2012

The migration-development nexus revisited through the lens of nationality: a case study of Filipino origin workers in information technology and nursing in Singapore

Seori Choi
University of Wollongong

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THE MIGRATION-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS REVISITED

THROUGH THE LENS OF NATIONALITY:

A CASE STUDY OF FILIPINO ORIGIN WORKERS IN

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND NURSING IN SINGAPORE

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

SEORI CHOI

School of Social Sciences, Media and Communication

Faculty of Arts

2012
ABSTRACT

Globalisation, and associated population movements, blurs the boundaries drawn by nation-states (Castles, 2004), but the era of globalisation is a “time of continuing and even heightening nation-state building processes” (Glick-Schiller et al., 1995, 59). This thesis explores the ways in which nationality/citizenship shapes the subjectivities of ‘skilled’ people born as Filipino citizens currently living and working in Singapore. It is based on empirical investigation amongst Information Technology (IT) workers and nurses. In doing so, this thesis revisits the migration-development nexus as a site to reproduce the institutional and ideological/moral salience of the nation-state. Its salience is maintained through its capacity of ‘(re)defining’ the population moving across state borders. People crossing state borders come to embody particular national meanings, while discourses around cross-border population movement are constructed by political leaders and intellectuals as being associated with development. The employment of ‘skilled’ Filipinos in Singapore is a site where competing discourses produced in ‘development’ processes in the Philippines and Singapore intersect. ‘Skilled’ Filipino origin workers in Singapore represent ‘lost brains’ contributing to poor development outcomes in the Philippines. They are simultaneously hailed as national ‘heroes’ for their earnings shared with their family members remaining in the Philippines. Filipino citizens’ labour is re-evaluated as they are deployed to the Singapore labour market through Singapore’s immigration (citizenship) regime that determines under what conditions non-citizens can live within its jurisdiction. This regime reflects the Singapore state’s vision of nation (or what ‘development’ should look like) and symbolises the lines of inclusion/exclusion drawn in the nation-building process in Singapore. This thesis makes a comparative analysis of the viewpoints and
experiences of ‘skilled’ workers in IT and nursing fields in order to explore the intersections between labour and citizenship. Using the data largely drawn from interviews, carried out between April and October 2009, in the Philippines and Singapore; this thesis explores the ways in which ‘skilled’ Filipino origin workers in Singapore negotiate the different national meanings they embody and contribute to the nation-building processes in both countries.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFTA</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations Free Trade Area</td>
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<td>ANU</td>
<td>Australian National University</td>
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<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
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<td>BES</td>
<td>Bureau of Employment Services</td>
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<td>BPO</td>
<td>Business Processing Outsourcing</td>
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<td>BSP</td>
<td>Balik Scientist Program</td>
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<td>CPF</td>
<td>Central Provident Fund</td>
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<td>DOLE</td>
<td>Department of Labour and Employment</td>
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<td>ERC</td>
<td>Economic Review Committee</td>
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<td>EFMA</td>
<td>Employment of Foreign Manpower Act</td>
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<td>EFWA</td>
<td>Employment of Foreign Workers Act</td>
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<td>EVP</td>
<td>Exchange Visitor Program</td>
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<td>FNA</td>
<td>Filipino Nurses Association</td>
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<td>GATS</td>
<td>General Agreement on Trade in Services</td>
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<td>GATT</td>
<td>General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<td>GFMD</td>
<td>Global Forum on Migration and Development</td>
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<td>GK</td>
<td>Gawad Kalinga</td>
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<tr>
<td>GNP</td>
<td>Gross National Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome</td>
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<td>ICA</td>
<td>Immigration and Checkpoint Authority</td>
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<td>ICN</td>
<td>International Council of Nurses</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communications Technology</td>
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<td>IDA</td>
<td>Info-communication Development Authority</td>
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<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
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<td>International Migration Review</td>
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<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organization for Migration</td>
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<td>IT</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
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<td>Institute of Technical Education</td>
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<td>Labor Assistance Center</td>
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<td>NAFTA</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental Organisation</td>
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<td>National Reintegration Center for OFWs</td>
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<td>National Seaman Board</td>
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<td>Overseas Contract Worker</td>
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<td>ODA</td>
<td>Official Development Assistance</td>
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<td>OEC</td>
<td>Overseas Employment Certificate</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>OEDB</td>
<td>Overseas Employment Development Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>OFW</td>
<td>Overseas Filipino Worker</td>
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<td>OWWA</td>
<td>Overseas Workers Welfare Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAP</td>
<td>People’s Action Party</td>
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<td>PEP</td>
<td>Personalised Employment Pass</td>
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<td>PIA</td>
<td>Philippine Information Agency</td>
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<td>PIDS</td>
<td>Philippine Institute for Development Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSIA</td>
<td>Philippine Software Industry Association</td>
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<td>PNA</td>
<td>Philippine Nursing Association</td>
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<td>PNG</td>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
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<td>Philcomdev</td>
<td>Philippine Consortium on Migration and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>POEA</td>
<td>Philippine Overseas Employment Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>POLO</td>
<td>Philippine Overseas Labor Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>Permanent Resident</td>
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<tr>
<td>RA</td>
<td>Republic Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>SARS</td>
<td>Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMC</td>
<td>Scalabrini Migration Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>SNB</td>
<td>Singapore Nursing Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TESDA</td>
<td>Technical Education and Skills Development Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOKTEN</td>
<td>Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Economical, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNITAR</td>
<td>United Nations Institute for Training and Research</td>
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<td>UNGA</td>
<td>United Nations General Assembly</td>
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<td>United States</td>
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INTRODUCTION

A STORY: DOCTOR ELMER JACINTO

In February 2004, ‘doctor’ Elmer Jacinto’s intention to migrate to New York as a nurse was publicised in major dailies in the Philippines. His decision to take up a nursing job in New York was affected by the nurse shortage in the United States (US) and the US immigration regime that favours non-citizens with skills that are in demand. Jacinto’s intention drew nationwide attention in the Philippines because he is not just an ordinary doctor. He graduated magna cum laude in medicine and topped the national medical board examination. The editorial of The Philippine Daily Inquirer criticised his decision, calling it a ‘sellout’ (Editorial, 2004). Former Secretary of Health Jaime Galvez-Tan was later quoted as saying that Jacinto’s story “was like a slap in the face” (Associated Press, 2007). The then Senator Aquilino Pimentel Jr. was invited as a guest of honour at the oath-taking of Jacinto and other new doctors in March 2004. In his speech at the oath-taking rites, Senator Pimentel was quoted as saying that: “We cannot begrudge you, but only appeal to you to stay [in the country]” (Geller, 2007). Jacinto’s story brought attention to doctors “ditching” their profession – and figuratively the nation – for greener pastures (Mendoza, 2005). In the local media, these doctors were contrasted with the ones remaining in the Philippines despite temptations (Lirio, 2005). Cardiologist Willie Ong created the Doctor’s Covenant in 2004, which sought the signatures of doctors who would volunteer to provide service in the country for three years before migrating. In some cases, doctors complained that they were pressured to sign the Doctors’ Covenant. Ong then established the Movement of Idealistic and Nationalistic Doctors.
When the doctors-turned-nurses’ decision stirred controversy, an interesting question was posed by one of such doctors (Mendoza, 2005): “Why can’t we be called heroes too?” The ‘hero’ label has been used in the Philippines to depict Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), Filipino citizen-workers ‘licensed’ by the Philippine government to work overseas, offering the country’s much needed foreign exchange by sending money to their families remaining in the Philippines. The citizens’ overseas work has been pursued as a state programme in the Philippines since 1974 when President Ferdinand Marcos appointed three state agencies¹ to assist citizens contracted to foreign employers largely located in the Middle East. Today the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), a state agency mandated since 1982 to oversee the programme, sees itself as a ‘facilitator’ of the employment of citizens beyond Philippine shores. Thirty years after designing the programme for overseas work, contracts processed each year by the state have reached one million. In 2009, overseas Filipinos, including those workers deployed through the state programme, remitted more than $US17 billion to the Philippines through formal channels alone. As the controversy over Jacinto’s and other doctors-turned-nurses’ cases show, ‘some’ Filipinos’ overseas work is ambiguously situated in relation to the Philippine government’s overseas employment programme.

Jacinto’s story again received public attention two years later when he and 27 other Filipino nurses, including five doctors-turned-nurses, were fighting a legal battle against their recruitment agency. The nurses did not get the salary and other

¹ Overseas Employment Development Board, the National Seaman Board, and the Bureau of Employment Services.
benefits promised by the recruitment agency and specified in their employment contract. Their lawyer in New York flew to Manila to meet with Senator Pimentel, who was the guest of honour at the oath-taking of Jacinto, and sought help in prosecuting the recruitment agency. Senator Pimentel, in his speech delivered at the Senate on 4 September 2006, described Jacinto’s story as a depressing one not only because many Filipino professionals “now readily place their expertise to serve” the interests of other countries, but also because they sometimes find that the grass ‘there’ is “even browner, more parched and drier” than ‘here’. The news report detailed the situation facing Jacinto and other Filipino nurses living “in leaking abandoned houses” (Lirio, 2006). The editorial of *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* described Jacinto’s situation as the ‘end of a dream’ (Editorial, 2006). However, as the journalist Geller (2007) states, “Jacinto, himself, is missing from the discussion, grown weary of explaining himself”. Geller (2007) reports Jacinto’s side of story as follows:

Back home, the expectation is “that you should become the model Filipino, doing it for your country. I want something for myself,” Jacinto says. “I want to move on.” He knows some in his homeland still judge him. Well, he says, let them talk.

This small vignette is an exemplar of the focus of my thesis: an examination of the voices of people, born as Filipino citizens, whose individual migratory stories have become what the Philippine nation is becoming.

**Enquiry**

Globalisation, and associated population movements, blurs the boundaries drawn by nation-states (Castles, 2004). Yet, Glick-Schiller, Basch and Szanton-Blanc (1995, 59) argue that this era of globalisation is a “time of continuing and even
heightening nation-state building processes”. Benedict Anderson (2003, 6) defines a nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign”. It is limited because it has finite, although elastic, boundaries. It is imagined as sovereign because the concept developed during the period of European Enlightenment and the French Revolution that delegitimised divine hierarchy and dreamt of “being free”. Sheila Croucher (2003) suggests that Anderson (2003, 7) directly links nations with states by noting that “[t]he gauge and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state”. Anderson (2003) argues that governing elites and intellectuals play a central role in shaping the sense of community through the use of such tools as the census, maps, and museums. From this perspective, “to make the nation”, as Jon Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss (2008, 537) note, “is to make people national”. However, Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008, 537) suggest that “the nation is not simply the product of macro-structural forces” from above. This thesis examines the perspectives of ordinary people whose labour carries different national meanings constructed by political leaders and intellectuals in the nation-building processes of two countries, from and to, which they migrate.

Population movements have been discussed in relation to development for decades, and ‘migration and development’ has emerged as a significant area of research in the social sciences. For instance, the major concern of International Migration, one of major journals on migration, in their early volumes in the 1960s, was development. Another major migration journal, The International Migration Review (IMR), published a special issue on migration and development in 1982. In the foreword of this special issue, International Labour Organization (ILO) expert
Roger Böhning (1982, 732) mentioned that “[t]he influence of international labor migration on development is a relatively recent and neglected subject compared with historiography, demography and sociology of international migration”. Böhning particularly mentioned limited research on the relationship between migration and development in countries from which people depart, and attributed it to these countries’ relative lack of resources to conduct research. In the same issue of The IMR, Charles Stahl (1982, 876) posed a question on the extent to which labour migration is advantageous to the emigration country, and outlined social benefits and costs deriving from labour migration. He highlighted the developmental value of remittances, and urged the careful management of this “uniquely inexpensive source of foreign exchange … to ensure that it contributes to long-run development” (Stahl, 1982, 876). Scholars have continued to examine remittance patterns or remitting behaviour and remittance usage (see De Haas, 2007).

Over the past few years, a drastic increase in policy interest in remittances has been observed since The World Bank Global Development Finance 2003 formally acknowledged the significance of remittances constituting a large share of financial flows into developing countries. One of the report’s findings is that remittances flown into developing countries have exceeded official development assistance (ODA) (Ratha, 2003). Remittances are seen as an “alternative mechanism or ‘new mantra’ for funding development in the global South” (Datta et al., 2007, 43). International institutions, including the World Bank, the Bank for International Settlements and regional development banks, consider remittances to be an “important anti-poverty tool” (IMF, 2009, 1). Many local and international
actors are engaged in ‘leveraging’ remittances for development. Accordingly, “migrants have come to be valorised as the latest agents of development” (Raghuram 2009, 104) or “heroes of development” (Degaldo-Wise et al., 2007). To quote Parvati Raghuram (2009, 105), “[t]heir bodies bear critical migration theorists’ global sense of responsibility for addressing issues of poverty”. While working outside the territorial boundaries of their home nation and sustaining ties with people remaining home, migrants serve as an ingredient in the nation-building process in their home country.

Meanwhile, another theoretical debate on migration and development began in the 1970s to interrogate the hypothesis that the out-migration of a certain set of people negatively affects their countries of origin (Bhagwati et al., 1974). This debate took place under the rubric of brain drain. The term ‘brain drain’ was coined during the public discussions on a report issued in 1963 by the Royal Society of London in the context of British scientists migrating mainly to the US and Canada since the 1950s. An increase in scientists leaving the United

2 The discursive and non-discursive practices of framing the earnings of migrant workers with their home countries’ development are politically charged as ODA is on the decline. Some scholars are critical of this approach. Kavita Datta and her co-authors (2007, 43) argue that “a development policy based on the generation of remittances is inappropriate, unsustainable and unethical” as the labour market conditions under which remittances are generated are often exploitative. Migrants make a great deal of personal sacrifices in terms of economic and emotional hardships to send home money. Sarah Becklake (2008, 19) also argue that “the preoccupation with remittances and their supposed developmental capabilities might result in global structural inequalities – which have historically developed through exploitative practices – being framed as problems to be solved by migrants from the global South”.

3 See Pierpaolo Giannoccolo (2009) for the review of economists’ studies on the brain drain.

4 The report contains the Royal Society’s findings of a questionnaire survey of 563 professors and other heads of departments in UK universities. In a House of Lords debate
Kingdom (UK) was noticeable as early as 1952 as Americans and Canadians established their recruiting offices in the UK (Godwin et al., 2009). This report gained significant newspaper coverage, and evoked public debate. This debate arose when feelings of British decline were prevalent in the post-war period and scientific manpower planning was high on the British government’s agenda (Godwin et al., 2009). The special Boards was established in 1956 to recruit émigré scientists constituting the brain drain back to the UK (Godwin et al., 2009). 5 Labour politician Harold Wilson urged British scientists to return “because the Britain that is going to be is going to need you” (quoted in Godwin et al., 2009, 41). The (governing elites’) nationalist sentiments surrounding the emigration of scientists faded away in the UK because the government extended its manpower planning in the mid and late 1960s to include all the professions. Some reports suggested that the impact that the emigration of scientists had on the UK was not as severe as thought (Godwin et al., 2009).

Similar logic and claims, however, grew in popularity amongst developing countries since changes in the immigration policies of the US and other traditional immigration countries in the mid 1960s impacted out-migration flows from Asia in particular. Immigration countries started linking their immigration programmes with economic planning. At the same time, an increasing number of students in the Third World went to Western countries to study, at first largely to two former that followed the issuance of the Royal Society’s report, the then Minister for Science Lord Hailsham used phrases like ‘academic brains’ and the ‘drain of talent’.

5 Ron Bullough, who interviewed candidates in North America on the Boards’ behalf, recalled: “These people that went to America were very special. They were the cream, because they had the opportunity and they could get a job there. There weren’t millions of jobs in America. This is a big misconception” (Goldwin et al., 2009, 45)
colonial powers, France and Britain (Brandi, n.d.), although by the 1970s, the US had attracted far more foreign students (Brandi, n.d.). It was estimated that the number of Asian students, particularly from Taiwan, Korea and Iran, not returning to their home countries was as high as 90 percent (Bernard, 1970). In this context, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) commissioned extensive comparative surveys on the citizens of developing countries, who were studying and had studied in Canada, France and the US, about their motivations in deciding a place of employment and residence. The results were published in a report entitled “The Brain Drain: Emigration and Return” (Glaser et al., 1978). The emigration of a broad range of the citizens of developing countries – from students to professionals – was discussed in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) under the theme of brain drain.

The brain drain discourse has been replicated since the 1990s in the face of the increasingly “quality-selective” immigration policies introduced in many Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (Docquier et al., 2006, 152). A question posed is whether skills-based immigration programmes of labour-importing states jeopardised the skill needs, or the operations, of the source countries (Commander et al., 2004, Chikanda, 2006, Perrin et al., 2007). As the international migration data became available, scholars also examined whether educational investment in developing countries was wasted because of population movements (Carrington et al., 1998, Docquier et al., 2006). However, this line of enquiry based solely on the available data is limited by its methodological constraints. A question was also asked as to whether the projected loss or waste would be compensated by remittances (Niimi et al., 2008).
Scholarly attention was also focused on the (potential) benefits brought by people considered to be making up the brain drain in their countries of origin (Khadria, 1999, Saxenian, 1999, Hunger, 2004). Studies on the brain drain are sparse, and there is a limited dialogue amongst scholars in different disciplines using very different conceptual and methodological frameworks. The essence of this scholarship is the ‘suspicion’ that the emigration of a certain set of people negatively affects their countries of origin: Some scholars tried to debunk the existing myths (Commander et al., 2004, Clemens, 2007, Kangasniemi et al., 2007) while others contributed to increasing the level of suspicion (Chikanda, 2006, Niimi et al., 2008).

While the brain drain emerged as an intellectual enquiry debating the ‘effects’ of human/labour mobility on the emigration country, in the current usage it is also a simple migration category – another name for ‘skilled’ migration painted in an unfavourable light. For instance, ILO expert Piyasiri Wickramasekara (2002, 3) defines the brain drain as “the permanent or long-term international emigration of skilled people who have been the subject of considerable educational investment by their own societies”. It should also be noted that the brain drain suffers from lack of terminological and conceptual clarity. The discussion of Yogesh Atal and Luca Dall’Oglio (1987), editors of Migration of Talent: Causes and Consequences of Brain Drain, is insightful, and should be taken into

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6 In this thesis, I place the term skilled within quotation marks in order to stress that it has questionable descriptive value. Skill is assessed and defined in different ways (McNeil-Walsh, 2008).

7 I argue that the ambiguity surrounding the concept, in fact, has contributed to its persistence.
consideration in understanding what we commonly call the brain drain. Atal and Dall’Oglio (1987, 3) note that: “Figuratively, it [the word “brain”] makes the distinction between those with a better intellect and those who are ordinary. It implies that both types of people migrate but one is more problematic than the other”. They continue to suggest that: “In common usage, it must be said, the word ‘brain’ … becomes a virtual synonym of all the migrants save the illiterate, unskilled migrants who have now begun to join the Middle East labour market” (Atal et al., 1987, 4). Despite the blurry concept of a ‘brain’, what is clear is that this term, together with the overall brain drain debate, stresses the ‘national’ value of an individual’s labour. This national value is further strengthened due to its combination with the term ‘drain’ which, as economist Harry Johnson puts, “conveys a strong implication of serious loss” (Pistone et al., 2007, 10).

However, this blurry concept leads to a question: How do ‘skilled’ migrant workers respond to the processes in which their employment is discursively constructed as having both positive and negative implications for their home country’s development? The discussion above shows that there are competing discursive forces ‘re-defining’ the labour of migrants originating from developing countries in the nation-building process of their home countries. This thesis will explore the perspectives of ‘skilled’ people whose migratory stories are swept by these competing nationalistic discourses by asking the following set of questions:

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8 Because of the negative meaning associated with the brain drain, some scholars proposed alternative terms like ‘step out migration’ (Pistone et al., 2007) or ‘skill flow’ (Clemens, 2009). I suggest that these alternative terms will neither eliminate the negative meaning associated with the migration of a certain group of people nor be likely to replace the brain drain because there still exists the unresolved doubt about their migration and the term brain drain itself carries this feeling of doubt.
Do they consider their migration as constituting the brain drain? What meanings do they give to their inter-personal connections, if any, towards their country of origin? Do they attach ‘national’ meanings to their cross-border\(^9\) ties?

This thesis further explores the ambiguity of the label ‘brain’ by posing the following question: Are they considered as constituting the ‘brain gain’ from the host society perspective? In order to seek the answer of this question, this thesis makes a comparative analysis of ‘skilled’ workers in two different sectors. Whether a non-citizen worker is considered as a ‘brain’ is often reflected in the immigration and citizenship regime of a host state. Daiva Stasiulis and Abigail Bakan (2003, 2) point out that as a result of cross-border population movements “citizenship itself is increasingly subject to social and legal differentiation, producing new forms of gradational or hierarchical citizenship”. I regard the extent of citizenship rights that non-citizen workers enjoy in a host society as a yardstick to determine whether they are valorised as ‘brains’ from the host society perspective.

A CASE STUDY: FILIPINO ORIGIN WORKERS IN SINGAPORE’S IT AND NURSING SECTORS

The ordinary people whose viewpoints and experiences are covered in this thesis are those born as Filipino citizens and currently living and working in Singapore. The case of the Philippines is unique one because, as discussed, the state has

\(^9\) In this thesis, I use the term ‘cross-border’ instead of ‘transnational’ because of the ambiguous meaning of the latter, except when I discuss a corporate activity across national borders. A tension in the use of the term ‘transnational’ has been discussed by many scholars (see Croucher, 2003, Yeoh and Willis 2004).
played a pivotal role in the overseas work of its citizens by ‘facilitating’ it. In contrast to the Philippine government, the Singapore government has brought in non-citizen labour in order to expand the skills of the workforce within its territory. Economic growth has always been the main principle in the Singapore government’s formulation of its non-citizen labour importation and immigration programme. In December 2006, the Singapore workforce numbered at 2,495,900, comprising 30.3 percent non-residents, 9.7 percent permanent residents and 60 percent citizens (see Table (i).1). A Singapore Ministry of Manpower paper on “Employment of Singapore Citizens, Permanent Residents and Foreigners, 1997 to 2006” notes that the share of employment gains going to Singaporean citizens is likely to decline if the economy continues to grow strongly because the citizen workforce grows slowly due to falling fertility and ageing (Singapore Ministry of Manpower, 2008). Singapore’s case is also exceptional because it represents a few states actively pursuing settler migration in contemporary Asia (Castles, 2004, 23) although it targets a certain group of people possessing capital – be it human or financial.

It is not entirely clear when Filipinos started working in Singapore because the Singapore government does not release the detailed statistics on non-citizen workers. But because of geographical proximity between the two countries, Singapore, just a three-and-a-half-hour flight away from the Philippines with per capita income nearly 14 times that of the Philippines, has become a major destination for Filipinos looking for a (higher paying) job. Filipino job seekers

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10 Non-residents refer to non-citizen workers on work passes.
often take advantage of the inter-governmental arrangement: As a citizen of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member state, Filipino citizens are permitted to visit Singapore without filing a formal visa application.

Table (i).1 Employment by residential status, as at December

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residential status</th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total employed</td>
<td>2,046,100</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>2,170,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents (locals)</td>
<td>1,427,300</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>1,501,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens</td>
<td>1,310,600</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>1,344,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRs</td>
<td>116,700</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>156,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-residents (foreigners)</td>
<td>618,800</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>670,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Singapore Ministry of Manpower (2008)

Note: Data may not add up to total due to rounding.

An important contribution that this study makes to the migration scholarship is its comparison of the lived experiences and viewpoints of migrant workers in two different fields. Little attempt has been thus far made to comparatively analyse the experiences and perspectives of ‘skilled’ migrant workers in different fields. Such a comparison is critical to avoid simply presuming that the experiences and perspectives of all ‘skilled’ migrant workers are equal. The brain drain concept, both as an intellectual enquiry and as a migration category, considers individuals mainly as the bearers of skills embodying a certain level of societal investment. Much research focuses on a single occupational group, such as nurses, doctors or scientists, in order to provide policy suggestions for countries of origin. In this
discourse, all departing ‘skilled’ workers are treated uniformly as being ‘valued’ for the skills they possess. The literature on migrants’ experiences in host societies, however, presents a more complex picture. The value of a person admitted to a country outside his or her citizenship, in an exchange of labour, is inscribed in the country’s immigration regime. This determines under what conditions he or she can live within the jurisdiction. As migration and feminist scholars point out (Lister, 2003, Castles et al., 2009), citizenship can be better understood as a hierarchy rather than as a citizen/non-citizen dichotomy; the comparison will highlight the relationship between different types of skills and citizenship.

The two employment sectors chosen for this study are Information Technology (IT) and nursing. The information revolution and the drive for new technologies and software resulted in a situation where most countries were short of IT workers (Iredale, 2001). The IT labour market therefore quickly internationalised. In comparison to IT, nursing has a more established history as a career, and the migration of nurses is not entirely a new phenomenon. The UK began to rely on Caribbean nurse migration in the 1960s (Kofman et al., 2006). A large number of Filipina nurses also immigrated to the US in accordance to its new immigration policy in 1965 (Joyce et al., 1982). However, the scope of international nurse migration has significantly expanded since the late 1990s (Buchan et al., 2005). One of the factors affecting increasing nurses’ mobility is health sector restructuring across the globe, that assumes “the ‘infinite elasticity’ of the labour of women and migrant workers who could be counted on to work unpaid overtime due to professional commitment and/or labour market insecurity” (Van Eyck,
Other factors influencing the heightened mobility of nurses include the ageing population of highly industrialised countries, their “active planning of international recruitment on a large scale”, and the corresponding policies of some developing countries to produce nurses for the international market (Buchan et al., 2005, 203, Yeates, 2009). The greater cross-border mobility of workers in these two sectors is reflected in growing scholarly interest in the migration of people employed in IT and nursing (Chakravartty, 2000, Xiang, 2001, Ball, 2004, Raghuram, 2004b, Banerjee, 2006, Chakravartty, 2006, Raghuram, 2007a, Xiang, 2007, Yeates, 2008).

A comparison of people skilled in IT and nursing provides an important case because they represent very different types of labour. My research is designed to engage with the ongoing discussions on gendered labour mobility. Migrants are gendered subjects (Lister, 2003). Eleonore Kofman (2004, 654) notes that “[m]en dominate movements within transnational corporations, information and communication technology sectors and science; women circulate through reproductive sectors such as education, health and social work”. Both IT and nursing are highly sex-segregated fields. While the IT industry is male-dominated, nursing is traditionally, as well as currently, dominated by women. Raghuram (2000) also stresses the need for further research in this area because the definition of skills is gendered and those skills often developed by women, such as caring skills, are relatively undervalued. Kofman (2008, 71) also argues that “the notion of the highly skilled … has been constructed” upon IT and scientific sectors. People engaged in IT work represent technical labour whose labour process involves measurable skills. Meanwhile, nursing can be classified as what Arlie
Hochschild (2003) calls ‘emotional labour’. Much of nurses’ work is “overlooked and invisible”, and their qualitative skills are often seen as “extension of the ‘natural’ nurturing roles of women and thus do not receive the compensation commensurate with this high level of expertise” (Schreiber et al., 1991, 34). Also of importance, as Chris Manning and Alexandra Sidorenko (2007, 1087) highlighted in their study of the regulation of professional migration, the healthcare and IT sectors are “extreme cases of regulation of professional standards and migration flows”; the healthcare sector is highly regulated by the governments whereas the IT sector is largely unregulated. As for nurses, a professional body, such as a local nursing board, is usually involved in the pre-employment confirmation of a non-citizen applicant’s qualifications (Manning et al., 2007). Conversely, there are no professional registration and licensing requirements in IT; professional standards in the IT sector are set by major corporations rather than national professional bodies (Iredale, 2009). Robyn Iredale further (2009) notes that the migration of people in the IT sector has been largely facilitated by the fact that employers themselves have been able to choose their employees.

The number and occupational composition of Filipinos living in Singapore continue to change as Filipinos move in and out of Singapore. According to the estimates of the Philippine Embassy in Singapore, Filipino workers in Singapore are concentrated in certain sectors of the economy, such as domestic work, IT/computer programming/analysis, engineering, nursing/healthcare and service. Information Technology and nursing are two main sectors in which a large number of Filipinos are employed; in June 2006, there were 12,700 and 6,700
Filipino workers in IT and nursing respectively (Philippine Presidential Communications Operations Office, 2007). The numbers of Filipinos in both IT and nursing increased in 2008 to 16,400 and 8,710 respectively despite the economic downturn. These numbers exclude Filipinos who have taken up Singaporean citizenship. Persons with IT skills can be employed not only as programmers or analysts but also as managers, so the actual number of Filipino origin workers in the IT field may exceed 16,400. There is no available data to indicate when Filipino IT workers began to migrate to Singapore; however, this particular migration flow was observed in the mid 1990s (Editorial, 1995, Lopez, 1996). Nurses from the Philippines officially started working in Singapore in 1989, following a recruitment drive by the Singapore General Hospital (Toh, 1989). In 1994, Tan Tock Seng Hospital also began recruiting nurses from the Philippines. According to the Singapore Nursing Board annual reports (2003-2008), the Philippines was the major source country of nurses for Singapore between 2001 and 2008, followed by China and Malaysia. Despite its small population size, Singapore has been one of the top five destination countries for Filipino migrant nurses (Buchan, 2008).

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11 Singapore was affected by the global economic downturn in 2008. When I started fieldwork in April 2009, Singapore was still recovering from the downturn. On 7 June, I attended the event in Hong Lim Green Park to celebrate the Philippine Independence Day. During the event, an official of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration made an announcement about the Philippine government programme to assist retrenched OFWs during the economic downturn.
**Methodology**

My study explores the subjectivities of ‘skilled’ Filipinos living and working in Singapore. I chose the interview method in order to access the ways in which their perspectives are constructed. Mats Alvesson (2002, xi) echoing a number of earlier debates on qualitative methodologies in sociology and anthropology suggests that much of what is being said under postmodernism “offers powerful challenges and that it may play a conscious-raising and creative role in social research”. He encourages scholars to carefully incorporate selective inspirations from postmodernism. The conventional approach to interviewing assumes that the interview text says “something about the views, meanings or beliefs of people” (Alvesson, 2002, 118). Alvesson (2002, 126) sees interview talk “as governed by and thus as a potential indication of the socially dominant modes for constituting, reasoning and shaping various objects of knowledge”. The data generated through the interview method is influenced by multiple factors, including the interviewer-interviewee relationship. These factors will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2. To understand the research participants’ subjectivities, I analysed government documents, other scholarly work and the print media that reproduce discourses that surround them.

My discussion in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 draws largely on the data collected between April and September 2009 in semi-structured, open-ended interviews with Filipino origin workers in the IT and nursing sectors who live in Singapore, together with my observation in the field. I targeted multiple sites for participant recruitment using a range of contacts that I identified with the assistance of a number of Filipinos living in Singapore. The snowballing method was then
employed to ensure that I included a range of respondents in terms of age, sex, marital status, citizenship and occupation. I interviewed a total of 19 respondents in the IT sector and 15 in the nursing sector: these workers were born as Filipino citizens and educated in the Philippines; 12 are Filipino citizens on work passes, 18 are permanent residents in Singapore, and four are now naturalised Singaporeans. The interviews addressed respondents’ decisions about their course of study, profession and movement to Singapore, career trajectories, work experiences and connections with people in the Philippines. They were also questioned as to whether they thought their migration from the Philippines to Singapore and their subsequent employment there had affected the two countries in any way. Additionally, I spoke with a number of students and workers in the fields of IT and nursing in the Philippines between September and October 2009. I interviewed seven Filipino IT recruiters based in the Philippines and Singapore as well as the manager of a Philippine agency recruiting Filipino nurses to Singapore. The interviews also included the representative of the Philippine Consortium on Migration and Development in the Philippines in October 2009.

THE CHAPTERS AHEAD

The remainder of this thesis consists of eight chapters. Following the Introduction, Chapter 1 reviews the ways in which the population movements have been constructed with national development issues in a range of disciplines. This chapter makes explicit the matters of nationality and citizenship which are often implicit in the debates and discussions on migration and development. It discusses how the heterogeneity of people moving across state borders is downplayed, and their nationality is made important by, the practices of linking migration and
development. This chapter will also highlight differing nationalistic discourses that have emerged in countries of origin as a result of the ways in which host states manage their citizenship. The discursive (and non-discursive) making of ‘brains’ and ‘heroes’ has, however, created in-between spaces in which their labour carries contrasting societal (national) meanings at the same time.

Chapter 2 provides a justification for the methodological choices, and illustrate my ways of knowing and understanding the world of my respondents. I will discuss how my research enquiry came into existence. This will be followed by a brief overview of the place of fieldwork. This chapter also outlines the criteria I set to select research participants and the detailed description of how I recruited the participants. The interview method is the integral component of this research. I draw on the work of Alvesson (2002) in understanding the interview data collection and analysis. In this chapter, I will also reflect on the power dynamics and nationality that may have influenced the data collection, which, in turn, shaped the nature of the material that I would analyse.

Chapter 3 discusses in detail how labour migration has been constructed in relation to the Philippine nation of today and tomorrow, with special focus on the post-1974 history of labour migration. It describes how citizens who cross state borders to work are moulded into OFWs, who are then constructed as heroes and heroines for the remittances they share with their family members or sent to the Philippines for their own purposes. By sustaining familial and/or affective ties across borders, Filipino origin workers beyond Philippine shores have come to symbolise Philippine nationhood. It includes discussions by different actors,
including scholars, NGO workers and politicians, about how to ‘maximise’ the citizens’ overseas work.

The state’s decades-long overseas employment programme has raised concerns about what is known as the brain drain. Chapter 4 provides the historical overview of the brain drain discourse in the Philippines that has posed a threat to the state-led harmonised construction of OFWs as heroes and heroines, but has produced equally strong nationalistic sentiments. It examines the origin and reproduction of the brain drain discourse in two employment sectors selected for this study.

In short, a certain set of – ‘skilled’ – citizens’ overseas employment has become a site in which two competing discourses intersect. The following three chapters provide a detailed analysis of the interview data:

Chapter 5 discusses the ways in which Philippine national identity is brought to life in the minds of Filipino origin IT workers and nurses by exploring the ways in, and the extent to, which they embody the two competing discourses that surround their employment. This chapter consists of two parts. The first section discusses the ways in which they respond to the state-sponsored discourse on their overseas employment. The second part outlines the multiple ways in which the brain drain discourse is reproduced and how the respondents deal with this discourse.

Chapter 6 explores the ways in which Singapore’s immigration and citizenship regime shapes the views and experiences of Filipino IT workers in Singapore. The valorisation of IT work is reflected in a work pass issued to the Filipino IT workers I spoke to: the Employment Pass. The brain drain claim is reinforced by the Singapore state-sponsored discourse on foreign/global talent that surrounds
Employment Pass holders. The lives and views of Filipino origin IT workers in Singapore are also shaped by one particular discourse that associates Filipinos with domestic work because Filipinos have been predominantly employed in the homes of Singaporeans for the past three decades. This chapter will discuss how Filipina domestic workers have come to shape the national imagery of the Philippines in Singapore and how this discourse further entrenches the respondents’ Filipino national identity.

Chapter 7 analyses the views and experiences of Filipinos facing the same narratives travelling across the Philippine-Singapore border but being engaged in the numerically female-dominated profession of nursing. Before going into the detailed discussion, this chapter outlines the ways in which Filipino nurses are deployed to the Singapore labour market. Whether their labour is valued in Singapore is mirrored in the type of a work pass issued to Filipino nurses recruited to Singapore. S Pass and Work Permit issued to Filipinos nurses recruited to Singapore have a range of constraints on their labour and social rights and eligibility for permanent residency and formal citizenship. This chapter highlights the female respondents’ experiences shaped by the prevailing discourse that positions all Filipinas as domestic workers.

The last chapter summaries the key findings of this thesis, and highlights its major contributions to scholarship.
CHAPTER 1 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The linkages between migration and development have been debated in academic circles on and off for decades (De Haas, 2010). The migration-development framework – especially that links labour migration with development within the boundaries of the nation-state – attracted renewed attention since the early 2000s from researchers across a range of disciplines as well as policy advisors and planners.\(^{12}\) This rise in scholarly and policy interest in this framework can be attributed to the following factors.\(^{13}\) One of the observable trends in the field of migration is the increasing talk about ‘skills’ by OECD countries, including traditional immigration countries. The parallel development in this field is the revival of the brain drain claim. Another noticeable development the world experiences over the decades is the connectedness of the population in different parts of the globe that induces continued cross-border human/labour mobility through varied – both acceptable and unacceptable from the state perspective – channels, which, in turn, results in the extension of the previously existing connectedness of the population. In comparison to earlier periods, today’s world population has a higher level of mobility potential, and states feel the urge of

\(^{12}\) Researchers studying the migration-development nexus have not extensively discussed what comprises ‘development’. The literature tends to be “based on notions of development that focus on (gross) income indicators” (De Haas, 2007, 1).

\(^{13}\) See Raghuram (2007) for a different view.
‘managing’ this mobility.\textsuperscript{14} Amongst all these inter-personal connections, what caught the attention of migration scholars and policy advisors is one particular form of connection – the migrants’ connections to their countries of origin. These debates and discussions focus on the mobilities of, and the connections maintained by, people born as the citizens of developing countries.

This chapter reviews the relevant literature by analysing different groups of studies that link labour migration with development through the analytical lens of nationality/citizenship.\textsuperscript{15} The detailed discussion of scholarly work on migration and development will demonstrate the salience of nation-states ‘(re-)defining’ the population moving across state borders. Scholarly accounts of migration and development are dominated by macro-structural concerns: Focus has been on the range of effects that the out-migration of labour, and the reverse flows that result from labour migration, have on countries of origin. This line of thinking has resulted in dichotomous arguments as to whether migration is ultimately beneficial for countries from which people emigrate. In this construction, some migrants are seen as the ‘lost brains’ of their home nations and others are viewed as national ‘heroes’. However, the making of ‘lost brains’ and ‘heroes’ is an ambiguous process as it simplifies the dynamics of human lives and overlooks the complexities of social realities. Drawing on the experiences of the Filipino origin IT workers and nurses I spoke to, I will further examine the abstract macro-level

\textsuperscript{14} I note that the population moves not only because of ‘ability’ but also by ‘force’.

\textsuperscript{15} Nicola Piper (2007) has re-interpreted the migration-development framework as a rights issue. The alternative voice was also expressed by Oliver Bakewell (2008) in his “‘Keeping Them in Their Place’: The Ambivalent Relationship between Development and Migration in Africa”.
debates dominant in the literature in the following data analysis chapters. This chapter aims to tease out the ambiguities in the process of constructing lost brains and heroes of a nation.

1.2 The Brains of a Nation in the Making

Labour or human effort was assumed as homogeneous in classical and neoclassical economics. Bill Kiker (1966) and Irvin Sobel (1978) note that classical and neoclassical economists were aware of the potential of human beings as capital, but differences amongst human beings or workers were not taken into account in their discussions. The concept of capital began to be applied to humans in the 1960s. The work of Teodore Schultz, Nobel laureate in economics, suggests investment made in people in the form of education (schooling) makes a difference in their earnings (Schultz, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963). Scholars, such as Edward Denison (1962), began examining the relationship between education and economic growth (Sobel, 1978). The state expenditure on education began to be seen as ‘investment’ on citizen-workers to make the size of a pie bigger for individual citizen-workers and a society as a whole. Influential policymaking entities, such as the World Bank, OECD, United Nations Economical, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), USAID and major foundations, especially Ford and Rockefeller, sponsored research and major

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16 Human capital explains individual economic success (in the form of earnings) at the micro level and economic growth (the aggregate level of income and its rate of growth) at the macro level.
conferences and seminars on human capital and the economics of education to “spread the message”, that is, the importance of expenditure on education (Sobel, 1978, 283). Sobel (1978, 282) notes:

The belief that investment in humans through education and training would pay off in development coincided with the “revolution of expectations” in which access to education was depicted as the open sesame to equality of status and greater income equality. Thus, economic analysis served to provide the “scientific” basis for educational expansion.

The expansion of education is closely related to the development of human capital theory. However, what also caught the attention of policy makers or planners or the proponents of human capital theory was the cross-border movements of ‘capital’ embodied in these citizen-workers. In the 1960s, traditional immigration countries, including Australia, Canada, the US and the UK, started linking their immigration programmes with economic planning. In 1965, the US passed the Immigration and Nationality Act, which abolished the quota system based on the discriminatory criterion of national origins 17 and established a series of preferences to determine who would gain entry (EH.net, 2010). Preferences were given to people – amongst others – in scarce occupational skills (Keely, 1979). As Thomas Bernard (1970, 31) explains, one of the main reasons for the liberalisation of the immigration laws is to “enable greater selectivity of highly qualified manpower, while at the same time relegating the less skilled to lower priorities”. Bernard (1970, 31-2) puts it in the following way: “Discrimination by national origin has been replaced by discrimination based on education and ability”.

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17 Immigration from any Asian country was for long practically prohibited, but with the passage of the 1965 Act Asian countries were treated the same as others.
Canada and Australia adopted the points tests in 1962 and 1979 respectively by abolishing whites-only immigration policies (Boucher, 2009). As discussed in the Introduction, the brain drain debate began in the UK in the mid 1960s as British scientists migrated to Canada and the US in growing numbers. In 1966, an article entitled “The International Flow of Human Capital” was published by Herbert Grubel and Anthony Scott, two economists based in the US, who (1966, 268) observed “recent strong manifestation of public interest in two major problems in international relations”. The first ‘problem’ is “the migration of highly skilled individuals to the U.S. – often referred to as the ‘brain drain’”, and the second is “the large-scale programme of training foreign students in the U.S.” (Grubel et al., 1966, 268). As such, the concept of human capital and the brain drain debate grew side by side in the 1960s. Onuoha Chukunta (1977) notes that the earlier brain drain debate resulted in two attitudes towards the movements of people assumed to embody ‘capital’ between “a nationalist orientation, which sought to stop the practice, and an international stance that favoured the free circulation of personnel throughout the world”.  

However, as Chukunta (1977, 281) views, “[t]he voice of the nationalists, as might be expected, was much louder, given their alliance with international organizations, private foundations, and national governments”. Since the late 1960s, state leaders of developing countries have raised the brain drain issue in the UNGA.

\[\text{See Chukunta (1977) for references. Andrés Solimano (2008, 2) also mentions that internationalists represented by Harry Johnson claimed that the mobility of brains leads to gains for migrants as well as for the world economy because “resources moved from places with low productivity to places with higher productivity”. Conversely, nationalists represented by Don Patinkin questioned the concept of world welfare, and pointed out the asymmetric distribution of gains from this human/labour mobility (Solimano, 2008).}\]
The analytical framework to view the out-migration of citizen-workers as lost capital has remained unchanged for the past decades. As highlighted in the Introduction, it is partly because, as Docquier and Marfouk (2006, 152) note, many OECD countries introduced “quality-selective” immigration policies since the 1990s. Anna Boucher (2009) argues that human capital claims entered into discourses in different sectors in Canada and Australia over the 1990s. Citing Robert McNabb and Keith Whitfield (1994), Boucher (2009, 9) notes that human capital theory “is the mainstream and theoretically dominant approach to the analysis of labour markets in Canada”. The US Immigration Act of 1990 further developed the H-1 specialty occupation programme launched with the passage of the McCarren-Walter Act of 1952 (Jachimowicz et al., 2002). The Immigration Act of 1990 was followed by the American Competitiveness and Work Force Improvement Act of 1998 (Docquier et al., 2006). As Kofman (2005, 463) observes, “[i]mmigration policies are directed towards selecting those who will be most advantageous to the economy”. In this context, Edward Taylor and his co-authors (1996, 194) noted the emergence of a “brain-drain syndrome” as a situation in which “migrant-sending countries subsidize developed countries by investing public resources in human capital that subsequently migrates abroad”. Abel Chikanda, in discussing health worker migration from Zimbabwe, (2006, 19)

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19 Australia’s immigration policy has officially privileged ‘skilled’ workers since 1984; immigrants have been selected according to their prospective “contribution to the Australian economy” (Docquier et al., 2006, 152).

20 The H-1 visa became divided into H-1A for registered nurses and H-1B for those in ‘specialty occupations’ or occupations that require at least a Bachelor’s degree in the field of intended employment. The H-1A visa category expired in 1995, and a new non-immigration category for ‘nurses in health professional shortage areas’, the H-1C, was introduced in 2000 (Money and Falstrom, 2006).
667) argues: “the migration of skilled workers constitutes a drain on the sending country’s human resources because it invests in human capital development that will be utilised by the recipient country”. Some scholars have attempted to estimate this ‘transferred’ capital. For instance, the UN tried to estimate the amount of human capital lost by developing countries through emigration during the period 1961-1972. Taylor and his co-authors (1996, 193) do not provide methodology employed by the UN to come up with the estimate, but they cite that the transferred capital was estimated to be around $US50 billion ($US121 billion in 1990 dollars). They put this number into perspective by comparing it with total ODA provided by three major countries hosting migrants over the same period (Canada, the United States and Britain) that totalled $US46 billion ($US112 billion in 1990 dollars). The Asian Development Bank (ADB) (2004) also interpreted ‘tertiary educated’ migrants living in OECD countries as capital lost to their home countries.\(^{21}\) By noting that it costs about $US20,000 to educate someone to the level of tertiary education, the ADB reported that the wealth (capital) transferred from developing to developed countries as a result of population movements was estimated to be some $US60 billion. These estimates were made to underscore the significant loss of ‘capital’ experienced by developing countries.

However, this line of argument does not take into consideration the varied debates within human capital theory. According to human capital theory, “more schooling would lead to higher productivity and macroeconomic growth” (Livingstone, \[^{21}\] The ADB simply assumes that these migrants are educated in developing countries.
David Livingstone (1997) notes that this perspective was supported in industrialised countries that observed the increase in both school participation rates and earned incomes in the post-1945 period. However, the theory’s claim that more schooling would lead to economic success has been challenged since the 1970s because “school enrolment rates have continued to increase while average incomes have stagnated, unemployment rates have worsened and underemployment rates have worsened and underemployment of highly schooled people has been recognized as a social problem” (Livingstone, 1997, 9). Despite the existing doubts and unsettled debates about human capital, the concept continues to shape the political and academic discourses about human/labour mobility. This internal disagreement of human capital theory is temporarily made invisible when people move across national borders.

LOCATING ‘LOST’ BRAINS

One body of research on the brain drain uses the extensive data on education and migration to examine whether the recorded past cross-border population movements drained developing countries of their educational investment embodied in citizen-workers (Carrington et al., 1998, Carrington et al., 1999, Adams, 2003, Docquier et al., 2006). This body of research intersects with the aforementioned discourse on human capital that resulted in the expansion of education since the 1960s.

William Carrington and Enrica Detragiache of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (1998) launched a new line of research on the brain drain using the existing
data on migration and education. They estimated the number of emigrants,\textsuperscript{22} over 25 years of age, originating from 61 developing countries and currently living in OECD member countries, by three educational categories (primary or less, secondary and tertiary).\textsuperscript{23} Based on these estimates, they calculated these countries’ ‘emigration’ rates for each educational category.\textsuperscript{24} Carrington and Detragiache show that emigrants tend to be better educated than the average population in these countries. They also note that there may be a sizable ‘brain drain’ from the Caribbean, Central America and some African and Asian countries; the past population movements from these regions and countries to OECD countries may have taken a high proportion of the better educated. In the Asia and Pacific region, the Philippines is the biggest migration source country to the US, with 730,000 Filipinos of origin, the great majority of which have tertiary education. Carrington and Detriagiache conclude that their findings meet some of the conventional wisdoms and should be taken into account by policy makers especially designing education policies in these brain drained countries. Carrington’s and Detragiache’s study stresses individuals’ national origin (the fact that they originated from developing countries) and their level of education. While doing so, the study silences these individuals’ disparate migratory stories and

\textsuperscript{22} The concept of ‘migrant’ is not homogeneous across OECD countries due to different nationality and citizenship laws. This will be further discussed in the page below.

