she described an encounter with Maria, the Filipina spouse of another European transnational, who was invited for lunch to be ‘screened’ as a potential member of the
group. She was tasked to fetch her and bring her to lunch. Maria had been in Delhi for quite some time and was not aware of Filipinos in the area. Barbra’s husband, Eric, and Maria’s spouse, Konrad, knew each other, as both were in the same industry. Eric asked Barbra to check on Maria and see if she could be part of their group. I got the chance to chat with Barbra when she was still getting to know Maria. At the time they met, Barbra only knew little about the prospective new barkada member through their short chat on the road. During Maria’s first lunch with the talkative Lunching Ladies, she barely said a word except to answer basic queries from the group. The following excerpts indicate Barbra’s initial assessments that suggest her usual set of criteria for choosing friends.

I cannot talk to her about India. She’s never been around. I can’t talk to her about socialising, she’s not been out! So it was difficult for me to find buttons to press…We’re both Filipinas but I can’t relate to her! …I don’t see any commonality between us. How can I work on it? It’s difficult!

Barbra then compared her with other members of the group using other criteria such as sharing the same gendered role as mother and having the same opinion.

Gilda is a mother, older than me. We don’t have the same wavelength (di ko ka-wavelength) but I could relate to her because she’s motherly. And then she’s very open. She’s not living with her kids, unlike me, but she’s open to me having kids around. Sophia, she’s not my age group… but there is a connection. Apart from being Filipinos, Sophia is smart anyway. When she talks she has her own opinion of things that I agree with. You know there is a conversation. There’s flow!

Reading through the above quote suggests that having the same occupation (as accompanying spouse) or nationality was not enough for Barbra to sustain relations or conversations. In her case, one’s ability to engage in “deep conversation” becomes a proxy for intellectual ability or for being educated, a middle class value. Barbara’s boundaries tend to include educated people. While Barbara is predisposed to make friends according to her criterion of ability, the expectations of barkada friendship challenge her boundaries. Initially, Maria didn’t quite make an impression on her and Barbara felt she might feel out of place. However, Maria secured her spot in the group when it was her turn to host lunch. She did not only impress them with her cooking, but also her food carving skills. Her ability and unassuming attitude were exactly the qualities that the barkada valued. Indeed, the values of barkada in the migration context such as acceptance, tolerance and egalitarianism supplant the tendency to impose class boundaries (occupation, educational attainment, socio-economic background). I do not
suggest that there were no tensions in the group. Members also felt uneasy or offended by jokes and judgemental remarks, but as Dumont (1993) rightly pointed out, the barkada ideology prevails to smooth interpersonal relations in the group. In the next section, I discuss another aspect of barkada sociality—how members symbolise their group identity.

**Publicising friendship**

The urge to take photographs and be photographed among Filipino transnationals was as natural and spontaneous as their boisterous laughter and animated chatter. There was the habit of taking pictures of the food on the table, oftentimes preceding or replacing the customary prayer before the meal. Even the urge to feast on a sumptuous handaan (preparation) was delayed for seconds, even minutes, to have a group picture taken with the food presentation. The people posing behind the table dressed up and cared to have a presentable appearance in the same way that the host took effort to make the food and table setting presentable. The desire to take photos and be part of that photographic space was almost like an enchantment, momentarily disrupted by cultural outsiders. Patrick, the Kiwi partner of Katrina, gave her a knowing look as she took out a camera from her bag and started clicking pictures at a Black and White-themed farewell party. Patrick looked slightly embarrassed in the company of Aussies and Kiwis as his wife pointed the camera on us and we obligingly smiled. “It didn’t happen, if there were no pictures”, Patrick muttered. But Katrina didn’t care and carried on until the host, an Australian diplomat, asked everyone to take their places on the steps of a winding staircase for a group photo.

For Filipino transnationals, parties, like other social gatherings, were photographic moments that became opportunities to fashion the self. Deidre McKay (2008) argues how photographs sent by migrant Filipino workers to kin in the homeland constitute self and relations in a spatial-temporal realm (pp. 381, 385). Using the case of a couple who were employed as domestic workers in Hong Kong, McKay demonstrates how multiple positioned subjects use photographic portraits to build social status in the homeland. Pictures sent back home create expectations for the sender, the subject of the photo, and the audience. The production and reception of the photograph reveal economic relations between the sender and the receiver (McKay 2008, p. 385).
Photographs, in themselves pregnant with meaning, take on more meaning as they appear and circulate on social media. Drawing from the work of Marilyn Strathern (1986) on kinship, Daniel Miller and Mirca Madianou (2012) point out that social networking sites, through friends lists and photo sharing functions, make one’s relationships visible. Applying McKay’s, and Miller and Madianou’s ideas to understand the practice of taking pictures in Filipino transnational house parties, I suggest that group photos that are published on social media make relations and social status visible. The self, relationship, food and venue, are there to be seen.

How group photos are taken also reveal social status and relationships (particularly in- or out-group membership). The party crowd wanted to be included in the picture or to be seen with special guests such as popular personalities in the community (e.g. highly paid executives, officials of the embassy, talented individuals) or visiting celebrities from the Philippines. Guests tended to bring their own cameras. Individuals voluntarily took turns and stepped out of the frame and volunteered to take shots of the group from the cameras, hanging from the forearm of the volunteer or lined up on the dining or centre table. I observed that those taking pictures of the group were often ‘outsiders’ in that gathering. They could be the hosts’ or guests’ local domestic workers or drivers. Filipino domestic workers in Filipino households also take that role, but in this case they were invited into the frame. In the same vein, the individual who volunteered to take the photos, at the expense of being excluded from the frame, would most likely be someone new to the group. Special guests were positioned in the centre of the frame, which became a symbolic boundary that marked the in- and out-group.

Social media, such as Facebook, have redefined what it means to be photographed. Filipino transnationals in India had Facebook in mind when posing before a camera. The idea that pictures would be published or disseminated in one’s social network made one conscious of what it meant to be seen or be seen with others. Social gatherings of peers were events that not only reinforced relations, but also performed status. Expressions such as paki-upload kaagad (please upload the photos right away) or paki-tag (please tag my picture) spoke of the urgency to share photos with the wider social network. This exposure made Facebook photos important to projects of the self—the work of building, improving or maintaining status—of Filipino transnationals, or to the recording of narratives of one’s Indian sojourn. It therefore opened up the images to appreciation, interpretation or criticism from others. Being photographed for Facebook
made one more conscious of one’s appearance, because, as one informant told me, “how one looks reflects her status”. Echoing McKay (2008), she observed that overseas Filipino workers or permanent immigrants were expected to improve their situation or status abroad. Photos on social media should therefore reflect this expectation.

Because social media users are both producers and audiences of content, the photographs can also be commentaries or statements. Hence, making one’s group photo visible also speaks to the politics of peer relations in the Filipino migrant community. One instance that demonstrated how Facebook group photographs could trigger tensions among peer groups was the act of making evident the presence of guests in house parties. Showing up in someone else’s party and declining another group’s invitation was an issue in the context of the factional politics in the migrant community. Given the high value of food and cooking skills in this migrant group, chefs were highly valued. In one party, a chef prepared a set of meals for the host. As soon as the buffet table was set up, the host called for a group photo. Somebody from the crowd remarked: “Baka mainggit yung iba diyan dahil nasa atin ang masterchef (Somebody would get jealous because the master chef is with us)!”. A Filipino chef cooking for free for a house party made the event and peer group important enough; publicising a photo of this gathering signified the (greater) influence of the peer group.

Group photos, however, not only served to establish or promote peer identity and status, as the example above showed. Sometimes they also became a form of critique, a parody of the self, to counter stereotypical representations. Peer groups that were viewed negatively played with their stereotypical images. The case of the Lunching Ladies exemplified this point. In the Filipino migrant community, they were known or referred to as ‘asawa ng mga puti’ (spouses of ‘white men’), a label that acknowledged their privilege but questioned their morality, particularly their occupation. When I was first invited to have lunch with them, one of the ladies declared: Kami ang taga-lustay ng limpak limpak na pera ng aming mga asawa (We are the ones who splurge our husbands’ bounty of money)! The sarcasm in her tone directly alluded to their stereotypical images as ‘women of leisure’ (Fechter 2010) and ‘Filipina brides’ (Tolentino 2001) whose privileges depended on their spouses’ generous compensation packages from their foreign or local employers. As spouses of ‘white men’ who dressed more liberally than other Filipino women in Delhi, they disrupted the conservative sensibilities of others who valued the containment of women’s sexuality. What others
thought of this controversial group was limited to their appearances in community events where they, as expected, dressed to the occasion. Facebook photos, accessible through common friends, also showed their involvement in social gatherings of other expatriate groups and unintentionally reinforced their image as a privileged group. I observed, however, that they worked as hard as the stereotypical overseas Filipino worker. They ran households, cared for their children and/or spouses and managed the transition of moving in and out of their host society, which included establishing social networks for support and survival. The label ‘women of leisure’ was just a thin slice of their time spent once a week with their peers. Compared to working women, their labour as housewives was devalued.

Lani was preparing to leave Delhi for good and decided to put her dresses on sale. She invited her peers for lunch and also asked them to check her stash of accessories, cocktail dresses, scarves, shoes and frocks. The theme or activity for that day was to dress in Lani’s style. When the ladies arrived, the host popped a bottle of champagne, handed each one a glass and took them to the living room where the goods—dry-cleaned and pressed—hang on movable racks. The girls giggled as they tried feather boas, stilettos, summer dresses, hats and halter tops. They chose a dress and matched it with a hat or scarf. As it was the first week of spring, lunch was served in the host’s sprawling lawn. One by one, the ladies emerged from the front door in Lani’s fashion and sashayed through the grass. There were, as usual, laughter, banter and commentaries on the choice of dresses. Lani took photos as her friends posed in her style of fashion.

Two metal poles used to prop up a badminton net stood not far from the dining tables. One lady took to the pole and turned like a dancer to the delight of the crowd. There was peer pressure to pose and perform before the camera. Wearing Lani’s summer frock, hat or party top, each lady took turns for that moment of parody. Katrina wrapped her leg around the pole, gripped it with one hand, arched her back and held a bottle of champagne from its neck. When other women needed coaching on how to pose, Lani obliged: she grabbed the rod, mounted her foot and whirled around it. Her long shiny black hair fluttered in the wind. Two ladies of senior age also let their hair down and indulged the pleasure of their peers.

By unbecoming a lady, each one subverted the norms of propriety that constrained the expression of sexuality. In this play and performance of stereotypes, the Lunching
Ladies made fun of themselves and criticised how others looked at them. “Panindigan ang pagiging Lunching Ladies (Let’s stand by our identity as Lunching Ladies)!” Having conviction about one’s identity was not only called for by the factional politics among Filipino transnationals in Delhi, but also as a critical response to the Filipino community as a normative social space. In enacting stereotypes through photos, this barkada made a statement against the tendency of others to make moral judgments on one’s occupation.

**Conclusion: Barkada in India**

This chapter has described the formation and significance of the barkada and relations among Filipino transnational migrants in India. Using the context of house parties, I have shown how occupation, morality and the idea of ability become the criteria for inclusion and exclusion in a peer group. What appears on Facebook as peer groups based on occupations and privileges are actually constituted by the interplay of place, the migrant situation, and the ethical stance arising from boundary making practices, such as gossip and moral talk.