\textsuperscript{23} Carrington and Detragiache used data from 1990 US Census and OECD Continuous Reporting System on Migration. They used immigration data (collected by a country of destination) because emigration data (collected by a country of origin) are often incomplete and not precise. Because of lack of data, they excluded the former Soviet Union and East Europe. Also, they excluded migratory flows to non-OECD countries although some non-OECD countries like the Arab Gulf also have a large foreign-born population.

\textsuperscript{24} They used Robert Barro’s and Jong-Wha Lee’s (1993) data set, known as the best available set of estimates of educational attainment for developing countries.
experiences. As discussed at the outset of this chapter, due to the interconnectedness of the world population, people move across national borders through different channels for different reasons – to study, marry or work. Some might have left their home countries because of war or ethnic conflicts. But this line of research pioneered by Carrington and Detragiache, along with the brain drain literature in general, give prominence to grand narratives, for instance, the developing-developed divide: While the ‘educated’ individual migrants’ origin is highlighted as a commonality, their heterogeneous migratory stories are effectively silenced. However, this homogenising and silencing process raises a number of questions.

Carrington and Detragiache note that the data sets they built should be interpreted with caution.\textsuperscript{25} In this chapter, I address two points relevant to my discussion. First, each OECD country has different nationality and citizenship laws, which unavoidably resulted in inconsistencies in Carrington’s and Detragiache’s data sets when combining the data collected in each jurisdiction. In some countries, including Australia, Canada and the US, the ‘place of birth’ is used to define an immigrant. Meanwhile, most European countries define an immigrant based on the ethnicity or immigration status of the parent. So, for instance, an ethnic

\textsuperscript{25} Despite their innovative methodology, a number of gaps and limitations in building the new data sets, also noted by Carrington and Detragiache themselves, are too significant to take their findings very seriously. The OECD data provides information on the country of origin for the top ten or top five sending countries, so small sending countries are usually excluded. There is a possibility that a large number of undocumented foreign born individuals are not counted in the US Census. They claim that this should not distort their estimates of the emigration rate of individuals with tertiary education in developing countries because those with higher levels of education are more likely to be in the US on a legal basis.
German who migrated from Romania to Europe is not counted as an immigrant in Carrington’s and Detragiache’s study. Second, the US Census, one of their data sources, records information on the foreign born population’s educational attainment, but it does not note the age of entry, which could indicate where this population was educated. In other words, an Argentinean who migrated to the US with his parents when small and has been educated in the US is, according to Carrington’s and Detragiache’s model, still counted as capital or educational investment lost by Argentina. Their model also exaggerates the loss by some countries from which a large number of people migrate to the US to study. An OECD report (2004) shows that the number of international students enrolled in the OECD countries increased from 1.32 million to 1.78 million between 1998 and 2002 (cited in Rizvi, 2005). Carrington’s and Detragiache’s model does not distinguish a person of Chinese origin, who obtained a degree in the US, from someone having completed their tertiary education in China. People move across national borders in different points of time in life for different reasons. So, Carrington’s and Detragiache’s study and a series of following studies employing their methodology, for instance, Adams (2003) and Docquier and Marfouk (2006), may be questioned as measurements of the extent of the loss of capital (embodied

26 The OECD System does not collect the educational attainment of the migrant population. Carrington and Detragiache addressed this data limitation by assuming that the educational distribution of migrants from each country of origin to the OECD is the same as that for the US. However, they note that this assumption may distort the estimates particularly in countries with low immigration rates to the US but with high immigration rates to another OECD country. For this reason, Carrington and Detragiache note that the estimates for non-US OECD countries are much more tentative than the US figures.
in citizen-workers) experienced by developing countries. Debating the brain drain is a way of homogenising (and nationalising) the population movements.

Following Carrington’s and Detragiache’s (1998) work, a number of economists tried to examine the brain drain using their methodology. I would argue that this line of work is the continual effort to homogenise (nationalise) the migratory stories of individuals. For instance, in his study of 24 “large, labour-exporting” countries, Richard Adams (2003) addresses the following questions:

Exactly how pervasive is the brain drain? Which countries or regions of the developing world are most affected? Does international migration deprive labor-exporting countries of a sizeable fraction of their “best and brightest,” or are their numbers too small to worry about?

Instead of ‘the tertiary educated’, Adams used the phrase ‘best and brightest’ to further exaggerate the matter of concern. Adams’ study (2003), published as a World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, adopts Carrington’s and Detragiache’s flawed methodology. Adams confirms the findings of Carrington and Detragiache (1998) that the majority of migrants to both the US and the OECD have a secondary education or higher. However, Adams also suggests that the past recorded cross-border population movements take less than 10 percent of the tertiary-educated from major labour-sending countries because they are often large population countries with a substantial number of tertiary-educated people. Therefore according to Adams, the past movements have certainly caused the brain drain – a high emigration rate for the tertiary educated – from some

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27 Accordingly, they share the same data limitations.
28 Both studies use Barro and Lee’s data set but of different years.
countries. He argues that geographical proximity to large developed countries in particular has a significant impact on the brain drain.\(^\text{29}\) He suggests that more work needs to be done to clarify the relationship between the brain drain, geographical proximity and the size of the (educated) population of migrant-sending countries and to identify policy programmes to minimise the “possibly adverse impact of brain drain” on some countries (Adams, 2003, 20). Using Carrington’s and Detragiache’s model, Adam’s study (2003) underlines the developing/developed divide or developed countries’ utilisation of developing countries’ investment.

In a chapter contributing to the edited volume *International Migration, Remittances, and the Brain Drain*, Docquier and Marfouk (2006) addressed the long-held conventional wisdom by asking the question of “who wins and who loses from skilled migration” (Docquier et al., 2006).\(^\text{30}\) The main finding of this study is that OECD member countries losing their ‘brains’ to others compensate their loss through immigration. Docquier and Marfouk note that the average emigration rate for tertiary educated residents in OECD member countries decreased from 4.1 to 4.0 percent between 1990 and 2000. In contrast, the

\(^{29}\) A large share of the best educated migrated to the US from some Latin American countries like Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica and Mexico, located closest to the US. Also, more than 10 percent of tertiary educated people from Jamaica, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey and Sri Lanka migrated to OECD countries.

\(^{30}\) With Carrington’s and Detragiache’s methodological framework as a base, Docquier and Marfouk incorporated additional statistical sources, such as national censuses and registers in all OECD countries. In their study, Docquier and Marfouk define ‘low-skilled’ as those with primary education (or with zero to eight years of schooling completed); ‘medium-skilled’ workers as those with secondary education (nine to twelve years of schooling); and ‘high-skilled’ workers as those with tertiary education (thirteen years and above).
emigration rate for tertiary educated residents in non-OECD member countries increased from 6.6 to 7.2 percent during the same period. In absolute terms (the number of educated emigrants), the Philippines tops the list with more than one million tertiary educated Filipinos working outside the country in 2000. In relative terms (in proportion of the educated labour force), small countries lost the highest proportion of their better educated. Docquier and Marfouk (2006, 168) suggest that “the international mobility of skilled workers is a crucial issue for middle- and low-income countries, mainly because their share of tertiary educated workers remains low compared with high-income countries”.

All these scholars’ emphasis on individuals’ nationality or national origin together with their educational level diverts attention from the heterogeneities amongst people grouped together, for instance, tertiary educated Filipinos. In the 1960s and 1970s, grand theories, such as neo-classical theory or historical-structuralism, shaped the field of migration research (De Haas, 2010). Migration theories have moved away from these nation-state-centred grand narratives: Scholars started using different analytical tropes, such as gender and network, in order to understand the social processes relating to the cross-border movements of people (Boyd, 1989, Silvey, 2004, Tyner, 2004). This trend in research does not negate the significance of economic factors and wage differentials between countries in people’s decision to cross national borders. Instead, this body of research urges us to understand multiple layers of structures affecting the lives of people. At the same time, as Raghuram (2008) puts it, “[g]lobalisation has not merely squeezed the ability of some people to earn but also (and more importantly) increased people’s expectations of what is ‘necessary’ to live”. But when labour is
highlighted as capital and population movements are framed in the developing/developed divide, the earlier mentioned multiple layers of structures easily come to disappear. All that remains are winning nations and losing nations; while other dynamics are silenced.

THE ‘NATIONAL’ BAGGAGE THAT COMES WITH MOBILITY

The brain drain question, as noted by Adrian Favell, Miriam Feldblum and Michael Smith, editors of The Human Face of Global Mobility (2006, 12), has become “the biggest single area of research on skilled migrants”. The scholarship on ‘skilled’ migration has become diversified since the 1990s, when corporate activities became internationalised and the managerial elite moved between global financial nodes (Beaverstock, 1994, Beaverstock et al., 1996, Beaverstock, 1996, Beaverstock et al., 2000, Beaverstock, 2002). Since then, scholars have documented the different types of mobilities of people, and these mobilities have been analysed through different frameworks. Geography has made a great contribution to this. Sam Scott (2004, 2006, 2007) shows the experiences of different groups of the British middle-class living in Paris. The feminist scholarship in the migration field called attention to the gendered dimensions of skilled population movements (Yeoh et al., 1998, Raghuram, 2004a, Raghuram, 2004b, Kofman et al., 2005, Yeoh et al., 2005). As the title of an article by Vaughan Robinson and Malcolm Carey (2000) “Peopling Skilled International Migration” and the aforementioned The Human Face of Global Mobility show,  

31 Due to the expansion of education across the world, most people embody ‘capital’.
scholars have tried over the past decade to move beyond looking at ‘skilled’
migrants simply as ‘skills’. Nevertheless, some cross-border movements of people
still generate much controversy because they continue to be seen as the bearers of
skills or ‘capital’ by virtue of their nationality or national origin.

(a) Theoretically debating the brain drain

The brain drain claim was for the first time supported – only theoretically – by the
econometric model introduced by Jagdish Bhagwati and Koichi Hamada (1974) in
their much cited article entitled “The Brain Drain, International Integration of
Markets for Professionals and Unemployment”. They examined the welfare –
measured by national income, per capita income and unemployment – for the left
behind of the out-migration of ‘brains’. In order to do so, they simplified the
social world to the extreme. They assumed an economy consisted of two types of
labour – educated and uneducated, and that cross-border mobility is restricted to
an educated labour force informed of the outside world’s (higher) wage. In other
words, they supposed a ‘selectively open border’. 32 Labour movement is assumed
to occur only in one direction. I will not dwell on Bhagwati’s and Hamada’s
model and discussion in detail because such detailed information is not essential

32 When Bhagwati and Hamada examined the brain drain in the 1970s, they had a
particular context in mind. As a background for the study, they cited Dumont’s (1969)
observation in Africa: During the period of colonialism efforts were made to equalise the
salaries of the educated elite in similar jobs in France and French Africa, which created
enormous disparity between the educated ‘elite’ – some of whom were educated in
France – and the rest of the population in (post-)colonial Africa. In Bhagwati’s and
Hamada’s understanding, the brain drain occurs because the educated elite in the
developing world are better informed about, and have better access to, the developed
world. This particular historical context is reflected in the ways they designed their
theoretical model.
to my thesis. In summary, Bhagwati and Hamada explained the multiple ways in which the increasing ‘integration’ of educated labour markets induces a decrease in the welfare of those remaining in a lower income country.\textsuperscript{33} In the policy debate, Bhagwati (1973) attempted to address this ‘loss’ experienced by developing countries through taxation on emigration, which was either paid by migrants themselves to their home countries or was levied by the governments of the host countries and transferred to the source countries. The so-called brain drain tax is discussed in John Wilson (2008) and Domenico Scalera (2009). The brain drain claim was further strengthened by economists Nadeem Ul Haque and Se-Jik Kim (1994) who argued that ‘human capital flight’ may lead to a difference in growth rates in the long run between the two economies from and to which human capital flies.\textsuperscript{34} They carried out this research in the context in which the role of human capital received renewed attention. However, Ul Haque and Kim also (1994, 24) note the limitation of their discussion:

\begin{quote}
The magnitude of the adverse impact of the brain drain depends on what the contribution of the quality of differing levels of human capital is in the production process. Unfortunately, this is an area on which little
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{33} It affects the real and expected wages, and the supply of, educated and uneducated labour in an economy.

\textsuperscript{34} Their theoretical model also assumes that there are only two types of rational economic agents in an economy, and they are endowed with different abilities. Individuals invest in human capital in their own country in the first period of life, and they decide whether they will continue to live in their own country or migrate to a foreign country in the later period. Although the cost of migration is fixed regardless of abilities, Ul Haque and Kim (1994, 12) explain that those with higher learning abilities choose to migrate because the gain from migration increases with abilities: For individuals with higher learning abilities, “the increase in return on their human capital when moving to the foreign country is more than enough to compensate the fixed cost of migration” whereas “the less skilled or educated cannot earn enough to be able to make up the fixed cost of migration and hence find that they are better off remaining at home”.


theoretical work has been done and is extremely difficult to develop any empirical evidence on.

It is an easy task to indicate that all the assumptions made in these studies are ‘unrealistic’. They assume an economy that produces one type of product; some kinds of negative effect occur when the selected few move across borders while others do not. Because of the way in which the model is designed, mobility becomes a source of ‘problem’ – the decreased welfare. However, in reality, an economy consists of many different sectors and more than just two types of labour. People move across different sectors of the economy, and people at all levels of education, or with different abilities, live and work outside their countries of birth for different reasons and motivations. The data introduced in the earlier section shows that emigrants tend to be better educated than the average population or international migration is not an equally available option to all. Such data does not include people living and working outside their country of birth without state permission. Drawing on the findings from a survey and in-depth interviews with Indian H-1B visa holders in the US, Paula Chakravartty (2006) sought an answer to the question of whether ‘the best and the brightest’ are sourced from a country of origin. Many Indian H-1B visa holders she interviewed were not the graduates of elite institutions like the Indian Institute of Technology. Instead, they migrated because they are not ‘good enough’ to compete in the Indian labour market. Some of Chakravartty’s interviewees found the brain drain claim inadequate for the reason being provided: “India has too many brains to drain. Many of the brightest boys are staying in India. They are the ones running the show” (Chakravartty, 2006, 167). At the same time, not all the ‘best and brightest’ migrate to other countries. John Gibson and David McKenzie, for instance, (2009) examine the
determinants of migration (emigration and return) choices amongst the best and brightest in terms of academic performance. They tracked down the highest achieving students in three Pacific countries – Tonga, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea (PNG) – at the end of high school, for students graduating high school between 1976 and 2004. Their study shows that not all the best and brightest have migrated although the incidence of ever migrating is high in the sample. One’s cross-border mobility is also enabled and restricted by different factors, for instance, gender as indicated in the large volume of literature on women migrant workers (Parreñas, 2001, Silvey, 2004, Tyner, 2004), network (Boyd, 1989, Poros, 2001), the recruitment industry (Guevarra, 2010) and the policies and programmes of states enabling and restricting mobility (Favell et al., 2006, Rodriguez, 2010). Nevertheless, an approach to divide the population into two (migrants and the left behind) has been commonly adopted in empirical studies. I will focus on this in the following section.

(b) The feelings and opinions of co-nationals

As Michael Clemens (2009, 5) notes, “while skilled worker emigration is typically observed in settings where many development outcomes are poor, it is difficult to make careful scientific assessments of what role – if any – skilled

35 They decided to focus on students with high ability or the best and brightest in terms of academic performance because “common concerns with existing efforts to quantify the brain drain are the extent to which individuals migrate for tertiary training, and the extent to which they self-select into occupations based on the ease of emigration in that occupation” (Gibson et al. 2009, 6). However, the tracking and response rates for PNG top students were lower because of “the non-existent school records, larger population size, poor infrastructure in PNG, and the fact that a vibrant mining sector offers jobs in multiple remote locations within PNG” (Gibson et al. 2009, 12).
worker migration has in causing those outcomes". This explains why the brain drain literature is dominated by economists using econometric models. Alternatively, scholars attempted to document the ‘felt’ effects of people who they thought might have been affected by cross-border labour mobility. These felt effects have been examined through the views and opinions of non-migrants about labour mobility. For instance, scholars examined how firms and hospitals cope with the departure of their employees (Fernandez et al., 1987, Khadria, 2002, Commander et al., 2004, Astor et al., 2005, Perrin et al., 2007). Mary Ann Fernandez and her colleagues (1987) examined Philippine employers’ responses to the mobility of labour with skills identified as critical to the Philippines. The findings of this study will be discussed in Chapter 4. A survey, administered by Simon Commander and his co-authors (2004) to 225 software firms in India, shows the majority of respondents, having lost workers to an offer abroad, reported very limited adverse impact on their performance. Less than a quarter of firms reported that the loss of a particular skill category had a negative impact on performance as measured by revenues per worker. The study shows some evidence of wage pressure associated with the departure of employees at the height of the software boom in the late 1990s, but they suggest that there was also a strong supply of workers. Because the prominence of healthcare in development has been widely accepted, labour mobility in this sector has been framed often as the brain drain. A study carried out by Avraham Astor and his colleagues (2005) on physician migration makes a comparison of five countries including Colombia, India, Nigeria, Pakistan and the Philippines. In order to examine the impact of
physician migration on the migrant-sending countries, they sought respondents’
level of agreement with the ready-made statements on a five-point scale. Their
study shows that responses varied significantly by country with regard to whether
physician migration resulted in physician shortages, however in all cases
migration had a detrimental effect on rural areas and public practice settings
(Astor et al., 2005). This implies that it is often not cross-border labour mobility,
but rather an unequal resource distribution ‘within’ the country that causes labour
shortage in certain sectors or areas of the economy.

Because of the recent increasing mobility of nurses, scholars have drawn links
between nurse mobility and poor health service provision in some countries. To
quote Richard Connell (2008, 2), “migration may increase further in future,
diminishing the possibility of achieving the Millennium Development Goals,
challenging work forces to manage HIV/AIDS and exacerbating existing global
and national inequalities in access to adequate health care”. The population is
often divided into nurses leaving their countries of origin on the one hand and
service providers and consumers remaining in these countries on the other hand.
Chikanda (2006) examined nurse migration from Zimbabwe by conducting a

36 The respondents included professors or healthcare professionals working in a university
or medical school setting, officials and researchers working for national and international
governmental and development organisations that conduct health policy or human
resource work, representatives of private organisations and national and international
NGOs that focus on migration, health, human resources and development issues,
physicians of different specialties working in office-based or hospital-based practices in a
diversity of settings and experts in related fields.

37 Stuart Tannock (2007) provides a fresh approach to the brain drain by taking
consideration of the movements of workers across occupational and industrial sectors.

38 Health is directly linked to three out of eight Millennium Development Goals,
including child health, maternal health and HIV/AIDS.
questionnaire survey involving face-to-face interviews with stakeholders. In Zimbabwe, nurses move from the public sector to private due to the salary differential, which results in a chronically understaffed public sector. The conclusion from this study is that nurses move to the private sector in order to save enough money to migrate to another country (Chikanda, 2006). Under the section of ‘effects of migration of skilled health personnel’, Chikanda (2006, 675) writes:

The decline in the number of skilled health professionals in the public sector has resulted in significant changes in the quality of care provided. For instance, it has led to understaffing of health institutions, which means that patients have to wait longer before they receive medical attention; indeed, some patients die from an otherwise curable condition (emphasis added). Experienced personnel have been lost from the system, the quality of care has fallen and the health system of the country has virtually collapsed (emphasis added).

Some patients ‘die’ and the country’s health system ‘collapses’ because of nurse migration. These strong terms are effective in disseminating information about the ‘felt’ effects. In concluding remarks, Chikanda (2006, 678) added that it is the community respondents who complained about “declining quality of care” in health institutions and “uncaring attitudes” by the healthcare workers. From this perspective, there is a causal relationship between the decision that healthcare workers make about their place of residence and employment and the quality of healthcare service in their home countries. Chikanda (2006, 667) argues that while the migration of skilled workers is “largely beneficial to the individuals

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39 The stakeholders identified include government officials, individual health workers, informants in key positions, community users of the health system, migrant health staff, and returnee health staff.
concerned”, it has “negative socio-economic impacts on the sending country”. Nurses from developing countries begin their migratory journey with this ‘national’ baggage. A space created by their border crossing is where they have to live with the feelings and opinions expressed by their co-nationals who remain at home.

The feelings and opinions of non-migrants dominate and reproduce the discourse on the brain drain, and for some their migratory journeys are accompanied by these emotions expressed by their co-nationals remaining in their home countries. In this section, I discussed research that highlights a divergence between the welfare of ‘brains’ and that of the left behind, creating tension surrounding human mobility particularly directed from developing countries. Because of the prevalent suspicion, the out-migration of a certain set of people had been seen as something to be stopped or discouraged. Stahl’s (1982, 871) statement highlights this point: “the fact that labour emigration does generate externalities raises a fundamental socio-political question, i.e., to what extent should society impose constrains on the individual to ensure that the outcome of his decisions are consistent with broader social objectives”.

**Brains of Other Nations?**

When we move from the earlier reviewed brain drain literature to the literature on immigration, we easily find a gap that needs to be filled out. The brain drain data sets developed by Carrington and Detragiache do not tell us about whether the tertiary educated originating from developing countries are employed in OECD countries and if so, in which capacity they are employed. Geraldine Pratt’s (1999)
study shows that tertiary educated Filipina nurses migrate to Canada as live-in care givers on a two-year contract, and multiple discourses continue to confine Filipinas in Canada in a limited range of low-paid occupations. While the studies reviewed earlier show that emigrants from developing countries tend to be better educated or posses ‘more capital’ than the average population in their home countries, migrants’ ‘capital’ may not be (fully) recognised in a host society because of implicit or explicit labour market discrimination. Scholars have already pointed out the deskilling of migrants (Stasiulis et al., 2003, Man, 2004, Raghuram et al., 2004). In this sense, as Raghuram (2008) points out, there is the need to bring immigration and emigration literatures together. People move across state borders not only as the carriers of skills or capital but also as the national citizens of one nation-state confronting the boundaries constructed by another nation-state. In this thesis, I aim to bring the contexts of sending and receiving countries together through the eyes of people whose lives involve the narratives of two nations.

This section focuses on the case of nurse migration to highlight the possible emergence of a liminal space in which nurses moving across states are situated. Nurses’ mobility has garnered much scholarly and policy attention because of the notable ‘shortage’ of nurses across the globe.\textsuperscript{40} Many nurses move between highly industrialised countries (Kingma, 2006, 178-9). For instance, France’s border regions with Switzerland have provided thousands of nurses to Switzerland, and

\textsuperscript{40} What causes, and who defines, this shortage are a very complex issue. In their study of immigration in the IT and nursing sectors in the US, Money and Falstrom (2006, 134) argue that “the debate over shortages and the need for immigrant workers is a political one: labor market and shortages exist under the prevailing labor market conditions”.

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these border regions have become a stepping-stone for nurses making their way to Switzerland (Kingma, 2006). However, such processes of nurse migration have received less attention in relation to, for instance, the movement from the Philippines to the US because the latter deals with the sensitive and emotional issue of the developing/developed divide. What is also important to note is that the most substantial cross-border movements of healthcare workers from developing to developed countries are between English speaking nations (Becklake, 2008). Over the years, scholars called attention to an imbalance in the distribution of healthcare workers, including nurses, across countries (Ball, 2004, Chikanda, 2005, Dovlo, 2007). There is a divide between nations that educate and train nurses and those that employ these educated and trained nurses. Some nation-states losing nurses are depicted as helpless because they are incapable of competing with nations offering much better remuneration. The Southern African Development Community called the recruitment of their nurses into higher income countries ‘looting’ (Kingma, 2006, 192). Ball (2008, 42) also views: “Sending nations tend to be Third World nations that supply capital rich nations with nurses, a situation that has exacerbated pre-existing imbalances in health care services in labour exporting nations”. The recruitment of foreign trained nurses received much attention in 1997 when Nelson Mandela criticised the UK for recruiting nurses from South Africa. In reaction, the UK Department of Health issued guidelines to all National Health Service (NHS) employers in November 1999 stating: “It is essential that all NHS employers do not actively recruit from developing countries which are experiencing nursing shortages of their own” (Bach, 2003, 22). A more detailed code of practice, issued in September 2001, stipulates that “[d]eveloping countries should not be targeted for recruitment”
(UK Department of Health, 2001, 5), and a revised code of practice was issued in 2004 (UK Department of Health, 2004). The practical guidelines for ‘ethical’ recruitment are difficult to establish, and this issue continues to be discussed in other immigration countries as well (see Runnels et al., 2011).

Although the national importance of the labour of nurses who originated from developing countries is highlighted, the lived experiences of migrant nurses documented in earlier studies show their marginalised status when in host societies. It is frequently pointed out that the difficulty in recruiting citizens leads to the recruitment of foreign trained non-citizen nurses (Ball, 2004). The circumstance in which non-citizen nurses are recruited – ‘filling the gap’ – itself sets out the employment conditions for these foreign recruits. Caribbean nurses, recruited to the UK in the 1960s, were regularly channelled into a non-career grade (enrolled nursing) in unpopular specialities (Bach, 2003). Rochelle Ball’s study (2004, 129) of the US and the Middle East nurse labour markets shows that nurses mainly from Third World nations “largely fill positions that nationals of receiving countries are unwilling to do, or are prevented from doing so”. Taking the example of Filipino nurses in the US and the Middle East, Ball (2004) notes that they occupy “marginalised and racialised positions in the labour markets”. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, foreign trained nurses are recruited according to racialised division of labour: Americans and Europeans are placed in the managerial or supervisory positions, whereas Filipinos and Egyptians are recruited into middle status positions. Ball (2004, 129) argues that: “The conditions of employment and the extent of personal freedom vary by nationality, and by the relative wealth of sending nations”. As Ball and Piper (2002, 1017)
accurately point out, “migrants are usually trapped between less developed and more highly developed countries with different state structures and power relations”. This clearly demonstrates that those labelled as ‘brains’ are racialised as they find employment outside their country of citizenship. Lesleyanne Hawthorne’s study also (2001) shows that foreign trained nurses’ experiences are shaped by ‘race’; Asian nurses having migrated to Australia also experience workplace discrimination. In another Australian example, an Indonesian nurse interviewed reported that she felt “not worthy of the job” (Hawthorne, 2001, 225). In the US and the Middle East, Filipino nurses experience workplace racism and harassment; they are frequently “talked down to” by patients, colleagues and members of the public. It is a common experience amongst foreign trained migrant nurses that their skills and previous experience are not recognised (Bach, 2003). There are some barriers that non-citizen nurses need to overcome before they get fully registered in host countries. Benny Goodman (2005) reports that migrant nurses were required to do tasks irrelevant to their title, such as cleaning, cooking and laundry. Migrant nurses also reported discrimination in terms of pay (Bach, 2003). According to human capital theory, differences in earnings are explained on the basis of differences in productivity (Boucher, 2009). However, migrant workers’ wages can be determined by factors other than their productivity, for instance, systemic discrimination against non-citizens. Consequently, the migrant labour population has come to embody the boundaries of two nations sending and receiving nurses. The discussion above highlights the importance of documenting the lived experiences of migrant nurses. The literature on nurse migration lacks empirical evidence in the Asian region. This thesis pays special
attention to migrants’ experiences of the liminal state potentially created by their cross-state movement.

1.3 The Heroes of a Nation in the Making

Since the 1960s, labour migration streams have been commonly divided largely into two: temporary and permanent. This division, however, does not actually pertain to the temporality of workers’ stay outside their countries of national origin. It instead indicates the difference in citizenship rights different groups of migrant workers enjoy in host societies. The host state determines “not only the general conditions of entry and work, but also the terms of residence” (Raghuram, 2008). As noted earlier, immigration countries have brought in non-citizens since the 1960s through their immigration programmes based on their merits/skills. This practice has become more intensified since the 1990s. Sandra Lavenex (2007) notes that skills have become the most prominent vectors in contemporary migratory regimes (cited in Raghuram, 2008). Correspondingly, the right to migration and eventual citizenship, Kofman (2005) argues, is also increasingly restricted to the highly skilled. Conversely, low-paid migrant workers continue to be treated as ‘guest’ workers with limited access to citizenship rights, including the right to bring their family along with them. Differentiated migration regimes excluding ‘low-skilled workers’ have emerged (Castles et al., 2009). Workers’ limited citizenship rights outside their country of citizenship have forced them to develop cross-border connections. One body of literature, on the migration-development nexus, deals with the earnings of migrants remitted to their families remaining on the other side of the border. In the pages that follow, I will discuss the way in which these workers’ earnings have entered into the national
development discourse in their countries of origin. While the statistics on remittances do not tell us about the residential/citizenship status of money senders, case studies conducted in a particular country or community have focused largely on migrant workers occupying low-paid jobs in host societies.

From as early as the 1970s, transferred money across national borders started to be seen as an important resource for capital-scarce developing countries, as many citizens ventured beyond the territorial boundaries of the state to look for better opportunities. However, the positive relationship between remittances and development was not supported by academics prior to the 1990s. Böhning (1975), for instance, questioned “the usefulness of remittances as a promoter of development, arguing that remittance receivers and returnees are more likely to be consumers than innovating producers” (quoted in Stahl et al., 1986). The UN also (1982, 42) claimed that remittances generally failed to contribute to development in the sending countries and “actually had a number of negative side effects. … Typically, little or none of the migrants’ savings has been invested in capital-generating activities” (quoted in Stahl et al., 1986). Considering these observations, states classified as migrant-sending countries were urged to design policies and programme to tap into the earnings of migrants. Stahl (1982, 896) argued more than two decades ago:

Without adequate policy … the developmental value of remittances and returnee savings can be easily lost. If not channelled into meaningful development projects to counteract the negative effects of emigration, the economy is likely to become increasingly dependent on emigration and remittances over time.

In Asia, the oil-boom of the 1970s in the Gulf region demanded a large number of workers, and the Gulf States met the high demand for labour by ‘importing’ non-
citizen workers. Some other states in Asia, including Pakistan, Philippines and South Korea, discovered benefits they would gain from the employment of their citizens in this region. They started being engaged in the deployment of their citizens contracted to employers in the Gulf region. South Korean and the Philippine states required citizen-workers to remit a fixed portion of their earnings through the banking system (Stahl et al., 1986). As some countries in Asia grew economically, they also had tight labour markets and began importing non-citizen labour, as did the Gulf States. Migrant workers in Asia are all expected to return to their home countries upon the termination of their contract because residency is tightly controlled in the region (Piper, 2010). With the prevalence of contract-based migration within Asia, policy advisors and planners considered the economic reintegration of individuals returning from work outside their countries of origin as crucial in order for these countries to maximise gains from this labour mobility. Upon return, migrant workers are expected to be self-employed – preferably by setting up an enterprise and creating jobs locally. Managing migrant workers’ earnings has been seen as critical in this project of making migration work for development. Scholars paid heed to how much migrants send to their families left behind and how remittance-receiving households manage their foreign earnings. Households, states and nations became deeply interwoven together through the citizen-workers’ overseas work.

Remittances always have been the topic of scholarly interest, but since the mid 1990s they have received renewed attention. When Jorge Durand and his colleagues published their article entitled “Migradollars and Development” in 1996, they noted that the prevailing view on labour migration from Mexico to the
US is that it discouraged autonomous economic growth in Mexico and promoted economic dependency. Scholars in this region – due to the proximity between Mexico and the US – were concerned about the agriculture-based economy’s structural dependence on migration and remittances sent by migrants.\textsuperscript{41} Taylor and his co-authors (1996) also observe that “the continuing dependence of economies on migrant earnings is often cited as evidence that migration does not promote development”. Durand and his collaborators (1996, 424) argue that this pessimistic view stems mainly from the observation that migrant earnings were spent mostly on current consumption rather than productive investment, such as “the capitalization of a business or the purchase of tools, equipment, or machines that might enable or augment production”.

As Hein De Haas (2010) points out, scholars attempted to readjust the overall scepticism about the migration-development nexus in the 1990s. Based on their review of case studies conducted in many countries of origin, Taylor and his co-authors (1996, 182) claim that the prevailing negative view is “unduly harsh”. It is the unrealistically high expectation of government officials and development planners who tend to view labour export as a “panacea” that, they argue, made many sceptical of the migration-development nexus (Taylor et al., 1996, 182).\textsuperscript{42} They also call attention to a limited definition of ‘productive investment’ employed by many scholars who often underestimate the value of spending on

\textsuperscript{41} Taylor and his co-authors (1996) argue that people in rural Mexico have extensive networks that lead to low paid jobs in the US.

\textsuperscript{42} Taylor and his colleagues (1996) claim that research findings in Asia are more optimistic than those in other regions because studies carried out in Asia discussed the indirect effects of remittances.
livestock, schooling, housing and land. Durand and his co-authors (1996) also contend that earlier researchers, holding a pessimistic view, did not give enough credit to the productive investments made by remittances-receiving households. More importantly, according to Durand and his colleagues (1996), earlier researchers painted a too pessimistic picture of labour migration’s effect on economic growth and development in Mexico because they ignored or undervalued the ‘multiplier effects’, or the indirect effects that, in Durand’s (1988) term, ‘migradollars’ had in increasing economic activity through consumer spending. They suggest that the inflow of migradollars stimulates economic activity in Mexico, leading to higher levels of employment, investment and income in communities they observed and the country as a whole (Durand et al., 1996). According to Irma Adelman and Edward Taylor (1992), for every dollar sent to Mexico, the Gross National Product (GNP) increases by somewhere between $US2.69 and $US3.18. The statement below clearly shows that individuals’ employment outside their countries of origin and their earnings have become a site in which the national development discourse is being produced:

Given the large outflow of workers and the corresponding massive inflow of capital, Mexico-U.S. migration must be regarded as one of the most important agents of social change in contemporary Mexico and a powerful catalyst of economic development. (Durand et al., 1996, 441)

In this context, Taylor and his co-authors (1996) claim that: “A primary issue in the macroeconomics of international migration is the possibility of mobilizing

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43 These multiplier effects had already been discussed by Charles Stahl and Fred Arnold (1986) who argued that the expenditure of remittances would be an important stimulus to local industry.
remittances for national economic development”. This line of thinking resulted in a large number of studies on the usage of remittances amongst remittance-receiving households. In this developmental narrative, “migrants have come to be valorised as the latest agents of development” (Raghuram 2009, 104) or “heroes of development” (Degaldo-Wise et al., 2007).

**COMPENSATING THE NATIONAL LOSS?**

Scholars, debating the brain drain in the 1960s and 1970s, mentioned potential benefits that the ‘lost brains’ would bring to their countries of origin (Grubel et al., 1966). In the past few years, scholars expanded the remittance-development discussion by examining – mainly theoretically – the remitting behaviour of ‘skilled’ migrant workers. This body of scholarly work is linked to the brain drain literature. What needs to be highlighted is the meaning that scholars give to skilled migrant workers’ remittances – the compensation for the national loss. Scholars have examined other cross-border connections maintained by – and the eventual return of – a certain set of people as a ‘response’ to the brain drain claim. This new perspective – named as ‘brain circulation’ – has changed the way in which the migration of labour-cum-capital has been typically imagined. This body of research has so far drawn on a number of cases of high profile expatriates in technology centres like Silicon Valley. In the pages to follow, I argue that this countervailing discourse, in effect, strengthens the existing brain drain claim and

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44 See De Haas (2010) for the literature review.
The image contains a page of text discussing the emergence of an in-between status that skilled migrant workers come to occupy in relation to their home nations. The text then discusses the emergence of skilled workers in relation to their home nations. Assuming that the ‘skilled’ workers’ departure generates some costs to their home countries, researchers posed a question of whether the (potential) benefits that result from ‘skilled’ labour migration ‘compensate’ the costs it creates to a society.

More than two decades ago, Robert Goldfarb and his colleagues (1984) analysed the Philippine government’s use of scarce capital for the expansion of medical education. The context for this was the almost open border context, which enabled many physicians to continue to migrate to the US. This study suggests that economically it may be optimal for the Philippine government to train doctors or expand medical training facilities because the volume of remittances may be sufficient to compensate for the associated costs (Goldfarb et al., 1984). Their study is based on an econometric model, and their analysis is weakened by data limitations and the assumptions incorporated into their model. Some scholars, in other disciplines, have cited Goldfarb’s and his collaborators’ findings without recognising the limitations of this study. To follow are examples of this, each taken from Forcier, Simoens and Giuffrida (2004) and Mireille Kingma (2006, 195) respectively:

Remittances … can be a crucial source of foreign exchange and aid the long-term development of the home country. For instance, a study focusing on physicians from the Philippines who practise overseas estimated that remittances were large enough to compensate for the economic losses associated with emigration (emphasis added). (Forcier et al., 2004)

One study focusing on Filipino physicians practicing overseas concluded that the money they sent home more than compensated for the economic losses associated with their departure (emphasis added). (Kingma, 2006, 195)
To provide evidence of the positive effect that the emigration of healthcare workers has on a country of origin, both Forcier and her co-authors (2004) and Kingma (2006) used the conclusion drawn by Goldfarb and his colleagues (1984). More importantly, migrant workers’ money sent for personal purposes is constructed as ‘compensation’ to the assumed national loss experienced by their countries of origin. This mode of construction certainly contributes to reinforcing the brain drain discourse. It also strengthens the earlier mentioned homogenising process by emphasising national origin and educational level or profession. In the face of recent growing interest in migrants’ remittances and the immigration programmes focusing on skills, one of the common questions posed is whether ‘brains’, drained from capital-scarce countries, send enough money to supplement their country of origin’s lost capital. For example, Taylor and his co-authors (1996, 192-3) noted in their literature review on migration and development:

We also lack information on how skill and education affect the propensity to remit. If highly skilled migrants are more likely to establish permanent ties abroad and less likely to remit funds home, or remit smaller amounts, then sending countries experience a double deprivation: not only do they lose valuable human capital; they do not receive a return flow of capital to compensate the loss.

Scholars came up with some hypotheses. In his article entitled “Who is afraid of the brain drain? Human capital flight and growth in developing countries”, Hillel Rapoport (2002, 2) suggests that:

We know from household surveys that transfers from educated migrants are not necessarily higher than for uneducated migrants; the former have higher earnings potentials, but migrate on a more permanent basis (with family) and, hence, tend to remit relatively less than their unskilled compatriots.
However, it has only been more recently that the relationship between the brain drain and remittances has been explored by scholars (Faini, 2007, Niimi et al., 2008, Bollard et al., 2009). In his article entitled “Remittances and the Brain Drain: Do More Skilled Migrants Remit More?”, Riccardo Faini (2007) began this discussion by drawing insights from past remittance studies and econometric models and using the data from the European Community Household Panel. He notes that immigration policies are increasingly in favour of ‘skilled’ labour, which has raised concern amongst policy makers in developing countries “wary of having to bear the cost of educating and then losing their most entrepreneurial and talented workers” (Faini, 2007, 177). Despite the claim that “the negative impact of the brain drain might be mitigated by its favourable effect on remittances” (Faini, 2007, 189), Faini’s study shows that the global trend towards skilled labour migration may not increase remittance flows to their countries of origin.

Faini’s view was supported by a study conducted by Yoko Niimi and her collaborators (2008). They sought to answer whether ‘skilled’ migrants remit more or less than ‘unskilled’ migrants. They explain that this question is important because: “A necessary – though not sufficient – condition for skilled migrants to generate a smaller loss for their home country than unskilled ones is for skilled migrants to remit more than the unskilled ones” (Niimi et al., 2008, 45).

45 In these studies, skilled labour and educated labour are used interchangeably because they use the available immigration data system that classifies immigrants by their educational level not skill.

46 This finding assumes that the migration of skilled workers occurs as a one-for-one substitute for unskilled migration.
1).\textsuperscript{47} Niimi and her colleagues (2008, 17) argue that their finding contradicts the claim that “the negative impact of the brain drain can be mitigated or even offset by the fact that skilled migrants remit more than unskilled ones”. They add that their findings “provide an additional source of concern about the brain drain for countries of origin” (Niimi et al., 2008, 17). They support Maurice Schiff’s (2007) suggestion of a cooperative arrangement between countries, including policies of return and circulation.

This perspective was challenged by Albert Bollard and his colleagues (2009) who examined the relationship between education and remitting behaviour based on 14 surveys of immigrants in 11 OECD destination countries. They compiled the most comprehensive micro-level database on remitting behaviour currently available, composed of data on 33,000 immigrants from developing countries. They conclude that more educated/skilled migrants ‘do remit’ significantly more because they have better jobs and earn more money than less educated/skilled ones. Though “[t]here is much concern about the negative effects of the ‘brain drain’ on developing countries”, Bollard and his co-authors (2009, 16) argue that their finding “suggests that sending highly skilled migrants who are able to earn higher income is one way to increase remittance flows”. John Brown and Richard Connell (2006) also analysed the data they collected for their study on Tongan and Samoan migrants in relation to the brain drain debate and human capital

\textsuperscript{47} They made some speculations on the remittance-sending behaviour of ‘skilled’ migrants as a group. ‘Skilled’ migrants have higher income, and therefore can afford to send more money to their families. But they also tend to come from wealthier families, and may not need to send money. The fact that they are often qualified for permanent residency or citizenship and can bring their families along with them can be another determining factor.
theory. They argue that: “the loss of skilled health workers, at least in the case of Tongan and Samoan nurses, is not a wholly negative phenomenon” because “the skill drain has some potential gains through … remittances” (Brown et al., 2006, 149). In particular, migrant nurses remit “more generously and consistently” than other migrant groups (Brown et al., 2006, 135). Their findings show that there are economic gains to these island states through “the training and export of nurses” (Brown et al., 2006, 149). Brown and Connell also (2006, 149) argue that: “A remittance-based economy has greater potential to contribute to economic development than has hitherto been realised”.

The question that this particular body of research poses is that the brain drain claim – that the migration of a certain set of people has negative effects on their country of origin – is being repeated and migrants’ earnings are regarded as ‘compensation’ for this assumed national loss. Due to this logic, policy advisors expect the money sent by ‘brains’ for personal reasons to be used for particular development purposes. For instance, the ADB (2005, 6), in its report on “Brain Drain Versus Brain Gain”, argues: “migrants who go abroad may benefit from higher incomes, but if they do not send home significant remittances, or send home remittances that fuel inflation rather than job creating development, those who stayed behind may be worse off”.

The brain drain debate has, since the 1970s, accompanied studies that examine the causes of the brain drain or the motivations behind a certain group of people’s decision to (re-)migrate. Scholars started tracing different groups of people – who they identify as brains – currently residing in developed countries but ‘originated’ from developing countries. For instance, Oh’s study (1977) examined the
motivations of students from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, India, Japan and Korea enrolled at two American universities in the late 1960s. Often, these studies were carried out to provide developing countries with the data that these countries could use in designing policies to discourage their ‘valuable’ citizens’ out-migration or encourage their return. As discussed in the Introduction, the UNITAR commissioned extensive comparative surveys on the citizens of lower income countries who were studying and had studied in countries like Canada, France and the US about their motivations in deciding a place of employment and residence (Glaser et al., 1978). The purpose of this study reads:

By providing information about motivations this study enables individual developing countries to assess their own circumstances and consider policies that might induce their nationals to study in the home country, or encourage those who might otherwise remain abroad to return. (Glaser et al., 1978, xxix)

In this context, labour-cum-capital’s continued linkage to their countries of origin is made normatively desirable. William Glaser and Christopher Habers (1978, xxxviii) wrote three decades ago:

Most students from developing countries plan to return home after study abroad. … Attachments to home remain strong even among many who plan to spend most of their careers working abroad. … The widespread feelings of belonging to one’s original home country mean that brain drain need not be irreversible. Many persons work abroad without feeling they have abandoned their home societies completely, and without feeling they have adopted a completely new country.

Policy planners in developing countries, together with policy advisors from research institutions and international organisations, have been trying to foster nationalistic sentiments amongst migrants having the right to reside outside their countries of origin. Programmes have been designed, since the 1970s, to utilise the resources of developing countries’ (former) citizens, living beyond national
borders, in these countries’ development processes. One of such examples is the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)’s Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) programme launched in 1977. This programme was initiated to “counter the effects of ‘brain drain’ in the developing countries by temporarily bringing back talented expatriate nationals to their home countries based on the spirit of volunteerism” (ILO, 2009). The TOKTEN Lebanon website also states: “This ever-persistent brain drain has deprived developing countries of the expertise of thousands of their most talented people at a time when their skills are desperately needed” (UNDP, n.d.). To lure them back to a place which may not be attractive, policy advisors and practitioners appealed to national identity. In Africa, the IOM has operated its assisted return programme, the Return and Reintegration of Qualified African Nationals. Migrants’ return to their countries origin has been encouraged and promoted.

This discourse became further strengthened since the 1990s when scholars began noticing some positive changes that occurred in brain drained countries. Economic geographer AnnaLee Saxenian’s work, on global production networks connecting Silicon Valley with Taiwan’s manufacturing sector and India’s software capabilities, documented roles played by scientists and engineers in Silicon Valley, who have immigrated from Taiwan, India and China, in encouraging flows of capital, information, and knowledge to their home countries (Saxenian, 1999, 2002). Saxenian (1999, 2) argues:

The view from sending countries … has historically been that the emigration of highly skilled personnel to the United States represents a significant economic loss, or “brain drain”, which deprives their economies of their best and brightest.
She argues that this view is inadequate in today’s global economy because “the dynamism of emerging regions in Asia and elsewhere means that it is no longer valid to assume that skilled immigrants will stay permanently in the United States” (Saxenian, 1999, 2-3). According to her, recent research suggests that “the ‘brain drain’ may be giving way to a process of ‘brain circulation’” while immigrants who study and work in the US return to their home countries (Saxenian, 1999, 3). Advances in transportation and communications technologies also allow these immigrants to play a critical role as middlemen linking businesses in the US to “those in geographically distant regions” even when they do not physically relocate or return (Saxenian, 1999, 3). These geographically distant regions are not just any places, but are ones in these immigrants’ countries of ‘origin’.