The material conditions of the place, the small number of Filipinos and an awareness of socio-economic inequalities (albeit within the relatively privileged position of Filipino transnationals), provide the context in which friendships are established. Food draws people together and becomes the medium through which friendship develops. Participating in house parties calls attention to the norm of reciprocity and equality that defines relations between members of peer groups. Analysis of the ways research participants prepare and evaluate meals reveals the importance of ability, which confirms status and membership of the individual to the group. Talk sheds light on the ways friendship is simultaneously constituted through evaluations and emotional support. Based on my observation and interviews with informants, evaluation of one’s socio-economic background and status, and moral talk about one’s occupation and conduct, triggered the formation of peer groups. Filipino transnationals in Delhi sought the company of people who treated them as equal. Comforting conversations, which avoided judgement and provided social support, nourished the friendship, along with group activities. In so doing, Filipino transnationals strove to be ethical in their relations with compatriots.
Friendship, formed in the context of the *barkada*, tended to be egalitarian. As shown by the case of the Lunching Ladies, members with different socio-economic backgrounds in the Philippines made an effort to tolerate differences and focus on organising activities and provisioning. They put effort in contributing resources and ability. The instrumental and reciprocal dynamic of the relationship was seen in the context of the material conditions of the place, especially the provision of food, and the demands of the migrant situation. Being physically away from kith and kin in the homeland necessitated a support network to deal with the practicalities of everyday in Indian cities, especially for transnational migrants with families. As demonstrated by the practice of conversations, friendships in the context of *barkada* involved sentiment. Informants displayed empathy that indicated an effort to be ethical.

While peer groups allude to the factional nature of the Filipino migrant community in Indian cities, they actually provided a sense of belonging. Through the relationship, members fashioned new identities that were otherwise impossible in the homeland. With some exceptions (e.g. Conradson & Latham 2005; Walsh 2009), peer relations in the context of transnational migrants have been inadequately explored. My fieldwork experience presented an opportunity to study the *barkada*, a popular form of sociality in the homeland that is reproduced and modified in the transnational migration context. In the case of Filipino transnationals in India, the *barkada* is a temporary, place-based social formation constituted in relation to other peer groups on the basis of moral boundaries and socio-economic status. Consistent with the original meaning of *barkada*, as bonds formed through the shared experience of travelling together, *barkada* formations in India are also about ties built by people on the move sharing the same situations and trajectories.

In the next chapter, I focus on how Filipino transnationals remake themselves through relationships and symbolic practices on social media.
Chapter 6
Recognition, identity and relationship transformations through the media

If I could make a difference in this country and if Indians recognise and appreciate it, then I am re-assured that moving here is all worth it.

Ema, 40, entrepreneur
(quote from her essay in the Economic Times)

Adopting an understanding that migration is a journey of achievement and self-transformation (Aguilar 1999), this chapter accounts for the ways identities and relationships are transformed in the context of migration. I highlight the role of traditional, new and social media in the process of identity production and relationship transformation. The media provide the resources for symbolisation and space for mutual recognition between transnationals and locals. The interactive and multimedia capacity of digital media enables not only simultaneous production and reception of symbols (Couldry 2012, p. 10) but also interactions that facilitate mutual recognition. By symbolising their achievements in the host society, Filipino transnationals in India challenge the classed and gendered stereotypes that affect them. I draw attention to how Filipino research participants used social media, particularly Facebook, in producing identities.

Another role of new media that I explore is the way in which it provides a space where connections and relationships across distance can be made. I refer to another Internet-based social platform, the chat room, where Filipino and Indian nationals who are spatially apart have the opportunity to connect. In chapter 5, I mentioned about Filipino-Indian couples who met through Internet chat rooms. Using the story of a couple who started as online friends, I address the misconceptions about Filipino-Indian marriages that started through Internet chat rooms. The example not only shows the potential of mediated space to connect people (Silverstone 2005, p. 201), but also presents how a relationship can be mutually transformative for both parties. I suggest that emotions such as gratitude and love animate such transformations. Emotions, as argued in Chapter 1, are linked to ethical practice (Prinz 2007).
This chapter therefore relates media practices to the making of ethical selves and relations. The mediated identity and relationship formations of Filipino transnationals in India suggest affinity between Filipinos and Indians. To illustrate the arguments I have outlined above, I use two sets of examples. The first set focuses on two individuals whose symbolic practices on Facebook address, consciously or unconsciously, different stereotypes, through achievement and morality. The second is a case of friendship and intimate relation between a Filipina and a local that exemplify possibilities for boundary transgression and the consequent self-transformation. The cases chosen are illustrative of general patterns I have seen among Filipino transnationals in Indian cities. Moreover, they were also informants or research participants whose life story and online presence contained emerging practices that were peculiar to the context of Filipino-Indian ethnic relations and the conditions of the India-Philippines migration route.

Symbolising achievement on social media

Facebook provides a format for self-presentation and social interaction. As an Internet-based social media platform, it provides spaces for one’s biographical information (name, etc), photographs (albums), play, creative expression through writing (notes), public (wall) and private interactions (private messaging). A Facebook user has a ‘wall’ or public space where messages (posts, pictures, webpage links) from one’s network flows. Two important space formats of Facebook that enable interactions are the status update, where one can post text messages, images, links and videos; and the comment box below a status update, where people could reply to a post. The comment facility is complicated by an added feature called the ‘like’ button that others can activate to express approval or acknowledgment. Users have the option to delete comments they made or ‘Unlike’ a comment. Facebook displays the number of people liking and commenting on a post. Hence, it enables surveillance of one’s social network. How Filipino transnationals in India creatively appropriate the social media’s format and capacities tells about emergent symbolic practices.

Aside from enhancing or preventing social connection, conflict and disconnection (Miller 2011), Facebook and other social media platforms, have been associated with self-display and identity construction (Davies 2007; McKay 2010; Miller 2011). Daniel Miller suggests that self-presentation on social media is not so much about its truth or
pretence but its performances based on social roles and expectations (Miller 2011, p. 177). Using the case of Trinidadian Facebook users, Miller draws attention to a consciousness of one’s image in the eyes of others. For Trinidadians, the truth of one’s self exists in others’ responses to one’s image or appearance. Facebook makes this social process visible. However, the case of Trinidadians’ view of the self, Miller qualifies, occurs in a more or less egalitarian society. The case of Filipino transnationals, who occupy different social positions in the homeland and host society, shows a similarity with Trinidadians and a point of departure.

Like the group of Filipino Facebook users investigated by Deidre McKay (2010), Filipino transnationals in India use digital photographs as symbolic resources (Silverstone & Georgiou 2005) to construct identities. I instantiate a particular presentation of the self that emphasises distinction through achievements. The use of digital photographs and digitised images of newspaper clippings are understood as symbolic practices that harness the power of media (the technology and institutions) to give meaning (Couldry 2000; Madianou 2012; Thompson 2000).

What meaning does a photograph on Facebook symbolise? John Berger (1982/2002) suggests that photographs provide evidence, or status of fact, through citation. A photo, Berger argues, quotes from appearances; it cannot lie and at the same time it cannot tell the truth. Therefore, a photograph tells limited truth and relies on words for meaning (Ibid, p. 54-55). The Facebook practice of posting photos of achievements and providing captions that state their significance is a manner of giving evidence to a migrant’s achievement. In photographing newspaper articles where they appear or are written about, Filipino transnationals cite the source of recognition, the local media, which validate their achievement. What they produce is a ‘truth’ about themselves, evidence of their achievement in their overseas sojourn. Filipino transnationals mobilise the symbolic power of the media to represent the value of their labour and consequently their self-worth.

**Making connections: How local relations create a transnational identity**

The story of Ema Trinidad¹ shows how her symbolic practices on social media, particularly Facebook, not only signify her achievements but also point to the way in which local relations create her transnational identity. Both traditional and social media

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¹ Permission to use her real name and photographs was granted.
become the space through which the process of making connections, re-presenting the self and gaining recognition occur. What makes the case of Ema also distinctive is her polymedia (Madianou & Miller 2012) presence, how she is present in several media and how she re-presents media coverage relating to her work and biography on social media. Here is a situation where media content circulate and acquire meaning (Silverstone 1999) in a participative and collective fashion. Indeed, Ema demonstrates how being socially embedded, that is making a connection with the local on many levels (personal, business and cultural), enables the fulfilment of one’s aspirations.

1. Ema’s ability meets Bangalore’s desire

Like other Filipino transnational workers I met in Indian cities, Ema was a hands-on manager. When I came to her office for the interview, she was in the middle of training her newly hired staff. Two young women from the Northeast were working on her fingernails and taking instructions and feedback on how to clean, trim and buff them. She apologised for the situation but I said I was happy for the chance to see her also at work. Ema requested her front desk officer for some tea and asked what I wanted out of the interview. I was touched by her generosity. For the rest of my weeklong stay in Bangalore, Ema would take me to parties and events so I could see her in action: mingling with the local elite and organising an event for her group of expatriates² and non-resident Indians. How Ema became integrated into Bangalore’s chattering classes was driven by her desire to be better. She surmounted the social constraints that held her back in the homeland through crossing boundaries.

For five years, Ema worked as an executive producer for a public affairs television program aimed at helping disadvantaged children. She quit her job because:

> There is a limit for you *(Hanggang doon ka lang!)*. I don’t have a career path five years down the line. It’s not about the job. I just didn’t want to be an employee. This is not what I want. I want to travel. I want to meet people. It’s about what I really want to do. And I want the freedom of having my own business.

² The term expatriate is associated with the social hierarchies of colonialism; however its current meaning refers to employees of a company who take on a foreign assignment (Fechter 2007, p. 2). The Indian state uses the term to refer to all transnational workers. In the context of my fieldwork, accompanying spouses of transnationals workers and several skilled workers use the term. Expatriate is associated with privilege, particularly the benefits that companies provide.
Her former employer, the largest TV network, has a competitive environment where patronage also thrives. Graduates from elite universities in the Philippines are given preference.

After she showed me the spot where she planned to open a branch in Bangalore’s newly opened mall in the heart of the central business district, we settled down for a chat at a French café. She confided that she used to consider only applicants from elite schools for job openings in her TV program. She pointed out that she herself did not come from an elite school. In our conversation, she went on to analyse how recruitment practices in her company reproduce inequalities in Philippine society. She lamented: “There is no equal distribution of wealth. Opportunities are all concentrated in the capital (Manila)”. I took her comment as a statement of fact and sentiment. Her understanding of her situation in the homeland provided a context that framed her migrant sojourn and symbolic practice on Facebook. I also observed that her background in the broadcast media industry would later give her the confidence and eloquence that are needed to thrive in the beauty industry and in Bangalore’s social circuit.

Ema resigned from the media company and found an opportunity to earn more income by getting into distribution of skin care products. She travelled to Singapore, Dubai and finally to India to find distributors. Upon the invitation of an Indian friend, she went to Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore to demonstrate her company’s products and find distributors. She was amazed at the locals’ interest in skin whitening products. She confessed that she found an opportunity in their fascination with fair skin (Parameswaran 2011). However, the company decided to halt the expansion in India during the 2008 global financial crisis. Ema already invested time, effort and money during her visit and thought she would miss an opportunity. She resigned from the company and studied skin aesthetics in the US. With a foreign qualification and an Indian business partner, she put up a skin aesthetics and spa centre in Bangalore named S2 (Soft and Supple) Spa and Anti-Aging Centre. Her services included a non-invasive method of skin treatment and body massage. She found the lack of quality services in the locality and positioned herself as an alternative to high-end spas offered by five-star hotels. Her pricing was competitive to attract high-end clients. She also justified that the products she used for her treatment were safe and superior in quality. Conscious of being ethical in her practice, she did not perform invasive procedures (e.g. pricking
pimples) and informed the client about the technology and chemicals she used before performing the procedure on them.