States have been urged to re-connect with their emigrants. Saxenian (2002) compared the cases of three countries, China, India and Taiwan, to call on policy makers to capitalise on their (former) citizens abroad. As she puts it, “[t]he brain drain offers substantial unintended benefits, but only to countries that actively pursue them”. She argues that policy makers in Taiwan and China have actively encouraged the return of (former) citizens abroad and provided attractive environment for entrepreneurship whereas their counterparts in India “have not yet fully exploited this resource” (Saxenian, 2002, 201). For Taiwan, Hsinchu Science Park had become by the early 1990s a destination for hundreds of (former) citizens each year, who started new companies there. Some 40 percent of the companies in the Park in 1999 were started by US-educated engineers. They also recruited their friends and former colleagues from Silicon Valley, facilitating even more return flows. Saxenian also (2002) notes a growing population of
‘astronauts’, highly mobile engineers working in both places, regularly commuting across the Pacific and spending much of their lives on airplanes. Their personal networks and knowledge of both Silicon Valley and the Hsinchu region of Taiwan play a central role in coordinating economic linkages between the two regions. For China, the return of US-educated engineers and entrepreneurs in growing numbers in the late 1990s and early 2000s has not amounted to a “full-scale ‘reversal’ of the brain drain” (Saxenian, 2002, 195), but Saxenian argues that the increasing return of the US-educated has contributed greatly to China’s growing role in global production networks. In discussing India’s case, Saxenian (2002, 194) argues “there is a small but fast growing professional community linking Silicon Valley and regions like Bangalore – one that could play an important role in upgrading the Indian IT sector in the future”. Software engineers of Indian origin gained seniority in US corporations during the 1980s and 1990s. According to Saxenian (2002, 192), they were “instrumental in convincing senior management” to establish operations in India to take advantage of the substantial wage differentials for software skills. By the late 1990s, India’s reputation as a supplier of software talent grew, and a significant proportion of large US corporations were subcontracting programming to Indian suppliers. Kapur’s study (2002) shows that some 95 percent of international companies in Software Technology Parks in Bangalore were run by Indians who had lived and worked abroad, mostly in the US. In 1999, some of Silicon Valley’s most successful Indian entrepreneurs began actively to build linkages with India and to serve as role models and advisors for local IT entrepreneurs (Saxenian, 2002). Saxenian (2002) claims that India had not fully utilised this potential resource for the country’s development because of the Indian government’s laissez-faire approach.
Saxenian’s study does not suggest that all the countries can benefit from their emigrants as did China, India and Taiwan because, as she also points out, Chinese, Indian and Taiwanese immigrants to the US returned to their home countries “to take advantage of promising opportunities there” and the return (re-migration) of immigrants in the US to their countries of origin varies significantly from country to country (Saxenian, 1999, 3). She notes that foreign born engineers may return permanently to their home countries when they perceive that the professional opportunities outweigh, or at least match, those available to them in the US (Saxenian, 2002). In another article, Saxenian (2005, 56) says that her findings are not to suggest that “all developing economies are positioned to reap the benefits of brain circulation and peripheral entrepreneurship”. She argues that such an opportunity is benefiting countries that “have invested heavily in higher education, typically technical education, and are politically and economically stable enough that immigrants will consider returning home” (Saxenian, 2005, 56). Ronald Skeldon also (2008) suggests that the return of people embodying knowledge and skills alone does not spur development in their home countries:

The assumption that the return of some of the highly skilled to Ghana, Chad, or Burkina Faso will automatically bring development is again assigning a primacy to migrant agency that seems totally misplaced. The underlying structures need first to be in place in order for the agency of migrants to function. (Skeldon, 2008, 13)

Instead of removing the negative image attached to the out-migration of a certain set of people, this discourse further strengthens the brain drain claim as this new body of research seems to suggest that there are particular conditions that lead to ‘circulation’. Nevertheless, policy advisors continue to imagine how people, embodying ‘capital’ and originating from developing countries, could contribute
to their home countries. The ADB (2005, 6) notes “if migrants abroad do not return, or return only to rest and retire, there may be only a limited transfer of new ideas, energies, and entrepreneurial abilities from more to less developed countries”. As an Indian economist, inspired by human development-led growth and interested in the Indian nation-building project, Binod Khadria’s (1999) concern is: “What should be done about brain drain”? To answer this question, Khadria (1999, 20) suggests thinking from the perspective of these migrants: “Can I return, i.e., give back (or restore), to the country the human capital I deprived it of”? In the 2000s, this discussion has gained renewed attention because of technological advancement which enables fast and easy communication and also because of the visibility of networks amongst people across the globe, including diaspora networks (Meyer et al., 2006, Leclerc et al., 2007). Migrants labelled as brains are situated in an in-between space where their employment outside their country of origin may harm but at the same time potentially benefit their home countries.

1.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed how the heterogeneity of people moving across state borders is downplayed and their nationality is made important by the practices of linking migration and development. The border crossings of people from developing countries and host societies’ management of citizenship have generated differing nationalist discourses amongst researchers and policy advisors concerned about countries of origin. However, this homogenising/nationalising process is fraught with ambiguity and ambivalence. The discursive (and non-discursive) making of ‘brains’ and ‘heroes’ has created in-between spaces in
which their labour simultaneously carries different meanings for the societies in which they are embedded. In this thesis, I will also explore these in-between spaces through the eyes of Filipino origin IT workers and nurses in Singapore. The next chapter illustrates how this research project came into existence and the process that I underwent to collect and analyse the data.
CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the methodological considerations underpinning my research. It demonstrates how I have woven together my encounters in the field to analyse my data. I will present my research process in a linear way for convenience, but the process of my research, qualitative in nature, was not as neat as what is written in this chapter. It was, as Judy Pinn (2001, 185-186) says, “a messy, alive, risky and uncertain process”. The rest of this chapter consists of nine major sections, but because of the nonlinearity of my research process, issues raised in each section are all interconnected. In Section 2.2, I will discuss how my research enquiry came into existence. Fieldwork was carried out in Singapore for the period of April to September 2009. In Section 2.3, I will provide a brief overview of the birth of Singapore and the nature of the Singapore state, and introduce Singapore’s foreign labour policy that has brought in foreigners to achieve its economic development goals. Section 2.4 outlines the criteria I set to select research participants and the detailed description of how I recruited the participants. This will be followed by the discussion on the research interview that is the integral component of this study. In Sections 2.6 and 2.7, I will discuss in detail the interactive processes of my data collection and analysis as a way to substantiate my claims. This chapter then turns to the issue of voice. The people I spoke to helped me understand their worlds, but the final written text of this research endeavour represents my own voice and my interpretation of their worlds. In the last section, I will consider the ethical issues that this research involved.
In qualitative research, the researcher becomes the main research instrument involved in the conception, collection, analysis and writing of the research study, and is “an inextricable part of the research endeavour” (Mantzoukas, 2004, 1000). The research enquiry I seek to answer emerged while pursuing my interest in migration issues. My initial interest in migration issues blossomed when I came to know the presence of migrant workers in my home country (South) Korea and their working and living conditions in the early 2000s through the local media. TV shows were successful in raising awareness amongst Koreans that migrant workers are people ‘like us’. A significant – both symbolically and practically – change was made in Korea’s non-citizen labour importation programme; migrant workers – previously treated as ‘trainees’ – became entitled to workers’ rights. I used this process of policy change for my Master’s thesis as a case to examine the ways in which human rights norms are diffused in the domestic setting. Upon the completion of my Master’s degree, I spent half a year in 2006 doing an internship with the IOM Seoul office, and continued to pursue my interest in this field. I felt the need to broaden the scope of my understanding of migration issues, and moved to the Philippines in 2007 to work with the Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC), which is a NGO conducting migration-related research and advocacy work with a specific focus on the Asia Pacific region. While writing the Asian Migration News, I became more familiar with news and events relating to

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48 Asian Migration News (http://www.smc.org.ph/amnews/amnews.htm) is a by-weekly information service aimed at providing scholars, policy makers, advocates and students with a summary of news and events related to migration in Asia.
migration. One event of that year, the first Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) meeting held in Belgium, attracted my attention.

The GFMD is the outcome of the High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development that took place in September 2006 in the framework of the UN General Assembly. During the High-Level Dialogue, UN member states “reaffirmed how good migration governance can contribute to development and how development policies can impact on migration” (Belgian Federal Public Service, 2007a). A large number of UN member states expressed their interest in continuing the inter-state dialogue on the interrelationship between migration and development (Belgian Federal Public Service, 2007a). The objective of the forum is to assess how migration and development policy planning can be linked (Belgian Federal Public Service, 2007b). Belgium took the initiative by volunteering to organise the first meeting, a state-led non-binding forum. At the end of 2006, the Belgian government sent a questionnaire to all UN member states to survey their priorities. Based on the responses to the questionnaire and in consultation with the ‘Friends of the Forum’, the following three themes were identified for discussion:

- Human capital development and labour mobility: maximizing opportunities and minimizing risks

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49 During my Master’s degree programme, I undertook a summer internship with the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok in 2005. As an intern I had access to seminars and conferences held in the building of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. In August 2005 the regional seminar on the social implications of international migration was held, and the result of the seminar was to constitute an input to the aforesaid UN High-Level Dialogue on the following year. The voices circulated in the seminar were those of government officials and experts.

50 International and regional organisations, the European Commission and the Holy See.
• Remittances and other diaspora resources: increasing their net volume and development value
• Enhancing policy and institutional coherence, and promoting partnerships

Since the first meeting hosted by the Belgian government in 2007, the GFMD has become an annual event.

One day in July 2007 – the same month when the first GFMD meeting was held – in my office, I came across the concept note for a conference on migration and development that the SMC was preparing. As I read through the note, one particular paragraph caught my attention:

Looking back to the early years of state-led overseas employment, it is instructive to note that labor migration was not only designed as a temporary measure to relieve the country of balance of payments and unemployment problems, but it also aspired to follow the Korean model of labor export, which also successfully launched the export of Korean products and technology, a package that contributed to Korea’s economic growth. Later on, the return of Korean scientists and entrepreneurs was also a contributing factor in ushering Korea’s pathway to development. Thus, by the 1990s, Korea became a labor-importing country.

My home country’s labour migration experience has often been a reference point in the discussions on migration and development because of the state’s planning that linked labour migration with its industrialisation strategy and the country’s transformation from a labour-export to a labour-import country. The conference organised by the SMC was held in November 2007, and examined the Philippines’ experiences of labour migration and discussed how migration can support

51 This particular history of Korea – together with the discourse on nationalism – is one of the reasons that campaigns for migrant workers’ rights were successful in the early 2000s.
development processes in the Philippines. Scholars and NGO representatives, working on Philippine migration issues and working with OFWs and their families, discussed labour migration in relation to what the Philippine nation is becoming. A series of events I encountered over the years made me familiar with the voices of government officials, scholars and civil society actors constructing linkages between migration and development. I became interested in speaking to Filipinos whose employment had become the subject of the heated debates and discussions. I left for Australia on the following year to document the voices of the brains/heroes of the Philippines.

2.3 **THE PLACE OF FIELDWORK**

*THE BIRTH OF SINGAPORE*

Singapore was governed by the British colonial government as a crown colony until 1959. The island served as a trading post. In 1959, Singapore was granted limited self-government with finance, defence and international relations that remained in the hands of the British colonial government (Chua, 2005, 2). Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah formed a federation and a nation named Malaysia in 1963. However, because of disagreement between the Federal Malaysian government and the state government in Singapore, Singapore was forced to withdraw from the Federation on 9 August 1965 (Quah, 2000). At the birth of the Singapore nation-state, its population numbered about one and a half million, consisting of the descendants of people from China, India and other areas of the Federation of Malaysia. Considering the lack of a shared history, Quah (2000) argues that the leaders of the ruling People’s Action Party (PAP) concluded that
the most efficient way of ensuring the people’s political allegiance to Singapore was providing them with material wellbeing. Therefore, economic growth has become an important pillar of the state’s nation-building project (Quah, 2000). The ruling elite’s legitimacy has had its basis largely on economic performance and effective governance. The elite ruling party has maintained its paternalistic style of governing by educating citizen subjects about what is the best for Singapore or the collective interests of the nation. The state’s ‘vision’ has been enforced on “the people whose short-term interests, or perhaps ignorance of their ‘true’ interests, may come into conflict with this” (Tan, 2008, 12).

Because of the absence of natural resources, the PAP government has focused on developing human resources. Meritocracy has been a key principle of governance. The government has encouraged competitiveness in education, thereby claiming subsequent rewards are made ‘fairly’ and based on individual merits. Singaporean sociologist Chua (2005, 15) argues that the ideology of meritocracy has “enabled the government to rationalize the consequential social and economic inequalities under industrial capitalism by ‘individualizing’ failures and successes”. He also argues that: “The discourse of meritocracy has come to play a significant role in the identity formation of individual Singaporeans, either as a self-congratulatory justification for those who are successful and self-deprecation for those who are not” (Chua, 2005, 15). Aihwa Ong (2005) observes that citizens in Asian cities, 

52 The PAP has been in power for more than half a century since 1959. The government operates within a multiparty system, but small and fragmented opposition has never won more than a handful seats in the parliament. First Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew, the co-founder of the PAP and founding father of Singapore, has been in office from 1959 to 1990.
including Singapore, are urged to self-improve or self-enterprise to raise the overall population ‘quality’. As she puts it, “neoliberal ethics of self-responsible citizenship are linked to social obligations to build the nation” (Ong, 2005, 698). The Singapore state’s non-citizen importation and immigration regime also reflects this principle. It is the emblem of the Singapore nation envisioned by the state.

**NON-CITIZEN LABOUR IMPORTATION & IMMIGRATION**

Singapore is a major importer of non-citizen workers in Asia. Economic growth has always been the main principle in the Singapore government’s formulation of its non-citizen labour importation and subsequent immigration programme. This section provides a brief history of the Singapore state’s non-citizen labour importation and immigration policies. It highlights the contrasting policies governing different groups of non-citizen labour.

Scholars have noted that the Singapore immigration regime has always included certain non-citizen subjects and excluding others (Pang et al., 1982, Low, 1995). After gaining Independence in 1965, engineers, management and technical personnel have been ‘freely admitted’ into Singapore and encouraged to make Singapore home (Pang et al., 1982). At the same time, it began to restrict the cross-border movement, employment and settlement of others, including Malaysians by introducing a one-year Work Permit scheme for Malaysians to perform ‘unskilled’ jobs (Kaur, 2007). A Work Permit is basically permission

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53 This selective policy was also adopted by the British administrators as early as 1953 (Asia Pacific Migration Research Network, n.d.).
given by the state to non-citizens ‘to work’ within its territorial boundary. During the 1970s, the government successfully attracted foreign investment and transformed Singapore from a society based on entrepôt trade to one based on labour-intensive, export-oriented manufacturing. Rapid economic growth resulted in a tight labour market, and necessitated the first amendment to the Regulation of Employment Act in 1975 (Low, 1995). Non-citizen workers – mostly Malaysians – were recruited to cut labour costs and keep the economy afloat. In 1978, source countries were extended to include Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand as the Malaysian economy itself also experienced full employment (Wong, 1997). In 1970, foreign labour constituted only 2 percent of the total labour force in Singapore, but by 1980 it rose to 120,000 or about 11 percent of the total labour force (Wong, 1990, 60).

In 1979, the government announced the Second Industrial Revolution aimed at restructuring the economy away from cheap labour-intensive manufacturing (Wong, 1997). This project of ‘economic upgrading’ preferred capital-intensive and higher value added industries based on skill-intensive activities. The government encouraged plant expansion, automation, computerisation and research and development spending by revising the existing investment incentives package of taxes and subsidies (Wong, 1990). State leaders realised that they had limited pool of labour with skills to support their project of shifting the economy to a higher value track. Thus, manpower training and skills development became a

54 State leaders launched an industrialisation programme in August 1961 with the creation of the Economic Development Board. The state’s industrialisation programme was primarily geared to job creation in order to solve high unemployment in the 1960s (Wong, 1990).
key issue. They placed it high on their political agenda to recruit highly ‘skilled’ non-citizens under the Employment Pass category. The state began labelling them as ‘foreign talent’. Professionals, such as lawyers and doctors, were granted free admission in the 1980s (Pang and Lim 1982). According to Pang Eng Fong and Linda Lim (1982, 549), “highly qualified and wealthy” Chinese from Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries “were readily granted employment passes and permanent residence”. This is in stark contrast to the government’s strict approach to the employment of ‘other’ non-citizen workers. The government implemented a monthly levy in 1980 to reduce the number of non-citizen workers in labour-intensive industries (Low, 1995).

In 1981, the government announced that all low-paid non-citizen workers in sectors other than construction, shipbuilding and domestic work were to be phased out by 1991 (Wong, 1997). However, after a severe recession in 1985, the government placed emphasis on service-oriented sectors and the internationalisation of the economy instead of pushing for high-wage policy associated with economic upgrading that accelerated the recession. The need for low-wage non-citizen workers was acknowledged, and in 1987 the government adopted a comprehensive policy to manage the volume and allocation of non-citizen labour

55 The government introduced a levy system in 1975 to reduce the number of foreign labour in labour-intensive industries that increased drastically during the 1970s (see Low, 1995), but it had not been implemented by 1980. The state has adjusted the foreign worker levy depending on economic conditions.
in unskilled/low-wage work through the introduction of the ‘comprehensive’ levy scheme and the dependency ceiling (Wong, 1997).

The Asian economic crisis of 1997 triggered another transformation under the official rubric of ‘manpower planning’. In 1998, the government transformed the Ministry of Labour into the Ministry of Manpower to “achieve a globally competitive workforce and great workplace, for a cohesive society and a secure economic future for all Singaporeans” (Singapore Ministry of Manpower, 2010b). In September 1998, the Employment Pass function of the Singapore Immigration and Registration under the Ministry of Home Affairs was transferred to the Foreign Manpower Division of the Ministry of Manpower (ASEAN, 2011). Accordingly, all matters pertaining to the employment of non-citizens became under the purview of the Ministry of Manpower, with the introduction of a new work pass framework with three main classification levels (P, Q and R).

P passes were issued to non-citizens earning more than $3,500 per month. Q1 work passes were issued to those who have five O level or a full Level Two National Technical Certificate and earn more than $2,000 per month (Saw, 1999). Q2 work passes were issued “on exceptional grounds” to those who do not meet the aforesaid requirements (Migration News, 1998). “Semi-skilled and unskilled” non-citizen workers came under the R category (or the Work Permit category).

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56 A dependency ceiling is a measure introduced in 1987 to reduce the number of foreign workers in labour-intensive industries. It limits the proportion of foreign workers in the total workforce of any one employer.

57 In 1998 a new work pass framework was introduced with three main classification levels (P, Q and R). Each class was divided into two (P1/P2, Q1/Q2, R1/R2). P1, P2 and Q1 fall under the category of ‘Employment Pass’ whereas R1 and R2 belong to the ‘Work Permit’ category. The Q category was for “skilled workers, technicians and those with specialized skills” (Saw, 1999, 43).
Q2 thus became ambiguously positioned between Employment Pass and Work Permit. Q2 work passes issued on ‘exceptional grounds’ formed a separate category in July 2004 with the introduction of S Pass. The rationale for this change was to increase ‘flexibility’ and ‘responsiveness’ of the ‘foreign manpower’ framework to industries’ needs for foreigners at the middle level skills (Singapore Ministry of Manpower, 2010c). S Passes are issued to non-citizen workers earning at least $S1,800 per month, and the levy scheme and the dependent ceiling applies to an S Pass. Today work passes are categorised largely into: Employment Pass (P and Q1 work passes), S Pass, and Work Permit (R work pass). The basic salaries required for non-citizens to qualify for S Pass and Employment Pass are $S1,800 and $S2,500 respectively. In short, the non-citizen workforce is largely divided into ‘foreign talent’ and other foreign workers.

2.4 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS & RECRUITMENT

My discussion in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 draws largely on the data collected between April and September 2009 in semi-structured, open-ended interviews with my research/interview subjects. I used a number of criteria to select participants. The first criterion was that a person must be born as a citizen of the Philippines.

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58 R1 work passes were for those with National Technical Certificate 3 practical certificates while R2 work passes were issued to those who do not meet these requirements or ‘unskilled’ ones (Saw, 1999, 43).

59 The number of S Pass holders a company can employ is capped at a sub-quota, or dependency ceiling, of 25 percent of the company’s total workforce. Employers are also liable to pay a levy to hire foreigners on S Pass.

60 The qualifying salary thresholds for S Pass and Employment Pass will be raised to $S2,000 and $S2,800 respectively from 1 Jul 2011 (Gan, 2011).

61 The participants were assured of anonymity.
The brain drain literature is concerned mainly with the citizens of developing countries who are educated and/or trained in their home country through formal education and/or on-the-job training. Although it was sometimes impossible to check potential participants’ education background prior to our meetings, I aimed at excluding people who obtained their post-secondary education outside of the Philippines whenever possible. For instance, I did not include a nurse who was born as a citizen of the Philippines, migrated to Singapore with her parents, and studied nursing in Singapore. Overall, the people that participated in my research meet the following criteria:

- They were born as a citizen of the Philippines;
- They completed their post-secondary education in the Philippines;
- They migrated to Singapore for the purpose of employment; and
- They are currently employed in the IT or nursing sector in Singapore.

I targeted multiple sites for participant recruitment using a range of contacts that I identified with the assistance of a number of Filipinos living in Singapore. The snowball method was then employed to ensure that I included a wide range of respondents in terms of age, sex, marital status, citizenship and occupation.

(a) Entering cyber space

The first method I employed to recruit research participants was posting an advertisement on online forums for Filipinos in Singapore, such as PinoySG and FilSG.\(^6\) I obtained permission from the people running these forums to post my advertisement. I thought that posting an online advertisement would be the most...

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\(^6\) PinoySG (http://www.pinoysg.com) and FilSG (http://www.filsg.com)
effective way to reach a wide range of Filipino IT workers and nurses having migrated to Singapore because the level of interactions in online forums seemed high. It was also my assumption that IT workers would frequent these forums. I also created a personal blog on which I posted the advertisement about my research. However, I failed to recruit any participants from this first attempt made via both the online forums and blog. After posting the advertisement a second time, I was contacted by two Filipinos who expressed their willingness to assist. One of them had been a moderator of PinoyITdotSG, a Yahoo forum of Filipinos employed in the IT sector in Singapore. He offered me help in finding respondents for my research project by sending out a message to the members through their mailing list. The moderator took my research project seriously and saw it as an opportunity to let people know about Filipino IT workers in Singapore; he played an important role in encouraging the forum group members to participate in the project. At the end of May 2009, the moderator gave me the contact details of seven male IT workers, including Carlo, Edwin, Gerard, John, Michael and Roberto, who expressed their willingness to be interviewed.\(^\text{63}\) Thanks to the generous assistance of the PinoyITdotSG moderator, the recruitment of male IT workers was relatively easy.

One issue that concerned me in recruiting participants this way was a possibility of having participants with similar socio-demographic backgrounds. Fortunately, all the recruits had disparate experiences prior to migrating to Singapore. They also belonged to different age groups. None of the respondents had previously met

\(^{63}\) Pseudonyms are used in this thesis.
each other or the forum group moderator in person. Because almost one third of the total 19 respondents working in IT were recruited from this particular network, it is important to provide some details about this group. PinoyITdotSG is a very loose form of network of Filipinos employed in the IT sector in Singapore.\textsuperscript{64} The moderators have maintained the online forum group through exclusive membership. To be a member, a person must be a Filipino currently employed in the IT sector in Singapore. In May 2009, this online forum group had approximately 2,000 members. One of the main functions of PinoyITdotSG is job networking. Filipino IT recruiters based in Singapore also have access to this online forum, so they share information on IT job vacancies in Singapore. The respondents recruited through this forum group told me that normally they used this online forum in order to update themselves with the Singapore IT labour market and/or share information with other Filipinos in a similar line of work. Although my online fieldwork helped me gain access to a group of Filipino IT workers, it was not the best way to recruit research participants because face-to-face interaction is crucial to convince people of my credibility.\textsuperscript{65} From then on, my field research in a cyber space focused on observing discussions made on online forums.

\textsuperscript{64} It was formed in 2004 by a group of friends working in one company in Singapore.

\textsuperscript{65} The moderator of PinoyITdotSG interviewed me before he provided assistance.
(b) Going offline

I decided to go offline by visiting different sites in which I could establish some Filipino contacts. The first organisation that I visited was the Bayanihan Centre run by the Philippine Bayanihan Society Singapore. The executive of the centre helped me get in touch with Leah, a Filipino who had been a volunteer teaching a nursing aide course to Filipina domestic workers. I obtained two contacts from Leah, and was able to recruit Shirley. During my visit to the Bayanihan Centre, I met the head of a remittance company, and she offered to help me. One Sunday I visited her office in Lucky Plaza, which is a shopping centre located at Orchard Road, and asked her to assist me by distributing my invitation letters to her clients. The manager of the remittance company provided me with the mobile numbers of five Filipinos working in IT and nursing who expressed interest in participating in my research project. I sent SMS messages to these persons. One declined to participate, and one did not respond. Two nurses, Cecilia and Eileen, and IT worker Mark agreed to be interviewed. Although they were recruited through one person, they were sourced from different circles. Cecilia is a client of the remittance company. The head of the remittance company met Eileen by chance when she was hospitalised. Mark is the relative of an employee of the remittance company. Later in my fieldwork, I obtained another contact, Joanna, from the head of the remittance company.

While in Singapore, I met two Filipinos Mary Ann and Irene, working at the National University of Singapore. They had different friendship circles. Mary Ann referred me to IT worker Katherine and nurses Maya and Rica. Katherine is Mary Ann’s housemate, and Maya is an acquaintance. Mary Ann and Rica met at their common friend’s birthday party. Irene referred me to her husband’s friend, IT worker
Luis and staff nurse Rowena. Irene met Rowena by chance while she was looking for a flat. I also chanced to meet Barry, a Singaporean who studied and worked in Australia, and he helped me get in touch with Sharon, who he met by chance in the hospital.

In May 2009, I attended the Gawad Kalinga Hope Initiative Forum held at the Ngee Ann Polytechnic. Gawad Kalinga, translated in English as “Give Care”, is a movement born in the Philippines with the vision for a world free from poverty (Gawad Kalinga, 2010b). It grew out of the Couples for Christ’s outreach programme in Bagong Silang, a huge relocation site for squatters in Metro Manila, in 1995. A more detailed explanation of this movement will be made in Section 2.7. The forum was not exclusively for Filipinos, but many of them who attended the forum on that day were Filipino Couples/Singles for Christ members. I recruited Paulo, a male IT worker during this event. In June, a series of events were held in conjunction with the Philippine Independence Day. On 7 June, I joined the whole-day event in Hong Lim Green Park to celebrate the Philippine Independence Day as a volunteer of the Bayanihan Centre. I met a female Filipino engineer who arrived in Singapore a few weeks ago with the intention of looking for a job. She was recruited as a participant after she got a job with a local IT company.

(c) Snowballing

Overall, I found it more difficult to recruit participants in nursing than in IT. I enquired at hospitals as to whether they would permit me to post an advertisement about my research on their noticeboard. All hospitals either declined my request or failed to respond to it. So, the snowball method was intensively used in recruiting nurses. Rica’s friend Leony introduced me to her colleague’s wife Maureen. I
recruited Maureen’s colleague Diane, who introduced me to Lance, who was working in a different healthcare institution. Though this research is not quantitative in nature, I also tried to reflect the occupational composition of Filipino citizen-workers in Singapore and their sex ratios in my sample. In 2008, there were 16,400 and 8,710 Filipino workers, including Singaporean permanent residents, in the fields of IT and nursing; the male/female ratios show 3.6 times more males than females in the IT field and 1.7 times more females than males in the nursing field. I decided to recruit more IT workers than nurses, more male IT workers than female ones, and more female nurses than male ones. In order to do so, my snowball method was at times directed; I asked participants if they knew any Filipino nurses who fit into a certain category. For instance, I requested Cecilia to get in touch with a ‘male’ nurse. I was able to recruit Jonathan through Cecilia. Jonathan referred me to Grace, who works in a nursing home. They met by chance when Jonathan had just arrived in Singapore. A few weeks after I interviewed Grace, I had another chance to speak to her. I mentioned that I had a hard time in finding a male respondent employed in the nursing field. Grace contacted different persons to help me recruit ‘male’ nurses. I recruited two nurses Alberto and Joel through Grace.

The directed snowball method was also applied when I recruited participants in IT. Some participants were willing to contribute to my research only by sharing with me their stories and opinions, but others were more active participants in a sense that they encouraged their friends or colleagues to participate in my research. Gerard, Luis, Mark, Michael and Paulo were more active participants, who tried to look for potential participants. I used this snowball method mainly to recruit women in IT because I was not able to recruit any female IT workers through the aforementioned Yahoo forum group. Gerard helped me recruit Iris and Michelle, and Luis referred
me to Janice. Michael and Paulo helped me get in touch with Lourdes and Rachel respectively. However, the snowball method did not always succeed because of their busy schedule or a lack of their interest. For instance, I looked for women in IT in their thirties or over. Luis and Mark gave me the contact details of Filipinas in IT with their permission, but they later declined to participate or did not respond to my request. I recruited Justin through Mark.

![Participant recruitment](image)

The problem with snowball sampling is that the sample is unlikely to be representative of the population (Bryman, 2004). However, generalisation is not the goal of this research. I recruited a total of 19 respondents in the IT sector and 15 in the nursing sector: 12 are Filipino citizens on work passes, 18 are permanent residents in Singapore, and four are now naturalised Singaporeans.
Table 2.1 Distribution of the research participants’ occupation by sex

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<th>IT professionals</th>
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<td>Male</td>
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See Appendix A for an overview of the demographic characteristics of participants in both fields in alphabetical order. The participants in the IT sector are aged between late twenties to early forties. I did not come across Filipino IT workers in their early twenties while in Singapore. It may be attributed to the fact that it is difficult to get an IT-related job in Singapore without some work experience. The respondents in the nursing sector are aged between their early twenties and early forties. I was able to speak to a Filipino nurse in his early twenties because he moved to Singapore soon after he passed the Board of Nursing Philippines licensure examination. Fifteen nurses I spoke to work in 12 different healthcare facilities in Singapore. The Filipino origin workers who participated in my research had worked in Singapore for between one and a half months to 12 years at the time of being interviewed.

2.5 Qualitative Enquiry & the Research Interview

Qualitative research places emphasis on “the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency” (Denzin et al., 2003, 13), and qualitative researchers seek to understand and interpret “how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them” (Glesne, 2006, 4). Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2003) argue that qualitative research has been haunted by a Janus-faced ghost. Qualitative researchers have assumed that they can report their own
observations of the social world, including the experiences of others, with “objectivity, clarity, and precision” (Denzin et al., 2003, 30). They hold the belief that there is a ‘real subject’ able to report on his or her experiences (Denzin et al., 2003). So, qualitative researchers seek a “method that would allow them to record accurately their own observations while also uncovering the meanings their subjects bring to their life experiences” (Denzin et al., 2003, 30). The expressions of meaning given by the research subjects are treated as “windows into the inner lives of these persons” (Denzin et al., 2003, 30). This position has been challenged by poststructuralists and postmodernists suggesting that “there is no clear window into the inner life of an individual” (Denzin et al., 2003, 31). What exist instead are “observations socially situated in the worlds of – and between – the observer and the observed” (Denzin et al., 2003, 31). I take the position that ‘reality’ is “an ever-changing, ongoing accomplishment” (Fontana et al., 2005, 717). I consider the interview as a site in which the social reality is (re)constructed and in which my research participants construct their self and social world. Hence, documenting the process of producing knowledge, or what is accomplished as a consequence of the interaction of the researcher and research subjects, is as important as the knowledge produced itself.

**Research Interview**

The interviews that I carried out were semi-structured and open-ended as I developed “new questions to follow unexpected leads that arise in the course” of my interviewing (Glesne, 2006, 104). The conventional approach to interviewing assumes that both interviewers and interviewees are engaged in “the knowledge-pursing project and capable of mobilizing a reasonable degree of rationality”, and the
Interview text says “something about the views, meanings or beliefs of people” (Alvesson, 2002, 113 & 118). The neopositivist aims to minimise researcher influence and other sources of bias, whereas the romantic advocates the establishment of rapport or a more ‘genuine’ human interaction between interviewer and interviewee in order to be able to “explore the inner world (meanings, ideas, feelings, intentions) or experienced social reality of the interviewee” (Alvesson, 2002, 109). The postmodernists, on the other hand, suggest that interview texts or accounts reveal less about some interior or external reality but more about ‘something else’ (Alvesson, 2002). Alvesson (2002, 126) sees interview talk “as governed by and thus as a potential indication of the socially dominant modes for constituting, reasoning and shaping various objects of knowledge”. In this thesis, I consider the accounts produced during the interview as the interviewees’ subjective ways of relating to the world out there (Alvesson, 2002). Alvesson suggests two ideas concerning how to conceptualise the research interview from this perspective. One sees interviews as “complex social settings in which accounts can be viewed as local accomplishment” (Alvesson, 2002, 114-5); “the interplay between two people with their own gender, age, professional background, personal appearance, ethnicity and so on makes a deep imprint on the accounts produced” (Alvesson, 2002, 126). The other considers the interview as “a play of the powers of discourse” (Alvesson, 2002, 116). In relation to the latter, Wendy Hollway (1984, 252) argues that thinking and actions “depend on the circulation between subjectivities and discourses which are available”.

James Scheurich (1997) suggests that researchers need to critically rethink what occurs during the interview and how they report (represent) their results. In the pages to follow, I provide a detailed description of my data collection and interpretation processes with a great deal of self reflection.
2.6 Generating the Interview Data

Using a semi-structured interview schedule, I had some questions prepared before the meeting with the research participants. The interview schedule was divided into five sections (see Appendix B). In the first section, I collected factual information, such as their socio-demographic characteristics (age, marital status, family members’ country of residence), the length of work/stay in Singapore, immigration status, and current work and/or job position. The second part comprised of their decisions about education, employment and migration. The brain drain literature focuses mainly on two issues: knowledge and skills embodied in human beings and their mobilities. I asked them how and/or why they came to acquire certain knowledge and skills and migrate to Singapore or, if relevant, any other country. My research did not use a life history method, but it thoroughly documented transition points of the participants’ lives and detailed accounts of their career trajectories. The third part addressed work experiences in the Philippines and Singapore. In order to compare their work in pre- and post-migration periods, I asked them to compare their work experiences in both countries. As such, I had a number of topics relevant to education, employment and migration that I wanted to talk about during the interview, but the schedule was flexible in terms of how I order topics of discussion and how I phrase questions.

Interviewing IT personnel and nurses was equally challenging for different reasons. Information Technology workers took different paths to enter the IT field. For instance, their academic backgrounds are diverse; many studied non-IT subjects like applied mathematics, business management and electronic engineering, just to name a few. Job mobility is also more frequent amongst IT workers, and many of them crossed national borders for different work-related reasons even before migrating to
Singapore. There is a body of research on the migration of Indians in IT to the US and Australia (Chakravartty, 2000, 2006, Xiang, 2007). However, the experiences of IT workers I spoke to in Singapore are quite different from those of Indian counterparts because of different socio-cultural and political contexts in both home and host societies. As for nurses, their post-migration experiences are varied because of the labour and immigration regimes governing their deployment to the Singaporean labour market. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, many Filipino nurses lost their professional qualification as a result of migration.

The fourth part of the interview schedule dealt with cross-border connections the participants sustain with the Philippines. In order to understand not only their familial ties but also their collective cross-border connections, I asked them to elaborate on different types of formal and informal social networks they maintained with the Philippines. Lastly, the participants were questioned as to whether they thought their migration from the Philippines to Singapore and their subsequent employment there had affected the two countries in any way.

In the initial period of fieldwork, I carefully listened to my interviewees’ responses. As I conducted more interviews, I naturally compared in my mind the responses of the particular interviewee sitting in front of me with those of previous interviewees, and the insights gained from each interview helped me to refine my research technique. As Corrine Glesne (2006, 79) notes, the questions I brought to my fieldwork were my ‘best effort’ before I tried them with my interviewees. I continued to assess whether the questions were easy for them to understand. New topics of interest also arose during the fieldwork, and I added a few new questions to my interview schedule. I returned to few respondents who participated in my research in
the early stages of my fieldwork to ask them these new questions that emerged in the later stages of fieldwork.

**POWER DYNAMICS**

Alvesson (2002, 114) defines an interview as “a social situation in which two persons (or more) who are typically unfamiliar to each other meet for a short period of time, on average around one or two hours”. Many scholars have already pointed out that the interviewer-interviewee relationship can be better understood when it is seen through the lens of ‘power’ (Garg, 2005, Kvale, 2006, Smith, 2006, Aléx et al., 2008).

The relationship between a researcher seeking information and a research subject holding the needed information is an imbalanced one. A researcher can be placed in a subjugated position when she has limited resources to find research subjects and there is a time constraint for her fieldwork. I had very limited social networks in Singapore that I could utilise to recruit participants. I often found myself chasing people who provided oral consent that they would participate in my research. I also frequently had to re-schedule meetings. Some cancelled the appointment a few hours before the meeting or even while I was waiting for them in the designated meeting place. Repeatedly asking them to fit me in their schedule was not an easy task, and I was disappointed when a number of potential interviewees eventually decided not to participate after many follow-ups. A big part of my fieldwork was dealing with my own emotions along the way.

In order to encourage their participation and not to interfere with their work or personal life, I let potential interviewees choose a meeting time and place of their
convenience. I usually suggested a neutral setting like a coffee shop as an option, but they had a final say about where the interview was conducted. Most of the interviews (25 out of 34) were carried out in a coffee shop or other eating places near their homes or offices or located along Orchard Road, a busy shopping district. When time allowed, I arrived at the meeting place an hour or two ahead to reserve a table at a quiet corner. Two interviews were carried out in participants’ workplaces, and another two were conducted near the outdoor pool within the condominium where the interviewee resided. Five interviews were carried out in the respondents’ house. When the interview was carried out at home, I felt that I had less control, but I believe that participants felt more comfortable in their own place.

The research participants were certainly aware of the power that they could exercise. One day, one participant called me at home, and asked me whether I would be able to come to the city centre to interview her. She had been postponing the interview for many weeks, but that evening she wanted to talk to someone. There were other situations which were out of my control. One participant contacted me a few hours before the interview, and asked me whether it would be okay to bring her friend along. I was concerned that her friend’s presence might effect her responses, so I politely mentioned that she might feel uncomfortable being interviewed when her friend was around. She replied that they were very close friends. I did not want to upset my respondent, so I also invited her friend to our meeting. Her friend, who is also Filipino, sat quietly during the interview, and my respondent seemed comfortable in the interview setting. The participant was playful at the beginning of the interview as she seemed to feel the presence of her friend, but soon she became more concentrated while relating her stories. While answering some of the questions, she looked at and whispered to her friend. But her friend rarely interrupted the
interview. The participant sought her friend’s help in answering one of the questions I posed. Then, her friend mentioned a few words, and the respondent added her own words to them. While analysing the data later on, I realised that such an interaction itself becomes further data to analyse. Moreover, our beliefs, ideas, and values are outcomes of societal influences and are embedded in social relationships. Therefore, having a second person present in the interview process is equally naturalistic. Another respondent also brought her Filipino co-worker along with her to the meeting without notice. She told me that her co-worker was like a sister to her. Her co-worker watched TV while I interviewed her, and there was minimum interaction between them while the interview was being conducted.

Most of the literature on interviewing deals at length with how to “get the interview subject to talk a lot, openly, trustfully, honestly, clearly and freely about what the researcher is interested in” (Alvesson, 2002, 109). An interviewer, of course, needs to make efforts to create a nonthreatening atmosphere for an interviewee, but I am critical of the romantic view of the interviewer-interviewee relationship advocated by some scholars (Miller et al., 1997), especially when the interview is conducted only one time in an unnatural setting like mine. The romantic view on interviewing, Alvesson (2002, 113) notes, “is grounded in an image of a potentially honest, unselfish subject, eager or at least willing to share his or her experiences and knowledge for the benefit of the interviewer and the research project”. My interaction with some interviewees was more cordial than with others. On reflection, I cannot claim that the ‘quality’ of interviews – if there is such – conducted in a friendly atmosphere was any better than that of interviews done in a less friendly atmosphere. Regarding the issue of rapport, I thought that my experience of living and working in the Philippines would help me build rapport with my research
participants. Some participants were pleasant to me when they learnt that I had such experience. They remembered the information, and used it when they talked about their experience in the Philippines, for instance, how difficult it is to make ends meet there. However, for others, that information was not anything ‘very special’ because there are ‘a lot of’ Koreans in the Philippines.

My relationship with each interviewee was quite different because they have very different socio-demographic backgrounds. Their ages ranged from the early twenties to the early forties. Some had just started their career, and others had already reached managerial positions. Some were well travelled, and for others Singapore was the first foreign country they had lived in. Some are from a better-off family so that they do not need to financially support their family members remaining in the Philippines, but others have immediate and extended family members to support. In terms of education, I have qualifications higher than all my respondents. I communicated mostly through SMS messages before meeting them in person for an interview; only those recruited through snowballing or PinoyITdotSG had some (vague) information about me. When we met in person, some of my participants commented on my high educational qualification. One male participant in his late thirties was very interested in my educational backgrounds because he considered it exceptional for a girl to study to the PhD level. Another male participant of similar age to myself assumed that I was a male researcher. So, it turned out to be that I did not match with their image of a ‘typical’ researcher.

Before I went to the interview, I considered the participants simply as research subjects that I had to study. However, as soon as we met in person, both my participants and I became conscious of certain identifying factors, such as our own
age, gender, professional background and personal appearance. For instance, I was very nervous in my first two interviews not only because they are the first two but also because they were married men older than me with many years of work experiences. One of them had over 15 years of work experience. I was brought up in a society in which age confers status. So, it was my interviewees who tried to make me feel comfortable talking to them. The second interviewee explained his entire career trajectories in the Philippines and Singapore, therefore I did not need to say much during the early stages of the interview, which allowed me time to feel relaxed in the interview setting. I interviewed another male IT worker in his late thirties in a Philippine restaurant. He ordered Filipino beer San Miguel and I ordered halo-halo, a Filipino dessert with colourful toppings. Our orders symbolised the roles we assumed during the interview; he talked to me like an ‘uncle’, a term used in Singapore to denote respect for a male elder. I also felt much less in control of the interview situation when I interviewed a nurse in her early forties, who had just given birth to her third child. She breastfed her baby during the interview, and I constantly had to read her cue about when to ask a question. The pace (and depth) of the interview was in her control. The interview setting is “a complex social interaction involving much more than a skilful researcher enrolling an interviewee in the service of science to produce information and insights” (Alvesson, 2002, 126). Most nurses I spoke to were older than me by a couple of years, but many of them were single so that I did not feel the significance of that age gap. I interviewed my first respondent in nursing in the hospital she works in. Before the interview, she mentioned that she watches Korean dramas and is a fan of one Korean actor. That topic was an ice breaker.

What I also noticed is that participants came to the interview with their own agenda and expectation. Information Technology workers responsible for the maintenance of
a company’s IT system frequently encounter unpredictable problems that need to be immediately sorted out. As a result, I communicated with three participants in IT for an extensive period of time – up to two months – in order to arrange a meeting. My persistence may have encouraged them to participate in my research, but I also became curious to know more about the source of their commitments. As for nurses, many of them have just one day off a week, and it is not easy to decide to spend an hour for someone else’s research project that may or may not benefit them. Out of curiosity, I asked some of my interviewees what motivated them to participate in my research. As for my first interviewee, it was his sympathy for me and responsibility as one of the Filipinos in the IT sector that made him decide to be interviewed because he came to know that I had a hard time recruiting participants. He did not want to let down a foreign researcher interested in studying Filipino IT workers in Singapore. A male nurse said that he felt honoured that I chose to study Filipino nurses, and wanted to help me learn more by contributing to my study. Two naturalised Singaporeans in their mid and late thirties told me that they wanted their voices to be heard. As Alvesson (2002, 113) points out, interviewees may be “politically aware and politically motivated actors (emphasis original)”. Other motivations include: to help me out, and to be out of curiosity. I had reasons to come to the interview. So did my participants.

As discussed, imbalanced power prevailed prior to the interview. Once a person decides to sit down and talk, an interviewer becomes more in control because she determines the direction of the interaction between them. However, interviewees are also well aware of their ‘privileged’ position as information holders. One nurse expressed her excited feelings about speaking in front of a voice recorder; she said that it felt like being an actress interviewed by a news reporter. One IT worker
playfully mentioned that I should write his biography. My interviewees also influenced the interview atmosphere in many different ways. A particular interaction with another IT worker also made me realise that interviewees also observed my behaviour during the interview. During the interview session, I had to write down some factual information, such as time and place, which will help my respondents and me quickly move between different points of time and place during our conversation. This note taking took place mostly at the beginning part of the interview. When I was taking notes, one participant tried to look over my notes, and then told me that I looked serious. I playfully responded by saying that he would not be able to read my notes because of my bad handwriting. But his reaction made me think that it could be his way of expressing his discomfort. The interview interaction is a human interaction. Interviewing, as Glesne (2006, 90) notes, “brings together different persons and personalities”. However, it is a very sophisticated and complex one because the baggage that we bring to the interview, such as age, gender, professional background and personal appearance, influence in a multitude of ways how we behave. After all, I was not able to control a lot of things which are part of me. Scheurich (1997, 73) argues that the interview interaction is “fundamentally indeterminate – the complex play of conscious and unconscious thoughts, feelings, fears, power, desires, and needs on the part of both the interviewer and interviewee cannot be captured and categorized”.

Overall, my respondents were very supportive in facilitating the interview process. None of the respondents refused to answer a question I posed. Some of their responses were very elaborate, and they provided me with numerous examples. But others made their answers very short, and were ready to move to the next topic. In the latter case, there was no room for me to probe or go deeper. Some were very
nervous about being interviewed. Before the interview, I had a chance to talk with a potential participant over the phone. She asked me what if she would not be able to speak fluently while the interview was being recorded. A few days later, I went to interview her in her workplace. After an initial phase of small talk, I turned on my two voice recorders, and started the interview by asking her to tell me briefly about herself. She suddenly froze and was not able to speak. I tried to relax her by saying that she did not need to worry about the fact that her responses were being recorded, but she was still tense during the interview, and found it difficult to answer some of the questions. I assumed that she was a very shy person. I had another chance to see her in her church group meeting, and I was so surprised that she was a totally different person leading that meeting. The interview content may also be affected by the participants’ mood. I got an SMS message from my interviewee after the interview: “I want to be positive while my own world is negative. Thanks. It was indeed a nice feeling after I voice my hurts and pains. Thanks for listening”. She had been postponing the interview, so I thought that I would never have a chance to interview her. She rang me one day, and asked me whether I would like to interview her on that day. Even though I positioned myself as a researcher, she might have seen me as a shoulder to cry on.

The views of respondents speaking in this thesis are those held by the respondents in a specific time and place. After finishing the interview with a male nurse, I switched off my digital recorders. He was struck by my last interview question, and he brought up the issue again while we casually chatted. His expressions were very interesting, so I asked him to hold that thought, and looked for my digital recorder. After turning on my recorder, I requested him to continue his conversation. It was not really a long statement. Because the digital recorder was still on, he seemed pressured to say
something ‘important’. Our thoughts continue to flow, and may change over time. What I present in this thesis is what comes into their mind first, and how they build their claim from that point. This is what makes the interview method interesting; it tells much about power at play that people may or may not be conscious of, but at the same time this is its limitation. The nature of the interview method allows an opportunity for interviewees to fabricate or alter their experiences or opinions because they may want me to see them in a particular way.

**Nationality & the Interview Data**

Alvesson (2002, 115) argues that the realisation of the research interview as a “complex interaction in which the participants make efforts to produce a particular order, drawing upon cultural knowledge” calls for “an appreciation of the local nature of interview talk and the specific identities that come forward in this specific situation”. This section focuses on one particular identity of all, which is also closely related to the topic of my research: national identity. Before going on fieldwork, I did not think much about how to position myself in relation to my research subjects, but I considered mixed images of Korea and Koreans held by the public in the Philippines and what roles my nationality will play during my fieldwork. What I was most worried about prior to fieldwork and during the first couple of weeks of fieldwork was participant recruitment, so I asked myself as to whether my nationality would help me recruit research participants or whether they will be willing to speak to me considering the mixed images of Koreans in the Philippines. The Korean population has grown quickly in the Philippines since many students started studying English, and more Korean small businesses sprung up. There are a number of districts in which Koreans congregate in Metro Manila. During my stay in 2007, I
came across a number of articles published in Philippine newspapers with nationwide circulation about unauthorised Korean business establishments and Koreans working in the Philippines without work permits. In July 2007, the Philippine Bureau of Immigration cracked down on Korean small businesses in Metro Manila. Then, Korean businessmen claimed to be victims of extortion by immigration officers, and the Korean government suspended the issuance of visas to Filipino workers bound to Korea (GMA News, 2007, Torres, 2007). The Korean Consul General hinted that the Korean government might take action against the estimated 15,000 undocumented Filipino migrant workers in Korea unless the Philippine government stopped the alleged extortion (Torres, 2007). The local media referred to the growing Korean population as ‘the invasion of Koreans’ (Quimpo-Espino, 2007). Because of my work experiences and research, I was familiar with the plight of Filipino workers in Korea and of Filipinos married to Koreans. Meanwhile, Korean dramas, movies and songs have been very popular in the Philippines and across Southeast Asia because of the Korean government-led large investment in cultural content and marketing efforts. One evening in October 2009, I was having dinner near Saint Luke’s Medical Center in Quezon City, the Philippines, and I heard two Filipinos – one with an American accent – talking about the significant presence of Korean pop culture – what Koreans call ‘the Korean wave’ – and the roles the Korean government played in this. They talked about the Philippine nation and state in relation to the Korean nation and state. In my eyes, Koreans were imagined by Filipinos to be people with a strong national identity. I was conscious of the images that Filipinos might have of Korea and how those images might affect their interest in speaking to me.

After having recruited a number of participants, I began to think about how to present myself to the interviewees. I was unsure about how they felt about Korea and
Koreans and how their feelings about them would influence the interview process. So I came up with the plan to present myself as a well-travelled student/researcher by making my stay in the Philippines and Australia known to the interviewees while not placing emphasis on my nationality. After carrying out a couple of interviews, however, I realised that I was still dealing with my nationality unconsciously. Every time I went to the interview, a question that came into my mind was: What should I say when they ask me why I chose to study about Filipinos? It is because I felt people might think – many actually do – it is ‘unusual’ for a Korean to study about the lives of Filipinos. Some participants assessed me before the interview by asking me why I became interested in what I was doing: I usually told them that it is my experience in the Philippines that made me want to know more about Philippine migration. I sometimes told the interviewees why I came to study about them even before they asked me. So, a difference in nationality is, I realised, something that I could not just ignore.

During the course of interview, I noticed that the participants were conscious of my ‘foreignness’, which, I believe, enabled me to obtain invaluable data. Because of the difference in nationality, no information was taken for granted. For instance, some of my interviewees explained to me in detail how migrant workers were perceived in the Philippines because they did not know to what extent I was familiar with Philippine situations. Martha Feldman and her collaborators (2003, 40) also point out: “Similarity [between the researcher and the researched] may ease some aspects of access but does not always increase information” (quoted in Glesne, 2006, 112). I also felt that they were comfortable talking to a non-Filipino researcher because I think ‘class’ mattered less in the cross-cultural context. Not being a Singaporean also enabled me to have access to invaluable data. I believe that I obtained information
that they might not be comfortable sharing with a Singaporean researcher, especially considering the Singaporean public regularly positions foreigners as job stealers and also the fact that they have to interact with Singaporean bosses, colleagues and clients in their daily lives. As mentioned earlier, it was not my plan to make my Korean nationality explicit. But halfway through my fieldwork one of my research participants told me that I looked Chinese (read, Singaporean), which made me wonder; what if my physical appearance reminded them of their bosses or colleagues or other Singaporeans? Since I did not want to lose the benefits that I may enjoy as a non-Singaporean researcher, I thought about whether I should make my nationality more explicit. Again, nationality continued to be an indicator that oriented me during my fieldwork.

My research participants’ interactions with me might be affected by the images of Korea and Koreans they held and their past interactions with Koreans. Carolyn Baker (1982, 109) writes:

> When we talk with someone else about the world, we take into account who the other is, what that other person could be presumed to know, ‘where’ that other is in relation to ourself in the world we talk about.

While responding to my enquiry about the perceived effects that her migration had on the Philippines and Singapore, a female IT worker mentioned that she hoped to bring back home ‘something’ from Singapore. Then, she continued, “I admire you Koreans most because you love your country a lot (emphasis added)”. In her eyes, I am ‘one of the Koreans’ who love the country a lot, although I did not say anything at all about my country before and during the interview. In Manila, she had some Korean classmates in her Spanish language class, and she was told: “You know? You have a lot of beautiful things in the country. Your country has so much to offer. But
the thing is you don’t love your country enough to come back and make changes”.

One of these Koreans told her that he will study in the Philippines for two years, but his ‘main goal’ is to ‘bring home’ whatever he had learnt outside Korea. I have no way to confirm what this Korean actually said to the respondent, but the expressions that she used in sharing with me the account, I think, reflects her interpretation of what she was told at that time. She told me that her interactions with Korean students were a ‘learning experience’. This made me wonder whether she would give the same answer if a non-Korean interviewer had asked the same question. In this sense, an account produced in the interview is a situational one. Her statement ‘you don’t love your country enough’ was so powerful that it stayed in my mind for a long time even after I finished my fieldwork in Singapore. What crossed my mind was that they might see me as a potential critic, who would judge their responses with reference to what is ‘appropriate’. This issue will be further discussed in Section 2.6.

My research participants were also informed of the fact that the interview data would be used for my dissertation and of the possibility that the data would be used for publication. This means that our conversations are meant to be shared by others. So, what is said in the ‘recorded’ interview is somewhat ‘screened’ in consideration of the potential audience. Participant I, who is now a Singaporean citizen, was critical of institutional racial discrimination present in Singapore. According to Participant I, the human resource department maintains a list of people by racial category. If a person is not Chinese, he or she has a slim chance to make it to the top. Before saying this, Participant I asked me to switch off my digital recorder. Participant I

66 I use roman numerals here rather than pseudonyms in order to avoid disclosing the participants’ gender due to fear of being identified by the Singapore state.
was clearly conscious of the presence of the recorder and the potential audience. 

Participant II, another Filipino of origin holding a Singaporean passport, was also conscious of the potential audience:

Interviewer: Now you are a Singaporean.

Participant II: Yeah, yeah. Actually, this is so bad for me to say. Uh, I better be careful. … I feel that this is not a country where you are really free. I don’t believe that people [here] are free to say or speak what they want. I feel that the media here is very controlled as well. … I don’t think it’s really a free country, and a lot of things… erase, erase (meaning, not intending to finish the statement).

**ENGLISH AS A MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION**

I carried out all my interviews in English. Using English made our national differences more obvious. Filipinos employed in Singapore are expected to be competent in English as their working language is most likely to be English. I have been speaking, writing and thinking in English for many years. Nonetheless, I should note that English is not our mother tongue. While I had already prepared my interview questions, my interviewees had to respond on the spot. Their expressions might have been limited by their fluency of English. However, I think that the issue of language expression is not only applicable to research carried out in a foreign language because of the limitations inherent in language (Berman, 1998). As Schuman Howard (1982, 23) also suggests, “[l]anguage is not a clean logical tool like mathematics that we can use with precision” (quoted in Mishler, 1986, 2). The postmodernists consider language not as an “expression of subjectivity” but as “what constitutes subjectivity” (Alvesson, 2002, 126). From this point of view, subjectivity is not a ‘structure’ but a ‘process’ – unstable and ambiguous. Although expressions they use are important, what I am after in this research is the process, or the ways in which they construct their views. Because I conducted interviews in English instead
of Tagalog, I also avoided a situation in which I would have to translate interview transcripts in English and use my words instead of theirs.

2.7 Reading/Interpreting the Interview Data

Although I discuss data collection/generation and analysis separately, they are not separate processes. Both my participants and I have our own reasons for living outside our countries of birth, regardless of whether or not we understand the structural factors underpinning our migration. However, I have shown in the preceding chapter that there are many controversies and ‘what-ifs’ that follow the migration of the interviewees born as citizens of a developing country. My research participants, as noted in Section 2.4, were asked whether they thought their migration from the Philippines to Singapore and their subsequent employment there had affected the two countries in any way. These questions have direct relevance to my research enquiry. In analysing the data, I compared their migratory experiences and their answers to those questions. I was surprised and confused at the same time after carrying out a few interviews because answers to those questions were similar to one another. Most research participants answered them within the parameters of discussions on migration and development. I began my data analysis by thinking about why all of them addressed similar issues despite their disparate experiences. I was also overwhelmed by emotions expressed by my interviewees while they discussed how they thought their migration affected the Philippines. I continued to ask myself about how I should interpret these emotions. I also questioned myself about whether their similar responses could be attributed to the wording of my interview question. So, halfway through my fieldwork I began to phrase the questions in a different way, but their responses were still within those parameters.
The similarity of the responses of Justin and Shirley, who were asked differently phrased questions makes this point clear.

Interviewer: (Do you think your migration has affected Singapore in any way?) How about the Philippines?

Justin: Yes, when I send money back to the Philippines, remittances help [the country].

Interviewer: You left the Philippines almost nine years ago. You returned [to the Philippines] to rest, and came back again [to Singapore]. You have been living and working here for a total of seven years. You may also apply for permanent residency. So, how do you think all this affects two countries – the Philippines and Singapore?

Shirley: When you work overseas, you can help the Philippines – boost the economy through remittances, by sending money to them.

Alvesson (2002) suggests that the accounts produced during the interview are indications of Foucault’s (1984) discourses at play and their powers over the individual subject. From this perspective, the interview is “an outcome of the discourses that are present, constituting the subject and her talk” (Alvesson, 2002, 116). What I aim to explore is “how discourses make themselves present in the interview situation, work on the subject and give primacy to how he or she ‘carries’ certain constitutions of the social world” (Alvesson, 2002, 117). I believe that the text produced in the interview says a lot about what the research participant thinks as ‘legitimate’. As previously discussed, my research participants had given me answers, within the parameters of discussions on migration and development, when asked whether they thought their migration affected the Philippines and Singapore. Subsequently, I noticed differences between IT workers’ and nurses’ responses and also different nuances in their responses, and started finding connections between their experiences in Singapore and responses.
To read and interpret the interview accounts, I continued to observe both societies in which my research participants are situated. Whereas the interview data was collected at a certain point of time, my observation of both societies was not limited to the fieldwork period. As stated at the outset of this Chapter, my observation of Philippine society started even before undertaking this research. During the fieldwork in Singapore, I visited St. Michael’s Church where Filipino priest Fr. Angel Luciano is based, Novena Church which offers Tagalog Mass, and some other Catholic churches alone or with my research participant or with other Filipinos. Another place that I frequented during my stay in Singapore is Lucky Plaza. This shopping centre has a wide range of shops selling Filipino products, Filipino eateries, beauty salons owned by Filipinos, remittance companies and an office of the Philippine National Bank. On Sundays, Filipina domestic workers spend their day off in Lucky Plaza and around the vicinity. I paid close attention to the sites in which the presence of the Philippine state is felt in Singapore. I started my observation in the earlier mentioned Bayanihan Center. I also attended a series of activities to celebrate the Philippine Independence Day, including the whole-day event in Hong Lim Green Park on 7 June.\footnote{The Bayanihan Society and Singaporean charity Community Chest organised a charity performance by the National Folk Dance Company of the Philippines on 16 June 2009 to raise funds. Since 2005, each year the Philippine Independence Day Celebration Committee chooses the outstanding Filipinos of Singapore to “recognize Filipino citizens and persons of Filipino heritage … who have actively contributed to the enhancement of the image of the Filipino and/or the promotion of Filipino heritage and culture” (Ong, 2009).} I also accompanied a Filipino when he went to the Philippine Embassy to register as a new OFW.

Filipinos in Singapore have formed a variety of social groups. In May 2007, there were 87 Filipino organisations in Singapore, including 19 socio-cultural, three
professional, four alumni and 58 religious groups (Subong, 2007). The oldest Filipino group is the Filipino Association of Singapore, founded in 1937. There are also many sports and hobby groups for pursuits, such as badminton, golf, bowling, dance and photography. People from the same region and province, for example, Bicol, Pangasinan and Batangas, also formed a group. I did discover that only few of my interviewees had joined any of these groups, and thus I had no access to them. The only group I was in touch with is the priorly mentioned Gawad Kalinga.68

Although I tried to get a perspective of different aspects of the research participants’ lives, I was not able to visit the workplaces of my IT respondents. I did manage to meet with groups of people working in the IT field, Filipinos and non-Filipinos, during my fieldwork and my most recent visit to Singapore in December 2010. I visited a number of healthcare service facilities as a researcher and a patient. A nurse who agreed to participate in my research was working in the Emergency and Accident Department of a hospital, and I went to her workplace to get a flu vaccine. I was able to observe her interactions with patients and colleagues. My first interview was with a nurse in her workplace. I visited one nursing home to meet up with my research participant a few times. In July, I also attended the Nurses’ Day event held in the hospital where one of my participants works. I was interested in interacting with the research participants even after the interviews, in order to have a ‘context’ within which to analyse my data. Some of my respondents were also interested in

68 With the belief that a new home instils people with a renewed sense of worth and responsibility, Gawad Kalinga launched a programme to build homes for the homeless from slum areas, or GK homes, across the Philippines. There are five GK villages built by Filipinos in Singapore and Singaporeans. In 2006, the movement grew to become a global one (Gawad Kalinga, 2010a). Their programme templates were replicated in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia and Cambodia.
spending more time with me. I often attended Sunday Mass, had a meal, chatted in a coffee shop, shared a beer, and went shopping with them. One of my interviewees plays the guitar in a band, so I went to watch his show. I also observed their interactions with Singaporeans. The data used in this thesis are mainly drawn from my interviews. However, it was my casual conversation with some participants that helped me better understand and interpret data. Some of my respondents are strongly committed to their religious belief, and they wanted me to join their church meetings, celebrations and Sunday service. Attending these gatherings provided me with another opportunity to meet many Filipinos.

In addition to the 34 interviews with Filipinos employed in IT and nursing sectors, I interviewed five Filipino IT recruiters/head-hunters in Singapore in order to better understand cross-border recruitment in the IT field. The moderator of PinoyITdotSG helped me get in touch with a Filipino IT recruiter by sending a Yahoo group message to a dozen of Filipino IT recruiters in Singapore. I obtained the email addresses of some Filipino IT recruiters from other online Filipino forums, and sent them an email inviting them to participate in my research. Four IT recruiters responded to my email, and participated in my research. When I approached Singaporean broker agencies involved in bringing in Filipino nurses to Singapore, asking them to speak to me was neither a pleasant nor an easy task. The manager of one firm quizzed me about how I found out about their role in nurse recruitment and wanted to know whether I was Filipino. She was unwilling to answer any of the questions I posed.

Considering my research explores the intersections between national identity and citizenship, I needed to understand the nation-building process in Singapore. In
addition to observing Filipino communities in Singapore, I observed Singaporean society by exploring different parts of Singapore and visiting historical sites and museums. In particular, I carefully observed the Singapore National Day events by walking around the city on that particular day. I also watched a special event broadcasted on TV.

After finishing my fieldwork in Singapore, I returned to the Philippines where the initial idea for this research project emerged. I interviewed two nurses, two IT workers and a student in computer science to understand the context in which my research participants were situated prior to migration. Friends in Manila and Singapore helped me get in touch with them. I also casually talked with nurses, and students in nursing and computer science. I visited agencies recruiting nurses for Singapore, and was able to interview the manager of one such agency in Manila. I also contacted an IT recruiter based in Manila with the help of one participant in Singapore. I spoke to this IT recruiter and her colleague over lunch. They invited me to a local job fair that their company took part in. I also interviewed the representative of the Philippine Consortium on Migration and Development (Philcomdev). During my stay in the Philippines, I attended workshops and forums related to labour migration from the Philippines.

69 Philcomdev is “a network of thirty-six (36) nongovernment and people's organizations, microfinance institutions, cooperatives, community based organizations, networks, and individuals who are involved in, and agree to converge their initiatives around the issue of migration, human rights and development – particularly the empowerment of migrants, overseas Filipinos, their families and communities as social development actors, addressing the social costs of migration, optimizing the benefits of migration, and contributing to people-oriented Philippine development” (retrieved from the Philcomdev website: http://www.philcomdev.org).
I extensively consulted print media and publications to understand both societies. I also read the past issues of OFW Pinoy Star, a magazine that publishes the views of, and the events related to, Filipinos in Singapore, and brochures that I collected at 7071 Flavours, a Philippine fine dining restaurant in Singapore, the Bayanihan Centre and the Philippine Embassy. In the Philippines, I was able to obtain copies of a range of publications relevant to Philippine migration in the SMC library. In addition, I consulted the annual reports of both Philippine and Singapore government or professional bodies, such as the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration and Singapore Nursing Board.

I observed discussions on online forum for Filipinos in Singapore, PinoySG in order to get information on the activities, interests and concerns of Filipinos living in Singapore. Online discussions amongst Filipinos, for instance, are made mainly in Taglish, Tagalog infused with English terms. Because of my limited proficiency in Tagalog, I sought some assistance from Filipino acquaintances, who translated some of the contents for me. I also read job postings on both Philippine and Singaporean job search websites, such as Workabroad (http://www.workabroad.ph), JobsDB SG (http://www.jobsdb.com/sg) and Jobstreet SG (http://www.jobstreet.com/sg), to gain a big picture of cross-border recruitment in the two selected sectors.

2.8 Voice

Paraphrasing Clandinin and Connelly (1998), Mantzoukas (2004, 1001) suggests “the research text will necessarily represent its researcher, and it will unavoidably bear his or her voice and signature”. This research project that emerged from my observations in the Philippines has been a long journey for me to find my own voice. All of my interviewees contributed to shaping the central arguments being presented
in this thesis. However, I already had my enquiry before going into the fieldwork, and asked them to be part of my search. The thesis text is again a ‘processed’ one through my interpretation of the data. In writing this text, I focused on teasing out the complexities and ambiguities surrounding the terms and expressions that orient us and shape our views.

In writing about Filipino origin workers in Singapore, I let myself freely move in a space that transcends the physical Philippine-Singapore border. My ability to freely move in this borderless space, however, does not mean that I am transcending the boundary between my interviewees and me. As outlined earlier, my nationality has often become a point of reference during the data collection. I am writing this thesis from the perspective of a person who is free from the prevailing discourses playing upon my interviewees.

2.9 Ethical Issues

I obtained ethics research approval from the University of Wollongong. The participation of those interviewed was strictly voluntary. If they decided to participate, interviewees were given a copy of participant information sheets describing what could be expected of them during the interview, and they were asked to sign two copies of a consent form (see Appendices C and D). They were also informed of their entitlement to withdraw their consent at any stage for whatever reason. I informed them of their right to refuse to answer any of the questions they were asked.

In this chapter, I have illustrated my ways of knowing and understanding the world of my respondents, and the processes through which I shall present and analyse their accounts in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Before moving to the data analysis, I will outline
discussions and debates concerning the overseas work of Filipino citizens in Chapters 3 and 4.
CHAPTER 3 THE PHILIPPINE STATE & LABOUR MIGRATION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The migration-related statistics collected by the Philippine state are far more extensive than those of any other state classified as ‘labour sending’ in the Asian region. Since 1969, the state has processed citizens departing for overseas jobs, and the current system for monitoring the outflows of citizen-workers came into full force in 1972 (King, 1987). The existence of this extensive data symbolises the nationalising process of individuals’ overseas work. This chapter examines the ways in which the overseas work of individuals, born as the citizens of the Philippines, has been discursively constructed as a nationalist heroic act, as well as a national development project. The chapter consists of two main sections. After briefly outlining the pre-1974 history of labour migration from the Philippines, I will provide an overview of the Philippine state’s overseas employment programme. This section also discusses multiple factors affecting the Philippines’ continual supply of labour to the world. This will be followed by an examination of the ways in which labour migration is constructed in relation to the Philippine nation of today and tomorrow. It describes how citizens, who cross borders to work are moulded into OFWs, are then constructed as heroes and heroines for the remittances they share with their family members or sent to the Philippines for their own purposes. The idea that the benefits of the citizens’ overseas work should be maximised was proposed, and the government became involved in the entire cycle of the citizens’ employment abroad.
3.2 **OVERSEAS EMPLOYMENT AS A POLICY/PROGRAMME**

The state engagement with the overseas work of Filipinos began during the Ferdinand Marcos regime (1965-1986). The intervention of the state was minimal prior to the 1970s (Asis, 1992). The overseas employment of Filipinos was seen as early as in 1906 when 15 Ilocano men were contracted to work on sugar plantations in Hawaii (ILO, 1996). Almost 125,000 Filipinos were recruited to Hawaii to harvest sugar and pineapple between 1907 and 1931, but most did not stay (King, 1987). The Philippine Islands were under American rule (1898-1946), and Filipinos granted “special noncitizen national status” – nationals but not citizens – had access to the US labour market even when the US restricted the migration of Asians from the 1870s (Gonzalez, 1998, 28). However, as anti-Filipino sentiment spread in the US due to the 1930s depression, the US government was forced to restrict the immigration of Filipinos through the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934.

In 1900, the colonial government adopted the English-only policy in Philippine formal education.\(^{70}\) Isabel Martin (1999) explains that the colonial government believed that English could unite the Filipinos from different regions who spoke different languages and dialects. English was also thought of “as the language that would provide the Filipinos access to civilization” (Martin, 1999, 134, quoted in Bernardo, 2004, 18). English language has enjoyed a privileged status in Philippine formal education as a medium of instruction since then (Bernardo, 2004). In the tertiary level education, instruction is in English although some institutions, such as

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\(^{70}\) The English-only policy encountered the nationalist movement and anti-colonial and anti-American sentiments in the late 1960s, and bilingual education began in 1974 (Bernardo, 2004).
the University of the Philippines, have encouraged the use of Filipino, and the board
examinations for the certification of professionals are all carried out in English.
Manolo Abella (1992) notes that Filipinos’ ability to speak English has enabled them
to have easy access to labour markets in other parts of the world. In the 1960s,
professionals immigrated to the US while taking advantage of the US’s new
immigration policy which gives preference to people in certain occupations, such as
engineers, workers in other technological and related fields, nurses and teachers
(King, 1987). Employment opportunities in the US fuelled demand for nursing
education in the Philippines (Joyce et al., 1982). Kingma (2006) explains that the
Marcos administration deliberately encouraged entrepreneurs to open nursing
schools in 1966, by passing an act that eases regulations on nursing schools. The
number of nursing schools expanded from 17 to 140 between 1950 and 1970 (Joyce
et al., 1982). But the deployment of citizen-workers to the foreign labour markets
was not yet institutionalised.

The contemporary history of labour migration from the Philippines differs
significantly from these earlier outward movements of Filipinos recruited to, and
searching for, work outside the boundary of the Philippine Islands because the
Philippine state is closely engaged in the overseas employment of its citizens,
making it a history of the Philippine nation. To understand the views informing
Filipino migrant workers’ perspectives, in the forthcoming pages I will discuss the
various strategies of successive governments up until that of the Gloria Macapagal-
Arroyo Administration, because my field work was carried out in 2009 and the
current President Benigno Aquino was not elected until June 2010. Marcos was
elected in 1965 and faced harsh economic conditions, including the balance-of-
payment problem and unemployment, which led the Marcos administration to
formulate a strategy to cope with the crisis. President Marcos declared martial law on 21 September 1972, and launched a new foreign policy called Development Diplomacy. The economic boom brought about by a dramatic increase in oil prices enabled oil-rich countries in the Middle East to launch large-scale infrastructure and development projects demanding more workers. In this context, the then Labour Secretary Blas Ople proposed the overseas employment programme. President Marcos considered that the combination of the Philippines’ surplus manpower and the high demand for labour from oil-producing countries as an opportunity to “show to other developing nations the virtues of independent development” (Gonzalez, 1998, 34). In 1974, President Marcos issued Presidential Decree 442, or the Labor Code, which served as the basis for the overseas employment programme. With Presidential Decree 442, President Marcos ordered three agencies to supervise the overseas work of Filipinos: Overseas Employment Development Board (OEDB), the National Seaman Board (NSB), and the Bureau of Employment Services (BES).

Article 17 of the Labor Code states:

An Overseas Employment Development Board is hereby created to undertake, in cooperation with relevant entities and agencies, a systematic program for overseas employment of Filipino workers in excess of domestic needs and to protect their rights to fair and equitable employment practices. It shall have the power and duty to:

1. promote the overseas employment of Filipino workers through a comprehensive market promotion and development program;

2. secure the best possible terms and conditions of employment of Filipino contract workers on a government-to-government basis and ensure compliance therewith;

3. recruit and place workers for overseas employment on a government-to-government arrangement and in such other sectors as policy may dictate; and

4. act as secretariat for the Board of Trustees of the Welfare and Training Fund for Overseas Workers.
Maruja Asis (1992, 70) points out the significance of the Labor Code in “ushering in the active participation of the government in the enterprise”. The Labor Code banned foreign employers from hiring Filipinos for overseas work, except through the OEDB and the NSB or entities authorised by the Secretary of Labour (Article 18). The essence of the Labor Code, Gonzalez (1998, 118) says, “was to promote overseas contract work and reap whatever economic benefits could be gained from the outflow, especially in terms of foreign exchange and employment”. The literature on the Philippine state’s overseas employment programme aptly points out the state’s desire for capital accumulation (Tyner, 2004, Rodriguez, 2010). Generating foreign exchange from the earnings of Filipinos deployed through the state programme was in the state interest in the face of the balance-of-payments problem. While formalising the citizens’ overseas employment, the 1974 Labour Code obligated citizens assisted by the state agencies in obtaining overseas jobs to remit a portion of their earnings to their dependents in the Philippines (Article 22).

The government’s promotion of overseas work intensified in the early 1980s. In 1982, the aforementioned three agencies – OEDB, NSB and BES – were merged into the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) (Executive Order No. 797, signed on 1 May 1982) because the earlier system was ineffective in managing all facets of the citizens’ overseas employment (Tyner, 2009). Asis (1992) argues that this reorganisation signified an intensified effort on behalf of the Philippine state to capitalise on the global economy through its citizens’ labour. As noted, the government obliged citizen-workers deployed to remit a portion of their earnings to their dependents in the Philippines (Article 22). Yet, it was claimed that the money sent through unofficial channels had adversely affected the country (Asis, 1992, Vasquez, 1992). In 1982, the Marcos administration again ordered Filipinos, whose
contracts with foreign employers were processed by the state, to remit 50 to 70 percent, depending on their occupation, of their earnings through the Philippine banking system (Executive Order No. 857, signed on 13 December 1982). The POEA (1982, 7) reports:

This order aims to organize the flow of remittances through formal channels in order to counter the proliferation of black market activities and divert the flow of remittances to where it can benefit the whole economy.

For those who did not comply, the state imposed penalties, such as the non-renewal of passports (Section 3, Executive Order No. 857) or disapproval of new contracts (Section 4) or suspension or exclusion from the list of eligible workers for overseas employment (Section 9). State institutions, such as Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (the Central Bank of the Philippines), the Ministry of Labor and Employment and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, made efforts in the implementation of mandatory measures and development of mechanisms to facilitate remittances (POEA, 1982). Deploying more citizens – and therefore generating more government income and remittances – became an important agenda. In her letter to Labour Secretary Ople in 1982, POEA Administrator Patricia Santo Tomas stated:

We are glad to report that for 1982, deployment grew by 20%, welfare fund collections increased by 75% and government income from overseas employment operations practically doubled compared to the previous year. … We also hope to increase government income and generate bigger foreign exchange remittances through a higher deployment level. (POEA, 1982, 2)

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71 The government collects fees for the processing of the citizens’ employment contracts. In 2007, the POEA was a top revenue earner for the government, generating an income of 408.44 million Philippine pesos (POEA 2007).
Remittance obligation was again stated on the Memorandum Circular, issued in 1983, on the Code of Discipline for Filipino Workers that morally obliges Filipinos employed overseas to provide “ample financial and moral support” to their family remaining in the Philippines. The introduction of mandatory remittance limits, however, spurred protests from home and abroad. President Marcos issued another order in May 1985, abolishing the relevant provisions (Executive Order No. 1021, signed on 1 May 1985). Still, families at home can file cases against migrant workers not sending remittances (Rodriguez, 2002). These migrant workers can be fined or prevented from working overseas again. There is a general agreement that the overseas employment programme was designed as a temporary economic solution of the Marcos regime or a ‘stopgap measure’ (Asis, 1992, Tyner, 2004). However, the citizens’ overseas work became institutionalised into a persistent labour and employment policy of the subsequent governments.

The 1986 People Power ended the Marcos regime, and Corazon Aquino took power (1986-1992). President Aquino, who inherited a poor economy and pressure to pay off all foreign debt obligations, continued her predecessor’s labour migration programme. The Aquino administration’s Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan for 1987-92 states: “Overseas employment will continue to provide interim employment until such time that the domestic economy can generate enough jobs” (quoted in Tyner, 2009, 63). During her term, a more vigorous marketing strategy was pursued. It was observed that annual per capita remittances gradually declined from $US3,026 in 1978 to $US1,819 in 1988 because of increased competition in the
foreign labour market (Vasquez, 1992).\footnote{Noel Vasquez (1992) notes that the Middle East market was dominated by Korean workers earning average monthly wage of some $US700 when Filipino workers entered it in the mid 1970s. The deployment of Filipino workers pushed down monthly wages to $US450 by the early 1980s, and wage levels further dropped to $US250-300 as more other Asian countries sent their workers (Vasquez, 1992).} The Aquino administration focused on penetrating “non-traditional markets” in terms of skills or geography (Tyner, 2004, 39). The marketing division of the POEA developed occupation-specific strategies to diversify the type of worker deployed (Tyner, 2004). During this time, the marketing philosophy was to avoid the stereotyping of Filipino workers abroad, for instance, as domestic workers, that “would jeopardize the POEA’s ability to exploit more fully other labor niches” (Tyner, 2004, 39-40). In the 1970s, a majority of Filipino workers were deployed to oil-producing countries in the Middle East, and most of them were male. However, more and more women migrated to other Asian countries as domestic workers and entertainers in the 1980s (Tyner, 2004, Sayres, n.d.). Another marketing strategy employed by the POEA was to “equip itself with a suitable supply of surplus labor” (Tyner, 2004, 40). This indicates that the overseas employment programme was no longer meant to utilise “Filipino workers in excess of domestic needs” (Article 17, Labor Code) because the POEA aimed at maintaining the pool of ready-to-leave workers.

As more Filipinos crossed borders to work, more abuses were disclosed in the local media.\footnote{By the mid 1980s, women migrants made up a significant portion of the migrant population (Rafael, 2000). In the late 1980s, amidst complaints of abuse and exploitation of Filipino domestic workers overseas, the Aquino administration banned the deployment of domestic workers abroad (Sayres, n.d.). Countries interested in hiring Filipino domestic workers had to negotiate on a country-by-country basis regarding the terms of employment (Sayres, n.d.).} In particular, several cases involving women migrant workers raised questions about the overseas employment programme or what President Fidel Ramos
(1992-98) projected in 1992 as the state’s “strategic development program” (Tyner, 2004, 40) that leads to the exploitation and oppression experienced by its citizens outside its territory. Both the death of Maricis Sioson in 1991 and the hanging of Flor Contemplacion in 1995 challenged the Philippine state’s stand on its citizens’ overseas employment, and forced the state to act on rising concerns for the protection of Filipinos working abroad. The case of Flor Contemplacion in particular left a significant mark in the history of labour migration from the Philippines. Contemplacion, a Filipina domestic worker in Singapore, was sentenced to death for murdering another Filipino domestic worker Delia Maga and a Singaporean boy Nicholas Huang. The case did not come to national attention when she was convicted of murder in May 1991, but rather came to light when some testimonies were published and rumours circulated that Contemplacion was coerced to admit to both murders. The execution went ahead in 1995, despite appeals from President Ramos asking for a delay. When her remains arrived in Manila, thousands of Filipinos gathered to mourn, and President Ramos’ wife Amelita also joined the mourners (Shenon, 1995). The hanging of Contemplacion stirred a national outcry, and inflamed public opinion in the Philippines; it became the rally point for a range of people, from migrant rights advocates to politicians. The Contemplacion case resulted in the creation of the Gancayco Commission, which undertook a fact finding mission on alleged government negligence and the plight of Filipino migrant workers.

74 Maricis Sioson was deployed on an entertainer visa and worked as a dancer in a nightclub in Japan. A few months after her deployment, she was admitted to hospital and died seven days later. The official cause of her death was multiple organ failure arising from fulminant hepatitis. But her remains revealed numerous cuts and bruises. The government’s engagement in deploying entertainers was heavily criticised.

75 See Anne-Marie Hilsdon (2003) for details of the case.
Feeling enormous pressure before elections on 8 May 1995, the Ramos government took steps to enhance the measures concerning the welfare of migrant workers (Gonzalez, 1998). A few months after Contemplacion’s death, the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipino Act or Republic Act No. 8042, also known as the Magna Carta for Migrant Workers, was signed into law in June 1995. The Act declares the state’s role in protecting the rights of citizens outside its territory (Section 2(e)). Using the rhetoric of ‘empowerment’, the Ramos administration emphasised the right of choice and freedom of movement, and the state came to position itself as a mobility facilitator. Because mobility is a natural right, any action to restrain it would be deemed a violation of human rights (Tyner, 2004). James Tyner (2009) argues that by emphasising Filipinos’ right to labour abroad and projecting overseas employment as a way to fulfil their aspirations, the government avoids the criticism that it exports people for foreign currency.

Globalisation, which became a buzzword in the 1990s, also helped the Philippine state re-position itself on the matter of the citizens’ overseas work. Then Labour Secretary Leonardo Quisumbing stated in the 1996 POEA annual report:

Recent development in the global economy such as relocation of production to developing countries offering the most attractive inducements, efforts to integrate economies like European Union, NAFTA, EAGA, AFTA, GATT, etc.; plus the easy access to rapid telecommunication technologies and transportation have accelerated international migration. This is what we call GLOBALIZATION (capital original). (POEA, 1996, 2)

Overseas employment is no longer a stopgap measure or interim employment. Instead, as the then POEA Administrator Felicisimo Joson puts it, “migration is a global phenomenon transcending mere economic boundaries” (POEA, 1996, 3). The state depicted itself as a ‘manager’ of this global phenomenon: Quisumbing claimed
“the role of the governments become more critical than ever” as “a modern world needs transnational movements to oil the wheels of the international economy” (POEA, 1996, 2).

The state’s position on labour migration shifted again when the Arroyo administration (2001-10) made it explicit that overseas employment was to be part of the state’s overall strategy for job creation. As stated in her Mid-Term Philippine Development Plan for 2001-04, overseas employment became,

…a legitimate option for the country’s work force. As such the government shall fully respect labor mobility, including the preference of workers for overseas employment. … Better employment opportunities and modes of engagement in overseas labor markets shall be actively explored and developed, consistent with regional and international commitments and agreements.

The Arroyo administration sought to promote the overseas employment of citizen-workers – especially “highly skilled, knowledge-based workers” – as a “growth strategy” (Go, 2002, 5). In a cabinet meeting on 11 September 2001, the Labour Secretary reported to President Arroyo about the increasing demand for IT and healthcare professionals (Go, 2002). The government also began focusing on enhancing the “competitiveness” of workers to be deployed through technical education and training (Santo Tomas, 2004, 7). The POEA’s efforts to “transform the quality and image” of Filipinos working abroad continued (POEA, 2006b, 10). This transformation was assumed to be achieved by deploying “high skilled workers” (POEA, 2006b, 10). The POEA linked this shift in policy with the Labour Department’s decent work agenda. The POEA and its partners geared up their campaign for Filipino workers to land in “high end/high value” occupations (POEA, 2006b). As the global economic downturn hit some countries in 2008 with reports of layoffs of migrant workers, President Arroyo signed an administrative order
instructing the POEA to shift its focus from regulation to “full-blast” marketing efforts to develop new overseas job markets for Filipinos (Section 1, Administrative Order No. 247, signed on 4 December 2008). She directed the POEA to craft “aggressive overseas employment strategies” that would help the Philippines “break through the 200-country barrier” in terms of countries hosting Filipino workers (Section 5). The POEA was also ordered to map locations that offer job opportunities or identify “Code Green” countries with a high demand for foreign labour (Section 2). In relation to this, the President also directed the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) to recast its priorities in line with the POEA’s efforts by intensifying its skills retraining and skills upgrading programme.\textsuperscript{76}

\textit{INTEREST GROUPS & CONTINUAL LABOUR SUPPLY TO THE WORLD}

A number of scholars have examined the structural factors that underpinned the steady increase in the number of Filipino workers deployed globally (Guevarra, 2010, Rodriguez, 2010). Both Guevarra and Rodriguez stressed the active roles played by the state in brokering the overseas employment of Filipino workers. A decade ago, Graziano Basttistella (1999, 231) rightly pointed out that “when the outflow of workers reaches over 700,000 and the remittances collected through official channels are a huge 5.7 billion as in 1997 … it is impossible to consider the government as a neutral observer”. Government officials themselves acknowledged in the early 1990s that the overseas employment programme served political interests: The assistant Director-General of the National Economic Development Authority considered that

\textsuperscript{76} A major thrust of the TESDA, established in 1994, is the “formulation of a comprehensive development plan for middle-level manpower based on the National Technical Education and Skills Development Plan” (The TESDA website: \url{http://www.tesda.gov.ph}).
migration eased social tensions caused by professionals’ dissatisfaction with their career opportunities at home (Asis, 1992). Robyn Rodriguez (2010, xviii) also argues that Philippine presidents “have offered up the promise of employment (albeit overseas) during the bleakest economic crises to calm citizens’ growing anxieties about job prospects”. The government has contributed to increasing the deployment of citizens overseas by intensifying marketing efforts. Since 1984, the Labour Department has deployed labour attachés tasked to gather information on employment opportunities in other economies. Marketing missions have also been sent to other countries. The government’s direct involvement with foreign organisations to “ensure a favourable intake of Filipino workers”, indicates that government action has impacted on the outflow of people (Battistella, 1999, 231).

Considering that the success of the government’s overseas employment programme is reliant on the performance of Filipino labour deployed, the government tries to maintain a ‘good image’ of Filipino migrant workers. In order to do so, the government has assumed a paternal role in disciplining its citizens. The Code of Discipline issued in 1983 is a good example of the state attempt to exercise disciplinary power over its citizens outside its territorial boundaries (Memorandum Circular No. 4). The POEA attributed the issuance of the Code of Discipline to:

…the increasing complaints for misbehaviour and the involvement by some Filipino contract workers in felonies while working overseas, and in order to preserve the image of Filipino contract workers as responsible, hardworking, industrious, and dependable (Memorandum Circular No. 4)

The Code of Discipline states, among others, the “duties” of Filipino migrant workers to their employers: that is, to “strive to maintain a high level of productivity” (Section 1, Memorandum Circular No. 4). In order to attract foreign investment, the Marcos administration did “the discursive marketing of an ‘internationally attractive
labor force”, i.e., a cheap and docile work force prevented from forming unions or going on strike” (Tyner, 2009, 50). The Philippine government applied the same logic to make Filipino labour favoured by foreign employers (Rodriguez, 2010). It is also the government policy to ensure “careful selection of Filipino workers for overseas employment in order to protect the good name of the Philippines abroad” (Article 12, Labour Code).

The POEA, as an organisation, also has its own agenda to improve its performance. When I visited the POEA one day in October 2009, a number of brand new TV screens were showing the total number of deployed OFWs in the previous year as well as the top ten destination countries. The POEA publishes its ‘performance highlights’ or ‘achievements’ in its annual reports, which feature the numbers of contracts processed and citizens deployed through the POEA in the year past. Since its inception, the POEA has tried to reduce the processing and evaluation time and the number of documents required.77 Today the POEA manages to process thousands of people for overseas employment each day. For instance, an average of 6,696 documents were processed daily in 2005 (POEA, 2005).

There are other factors that make possible the continual global demand for, and supply of, Filipino workers. In Marketing Dreams, Manufacturing Heroes, Anna Guevarra (2010) examines the ways in which recruitment agencies broker the overseas employment of Filipina nurses and domestics. During the first few years of its overseas employment programme, the government did not allow the private sector to participate because, as Asis (1992, 92) argues, it did not predict the foreign  

77 The Administration also introduced the ‘e-Submit facility’ that processes the OFW contracts submitted by recruitment agencies in five minutes per contract (POEA, 2005).
demand for Filipino workers. However, the unexpectedly high demand for Filipino labour resulted in a situation in which the government alone was incapable of fulfilling the intermediary role. To adequately supply labour to the world, the Marcos regime, through Presidential Decree No. 1412 (signed on 9 June 1978), formally ended the government’s monopoly on labour supply and allowed the private sector to participate in facilitating overseas employment (Tyner, 2004). The decree ushered a public-private sector partnership in institutionalised labour migration. The former assumed regulatory functions, while the latter focused on day-to-day recruitment and placement activities (Tyner, 2004). Although the state imposes strict regulations on recruitment agencies, the agencies claim that they are not the state’s enemies but partners (Guevarra, 2010). They participate in the discursive and non-discursive construction of Filipinos as ideal workers (Guevarra, 2010). This practice is very similar to the state’s efforts to maintain the image of Filipino workers abroad.

The survival of recruitment agencies also relies on the willingness of Filipinos to work abroad, so the agencies also instil “the notion that the promise of the good life is outside the Philippines (emphasis original)” (Guevarra, 2010). In relation to this, it is also noticeable that a ‘culture of migration’ has also emerged in the Philippines (Asis, 2006). A nationwide survey of 1,200 adult respondents in 2002 found that one in five Filipinos expressed a desire to migrate (Asis, 2006). Another nationwide survey in 2003, found that 47 percent of children ages 10 to 12 polled, reported their wish to work abroad in the future (Asis, 2006). The Philippines’ case clearly shows that it is not poverty or underdevelopment alone that induces migration.
3.3 **OFWs Embodying the Nation of Today & Tomorrow**

OFW is perhaps one of the most frequently heard acronyms in the Philippines. It is used regularly in daily newspapers and pamphlets distributed in shopping malls and on TV and radio. The Philippine state has discursively inculcated OFWs’ shared characteristics as performing special roles in the country’s development processes. In the context of massive out-migration of workers, some scholars and civil society actors have suggested that the benefits of citizens’ overseas employment be maximised for development. In other words, OFWs came to embody the Philippine nation of today and tomorrow.

*Manufacturing OCWs/OFWs*

Filipinos doing overseas work are moulded into OFWs in a number of ways. The aforementioned RA 8042 defines a “migrant worker” as “a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a state of which he or she is not a legal resident to be used interchangeably with *overseas Filipino worker* (emphasis added)” (Section 3, RA 8042). Filipinos deployed overseas through the state-facilitated labour migration programme were initially called Overseas Contract Workers (OCWs) because of the temporary or contract-based nature of their employment. With the introduction of RA 8042 in 1995, Filipinos employed overseas became designated as OFWs. The POEA (1995, 3) explains the introduction of a new label:

…destroy[ed] the image of workers as mere contractors that brought in much-needed dollars and affirmed them as Filipinos who had to enjoy the government’s protection and, moreso, its counsel.
The OFW tag is used throughout the cycle of overseas employment, from departure to return. Filipinos seeking overseas jobs are subject to the approval of the POEA. Name hires, a term used to describe Filipinos who have acquired jobs without the assistance of local recruitment agencies or the POEA, still need to get ‘certified’. Once certified, they can avail themselves of travel tax and terminal fee exemptions at the airport. As soon as they enter the POEA building to get their job offers approved, Filipinas and Filipinos begin to be categorised as OFWs. They are asked to fill a form called ‘OFW Information Sheet’. This form, used by three agencies POEA, the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) and PhilHealth, asks for personal details and contract particulars. Outside the POEA building, I saw dozens of people lined up along the narrow pavement distributing leaflets that contain information about OFW and seaman loan services. Handing out the leaflets, they asked me: “OFW ka ba”? (Are you an OFW?)

The Labor Assistance Centers (LACs) located at the international airports serves as the final checkpoint for departing Filipino citizen-workers. Prior to departure, they have to get ‘cleared’ by the LAC on whether they are properly documented or whether they possess the Overseas Employment Certificate (OEC) or their OEC is genuine. The establishment of the LAC was attributed to the “unscrupulous activities

78 A name hire refers to “a worker who is able to secure an overseas employment opportunity with an employer without the assistance or participation of any agency” (POEA Rules and Regulations on Recruitment and Employment, Part I, Rule II).

79 In July 1986, the President signed Executive Order No. 25 that granted exemption from the payment of the travel tax to workers with employment contracts duly certified by the government.

80 The OWWA is an agency attached to the Department of Labor and Employment and tasked to protect and promote the welfare and wellbeing of OFWs and their dependents. The Welfare Fund for Overseas Workers (WelfareFund) was created in May 1977 to “protect the interest and well-being of Filipino OCWs and their families and dependents” (Asis, 1992, 73). The WelfareFund was restructured and renamed as the OWWA in 1987.
of individuals who victimize innocent persons seeking overseas employment” (POEA, 1984, 21). In 1999, the LAC at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) denied clearance to 282 Filipinos, who either lacked documentation or were found to have inconsistencies or discrepancies in their documents (POEA, 1999). Even with overseas job offers it is not easy for Filipinos to leave the country unless they have their job offers ‘cleared’ by the state regulatory system. In order to facilitate mobility, in March 2008, the POEA scraped the LAC’s function of verifying the OEC. However, the government has been pressured to restore the LAC’s role due to an alleged increase in the cases of human trafficking and illegal recruitment (Mamanglu, 2009). From March 2011, departing Filipino workers again have to pass through LAC for verification (POEA, 2011). The government also tightened their watch over ‘tourist workers’. The Bureau of Immigration tries to screen Filipinos posing as tourists but actually leaving to find work in other countries. In early 2008, Immigration Commissioner Marcelino Libanan said that many of these tourist workers managed to get past the immigration counters because they were escorted by airport workers who collaborated with “illegal recruiters and human traffickers” (GMA News, 2008). Bureau of Immigration spokesman lawyer Floro Balato said that the suspected tourist workers barred from leaving the country in 2007 were bound for Singapore, Dubai and Hong Kong (GMA News, 2008). More than 20,000 ‘tourist workers’ were stopped at the NAIA from August to December in 2010 (GMA News, 2011).

John, one of my research participants, searched for an overseas job online, and was interviewed by his first Singaporean employer over the phone. He travelled to Singapore in 1998 as a ‘tourist’ with a job offer. Because he presented himself as a tourist, the Philippine Immigration checked whether he had enough money to travel.
Being aware of this practice, his employer lent him $US1,000, so John was able to pass the Immigration in the Philippines. He returned the money to his employer upon arrival in Singapore. Another respondent Gerard migrated to Singapore as a tourist to seek work because he had an assurance that it would not be difficult for him to find a job. At the time, he was well aware that this is not a legitimate way of finding a job abroad: “I flew to Singapore as a tourist. I am not supposed to do that, but (he laughs)”.

Despite these strict border control measures, many Filipinos arrive in Singapore as tourists, and then look for jobs. Online forums for Filipinos in Singapore, such as PinoySG, provide a venue for Filipinos to share information on how to land a job in Singapore. On PinoySG, people discuss how to deal with Philippines border control. Those who secured jobs while in Singapore can get their employment contracts verified and registered with the Philippine Overseas Labour Office (POLO) and purchase OWWA membership at the Philippine Embassy in Singapore.\(^\text{81}\) OWWA membership costs $S43 and is renewable every two years.\(^\text{82}\) An OFW who “is on vacation or on leave and is returning to the same employer within six months from arrival in the Philippines”, named as Balik-Manggagawa (Worker-on-leave), also needs to get the exit clearance when he or she returns to the employer.

\(^\text{81}\) “Those whose employment contracts were not processed with the POEA or subsequently verified and registered on-site by the POLO” are classified as ‘irregular/undocumented Filipino migrant workers’ under Rule II, Section 1 (u5) of the Omnibus Rules and Regulations Implementing Republic Act No. 10022.