In interviews with the local press, she admitted that she encountered obstacles in setting up the business. However, she always made clear that her perseverance paid off: “When the signage of S2 Spa was turned on, I was moved to tears”. The exorbitant cost of importing the equipment and furnishing for the spa left her with no budget for traditional advertising (print, TV and radio). She decided to use social networking and complemented this form of communication with social media. With the help of her business partner, she made friends with the local and expatriate crowd. She said that all she needed to do was to catch the attention of her prospective clients and to educate them about her services. Ema would show her customers the instant transformation in one’s skin colour and texture after the application of some skin product and procedure. She confided that being talked about or generating a buzz was a way for the business to be known. Word of mouth soon attracted coverage from the local print media. The following excerpt from local press reviews, which Ema posted on Facebook, demonstrates how she was talked about:

The highlight of the week was an invitation by a pint-sized bombshell called Ema. She runs a successful spa and had invited a gaggle of ladies for high tea. The only catch was we needed to listen to her for 2 solid hours. But jokes apart, this fiery Filipino enlightened her enthralled guests with tips on skincare and makeup. The piece de resistance was when she showed us how to evenly spread our lipstick. Hips jutting out and with a naughty twinkle in her eye, she pursed her lips in a pucker and stuck her middle finger into that orifice and pulled it out with a loud pop! Well, well... one always lives and learns. (Rubi Chakravarti, columnist, The New Indian Express)

The columnist’s description suggests sexual objectification. However, the same sexualised reading of Ema’s performance is the source of enchantment, especially in the beauty industry, which creates the promise of desirability. The columnist’s graphic description was precisely the sort of buzz that Ema needed in order to generate interest and curiosity among the locals.

Showing her ability to deliver the desired transformation or makeover was part of generating interest. Inviting or accepting media coverage allowed her to gain credibility as exemplified in the following post:
Ema: *Time Out* magazine did a review of organic treatments of 14 spas in Bangalore, India. They investigated if they really deliver what they promise. This is their cover story in their issue. Here’s their review on the ageLOC Wrinkle Iron Facial of S2 (Soft N Supple) Spa & Anti-Aging Centre:

... To prove the nearly instant effects, Trinidad first worked only on one half of my face. The results were dramatic. In about half an hour, she’d crafted a Harvey Dent/Two Face character out of my partially cleansed mug. (*Time Out*, March 2011)

The testimony from the *Time Out* columnist validates Ema’s ability. As discussed in Chapter 3, Filipino workers demonstrate their skills to legitimise their role as experts in the workplace. She also has a YouTube video where she demonstrates face yoga for *Sakkath Spice* a show on TV 9, a local channel based in South India. The video has 52,141 views. Below the video clip are contact details of Emma’s spa. As an entrepreneur, Ema’s demonstration of skills had to be in the public domain.

2. Being represented by and representing the local

I now compare how local media represent Ema and how she represents her host society in the same media. The juxtaposition will show not only how she is portrayed as an outsider, but also how the locals and outsider claim connection or affinity.

Ema, her family and business had graced the pages of the newspapers and lifestyle/women’s magazines in Bangalore. Most of these publications were local city editions produced by India’s major media companies including Bennett and Coleman or the Times Group, The Age and the major regional player in South India, The Printers. They included the *Times of India, Bangalore Mirror, Deccan Herald, DNA (Daily News and Analysis), Economic Times, Midday, The New Indian Express, Elle Magazine* and *Time Out*. Aside from these mainstream media, India also has a thriving Internet-based magazine industry. Some of these publications are run by interest groups, such as the India Growth Institute, which publishes *Inc India*, a magazine for start-ups.

There were two ways in which Ema appeared on the pages of newspapers and magazines: in the company of others (expatriates, locals) or on her own. It is important to distinguish the two in order to tease out the discourses that constitute locals’ perceptions of expatriates, which inform how she is regarded by the local media.
Expatriates from Europe and North America are highly regarded in Indian society. How they are talked about in the media is instructive. For example, in 2008, Outlook, a national magazine, published an essay titled ‘White Nights’ about the special treatment of foreigners with Caucasian features and fair complexion in Delhi’s nightclubs. On certain days of the week, a club becomes exclusive to expatriates who are given free entry and drinks. The author of the article, Omair Ahmad (2008), calls attention to the discriminatory practice in Indian society based on skin colour and race. Another magazine, Open, pursued the same topic and reported that local companies hire foreigners (of Caucasian background) to pretend as employees or clients to create an impression of credibility among the locals (Polanki 2010). The positive discrimination toward white foreigners is linked to the locals’ politics of skin colour that privileges fairness (Parameswaran 2011, p. 69). Hence, the practice of local elites and white expatriates being photographed together and appearing on Page 3 (the society page) suggests the mutually beneficial exchange of symbolic power. Ema’s business is therefore implicated in the local politics of appearance and body, which nourishes India’s beauty industry (Parameswaran 2011, p. 71).

Ema’s photographs on Page 3 with other expatriates and locals were taken at parties or events such as product launches, restaurant openings or gatherings and celebrations of expatriate groups. As an officer of Bangalore Expatriate Club, her presence in such gatherings was expected. Moreover, the state government’s midnight curfew, which affects pubs and nightclubs, has contributed to the proliferation of restaurants as alternative spaces for sociality. As Filipino informants would say, the main social activity in Bangalore was not clubbing but eating out and evening cocktails. Emma confided that attending these gatherings was part of promoting her business as she relied much on personal networks. The photos published the following day on Page 3, where
she smiled ear to ear with local restaurant owners, fellow expatriates or Bangalore’s ‘chattering classes’, suggested her importance to the locals.

The second type of media appearance was through articles devoted to Ema and/or her business. Media coverage of her business took the format of a customer review (usually by editors of lifestyle magazines or newspapers). When Ema posted these write-ups, they became testimonials or proof of the quality of her work. For instance, the editor of *Midday*, Piali Dasgupta (2011) tried the services and concluded that the business stepped up to its promise in giving her soft and supple skin. In same vein, *Elle* (September 2010) magazine reviewed Ema’s facial treatment and found it easy with no side effects.

Unhappy customers were also part of doing business. During my interview with Ema, a customer complained about not being accommodated on the day he was supposed to avail of a gift voucher. The customer argued with the front desk officer, Divya, who insisted there was no available slot for him and the queue was long. Ema intervened to sort out the problem and listened to both sides. When the customer left, she and her staff reviewed the incident and reminded Divya, “we are in the hospitality business and we take shit. Next time, don’t argue”. Ema told me, “It’s good that you saw what happened!” The incident proved to be instructive in revealing the nature of her business as constrained not only by what other people say but also what the locals expect from the hospitality industry—to be accommodated, regardless of rules.

Finally, a very illustrative example of the way in which locals recognised her achievement through the media was her inclusion in a special issue of an Internet-based magazine, *Inc India*, that featured successful expatriate entrepreneurs in Indian cities. Emma joined the distinguished company of several expatriates who included men and women from Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Singapore and the UK. How these achievers were portrayed traced why they decided to put up a business in India and how they surmounted the challenges of the place such as bureaucratic red tape and the unpredictable attitudes of the local workforce and suppliers. A recurring pattern was their affinity for the place and a business opportunity that they sensed based on the lack of a particular service or product that both locals and foreigners in India were willing to pay for such as organic produce, bagels, kitsch items, beauty services, travel assistance and adventure sport. The title given to the essay on Ema suggested how the editorial
team regarded her accomplishment in India: “Giving a makeover to the Indian beauty industry”. Using interview quotes, the author Pooja Kothari (2010) pointed out the ways in which the Filipino entrepreneur was able to carve her space in the beauty industry by providing high quality services at a competitive price.

Local media were also interested in Ema’s personal experience of the place or host society. I observed that she was given voice in Indian media space through verbatim interview quotes. In a feature story by Kavya Balraman (n.d.) in Metrolife, she was portrayed as “a globe trotting expatriate” who was integrated into her locality. A Times of India article by Aparajita Ray (2011) echoed the same discourse on affinity for the place: “Ema considers Bangalore as her second home”. The article cited why she and her family preferred to be in India for the Christmas holidays when most expats left the country. While she explained that Christmas is a peak season for her business, the paper put emphasis on her emotional connection with the place by headlining the article ‘We’re just happy to be in Bangalore’. The text indicated the local media’s positive regard for outsiders.

How Ema regards her host society demonstrates not only the same symbolic boundaries that Filipino transnationals tend to make but also the sort of connections and affinities that she sees between Filipinos and Indians. I draw from two texts: one from a local magazine published in Bangalore, Culturama, and the other from an article written by Ema herself in the Economic Times.

Consistent with other Filipino transnationals, Ema evaluated the locals in moral terms. In print media interviews, I observed that she used the words ‘lazy’, ‘cheater’ and ‘corrupt’ to describe the people she engaged in the context of work and business. However, she went a step further by qualifying her statement or putting it in context. The following examples show her nuanced way of drawing moral boundary:

Before you come here, there is an impression that the country is corrupt and you might be cheated at every turn. My experience has been quite different. I must say that the few people who have cheated me are far outnumbered by the many nice and sincere people who have helped me grow both as a person and as an entrepreneur. (Trinidad 2010)

What I dislike are the self-imposed “limiting beliefs”. Most are resigned to their fate and so they tend to be lazy and they only think of instant gratification. How do I change this? I don't know if I
can, but in my company, I am doing my best to change this “small thinking” attitude with positive and inspiring thoughts. (Ema Trinidad: Entrepreneur and Aesthetician 2011)

How Ema qualified her observations showed her attempt to understand the lack of a work ethic (‘being lazy’) or motivation as a consequence of the host society’s culture, in particular, the caste system. I observed that Filipino transnationals generally understood caste as ascription by birth or ‘fate’. As a way of comparing social conditions of existence, Filipino transnationals tended to say that “at least Filipinos think that they can improve their station in life compared to Indians who are resigned to their fate”.

Ema used the metaphor “small thinking” to make sense of the beliefs and attitudes of locals she encountered, especially people who worked with her. I observed that Filipino transnationals referred to locals who were disadvantaged by a combination of caste, class, gender, ethnicity and religion. In spaces where they had control, Filipino transnationals dealt with their perceptions of inequality in the host society by helping the disadvantaged through charity and giving them employment opportunities. (I will describe charity work in the next section.)

Ema told me that she preferred to hire Northeast people because “they have better work ethic and are more hygienic”. In Chapter 2, I have suggested that Filipinos are mistaken for being people from the Northeast who are socially disadvantaged but gaining advantage in India’s service industries (McDuie-Ra 2012a). In relating to Northeast people, Filipino workers found affinity not in similarity of appearance, but in their embodiment of moral qualities. Ema’s recruitment practice indicated how her symbolic boundaries translated into social boundaries. Thus, by extension, it is such moral qualities that actually open opportunities for Northeast people in India’s growing service industries where Filipino transnationals find themselves thriving and gaining influence.