\(^\text{82}\) OWWA members are entitled to medical, disability and death benefits and financial assistance for education and training.
The deployment of land-based and sea-based workers has been on an upward trend since the 1970s. Parallel with the increase in the number of migrant workers, the flow of remittances also continued to increase (see Figure 3.1). In the Philippine context, “migration is synonymous to remittances and one cannot be discussed without the other” (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2008a, 5).

In recognition of migrant workers generating the country’s much needed foreign exchange, in 1987 President Aquino declared the last week of March of every year as “Overseas Filipino Contract Workers’ Week” (Proclamation No. 91, signed on 18 March 1987). In the following year, President Aquino gave a speech to a group of domestic workers in Hong Kong (Rafael, 2000). In her speech, she nationalised their labour by saying: “Kayo po ang mga bagong bayani” (“You are the new heroes”) (quoted in Rafael, 2000, 211). The making of heroes and heroines became intensified under the Ramos administration. In 1993, the POEA launched ‘Pamaskong Handog sa OCW’ (Christmas offering for OCW) as a way of manifesting the government’s “appreciation to the contributions of the OCWs to the country” (POEA, 1993, 23). President Ramos welcomed Filipino workers coming home for Christmas holidays at the airport. They also received special cash prizes, promotional products and gift items. Special care was given to their baggage. They also had easy access on their way out of the airport. In a speech marking the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Philippine Islands after the Contemplacion case, President Ramos said:

83 In 1988 President Aquino declared December as “The Month of Overseas Filipinos” (Proclamation No. 276, signed on 21 June 1988).
I also would like to pay tribute and render honor to a new kind of Filipino hero, who are our overseas workers (emphasis added). … Today the body of one such heroine is coming home, and I refer to the late Mrs. Flor Contemplacion. … The death of your beloved Flor will not be in vain. (quoted in Shenon, 1995)

Figure 3.1 Remittances, 1975-2005

Source: The statistics from Asis (2007)

Note: Amount is in $US (in millions)

In analysing government documents published after the Contemplacion case, Tyner (2004) argues that the state moved away from the construction of migrant workers as the country’s heroes and heroines. Instead, the state began to frame migration as “an essential feature of one’s identity” and therefore, denying individuals “from acting upon these ‘natural drives’ would be a violation of human rights” (Tyner, 2004, 47). However, the government, in fact, continued to reinforce such construction in a multitude of ways. At the NAIA, there is a lounge exclusively for OFWs. There is also a special lane for OFWs at the immigration check point. The year 2000 was declared as the Year of the OFWs (Presidential Proclamation No. 243, signed on 8 February 2000) because they are the “real heroes and heroines of the new millennium”
In her speech during the Bagong Bayani Awarding Ceremonies in June 2001, President Arroyo (2001) stated: “In fact, in several instances when the economy had a foreign exchange crisis, the consistent dollar inflows from our OCWs saved the economy from collapsing (emphasis added)”. She continued that the billions of dollars had “built homes, sent children to school, and started small businesses” (Arroyo, 2001). NGO workers and scholars also participated in this construction. For instance, journalist-turned-activist Jeremaiah Opiniano (2004, 16) claimed: “Filipino migrants have long saved the economy through their remittances, as the country contributes to reel due to the lack of foreign exchange (emphasis added)”. Economist Aniceto Orbeta (2008) begins his review of the literature on the economic impact of remittances on household welfare in the Philippines by calling attention to the enormous portion of remittances that take up in the country’s economy:85

Remittance inflow is estimated to be 14.4 US dollars in 2007 or about 9 percent of GNP (Bangko Sental ng Pilipinas). This is clearly understated given the extent of flows through the informal channels. This is also bigger than the contribution of many traditional industries. As an offer of gratitude for their help in keeping the economy afloat in times of economic crises, overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) are often officially referred to as modern heroes.

A number of studies have highlighted the significance of remittances in the Philippine economy (Stahl et al., 1986, Stahl, 1988, Rodriguez, 1996, Burgess et al.,

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84 The Medium Term Philippine Development Plan (1999-2004) mapped out by the Joseph Estrada administration also notes: “remittances from the OFWs accounted for 7.2 percent of GNP in 1998. This was about 16.7 percent of total export earnings for the same year”.

85 Orbeta (2008) pays special attention to the methodologies used by the past studies using large scale nationally representative datasets, and points out that the conflicting findings of these studies may result from differences in methodologies that are valid only under specific assumptions.
2005), providing good reasons for the construction of OFWs as heroes and heroines. By continuously sending money to the Philippines, OFWs have become a binding force for the Philippine nationhood.

**EMBODIMENT OF THE ‘STATE-CENTRED’ DEVELOPMENT PROJECT**

Scholars acknowledged the positive effects of labour migration, such as employment generation and foreign exchange earnings. They further argued that the societal (read, national) benefits of the citizens’ overseas work should be ‘maximised’ and explored the ways to do so (Vasquez, 1992, Asis, 2008) as a significant number of citizens continued to be deployed overseas through the state-sponsored programme. As a matter of fact, the Philippine state has not actively linked the citizens’ overseas work with its development planning. However, persistent labour migration from the Philippines has resulted in a situation in which different actors – local and international – are encouraged to think about the ways through which the societal benefits of labour migration could be maximised. As a labour mobility facilitator, the Philippine state certainly has benefited from the (potential) positive linkages constructed between the citizens’ overseas work and development issues in the Philippines that, in turn, provide the legitimacy of the overseas employment programme. In this regard, I would argue that OFWs embody the ‘state-centred’ development project.

Thirty years ago Abella (1979, 57) noted that: “One of the benefits that can be expected from sending our workers overseas is that they get exposed to and eventually acquire familiarity with technologies and forms of organization which may be superior to ours”. By then there were no studies carried out on return migration in the Philippine context. Abella (1979) cited Suzanne Paine’s study (1974)
on Turkish migrant workers that challenges the prevailing assumption about new skills acquisition through migrant workers. Nevertheless, Abella (1979, 58) still argued: “A priori, the expectation is that exposure to other cultures and other technologies, leads to acquisition of new skills and knowledge which in the long, if not in the short run, will benefit the rest of society”. In other words, individuals’ overseas work was constructed in such a way that it was interconnected with the country’s economic development. Empirical studies conducted to test the hypothesis, on the positive linkage between migration and development through improvement in the human capital stock, showed contradictory findings. A survey conducted by the Institute of Labor and Manpower Studies in 1982-83 shows that a majority of worker-respondents did not acquire new skills while abroad although amongst the seamen respondents, more than half claimed that they did (Editorial, 1995). In her study of people having returned from overseas work in Metro Manila, Stella Go (1985) also tested the same hypothesis. Many of her 59 respondents “had upgraded at least one of the skills”, but they were not able to apply what they had learnt while abroad (Go, 1985, 14). She called attention to the economic reintegration of citizen-workers returning from their overseas work to ‘maximise’ the gains of labour migration “for the worker, his family, and Philippine society as a whole” (Go, 1985, 22). The engagement of the state with the citizens’ overseas work was further encouraged. The citizens’ employment, beyond the territorial boundaries of state authority, entered into Philippine national development narratives. As the number of citizens who have completed their contracts increased in the 1980s, the government needed to respond to their return. The government launched a formal programme in the late 1980s to assist the reintegration of returning migrant workers by providing credit and technical assistance (Borja, 1999). In consideration of the observation that
returning workers shifted their occupations from the industry to service sector, Vasquez (1992) suggested developing programmes for channelling remittances into production, for instance, small manufacturing activities, because such activities would generate employment opportunities locally.

In the early 1990s, local actors stressed the importance of industrialisation as a path to economic development (Asis, 1992). President Ramos launched the Philippines 2000 initiative, which exhibits the government’s drive towards Newly Industrialised Country-hood or “Tigerhood” or becoming like neighbouring Asian countries, such as Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan. The Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) gave priority to the science and technology sector in this endeavour. In 1993, President Ramos ordered to revive the Balik Scientist Program (BSP) as part of its industrialisation efforts under the Department of Science and Technology (Executive Order No. 130, signed on 30 January 1987). Prior to the Contemplacion case and the passage of RA 8042, President Ramos tried to integrate the overseas employment programme into his vision for the newly industrialised Philippines. In an issue of Overseas Employment Info Series published in 1992, President Ramos was quoted as saying: “Overseas employment remains a strategic development program of our government” and “the overseas employment program is a major pillar of national development” (quoted in Tyner, 2009, 67). The Philippine development research sector also considered the return of workers with

86 The Philippines launched the BSP in 1975 with the issuance of Presidential Decree No. 819 as a “mechanism for countering the brain drain phenomenon” (The BSP homepage: http://bsp.dost.gov.ph). The decree aimed to “attract foreign-based Filipino scientists to … contribute their share in the building of a New Society” (quoted in King, 1987, 112). The BSP lasted for about a decade until 1986. Department of Science and Technology Secretary Estrella Alabastro said that response to the programme was not very enthusiastic. By 1987 a total of two hundred Filipinos came under the programme (King, 1987, 114).
enhanced skills as the potential gain of labour migration: “Once the workers come back, they have the chance to use these advanced skills in their home country” (Editorial, 1995, 2). The PIDS suggested in 1995 that the overseas employment programme be transformed into a “major element in the country’s overall capital and skills formation program” (Editorial, 1995). The PIDS constructed the employment of citizens abroad as a ‘national’ (human resource) development issue by suggesting overseas employment,

…should not only be a source of higher incomes and savings for workers. It should also be a means for upgrading the country’s manpower and industrial base including the acquisition and accumulation of technologies. (Editorial, 1995, 3)

Similarly, while emphasising the need to accelerate the skills development of workers in order for the Philippines to become another ‘tiger’, then PIDS President Ponciano Intal (1995, 30) argued:

…we can use the factory jobs of our overseas contract workers especially in South Korea, Taiwan and Japan as part of the country’s aggressive skills development program. What is needed then is a well-designed program rather than the current ad hoc approach. … The government can support tie-ups with South Korean (or for that matter, Taiwanese and Japanese) firms in a modified form of “dualtech” training (where the training is conducted abroad). This can be a part of the South Korean or Taiwanese or Japanese official development assistance program for the Philippines.

According to this discursive construction, citizens in technology-related fields of work carry an additional meaning to their work outside the country: It is not simply their income earning activity but also the country’s development project. The PIDS also claimed that the Philippine “should position itself in such a way that it can deploy more OCWs in the high end of the skills spectrum” (Editorial, 1995, 4). Therefore, it seems clear to policy advisors which groups can contribute most to the country’s endeavour towards becoming an Asian Tiger. Considering the increasing
number of women workers deployed in the 1980s as domestic workers and entertainers, this proposal implied the need for the Philippine government intervention. The PIDS (1995, 15) notes:

…only a small percentage of these [the Philippines’ huge labour force] are highly skilled and have the capacity to steer the country toward NIC-hood. Lest Filipinos will be known forever to the rest of the world as “good” housemaids and entertainers, there is a need to arm the labor force with the right skills, knowledge and priorities.

Also, it was pinpointed as the challenge for the government to provide the conditions that “will maximize the skills gains” of returnees (Editorial, 1995, 15). On the very same year, it was announced with the passage of RA 8042 that “the State does not promote overseas employment as a means to sustain economic growth and achieve national development” while “recognizing the significant contribution of Filipino migrant workers to the national economy through their foreign exchange remittances” (Section 2(c), RA 8042). The state declared that its overseas employment programme was not a development programme. Nonetheless, the state continues to utilise any positive societal changes involving the citizens having been employed outside the territorial boundaries of the Philippines as a way of legitimising its overseas employment programme. For instance, the Medium Term Philippine Development Plan (1999-2004) notes: “Gains from international labor migration in the form of technology and skills transfer are also noted” (Chapter 7, I, C.).

When the financial crisis in 1997 hit many countries in Asia, a large number of Filipino migrant workers were forced to return to the Philippines. The issue of reintegration emerged as an important social issue. By then studies had indicated the difficulties facing returnees in finding jobs where they could use their skills acquired abroad because of limited economic opportunities and low wages in the Philippines
(Asis, 1992). In her study of labour migration in four occupational groups (seamen, production/construction workers, domestic helpers, and entertainers), Edita Tan (1993) also questioned the usefulness and value of training received by migrant workers abroad to the Philippine economy. Policy advisors showed interest in the alternative income generating activities of Filipinos having returned from overseas work, and entrepreneurship became a key issue in policy discussions. In the late 1990s, the ILO commissioned a series of studies on return migration, and facilitated the discussions. For instance, a study commissioned by the ILO and conducted by the International Catholic Migration Commission (1998, viii) stated:

…it with some support, they can … contribute to the development efforts of the country through wise investment of their savings, engaging in business ventures and creating jobs, utilizing knowledge and skills learned overseas to improve technology and systems, and participate in political activities because of their increased social fluency and self-confidence.

The government continued to be urged to engage more in the reintegration processes of returning migrant workers in order “to capitalize” on their strength (International Catholic Migration Commission, 1998, viii). The practices that link returning citizens’ activities with national development issues further strengthen the government’s overseas employment programme.

In the early 2000s, the migration-development relationship gained academic and policy interest across the globe (Martin et al., 2001, 2002, Ratha, 2003); The International Migration published a special issue on migration and development (Gammeltoft, 2002, Gundel, 2002, Jazayery, 2002, Nyberg-Sørensen et al., 2002). Actors in the Philippines also corresponded to this global agenda. In 2003, for example, local actors discussed relevant issues in the forum entitled ‘Overseas
Filipinos as Part of the National Development Agenda’. During the forum, then Labour Secretary Santo Tomas (2004, 8) argued:

To my mind, the OFW are part and parcel of the national development agenda insofar as they are, in a lot of ways, agents of development, mainly for themselves, and secondly for the country. … Their involvement in overseas employment … is meant to be an “enabling” tool to help them act on their own choice … a choice to remain relevant in national development. … And lastly, it has empowered them professionally, enabling them to acquire information and skills that the government is keen on harnessing under its reintegration program.

In this construction, the welfare of (former) citizens and that of the Philippine nation are interconnected through their employment outside the country. The governing elites also began to show greater interest in the potential of Filipino migrant workers as investors. Senator Manny Villar, President of the Nacionalista Party and Chairman of the Senate Committee on Finance, was quoted as saying that: “Imagine what this huge amount of money from OFWs can do to our country’s economy if they would be invested into business ventures? The amount would multiply even more” (Philippine Senate, 2006). His Overseas Filipino Investment Bill intended to encourage migrant workers “to save, invest and engage in business ventures that would translate their hard-earned money into more economic gains for their country” or to become overseas Filipino investors (Philippine Senate, 2006).

The global interest in making migration work for development has positively affected the Philippine state’s position on its citizens’ overseas work. The Philippine state has shared its experience with other countries in state-led forums. In sharing his experience of reintegration of migrant workers, in the expert meeting on ‘Maximizing the Development Impact of Remittances’ organised by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in February 2011, National
Reintegration Center for OFWs (NRCO) Deputy Director Saul de Vries (2011, 5) argued that the return of migrants should,

…help contribute in the national development agenda. Thus, the government’s reintegration program is anchored on encouraging migrants and their families to venture into productive and sustainable economic undertakings that emphasize on wealth creation and make the migrants stay home and keep the family integrated and, at the same time, help stimulate economic activities in local communities.

He explains that this requires the government to change migrant workers’ “traditional mindsets and behaviours” (De Vries, 2011, 10). Because “Filipinos are not entrepreneurial and have low consciousness on the importance of savings and investments”, he stresses the importance of a stronger advocacy on financial management (De Vries, 2011, 10). As the previous discussion shows, Filipino people of origin having worked outside the country and coming back to the Philippines, regardless of their educational backgrounds or skills, are all seen as ‘returnees’, most of whom are (former) OFWs, embodying the state-centred – not necessarily the state-led – development project. While the government gets involved in the ‘entire’ cycle of labour migration, the citizens’ overseas work continues to serve as an essential ingredient for the national discourse on development.

3.4 CONCLUSION

In the Philippine context, overseas work can never be an individual affair because it has been pursued as a government policy/programme for the last three decades: It is a national story linked up with ‘development’. The overseas employment programme was designed, in the 1970s, as a temporary economic solution. However, after many years of development, the citizens’ overseas work became institutionalised into a persistent labour and employment policy of subsequent governments. Many actors –
local and international – have acknowledged the positive effects of the citizens’ overseas employment on the Philippines and participated in making it work for development. As a mobility facilitator, the Philippine state is the primary beneficiary of this particular discourse. In crossing borders, Filipino citizen-workers come to symbolise the Philippine nation envisioned by the State.
CHAPTER 4 THE BRAIN DRAIN FROM THE PHILIPPINES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The citizens of the Philippines, departing to work abroad, are grouped together by the OFW label and they get their employment contracts processed by the POEA. The Philippine state has discursively inculcated their shared characteristics as ‘heroes’ and ‘heroines’ who have also become the constituents of national development narratives. However, these constructions are imperfect because of the opinions and voices of people challenging them. The state’s decades-long overseas employment programme has raised concerns about what is known as the brain drain. This chapter provides the historical development of the brain drain discourse in the Philippines, and illustrates some patterns of its reproduction. It also examines the brain drain discourse pertaining to two sectors selected for this study.

4.2 THE ORIGIN OF THE BRAIN DRAIN DISCOURSE

Before the state-sponsored overseas employment programme was introduced, the out-migration from the Philippines was dominated by those going to the US as permanent settlers. Economist Ernesto Pernia (1976) noted that Filipino professionals responded vigorously to the changes in the US immigration policy in the 1960s. According to Amelita King (1987), Philippine public interest in the issue of brain drain existed as early as 1967, after the then Senator Rodolfo Ganzon’s visit to the US. This corresponded to the time when the brain drain was hotly debated in academic and policy circles as discussed in the Introduction and Chapter 1. The former Senator was shocked at the great number of Filipino medical personnel in the US. Filipinos also migrated to Australia after the liberalisation of Australian
immigration policy in 1966 (Gupta, 1973). Settler migration to the US continued in the 1970s, while an increasing number of workers were deployed overseas – mainly to the Middle East – through the state programme. Political repression during the martial law period (1972-81) led to exile migration mostly to the US by political figures opposed to President Marcos, and many middle-class Filipinos also migrated to settle in the US (Asis, 2007).

In this context, discussion began in the late 1970s over the relationship between the out-migration of labour from the Philippines and the domestic labour market and economy. Pernia (1976) argues that the “brain drain problem” needs to be qualified because in the case of the Philippines the domestic supply of professionals outruns the country’s economic capacity. However, Pernia (1976, 71) warns about the possible loss of what Albert Hirschman (1958) calls ‘binding agents’ or people with “rare creative and entrepreneurial attributes” who “might have significantly contributed to the development effort had they not emigrated”. Pernia (1976) suggests that the out-migration of professionals can be managed through an education and training policy that directs itself to the society’s actual needs and a manpower policy that tries to match supply with demand. A few years later, by the early 1980s, Richard Joyce and his associates (1982) wrote about the interdependence of Philippine and US nurse markets. Joyce and his co-authors (1982, 1232-1233) referred to Portes’ (1976) thesis on the brain drain to caution that “there may be real problems” behind the emigration of nurses, although they claimed that these problems “do not seem to be insuperable” because “Philippine schools can easily turn out a few thousand graduates a year for the American market and can do so without necessarily depleting the supply of nurses at work in the Philippines”.


Unlike the Filipinos migrating as permanent settlers, the Filipino workers deployed through the state programme were destined to return to the Philippines upon the completion of their contracts. So, at first glance their migration had little association with the brain drain interpreted as the permanent loss of citizen-workers. In addition as discussed, the overseas employment programme was meant for Filipino workers “in excess of domestic needs” (Article 17, Labour Code). The state-facilitated citizens’ employment outside the country was rather “presumed to improve the stock of human capital, as workers returned with skills acquired from abroad” and “expected to promote Philippine development” (Tyner, 2004, 32). As such, a distinction was made between the two streams of labour migration – settler migration, frequently translated into the permanent loss of skills, and contract labour migration. However, it was realised during the debate, on the impact that the population movements had on the domestic labour market, that this permanent/temporary difference became less significant. A few years into the overseas employment programme, Filipino economist Abella (1979) questioned whether the Philippines would be able to sustain the high level of the out-migration of ‘professionals and technical workers’ – used by him interchangeably with ‘skilled labour’ – by noting that:

…our domestic economy may be seriously affected by the exodus of our skilled workers. There are already growing complaints from some industries that their productivity has suffered from the loss of skilled workers who took years to acquire their skills. (Abella, 1979, 21)

Important questions emerged included: who leaves for overseas work and how the labour market functions in the context of institutionalised labour migration. A majority of worker-respondents, who participated in a survey conducted by the Institute of Labor and Manpower Studies in 1982-83, claimed that their former
employers did not have difficulty looking for replacements (Editorial, 1995). In contrast, another study carried out in 1983 indicated that the Philippine economy, particularly the construction industry, suffered a scarcity of certain skills (Editorial, 1995). The latter study also noted the shortages of accountants, physicians and architects. Facing complaints from industries employing telecommunications technicians, petrochemical workers and aviation maintenance workers, the government announced in 1983 a policy to require workers in ‘critical’ occupations to obtain clearances from their present employers before their contracts are processed (Fernandez et al., 1987). The state indicated the possibility of future measures to control the labour mobility that it had facilitated. The vulnerability of the domestic labour market and economy created tension within the state’s overseas employment programme.

4.3 The Re-production of the Brain Drain Discourse

In the Philippine context, in which a broad range of people temporarily or permanently emigrate, the term brain drain has been liberally used, often in confusion. Some scholars used it as a particular migration category to refer to the migration of “professional and technical workers” (Zosa et al., 2009, 30). Victorina Zora and Aniceto Orbeta also (2009, 5) referred to the brain drain interchangeably with “skilled worker migration”. When the brain drain is defined as a certain migration category, there are the “losses and gains” of the brain drain (Zosa et al., 2009, 3). The brain drain suddenly carries another meaning when Zosa and Orbeta (2009, 5, 8) write: “depending on the individual and social calculation of costs and benefits, this might not pose much of a brain drain problem” and “[t]he literature cites mixed brain drain effects of the migration of nurses” (Zosa et al., 2009, 8). It is
not clear what Zosa and Orbeta meant by the brain drain in such contexts, but certainly it carries a negative meaning from the national perspective. Some authors make a temporary/permanent distinction, and use the term to describe the permanent settlement of a certain group of people, for instance, ‘professionals’, outside the Philippines. In particular, Jovi Dacanay and Maria Rodolfo (2005, 25) note: “The risk of brain drain starts to happen when these professionals get married and decide to live in other countries”. In the following pages, I will demonstrate the ways in which the brain drain claim has persistently has served as a potential threat to the overseas employment programme and the harmonised construction of OFWs as heroes and heroines.

When Corazon Aquino was elected as President of the Philippines, international organisations, such as the UNESCO and the ILO, commissioned studies to review the Philippines’ overseas employment programme. In 1987, the UNESCO published an edited volume entitled *Migration of Talent: Causes and Consequences of Brain Drain*. This research project covered three countries in Asia including the Philippines. King (1987, 111) notes:

> Loss of critical skills is an issue that has been raised against the promotion of overseas employment. Critical shortages have, in fact, occurred particularly in areas where specialized training is required for proficiency. Hardest hit were those involved in petrochemical operations, civil aviation, telecommunications, computers and culinary arts.

King (1987) investigated the labour market conditions of some professions based on her consultations with selected professional organisations. With respect to nursing

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87 Selected professions include mechanical engineers, electrical engineers, chemical engineers, agricultural engineers, physicians, nurses and geologists.
in particular, King (1987, 99) claimed despite the ‘oversupply’ of nurses that “it is the good, experienced and highly specialized nurses who are being lost to other countries”. Predictably, however, officials of government agencies interviewed by King (1987) held the view that the migration of professionals benefited the Philippines because it eased unemployment especially in areas of oversupply and their foreign exchange earnings were valuable to the country. Fernandez and her associates (1987) also identified skills critical to the Philippines, and asked local companies to what extent they were affected by the loss of workers with such skills and how they coped with it. This ILO-funded study is conceptually framed by Abella’s (1979) observation that the loss of skills that are hard to replace may damage the domestic economy through a reduction in productivity. In their introductory chapter, Fernandez and her co-authors (1987, 8-9) note: “companies experiencing high rates of resignation due to overseas employment may suffer heavy losses in output as they find difficulty in seeking replacements at prevailing market wages”. They attempted to address the concern of those wary of the government’s overseas employment programme:

The advocates for regulation stressed the policy that overseas employment was meant to mop up only those skills which were in excess of domestic demand. What is happening, they added, is a creaming-off process which initially makes Philippine industries a training ground for overseas employment. (Fernandez et al., 1987, 2)

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88 One fourth of the registered nurses were reported to be unemployed or employed in occupations other than nursing.

89 They focused on aviation maintenance technicians, electricians, engineers, heavy-equipment operators, nurses, ship-repair technicians, and telecommunication technicians. These skills, according to the author, “have a heavy outflow either in absolute numbers or relative to the domestic market, and which are ‘costly’ to replace, in both the monetary outlays for training and the time it takes to acquire skills, either through formal schooling or through experience and on-the-job training” (Fernandez et al., 1987, 12).
The study respondents were asked the extent to which they were affected by the loss of skills. They reported that it was easy to find replacements for the outgoing labour force. Although they also noted that departing workers were senior and more experienced, such as head nurses and supervisors, who would be valuable training resources. In addition, it was reported that the workers who left for overseas offers generally had qualifications which were better than those of their replacements. The two studies were published on the same year when President Aquino proclaimed OFWs as ‘new heroes’. As such, the construction of heroes and heroines carries within it inconsistency.

The Mid-Term Development Plan for 1993-98 set out by the Ramos administration considered overseas employment as “an alternative source of employment opportunities”. But President Ramos was also cautious about the domestic needs of skills in consideration of the scholarly debate on the brain drain (Abella, 1979, Fernandez et al., 1987, King, 1987), by adding that “provided that this does not result in an undue drain in scientific/technical expertise and locally needed and middle-level skills”. This demonstrates the vulnerability of the harmonised constructions of OFWs; some departing workers symbolise the sources of poor development outcomes in the Philippines.

As the state aggressively facilitated labour mobility after President Arroyo assumed office, the brain drain discourse also became intensified. Opiniano (2004, 30) writes: “Another economic problem that international migration brings about is the renowned “brain drain” problem – i.e. the exodus of skilled labor will undermine domestic economic activity, especially in identified sectors”. However, when non-economists disseminate knowledge produced by economists to the public in lay
terms, such knowledge sometimes gets distorted. Opiniano (2004) made use of economist Fernando Aldaba’s (2004a) study to discuss the connections between the migration of ‘skilled’ workers and the country’s development:

For Aldaba (2004a) as skilled workers seek higher returns in foreign countries with supply constraints, the social costs of continued migration affect the sustainable growth of the economy. The economy, in this respect, will be unable to replace the productivity of the skilled workers who either migrated temporarily or permanently. (Opiniano, 2004, 32)

I have already discussed in Chapter 1 various assumptions made by economists in making their claims and the importance of making explicit the limitations of such knowledge. Opiniano (2004) did not define what he meant by ‘skilled’ workers, did not mention the gaps of Aldaba’s assumptions, and disseminated this knowledge as if the migration of all ‘skilled’ labour might negatively affect the country’s economy. Nevertheless, this example shows that the brain drain claim had been employed by different actors to challenge the existing status quo.

The vulnerability in some sectors of the economy surfaced towards the late 2000s. In January 2006, Roseller Barinaga, chairing the Labour and Employment Committee of the Congress, said in his privilege speech delivered in the Congress: “After three decades of deploying Filipino skilled workers overseas, we should set things alright by choosing primordial national interest over the short-term relief the remittances provide” (Barinaga, 2006). He urged the administrative body to take immediate measures, including the imposition of a moratorium, or suspension of overseas deployment of mission-critical personnel, in accordance with the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipino Act of 1995 (The 15th Congress of the Philippines Labor and
Employment Committee, 2006). Following his speech, the Labour and Employment Committee conducted public hearings and consultations on the deployment of Filipino workers in strategic industries, such as aviation, electronic, shipping, steel, petrochemical and telecommunications (The 15th Congress of the Philippines Labor and Employment Committee, 2006). The POE Governing Board issued, in the same year, a governing resolution directing “the adoption of the POEA recommended framework in determining the level of skills supply and demand and the occurrence of shortage of mission-critical skills in a particular industry” (POEA, 2006b, 24). This also clearly demonstrates the volatility of the state’s programme.

In addition to the aforesaid labour market concerns, the social costs of education and training have emerged as a critical issue that accompanies labour migration from the Philippines. This issue was brought to light as early as in the mid 1980s when Goldfarb and his colleagues (1984) analysed the Philippine government’s use of scarce capital for the expansion of medical education despite the continued migration of physicians to the US. “Education and training spent by society on the workers’ education and skills development” were also pinpointed as the social costs involving labour migration in an article published by a Philippine development research institution in the mid 1990s (Editorial, 1995, 2). Across the globe, the brain drain debate was revived in the early 2000s as a result of the immigration policies of OECD countries that focus on skills. The Philippines has been selected as one of the case studies of the ILO project on “Skilled labour migration (the ‘brain drain’) from

90 The Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipino Act or RA 8042 has given the Philippine state the power to place a ban on the deployment of Filipinos when national interest or public welfare warrants. Section 5 states: “the government, in pursuit of the national interest or when public welfare so requires, may, at any time, terminate or impose a ban on the deployment of migrant workers”.

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developing countries: Analysis of impact and policy issues” (Alburo et al., 2002).

The authors open the ILO report on the Philippines’ case study with the following statement:

Since the early seventies the Philippines has been experiencing a “brain drain” phenomenon with the migration of highly skilled physicians, teachers, seamen, mechanics, engineers, and others from the country (Alburo et al., 2002, 1).

Their study is an update from Abella’s (1979) earlier study, aimed at examining whether the past out-migration of people actually drained the available stock of human capital (or skills). Alburo’s and Abella’s (2002) research is in the same line of work on the brain drain that I introduced in Chapter 1, using the extensive data on education and migration to examine whether the recorded previously cross-border population movements drained developing countries of their educational investment embodied in citizen-workers (Carrington et al., 1998, Carrington et al., 1999, Adams, 2003, Docquier et al., 2006). Migration means there is a loss of investment made in the citizens of developing countries. Using the statistics on tertiary education and migration, Alburo and Abella (2002) demonstrate that the number of professionals and technical, managerial and administrative workers leaving the Philippines exceeded the net additions to the workforce during the period 1992 to 1998. This is despite the fact that the domestic education and training system was quickly adjusted, for instance, as reflected in the dramatic expansion in computer sciences. They also

91 The project was funded by the UK government that urged the developed part of the world to be more sensitive to the brain drain from developing countries.

92 While Abella’s earlier study (1979) looked at the stock number of physicians, nurses, engineers and agriculturists, Alburo and Abella (2002) gave special attention to teachers, engineers, nurses and computer and information and communications technology professionals. This shows that who belongs to the ‘brain’ category changes over time.
note that it is reasonable to say that departing workers included those already working or those who had gained sufficient experience in the discipline (Alburo et al., 2002).  

During the past decade, education and training emerged as an important issue in the context of the Arroyo administration’s strategy to deploy “highly skilled, knowledge-based workers” (Go, 2002). A number of studies were carried out to assess higher education in the Philippines and examine the country’s capacity to supply ‘quality’ workers for both domestic and global needs (Tullao et al., 2008, Tan, 2009a). These studies warn that there may be a brain drain from the Philippines, and suggest the need to improve the existing education and training system. Tan’s study (2009a), commissioned by the IOM, examines the capacity of the education and training (ET) system to supply workers with the skills demanded in the domestic and foreign markets. To put it another way, the study examines if the voids created by more experienced workers leaving the Philippines can be filled efficiently by labour available in the domestic market. Tan (2009a, 3) argues that the brain drain,

…occurs only when the ET system is unable to increase the supply to replace the departing workers. There is evident drain of high quality nurses, ICT specialists, teachers, welders, metal workers and pipe-fitters because only a few institutions offer high quality ET in these skills.

Though also reproducing the brain drain discourse, Tan (2009a) focused on the domestic incapacity to supply suitable workers instead of labour mobility itself. Tereso Tullao and John Rivera (2008, 35) used the term brain drain similarly by

93 Nevertheless, Alburo and Abella (2002, 23) suggest that the brain drain may not be as bad as many think because global integration and new technologies may provide options that “reduce the attractiveness of migration temporarily or permanently” and enable the country to address the issue more positively.
claiming that: “Brain drain occurs when a country loses its talented and skilled labor force and its ability to replenish those who leave the country is threatened”. They also point out that the brain drain,

…will certainly be harmful to the economy as other countries will reap the benefits of the education and training provided by the Philippine education system (emphasis original). Training their replacements will entail additional expenses, with no assurance that these replacements will remain in the country (emphasis original). (Tullao et al., 2008, 35)

While emphasising the social costs of education and training, some researchers constructed the brain drain as the developed world’s exploitation of the Philippines’ scarce resources. According to this claim, developed countries need to ‘compensate’ the costs of education and training conducted in the Philippines. For instance, the Philcomdev, a network of Philippine organisations concerning migration and development issues, argues for the ‘compensation schemes’ “whereby developed countries which draw and use the skilled labor from developing countries provide some form of compensation to offset the effects of brain drain” (Philcomdev, 2007).

A question often posed is whether the aforementioned social costs could be ‘compensated’ in any form. This question is related to a normative question about the remittance-sending behaviour of ‘brains’ and the usage of their remittances. As discussed in Chapter 1, many scholars doubted that ‘skilled’ migrant workers – who are more likely to hold residency in host societies – send as much money as ‘unskilled’ ones do. A few years after the introduction of the overseas employment programme, Abella (1979, 55) noted: “It is expected that per capita remittances of permanent immigrants will, on the average, be less than what will be remitted by contract workers”. Abella’s speculation is that Filipinos settling abroad are likely to bring their families with them and these settlers’ saving patterns will be influenced
by their higher income in the future, unlike ‘contract workers’ who need to save more within the fixed period of time. In his policy-oriented report on migration and development, Opiniano (2004) cites Devesh Kapur’s (2003) study to claim that the money ‘skilled’ migrant workers send to their home country may not balance the costs that occur in the country as a result of their departure. Paraphrasing Kapur (2003), Opiniano (2004, 31) writes: “Remittances do not go directly to the sectors or professions affected by the exodus of skilled labor, but benefit the families of these skilled workers”. While Kapur and Opiniano construct ‘skilled’ labour migration as the issue of inequality by dividing the population into households with ‘skilled’ migrant workers and the rest, they contribute to strengthening the brain drain claim that the migration of a certain set of people – namely ‘skilled’ workers – negatively affects the society as a whole (or a certain sector of the society).

The Philippine state facilitating its citizens’ cross-border mobility does not want the citizens’ overseas employment to enter into the brain drain discourse. Nevertheless, even the state uses the term when it serves its own interest. A crisis in Lebanon in 2006 and the repatriation of domestic workers forced the Philippine state to act on the reintegration of these repatriated citizens. In 2007, the government opened the NRCO, in the then Labour Secretary Arturo Brion’s words, “to ensure that the phenomenon of global migration will have long-term benefits for OFWs and their families and will have (a) positive impact on national development” (quoted in Uy, 2007). Brion also mentioned that the centre “shall act as the re-entry doorway for economic social reintegration, which assures a process of brain gain, in lieu of drain or loss of talent and human capital for the country” (quoted in Uy, 2007). In so doing, the government official admitted that there was a drain of ‘talent and human capital’ from the Philippines, but the establishment of this centre came symbolically to
represent the ‘greater gain’ that comes with such loss. The state easily turns ‘brains’ into the embodiments of the Philippine state-centred development project.

4.4 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY & NURSING

The above discussion has shown the ways in which the overall brain drain discourse has been reproduced in the Philippines. This section focuses on the two sectors chosen for this study, IT and nursing.

**INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

The brain drain discourse is reproduced not only in academic circles but also in many other sites. One of the sites where ‘brains’ are discursively produced is in the recruitment process. In 1996, Asiaweek issued an article entitled “Goodbye, Philippines; Can Manila Stem a Computer Brain Drain?” It reports that whereas some 10,000 computer programmers were added to the country’s labour market each year, a fifth ended up migrating to the US, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore “where they command up to five times what they get at home” (Lopez, 1996). The Chief Executive Officer of Systems Standards complained: “We invest so much in training our people, only to find them being pirated for jobs abroad” (Lopez, 1996). The term ‘pirating’ represents the Philippine domestic sentiments towards the out-migration of programmers. The same expression was used by Justin, one of my interviewees, who migrated to Singapore in 1999 through a Singapore-based recruitment agency.\(^\text{94}\)

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\(^\text{94}\) Before moving to Singapore, Justin was planning to immigrate to the US where his sister was settled. He realised that it would be difficult to save money to buy a house and a car while working in the Philippines, which made him decide to look for a better-paying job.
said: “At that time, there was a guy literally pirating people from the Philippines to Singapore”. The aforementioned article reports that the shortage of programmers – which, this article suggests, is created by migration – is the main reason for the Philippines to lag behind India in its drive to become a software centre in Asia: Because of this shortage, Manila’s top software service firms are unable to take international orders, focusing only on the domestic market.

By the turn of a new millennium the IT and IT-enabled services industry had already become a major engine of the Philippine economy (Villegas, 2001). This industry, nicknamed as the ‘Sunshine Industry’, contributed a major share of foreign direct investment to the Philippines in the early 2000s, resulting in a growing share of employment (ASEAN – ANU Migration Research Team, 2005, 39-40). Randy Bandiola, President of the Philippine Information and Communications Technology council, said the positioning of the Philippines as the IT destination “will stop the brain drain syndrome” (Nessia, 2011). While the IT and IT-enabled industry grew in the Philippines, a question about the country’s ability to supply a sufficient number of workers to meet the labour market demand continued to be raised. In relation to the brain drain debate in the IT sector, this section outlines the tension that emerged from the recruitment activities of IT workers from the Philippines to Singapore.

outside the country. While he was waiting for his H-1B visa to be processed at the end of 1990s, he heard about Filipino IT workers going to Singapore. Unlike US borders, Singaporean borders were readily open to Justin because the Singaporean government declared the open-door policy to lure ‘foreign talent’.

95 The IT-enabled services have five specific areas that include contact centres, business processing outsourcing, application outsourcing, digital animation, and medical transcription (ASEAN – ANU Migration Research Team, 2005).
Two respondents in the IT field, Katherine and Justin, got their job offers in Singapore through a recruitment company based in Singapore. That company sends a representative several times a year to the Philippines to collect applicants’ resumes. The notice about their trip is posted on different websites. A large transnational financial company Katherine works with recruits IT workers through this agency. Justin, recruited in the late 1990s, particularly remembered the speedy processing of his application. After the interview, the company wanted him to start working in two weeks. Because Justin was expected to give his employer in the Philippines a two-month notice, he had to negotiate to cut it down to one month. These types of recruitment activities by Singaporean agencies gained much media attention. In 2007, the demand for IT workers heightened in Singapore. Recruitment firm Kelly Services’ labour market brief suggests that there was an increase in hiring of non-citizens in the IT industry in that year (Kelly Services, 2008). The Philippine software industry was booming as well, with a huge demand for software developers (Oliva, 2007). It is under this circumstance that the Philippine Software Industry Association (PSIA) issued a position statement to raise ‘awareness’ about the way Singaporean firms recruit Filipino software engineers:

They [Filipinos recruited by Singaporean firms] are usually given less than a week’s notice, which leaves them with no opportunity for proper resignation and transition. Much as they would like to ensure a smooth transition, these engineers are often compelled to breach their existing contracts for these “take-it-or-leave-it” opportunities. (Calimag, 2007)

This recruitment practice was labelled as ‘poaching’ in the local media (Oliva, 2007). The PSIA urged the recruitment agencies to be “responsible enough to ensure that the hiring process is fair to all affected parties” (Oliva, 2007). It continued:

For one thing, it is clearly hurting the business of local [Philippine] software companies. On a bigger scale, it is putting the Philippines in a bad
light from the clients’ perspective. The global software industry recognizes the Philippines as a source of world-class talent. But if this practice goes on, we might ultimately earn a reputation for not meeting clients’ expectations. (Oliva, 2007)

The recruitment activities of Singaporean agencies, as the Association claims, negatively affect the reputation of the Philippines. Jocelyn, a Filipino IT recruiter currently based in Singapore, remembered the incident, and shared with me an anecdote which reflects the strain between the Philippine and Singapore with regard to recruitment activities. Jocelyn laughed and said:

My consultants [recruited from the Philippines] were telling me: “Be careful! When you go back to the Philippines, they might pick you up at the immigration and say that you are the one who gets all the people to Singapore”.

In 2007, Fermin Taruc, then PSIA President, was quoted as saying: “We don’t have the numbers right now but based on anecdotal evidence from member companies, a significant number of employed IT professionals are leaving for abroad” (Casiraya, 2007b). The Association President Taruc reported that he and other PSIA officials met in the Philippines with Singaporean Embassy officials expressing “sympathy” (Casiraya, 2007b). Taruc said: “This is not so much an issue governed by laws but a matter of professional ethics” (Casiraya, 2007b). The Association requested the Singapore government to impose additional requirements on those securing work visas, such as a copy of the applicant’s resignation letter and clearance from his or her latest employer stating that “the visa applicant has no pending contractual or legal obligation with the company, and is thus free to enter into any employment contract with any other company” (Calimag, 2007, Casiraya, 2007a). The PSIA announced that they planned to examine labour laws to find ways to stem the out-migration of Filipino IT workers to Singapore and other countries (Casiraya, 2007b).
The PSIA sought government intervention, but this attempt failed because, as the present President of the Association Cristina (Beng) Coronel puts, “it is not kosher for the government to take a stand on this”. 96 In fact, the POEA promotes the skilfulness of Filipinos in the IT field as a group. The excerpt below is taken from the POEA website:

Filipino information technologists are experts in programming, data analysis, design, training, documentation and consultancy. … Aside from technical skills, Filipino IT professionals are proficient in strategic planning, project management, customer service skills, interpersonal skills and creative thinking and presentation skills. (POEA, 2006a)

Filipinos recruiting IT workers to Singapore are also aware of the paradoxical role they play in relation to the Philippines. An Indian-owned transnational IT consultancy company based in Singapore hired Maricel, a Filipino IT recruiter, when their Filipino recruiter was about to leave. 97 Maricel thought that the company did not want to lose the Philippine market as a source of their IT consultants. There was a high number of Indian consultants, and she was expected to focus on recruiting more Filipinos. One major business client of her company had favoured Filipinos, so the company had arranged job interviews in Metro Manila for that client every quarter. They call this a ‘recruitment drive’. 98 At the time of the interview with

96 Email correspondence with PSIA President Cristina (Beng) Coronel on 16 September 2009.
97 Xiang Biao (2004) notes that more Indian IT companies are setting up branches in Singapore to have greater access to the Asian market. While in Singapore, I spoke to five Filipina recruiters in their late twenties. All of them started to work with their Singaporean employer either in 2006 or 2007. Job orders come from their clients, and in some cases the proficiency of Mandarin is a requirement. However, the Filipino recruiters I spoke to believe that they have a role in recruiting Filipino IT workers to Singapore and keeping them in Singapore.
98 The number of Filipinos they recruit at a time depends on the client’s need, but they interview hundreds of candidates to select some two dozen consultants.
Maricel, the company had three Filipino recruiters in their Singapore branch, and wanted to place two more Filipino IT recruiters. Filipino IT recruiter Maricel considered her work as meaningful because she believed that she had given opportunities to her fellow nationals. Maricel was also aware of the brain drain discourse:

I want to say that I am helping the Philippines, but sometimes it’s like I am taking the resources from my country, asking them to come overseas and help the economy here [in Singapore].

By doing her job and letting fellow nationals know about better opportunities, she has become a Filipino delaying development in her own country: “So, I think I am an instrument (she laughs) in doing that brain drain from my country”. Her laughter may indicate her mixed feelings.

NURSING

Nursing was introduced in the Philippines during the US colonial period, and it had been promoted and understood as a profession ‘serving the nation’. It is worth reflecting on the most extensive study on the early history, *Empire of Care: Nursing and migration in Filipino American history*, written by Catherine Choy, a Filipino-American historian (2003). Pioneering Filipino student nurses, according to Choy (2003, 31), interpreted the introduction of nursing in the Philippines as “an opportunity to enter a new and prestigious profession that benefited Filipinos and the Philippine nation”. The Philippine General Hospital School of Nursing stated in their annual catalogue, “[nursing] is a work that should appeal to every young Filipino man and woman of high aspirations, truly to serve their country” (quoted in Choy, 2003, 32). During the World War II (1939-45), the archipelago became a battleground between Japanese and American armies. Filipino delegates attended the
first post-war congress of the International Council of Nurses (ICN) held in New York in 1947. In one session, delegates from all over the world gave a tribute to the achievements and struggles of Filipino nurses during the war. Since the late 1940s, Filipino nurses had a chance to visit the US through the Exchange Visitor Program (EVP), first established by the ICN and later sponsored by the American Nurses Association. In 1948, the US government established the programme through the US Information and Education Act. The US government allowed the programme participants a maximum stay of two years, and then they were expected to return to their country upon the completion of the programme. Choy (2006, 63) argues that the programme promoted nationalist agendas in both countries. American leaders wanted to disseminate the national nursing achievements of the US. Filipino leaders, on the other hand, wanted new skills for the nurses who served in the Philippines. Choy (2003) explains that the EVP transformed nursing into an international profession.99 With time, as the programme developed, both nursing leaders and government officials in the Philippines grew alarmed about the desire of the programme participants to prolong their stay or permanently remain in the US. Assistant Secretary for Cultural Affairs Pura Castrence is quoted as having said:

The country needs you nurses here. There are in the Philippines only 300 rural health units with a full complement of 1 physician, 1 nurse, 1 midwife, and 1 sanitary inspector. … [T]here are 112 units without physician or nurse. (Choy, 2003, 84-85)

99 Opportunities to go abroad motivated young Filipino women to study nursing. By the early 1960s, there were already more applicants for nursing than colleges and schools of nursing were able to accommodate. Between 1956 and 1969 more than 11,000 Filipino nurses participated in the EVP (Choy, 2003, 65).
After decades, the same discourse still prevails. While the domestic and overseas labour markets are clearly interlinked, the out-migration of Filipino nurses has come to symbolise an unfair trade.\textsuperscript{100} The Philippine Nursing Association (PNA) (1991, 128-129) stated:

Top-grade health care professionals are expensive to produce, requiring substantial public investment. Loss of these resources through migration is a “gift” from one country to another, typically from a poor country which cannot afford it to a rich country.

The migration of nurses was described as an “invisible debt” that rich countries owe to poor ones (PNA, 1991, 129). In response, Philippine nursing leaders and policy advisors have proposed bilateral agreements (Lorenzo et al., 2007), and also urged other countries to develop ways to ‘compensate’ for education and training costs borne by the Philippines. Lorenzo and her associates (2007, 1416) suggest “exploration of bilateral negotiations with destination countries for recruitment conditions that will benefit both sending and receiving countries”. By referring to the example wherein the UK pays 1,200-1,500 pounds to the South African government for every South African nurse hired, former Secretary of the Department of Health Galvez-Tan has urged the Philippine government to negotiate for development aid in exchange of Filipino nurses (Center for Migrant Advocacy, 2005).