Outside the context of work, Ema’s statements showed connections based on similar values with the locals. She called attention to shared realities between Filipinos and Indians:

Both Filipinos and Indians are very family-oriented. They would do anything to protect, support and serve their loved ones. We respect our elders a lot and both cultures are religious. Both are known for being migrants; you would surely find them in all countries around the world! (Ema Trinidad: Entrepreneur and Aesthetician 2011)
I also heard the same opinion from research participants in Delhi and Mumbai. Lisa, the pioneer of Delhi’s first chain of 24-hour convenience stores told me that her employer granted another Filipino consultant of the company a month-long paid vacation leave for him to attend to a family emergency situation. She told me “they understand if the situation is about the family”. Family connection was a trope in Ema’s interviews with the local press when asked what she thought about the place.

Tellingly, Ema’s connection with the place crossed the corporeal boundary of food. While most Filipino transnationals did not have a taste for local food, Ema confidently declared her appreciation: “I like all the tandooris, dahi vada, mutton biryani and any fresh fish cooked with tasty masalas” (Ema Trinidad: Entrepreneur and Aesthetician 2011).

In an essay she wrote for the *Economic Times*, she explained how she related to India and its people as a businesswoman and as a person.

> I will no longer give you a litany of the challenges of living and doing business in India because at this point, I have already learned to accept the things I can change and cannot change. I feel that is the key to being happy here, and it becomes easier with Indian friends. I now see India from a different perspective. Its imperfections are what make it perfect for business. If you can offer solutions, then you can utilise hitherto untapped opportunities, and a whole new set of people are suddenly your clients and friends. (Trinidad 2010)

Ema’s candid statement indicated her recognition of the boundaries that could and could not be crossed in the host society. Being able to connect through friendship and her work was the way she went through the boundaries in her host society.

3. Ema in diasporic media

Ema was not only recognised by her host society but also by fellow overseas Filipinos. *Illustrado*, a Filipino-run lifestyle print and online magazine published from Dubai, honoured Ema, along with other Filipino women, who were achievers in their respective fields. She flew to Dubai and accepted the award in a sari, a popular national costume of India. *Gulfnews*, a major broadsheet, published an essay on these distinguished women. Emma posted photos of the event and the *Gulfnews* article on Facebook. A closer
examination of this magazine and article points not only to the larger discourse of the Filipinos’ preoccupation with ‘proper’ recognition but also an attempt to redefine the image of Filipinos overseas, particularly women. The aims behind *Illustrado* magazine articulate this symbolic project:

*Illustrado* is a unique lifestyle-community magazine published out of Dubai, United Arab Emirates devoted to uplift the morale and the image of Filipinos around the world. The slogan ‘*Taas Noo, Filipino*’ [keep your head up high] and the vision of ‘Helping the Filipino flourish – global vision, native soul’ define the substance, style and corporate ethos that has helped *Illustrado* gain respect and recognition in the Gulf region as a wholesome, positive, highly engaging and richly visual medium that has accorded due respect and recognition to the Filipino community.

The magazine’s goals imply the importance of recasting the meaning of a Filipino identity to generate self-confidence (‘uplift the morale’), which relates to one’s self-valuation. The title of the magazine is also instructive. *Illustrado* is a Spanish word, which means enlightened, and is used to refer to a group of Filipinos who were educated in Europe and espoused liberal views during the Spanish colonial period. The word has evolved to mean upper class. It is closely related to a more current and frequently used Filipino word of Spanish origin *edukado* (educated), a term my informants used as a symbolic boundary to distinguish themselves from others (see Chapter 4).

Examining the front cover of *Illustrado* issues that are posted online, one notices its fantasy motif in which models are not only garbed in high fashion but also made to appear surreal. In other words the magazine title and its cover image reinforce each other’s meaning. (See Figure 11.) This symbolic construction demonstrates an attempt to re-classify the Filipino identity or re-imagine it beyond the occupational stereotype of overseas Filipino workers (e.g. construction workers, domestic helpers). The magazine promotes the Filipino in a rather affluent image or lifestyle through success stories from the Filipino diaspora. It claims to have “an eclectic non-traditional team of contributing writers, photographers and artists spread across the Philippines, the UAE, including Southeast Asia and the US who share the same passion towards the Filipino cause”.

Facilitated by the Internet, this collaborative effort among overseas Filipinos further strengthens the observation that the symbolic project of redefining the Filipino image is significant to them. Interestingly, *Gulfnews*, a mainstream media company in Dubai, a
host society to expatriate workers, also understood this project. Here is an example of
diasporic and host society media speaking to each other.

Written by a person of Indian origin, Manjari Saxena (2010), the *Gulfnews* article on the
recipients of *Illustrado* Women of Substance award, exemplifies the effort to redeem
the image of Filipino women in Dubai from their stereotypical portrayals as
“housemaids, nannies, waitresses and hairdressers”. Saxena interviewed the Philippine
ambassador to the United Arab Emirates and the editor in chief of *Illustrado*, the award
giving body, about the problem of Filipino women’s image. The article featured each
recipient of the award by sharing their thoughts on being a Filipino woman and her
stereotypical portrayals. *Gulfnews* labelled Ema as “anti-aging skincare guru who works
between Dubai and India”. How Ema framed the idea of being a Filipina in her
interview excerpt pointed to the discourse of triumph over constraining structures in the
homeland: “Regardless of her educational background, [a Filipina] can rise above the
ranks just by hard work, sincerity and dedication”. The quote refers to her narrative of
achievement.

In these examples we see how Ema’s practice of posting positive images on Facebook
resonated with collective attempts to take control of one’s identity through the media.
Taken all together, the case of Ema (or other Filipino transnationals) and her
representation in Indian media suggest a migrant’s “presence on one’s own terms in
national media and the Internet, a global common space” (Silverstone & Georgiou
2005, p. 436-437). Indeed, a Filipina’s desire for self-determination has been
accommodated materially and symbolically in her host society, India.
4. Recognition from the homeland and beyond

Most of the persons who commented on Ema’s album of press clippings were her kin and friends from childhood, school days and previous workplaces. They were significant others who knew her and followed her overseas sojourn as it unfolded on Facebook. Eighty-four people ‘liked’ the album and 18 wrote comments that were congratulatory, laudatory or confirmatory. They praised Ema’s achievements and fame abroad (“wow you are famous! The anti-aging diva!”), expressed pride in being associated with her (“I’m proud of my sistah (sister)!”) and, for those who have known her longer, restated their belief in her track record of success (“keep doing what’s best…high school till now…we our batch hapi 4 u [we, your high school mates are happy for you]”). Friends congratulated her for the independent reviews of her spa that
she included in the album (“the review was great for you, Ems. Congrats!”). Moreover, her friends also perceived her as a celebrity, as evident in the following comments:

Celeb I think she owns the word. Emma you have proven to be a force to reckon with. (American male friend)

I should have gotten your autograph. Miss Celeb! (Filipino male friend)

*Iba na ang sikat* (It’s different being famous [An utterance that calls attention to Emma’s situation of being famous]). (Filipino female friend)

Her visibility on visual media (TV, print and Internet) in India and the diaspora suggests another achievement, her celebrity status overseas. In social theory, regarding a person as a celebrity is “attributing glamour or notorious status to an individual within the public sphere” (Rojek 2001 in Liebelt 2011: 228). In the context of global consumer capitalism, being a celebrity is the contemporary manifestation of “symbolic power par excellence” (Rojek 2001, Marshall 1997 in Liebelt 2011, p. 228). To a large extent, Emma’s situation alludes to this theoretical definition.

Whether or not Ema sought celebrity status is not a point I will pursue in this concluding paragraph. As described above, her performance as a celebrity was a consequence of cultural negotiations that outsiders or expatriate workers needed to do (the importance of social status in the host society) and a practice of the beauty industry (media appearances and presence in events). Another example to prove this point: Ema took me to a charity event, a dance recital, before our second interview. She said that she needed to be there to catch up with Bangalore’s important people and to support a friend who was behind the charity. Her celebrity status is a (work) performance.

Claudia Liebelt (2011) links the idea of celebrity with the Filipino migrant condition. Liebelt argues that Filipino domestic workers transcend their marginal social positions through the experience of celebrity status or glamour overseas. The symbolic value of being photographed with religious leaders or being part of globally publicised events uplifts their status in the homeland (Liebelt 2011, p. 225). In the case of Ema, however, her achievement of celebrity status runs parallel to the situation Liebelt describes. The similarity is the idea of achieving celebrity status overseas; however, the difference is the way in which it is constituted and used. Ema’s celebrity status derives directly from
the local’s recognition of her achievement and work. Publicising these press clippings on social media is her way of sharing and symbolising her achievement overseas. As a former producer for a television program, she harnessed the symbolic power of the media to shape perceptions, generate emotions and move people to action.

This observation contradicts the assumption about minority groups’ struggle for respectable representation in mainstream media (Silverstone & Georgiou 2005). Ema’s relation with the host society is mutually beneficial. When I wrote this chapter, the background image on her Facebook page was a digital copy of an article she wrote for the Economic Times, a reputed national broadsheet. The epigraph in the beginning of the chapter is from the same essay where Ema claimed: “India’s imperfections make it perfect for business”. She saw an opportunity and pursued her dream of being her own boss. “If I could make a difference in this country and if Indians recognise and appreciate it, then I am re-assured that moving here is all worth it”, Ema writes in the Economic Times. (See Figure 10.) The media coverage she received from Bangalore and beyond demonstrate recognition of her ability and achievements as ‘beauty guru’, entrepreneur and expatriate community leader.

Showing gratitude: How the practice of morality transforms social identity

Diosa, 34, came to Delhi with her European husband who was hired by a local company. They have two children. One day, she posted a lengthy status update about being grateful for the opportunity to teach basic English to children of construction workers who lived behind a commercial complex where her husband worked. The post was a caption to an album titled ‘I am grateful’ which contained photos of Diosa in action and her students at work—answering test questions, painting and speaking before their peers.

Publicising one’s charitable acts makes one vulnerable to scrutiny, that is, questioning whether or not the motive is selfish or selfless. Why would one still engage in such activity? In the case of Diosa, I tease out the individual motivations and contexts that constitute this type of symbolic practice. It foregrounds the idea that good deeds generate positive feelings or contributes to one’s wellbeing as captured in the Filipino phrase “magaan ang buhay (a life without burden)”. Posting this experience on Facebook is sharing this feeling. Friends recognise this state of being and the meaning
of the act (using the opportunity to help the needy). In so doing, it reveals a connection between recognition and emotion. The recognition of a meaningful act also generates positive emotions, which affect how the actor is regarded. This process of recognition occurs through the symbolic power of the media, the photographic images that evidence the act.

Some background on Diosa is important to understand the meaning of her post. Before becoming the wife of a European expatriate, she worked as a marketing officer for an international luxury hotel in Manila. She obtained a bachelor’s degree in journalism from an elite institution, the University of the Philippines, and previously worked for a media company. Diosa met Markus, a European chef, at the hotel they both worked for. She had a vague idea of what it meant to be the wife of an expat and to have an expatriate lifestyle. Her friends teased her as ‘a woman of leisure’, a stereotypical understanding of the trailing spouse. They told her that she didn’t have to work anymore. However she said to herself: “I cannot fathom the idea of not doing anything because I was doing so much! …I never stopped. I always wanted to do something”. Her first few years as an accompanying spouse was challenging as she dealt with boredom and the idea of being financially dependent. However, she was fortunate because her husband entrusted all his salary to her. “Mama, see my wallet; I only have five rupees,” she recalled how her husband asked like a child for his allowance. When they started having children, Diosa became preoccupied with being a mother and a role model to her children while still being a good wife. Depending on Markus’s work contract, their family has moved to different places. It was their second time to be in Delhi when I met them during fieldwork. Previously they were in Singapore. They accepted another job offer in Delhi because Markus was given the top post of an executive chef in a local chain of five star hotels, which had a management contract with a prominent European luxury hotel group.