The out-migration of nurses has become hotly debated in the Philippines over the past decade as an increasing number of people migrate as ‘nurses’. Barbara Brush and Julie Sochalski (2007) highlight a sudden increase in the out-migration of nurses

\textsuperscript{100} Some economists suggested that migration opportunities could positively affect the country of origin by providing the incentives for people’s investment in education (Mountford, 1997, Stark et al., 1997). However, the case of nurse education in the Philippines shows the limitation of this kind of simple economistic approach.
in the early 2000s, using the POEA data that indicates that nearly 88,000 nurses left the Philippines between 1992 and 2003, and about half of them emigrated between 2000 and 2003. A dean of a nursing school that Philip Kelly and Silvia D’Addario (2008) interviewed is quoted as saying:

The effect is that our nurses are depleted. The hospitals are now understaffed because many nurses go abroad. ... We have very rapid turnover and then we lack faculty. ... It’s hard nowadays to get sick because it’s hard to get a nurse. It scares me, and that’s true.

Kingma (2006, 180) argues that: “High turnover rates contribute to a substantial loss of institutional memory, which may result in a duplication of work and the wastage of resources”. It has been suggested that the emigration of employed nurses puts strains on the ability of local hospitals and schools to train nurses (ASEAN - ANU Migration Research Team, 2005). At present, most available evidence is anecdotal with impressionistic statements dominating as policy advisors construct a link between nurse migration and the public health in the Philippines. The following is such an example:

The proportion of Filipinos dying without medical attention has reverted to 1975 levels with 70 percent of deaths unattended during the height of nurse and nurse medics migration in 2002-2003. (Lorenzo et al., 2007, 1414)

The causal linkage between cross-border mobility and a death rate that the authors attempt to establish seems exaggerated. In 2004, Bu Castro, President of the Philippine Medical Association, said that nurse migration represents a ‘national crisis’ (Conde, 2004). In a conference on migration and development held in Manila on November 2007, participants addressed the brain drain as one of the key issues
within the nursing sector. Maruja Asis and Fabio Baggio (2008, 11) summarised the relevant concerns as follows: “With an eye on jobs abroad, the Philippines is becoming a “halfway house” for many nurses who accumulate enough work experience to help them land a job abroad”. Congressman Tranquilino Carmona tabled a bill in Congress that would require nurses to render at least two years of service in the Philippines prior to any employment abroad (House Bill 2700) (Villas, 2004).

The nurses’ labour market has become more internationalised since the 1990s (Buchan et al., 2005). The private sector in the Philippines responded quickly to the global demand for nurses, leading to the mushrooming of schools offering nursing courses (ASEAN - ANU Migration Research Team, 2005, 59). The increase in training courses resulted in the over-production of nursing graduates. For example, in my interviewee Lance’s nursing school alone there were 26 sections, and in the year he took the Board of Nursing Philippines licensure examination, he was one of some 32,000 examinees. In March 2011, there were more than 160,000 nurses who remained unemployed in the Philippines (Panti, 2011). In view of the continued (over)supply of nurses, the Philippine government signed a Recruitment Agreement with the UK government in 2002-2003 to facilitate the migration of Filipino nurses.

101 For more information of the conference visit: http://www.smc.org.ph/conference%202007/conference07.html

102 In response, a nursing student was quoted as saying: “The government is depriving us of the privilege of seeking greener pastures by limiting our employment options” (quoted in Villas, 2004).

103 Kelly and D’Addario (2008) also suggest that nursing colleges in the Philippines find it profitable to send more graduates abroad because they receive donations from overseas alumni so that the curriculum of these training institutions is tailored to the needs of overseas employment.
into the NHS, and a similar agreement was in place in 2001 with the government of Norway (Manzala, 2003, cited in ASEAN - ANU Migration Research Team, 2005). In 2006, the Philippine Information Agency (PIA) released a press statement headlined “No brain drain for nurses: POEA” (Gevera, 2006). POEA Regional Director Francis Domingo was quoted as saying: “We produce so many nurses but we cannot absorb all of them locally” (quoted in Gevera, 2006). POEA Regional Director also stated that most of the nursing graduates remain unemployed or, if employed, are underpaid. This press release also puts it this way: “[t]his has pushed the POEA to assist foreign companies looking for Filipino nurses to accommodate the hiring process” (Gevera, 2006). A government official announced that a recruiter is in town to look for 8,000 nurses bound for Saudi Arabia. The POEA positioned itself as a job provider by directing attention to the over supply of nurses. The official attributed the increased Filipino nurse requirement in Saudi Arabia to the loss of Saudi nurses to the US and the UK (Gevera, 2006). This press release intends to inform readers that: The Philippines is not alone in experiencing the out-migration of nurses; and the Philippine government provides jobs to ‘unemployed’ nurses and better jobs to ‘underemployed’ nurses. In this context, when I sought her opinion on the brain drain, the manager of a nurse recruitment agency in Manila immediately reacted by saying that there was no brain drain from the Philippines because many nurses were graduating every year. What caught my attention is her following

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104 PIA is a government agency established in 1986 to “to respond to the information needs of the citizenry” (http://www.pia.gov.ph).

105 The Philippine state has established a bilateral agreement with the Saudi state in recruiting Filipino nurses to Saudi Arabia, so the recruitment of nurses has been carried out through the Government Placement Hiring Programme.
statement and reaction: She said that her company would recruit nurses to Singapore as soon as they acquired three years of experience, and laughed at the irony.

4.5 CONCLUSION

The state’s decades-long overseas employment programme has raised concerns about what is known as the brain drain. The impact of labour mobility on the domestic labour market and economy has been a subject of debate for decades. The departure of those commonly described as ‘educated and skilled’ Filipinos is also seen as the loss of national investment made to citizens. The long-debated brain drain claim has persistently served as a threat to the state-led harmonised construction of OFWs as heroes and heroines. In short, a certain set of citizens’ overseas employment has become a site in which two competing discourses intersect. Consequently, the state-facilitated labour migration from the Philippines has become trapped in the migration-development nexus while continuing to reproduce these two competing discourses. The three chapters that follow examine the perspectives of Filipino origin IT workers and nurses who have become the targets of these discourses.
5.1 **INTRODUCTION**

The previous two chapters provided an overview of labour migration from the Philippines, and highlighted the nationalist enthusiasm and tension surrounding the state’s overseas employment programme and the citizens’ overseas work. Upon the crossing of national borders, Filipino origin IT workers and nurses have come to symbolise what the Philippine nation is becoming. This chapter explores the processes through which Philippine national identity is brought to life in the minds of Filipino origin IT workers and nurses. It does this by examining how and to what extent Filipino origin IT workers and nurses embody the dominant discourses discussed in the previous chapters. This chapter consists of two parts. The first section discusses the ways in which they respond to the state-sponsored discourse on their overseas employment. A majority of respondents were aware of the state-led discourse, although they demonstrated different levels of engagement with it. This section also maps out these differences. The second part of this chapter outlines the multiple ways in which the brain drain discourse is reproduced and the respondents deal with this discourse.

5.2 **FROM IT WORKERS & NURSES TO OFWs**

*LABELLING ONESELF AS AN OFW*

The OFW label is the glue that holds together Filipino workers departing for an overseas job. During my fieldwork in Manila, I spoke to the manager of one of the nurse recruitment agencies. I introduced myself as a student currently carrying out
research on nurse migration from the Philippines. After I used the term ‘migration’ or ‘migrate’ a few times, she intervened to clarify their role by saying: “Our workers go to Singapore not to migrate. They work over there for two years, so they are not really migrating. They are overseas contract workers”. She continued by pointing out that the renewal of their contract depends on their performance in Singapore. By labelling the recruited nurses as ‘overseas contract workers’, she intended to highlight that their business was legitimate from the state perspective. As such, strong state authority is reinforced in the OCW/OFW label itself. When the OFW label symbolises the Philippine nation envisioned by the state, labelling oneself as an OFW is a political act that validates the state’s authority. It also implies one’s continual belonging to the Philippines and his or her participation in constructing the togetherness of Filipino citizen-workers outside the territorial boundaries of the Philippines. All respondents I spoke to came to Singapore for the purpose of employment, which means that all of them were required to register with the POEA and officially became OFWs. Some respondents used this particular term in their narratives in constructing their experiences in Singapore. Lance used the term OFW a number of times, so I asked him whether he considered himself as an OFW. He said that he would label himself as such because “I am here not for pleasure. I am here to work, so I consider myself as an OFW”. In the eyes of Lance, ‘here to work’ represents what it means to be an OFW. This expression ‘here to work’ was also used by other respondents. While emphasising the importance of saving, Garry, in his early forties, strongly argued:

\[\text{106 I used the term migration as it is often used in academia, but she interpreted it as permanent settlement outside the Philippines. I believe that she meant to say that her recruitment agency is not responsible for nurses’ permanent settlement outside the country.}\]
…people should realise that they are not here to spend. We are here to work, ok? Sometimes we forget why we are here. Life is good if you buy this and that, but at the end of the day you realise where has all your money gone? … That’s one thing every migrant worker should know.

Garry’s own experience speaks for the perspective he held. The first company that employed him upon graduation in the Philippines was a computer-related company, where he was assigned to operate the company’s IT system. After working in the Philippines for two and a half years, he moved to Saudi Arabia, a major destination country for Filipino workers. Garry wanted to be somewhere far from his ex-girlfriend after a breakup. Garry returned to his employer in the Philippines after completing a year contract with a Saudi employer, because he found it difficult to adjust to the cultural difference. The one lesson he learnt after his first overseas employment is the importance of saving. Garry bought many electronic items with the money he earned in Saudi Arabia, but he realised that the money he earned was soon depleting. As he observed, his case was not an isolated one. He saw his cousins working in Saudi Arabia and spending all their earnings on appliances and festivities in his hometown. So, Garry decided to save more when he moved to Singapore ‘to work’, and he developed his thoughts about an ideal Filipino migrant worker. Roberto, in his late twenties, also actively used the term OFW. While sharing with me how overseas work affected him, Roberto mentioned:

For most OFWs, the bottom line is [earning] money. If you work in the Philippines, you have to wait for 10, 20 years before you can buy a house. If you work in another country, you just wait for one year and you can buy a house.

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Garry studied electronics and communications because during the late 1980s the communications engineering and electronics industry was booming. According to him, in the early 1990s the computer industry emerged in the Philippines, and the internet was introduced.
While narrating his own experience, Roberto emphasised the commonality amongst OFWs, identifying himself as an OFW. Roberto stressed the linkage between overseas work and money. Aiza, in her late twenties, also made a similar point: “Most of the time we [Filipinos] go abroad because we want to earn a lot for our family. We don’t come here just to roam around or experience the beauty of the country. It’s for the purpose”. However, another respondent, Diane, expressed her uncomfortable feelings about the fact that Filipinos in Singapore are frequently associated with money. By recollecting her early days in Singapore, Diane was at pains to explain the local perception of Filipinos:

A lot of [local] people think that Filipinos are here just for money. Well, maybe, maybe yeah. But it’s not the only reason [for us] to come over here. Some of the [local] people, they look at us and say, “Hey, these Filipinos are just looking after money”. They just think of us as money [hungry]. But I hate it, you know, because for me, it’s not only because of the money.

What seems clear is that Diane’s employment in Singapore is not seen in isolation, because of the large presence of OFWs or Filipinos earning dollars. While in Singapore, I attended one Christian group’s social event called “Fiesta sa Bayan 2009”. A large number of Filipinos have joined this Christian church, and a couple of interviewees in the nursing sector – recruited through different channels – were coincidentally the members of this church group. Fiesta sa Bayan is their annual event to celebrate Philippine culture. They had an Ilocano festival in 2007 and a Visayan festival in 2008. In 2009 they had a dance festival, and Filipinos from different districts of Singapore presented dance performances. One team chose the OFW as

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108 The Ilocano are the third largest Filipino ethnic group, and the Visayas are one of the three principle geographical divisions of the Philippines.
the theme of their performance, which shows that the OFW label is commonly used, even in their everyday lives.

While Lance and Roberto fully embraced the OFW label, Lourdes and Cecilia chose to distance themselves from it. At the time of being interviewed, Lourdes, in her late twenties, had been working with an IT outsourcing company in Singapore for four months. She chose Singapore as her destination because her boyfriend had been working in Singapore. Lourdes had been travelling between the Philippines and Singapore before she finally migrated to Singapore in 2009. When I asked whether she thought her migration affected the Philippines in any way, the first expression that came into Lourdes’ mind was “a member of [the] OFW [community], something like that”. That Lourdes was reluctant fully to accept that label is shown by her adding ‘something like that’. This reluctance was also shared by Cecilia, who migrated to Singapore in 1997. Cecilia, who is from a small town in the Visayas, the Philippines, used to see big houses in her neighbourhood, owned by nurses who had worked overseas. This motivated Cecilia and her friends to choose a nursing course, and they dreamt of working abroad one day. After working in the Philippines for months as a trainee, private nurse and staff nurse in hospital, Cecilia decided to look for a higher paying job abroad. When asked the same question above, Cecilia first said that it affected her family remaining in the Philippines by improving their lives. She then mentioned: “We are called overseas Filipino workers”. As reflected in her wording ‘are called’, Cecilia implied that the OFW label was externally imposed.

109 Cecilia migrated to Singapore through a recruitment agency run by a Filipina who had worked as a nurse in Singapore. This nurse-turned-recruiter had been sourcing nurses from her hometown in the Visayas, and Cecilia, from the same town, happened to know a job opportunity in Singapore through this recruiter.
Cecilia was ‘technically’ no longer an OFW because she was not being registered with the POEA and had taken up permanent residency in Singapore. However, when she imagined the connection between herself and the Philippines, she easily drew on this particular label. In relation to the government’s decision in 1995 to label deployed Filipino workers as OFWs instead of OCWs, Rodriguez (2002, 347) argues that:

Purportedly a transition designed to capture the populations of Filipinos that are abroad but not necessarily working on short-term contracts, it is significant that the state emphasizes the Filipino-ness, or the nationality of workers in the diaspora with this term.

Lance, who earnestly claimed to be an OFW as shown above, is also a permanent resident of Singapore.

Some attached the OFW label to themselves with no hesitation or with some reluctance, but others refused to label themselves as such or completely rejected it, because of the stereotypical image attached to that label. Gerard’s and Rachel’s views are the cases in point. Gerard, in his late twenties, considers it very important to see different parts of the world while he is single. Gerard spent a year in the US as a beneficiary of a study abroad programme before entering the university. While working in the Philippines, he was deployed to Bangalore, India, for a couple of months. Although he was enjoying his life in Singapore, he was also thinking of migrating to New Zealand, because he is interested in photography and he believed that there are nice spots for photography in that country. I recruited Gerard to participate in my study through PinoyITdotSG, so I asked him whether he had ever participated in any activities relating to the Philippines as a member. Gerard responded,
Some of the guys are active with the [Philippine] Embassy. There was a time when a politician came here. He wanted to talk about OFW (he pauses) stuff, but I just didn’t want to participate at that time.

I noticed that he distanced himself from the label by adding the term ‘stuff’. I followed up by asking whether he considered himself as an OFW. Gerard said that he is “technically” – meaning, literally – an OFW because he is a “Filipino working outside” the Philippines. But Gerard and his friends do not identify themselves as OFWs “in a traditional sense”. For Gerard, Lucky Plaza symbolises a place for what he calls typical OFWs:

I am sure you have been to Lucky Plaza. People who are out there would be an example of typical OFWs. They are probably people who save a lot of their money just to make sure that their kids go to school. Some of their parents are probably sick. They are working outside [the Philippines] because of circumstances, not by choice. In that sense, my friends and I are probably not that kind of OFWs.

Having emphasised lifestyle motivations behind his migration, he distinguishes himself from ‘typical’ or ‘traditional’ OFWs who work abroad because of necessity. Gerard’s explanation indicates that there is a certain image of OFWs in the minds of Filipinos and that this label is too limited in scope to hold all the Filipinos migrating to work in another country. Gerard’s view is also shared by Rachel, who is now a Singaporean citizen. While talking about the topic of remittances, Rachel, in her mid thirties, said: “I am not like one of those overseas Filipino workers who work overseas to earn money for a family, right?” She added that she did not see her Filipino friends in Singapore, who also work in the IT field, remitting money to support their family. Even when they send money, the money is not the only source of income for their family members in the Philippines. In Rachel’s view, profession and class are interwoven together with the result that they become a boundary to divide Filipino workers outside the Philippines. I would suggest that their refusal of
the label OFW can be interpreted as their struggle to ‘individualise’ their overseas employment and their act of distancing themselves from the state-led discourse on the citizens’ overseas employment. It also needs to be highlighted that whether or not the respondents attached this particular label to themselves had little relevance to their immigration status in Singapore – whether they were registered with the POEA or had already acquired permanent residency in Singapore.

**Remittances & Nationhood**

The significance of remittances for the Philippines has been the prevailing discourse concerning migration in the Philippines, and a majority of respondents brought up the issue of remittances in linking their employment in Singapore with the Philippines. However, the ways in which they described the relationship were also slightly different. Katherine, in her late twenties, was motivated to migrate to Singapore by her desire for her family to experience travelling and life abroad. While in Manila, Katherine was trained for six months in the US where her employer, a US owned IT consulting company, headquartered. It was her first time travelling outside the Philippines. She enjoyed travelling within the US, and wanted to give her family members the same opportunity. She particularly stressed that it is the ‘only’ reason for her overseas work. By doing so, she seemed to indicate that she is not an economic migrant. As Katherine saw the situation, IT workers in the Philippines are well paid, and her salary was enough for her as a single person. When I asked Katherine whether she thought her migration affected the Philippines in any way, she told me that it would, through the money she had been sending to her parents: “It would only affect through remittances. That’s all”. Katherine also commented that as a non-economist she would not know the actual effects of remittances. Grace, in her
late twenties, had been sending money to her family in the Philippines to support her little brother’s schooling. Though bringing up the issue of remittances, she was uncertain about how her own overseas work was related to the Philippines as a whole:

Philippines? It [my migration] can help. I think so, especially for my family. [My overseas work] helps my brother go study. In terms of our economy? I don’t know. I think so. We send money… I don’t know how, but I think we can.

Her emotional detachment from the connection between remittances and the Philippine nation should not be attributed to her lack of technical knowledge to explain the ‘actual’ effects, because some respondents were more actively engaged with the construction of this linkage even without possessing such knowledge. Rica, in her early thirties, had been employed in Singapore for more than three years, and she became a permanent resident a couple of months before our interview was held. Rica enjoyed work in the Philippines, but many expected her to take an opportunity to work abroad. One of her sisters, working in the US for over 13 years, continued to ask Rica to join her in the US, because nurses there are well-paid. Many of her colleagues had already migrated, which gave her a feeling of being left behind. Rica told me that she was pressured, as people kept on asking her when she would migrate. Since she arrived in Singapore, she was able to purchase a green coloured car for her family remaining in the Philippines. For Rica, the green coloured car symbolises “greener pastures” in which she hopes to land. Despite these personalised meanings attached to the money sent to her family, Rica was also very well aware that that money had some implications for the Philippines. She claimed that her migration

\[110\] The location of her house in the Philippines is not close to public transportation stations, so she had long been dreaming of having a car. She collected the photos of cars from magazines, hoping to have her own one day.
certainly affected the Philippines, and then giggled and whispered to Leony, her Filipino friend sitting next to her, that she might have answered my question so proudly. Rica continued: “Overseas Filipino Workers, the Philippines benefits from us because we are considered as Overseas Filipino Workers”. As in Cecilia’s and Lourdes’ cases, the OFW label first came into Rica’s mind in drawing attention to her relationship with the Philippines. Rica’s response to the question seems incomplete for someone who is not familiar with how OFWs are treated in the Philippines. However, for Rica and many Filipinos, it is common knowledge that OFWs benefit the Philippines. So, in a way I asked a question for which the answer is too obvious. She then added: “We are paying the government also”. I probed to clarify what she meant by ‘paying the government’. Rica found it difficult to explain herself, and sought help from Leony. They first talked about travel tax.\footnote{As a permanent resident in Singapore, she needs to pay travel tax whenever visiting the Philippines. This clearly shows that she no longer avails herself of a travel tax exemption available only to OFWs. Permanent residents of other countries can gain travel tax exemption by applying for it at the Philippine Tourism Authority.} As Leony also raised the issue of remittances, Rica added a few words to it. This episode made me realise that Rica mechanically responded to the question I posed. Lourdes also argued that she “can help the Philippines” through the money that she shared with her family in the Philippines, even though she did not hold the technical knowledge to explain how it does so. This suggests that the respondents were unconsciously voicing the state-sponsored discourse.

Many respondents were aware of the state-citizen relationship established through labour migration and of significant state interest in it. Maureen, in her early thirties, wanted to become a pharmacist, but there was no tertiary institution having a
pharmacy course near her place. When she decided to study nursing, it also came into her mind that she would be able to help her family by working abroad. As she said, “the first priority of most nurses is a family”. In her family, three out of four siblings are nurses. First child Maureen had supported her younger siblings’ tertiary education in nursing. Maureen and her husband were supporting her nieces’ schooling. Maureen’s case reflects the claim of Aurora Javate De Dios (1992, 47) who states that “Filipinas are primed by orientation and socialization to take on the role of a ‘sacrificial lamb’” for the family (quoted in Tyner, 2004, 127). Ball’s (2000) study also suggests that responsibility and obligation to family have influenced the decision of the majority of 640 Filipino nurses to choose nursing as a profession. Maureen, who had been working in Singapore and sending money to the Philippines for almost eight years, claimed that her overseas employment,

…”helps my country because every time we send money, how do you call that? My husband knows. (She laughs at the embarrassment.) Every month most Filipinos send money, right? Our government is earning from that (emphasis added).

Maureen argued that if she had remained in the Philippines, the government’s revenue would be much less, because her tax paid from her small earnings in the Philippines would be very small. Maureen made these claims despite the fact that the Philippine state was absent from the story she shared with me concerning decisions to take a nursing course and migrate to Singapore. Lance, in his mid thirties, was also clearly aware of the state-citizen relationship established through overseas work. After graduation, Lance worked as a salesman for five years because it was very difficult to get a staff nurse position as a new graduate. While working as a salesman for five years, he came to know that some of the doctors he had met had “secretly” taken up a nursing course to migrate to another country, which motivated him to
return to the nursing profession. He spent two years working with two hospitals in the Philippines as a volunteer nurse and a staff nurse with the intention of going abroad. When I asked him how his migration had affected him, Lance responded:

Personally it has not affected me much because I am still in touch with my culture. … What else? In a way I am able to help my government because we send money (emphasis added). Overseas Filipino workers play a significant role in our country.

The presence of the Philippine state is felt by Lance even within the territorial boundaries over which it has no power. Although Lance had already acquired permanent residence in Singapore, he was still planning to migrate to New Zealand or Australia, which he imagined to be pleasant places to work. I asked him whether his further migration either to New Zealand or Australia would affect the Philippines. Lance replied: “I think if I move to another country and earn better, I can send more money [to the Philippines]. Then, the [Philippine] government will benefit more”. As Lance saw the situation, the better he earns abroad, the better he can help the Philippine government. The interviewees were also keenly aware that there is significant Philippine state interest in their overseas employment. Maya and Rowena, in their early thirties, argued respectively:

All the money we put into the Philippines, right? It does help the government. The government actually encourages (she laughs) people to go out of the country, so they can help the economy. (Maya)

They say that the more remittances, the more we help the country. That’s why the government is encouraging citizens to go abroad. (Rowena)

However, this was not the only reason. Lance found a sales job “unhealthy” as he had to bribe clients to sell medical products, and on some level he also believed that there was a reason for him to have studied nursing.
Maya’s laughter indicates that she finds it ironical for the government to “encourage” citizens to work abroad instead of at home. While the respondents were aware of the state-citizenship relationship established by their own employment abroad, their attitudes towards the government and its overseas employment programme differed. In comparison to Maureen and Lance, Maya and Rowena were more cynical in their description of the state’s policy.

Because of continued familial linkages across borders that include monetary support, these cross-border linkages, represented by remittances, become a common factor amongst Filipino migrant workers, who in fact cross borders for different reasons. Garry in particular was well aware that the respondents I spoke to would give similar answers to my question regarding the perceived effects their migration had on the Philippines. When asked the question, Garry immediately responded: “I think this is a common answer. We send money back (emphasis added)”.

Because of the earlier mentioned common feature of OFWs – ‘here to work’, it was not difficult for Garry to imagine a sense of nationhood amongst them. For Joanna, who was brought up in the countryside, the poor healthcare service in her neighbourhood influenced her decision to take up a nursing course. During the interview, she recollected that she saw many sick people in her neighbourhood left with no care. They had only one midwife in her area. Nursing is known to be an occupation with higher income when practiced outside the Philippines, so it is often a ‘nurse’ who migrates when a household has some financial troubles. Joanna, in her early thirties, migrated to Singapore in 1999 because her father needed very expensive medication. She was the only person in her family who had a chance to earn a better living by working abroad; her two brothers were not qualified for better paying overseas jobs. Despite the fact that her overseas work had no association with either state or nation, Joanna was well
aware of the connection between the Philippines and her employment in Singapore, because she had been sending money to her family in the Philippines. When asked whether she thought her migration affected her in any possible way, Joanna, who is now a permanent resident of Singapore, responded:

Actually, having workers going to other countries is a big help for the Philippines (emphasis added). If we bring some money to the country, it’s a big help for them. Nowadays, in the Philippines every family has one person working in another country to support their family. If not, it’s difficult [to make ends meet]. If you want your child to have very good education, you have to go abroad.

In Joanna’s narratives, the wellbeing of households and that of the nation are very much interconnected. Joanna sees her act of remitting as her ‘help’ for the country. As such, remittances came to symbolise a sense of nationhood for some respondents. Eileen and John, who both acquired Singaporean citizenship in 2007, also internalised the claim that their overseas work and the Philippines’ wellbeing are interconnected. Eileen migrated to Singapore in 1995 as a single person, and is now married with three children. Eileen judged her presence in Singapore as meaningful because she had been helping the Philippine Embassy through voluntary work. As a nurse she accompanied distressed Filipina domestic workers returning to the Philippines. When asked whether her migration had affected Singapore in any way, Eileen said:

We are helping Singapore healthcare-wise. … And in a way they can help Filipinos because when we work here, salary is considered as good compared to the salary we receive in the Philippines. … Both countries benefit from migration.

In her narratives, the benefits to Filipinos turn into the benefits to the Philippines.

John studied chemistry at university, but he became interested in the computers, and took a programming course for about a year after graduation. John recalled that in the
late 1980s there were only few universities offering a computer science course. Because he studied a non-IT-related subject, John considered overseas work as an opportunity to break into the IT labour market, which he found difficult in the Philippines. John had a chance to work in Saudi Arabia as a systems analyst for three and a half years, but like Garry he did not enjoy living there, because he felt the intensity of cultural differences and separation from his family. He returned to the Philippines to join a company as a system analysis programmer in the mid 1990s. But, in his view, his salary was never enough, which motivated him to apply again for a job outside the country. Now John’s family is settled in Singapore, but initially John was alone working there. Because he used to regularly send money to his family remaining in the Philippines, John remarked:

During the time my wife and kids were still in the Philippines, we were helping the economy because I was sending money. … There are eight million Filipino workers outside the Philippines. Just imagine! It’s no longer a manufacturing sector [which contributes to the economy]. It is Filipinos overseas who are remitting.

John’s statement is similar to the sort of discussion of remittances and economic performance in the Philippines offered by Filipino scholars. Opiniano (2004, 27) summarises the discussion as follows:

Analysts were even of the view that it is remittances – not agriculture or manufacturing – that are propping up domestic economic performance. In the view of migration and development issues (Estopace, 2002), outputs of service overseas workers, not the Philippine manufacturing sector, bolster economic performance.

Like Joanna, John stated that his act of sending money to the Philippines was his ‘help’ for the Philippines. However, John was also sceptical about the genuine positive effect of his (and other Filipino migrant workers’) help for the Philippines,
because the money in the end goes to the rich. As John put it, “Filipinos who receive the money go to the mall and spend money, so the money goes to Henry Sy\(^{113}\).”

**HEROISM**

Some of the respondents expressed more nationalistic sentiments in narrating their employment experience in Singapore. Guevarra (2010, 169) found that most of the nurses she interviewed in the US between 2004 and 2007 “had not embraced, or even heard of, the state’s designation of them as bagong bayani”. Some of my interviewees were not only familiar with such a designation but also made use of it in imagining their relationship to the Philippines. Yet, Cecilia was more ambivalent about her valorised status as a citizen working outside the country: “They always refer to us the heroes of the nation. Well, we are kind of helping the economy of the Philippines”. Notably she used the phrase ‘kind of’ in talking about the OFWs’ help for the Philippine economy. In contrast, Joel, in his late twenties, was at ease with the designation as a hero:

> As they say, overseas Filipino workers are the national heroes of the Philippines because we bring money to the Philippines. … I am helping [the Philippines] a lot every time I send money to them.

Jonathan, also in his late twenties, thinks that the remitted money – together with other Filipinos’ remittances – makes “the Philippines keep on running”. He had been contributing to his mother’s tuition fee for a nursing course. Both Jonathan and his mother had an intention of going to the US to unite with her sister. In emphasising

\(^{113}\) Henry Sy is a chairperson of SM Prime Holdings, the largest shopping mall operator in the Philippines.
the positive effect that labour migration had on the Philippines, Jonathan referred to the authority of the state that confirms it:

The President of the Philippines gives awards to migrant workers because of their contributions to the economy. It [remittance] helps [the Philippines] a lot.

The POEA launched the Bagong Bayani Awards in 1983 for OFWs. As the name of the Awards – translated into English as a new hero – shows, the Philippine state started to construct the personalised acts of labouring of citizens abroad as heroic acts as early as in the 1980s. As the POEA explains, the Awards are a “special tribute to the new form of patriotism that overseas contract workers today symbolize” (POEA, 1984, 21). The Awards “honor the Filipino workers worldwide and their families for their distinct role in promoting the integrity of the Filipino workers, and in nation building” (POEA, 2009a). After claiming that that remittances are the main revenue for the Philippine government and help the economy, Garry also referred to the state rhetoric: “The President admits that. That’s why they have labelled us as new heroes”. Both Jonathan and Garry held the view that Filipino migrant workers’ earnings shared with their families deserve recognition from the state.

5.3 FROM IT WORKERS & NURSES TO ‘LOST’ BRAINS

While the state-sponsored discourse on the citizens’ overseas work prevails, the departure of ‘skilled’ Filipinos for overseas employment has produced an equally

114 The Bagong Bayani Awards are awarded to migrant workers “enhancing and promoting the image of the Filipino as a competent, responsible and dignified worker” and “greatly contributing to the socio-economic development of their communities and our country as a whole” (POEA, 2009). To be nominated, a person should be or has been an OFW for at least two years and his/her employment contract must have been processed by the POEA. The first awarding ceremonies were held on 1 May 1984. Eleven Filipino migrant workers were awarded.
powerful counter discourse – the brain drain. This section examines the ways in which this alternative discourse is reproduced and how the respondents come to consider their own migration as constituting the brain drain. It also discusses how the respondents deal with the situation in which their national identity is evoked and loyalty is questioned: The brain drain discourse suggests that the respondents’ individual wellbeing is not in harmony with that of their nation (of which they are part).

LABELLING ONESELF AS A BRAIN & DEALING WITH A DRAIN

Some suggested that a shortage of IT experts might not be as bad as reported. An official of the Cebu Educational Development Foundation for Information Technology said that the migration of senior IT workers from the Philippines is a minimal problem, because the country’s overall turnover rate in the IT industry is just 10 percent (Villafania, 2007). However, there has always been speculation that workers who have left for overseas job offers have a higher level of skills or are more experienced in their respective fields. Fernandez and her associates’ (1987) study on labour market adjustment to the outflow of labour, for instance, suggested no shortage of seven skills they identified as critical to the Philippines, because the country has an abundant labour supply. But, they also reported that the companies “lamented the loss of “good” nurses, telecommunications technicians the heavy-equipment operators” (Fernandez et al., 1987, 70). Tan (2009a, 65) also notes that “the exodus of … ICT specialists has probably resulted in brain drain” based on the speculation that departing workers tend to be superior in quality. The advisory body to the Congress on the matters of the IT and IT-enabled industry also implies that the
Philippines is losing “experienced and top quality professionals” (Congressional Commission on Science & Technology and Engineering, n.d.):

The ‘Brain Drain’ of experienced and top quality professionals to countries abroad is impacting on the ability of local companies to retain their top personnel and weakens the companies’ ability to provide quality products and services, to sustain the growth of their organization, and to remain competitive versus other companies worldwide.

Luis, in his mid thirties, who had worked in the Philippines and Singapore for two and nine years respectively, believed that migrant IT workers are better qualified than those ‘left’ in the Philippines and that this migration ‘selectivity’ had a great impact on the Philippines. When asked whether his migration affected the Philippines in any way, Luis responded: “I am only one person. So, if I am going to talk about myself, I don’t think the Philippines was affected by me leaving”. Then he continued: “If you talk about all the IT people who have left the Philippines, then definitely it [migration] has affected the Philippines. Definitely”. Luis’ migration was easily turned into a collective form. Luis then drew a boundary between those IT people who had crossed borders and those who had not. He saw that “the brain drain is tremendous” because “all the bright people” were departing. The ‘bright’ is a commonly used term in the brain drain debate to dramatise the impact of labour mobility. For instance, the ADB (2004, 9) reports: “Draining some of the best and the brightest from a sending country reduces its capacity for long-term economic

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115 Prior to each interview, I was obliged to brief participants about my research. I explained that I am interested in their experiences and opinions about profession, migration and interactions with people in the Philippines. The working title of my research “reassessing the migration-development nexus” was printed on a copy of participant information sheets that I provided. Luis was the only respondent who enquired about the meaning of the title. I briefly explained to him how migration and development had been often discussed together. So, when asked whether he thought his migration to Singapore affected the Philippines in any way, he seemed conscious of what I explained to him.
growth and human development”. In his article on nurse migration, Chikanda (2006, 668) also used the same expression:

Since it is usually the ‘best and brightest’ professionals who are mostly likely to emigrate, leaving behind the ‘weak and less imaginative’, the brain drain presents socio-economic challenges for developing countries.

While putting it as “not good thing to say”, Luis claimed, “…those left in the Philippines, it’s not that they choose to stay, but it’s because they don’t have the opportunity to migrate”. As Luis saw it, Filipino IT workers remain in the Philippines because they are not chosen to work overseas; only the select few are able to take advantage of opportunities outside the Philippines.

The discussion of the poor quality of tertiary education in the Philippines also reinforces the brain drain discourse. The IT revolution brought job opportunities, resulting in the opening of computer science programmes in higher education institutions and the establishment of new computer science schools in the Philippines (Tan, 2009a). Enrolment in computer science grew rapidly in the later part of the 1990s, but it started to decline in 2002. Tan (2009a) attributes this decline to the realisation by people that a degree did not qualify them for IT jobs. The Information Technology Association of the Philippines and the PSIA reported in 2008 that the large number of some 233,000 graduates of IT and IT-related courses were unable to have IT-related work because they ‘lacked skills’ (Suarez, 2008). Some of my

116 Based on her study of the national qualification examination passing rates of degree programmes, Tan (2009a) argues that many higher education institutions are of poor quality and unable to supply workers to fill the vacancies created by workers departing for overseas jobs.

117 According to the industry experts in 2008, only 5.7 percent of the IT-related course graduates were employed in IT and IT-enabled services industries (Suarez, 2008).
respondents also point out that there are many IT graduates entering the labour market every year, but not all are capable of obtaining the knowledge and skills needed in the IT field. Roberto put it in the following way: “Let’s say I am teaching you IT. No matter how good I am in teaching, no matter how good I am in IT, if you can’t learn, you can’t learn”.

Luis was very certain that those in the Philippines will migrate once given a chance. He continued: “I am sure of that because a lot of IT people in the Philippines I know are contacting me and asking me if they can move to Singapore”. Luis mentioned that his manager (his former boss) in the Philippines also enquired whether there is an opening for him in Singapore. After sharing the story with me, Luis laughed and said: “That was my manager!” Luis’ remark can be better read when we consider his migratory story. After graduation, Luis started to build his career in IT while working for a small bank in the Philippines. He achieved his personal goal in his mid twenties by becoming a manager. However, things suddenly changed when his company was purchased by a larger bank. Luis realised that despite his knowledge and abilities, his chances of getting promoted in the newly merged company were slim. As mentioned in the Introduction, Clemens (2009, 2) suggests that we use a “neutral, descriptive, and equally concise term such as skill flow” instead of “the pejorative and inflammatory term brain drain”. Interestingly, however, Luis found the boundary created by this ‘pejorative and inflammatory term’ useful in constructing the self in a positive way, because it provides him a sense of achievement. His sense of achievement, however, strengthens the brain drain discourse.\footnote{While Filipino IT migrant workers emphasise their superior skills to those remaining in the Philippines, Daniel, to whom I spoke in Metro Manila, constructed the crossing of}
Accepting the ‘brain’ label means that one has to deal with the fact that they are part of being ‘drained’: A brain cannot remain singular because it is attached to a drain (a mass). Luis noted:

I am concerned that the Philippines are losing knowledgeable people. But it’s not really our fault because in the Philippines we felt that we didn’t have the opportunity to grow.

Luis tried to avoid giving anyone a chance to cast blame by pointing at brains including himself by stressing that his potential was not fully realised in the Philippines. Luis’ emphasis on Filipinos’ professional aspiration that needs to be fulfilled supports the Philippine state’s position to ‘facilitate’ labour mobility.

The respondents interpreted the abstract concept of ‘brain’ in a multitude of ways, because as discussed in the Introduction and Chapter 1, the concept is broad enough to include a range of people. Demographic studies in the brain drain literature define the out-migration of ‘educated’ workers from developing countries as the national loss of educational investment. Michael also interpreted his employment in Singapore as the Philippines’ loss of investment in his schooling. Michael travelled to Singapore in 2008 as a tourist, and got a job offer within a month. He was then hired as a consultant by an Indian-owned IT solutions firm operating both in the Philippines and Singapore. In Singapore, there are many IT solutions providers, or national borders as a yardstick to judge one’s national loyalty. When I explained the concept of brain drain to Daniel, he responded: “When you say that, the quality of Filipinos left here in the Philippines are poor ones? That’s what I disagree because there are still many Filipinos who are very nationalistic. They want to work for the Philippines”. In this perspective, Filipinos working ‘in’ the Philippines are not the less qualified ‘left behind’ but nationalists stopping the Philippines from collapsing.

Some of these IT solutions companies in Singapore employ Filipino IT recruiters. Bigger IT solutions providers operate in several countries in Asia, such as China, India, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore, with their presence in other parts of the world as well.
also commonly known as IT consultancy firms which recruit and employ people with IT skills to be deployed to their local clients, looking for contract workers.¹²⁰ These employees of IT solutions providers are called IT consultants, and they are stationed either in their employer (IT solutions provider) or on the client side. When asked whether he thought his migration affected the Philippines and Singapore in any way, Michael right away responded:

Actually, since college we were told during one of the classes that eventually there will be a brain drain from the Philippines. Unfortunately, most IT professionals who have been working in the Philippines for quite some time leave the Philippines.

As a consequence, local companies would not maximise their investment in training people, a point that has been also made by scholars. For example, King (1987, 111) notes:

Overseas employment [in the Philippines] was initially envisioned to mop up only those skills which are in excess of local demand. What has happened though is a creaming-off process which virtually makes local industries a training ground for overseas requirements.

As Michael saw the situation, “it’s [the out-migration of trained people is] not good for the Philippines”. Michael saw himself being “torn apart” because his personal advancement was at the expense of the wellbeing of the Philippine nation:

For myself, I want to work here because pay here is better, and career-wise it’s also better [here]. But if I look at the Philippines, sometimes I feel sorry for my country because I just used them for study, and left them.

Recruiters located in different sites also cooperate in order not to lose their candidates (people with IT skills) and clients (organisations in need of IT skills) to other competitors (other IT solutions providers).

¹²⁰ Business firms and other organisations find it harder to obtain suitable staff of their own to manage the different aspects of new IT applications. The IT department of well-established firms also outsource some aspects of their operations by hiring consultants.
He interpreted his act of leaving the Philippines as betrayal to the nation that nurtured him through education, and he expressed his empathetic feelings towards his home nation. The nation’s investment in him is “wasted”. This is a common argument in the brain drain discourse. For example, King (1987, 106) suggests:

In a general sense, every individual is reared and educated at a certain cost to society and the national economy. His emigration implies that the country would not fully and directly benefit from its “investment” on his capabilities and potentials (except perhaps indirectly through the interrelationship of nations or except upon his return to the Philippines) because he would cease to be a part of the society’s reproduction and development.

Michael’s response left me puzzled however. In the Philippines, Michael did not have a satisfactory IT job for which he had been trained. Michael, as an ethnic Chinese Filipino, always thought of running his own business, and obtaining seed money to start up his business had been his major interest. Michael said: “That’s how Chinese in the Philippines think. We do business, not actually work for someone else”. Michael chose a computer-related course because he was fond of technology, but for him his IT skills are also a means to accumulate capital for his own business. However, limited opportunities in the Philippines hindered the realisation of his aspiration. After graduation, he provided some IT support for his family friend’s business for nine months and then worked as a freelance programmer for another nine months. During this period of casual employment, Michael was already contemplating the idea of going abroad to work. Michael decided to take a non-IT

Human capital theory has, for a long time, focused on investment in formal (organised) education or schooling and their returns (earnings at the micro level and output and growth rates at the macro level). However, there is no causal relationship between one’s education (in terms of level and subject of study) and his or her labour market participation and occupational outcome because his or her employability in the market is determined by a combination of multiple factors.
job in a well-known US-owned corporation because, he believed, the esteem value of the company would make his resume look better. While working with the company for two years, he also constantly looked for a chance to shift to the IT department of that company. However, this attempt did not succeed. Getting a job in the Philippines was a process of deskilling for Michael. Despite his own experience challenging the simplified version of the social world presented in the brain drain literature, Michael saw his migration as constituting the brain drain from the Philippines as one of ‘educated’ Filipinos employed abroad. The voice of Michael, shaped by the brain drain discourse, contributes to its reproduction.

Gerard, in his late twenties, saw himself as a lifestyle migrant, but as a citizen of a ‘developing’ country he was aware of an additional discourse surrounding him – in comparison to those holding the passports of developed countries (Molz, 2005, Scott, 2006). Gerard completed his degree in management information systems on scholarship at one of the prestigious universities in the Philippines. Before migrating to Singapore, he worked for three years with a British owned banking software company in Manila. In illustrating the perceived effects that his migration had on the Philippines, Gerard compared the out-migration of IT workers and mothers. When IT workers migrate,

…companies back home probably feel some kind of void that they need to fill right away as opposed to [the case wherein] a mom who leaves her family. She is probably a housewife who came here to work as a house helper. … Back home they [IT companies] need to retrain people to get the job done.

As Gerard saw, the departure of IT workers may leave a “big impact” on the Philippines because they are labour carrying out productive tasks – as opposed to ‘mothers’ doing reproductive work – with skills that are “not easily replicated". I
noticed a change in Gerard’s voice, a sign of his discomfort about the topic of discussion when he asserted that the Philippines will be still “coping” because: “They probably say it’s a brain drain – people with skills will be taken away –, but I think it’s also a matter of having a brain trained”. Gerard skilfully deemphasised a national crisis and undermined the negative connotation attached to his migration by creating a new term ‘brain train’ that reconfigures the way in which his migration is generally viewed. As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, Gerard distanced himself from the state’s overseas employment programme by refusing to label himself as an OFW. However, Gerard indirectly contributed to the state-led discourse on labour migration by playing down the brain drain claim that poses a threat to the state’s overseas employment programme.

Almost all respondents in IT were familiar with the term brain drain, and the brain drain discourse had clear presence in their minds. Justin, in his mid thirties, quickly responded when I mentioned the term brain drain: “Ah, this one, actually I see it’s the government’s fault”. He explained to me that the government is ‘selling’ people in anticipation of remittances coming from abroad, thereby “encouraging the brain drain”. When I asked Lourdes whether she had heard the term brain drain, she responded as if she answered a quiz:

Ah! Since skilled [human] resources in the Philippines come here [to Singapore]… Well, somehow it affects the economy in the Philippines because … the skills needed [there] lack.

Though she acknowledged the negative effect that her (and other skilled workers’) migration had on the Philippines, Lourdes also asserted that it also had a positive effect: the departure of skilled workers had given opportunities to the next generation of the Philippines.
The respondents were also well aware that they were the targets of this particular discourse. When asked whether she thought her migration affected the Philippines, Katherine responded: “It would only affect through remittances. That’s all. That’s the only effect (emphasis added). She paused and then added, “with regards to the concept of brain drain...” Katherine, like Filipino origin IT workers I spoke to, felt the need to respond to this particular discourse travelling across the Philippine-Singapore border. The respondents rarely rejected the brain label, so they had to deal with the negative connotation attached to their own employment. Katherine, however, tried to point to the inadequacy of attaching such a label to her, and thus attempted to free herself from the need to ‘defend’ her actions. Being a lifestyle migrant and familiar with the prevailing discourse surrounding her own migration, Katherine, who migrated to Singapore in 2004, tried to refute the brain drain claim based on her own experience.

It is often assumed that IT workers have educational backgrounds in computer or IT. However, many IT workers I interviewed are non-IT graduates hired by large IT firms upon graduation. The case of Katherine illustrates some common career paths. Katherine chose agriculture as her course in order to secure a place in one of the prestigious universities in the Philippines. In the second year, she switched her major to applied mathematics, as she was advised that this discipline is flexible enough for her to get a job in a broad range of fields. Pursuing a degree in applied mathematics, she had taken two classes in computer programming. Nevertheless, Katherine was employed by an US-owned corporation particularly recruiting graduates from her university, regardless of their coursework. According to Katherine, this well known
company appreciates students’ analytical skills more than technical skills that the graduates of computer science normally have. Katherine and other new graduates were trained by the company as a programmer. For the reason noted above, Katherine claimed, “There is too much population in the Philippines. There would always be new graduates. If they are saying that it will be hard to train…” She paused and continued to refute such a view by saying that her former employer (IT company) “still grow and operate” despite the departure of employees. Katherine argued that it is often middle-level employees or subject experts who leave the company and that each unit of the Manila office would always have someone to replace. Katherine’s response to my question demonstrates that it is only through her active engagement with the brain drain claim that she was able to get the national burden off her conscience.

**BRAIN HAEMORRHAGE**

The out-migration of nurses is now described a ‘trend’ in popular discourse in the Philippines. In Quezon City, the Philippines in 2009 I met Ivan, a recent graduate of nursing, who was then looking for a trainee position in the hospital. He was very certain that he would be asked during the job interview: “Are you going to leave us in two years?” Diane, whom I spoke to in Singapore, also said that nursing had become an occupation used to facilitate going abroad:

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122 Some of my respondents shared the viewpoint of Katherine’s former employer. Justin’s comments highlight this: “A good IT worker – even if he doesn’t know how to code – knows how to solve the problem. … It’s better to have someone who has the overall picture instead of someone who knows only this part but does not understand how it interacts with other parts of the puzzle”.
Well, honestly, now a lot of people are taking up nursing not because they have a heart in nursing but because they really want to go abroad. Even our doctors, I got a lot of doctor friends who took up nursing just to come over here.