While Diosa lived a comfortable life as an expatriate, she (like other women, especially non-Western) had to put up with the misconceptions or stereotypes attached to her occupation that were remote to her when she was single and earning her own income. After years of being an expatriate, she gained an understanding of her identity and lifestyle and came up with a justification for its value: “We are still women of leisure, we are still women who lunch, but attached to it are responsibilities. Hindi siya ganun ka shallow (It’s not that shallow). …May iba pang puwedeng gawin sa buhay (there are
other things that one does in life)”. Diosa pointed out the diversity of cultures that she had to engage at the same time:

As an expat I deal with a German system in school, I deal with the local system in the market, I deal with a cross-culture environment in my home. Markus is from a different culture; I’m from a different culture; and my kids—they live in an environment that is not even from my husband’s culture... [T]hat is an expat lifestyle. You are exposed to all these factors that are not yours. They maybe yours because you adapt to it but you cannot entirely claim it.

Diosa also dealt with her local domestic workers: a cook, cleaner and driver. I observed that she switched from one mode of speaking to another. For example, she spoke in broken English in an authoritative voice with the locals whose English was limited. She then spoke affectionately when her daughter Maria asked permission to watch television. In other words, her situation of having to deal with household members of diverse cultural orientations and language competencies demanded different performances.

In spite of having helpers around, she still looked after her children Maria, 7, and Bruno, 3. Her daughter attended a German School and her son went to a day care centre. Her day starts at 6:30 AM and prepares her daughter for school. She joins Markus and Maria for breakfast before they hit the road at 7:30. By 8:00 AM, Bruno wakes up and needs to be ready for school. Diosa also gets dressed and takes her son to the day care centre at 9:00. Between 9:00 AM-12:00 noon, she makes use of the time by organising Markus’s social calendar, meeting other expatriate friends for coffee, shopping, running errands, doing work for the German school’s parents’ association, supervising repair works at her flat or preparing her place when it’s her turn to host lunch for her group of Filipino friends. She picks up Bruno by noon and they dash off to a scheduled lunch every Wednesday. They linger until 3:00 or 4:00 PM when it’s time to pick up Maria from school.

One afternoon after a hearty meal and engaging conversations with her friends, she apologised for leaving early. She had a scheduled meeting with her daughter’s teacher at the German school. Her friends asked her to stay a bit and she replied jokingly, “What would my children say if they fail in school because of their mother’s neglect?” The ladies laughed and she dashed off. Her comment alludes to a gendered morality that expects Filipino women to be family-oriented (Espiritu 2001).
Part of the motivations of her self-publicity on Facebook is an attempt to recast the meaning of her occupational identity. Posting an album about her charitable act is a confluence of motivations that are inseparable from her identities and relationships as a woman, Filipino, expatriate, mother, wife, daughter, friend, Catholic Christian and alumna of an educational institution (an important source of identification among Filipinos). These identity discourses will become clearer as we probe into her project of volunteering to teach children.

Diosa confided that when she discussed her plans to do volunteer work with her husband she was asked to explain why. She had to give Markus, who thought that charity was an alien concept, a compelling reason:

> What’s the purpose of teaching? How can I teach my kids about helping people if they don’t see me helping others?...How do you tell kids to be nice if you are not? Also it’s also good for my heart! When you feel good, you do good. So when you feel good and you do good, _magaan ang buhay_ (life is less burdensome)! Again _humabalik nanaman ako sa—ayoko ko kasing pabigat sa buhay_ (I’m repeating my earlier point—I don’t want to be a burden to others)!

Based on her statement above, it is evident that Diosa’s reason to do charity is linked to her role as a mother and to her expectation of that role as a model of virtue to her children. As mentioned above, being a good mother to her children is a self-project. Encompassing this reason is the value that she sees in helping the disadvantaged.

It’s nice to see the faces of the kids...When they saw that I would be teaching them ‘hi! Ma’am’ the smile on their face they wanted to see me. I think they want to learn, not for anything else...Consciously _sabi ko Lord, may binagay naman kayong utak sa akin no. Sayang naman kung biglang magka Alzheimer, hindi magamit no? Meron naman ako ang kakayahang magturo ng Ingles_ (I told myself: Lord, you have given me brains. It would be a waste if I get Alzheimer’s disease and not make use of it. I would like to think I have an ability to teach English). _Hindi naman ako_ (I’m not a) teacher but I think, for basic [English], you don’t have to be a rocket scientist. And if I can teach my kids and if their level is the same as my kids, I mean, it would not be so much [effort]. And it’s a fraction of my time. What do I do with my time when I go out? I shop, _nag-Fa-facebook ako_ (I’m on Facebook). It’s not as if this [teaching] had more bearing compared with what I was doing before. I was thinking, ok I need to do this. It’s good karma; it’s for my heart; it’s for my kids. And primarily it’s also to help these kids.
Diosa’s reasoning reveals internalised Christian discourses of charity and the use and cultivation of human ability and talent. The practice of such ideals increases one’s worth not only in the eyes of others but also one’s self-regard. In other words, such actions reinforce one’s Christian identity. Being in India, for many of Filipino informants is both a challenge and opportunity to practice or perform Christian living. The following quote shows what she said to preface the album ‘I am grateful’:

Today is one of those special days of my life - today I was given the opportunity to bring smiles to the kids who are joyful with simple things. I only have gratitude in my heart for all those who have helped me (those who donated bags) and have supported me like Angela and Sonia (who provided not only bags for the kids but also snacks) and Lily who is readily available to share her time ;-) I am not a teacher by profession, but these kids have given me the inspiration to be able to at least share with them what I was blessed to have learned in school - they don’t have much and they don’t complain ... they only want to learn and that's what I hope and pray to be able to help them with. We really can make a difference - even how little we think it is.

Her friends’ (mostly Filipinos and other European expatriates) comments validated her actions and intentions. The photos of children and their work elicited praises and recognition for her act (e.g. “Fantastic woman, I wish I was more like you; may you be blessed more; keep up the good work”). Tellingly, none of her Indian local friends or acquaintances liked or commented on the album. One male friend from her days as a university student responded and gave another layer of meaning to her action:

You know what I like about the Journalism Workshop we used to do in UPJC [University of the Philippines Journalism Club]? It’s that it was living out what UP is really about: service (free at that) that we give back to the younger generation, hoping that we can inspire them to be responsible journalists or simply be responsible writers. What you’re doing here Diosa is a service to the younger generation and I thank you for continuing on and living the creed that UP stands for regardless of race. Hurray and I am so happy beyond words for your generosity and kindness. You are building a wonderful legacy not only for these children but more importantly for your children to follow. God bless you!

The quote above demonstrates two important points: First, it is evident that educational institutions in the Philippines, a main source of identification, perpetuate discourses of Christian charity through institutional practices such as activities of school organisations. Second, educational institutions in the Philippines have identity or

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3 For example, Matthew 25:14-29, Romans 12:6-8 (*New American Bible* 2002).
character formation as one of its goals. The performance of such goals or idealisations is valued through recognition by fellow alumni, informally or by the alma mater, formally. Being able to consistently perform the identity ideals of being Christian or an alumna of a school, especially in a foreign place, makes the achievement significant.

Diosa’s act of charity is a reproductive practice of internalised ideals and beliefs. However, she is also aware that it can be construed in other ways (as an expatriate she has friends from different faiths and convictions). In a response to a friend’s comment, she provides a justification for posting the pictures of children. (See Figure 12.) She hopes that the photos serve as evidence of the inherent value of teaching and learning and their transformative potential. “I post the pictures of the kids whenever I can so others may be inspired not by what I do but by what the kids do—their eagerness to learn and make something of their lives”.

Like most Filipino transnationals I met in Delhi, Diosa loved taking photographs, being photographed and sharing these images on Facebook. Of the three cases discussed here, she had uploaded the most number of photos (126 albums; 9706 images). Every week, she changes her profile photo, the main image on one’s home page. Always with a camera in hand, she captures every moment of her family’s sojourns. The contents of her albums on Facebook can be classified into her children’s accomplishments and activities; her social life—lunches, cocktails and events; her family holidays; her activities with other accompanying spouses (e.g. yoga, cooking demonstrations); people, material culture (e.g. food, built structures or environments) or sceneries from her travels or everyday life in her expatriate posting. The photo albums show a privileged lifestyle. However, when I interviewed her in-depth, Diosa is self-aware that expatriate privileges are temporary⁴. On face value, the album ‘I am grateful’ can be understood as self-serving publicity. What I have established, however, is a confluence of motivations that address, among others, gendered and occupational stereotypes that affect Diosa’s reputation. Facebook’s unintended consequence is to make her abilities evident. Through social media’s capacity for talking back, people who know the truth about Diosa can testify to her actual worth.

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⁴ Filipino transnationals married to citizens from Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand readily admit that they are ordinary citizens when they go back to their husbands’ country of origin. They explain that an expatriate mode of living has more privileges as the employer provides more benefits such children’s education, housing and transportation.
‘When Hari met Sally’: The transforming power of love

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Internet-based interactions between Filipino and Indian nationals have become common. Many of these online encounters have resulted into relationships, particularly marriage. In most cases, Filipinas migrate to India permanently to join their husbands. Based on my interactions with transnational Filipinos and Filipino-Indian couples who met in face-to-face settings, I observed that marriages or relationships that started online are perceived as intriguing. Filipinas I met did not mention if their relationship started online; and if they did, they smiled with a tinge of embarrassment. The reactions are also shaped by cases of domestic violence where the Filipino woman is presumed to have met her local partner through the Internet. Calls for help on the Filipinos in India newsgroup are fairly common. Usually, Filipino-Indian couples in respective localities offer assistance to the aggrieved party. They provide temporary shelter and coordinate with the Philippine embassy in Delhi. The circulation of stories from the newsgroup, or the people providing assistance to the close-knit group of Filipinos in Indian cities, reinforces the idea of the unstable
relationship of couples who met online. However, I also met a number of them who claim and are reputed to be in happy and stable relationships.

One of the couples was Hari and Sally. I learned about them through word-of-mouth when I conducted fieldwork in Bangalore. A common friend, a Filipina married to a local, gave Sally’s number and introduced me to her. Sally and I chatted on the phone first, and upon learning that I also taught college students back in Manila, we instantly established a connection. She agreed to share her story and invited me to her home for dinner. Hari and Sally prepared several dishes for the occasion and agreed to be interviewed as a couple. The nature of the interaction was informal, candid and argumentative. The couple joked and debated as I listened in amusement. Their story and views about their relationship exemplify transnational intimacies that enable self-improvement (Alexandrova 2007, p. 146).

Hari, 35, and Sally’s, 40, love story illustrates boundary crossings on different levels: nation, age, (classed) culture, religion and the on- and offline dimensions of space. The narrative can be a material for a Bollywood film. However, the couple prefers to keep a low profile and tends to associate with trusted Filipino-Indian couples who respect their identity as ‘a couple who met online’. The story begins in Manila in 2001.