She added: “Before the 1990s maybe it’s just the nursing profession, just Florence Nightingale, but now more about go[ing] abroad”. Considering the stigma attached to nurse migration he was very well aware of, it was not easy for Jonathan to tell me that he studied nursing as a ‘second course’ to go abroad. Jonathan is a biology graduate, and worked as a salesman selling healthcare equipment after completing his degree. Though enjoying his work as a salesman, Jonathan struggled with financial constraints. Jonathan was then advised by his aunt, working as a nurse in the US, to study nursing and join her in the US. When asked how he became a nurse, Jonathan said that the main reason for choosing nursing was to go abroad. But, in responding to that question, he used the phrase “frankly speaking” a number of times, which well indicates his discomfort about the topic. He talked about the currency difference between the Philippine peso and other currencies, and then added: “That’s the main reason, frankly speaking”. He laughed in an embarrassed and rather sad way. Before moving to Singapore, he worked in a small hospital in Metro Manila for two years. When asked whether he thought his migration affected the Philippines in any way, Jonathan claimed,

…nobody will serve Filipino citizens (emphasis added). … No one will take care of (he laughs at the irony) the patients left behind in case all the Filipino nurses will fly abroad.

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123 A nurse whom I met in the Philippines told me that she sometimes had to bear sarcastic comments made by her patients about her intention to have become a nurse. In fact, she was not at all interested in nursing, but her parents-in-law living in the US and her husband asked her to take up nursing, so that her family would be able to get a residency permit in the US and unite with her parents-in-law. She studied nursing as a second course. Her choice was not entirely her own, and she was at the same time judged by others because of that choice.
Jonathan continued: “Even though there are lots of new nurses coming in, it takes time for them to have skills to deal with patients”. Overseas employment has been normalised and, as some respondents pointed out, even ‘encouraged’ in the Philippines, which made Sharon argue that: “Singapore cannot live without Filipinos. If you look at the census, how many Filipino nurses are in one hospital”? Yet, her employment beyond Philippine shores contributes to the national healthcare crisis at the same time. Chuckling at the irony of chronic understaffing Philippine hospitals, Sharon similarly noted:

All the people are going abroad. They say nurses [remaining in the Philippines] are not competent because all the nurses left there are all fresh graduates. Yah, all the experienced ones always go to other countries.

Considering the high unemployment rate amongst nursing graduates, Ruth Padilla, the then President of the PNA, said in 2004 that the Philippines did not lack nurses and doctors, but was short of ‘skilled’ nurses and doctors and “those who are committed enough to go to the rural areas” (Conde, 2004). Jonathan explained how the out-migration of nurses negatively affects the healthcare system in the Philippines, adding: “It’s sad. It’s sad, you know?” When asked how she felt about the situation she described above, Sharon responded:

Even if understaffed, they can still cope up. [Hospitals are] affected, but not that bad. We can still function. We say that Filipinos are so intelligent that we always find a solution. Whatever situation, Filipinos still can survive.

Being “proud to be a Filipino”, Sharon claimed that her home country has the ability to cope with the out-migration of experienced nurses. Because of the widespread brain drain discourse, Diane, despite having a different migratory story, still held a very similar opinion when asked the same question. Having grown up in a farming family, Diane used to care for animals in her farm. As she realised she is a ‘caring’
person, she thought about becoming a doctor, and took some pre-medical subjects. But her parents suggested that she take up nursing. Before moving to Singapore, Diane had worked in a town in the northern part of the Philippines for almost 10 years. Because of poor pay, Diane needed her family’s financial support even while working with the hospital. This drove her to look for a job that pays more. By that time Diane had some friends already working in Singapore, and they “encouraged” her to join them. Diane recalled that her boss was not happy about her decision to leave after 10 years’ employment. She was told, “But if you have to [professionally and financially] grow over there, if you think it will be the best for you, I cannot stop you”. An emotional baggage followed Diane’s border crossing. Her baggage resembles the one carried by a head nurse whose story was published in 2004 by Bulatlat.com (Conde, 2004). This head nurse in the only private hospital in a small town in North Cotabato, the southern Philippines, was about to migrate to Saudi Arabia. She is described as one of the “thousands of Filipino nurses – and doctors – who seek jobs abroad every year, leaving behind poorly manned hospitals and clinics across the Philippines” (Conde, 2004). She was quoted as saying: “I have tried for years to resist the temptation to quit”. So, it was not difficult for Diane to translate her (and other nurses’) migration to Singapore as “a big loss for the Philippines”. Diane argued: “It [migration] really affected my country so much because they lost nurses. They lost all the people serving them (emphasis added)”. The strong sentiments Diane and Jonathan expressed about the drain of nurses resemble the statement by former Secretary of Health Galvez-Tan who called attention to a crisis in Philippine nursing: “The Philippines will be bled dry of nurses” effectively experiencing a ‘brain haemorrhage’ (Conde, 2004). The only similarity between Diane and Jonathan is the fact that they are nurses from the Philippines. However, as
one of the migrant nurses ‘collectively’ seen as contributing to depleting the nursing profession in the Philippines, Diane and Jonathan were conscious of the particularity of their migration.

Having strongly agreed with the brain haemorrhage claim, Diane laughed at the government making no efforts to retain nurses while anticipating remittances to continue to flow in:

The remitted money really helps my country a lot, you know?\textsuperscript{124} That’s why this country is very happy when they send a lot of people abroad. Even though they don’t have nurses, as long as they get money, it’s ok with them. So funny, you know?

As Aguilar (2004, 113) puts it, “[m]oney and nation dance around each other”. Diane’s expression that followed well expresses her feelings about the Philippine government’s overseas employment programme: “Just go, send money. Send more money, money!” As discussed previously, the brain drain claim has posed as a threat to the Philippine state-led nation-building process. Despite his shared understanding of the Philippine situation called the brain haemorrhage, Jonathan mentioned that the Philippine government should not be solely blamed for the depleting nursing profession, because there are “many problems” in the Philippines, including the large population: “We can’t put all the blames on the government because we have many reasons [for migration]”. The different perspectives of Diane and Jonathan symbolise the puzzling situation in which the Philippines is today placed. The Philippine state’s overseas employment programme has a great level of tension within it.

\textsuperscript{124} Diane has invested her earnings by purchasing cows for her family farm.
Diane feels for the hospital and her former colleagues, so that she visits them whenever in the Philippines. I explained to her the concept of brain circulation/re-gain in order to seek her opinion about it: I stated that some scholars and policy advisors claimed that skills and knowledge brought back to a country of origin by ‘skilled’ migrants can make the country progress. As soon as I finished my explanation, she responded in a more animated tone: “Yeah, that’s what I think of. Actually, that’s one of my plans”. Diane had been discussing with her former colleagues, some of whom are also working in other parts of the world, about how to help her former place of work, the hospital. As she also empathised with nurses “who don’t have a chance to come over here”, she had been thinking about becoming a nurse educator when she returns to the Philippines. Though my reference point was the Philippines as a whole and Diane’s was a particular place in the Philippines, the ‘local’ was easily exchangeable with the ‘national’ when the Philippine-Singapore border was strongly felt. Personalised linkages maintained by individuals like Diane’s are often translated through the eyes of people on the other side of the Philippine-Singapore border into expressions of continual attachment to the Philippine nation (see Opiniano, 2006). Those of Filipino origin abroad who maintain these ties – like Diane – come to symbolise the Philippine nationhood. In turn, the state’s overseas employment programme becomes further legitimised. This situation is a paradoxical one, considering that Diane is critical of the state’s overseas employment programme.

When nurse migration was depicted as the ‘brain haemorrhage’, all the Filipino origin nurses employed outside the Philippines often found themselves having to respond to the national crisis they symbolise, regardless of their own career trajectories. Rowena, in her early thirties, agreed that her migration constitutes an
example of brain drain, despite the fact that her own career trajectory does not seem to fit well with the brain drain claim. Rowena chose nursing because of her mother’s wish. She described choosing a nursing career on account of her being an “obedient daughter”. Rowena and I found that expression amusing, so we laughed at the same time. She already knew that she would go abroad to work one day. Before migrating to Singapore, Rowena was employed as a nurse in the government hospital in Cebu. Rowena’s grandmother was a captain in Philippines’ smallest administrative division barangay, and campaigned for one of the mayor candidates before a local election. But the candidate lost the election, and his/her rival took office. According to Rowena, the hospital retrenched all the people who were campaigning for the candidate who lost the election. Though Rowena herself did not participate in the election campaign, they came to know about her grandmother’s involvement. Rowena was retrenched because of a change in the local government. While unemployed, she came across a job advertisement in the nationwide newspaper, and submitted her application to an agency in Manila.

When I sought her opinion on the brain drain claim, Rowena agreed by stating: “I think it’s true. I saw the news just recently. The nursing board encouraged all the newly registered nurses to practice in the Philippines first before going overseas”. In general, most nurses I interviewed emphasised the commonality amongst Filipino migrant workers as contributors to the Philippine economy, and fewer respondents in nursing than IT discussed the brain drain when asked whether they thought their migration affected the Philippines. Most nurses, unlike IT workers, were not familiar with the term brain drain. So, I introduced the brain drain claim, and sought their opinions of it. To return to Rowena, she added: “Filipino nurses won’t be going overseas if the government gives a sufficient salary. … I blame it on the
government”. The brain drain discourse encouraged Rowena to speak on behalf of all Filipino nurses employed outside the Philippines, despite the fact that her migratory story is different from others. For individuals born as the citizens of the Philippines and skilled in nursing, one’s employment beyond the boundaries of the Philippine state is tied up with that of other Filipino migrant nurses. In the face of the brain drain discourse, they need to defend and give a reason for their own employment abroad.

When the brain drain claim was introduced, Shirley firmly argued that overseas employment would not mean the abandoning of her home country:

If we think about our future, we need to migrate. It’s for our own future. … Like you [the interviewer], you study overseas in order to help them [your co-nationals], bringing back your credit to them. We Filipino people also need to migrate to other countries so that we can save more. When we go back to the Philippines, we can help them.

By assuming that my motivation to study overseas is to contribute to my country, Shirley stressed that ‘skilled’ Filipino migrant workers would also not forget their co-nationals. The national baggage follows her cross-border movement. The active responses of the Filipino nurses discussed in this section are the clear indication of the normative narratives fostering their sense of national identity while they live and work outside the territorial boundaries of Philippine state authority.

125 Rowena’s comments also imply that she never felt that she was treated as a ‘brain’ – that deserves the state recognition – within the territorial boundaries of the Philippines. Rowena believes that her labour and that of other nurses is valued when it is performed outside Philippine shores on one particular condition: sending money to the Philippines.
Aiza constructed her migration as belonging to the brain drain. But my conversation with Aiza clearly shows that her voice is shaped by the prevailing discourse rather than her own experience. It also highlights the ambiguity of the ‘brain’ label. When asked about the perceived effects her migration had on the Philippines, Aiza said that the departure of “people” would affect the Philippine economy in a negative way. Before migrating to Singapore, Aiza worked as an engineer for three years with one of the biggest telecommunication companies in the Philippines. I asked her whether she thought the company was affected by the departure of employees for overseas jobs. She argued that the company had been losing “bright” engineers, or their “assets”, leaving behind those less qualified in terms of performance. This, she believed, consequently affected the company’s overall performance. I followed up by asking whether she thought her departure affected the company. Aiza did not think that the large telecommunication company “suffered” as a result of her departure, because she was one of many engineers “doing the same work”. She continued: “I was not really a super asset to the company. I was just an ordinary employee”. Her departure as an ordinary employee did not cause much harm to her former employer as did, in her words, ‘super assets’. Despite her belief that her departure caused only minor damage, Aiza’s understanding of her migration had a relevance to what is commonly known as the brain drain. In dealing with the brain drain discourse, she noted the positive aspect of labour migration from the Philippines by saying: “OFWs

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126 According to her, the company hired many engineers for the same task in order to maintain high quality service to their mobile service subscribers.
have bigger taxes than those in the Philippines. The government is earning from OFWs”.

‘Skilled’ Filipinos employed in Singapore find themselves in a site in which the two competing and contradictory discourses sit side by side. The statement of Ernesto Pernia, professor of economics at the University of the Philippines, (2007) published in *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* as a commentary highlights this point:

Some experts claim that while migrants are typically well educated, migration does not take away a very large share of a country's best. Others, however, argue that migration leads to a significant loss of highly educated persons. Nevertheless, the brain drain is probably not an unmitigated bane as there are compensating benefits, such as remittances and other beneficial links that the emigrants maintain with the home country, plus the return migration.

Referring to the alternative discourse (or label) is a technique frequently used by the respondents facing the brain drain claim. Paulo migrated to Singapore as an intra-company transferee five years ago. As an employee of a transnational corporation, Paulo’s first overseas assignment was in Hong Kong where he worked for three years. After returning from Hong Kong, he worked in the Manila office for a year before an opportunity to work in Singapore came to him. His manager asked him if he was interested in going to Singapore for a new project. He recalled that it was not a difficult decision to make, because he had never been to Singapore and that project would give him an opportunity to learn a new system. Paulo’s employer was merged with another company, and he became a permanent staff in the Singaporean office of that newly merged company. When asked whether he thought his migration affected the Philippines, Paulo responded:

Sometimes I feel guilty I am not in the Philippines. I feel that I left *my own* country to work *for* another country, *but* sometime I also think that I may
be able to help the Philippines because I remit money (emphasis added). They say it [remitting money] helps our economy.

Paulo believed that the Philippines would have benefited from his knowledge and skills if he had stayed there. But, he was also familiar with the narrative that the country had been enjoying a portion of his earnings sent from abroad. As a ‘brain’ drained from the Philippines, Paulo has come to assume contradictory positions at the same time in relation to the Philippine nation. Indeed, Paulo expressed his attachment to the Philippines by juggling these prevailing competing discourses: “I don’t know [in] which [way I] would be more helpful”. The solution Paulo discovered to remove the earlier noted feeling of guilt is ‘return’ to the Philippines: “It’s [what it means to be patriotic] something I think about. … Sometimes I don’t want to think about. But I will hopefully, eventually be going back [to the Philippines]”. Though he expressed his belief that one can be “still patriotic” wherever he is because the world is “getting smaller” and “more globalised”, the Philippines is still seen as the ‘right’ place to be for a person claiming to be patriotic. Mark’s response also shows that he juggled with the two discourses:

…I am not using my skills in the Philippines; I am not applying in the Philippines whatever I learnt. But how I contribute to the Philippines is through money remittances (emphasis added). A big percentage of Philippine GDP relies on remittances from overseas Filipinos from all over the world.

He stated that his skills were no longer used in the Philippines (the brain drain), but then stressed ‘how he contributes to the Philippines’, thereby moving away from the often perceived negative effects that his overseas work had on the Philippines. Like many Filipinos, Mark saw some of his relatives working abroad as he grew up. Some worked as seafarers, and others worked in the Middle East. He also had a cousin who went to Japan as an entertainer. Mark’s father also migrated to Saipan to work after
he retired in the Philippines. By emphasising the money he remitted to his elderly mother, Mark downplayed differences between their migration and his. Also of importance is the way Mark internalises the Philippine state rhetoric by calling remittances as his ‘contribution’ to the Philippines. He therefore indirectly supported the Philippine state’s overseas employment programme. In addition, a new notion of Philippine citizenship established through labour migration continues to be validated through the eyes of Mark. He also added:

If I go back to the Philippines, I can also contribute to the Philippines as a public servant with the experience I had here and [my knowledge of] how the government works here.

Mark had been working in Singapore for a decade, and his company provides IT support to the Singapore government. His remark resembles the discourse in the Philippines regarding the positive migration-development nexus:

Developed countries where Filipino workers are located have also been the source of awareness for OFWs on how responsible leaders should run their nations and serve their people. This exposure may be able to plant some seeds of hope that the same development in their host countries may also occur in the Philippines. (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2008b, 2)

In Chapter 1, I discussed how ‘skilled’ migrant workers’ remittances had been constructed in the literature as ‘compensation’ for the national loss experienced by countries of origin. Some nurses I interviewed employed this way of thinking when they had to deal with the brain drain discourse. Considering that the Philippine state interest lies in undermining the brain drain claim, the use of this technique by the respondents has the effect of indirectly legitimising the state’s vision of the Philippine nation being constructed through its citizens’ employment beyond the shores of the Philippines. Although concerned about the migration of Filipinos ‘as
nurses’ and the consequent deteriorating healthcare system in the Philippines, Jonathan also argued,

…we can just take it as a positive way that we work here and send money to the Philippines to support (emphasis added). … If all Filipino nurses and other professionals remit money every month or every week, this helps strengthen the economy of the country.

As highlighted previously, Jonathan had been contributing to his mother’s tuition fees. His act of sending money not only expresses being a good son but also being a good national citizen: It constitutes his ‘support’ for the Philippines. Jonathan also internalised the new notion of citizenship reconfigured by the state. As Rodriguez (2010, xxi) puts it: “Rather than denigrating out-migration as a “brain drain” (and therefore some kind of nationalist betrayal) …, working abroad and remittances are recast as nationalist acts” in the Philippines. When the brain drain issue was brought up during the interview, Rica responded in a way similar to Jonathan:

Now there’s a shortage of nurses because nurses are migrating. But other than that, we can also be of help to them [through remittances] (emphasis added). … We can help the economy. It [migration] can really help the economy positively.

In dealing with the suffering Philippine nation, Rica reemphasised her help for the Philippine economy as a dollar remitter. This, in turn, further strengthens the Philippine state’s position on overseas work. Maureen had difficulty in securing a permanent staff nurse position in the Philippines after she chose nursing as a way of financially supporting her family by working abroad. However, her migration is still classified as constituting the brain drain in popular discourse. When I sought her opinion on the brain drain, Maureen stressed the incapacity of the Philippine state to
provide a decent standard of living for its citizens, and then contrasted it with the
capacity of Filipinos to provide a living for their families by any means. From
Maureen’s perspective, the OFW’s valorised status is legitimised, because they are
‘capable’ of finding a solution to poverty on their own while the state is ‘incapable’.
This explains well why she firmly stated the important role played by OFWs:

Let’s say there are no migrant workers outside the Philippines. Are you sure if the Philippines can survive from the debt? How much debt does the Philippines have? How many billions? They are waiting [for money] from us daily, every month.

Maureen observed that the Philippine nation(-state)’s survival relied on her and other migrant workers sending billions of dollars a year. Indirectly accused of contributing to the Philippines’ poor development outcomes due to their departure, Rica and Maureen stressed instead their ‘contribution’ to the Philippines. Lance also reasserted the financial contribution of Filipinos working outside the country by sending money to the Philippines. Lance was very articulate throughout the interview. But when I introduced the brain drain argument to him, and sought his opinions about it, he could not easily put his thoughts into words, which perhaps indicates his discomfort about the topic of discussion. He tried to lessen the national baggage by saying that new graduates continue to be trained to fill the vacant positions. In further dealing with the brain drain claim, Lance said: “Skills-wise you don’t apply your skills in your own country. But if you send money, you are able to help the [home] economy”.

As discussed before, Lance did not practice the nursing profession for five years. His labour (schooling and training in nursing) was already a loss to the Philippines

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127 Maureen believes that this flexibility is a trait that distinguishes Filipinos from other ‘races’.
because he did not make use of his qualification. He spent two years working with two hospitals in the Philippines as a volunteer nurse and a staff nurse with the intention of going abroad. Despite his own experience that, to some extent, challenges the brain drain claim, Lance becomes the target of the brain drain discourse as one of the Filipino nurses. In order to lessen his discomfort, he referred to the equally powerful state-sponsored discourse. In dealing with the brain drain claim, Cecilia also reiterated that her migration is,

\[\text{...a way of helping the Philippines because when we send money back home, it will really help a lot of people have a better life. I don’t think that staying there would make a difference to the Philippines.}\]

As a matter of fact, Cecilia was ambivalent about her valorised status as a hero. But, in the face of the brain drain claim, she firmly stated that her overseas work and that of other Filipinos made a big difference to the lives of a lot of people in the Philippines. Cecilia thought that her presence alone would neither make the country’s economy improve nor solve deeply rooted social problems the country had. By re-emphasising the state’s claim that overseas work does serve the interest of the nation, the nurses whose viewpoints represented in this section indirectly affirmed the state’s authority and legitimacy to represent and envision the nation.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The existing debates over labour migration and development encourage the respondents to continue to think about their own employment and familial ties across borders in relation to the Philippine nation. The presence of both state and nation of the Philippines was strongly felt in the minds of the Filipino origin workers I spoke to, despite their disparate individual migratory stories. In the first section of this chapter, I highlighted that the responses of some Filipino origin IT workers and
nurses to whom I spoke reflect their internalisation of the state-sponsored discourse about labour migration. The brain drain discourse was not alien to many respondents either, and they also knew that they were the targets of this particular discourse. Attaching the ‘brain’ label to themselves helped the respondents construct themselves in a positive way, but they also had to deal with the negative connotation attached to their own employment abroad. They expressed more state-sponsored nationalistic sentiments when they found themselves caught within the two competing discourses.
CHAPTER 6 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY & CITIZENSHIP OF SINGAPORE

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the ways in which Singapore’s immigration and citizenship regime, intersecting with the prevailing discourses surrounding the Filipino origin IT workers, shapes their views and experiences and interacts with their Filipino national identity. Before going into the discussion, I will provide an overview of the cross-border mobility of Filipino IT workers to whom I spoke.

6.2 MOBILITY ACROSS TWO LABOUR MARKETS

The respondents in IT used various routes to migrate to Singapore. Online search suggests that a large number of agencies are involved in IT recruitment in the Philippines. However, none of my respondents in the IT field found their first job in Singapore through a Filipino recruitment agency. This may be attributed to the fact that vacancy notices are freely available on online job portals. John and Victor searched for a job online, and were interviewed over the phone. A number of the research participants had travelled to Singapore before securing a job. They found their jobs by posting their resumes on online job portals, such as JobsDB, Monster and Jobstreet, or by responding to vacancy notices. Information Technology recruiters have access to the resumes posted by applicants, and directly contact the applicants whose skills match their clients’ requirements. Gerard, in his late twenties, first visited Singapore to do an assignment for his employer in the Philippines. He was then looking for a change, as he had been working for the same employer for almost three years. During his visit for a few weeks, he contacted some recruiters in
Singapore, and got positive responses. Gerard took it as a positive sign that he would be able to find a job in Singapore. So, Gerard resigned from his position in the Philippines, and moved to Singapore as a tourist to look for a job. He obtained a job offer within a week. Luis, in his mid thirties, knew a number of friends working in Singapore, so in 2000 he also decided to ‘try his luck’ in Singapore. Finding a job was not easy; he spent a couple of months in Singapore before he finally started working for an IT solutions company. Others, like Justin and Katherine, used a recruitment agency based in Singapore, of which a representative regularly visits the Philippines to collect Filipino job seekers’ applications. Iris, Janice and Michelle were ‘head-hunted’ by recruiters and/or their Singaporean employers while in Manila.

Three respondents, including Edwin, Paulo and Rachel, migrated to Singapore as intra-company transferees. The internationalisation of corporate activity has facilitated the cross-border movement of Filipino IT workers. Since the late 1990s, scholars have discussed a correlation between corporate development and the mobility of people with professional and managerial skills (Salt, 1997, Straubhaar et al., 1997). As a company expands through the ‘internationalisation of production’ (Castells, 2000), it optimises the use of its human resources worldwide. Salt (1997, 25) explains, “[e]xpertise in any part of the company can at this stage be regarded as mobile in any direction”. The importance of corporations operating across borders should not be understated in understanding the migration of people skilled in IT. It has been pointed out that the deployment of IT personnel may be part of a global optimising exercise on the part of these companies (ASEAN - ANU Migration Research Team, 2005). A study carried out by Commander and his co-authors (2004) on Indian IT firms confirms that the cross-border movement of employees takes a variety of forms: Many employees of the firms surveyed have acquired on or off site
work experience in highly industrialised countries on a temporary basis. From my interview data, I found that large transnational firms share their human resources in IT among different offices within a regional boundary, for instance, Southeast Asia. Nine respondents had worked in Manila for foreign-owned or Philippine-owned transnational corporations operating transnationally; during their employment in Metro Manila five of them were assigned to another country by their employers; two were trained overseas; and one made numerous overseas business trips.¹² Eight Their movements were internal to their organisations but involved a border crossing. Gerard, for instance, worked in the Philippines for four years after graduation. With his first employer, he worked both in Manila and Bangalore for a year. While he was in Bangalore, the company closed down because of the dotcom crash, and he returned to Manila. The first employer of Justin was a large IT firm based in Manila. During his employment with the company, he was assigned to take up a short-term project in Malaysia and Indonesia. In explaining the reason for his deployment to Malaysia, Justin said:

> It was a very big firm, so they had this culture of sharing people. I was assigned to a particular project [when I joined the company]. I was there [in the company’s Manila branch] for around a year. Suddenly the same project was formed in Malaysia. They needed the expertise, so they assigned me to go there.

When he completed his assignment in Malaysia, he was reassigned by the company to Indonesia for another six months. Justin had enjoyed his ‘expat life’ in Malaysia and Indonesia. It was one of the factors that affected his decision to again work abroad. Similarly, Rachel had been deployed to Australia, China, Hong Kong, ¹²

¹² Eight out of a total of 19 respondents had some work-related overseas experiences, for instance, employment, training or business trips, before moving to Singapore.
Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Taiwan to work on a project or for other business-related reasons. Michelle was sent to the US and Spain as part of the company’s training. While in Singapore, foreign IT workers are also deployed to other countries. Janice’s migratory story is a case in point. Janice migrated to Singapore in 2007. After working in Singapore almost for two years as a software engineer, Janice had an opportunity to work in Japan. She decided to go to Japan not only because it provided her with better remuneration, but also because she believed that it was a right move for her career growth. However, she decided to return to Singapore after 15 months because she found it very stressful and lonely to work and live in Japan.

The presence of transnational corporations in the Philippines also opens up opportunities for Filipinos seeking an overseas job. Iris’s migration from the Philippines to Singapore clearly shows the ways in which transnational corporations facilitate the movement of people skilled in IT. Upon graduation, Iris was hired by a banking software company and trained as a programmer. Things became monotonous after she spent three and a half years in one workplace. This motivated Iris to look for “something new”. She tried two other companies in Manila after resigning from that company, but she was satisfied with none of them. It was then she got a phone call from a ‘head-hunter’ in Singapore. The Singaporean branch of the banking software company for which she had worked for three and a half years was looking for a person with her qualifications. It was not a difficult decision for her as the offer had everything that she looked for. Justin also believes that his work experience with a large transnational company was his ticket for Singapore. Justin recalled the following the conversation between a Singaporean recruiter and himself:

Recruiter: Why didn’t you tell me that you worked for this company?
Justin: I don’t know. You didn’t ask me.

Recruiter: You are hired.

Justin: Ok, where am I going? What’s my project?

Recruiter: I don’t know yet, but you are in.

A number of interviewees have taken a downgraded position, for instance, from a manager to a programmer, by migrating to Singapore. Many respondents described this experience as a relief rather than a downward move in their career. Mark managed a team of 10 staff in Metro Manila before migrating to Singapore. The offer he got from Singapore was “only managing” himself with four times his then salary. Lourdes who supervised her juniors in a large transnational corporation employing some 15,000 in the Philippines also stated: “(In Singapore) I only need to worry about myself, not to worry about the work of other people”. Cross-country comparison may not be adequate because the nature and scale of the IT markets in two countries are different. Michael and Luis pointed out the differences between the two labour markets as follows:

It’s not very easy to land an IT job [in the Philippines]. The IT industry there is not as big as here in Singapore. So, competition is very high [in the Philippines]. (Michael)

Now there are a lot of IT jobs [in the Philippines], just recently. They are mostly [jobs] in call centres – business processing, back office. We call them back office. So, when someone from the US calls a help desk, the call will be directed to the Philippines. … There are not many opportunities career-wise. (Luis)

Manila has become an outsourcing centre for companies from the US, Europe and Japan, for instance, Accenture and Fujitsu (Antonio et al., 2003). Business Processing Outsourcing (BPO) companies in particular contributed about nine billions of US dollars to the Philippine economy in 2010 (Nessia, 2011). According to a study commissioned by IBM in 2010, the Philippines had overtaken India in
terms of voice BPO services (Nessia, 2011). Aiza studied computer engineering at a university well known for computer and engineering courses. Her first two jobs were in call centres in Metro Manila, because, as a fresh graduate, it was difficult to find a job as an engineer. Getting a job in a call centre was relatively easy, because the IT-enabled services industry, including call centres, had expanded in the Philippines. Information Technology workers in call centres monitor and handle all the telephone lines installed in computers. Aiza said that people can start working in call centres once they complete the first year of their computer-related course at college. So, this job does not require advanced IT skills. Villegas also (2001) notes that although these IT-enabled services have created jobs in the Philippines, they do not require the highest IT skills and they employ more non-IT workers. In Singapore, on the contrary, many transnational corporations have set up their IT hubs. Today more than 80 of the world’s top 100 IT software and services companies are based in Singapore (Singapore Economic Development Board, 2010).

Luis’ case highlights the dynamics experienced by Filipino IT workers crossing the Philippine-Singapore border. Upon graduation in the Philippines, Luis started working for a small firm in the Philippines. By migrating to Singapore in 2000, Luis was downgraded in terms of job title. Luis already reached the managerial level in the Philippines, but in Singapore he was employed by an IT outsourcing company as a consultant to be deployed to one of the world’s largest IT companies. In the early

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129 I had another chance to meet Aiza after the interview to help her move to a new flat. Aiza’s new roommate was a Filipina with whom she had worked in a call centre in the Philippines. They shared with me how much they enjoyed working in the call centre. The salary was also fairly good. The only reason for their decision to leave the job is that there was almost no chance to get promoted in the call centre setting. For their career advancement, they had to move on.
2000s, this transnational IT company decided to adopt a new business solutions application called SAP, and no one in that company had knowledge of this particular application. Luis volunteered to undergo training, which turned out to be his biggest break: After six years’ work as a consultant, Luis became a permanent employee of the transnational company, and his speciality, SAP security, is today a niche area in SAP and thus high in demand. Today Luis is a much sought-after IT expert, which he believes would not have been possible if he had remained in the Philippines.

Many respondents pointed out that having a degree is one of the advantages Filipino IT workers have in the Singapore labour market. According to Aiza, local Singaporeans are oftentimes polytechnic graduates (diploma holders), but “some companies prefer graduates with a bachelor’s degree from other countries”. The case of Roberto highlights the point. Roberto chose computer engineering because a computer was “really a big thing”. He got interested in it because everyone talked about computers. But Roberto started his career as an IT professional even before obtaining his degree in computer science. Roberto had to find a job a year after entering the college due to his family’s financial troubles. He got a chance to work in one of the biggest telecommunication companies in the Philippines. Once he secured employment, he did not feel the need to go back to university. Roberto was one of the pioneers in the IT department of his employer, and at one point he and his colleagues were sent abroad to assist the company’s overseas branches. During his assignment in Hong Kong, he discovered an interest in living abroad. Roberto’s two

130 During my fieldwork in Singapore, I met a Singaporean IT worker who enrolled in an IT degree course offered by an Australian university. She decided to take that course because as a polytechnic graduate (diploma holder) she felt insecure about her employability, considering that most foreign workers in her workplace held a degree.
brothers are also working in the field of IT, and one of them had been working in Singapore. So, Roberto was already familiar with the Singaporean IT labour market. Upon returning to the Philippines from Hong Kong, he decided to complete his degree simply because having a degree is a requirement for applying for a job in Singapore. As I have outlined previously, scholars have debated whether the departure of the educated from developing countries actually drained those countries of its educated citizens (Carrington et al., 1998). However, some people decide to acquire their degree simply to be qualified for a job abroad. In Roberto’s case, as soon as he got a degree certificate, he flew to Singapore as a tourist in order to seek work.

6.3 FILIPINO IT WORKERS AS TALENT

Talent in the making

All of my research participants in IT, except one, migrated to Singapore on Employment Pass. As highlighted in Chapter 2, Employment Pass holders are referred to as ‘foreign talent’ in government and public discourses. Many industrialised countries have instituted programmes to encourage the inflow of ‘talent’. Yet, Pang (2006, 156) observes that “none probably has been as assiduous or organized as Singapore in courting them”. PricewaterhouseCoopers’ 2005 survey of

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131 I did not seek this particular information from all research participants in the IT field, but considering their job position it was not difficult to speculate about the type of work pass they held upon arrival in Singapore. Singapore-based firms also prefer hiring non-citizen IT workers on Employment Pass because the aforesaid levy scheme and the dependency ceiling do not apply to Employment Pass holders. One female respondent who recently arrived in Singapore was working as a helpdesk analyst. Kelly Services (2008) reports that the minimum monthly salary of helpdesk analysts is around $S2,500 in 2008, but the research participant received less than $S2,500 and held an S Pass.
multinational corporations shows that Singapore’s talent management policies are among the ‘friendliest’ in the world (Pang, 2006). He attributes Singapore’s success in attracting “more than its share of internationally mobile talent” to the commitment of state leaders to this policy (Pang, 2006, 160). The Singapore government has employed an open-door policy for foreign talent. Since the late 1990s, policies to recruit foreign talent and the state rhetoric have become more intensified. This trend is closely related to the Singapore state’s pursuit of the knowledge economy, a dominant labour market discourse that began in the mid 1990s (Coe et al., 2000). Coe and Kelly (2000, 420) claim that labour market discourses are constructed to “justify and explain the necessity of extra-local linkages for providing certain types of labour, capital and knowledge”. At a 1997 National Day Rally speech, the then Prime Minister (now Senior Minister) Goh Chok Tong suggested ‘gathering talent’ as a main strategy of meeting future competition. Singapore, as claimed Goh, had prospered because of talent from all over the world. In his National Day Rally speech in 2001, Goh also (2001) announced the state’s vision for ‘a new Singapore’ – turning Singapore into a global city, a ‘globapolis’. In order to make the new Singapore, Goh (2001) urged Singaporeans to “discard mindsets and old ways of doing things that have become irrelevant” because Singapore has “no choice but to run at the high speed of the global economic treadmill”. One of the strategies envisioned by the Prime Minister is enlarging the pool of human capital and raising its quality. In addition to investing more on education and training, Goh (2001) again stressed the importance of bringing in global talent to “compete in the top league of

132 There has been much debate in the media about the state’s foreign labour policy, especially pertaining to foreign talent. When the recession following the Asian financial crisis in 1997 caused layoffs amongst locals, resentment grew towards the state’s policy (Srilal, 1999).
nations”. Goh also (2001) introduced the initiatives that other nations have taken in the ‘war for talent’:

Australia recently enlarged its immigration programme to bring in about 45,000 skilled migrants a year. And Japan is finalising a blueprint to import at least 30,000 IT professionals in the next five years. The US economy has done immensely well because it enjoys a “brain gain” year after year. For example, one quarter of the companies in Silicon Valley are created by or led by Indian and Chinese immigrants. Also, since 1945, the US has won 60% (228) of all the Nobel Prizes in economics and the sciences. At least 30% of these economists and scientists were born outside the US.

Prime Minister Goh (2001) emphasised that Singapore is not alone in wanting to attract talent, since “our own talent is being creamed off” by other countries. While the Philippine government has rarely engaged itself with the brain drain debate, the Singapore government has employed this claim to justify its open-door policy for foreign talent. Goh (2001) called talent importation “a matter of life and death” for Singapore because many “high-valued jobs” will move to China and elsewhere in 10 years’ time unless Singapore fights against other countries in this war for talent. Stephan Ortmann (2009) argues that state leaders in Singapore legitimated their role by using an ‘ideology of survivalism’ instead of constructing myths of national identity by emphasising its relatively small size and the scarcity of national resources. Because of the Singapore state’s repeated rhetoric, most respondents in IT were well aware of the meaning of their employment for Singapore. Mark, in his late thirties, reproduced the same rhetoric that Singapore will not be able to survive global competition without “foreign professionals”:

What they [Singapore] do is to import people from other countries, whether it’s China or India or the Philippines or even other countries like Myanmar or Malaysia. I don’t think they will be able to cope up without foreign professionals.
As Mark saw, the Singapore state opened its borders wide to non-citizen IT workers because of “a scarcity of home-grown IT talent”. Mark’s own experience of easier admission to the country – in comparison to Australia or the US where he initially wished to go – may also be the reason for him hold such a view. Before moving to Singapore, Mark applied for Australia’s skilled immigration, and after arriving in Singapore, he also considered moving to the US. However, because of a series of incidents, such as the dotcom crash and the 9/11 terrorist attack, Mark’s attempt to immigrate to the US did not succeed. Many respondents in IT repeated the state rhetoric about foreign talent, regardless of the personal story behind their decision to migrate to Singapore. This contributed to perpetuating the rationale for the Singapore state’s ways of nation building. Coe and Kelly (2000, 420) argue that labour market discourse in Singapore is dominated by the state, hence it is “fairly mono-vocal and uncontested”. As talent, Luis was also clearly aware that Singapore had benefited from his presence because his knowledge related to SAP security made a Singaporean branch more visible amongst all branches of the transnational corporation he had been working for.

This project of attracting talent is ongoing. In January 2007, the Singapore government introduced a new scheme, the Personalised Employment Pass (PEP) as part of their search for global talent. Contact Singapore, a centre established to attract global talent to work, invest and live in Singapore, explains that this new scheme is to “encourage global talent to work in Singapore” by giving them a great level of ‘flexibility’ (Contact Singapore, n.d.). Unlike the Employment Pass tied to a specific employer, the new PEP is granted on the strength of an Employment Pass holder’s individual ‘merits’. They do not need to re-apply for a new pass when changing jobs and also can remain in Singapore for up to six months in between jobs
to evaluate new job opportunities. Applicants must have earned a fixed salary of at least $30,000 in the preceding year, and have to maintain this fixed salary per annum.

**Flexible and cheaper Filipino labour**

However, there are other narratives challenging the discourse that positions Filipino origin IT workers as ‘talent’: Information Technology work is known for its long work hours; and Filipino IT workers in particular are also seen as ‘cheaper’ labour in the IT labour market in Singapore. The number of workers in the Information and Communications sector stood at 111,400 in 2005, comprising some 5 percent of the labour force (Info-communications Development Authority of Singapore, 2007). The Info-communications Development Authority of (IDA) has set a target to create 55,000 more ICT-related jobs by 2015 (Info-communication Development Authority of Singapore, 2009). However, Michael noted that: “Most IT workers here are actually foreigners. A very few locals are into IT”. Many respondents also pointed out that IT work in Singapore is occupied largely by specific ethnic groups (or

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133 The pass, which is valid for five years, is not renewable so that when the period is up, the pass holder will need to decide whether to take up permanent residency or revert back to the Employment Pass.

134 According to the Singapore Workforce Development Agency, IT-related occupations include (a) systems designer and analyst, (b) network systems and data communication analyst, (c) software engineer, (d) application programmer, (e) network and computer systems administrator, (f) helpdesk, (g) network engineer, (h) computer and information systems manager, (i) computer systems operator and (j) others.
nationalities). When asked how IT work is perceived in Singapore, Justin and Gerard mentioned respectively:

There is a racial category, and only a few races work in the IT sector. You see an Indian guy. Most probably this guy works in IT. You see a guy from the Philippines. They will say this guy most probably works in IT. (Justin)

In Singapore, I noticed that there are a lot of Indian and Filipino IT professionals. When I first came here, it seemed to me that there were mostly Indians, but slowly over the past few years Filipinos have been recognised. (Gerard)

At the time of the interview, Katherine was a country relationship manager of a large transnational financial company. Her company is known to employ a large number of Filipinos in its IT department. She estimated that between 500 and 1,000 Filipinos were working in her company while Indians comprised the highest portion of the IT workforce. During my fieldwork in Singapore, I met another Filipino employed in the same company. He told me that with many Filipino colleagues around he felt as if he were working in Manila. Katherine’s view was that IT work is not a popular job amongst Singaporeans although it is well paid:

I think Singaporeans don’t want to work in IT. There’s a very small percentage of true Singaporean Chinese in my company. ... In my company, there are only few [Singaporeans]. ... Even in other IT companies there are only few Singaporeans. I think they don’t like it [IT work]. They don’t like stress and long work hours.

Katherine reported that there were 20 IT workers in her team, but only one of them was Singaporean born. In the IT department of her company, only about ten out of a

\[\text{135} \text{ In Singapore, the population is categorised into four ethnic groups: Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others. When my interview respondents talked about Chinese or Indians, it was difficult to tell whether they referred to nationality or an ethnic category.}\]

\[\text{136} \text{ By ‘true Singaporean Chinese’ Katherine meant ethnic Chinese born as Singaporean to distinguish China-born Singaporeans or Chinese immigrants.}\]
hundred were Singaporean. As Katherine pointed out, IT work is known for long hours. Michael, working for an IT consultancy firm, stated that his employment in Singapore had been rewarding, but he also realised that he had become “more a workaholic type [of person] like Singaporeans”. In Singapore, he often found himself working in the client’s office even after office hours. His clients expected him to solve problems they encountered even after office hours because, as he put it, “they cannot wait until tomorrow”:

Here even after work sometimes clients still call you. You still need to support them. You do a lot of overtime without pay. … Actually, my boss didn’t specifically say that we have to work for overtime. Whenever we are in the client’s office doing something, if we haven’t finished, usually they are waiting for us to finish, so we end up finishing the work even after office hours because usually they say that they cannot wait until tomorrow. They want to solve it as soon as possible.

In the context of the racialisation of IT work, certain stereotypes of Filipino IT workers also emerged. Information Technology recruiter Maricel noted that Filipinos are known to be ‘flexible’ in terms of work hours and are more likely to go for overtime. Michelle, in her late twenties, agreed on this point: “Filipinos normally are known to be hardworking people. It’s not an issue for us to stay late at work to do overtime”. Michelle attributed this work ethic – flexibility – to Filipinos’ background as the citizens of a ‘Third World’ country. Filipinos are also seen as ‘cheaper’ than other ethnic groups and/or nationalities. Jocelyn, one of the recruiters interviewed, said that Singapore benefits from the migration of Filipino IT workers because of lower cost:
They [Filipinos] are cheaper compared to Caucasians. Their [Caucasians’] pay would be high whereas, you know, Filipinos and Indians are paid less.\textsuperscript{137}

Coe and Kelly (2000, 416) also note that in Singapore “[t]he willingness of foreign workers to accept (or rather their inability to contest) conditions of work that include shift work, overtime and few fringe benefits also tends to keep business costs down”. According to Jocelyn, Singapore has become an IT hub for big transnational financial companies because it has abundant cheaper labour – Filipinos and Indians.

As discussed, IT recruiter Maricel’s employer (IT consultancy firm) had regularly recruited Filipino IT workers as consultants because the firm’s major client ‘favoured’ Filipinos. Maricel argued that bringing in Filipino IT workers is beneficial for her employer, because Filipinos’ labour is “quite cheaper” than that of locals or other nationalities. Maricel also pointed out that there is a hierarchy within the cheaper IT workforce consisting of Indians and Filipinos:

India already has a very big market. A lot of big companies are there, and Indian IT workers get good salaries. When you bring them from India to Singapore, it’s quite expensive. It [recruiting and hiring IT workers from India] costs as much as recruiting locals [Singaporeans].

According to Maricel, Indian IT workers frequently “drop out” in the recruitment process because there are also attractive packages in India. Considering that Indians are now less attracted to the Singapore IT market and demand more benefits, the Philippines is a good source of labour in “a lower salary bracket”. In her study of identity and belonging of Australians employed in Singapore, Melissa Butcher (2006) notes that Australians are nicknamed ‘White Collar Filipinos’ due to the perception

\textsuperscript{137} Xiang (2004) notes that Singapore is seen as a transient point for Indian IT workers who want to have some international work experience and establish contacts.
within the transnational corporation sector that Australians are hardworking and cheap. As such, ‘Filipino’ in Singapore carries a connotation of being cheap.

**BENEFITS TALENT ENJOYS**

Despite the aforementioned rupture in the state-led construction of Filipino IT workers as ‘talent’, many Filipino IT workers still enjoy a range of labour and social rights granted by the Singaporean state, which symbolises their valorised status in Singapore. While Work Permit and S Pass holders are subject to a number of restrictions in Singapore, Employment Pass holders are only required to update their residential address during their stay (Singapore Ministry of Manpower, 2010a). Employment Pass holders can bring their family with them on a Dependent or Long Term Social Visit Pass. As Ruth Lister (2003, 44) aptly observes, “the rights associated with residence in and membership of a state can be seen as more of a hierarchy than a sharp division between citizens and non-citizens”.

Still, the major concern of Filipinos who have entered the Singapore labour market as non-citizens is job security. According to Katherine, Singapore has adopted a concept ‘30:70’. That is, only 30 percent of employees are permanent, and 70 percent are on contract. So, they can always ‘release’ employees during an economic downturn. They hire people again when they have a new project. In this respect, Katherine equated the Singaporean economic system with a machine: “Here, they

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138 These restrictions will be further discussed later in this chapter.
139 Q1 work pass holders are not eligible for the application of Long-Term Visit Pass for their common-law spouse, unmarried daughters above twenty one years of age, handicapped children above twenty one years of age, stepchildren under twenty one years age, parents and parents-in-law.
view people more like a machine that you can turn off when there is a recession. Then, you can turn [it] on when you need it”.

The respondents in IT also regarded the labour market in Singapore as highly competitive, because of the state’s open door policy towards foreign talent. For that reason, Michael felt the need to continuously update his skills. Michael explained that competition in the Philippines was only with locals, whereas in Singapore he saw a lot of people coming from different parts of the world, many of whom were more experienced than he. Michael said: “I need to continue to update my skills so that I can compete with them”. Michael’s comments are also in line with the Singapore state-led discourse on the knowledge economy. Since 1995 state leaders have talked about the need to constantly ‘update and upgrade’ the workforce in the face of new forms of knowledge-based competition (Coe et al., 2000).

In this context, obtaining permanent residency is one way of securing their employability in Singapore. 140 Most Filipinos interviewed considered taking up permanent residency or had already taken it. When I asked whether he had acquired permanent residency, Roberto, on Employment Pass, said that he had been planning to apply for it, but he was unable to get it yet because of his busy schedule. To become a resident, he had to have an interview with the Immigration and Checkpoint Authority (ICA). He set an appointment a few times, but he had to cancel them:

> I always set an appointment, but let’s say my appointment is January 13, and then come January 13, I am busy that day. So, I have to cancel my appointment. The next one will be two months from now [sic] or three months from now [sic] because it’s fully booked. When I set an

140 Some employers require job applicants to be Singaporean permanent residents or citizens.
appointment, I will be busy again. That had been dragged until eventually I gave up. Never mind. 

The ease of obtaining residency in Singapore can be identified in Roberto’s narratives. This ease felt by Filipino origin IT workers also symbolises the Singapore state’s valorisation of their ‘talent’. There are significant differences between this and the ways in which nurses narrate the process of acquiring residency. The experiences of nurses will be considered in the following chapter. Information Technology worker Rachel was transferred in 2006 from a Manila branch to Singaporean one within the same company, and she got her residency the same year she arrived. Having seen low population growth in the 1970s, the government has encouraged the settlement of foreign talent based on their belief that it will help improve the quality of residents thus furthering Singapore’s economic development. The state’s rationale for its foreign talent policy, as Pang and Lim (1982, 550-1) explain, is, 

…not just to increase the level of skills in a rapidly expanding economy, but to ensure that these skills are imparted to the local population and continue to be reproduced in future generations, thereby enhancing population quality.

The Singapore government pursued a population policy based on eugenics in the 1980s with the belief that intelligence is genetically inherited. This policy was unpopular, and was replaced by a new population policy focusing on ‘affordability’ (Wong et al., 2003). In the same vein, the Singapore state encourages the settlement

141 Information Technology workers I spoke to mentioned that Employment Pass holders usually apply for permanent residency after six months of employment in Singapore. When their applications are rejected, they have to wait for another two years before re-applying for residency. So, a frequently asked question in online forums for Filipinos in Singapore is: When would be the right time for a permanent residence application?
of self-governing subjects who can look after themselves and their families without state support. Meanwhile, Ong (2008, 123) observes that the influx of foreign talent has put strong pressure on locals who are both worried about losing middle class jobs to foreigners and urged to be continuously self-improving. Ong (2005, 697) argues that:

…rights and entitlements once associated with all citizens are becoming linked to neoliberal criteria, so that some entitlements may be withdrawn from some citizens and given to non-citizens.