Sally, a computer engineer, worked as a network administrator and teacher at a public university in Manila. She taught college students a course on ‘technology integration’ or the application of computers in everyday settings. Internet-based chat rooms were becoming popular at that time and she wanted to keep up with her students’ experiences online. “I don’t want to sound stupid when students ask about chat rooms!” She explored the world of chat rooms and met all sorts of people, mostly men. Sally, then in her 30s, had been single and abandoned plans to marry.

One early morning, she met Hari, a web designer, online. Two computer enthusiasts connected. Hari told me he was smitten by Sally, who in turn, confided that she liked him because he was decent. Unlike most men in chat rooms who were only after lewd conversations, Hari was respectful. Sally also shared that other men were only nice for a week or two and then their true colours emerged. Hari was consistent. More importantly, Hari’s constant online presence made a difference. Sally said: “He was there when I needed help (concerning her work as a network administrator for the
university)”. Conversely, Hari admitted he changed since meeting Sally: “She helped me in my personal growth; she helped me polish my personality (referring to improving his manners)”. Hari confided that his boss noticed that he became less ill-tempered since he met his girlfriend. “Love changed my life!” The relationship was sustained online for a couple of years until they decided to go a step further. Hari visited the Philippines for a few months to see Sally and to also work on a web design project. During school breaks, Sally would visit India. Sally’s family initially doubted her relationship with Hari but eventually recognised his commitment in the course of the courtship period when Hari and Sally shifted between Manila and Bangalore.

Sally was Catholic Christian and Hari was Hindu. However, religion was never an issue for them. Hari attends Catholic mass with Sally, who in turn also accompanies her husband in Hindu temples. They never had a marriage ceremony in either a Catholic or a Hindu ceremony. The two decided to have a civil wedding in India. It was time for Sally to decide where to live. She confided that it would be harder if Hari were to relocate in the Philippines because he would experience discrimination. The decision to live in India was tough for her to make. As the eldest daughter in her family, she took care of her parents and provided any form of assistance to her siblings. Her immediately family depended on her, a point she always emphasised during our interview. She also had to give up a stable and satisfying career in her homeland. However, she also recognised that the chance to find another man who was committed as Hari was rare. She would lose him if she decided to stay. The thought that her family would always be around, no matter where she was, strengthened her decision to be with Hari. A combination of the said factors influenced her decision to leave Manila and settle in India.

I asked them to describe their relationship. “More than husband and wife, we are good friends and we share jokes. Suppose somebody stares at her, we just enjoy the moment; or if I’m chatting with another girl, she just pulls my leg”, Hari revealed. In Chapter 4, I pointed out that jokes about Filipinos in the India newsgroup easily offended both Filipinos and Indians. Sally and Hari’s joking relationship shows that such boundary could be transcended. “We are open and we are not hiding anything”. They had arguments or misunderstandings, which arise from Hari’s brash manners or Sally’s pride. But they learned to adjust to each other’s ways. Sally also told me that her
husband shared household work and he allowed her to work or become financially independent.

I learn from interviews with other Filipino-Indian couples that the common practice is a relationship of dependence where the husband is the sole provider. Women are not usually allowed to work. Dowry is another practice in marital relations. Filipino women initially face resistance from their in-laws because they do not come with a dowry and perceived as dependent on their husband. Filipina informants tell me that one of the main causes of domestic abuse or violence against Filipino women is the lack of dowry. They reveal that they prove their worth to their in-laws by fulfilling traditional obligations of an Indian wife (domestic work and giving birth to children, preferably male). However, not all are fortunate. Domestic abuse, which sometimes happens when Filipino-Indian couples live with in-laws, often results in conflict and breakdown of the marriage.

Thus, Sally’s financial independence addressed the negative perception levelled against Filipino women. At the same time, Hari showed his willingness to break away from tradition. The fact that the two were away from Hari’s in-laws, I surmised, made their non-traditional arrangement possible.

Sally’s first job in Bangalore was to manage a printing business. When she started, the owner did not give detailed instructions about the shop’s operations. Having no experience in customer relations, and no knowledge of the local language, she almost gave up. She noticed, however, that the business lost customers because nobody talked to them when they entered the premises. Sally started looking after clients who, fortunately, spoke English. Her move proved to be effective as they gained more customers. She also organised the shop floor and used her authority to discipline employees. The branch earned more money and the owner was happy. From a printing shop, Sally moved on to manage a restaurant and applied the same strategies. She was happy in the job, but it demanded time away from home and her husband. She quit and took an offer from a call centre company with better work schedules. Having acquired customer relation skills from her two previous jobs, she had relevant experience that helped her excel in call centre work.
Sally never imagined what she had achieved in Indian workplaces. Her job as a teacher in her homeland was given respect but did not provide her enough financial compensation. In India she was lucky to get satisfaction in her job and a good salary. What she gave up in the Philippines, she recovered in India.

The story of Hari and Sally demonstrates boundary crossing through marriage. New media play a crucial role in providing a space where the meeting and connection were established. Such connection enabled the crossing of territorial boundaries. From the perspective of Hari, choosing a wife from overseas signifies crossing religious and cultural boundaries. On the part of Sally, choosing an Indian national for a husband means crossing racial and ethnic boundaries. Giving up a respectable career also meant losing her financial independence and occupational status. However, in taking a new occupational identity in India, she improved her socio-economic status. Indeed, the relationship that emerged from crossing and transcending boundaries enabled self-transformations.

**Conclusion**

Adopting an understanding of social media as a symbolic practice of truth-telling and testifying (e.g. Miller 2011) and the power of media to shape meaning (Couldry 2000; Madianou 2012; Thompson 2000), I have linked symbolic practices on Facebook of Filipino transnationals with their self-projects and social relations. By symbolising achievements in the host society, Filipino transnationals produce identities that contest their stereotypical representations. The examples of Ema and Diosa also show how media provide the space for recognition of their work and identity productions. Both cases also show migrant agency at work in establishing affinities. Ema emphasises similarities between Filipinos and Indians and Diosa demonstrates altruism. Such acts show how sociality is intimately linked to being moral. Emotions such as gratitude and love animate these processes. Motivated by love, the story of Sally and Hari shows the potential of relationships to transform selves. Their relationship transcends the boundaries between on- and offline, and between different ethnic identities. Sally and Hari challenge the ways Filipino-Indian relationships are viewed, not just in the host society of India, but also in the homeland. Indeed, the chapter has shown the significance of the media as space and symbolic resource for recognition and the transformation of identities and relationships.
Chapter 7
Conclusion:
Recasting identities and relations

They don’t know Filipinos, so we have a chance to show who we actually are.

- Filipino informant

The quote above is from a supervisor working for a multinational company in Bangalore. His idea resonates in the stories of most Filipino transnationals I met in Indian cities. As I will argue in the concluding chapter, the relatively privileged situation and position of Filipino transnationals in Indian cities allow them to recast their identities in relation to the ways they are categorised in the international labour market and host societies. Their marginal position as migrant workers and the use of classed, gendered and racialised stereotypes in the host society shape their collective identities. The case of Filipino transnationals in India demonstrates how they exercise agency as workers in a relatively privileged position in the workplace and in the host society. Compared to their compatriots in major receiving countries who experience contradictory class mobility, i.e. a decline in occupational status and improvement in social status (Parreñas 2001), most Filipinos in India live in privileged material conditions, or conditions consistent with their middle class existence in the homeland.

In understanding how they redefine their identities in Indian cities, I deployed an inductive boundary approach that seeks to ascertain the criteria through which they categorise others and identify themselves. In thinking about the relational (Pinches 1999; Lamont 2002) and situational (Wimmer 2008a) character of the boundary process, I looked at the contexts where boundaries emerge and become salient. How the boundaries become bases for inclusion and exclusion was the next aspect I investigated. Crucial to observing the practice of boundary work was paying attention to its emotional dimension. In so doing, the study not only examined how Filipino transnationals defined their identities relationally, but also the possibility for sociality arising from their situations. Hence, the relationships that enable boundary crossing or enforcement become a core element in investigating the dynamics between boundaries and identities.
I begin this chapter by synthesising the findings from chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. In the first section, I account for the emergent boundaries in social relations, between Filipinos and Indians, and among Filipinos themselves, examining as well the situations in which they arise - in everyday life, work and the mediated spaces of Indian cities. I also situate the patterns of boundary work evident within the literature of migration studies, in general, and in reference to Global South migrations, in particular. Recognising the role of local forms of relationships in the boundary process is a significant contribution of this study. In the second section, I relate the patterns of boundary work to the making of middle class culture among Filipino transnationals. I use the terms ‘identity production’ and ‘mutual recognition’ in reference to an emergent dynamic arising from the identity formation of Filipino transnationals in India. Finally, I propose some arguments about the nature of boundary work or dimensions of the boundary process that emerge from this ethnographic investigation.

Boundaries, relations, social inclusions and exclusions

1. Between Filipino transnationals and Indian locals

Filipino transnationals define themselves based on presumed qualities of ability, morality and modernity. They evaluate each other based on these qualities and demonstrate the possession of such attributes to legitimise their social positions in the host society. Ethnographic data reveal that corporeal boundaries and distinctions in material practices overlap with symbolic boundaries. Evaluations generated by sensory perceptions in everyday life confirm the “classed, gendered and racialised experience of migration” (Clifford 1994, pp. 223-229).

A significant finding is the way locals of Indian cities commonly misconstrue Filipinos as Northeast people, a regional ethnic grouping in India. The gendered and racial stereotype attached to Northeast people extends to Filipino transnationals, especially in fleeting encounters. In turn, the ways Filipinos sense Indians and India indicates their class and racial biases that derive from the homeland (Lorenzana 2013).

How Filipino transnationals and Indian locals relate in the realm of material culture and consumption establishes a boundary constructed in terms of modernity and taste. Filipino transnationals as ordinary consumers and experts in the retail and service
sectors claim to be more modern in taste. Moreover, locals acknowledge Filipinos’
command of modern fashion and taste in music, but Indian customers appropriate the
modern style of Filipino experts to suit local sensibility. Conversely, attempts by
Filipinos to consume or adopt Indian fashion are evaluated according to local urban
tastes and standards. Among Filipinos, the ways in which they consume local products
indicate degrees of appreciation of the symbolic and material culture of the place.

In the context of the workplace, both Filipino and Indian workers evaluate each other on
the basis of professionalism, which refers to both occupational ability and work ethic.
There are, however, different emphases from each side of the boundary. Filipino
workers tend to highlight work ethic (professional conduct) and Indian workers
emphasise ability (professional competence) in their perceptions of each other. Both
boundaries at work possess a paradoxical quality. They are both sources and bases of
inclusion and exclusion. For example, the case of Ema Trinidad, the owner of a beauty
and skin care centre, demonstrates how work ethic becomes her basis for hiring people.
Her criterion for employment privileges Northeast people, a regional ethnic grouping
that is marginalised in Indian society (McDuie-Ra 2012a), but which has benefitted
from the growing service industries of India. While Filipinos are mistaken for ‘looking
like Northeast people’, the urban Indian preference for them in the workplace goes
beyond similarity of appearance to the assumed possession of work ethic by both groups.

I have shown that in face-to-face encounters between Filipinos and Indians, varied
sensory perceptions are often paramount. However, in mediated spaces, such as the
Filipinos in India (FII) newsgroup, boundaries based on smell, taste (gustatory) and
sound tend to be disregarded. Rather, boundaries are expressed in visual and emotional
terms through texts and images. The interactive nature of the newsgroup allows debates,
sharing of opinion and expression of sentiments. While the newsgroup serves as a space
where Filipino transnationals can connect on the basis of shared language and material
needs (food and other provisions), they also accommodate Indian subscribers. The
relative anonymity in such space allows frank exchanges that demonstrate the
construction of boundaries based on national identity, ability, morality and gender. As I
have argued in Chapter 4, the newsgroup is a mediated space where Filipino
transnationals in India mark boundaries of national belonging. Morality, as expressed
through manners or propriety, and ability, as indicated by one’s media literacy and
‘quality’ of opinion, become the bases for inclusion and exclusion in the re-territorialised space.

In re-territorialised mediated spaces such as the FII newsgroup, propriety or online etiquette (netiquette) is the criterion through which members (both Indian and Filipino transnationals) of the online community are included and excluded. Notions of propriety centred on acceptable behaviour in public space. Debates or discussions on topics such as gender relations and sexuality show divergent and overlapping moral frameworks between Filipinos and Indians. On the FII newsgroup, Indians advocate more liberal conceptions of gender identity and expression, i.e. being gay; conversely, Filipinos highlight egalitarian relations between men and women.

Literature suggests that skilled workers in the Global South migration route are characterised by professional ability. Indian professionals (in information technology, finance and manufacturing) posted in Thailand are seen as “intelligent”; while local workers in Indonesia are said to be willing to learn from them (Bin Yahya & Kaur 2010, pp. 108, 206). The premise of skilled migration in the Global South, that is filling localised skill gaps, configures such responses. In the context of globalising Indian cities, where consumer practices are being modernised, skilled workers assume significant roles. They become valued in the context of unequal levels of ability.

Informal mentoring relationships and relations of patronage become the means through which ability and work ethic are embodied. The performance of roles as guru and patron is strategic in the social context of the workplace, constrained by the logic of profitability. The contractual obligation of Filipino transnationals to facilitate profit generation thus constrains their actions. Nevertheless, my ethnographic data suggest that sharing skills as informal mentors or extending financial assistance or job security as patrons become ethical practices in their situation as migrant workers.

2. Between Filipino transnationals

Among Filipinos in Indian cities, occupational status, morality and ability were the criteria through which they identified themselves and made friends. Peer groups indicated not only how members were included and excluded based on occupation, but also how the principle of morality was often invoked. Moral boundaries of Filipino
transnationals in Indian cities focused on propriety, egalitarianism and sexuality. Interactions on the Filipinos in India newsgroup reveal a preoccupation with etiquette or what contributors believed was appropriate public behaviour. Examining peer relations and practices, such as gatherings around food, I observed the conscious effort to relate in egalitarian terms, by avoiding distinctions based on gender and socio-economic status. At the same time, moral boundaries were drawn on the basis of gender. Echoing Yen Le Espiritu’s (2001) findings on Filipinos in the US, Filipino transnationals in Indian cities construct women’s morality based on their “dedication to their families and sexual restraint” (Espiritu 2001, p. 421). Filipino women married to, or in a relationship with, Indian men or transnationals from Europe and North America were evaluated not only in terms of their perceived dependence (Alexandrova 2007, p. 139), but also their reputed liberal sexuality. Moral boundaries in the Filipino transnational community result in peer group formations that share (or do not share) the same moralities (Lyon 2007b) in relation to others.

Abilities, such as linguistic competence, intelligence and cooking skills were not only used to establish boundaries or status but to engage in reciprocal relations that defined peer groups. Intelligence or linguistic competence were believed to indicate one’s occupation or educational attainment. Friendship, for example, was constituted through one’s ability to engage in conversations and prepare food. The constraints on food provisioning highlighted one’s improvisation skills in cooking.

The consistent moral boundary pattern across the contexts of work, everyday life and mediated space in the interactions of Filipino transnationals in India points to the broader importance of moral boundaries in the context of migration. Among racially marginalised Filipinos in the US, drawing moral boundaries based on the containment of female sexuality and dedication to family is a way to assert a superior position (Espiritu 2001, p. 416). In the transnational migration context, national identity becomes a primary reference point (Williams 2006). As the literature suggests (e.g. Espiritu 2001; Mankekar 1999), national identity is rendered in gendered terms, based on the moral purity of women. The salience and policing of gendered moral boundaries among Filipinos in Indian cities therefore points to their effort to position themselves in relation to national/occupational stereotypes (e.g. Asian bride).
On another level, the salience of moral boundaries between Filipinos and Indians reflects a broader pattern of moral contestation, inclusion and exclusion in the migration context (Silverstone 2005). For example, Dawn Lyon (2007b) finds moral boundaries constructed around work ethic and female sexuality between Western Europeans and migrant workers from Eastern Europe. Anthropologists studying transnational processes (e.g. Howell 2009) also highlight the significance of conflicting moralities in international exchanges and engagements. Thus, my findings not only provide further evidence to the moral dimension of social relations, especially in the transnational migration context, but also point to the ways in which contested moralities become a manifestation of power relations or politics of inclusion and exclusion.

Relationships, boundary crossing and mediation

The study also investigated if interpersonal transnational relations, connections or affinities were possible in the experience of Filipino transnationals in India. Ethnographic fieldwork reveals that the boundary process of making distinction also entails the paradox of making connections or establishing inter-ethnic relations. Filipino and Indian research participants simultaneously claim affinity and difference based on professionalism or moral boundaries. More significantly the study finds that local forms of social relations provide a means by which boundaries can be transcended (yet also possibly reinforced). Guru-student and patron-client relationships between Filipino and Indian workers provide recognisable role dyads through which outsider-insider distinctions are transcended and paired local identities are produced. Filipino skilled workers become gurus and experts recognised by the host society.

Forms of social relation from the Philippine homeland, such as those of kababayan (compatriot) or kabarkada (peer/friend), overcome the boundaries of socio-economic difference among Filipino transnationals. The small number of Filipino transnationals in Indian cities, and the constraints of provisioning, foster more cooperative and hospitable relations among kababayan. However, among Filipino transnationals moral boundaries inform how friendships are formed, as shown by patterns of peer group formation. The sociality among Filipino transnationals in India calls attention to the importance of peer groups (barkada) in (Filipino) migrant experiences. The barkada may be constituted according to shared moral, socio-economic, occupational or gender qualities, or to a combination of these boundaries. While it can potentially reproduce identities based on
symbolic boundaries drawn from the Philippines, the *barkada* is a form of social grouping that simultaneously mediates experiences, opportunities and resources for temporary migrants, in India.

Friendship and marriage between Filipinos and Indians, as exemplified in Hari and Sally’s experience, shows how shared morality can be a basis for intimacy that transcends corporeal boundaries. Furthermore, intimate relationships propel boundary crossings that result in possibilities for remaking the self (Alexandrova 2007). Alongside boundary making, the possibility of different forms of affinity between Filipino transnationals and Indian locals contrasts with other studies of privileged transnationals in the region who tend to exclude local Indians (cf. Fechter 2007).

The comparative perspective adopted in this study enables an understanding not only of boundary work but of the way such boundaries are commonly transgressed. Filipino transnationals married to locals or skilled workers who have spent considerable time in India, and conversely, Indian transnationals or locals who have spent time in the Philippines, are in a position to clarify common misconceptions about one another. The media of transnational migrants usually become the space where boundary crossings can take place. The Filipinos in India newsgroup and recently Facebook groups serve as spaces for such mediation.

The communication and amicable relations between Filipinos and locals in Indian cities point to a changing inter-ethnic relationship. In studies of the Indian diaspora in the Philippines, racial and class boundaries between Filipinos and Indians generally characterise the relationship (Lorenzana 2013). My findings here however suggest the presence of an affinity based on shared moralities centring on family and interpersonal relationships.

**Identity production, mutual recognition and the media**

One of the premises of this ethnography is the integral role of media in the everyday life of transnational migrants. Media here include traditional (TV, print), new information and communication technologies (Internet and mobile phone) and social media platforms. I looked at their presence, or absence, as well as the practices on mediated spaces to examine symbolic and social processes. Traditional and social media work in
tandem in producing transnational identities and enabling sociality. The case of Ema Trinidad shows how her social embedding enables her traditional media coverage, which in turn feeds into her social media presence. The newsgroup exemplifies how national identity is collectively produced in a discursive space.

A significant finding of the study concerns the positive way in which Filipino transnationals appear in mainstream media of the host society. Consistent with their occupational status and achievement in the workplace, Filipinos are commonly portrayed as ‘experts’ and ‘gurus’. Their favourable representations in Indian media signify the host society’s recognition of their ability, contribution to India’s evolving consumer culture and, in general, their respected identity as Filipino transnationals. The representation, presence and voice of Filipino skilled workers and entrepreneurs in Indian media thus challenge the assumption that ethnic minorities appear in negative stereotypical ways in the media of the host society (Silverstone & Georgiou 2005).

How Filipino transnationals represent themselves and are represented in different media spaces and platforms points to relatively autonomous symbolic practices and a process of mutual recognition. Filipino transnationals make contributions in the Indian workplace, and society at large, through their ability and achievements. This study finds the way in which ideas and practices associated with ability translate into achievement. Achievement through migration alludes to a cultural understanding of migration as a means of self-transformation (Aguilar 1999) where recognition is sought from the homeland. This ethnography reveals that the host society recognises the efforts of Filipino migrants through positive media representations in mainstream media. In turn, through social media, Filipino transnationals acknowledge the opportunity given by the host society. The condition of mutual recognition between migrants and host society in this case occurs in the context of globalising Indian cities, a process characterised by the modernisation of service and consumer industries, where transnational workers contribute their skills to companies and knowledge to changing consumers.

By symbolising achievement in the host society, Filipino transnationals engage in identity productions through the conscious symbolic representation of collective and personal social standing. Symbolising themselves as achievers and moral beings is a relational process that takes into account their stereotypical representations, as well as their constructed distinctions in relation to peoples of the host society and other Filipino
transnationals. What particular collective Filipino transnational identity is produced in the cities of India?

**Moral and modern: A Filipino transnational middle class formation**

Occupational stereotypes of Filipinos in the international labour market shape their identities and how they are regarded. Where they do not have any control of their identities, they are marginalised (cf. Paine 2000). What I have sought to do in this study is to present a case where Filipinos experience a relatively high occupational status and enjoy a certain degree of control over how they construct their identities relationally. Hence, I argue that the privileged position of Filipino transnationals in the host society enables them to recast their identities through their making of symbolic boundaries and social relations. The case of Filipino transnationals in India demonstrates how ethnic identity and inter-ethnic relations are constituted through symbolic boundaries of class.

Wimmer (2008a) notes that boundaries are symbolic resources for collective representation. Hence, the signification of boundaries (Cohen 1985) indicates group identity. Ethnographic fieldwork with Filipino transnational middle classes reveals that shared ideas of ability, achievement, morality and modernity are criteria they use to make boundaries and connections. Such a ‘configuration of symbolic boundaries’—to borrow Christopher Bail’s (2008) terminology—is consistent with other middle classes in other national and transnational contexts. Filipino transnationals in India share with them the same preoccupation with ability (as with Indian IT professionals [Upadhaya 2011]), achievement (as with American middle classes [Lamont 1992]), morality (as with African American professionals [Lamont 2000], the middle classes in Chile [Mendez L. 2008] and Hyderabad [Saaval 2010]), and modernity (as with the middle classes in Nepal [Liechty 2003] and India [Baviskar & Ray 2011, p. 9]). Filipino middle classes in India use ideas of both moral character and ability as symbolic boundaries among themselves. Their understandings of morality not only serve as an evaluative criterion, but also as a basis for social inclusion and exclusion. However, in relation to Indian locals, modernity is emphasised. As Chapter 2 evidences, modernity was a criterion in defining taste, especially in the ways Filipino transnationals perceive the locals and vice versa.
The middle class formation of Filipino transnationals in India is shaped by their privileged condition as skilled migrants in the country’s globalising cities and neoliberal economy that privilege not only their skills, but also their professionalism as a moral disposition. In this sense, structural conditions influence the emergent boundaries or identities that people make for themselves (Lamont & Molnar 2002, p. 172). Economic transformations, such as India’s globalising economy, shape social positions of people and groups. India’s growing consumer industries have given opportunities to internal and external migrants. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, people from India’s Northeast states and Filipino skilled workers have benefitted from the expansion and modernisation of the retail and services sectors. The economic transformation has privileged the goal of modernity, which translates not only into new consumer cultures (Chatterjee 2004) but also new moral systems that manifest in work standards and work ethic. As skilled workers or qualified professionals embodying modernity, Filipino transnationals occupy a privileged position in this new economic and moral order. They use this position to constitute their (collective) identities. The unequal and hierarchical nature of Indian society, where a middle class identity has gained social currency (Saavala 2010), favours migrant groups, such as Filipino transnationals, that have the economic position and cultural resources.

While the Indian state defines and provides the legal framework for their privileged socio-economic position, Filipino transnational migrants have to negotiate, through performance, their place in the fabric of everyday life and social relations in India. Filipino transnationals use shared ideas of morality and modernity as criteria to define themselves and categorise others thereby legitimising their presence and position in the workplace and other social contexts. Their performance as moral and modern (i.e. professional) workers or persons resonates with the prevailing narrative of a globalising India. Filipino skilled workers, specifically in the emerging manufacturing, retail and service sectors, become embodiments of modernity through sharing knowledge and skills or by implementing global standards. Thus, as Chapter 3 demonstrated, they enact roles in the process of standardisation, which constitutes the modernisation of Indian workplaces.

The ways Filipino middle classes in India use both morality and modernity as criteria for evaluation, as well as social inclusion and exclusion, define their boundary work. Both criteria encompass the domains of the workplace and everyday life. Modernity
crosscuts ability, work ethic and aesthetic sensibility. The modern identity of Filipino transnationals clearly manifests in the ways they define themselves as workers with a professional ethic and as consumers with modern tastes. That morality and modernity appear as salient boundaries among Filipino transnational middle classes can be explained not only in terms of their middle class position in globalising India, but also by considering the contested meanings of a Filipino identity on a global scale.

As seen in a number of cases (e.g. Aguilar 1996; Manalansan 2006; Nagy 2008), Filipino transnational migrants engage in symbolic boundary work in relation to occupational stereotypes attached to Filipino migrant workers. For example, Sharon Nagy (2008) finds that Filipinos in Bahrain stage semi-public events, specifically beauty contests, that aim to project Filipinos as educated and decent people. Filipino beauty contests in Bahrain are organised with “the gaze of others” in mind, and are aimed at countering undesirable images of Filipinos in Bahrain among locals and fellow transnationals (Nagy 2008, p. 99). The preoccupation with moral behaviour and competence at work among Filipinos in India is emblematic of this gaze. The fact that Filipinos in India display the same tendencies as Filipinos elsewhere points to a common consciousness among them to represent themselves in terms that run counter to the stereotypes they encounter. As discussed in Chapter 5 (also Nagy 2008), negative representations of Filipinos make them vulnerable to undesirable moral judgments. The strong moral boundary work among Filipinos and their preoccupation with ability and achievement serve to substantiate and express their desired identities. In India, their socio-economic position is pivotal for this project. Hence, the Indian context, a Global South-South route, provides a basis of comparison with other experiences of Filipino transnational migration. The case of Filipinos in India shows how transnational migrant workers in the same, if not better, socio-economic positions to those they occupy in the homeland, have more control over their identities or opportunities to recast themselves.

Indeed, the pattern of boundary work among Filipino migrants and other such ethnic groups demonstrates the importance attached to middle class values in building minority status and identity in the wider host society. For example, educational attainment, occupation, achievement and morality are the very same boundaries many African Americans use to build their status in US society (Lamont 2000). Hence, following Sherry Ortner (1998), one of this study’s conclusions is that the criteria used for boundary work simultaneously articulates both a class and ethnic identity. In theoretical
terms, the sort of ethnic boundary that Filipino transnational migrants make for themselves in India takes the form of cultural differentiation (Wimmer 2008a, p. 982) using middle class categories of identity. The following section reflects on the nature of such boundary work.

**The positional, performative and interpersonal dimensions of boundary work**

The boundary approach that I deployed both in fieldwork and in data analysis is based on the constructivist tradition originating from Barth (1969) and elaborated by Lamont (1992; 2002) and Wimmer (2008a; 2008b; 2009). Boundary making is understood as a situational and interactional process of constituting schemes used for defining and differentiating people as ‘us’ and ‘them’. I used this approach as a way of describing and explaining the social and identity formations of Filipino transnational migrants in Indian cities. While most studies on boundary work focus on mapping out symbolic categories or schemes, my thesis sought to examine the boundary process ethnographically, that is how boundaries work in actual interactions. Thus, the manner in which I investigated the boundary process also influences the way I reflect on my study’s modest contribution to the task of ‘advancing a theory of boundary work’ (Bail 2008; Wimmer 2008b; Lamont and Molnar 2002), especially the need to explore its application in the context of migration (Faist 2010; Wimmer 2009).

I make three interrelated arguments about boundary work in the migration context based on the case of Filipino transnationals in India. First is the role of social position in boundary work. As the experience of Filipinos in India shows, the socio-economic position or occupational class of migrants in the host society fundamentally shapes their material conditions, access to opportunities, privileges and status in society. I find that the boundary work of Filipino skilled workers is consistent with their middle class status in Indian society. This finding highlights the way in which social hierarchies, emerging from particular economic systems, in this case India’s transformation into a neoliberal economy, also configure the nature of boundaries that individuals and groups make. Wimmer’s (2008a, p. 1007) proposition that the choice of boundary depends on the actor’s position in a hierarchy of power is thus substantiated by my finding. The socio-economic position of migrant Filipinos, as expatriates, managers or professionals, which comes with (limited) official power, becomes a vantage point from which they
constitute themselves as modern and moral workers. Hence, boundary work is always enacted from a position of relative power or powerlessness.

Second, considering the conscious effort among Filipino transnationals to act in particular ways, not only in moral or ethical terms, but also according to their role and position in the workplace, boundary work is performative in nature. Their roles as consultants, managers or technical staff predispose them to enact modern ways of working and relating. The performative dimension of making boundaries is consistent with their symbolic nature (Cohen 1985) or how boundaries are actually communicated by actors. Performance is a way of communicating a boundary as demonstrated by the practice of producing identities among Filipino middle classes. The fact that their positive moral and modern identities are constructed in relation to negative Filipino stereotypes and the gaze of others (Nagy 2008), only reinforces the need for boundaries to be performed. The performance takes place not just through talk, including interviews with the researcher or the media, but also through other symbolic practices (such as photo sharing and group formation on social media) and social contexts.

Third, the micro-level scale and ethnographic nature of the study highlights the role of interpersonal relations in boundary work. I propose that both local and translocal relations motivate boundary transgressions and crossings. The logic or ideology of a social form compels actors to make a connection and reinforce it. Hence in this situation, boundaries can be de-activated or new ones are activated (Tilly 2004). Such is the case with the barkada formations among Filipino transnationals. Here socio-economic boundaries are less salient than the interpersonal moral boundaries that actually define friendship groupings. Informal mentoring relations and patron-client arrangements in the workplace also show how interpersonal relations animate boundary crossings. Filipino transnationals cross professional boundaries and engage locals on a personal level through their role as patrons, mentors or friends. Their presence in local media and prayer corners shows their (symbolic, to say the least) inclusion in Indian society. Such a possibility, however, occurs under conditions where the parties involved engage in a reciprocal relationship. Hence, it could be inferred that reciprocal interpersonal relations render ethnic and socio-economic boundaries permeable. My findings, however, suggest that moral boundaries within and between ethnic groups tend to be rigid. The firm quality of moral boundaries in the transnational migration context could be traced to individual subjectivity (such as the need to maintain a Catholic Christian identity),
the institutional demands of the workplace (the need to set a standard example among employees) or a pervading consciousness or ‘internalised gaze’ to perform a moral Filipino identity overseas.

**Directions for further study**

This ethnographic inquiry into the boundary work of Filipino transnationals is a partial account of their experiences in India. The last section of the thesis identifies several limitations and aspects of the ethnography that can be explored further in future studies.

The main site of investigation is Delhi; however, I interacted with Filipino communities in other Indian cities, such as Mumbai and Bangalore. Future studies can explore in-depth the social relations of Filipino groups in said cities (or those not covered in the study, such as Kolkata and Goa where Filipinos are also present) through participant observation. The comparative ethnographies can ascertain the extent to which place, that is the particularity of a specific Indian city, plays a role in the social constitution of a migrant group.

While I was able to examine activities of the Filipino community, particularly those centring on the *barkada*, an activity that needs further investigation is their participation in homeland political process. How they organise themselves to protest on certain issues allows us to examine citizen involvement of Filipino transnational migrants. Several months after I left Delhi, I noticed the involvement of members of the Filipino community in Delhi in protesting the incursion of Chinese vessels into the Philippines exclusive economic zone in the West Philippine Sea (formerly South China Sea). Several of my research participants made their sentiments known on social media, primarily Facebook. The audience of their online protests - those who are members of their social network - spans not only the homeland but also elsewhere.

Filipino-Indian marriages are relatively new and inadequately explored. Although the views of Filipino and Indian couples are represented here, future studies can examine in-depth their married lives and the experiences of their children. How they communicate and negotiate their identities and relationships in Indian society and in the Philippines would make for an interesting comparison. Such inquiry would also enable
us to examine the possibilities of a Filipino-Indian subjectivity, identification and consciousness.

Morality emerged as a salient boundary in Filipino-Indian ethnic relations. I explored this theme in the context of work and community relations. A further project which investigated morality in the context of Filipino-Indian families would show how moralities are negotiated in the intimate space of home.

To further the work of a comparative approach to Filipino-Indian ethnic relations, an investigation into Indian skilled workers in Philippine cities is needed. The establishment of Indian BPO companies for example, would seem to provide a productive ground to examine Indian transnationals in similar managerial and technical roles to Filipino skilled workers in India. Such an investigation would reveal whether or not the same boundary work is evident. The Philippine context provides a set of conditions that is different from India. For example, Indian business process outsourcing companies operating in the Philippines encounter more equitable gender relations and a workforce that is conditioned by a Catholic Christian ethic and a US-derived educational system and work standard. How Indian professionals relate with Filipino middle classes in this context, and the boundaries and connections that emerge from their interactions would be interesting to map out. Finally, a line of inquiry that allows productive comparison is to investigate how the material conditions and social positions of Indian skilled workers in the Philippines influence their boundary work.
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