While a range of rights are granted based on one’s economic contribution to a society, the notion of citizenship, which traditionally entails membership in a political community, undergoes transformations. In fact, permanent residents have access to most of the rights (including public housing, tax, healthcare, and educational benefits) and duties of Singapore citizens (Immigration and Checkpoint Authority of Singapore, 2010).142 As a single person, Michael does not see yet the difference between permanent residency and citizenship, except that Singaporean citizenship would give him a better opportunity to migrate to Canada. He said that he did not see “any reason to become a Singaporean citizen” because permanent residency is good “enough” to live and work in Singapore.143

State leaders have been put under pressure however. In September 2009, Prime Minister Lee Hsein Loong announced that the government will sharpen the

142 The Singapore government has enforced savings through the Central Provident Fund (CPF), which mandates that residents save for their retirement. Employers hiring a permanent resident are required to make a monthly CPF contribution. Those hiring non-citizen workers on work pass are exempt from it.

143 Nurse Diane, who is currently a permanent resident in Singapore, responded when asked whether she would consider taking up citizenship: “A lot of citizens are complaining. They don’t want to be a citizen. So, why would I be a citizen”?

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differentiation between citizens, permanent residents and foreigners (non-residents) to reflect the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship, although he added that: “…we cannot make it so onerous for PRs and non-residents that nobody wants to come to Singapore” (Ramesh, 2009). The government also tries to educate Singaporeans of the benefits Singapore enjoys by granting residency to foreign talent. In March 2010, the Minister for Manpower said in the Parliament Committee of Supply mentioned that “some of our foreign talent have not only contributed economically to Singapore, they have also made significant contributions in other ways” (Singapore Committee of Supply, 2010). The Minister introduced a story of Dr Law Wei Seng, a Malaysian who came to Singapore on an ASEAN scholarship in 1991 and is now a permanent resident. While working as a consultant at KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital, he has taken part in medical missions to disaster areas, such as the Aceh tsunami area and the earthquake zone in Padang. The Minister said: “We are proud to have global talent like Dr Law amongst us” (Singapore Committee of Supply, 2010). As a member of a Filipino music band, Garry had performed on many occasions. In addition to contributing to the Singapore economy by working for a company based in Singapore, Garry believed that he had also contributed to the nation building of Singapore by taking part in cultural activities and paying taxes. As he puts it, “I am helping in the nation-building [in Singapore] because I am a PR [permanent resident]”.

6.4 BETRAYAL & CONTRIBUTION

LOST TALENT

Policy makers and business leaders in most OECD member countries see bringing in non-citizens as part of their human-resource planning to redress skill shortages and to
quicken economic growth (OECD, 2002, Kuptsch et al., 2006). These OECD states, however, also constantly reminded themselves of an ‘ethical’ issue resulting from their efforts to attract people best suited to their economic interests (OECD, 2007). As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, the people who speak in this chapter are often grouped together to form the brain drain from the Philippine perspective. The respondents were aware of the particularity of their migration, because of the Singapore government’s rhetoric of foreign talent. In other words, the brain drain discourse and the Singapore state’s rhetoric of foreign talent reinforce each other.

Both Rachel and Edwin migrated to Singapore as intra-company transferees, and became naturalised Singaporeans. For Rachel, joining an IT company was a logical step after getting a computer-related degree. Rachel said that computers were the “in-thing” when she had to make a decision about her major. Rachel said that she did not have a clear idea about what she really wanted. Her parents and others told her that it would be good to study computer science, so she decided to take others’ advice. She put it this way: “I was just like following the flow of water where it pushed me to be”. Rachel was transferred in 2006 to the Singaporean branch of the company she worked with for a decade in the Philippines. Officially, she moved to Singapore as an intra-company transferee, but she also had a desire to be independent:

I think it’s mainly driven by the desire to be independent, to travel, to see more of the world. … You feel like you are a bird in a cage. You just want to go out. Go out of the cage and see what is out there.

Edwin was exposed to computers at an early age. He was one of a few people in his neighbourhood who had a computer, and he had already done some programming even before learning theories at university. Upon graduation, he started working straightaway. It was in the late 1990s, and according to Edwin, people just started to
show interest in the IT field. He shifted to another company in 1997 through which he was transferred to Singapore in 1999. Initially, he was on a short-term assignment, but his short-term assignment turned into long-term one, and finally the company made him a permanent employee of the Singaporean office. Brenda Yeoh (2006) notes that a non-citizen must have been a permanent resident for at least two to six years to obtain formal citizenship in Singapore. However, ethnic Chinese Rachel became Singaporean only two years after her arrival in Singapore. Rachel lodged her application for formal citizenship a year after she migrated to Singapore as an intra-company transferee. She described a Singaporean passport as “really easy to use”. If one has a Singaporean passport,

...practically almost all the countries, you don’t need visa. My job is, anytime they ask me to fly, you have to fly next day even. So, I thought it’s very convenient.

In addition, her decision to take up Singaporean citizenship was affected by how “the world perceives the Philippines”. As she saw it, the Philippines is ranked below average in the hierarchy of nations. She hoped to remove the ‘Third World country’ tag attached to her identification through naturalisation. As a recent naturalised citizen, Rachael still referred Singapore as ‘their’ nation. Rachael believed that her naturalisation is a ‘mutual benefit’: She benefited from having Singapore citizenship, but she considered that Singapore with a small population benefited ‘more’ from this deal because she is a ‘young’ – meaning, productive – professional sought after by the state. Rachel also viewed that she added a ‘number’ to the population of

144 The Singaporean state aims at maintaining the existing balance between three ethnic groups – Chinese, Malay and Indian, and the narratives of the Singaporean nation have evolved around these three ethnic groups.

145 She told me that almost all of her friends in Singapore are Filipinos.
Singapore “very desperate in terms of head count”. Edwin’s statement captures the essence of the Singapore state’s population/immigration policy: “They [Singapore] are actually organically acquiring a population”. Edwin acquired Singapore citizenship for security that the Singapore state provides, but he called himself Filipino by heart. As he put it, “I am a Singaporean citizen, but I am Filipino (ethnicity)”.

Rachel’s and Edwin’s career trajectories transcended the Philippine-Singapore border, but they were aware that their cross-border movement had different implications for the two countries involved. Rachael considered IT as one of the key professions in the Philippines, and therefore “losing talent like us (emphasis added)” had an impact on the country. As Rachel saw the situation, she was “working to help the Singapore economy rather than the Philippines”. Resembling the perspective of Rachel is that of Edwin who observed that Singapore without enough “IT people, financial people, engineers, architects … needs to import talent (emphasis added)”.

When asked whether he thought that his migration affected the Philippines in any way, Edwin responded,

…they would call it the brain drain. Yes, it’s true. My talent would have been better used there, but actually I am rendering it for Singapore.

Once the participants identify themselves with the label ‘talent’ given by the Singapore state, they naturally become talent taken away from the Philippines.

146 When I collected his socio-demographic information at the beginning of the interview, Edwin told me that he had acquired Singapore citizenship. When I was taking a note of the information, he suddenly asked me: “I am still qualified [to participate in your research]? I am still Filipino, right?”
Sharing the opinion of Luis, who claimed migration selectivity in the previous chapter, Garry also used this particular term ‘talent’:

So, who are those left behind, you know? … Those who are excelling more or good have a better chance to go out, which means those left behind are not (he hesitates) as good as those [migrating] because naturally good talent will be a priority (emphasis added). So, all the left behind are not the top. I am not saying I am the top – that will be a tendency. So, in that sense, the country will suffer.

The term talent – like brain – is ambiguous. Garry returned to his first employer in the Philippines after completing a one-year contract with a Saudi employer. It was in the late 1990s when he got a phone call from a former colleague who had moved to Singapore about a year ago. She was then about to move to the US with a job offer. When her boss asked her to recommend her replacement, the first person who came into her mind was Garry. He was interviewed over the phone. After the casual talk, Garry was asked to move to Singapore. The information about a job opening given to him was exclusive, and he did not need to compete with other candidates to secure the job. Notwithstanding his personalised migratory story, Garry believed – although feeling uncomfortable saying it out loud – that ‘those left behind’ were as not as good as Filipinos employed abroad – namely talent – in terms of performance, which, in turn, negatively affected the performance of the Philippines as a whole.

Though Rachel also described herself as talent lost to the Philippines, implying that her migration constitutes the brain drain, Rachel’s career trajectory makes us rethink what she described as ‘talent loss’. Rachel previously worked for a company operating in Manila, but she rarely worked ‘in’ Manila. Rachel spent almost nine out of 12 years of her employment in Manila ‘outside the country’. She recalled that while in Manila she was never home for three consecutive weeks. So, her migration was not entirely a ‘loss to’ the Philippines. At the same time, Rachel was in reality
regarded as ‘cheap’ labour in the global IT labour market during her decade-long employment in the Philippines. Rachel stated that the practices of employing Filipinos and deploying them for overseas assignments help companies with overseas branches cut labour costs, because Filipino employees still get their salary at the Philippine labour market rates. She was hired by a transnational corporation that is keen on lowering labour costs. While her company lowered labour costs by deploying her for overseas assignments, she felt that she was not able to save enough money for herself. This was one of the factors affecting her decision to look for an overseas job. Despite the fact that it is only in crossing the Philippine-Singapore border that Rachel became labelled as ‘talent’, Rachel considered herself as talent lost to the Philippines and gained by Singapore.

The respondents above shared the opinion that the Philippines was losing in the global competition for talent. Both Rachel and Edwin acknowledged that their migration (alongside others’) had become a source of poor development outcomes in the Philippines. Although she likened migration and development to the conundrum about “the chicken or the egg”, Rachel claimed the impracticality of the concept of national loyalty in today’s world, while still constructing migration as a matter of loyalty:

It’s [brain drain is] not something that I alone can fix. … The fact is that people are realistic nowadays, right? I – probably other people also – can’t

I met Daniel in Metro Manila, where he was working to finish his Master’s course in business. He was willing to grab an opportunity to work abroad if one comes. Employed as an IT consultant in an Indian-owned, Southeast Asian-based IT consultancy company, Daniel was supporting the business processes of clients offshore in high-income countries. One of their clients is from Ireland. He explained that this Irish client could hire 12 programmers in the Philippines with a budget to hire three Irish ones. People in the Philippines often questioned him, “Why are you still here!?"
be loyal and ‘do something for the country’ when I cannot feed myself and am about to die.

Edwin expressed his guilt about having left the Philippines and rendering his skills to Singapore. Having observed his home country’s ‘suffering’, Garry shared with me that it is his dream that all the bright minds in Asia gather in the Philippines:

I discuss with frustrated Filipinos here. … I dream of the day when Singaporeans coming to the Philippines to work. Instead of us coming here, Singaporean, Japanese and Malaysians come to work in the Philippines. I dream of that happening one day. Maybe it will. I don’t know how, but that’s my dream, so if that happens, I will be happy. (He laughs.) In 1965, we were number two, I think, in Southeast Asia. Now we are, I think, the second to the last in Southeast Asia. Even Thailand has overtaken us. We were much better than Thailand before.

When Garry decided to migrate to Singapore almost 13 years ago, he thought that employment in Singapore would be a good opportunity for him because Singapore was becoming the IT hub of Asia. Competition for talent across the globe and the Philippines’ struggle in this competition generated nationalistic sentiments amongst Garry and other “frustrated” Filipinos in Singapore. Garry hoped to return to the Philippines one day to be part of the dream he described. Garry’s view contributes to reinforcing the Philippine state-led discourse on labour migration and development.148

GUARDIANS OF THE GOOD NAME OF THE PHILIPPINE NATION

The Singapore state’s rhetoric of foreign/global talent reinforces the brain drain discourse, but it also allows the respondents an opportunity positively to engage themselves with the Philippine nation. Today Singapore is one of a few countries

148 As noted in Chapter 5, Garry internalised the state rhetoric about heroism by arguing that that OFWs’ contribution to the Philippines deserves national recognition.
which Filipino citizens are able to visit without filing a formal visa application. Also, because of geographical proximity between two countries, Singapore has emerged as a major destination for Filipinos looking for a (higher paying) job. Over the past decade, Filipinos have found a range of jobs in different sectors of the Singapore economy. Yet, the largest portion of Filipinos employed in Singapore works in the homes of Singaporeans. In 2008, out of the 144,312 Filipinos employed in Singapore some 80,000 Filipinas were employed as domestic workers. The importation of domestic workers has been part of a planned programme by the Singapore state. In an attempt to encourage Singaporean women’s participation in the paid work in 1978, the Singapore government introduced the Foreign Maid Scheme (Huang et al., 1996, Lyons, 2005). In 2008, there were an estimated 170,000 domestic workers in Singapore or about one in every six households hired a domestic worker (Yeoh et al., 2010). These domestic workers come mainly from Singapore’s less affluent neighbouring countries in South and Southeast Asia. Indonesians and Filipinos make up some 80 to 90 percent of the domestic work market in Singapore (Yeoh et al., 2010). The share of Indonesians has increased over the 2000s: At the time of their research, Coe and Kelly (2000) found that Filipinas constituted some 80 percent of domestic workers in Singapore.

Singapore’s (migrant) labour markets are gendered. As Kofman (2008, 68) puts it, “[d]omestic work is naturalised as being particularly suited to women who are deemed innately to possess the requisite skills, transferred from one private space to another”. These women migrants are employed on a special variant of Work Permit, and are not protected by the Employment Act, because the government prefers to see the terms and conditions of their work as private agreements between employers and employees. Work Permit holders – in contrast to Employment Pass holders – are
subject to a range of restrictions. The Employment of Foreign Workers Act (EFWA) of 1990 came into force in January 1991, and became a legal and administrative framework for the regulation of Work Permit holders. This EFWA was amended and renamed the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act (EFMA) in 2007. The Regulations have been put in writing in order to carry out the provisions of the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act (EFMA), and the Regulations specify the conditions of all work passes. Under the Regulations, Work Permit holders need to undergo a medical examination when directed by the Controller, and their work pass will be revoked if they are certified “medically unfit” (Singapore Ministry of Manpower, 2010a). They are not permitted to bring their families to Singapore. They are also prohibited from marrying Singaporean citizens or permanent residents without the prior approval of the Controller of Work Permit; failure to do so would result in repatriation and a ban on re-entering Singapore (Singapore Ministry of Manpower, 2010a). A Ministry of Manpower spokesman said that marriage approval is necessary “to send a clear message to foreign workers that they should come here only to work and not with the intention of sinking roots in Singapore” (Ng, 2008). The government also tries to ensure that migrant workers are repatriated upon the termination of their employment and prevent them from becoming undocumented by requiring their employers to deposit an $S5,000 security bond with the Ministry of Manpower. Employers have to “manage their worker’s behaviour in line with the Work Permit conditions”; otherwise, they could lose the security deposit (Singapore Ministry of Manpower, 2011). This arrangement leads to heightened surveillance of

149 The most recent revision to the EFMA was made in 2010.
150 The Ministry of Manpower considers on an individual basis the ‘merits’ of the appeal.
non-resident employees. It has been also reported that employers, fearing that they might lose thousands of dollars in security deposits, keep their foreign employees’ passports (Ng, 2010). Furthermore, female Work Permit holders, except those already married to a Singaporean citizen or permanent resident, are not allowed to fall pregnant or deliver a child during their employment in Singapore (Singapore Ministry of Manpower, 2010a). A woman found to be pregnant will be repatriated and the security deposit paid by her employer will be forfeited. As Willis, Yeoh, and Fakhri (2004, 5) note, “[f]or all the talk of fluidity and porosity, nation-states still exercise power over who legally enters the national space”. The unequal relationship between non-citizens and the receiving state is inscribed into “a system of laws, regulations, and practices by which it is decided who can live within a territory under what kind of conditions” (Anderson, 1983, cited in Piper et al., 2003, 15).

Figure 6.1 Filipinos in Singapore by major occupational sector, July-December 2008

Source: The Philippine Embassy in Singapore

Note: The Philippine Embassy classification; ‘domestic helpers’ number at 80,000.
The IT labour market is sex-segregated in Singapore. The Singapore Ministry of Manpower (2000) notes that engineering, IT and physical science professions are male-dominated occupations with women’s share at around 22 percent although the number of women in these occupations increased from some 7,500 to 22,600 between 1991 and 1999. The composition of Filipinos employed in the IT field of Singapore also reflects this imbalance. According to the estimates of the Philippine Embassy in Singapore, 12,800 male and 3,600 female Filipinos, including those having acquired residency, were employed as IT/computer programmers/analysts in 2008. In a country where a large number of Filipinas are employed as domestic workers, the experience of Filipina IT workers is different from that of their male counterparts.

Figure 6.2 The image of Filipina maids with a Philippine national flag

![Filipino Maids](image)

**Note:** A Filipino maid placement agency; photo by the author

Because of the decades-long history of the migration of Filipinas to Singapore predominantly as ‘maids’, the image of the Filipina maid looms large and Filipinos
in Singapore have become the ‘racialised’ Other. As Stephen Castles and Alastair Davidson (2000, 82) argue, “the nation-state has an inbuilt tendency to create difference and to racialize minorities”. Aiza, in her late twenties, believed that there is a stereotyped image of Filipinas that influences the type of job Filipinas get. She was hired by an IT consultancy firm that looked for a replacement for their Filipina employee.

She [the Filipina employee] said to me that they prefer a Filipina to work on her position. Why would they prefer a Filipina? Not Chinese, not Indian? There was an Indian who temporarily replaced her for two weeks. Then, they fired her. Why? Because the girl was complaining a lot that she was doing so many things. But Filipinas cannot complain. Filipinas do everything (emphasis added). … You see? Just think of it. Why do they hire a Filipina?

Bridget Anderson (2000) notes that migrant domestic workers she interviewed in Europe described jobs they were performing as ‘everything’, suggesting that a lack of job description for a domestic worker has serious implications for their working conditions. Aiza’s statement “Filipinas do everything” signifies the dominant discourse about Filipinas in Singapore as ‘maids’.

Michelle, in her late twenties, likes travelling, so she feels it is important for her to take some days off to travel to other countries from time to time. She enjoys planning her trips, and sharing travel tips with her friends through her blog. As a travel lover, she is also contemplating the idea of becoming a tour guide. Michelle called her IT professional journey as “accidental” because she never imagined of doing IT work during her college years. Michelle is an exemple of the bright minds of the Philippines. She chose political science as her major because she wanted to become a lawyer. But she did not pursue it because of the added costs that an extended study would generate, and instead decided to study business management. Upon graduation
from a prestigious university, Michelle joined a large foreign-owned consulting company in which she had interned at her final year of the university. She explained that this consulting company invited a top student of each course to participate in their leadership programme. Michelle has since then built her career in IT. Michelle was sent to the US and Spain as part of the company’s training. While in Spain, she fell in love with the country, and explained her experience with great passion and emotion:

We [Michelle and her colleague] were the first Filipino expats in Madrid. Spain is actually one of my dream countries. … I have been studying Spanish since I was in the university. When I got there, I got to practice my Spanish. We were just two of us; we were forced to mingle with locals and make new friends. I got to travel to Belgium and France. I was thinking, “Wow, the world is such a huge place, and this is what I have been missing’. … I love to read. I saw people in trains or in parks reading. I love being in the environment where you don’t get told by your friends, “Why are you reading again”? … When I was there, it was normal for me to talk to them about my passion, my interest, books. I got to learn a lot from their culture. It was a kind of eye opener for me.

Since then, she had been keen to have the second chance to live in Europe. Michelle was not tempted to migrate to Singapore, because she enjoyed working in Manila – she called it an ideal job. But, Michelle decided to take the offer for the money she needed to achieve her dream – studying in Spain. She had applied for a highly competitive European Union scholarship for a Masters degree. Failure to get this competitive scholarship, as Michelle put it, “triggered” her. It was then that the Singaporean branch of a large financial services company contacted her via the facilitator, whom she knew previously. “This job is the means for me to earn and be somewhere I want to be”, said Michelle. Having worked for less than a year in Singapore, Michelle found the work environment in the country stressful, but she considered her work experience in Singapore as an opportunity to work with people from different cultural backgrounds. Outside the workplace, her experience in
Singapore is somewhat different from that of male Filipino IT workers. One weekend Michelle took a taxi after finishing work. The taxi driver asked her whether it was her ‘day off’; considering the way he phrased the question, it was clear to her that the taxi driver assumed that Michelle is one of the Filipinas working in the homes of Singaporeans. Michelle told him that she just finished her shift. The driver followed up by asking where Michelle works, and she answered that she works in the bank. Michelle said that the driver was “so surprised” that he was not able to continue the conversation.

In the Philippines, some policymakers and key persons interviewed by Asis spoke of national dignity that had been compromised as a result of the migration of Filipinas as domestic workers. Asis (1992, 82) summarises the point:

> To some, it is a national disgrace that Filipinos have to look for opportunities elsewhere, that they have to work as servants or domestic helpers in foreign lands … The costs to national dignity are irreparable when these workers, regardless of how many, are victimized.

In 1993, the Social Weather Stations, a private survey research institution in the Philippines, conducted a national survey entitled “Public Attitudes Towards Female Overseas Workers: Implications for Philippine Migration Policy”. One of the survey findings, cited in Rodriguez (2005, 8) is that:

> …on the statement that women workers overseas bring shame to the country, the predominant position is disagreement (47%). Still, the percentage who outright agree (21%) and those who neither agree nor disagree (32%) are, uncomfortably high. (Abrera-Mangahas, 1994)

As Rodriguez (2008) points out in another article, the way this survey question was phrased and its findings were presented are erroneous. Nevertheless, the issue of ‘national shame’ certainly emerged, because a large number of Filipinas take up low-paid jobs abroad and are often subjected to abuse and exploitation on account of their
limited labour and social rights in host societies. The issue of national shame was also raised in the public dialogue on whether the migration of Filipinos as domestic workers threatens the image of the country (Rodriguez, 2005). According to Rodriguez (2005, 10), one migrant advocate’s statement implied: “the Philippines cannot be seen as a ‘world-class’ exporter of labour if it exports low-status domestic helpers”. It was when Filipinos began to be conscious of the image of the Philippine nation and the national self-esteem that the earlier introduced case of Flor Contemplacion occurred in Singapore.

The deployment of a large number of Filipinas into the homes of Singaporeans for almost three decades has become a significant factor affecting how Singaporeans see the Philippine nation.¹⁵¹ In Singapore, a contributor to OFW Pinoy Star, a monthly Filipino community magazine, writes:

[Arriving in Singapore twenty years ago] has allowed me to experience what it means to be a Filipino in Singapore. We have been described as a nation of domestic helpers … We are quiet by nature, and that is why we never strive to address these negative perceptions (emphasis added). (Certeza, 2009)

Aguilar (1996, 120) argues that in Singapore the stereotype of the Filipino as a maid is prevalent, so that “the higher-status Filipino professionals, most of them in the corporate sector, struggle with the imagery with which they are unavoidably lumped”. They internalised the Singapore society’s “racially stigmatized definition of Filipinoness”, and became amongst “the most sensitive to the underclass image of

¹⁵¹ Meanwhile, Filipino IT workers and nurses are not as well known as Filipina ‘maids’ to other Filipinos in Singapore or in Singaporean society at large. For this reason, Filipino IT workers and nurses I talked to were not conscious of each other’s presence. Only a few research participants mentioned about the other group; the only reason Filipino IT workers and nurses talked about the other group during the interview session is that they were given with the information that I study both Filipino IT workers and nurses.
their nationality” in Singapore (Aguilar, 1996, 123). The earlier mentioned contributor to the magazine celebrated the changing face of Filipinos in Singapore by listing the names of well-known Filipinos living and working in Singapore. Similarly, Gerard noted that the increasing Filipino IT population contributed to altering the image of Filipinos in Singapore:

I got the impression that Singaporeans thought of Filipinos as domestic helpers, but now it seems that they are getting a different idea. They seem more open to the idea that there are a lot of Filipino professionals as well. And most of these guys are in IT.

This view was also shared by Victor who had been working in Saudi Arabia and Singapore for 15 years:\footnote{152}

Because there are many Filipino IT professionals here, I guess our [Filipino IT professionals’] stay here as a group brings a [new] image that there are Filipino professionals who can make it abroad. Some locals here think that Filipinos can get a job only as a domestic helper.

Filipinos labelled as talent/brains hope to shift the national image of the Philippines marked by Filipina maids. The respondents were well aware of the importance of IT in Singapore. The Information and Communications sector is considered as a key contributor to Singapore’s economy, contributing some $11.1 billion or 6.1 percent to Singapore’s GDP in 2004 (Singapore Workforce Development Agency, 2006/07). Gerard stated: “The government spends a lot for IT. … It seems like Singapore

\footnote{152 He considers sending money to the Philippines is one of the reasons why he is in Singapore. He sends money for the expenses of his partner and their new born child, and also allocates a portion of the remitted money to his daughter’s education plan in order to make sure that she gets a college education. A portion of the remitted money also goes to his own pension plan, because he believes that the amount of pension that he would receive from Social Security System – the Philippine government-sponsored social plan – would not be enough for him to live on after his retirement. Although the Philippine state or nation did not appear in his narratives about his study, work and migration, Victor is also well aware that his migration has implications for the Philippines.}
acknowledges that IT is important and is going to help their economy – something that they cannot live without”. Accordingly, the respondents also stressed the significance of their labour in Singapore.\textsuperscript{153} Roberto remarked: “If all of Filipino ITs here in Singapore go back to the Philippines, some investors will also move out of Singapore”. Roberto’s remark resembles the statement made by Prime Minister Goh at a 1997 National Day Rally speech:

> Without foreign bankers, we cannot be a financial centre, and there would be fewer jobs for Singaporeans in the banking sector. Without foreign skilled workers, many MNCs would not set up factories here, and there would be fewer jobs not only for Singaporean workers, but also for Singaporean engineers and managers.

In this context, Michelle interpreted it as a ‘positive’ change that many Filipinos come to Singapore to work in the IT field:

> I think it’s a good thing that a lot of [Filipino] IT professionals are coming to Singapore because it kind of changes what they [Singaporeans] think about Filipinos. I think, before, they used to think that [all] Filipinos are working as domestic helpers.

Michelle’s view was that “it’s only now” that Singaporeans’ perception of Filipinos was changing and they came to realise that “there are more to Filipinos than domestic helpers”. Filipina domestic workers abused and exploited due to their limited rights in Singapore have become emblematic of the Philippine nation – symbolising the Philippines’ inferiority to Singapore, which makes Filipinos labelled

\textsuperscript{153} Wong (2003) notes that the growth of IT skills available in Singapore is attributed in part to the government’s non-citizen labour policy to attract people with IT skills from around the world. Local IT firms actively recruit non-citizen workers, especially from China and India (Manning et al., 2007). Surveys conducted in the mid 1990s show that non-citizens made up more than 25 percent of the total workforce in the IT sector (Wong, 2003).
as talent/brains believe that their representation abroad benefits the Philippines, because it upgrades the national image of the Philippines abroad in a positive way.

6.5 CONCLUSION

The respondents in the IT field were well aware of the value of their labour in Singapore, because of the Singapore state rhetoric about foreign ‘talent’. The value is also inscribed into the immigration and citizenship regime. The brain drain claim is reinforced by this particular discourse that surrounds Filipino origin IT workers in Singapore. Their valorised status in Singapore also makes them believe that their presence in Singapore would benefit the Philippine nation because it would ‘upgrade’ the current underclass image of the Philippine nation, which has been predominantly represented by Filipina maids. In crossing the Philippine-Singapore border to labour, Filipinos are classified according to the categories specified by the Singapore state which is actively pursuing economic prosperity as a way of constructing the nation. Those Filipinos constructed as most contributing to the nation-building process of Singapore also claimed to represent the Philippine nation. This talent/maid division reveals the irony in the Philippine state-led harmonised construction of heroes and heroines, and at the same time validates the Singapore state’s regime that considers the labour of Filipinas employed in the homes of Singaporeans as less economically worthy. The accounts of IT workers represented in this chapter are markedly different from those of nurses – another group of ‘lost brains’ – which I am going to analyse in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 7 NURSING & CITIZENSHIP OF SINGAPORE

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Information Technology is a male-dominated sector, as the existing statistics show. The voices introduced in the preceding chapter were mostly of male Filipinos. In this chapter, I analyse the views and experiences of Filipinos facing the same discourses travelling across the Philippine-Singapore border, but practising in a numerically female-dominated profession, nursing. Raghuram (2000, 432) precisely points out that the nation-state has been the primary unit of analysis in the brain drain literature, and that gender issues are ignored in the framing of the questions it asks. She also argues that the relevant literature has “largely neglected the social and cultural characteristics of brain drain, including gender, as it is professed gender-neutral” (Raghuram, 2000, 432). According to the Singapore Nursing Board (SNB), nursing in Singapore is a female-dominated occupation. In the case of the Philippines, nursing is still largely dominated by women, although many men have also taken up a nursing course for an opportunity to migrate. The comparison of two occupational groups brings an additional dimension to the topic of my enquiry because, as pointed out by Manning and Sidorenko (2007, 1087), the healthcare and IT sectors are “extreme cases of regulation of professional standards and migration flows”. The healthcare sector is highly regulated by the governments, whereas the IT sector is largely unregulated. This chapter begins with a discussion of labour mobility between the two labour markets, before exploring the ways in which the Singapore’s immigration and citizenship regime, intersecting with the prevailing discourses surrounding the Filipino origin nurses, shapes their views and experiences as well as how that regime interacts with their Filipino national identity.
7.2 Mobility Across Two Labour Markets

A Licence as a Barrier

Filipinos who have passed the Board of Nursing Philippines licensure examination become nurses in the Philippines, but their qualification from the Philippines is not recognised in Singapore. One must get a license to practice nursing in Singapore. Nurses in Singapore are divided largely into two groups: registered nurses and enrolled nurses. In the UK and its former colonies, the registered nurse is a first-level nurse, and the enrolled nurse is a second-level nurse who reports to a registered nurse or doctor (Nichols et al., 2010). The SNB is the regulatory authority responsible for approving applications for the registration and enrolment of nurses. While ‘registered’ and ‘enrolled’ nurses are terms to indicate that workers have passed the SNB licensure examination and met all requirements needed, corresponding job titles are ‘staff’ and ‘assistant’ nurses. The two figures below show the numbers of foreign trained nurses who sat for the licensure examinations both in and outside Singapore. These bars symbolise one of the ‘barriers’ facing foreign trained nurses.
Figure 7.1 Foreign trained nurses who sat for the Registered Nurse licensure examination, 2001-2006

Figure 7.2 Foreign trained nurses who sat for the Enrolled Nurse licensure examination, 2001-2006

Not all the Filipino nurses are qualified to take the SNB licensure examination, because they need to have Singaporean employers sponsoring them. Singapore hospitals regularly employ foreign trained nurses for three positions: staff nurses, assistant nurses and healthcare assistants. The SNB has set a criterion for foreign

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154 The healthcare assistant position was created during the restructuring of public hospitals after 1985 to enable nurses to concentrate on nursing (Tan, 2009b). In some hospitals this
trained individuals applying for each position. To qualify as a staff nurse in Singapore, a foreign trained applicant must have three years’ work experience as a staff nurse in a hospital with a capacity of no less than two hundred beds. To work as an assistant nurse, an applicant should have at least one year’s work experience as a staff nurse in a hospital with a capacity of no less than two hundred (a hundred at times) beds. Some do not meet these criteria because the hospitals in which they have worked were not large enough or they worked as company or school nurses. Rica, for instance, worked as a staff nurse for seven years, but she was recruited as an assistant nurse only. Filipino nurses who do not fall under either category may apply for a healthcare assistant position.155

RECRUITMENT PROCESS

All the interviewees were assisted by recruitment agencies either in the Philippines or Singapore to get in touch with their respective employers. Singaporean hospitals do not recruit non-citizen nurses directly. For instance, Jonathan arrived in Singapore as a tourist to find a job, and visited a number of healthcare institutions to submit his job application. However, he was asked to contact a local Singaporean recruitment agency. As such, mobility amongst nurses is more restricted than it is amongst those with IT skills. The fact that nurses must use recruitment agencies has implications for position is designated as the patient care assistant. They are usually called nursing aides in nursing homes.

155 When I visited one of the agencies in Ermita district, Manila, outside the agency I saw three Filipinas looking at the poster advertisement about nursing jobs in Singapore. They were friends who were together looking for overseas jobs. I told them I had had opportunities to speak to a number of Filipino nurses currently working in Singapore and they could ask me any questions they might have. One of the Filipina nurses, who did not have any work experience, asked me whether she could work in Singapore as a staff nurse. It has become difficult for nursing graduates to get work experience as staff nurses because of the large number of students graduating every year.
the lives of nurses because of an additional financial burden that results from using agencies. According to the manager of a recruitment agency in the Philippines, there are a lot of documents that need to be verified in the cross-border recruitment context, and it is their job to verify them on behalf of their Singapore clients. Hospitals in Singapore recruit Filipinos who have passed the Board of Nursing Philippines licensure examination mainly through two Singaporean firms who establish partnerships with Philippine recruitment agencies. These Singaporean firms typically have more than one partner in the Philippines. This arrangement creates competition amongst the Philippine agencies recruiting nurses from different regions of the Philippines. Recruitment agencies operating in the Philippines are required to obtain a license from the POEA. These recruitment agencies tend to specialise in the deployment of particular occupations and/or in particular destinations (Tyner, 2009). Recruitment agencies in the Philippines are concentrated in Metro Manila; almost half of the private employment agencies were particularly in the city of Manila (Tyner, 2009). Amongst the five recruitment agencies that I identified as specialising in the recruitment of nurses to Singapore, four have their headquarters in the city of Manila, specifically Ermita district. They usually have another branch outside Metro Manila in order effectively to recruit nurses from other regions and cities of the archipelago. The Philippine agencies recruit nurses throughout the year in order to

156 The agencies recruiting and deploying land-based Filipino workers are classified into private employment agencies and service/construction contractors. Tyner (2009) elucidates how the POEA positions itself in linking recruitment agencies in the Philippines and foreign employers. The POEA runs the Client Referral Assistance programme to bridge foreign employers who attempt to recruit Filipino workers for the first time with local recruitment agencies. Upon the request, the POEA provides a list of usually three recruitment agencies to the potential employer. Three agencies make bids to the potential foreign employer, who may either accept one of the proposals or decline all. In the latter case, the POEA provides a full listing of licensed recruitment agencies.
quickly respond to job orders from their Singaporean partner. A manager of a Philippine recruitment agency also mentioned that it had become more difficult to find candidates meeting the aforesaid minimum requirements set by the SNB. In this situation, the efforts of the Singaporean professional body to regulate the employment of foreign trained nurses in Singapore are not always successful. One nurse I interviewed, for instance, did not meet the requirement to become a staff nurse. However, her recruitment agency, which wanted to meet the job order from their client, told her that “what matters is [that] you function as a staff nurse”. In 2009, these cross-border business networks were annually recruiting some three hundred Filipino nurses for major hospitals in Singapore.\(^{157}\) A majority of interviewees were recruited through these cross-border business networks. Although major Singapore hospitals recruit Filipino nurses through the cross-border business networks, there are other players involved in the recruitment of Filipino nurses to Singapore. The representative of a Singaporean recruitment agency mentioned that they send people to the Philippines for the purpose of recruitment once or twice a year, but that the frequency of their visits depends on orders from their customers.\(^{158}\)

Although nurses’ cross-border mobility is more restricted in comparison to those in IT, Singapore has become the ‘easiest’ option available to Filipino nurses searching for a job outside the Philippines, except for some countries in the Middle East. It is difficult to land in the destination countries most favoured by Filipino nurses, including Canada, the US or the UK. Many respondents stated that the processing

\(^{157}\) Interview on 7 October 2009 with the manager of a nurse recruitment agency in Manila which has a partner Singaporean firm.

\(^{158}\) Email correspondence on 17 August 2009.
time was short for a job in Singapore. For instance, Lance said the entire process – from application to arrival in Singapore – took less than three months. Maya identified peer pressure as one important factor that had affected her decision to migrate to Singapore. She recalled that her best friends had already migrated to Saudi Arabia and Canada. So, she said to herself, “You need to do something. You will be the only one left here”. Canada was the country that she wanted to land in, because of positive images she had had of Canada, ever since as a child she had seen pictures of her classmate from Canada. But because of the lengthy process required for a job in Canada or the US, she decided to migrate to Singapore, the first country from which she received positive feedback. Eileen’s decision to become a nurse was strongly influenced by her father who was then working in Saipan. Having observed the increasing demand for nurses abroad, he predicted that the nursing profession would provide Eileen with a better opportunity to work in a high income country. Though Eileen was not interested in nursing at all, she recalled that she was very excited about her father’s promise to take her to the US once she completed her course. After graduation, Eileen worked in Manila, financially supporting her relatives’ educations while waiting for her application for US immigration to be approved. Then, she met a recruiter looking for nurses to work in Kuwait. Eileen was attracted by his/her offer that she would not need to pay a recruitment fee to secure a position, as well as the good salary and other benefits promised. After working in Kuwait for six months in 1995, Eileen went to Dubai and Abu Dhabi for a break. During the visit, she met her classmate, who just started working in

159 The recruiter came to her hospital. It was her nurse manager who helped her get in touch with this recruitment agency. It was reported that recruitment agencies reward a staff nurse or nurse educator with a $US1,000 check for each nurse that they recruit (Kingma, 2006, 45).
Singapore. She asked Eileen if she would be interested in applying for a job in Singapore. At that time, Eileen heard about a foreign (non-Filipina) woman being raped in the Middle East. This incident influenced her decision to move to another country. Eileen returned to the Philippines after one year working in Kuwait, and she lodged her application for Singapore. Sharon also wanted to migrate to the US or the UK. But she did not receive any positive response to her applications. One day, she passed by a local job fair, and happened to see one agency recruiting nurses to Singapore.

Although the processing time for a job in Singapore’s nursing sector is short, the migration of Filipino nurses to Singapore shows a clear pattern of downgrading of their occupational status. The data available suggests that a large number of Filipino nurses might have taken a healthcare assistant position by migrating to Singapore. According to the SNB data, a total of 672 Filipinos were employed as staff nurses in Singapore as of 2008, with 734 designated as assistant nurses. The SNB does not report the number of Filipinos employed as healthcare assistants. Meanwhile, the data collected by the Philippine Embassy in Singapore indicates that a total of 8,710 Filipinos have nursing-related occupations. The gap between the two sources of data suggests that a majority of Filipino nurses assume lower level positions in the nursing sector in Singapore. Six out of 11 respondents employed in Singaporean hospitals had started their careers in Singapore as healthcare assistants/nursing aides.

Another observable pattern is that Filipino nurses are recruited to fill the poorly paid occupational niche in the nursing sector, as has been shown for other countries (see Ball, 2004). Filipinos fill a significant portion of positions in Singapore’s hospitals, but their presence is particularly dominant in care facilities for the elderly. A
majority of the staff in nursing homes are non-citizens (Kok et al., 2010). This is also the case in Grace’s nursing home. The staff shortage is especially high in primary healthcare institutions, such as community hospitals and nursing homes. However, many locals shun work in nursing homes, because, as Member of Parliament Denise Phua Lay Peng said in the March 2010 Budget Speech on Productivity, Aged, Disabled and Babies, “[t]he daily tasks of having to carry, wash, feed and diaper-change adult disabled patients – especially basic care for the chronic sick – are tasks that most will not find appealing” (Peng, 2010). As a response, the government has facilitated the employment of non-citizen workers in some institutions providing eldercare by waiving the foreign worker’s levy (Ling, 1998). Pay is poor in nursing homes. In 2008, nursing aides employed in a private nursing home were reported to earn about $S300 to $S400 per month, after the deduction of $S300 for their food and lodging (Thomas et al., 2008). As noted a few times, the unemployment rate amongst nursing graduates is high in the Philippines, because of the mushrooming of nursing schools. Three respondents in their twenties, currently working in nursing homes, were unemployed before migrating to Singapore. Grace spent some rough months before moving to Singapore, because she failed in the qualifying examination to apply for a job in the US and stayed unemployed. It was then that a Singaporean recruiter approached her in her hometown with an opportunity to work in Singapore, as a nursing aide. Alberto wanted to become a veterinarian, but he chose to study nursing because of the advice of his elder brother who works as a veterinarian in Canada. Upon graduation, Alberto started working as a voluntary nurse in the

160 Community hospitals provide care for “elderly patients, who require longer inpatient care, but who do not require the high technology and sophisticated care of acute hospitals”, whereas nursing homes provide “primary nursing care, with little or no medical care” (Ling, 1998).
Philippines. Because he saw many unemployed nursing graduates from his college, Alberto realised that it would not be easy for him to get a job in the Philippines. It was then Alberto’s family friend, who had been working in Singapore, gave him the contact details of a placement agency in Singapore. Though many men have taken up a nursing course in the Philippines for an opportunity to migrate, it seemed clear to me that the male nurses I spoke to were conscious of the perception of nursing as ‘women’s work’. For example, Joel’s decision to choose a nursing course was influenced by his mother, who herself is a nurse in a community clinic. Because he wanted to be a musician, Joel was not entirely happy. In particular, when he enrolled in nursing in 1999,

…most of the nurses were female. So, my friends were teasing me, [saying]: “Hey, all the nurses are females. Are you one of them?” Even a guy can be a nurse, right? ... In our school, there were only three of us, three guys, and two are a bit, you know, half (read, gay).

Joel was also conscious of nursing as involving “feminine qualities – something that women are deemed to be naturally good at and able to perform relatively easily” (Payne, 2009, 353) when he explained to me the meaning of nursing:

Nurse means to care, to look after. We are here to look after them. We are here to take care of them. It’s a bit awkward for a guy to say that, but to me, it’s really important (emphasis added).

After passing the Nursing Board of the Philippines licensure examination, Joel spent months playing the electric guitar instead of looking for a job because, as he put, hospitals in the Philippines hire graduates from well-known universities and his is “ranked at the bottom”. He remained unemployed because of high competition for entry-level nursing positions in the Philippines. His mother then suggested to him to work in Singapore, because the nursing workforce in the Philippines had become bigger and it would be more difficult to get a nursing job in the Philippines. Joel had
a cousin who was then working as a manager in one of the nursing homes in Singapore. Joel’s mother gave his resume to the cousin who then passed it on to the agency in Singapore. It was difficult for Joel to accept the situation where he had to work for a nursing home. As he put it, “I came to Singapore in 2004. All I knew was that I would be working in the hospital. To my surprise, I was brought to a nursing home. (He pauses.) Ok, from the hospital [in the Philippines] to a nursing home [in Singapore]”.

7.3 **Filipino Nurses as Non-Talent**

**Undervalued Labour**

The foregoing discussion highlights that the migration of Filipino nurses to Singapore is highly regulated and that they are recruited mainly to take up lower level positions in the nursing sector. This highly regulated and controlled cross-border movement has a significant impact on the lives of Filipino nurses in Singapore. As noted above, Filipino nurses’ experience in the Philippines, such as the length and place of work (the bed capacity of their workplace), is considered in the determination of their designation (staff nurse, assistant nurse or healthcare assistant), but their ‘skills’ are not taken into account in the determination of their salaries.161 Filipino nurses recruited to Singapore as entry-level nurses are treated as being equal to local nursing students just entering the labour market. For instance, Diane worked in the Philippines for 10 years – two years as a volunteer nurse and

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161 Non-citizen nurses recruited to Singapore are often not protected by a union. For instance, according to the 2010 collective agreement between the Singapore Health Services, one of the largest clusters of Singapore’s public healthcare institutions, and the Healthcare Services Employees’ Union, the union does not negotiate on the terms and conditions of “foreign staff on first contract”.
eight years as a staff nurse – before being hired as a staff nurse in Singapore. But her 10 years’ experience was not counted in her initial salary in Singapore because hospitals appoint migrant nurses on a flat rate for each position (staff nurse, assistant nurse or healthcare assistant).  

This sets out the highest basic monthly salary (below $S1,800) to be received by foreign trained non-citizen nurses recruited to the Singapore labour market. As discussed in Chapter 2, salary is one of the key factors that determine the type of a work pass issued to a non-citizen worker. Almost all non-citizens recruited as nurses are therefore employed on S Pass – not Employment Pass issued to ‘professionals’ earning more than $S2,500 a month, which symbolically indicates the status of nursing in Singapore as a ‘middle-level skilled’ occupation.

Solimano (2008b), in *The International Mobility of Talent*, classifies talent into three types: ‘directly productive talent’, ‘academic talent’ and ‘talent in social and cultural sectors’. According to him, medical doctors and nurses constitute the third type of talent. However, the work pass category or immigration status of non-citizen nurses recruited to Singapore clearly indicates that they are not considered as so-called talent. Unlike their counterparts in the IT sector, none of Filipino nurses used the term talent in identifying themselves.

The positioning of nursing as a middle-level skilled occupation is also embedded in the system to educate and train nurses in Singapore. I would suggest that Singapore’s

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162 Filipino nurses recruited in 2011 as healthcare assistants are paid about $S900 with free accommodation.

163 This categorisation is also adopted by the Singapore Department of Statistics which classifies nurses – both staff and assistant – as ‘associate professionals and technicians’, implying that nursing is not a profession but is semi-professional.
non-citizen labour importation and immigration regime is a mirror of societal values. Lance chose engineering, because of his father’s advice, but later shifted to a nursing course “out of encouragement” from his mother and grandmother. He felt that their advice was convincing because becoming a nurse would be the “easiest way to go to another country”. He described his decision to choose a nursing course as “just go[ing] with the flow”. Lance, working in the community hospital in Singapore, noted:

As far as I know, a nursing job here is just a diploma [job]. It’s not really considered as a degree [job] here in Singapore. … Singapore is hiring so many nurses from other countries because nobody wants to take a nursing course here. It's just a diploma course.

In Singapore, nursing is usually seen as a career option for people with less than impressive academic results (Koh, 2004). According to Joanna’s observation, Singaporeans tend to think that “nursing is not good enough”, so that Singapore imports non-citizen nurses “to build up the hospital”. Lance’s view is shared by O’Brien and Arthur (2007) who suggest that nursing is often not regarded as a preferred career choice for school leavers in Singapore partly because it is “undervalued when studied at the diploma level”.

Today nurses in Singapore are largely educated by post-secondary institutions. Formal nursing programmes began in 1956 with the opening of the School of Nursing adopting the British system of nurse training and education (Tan, 2009b). The School of Nursing ran the basic and post-basic certificate programmes. A change was made to the structure of nursing education when Nanyang Polytechnic began offering a diploma course in 1992 (Tan, 2009b). In 2000, the School of Nursing was closed and replaced by the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) (Tan, 2009b). Since then, staff nurses have been required to complete a three-year full-time
polytechnic diploma, whereas assistant nurses need to obtain a certificate from the ITE.\textsuperscript{164} There was resistance to introducing a nursing degree programme in Singapore (Tan, 2009b). A Ministerial Committee, made up of doctors and ministers, tasked to review and recommend the government’s role in the provision of healthcare in 1993, did not support the idea of upgrading nursing education to the degree level. This was because the Committee thought this would increase healthcare costs and discourage graduate nurses from performing more mundane duties (Tan, 2009b). It was only in August 2006 that the first undergraduate nursing degree programme was introduced to educate nursing ‘leaders’ (Tan, 2009b).\textsuperscript{165} The overall structure has remained the same.

In this context, Lance’s employment in Singapore is a persistent struggle. His professional identity has been compromised because he is doing a ‘diploma job’ after having completed a four-year degree course in the Philippines: “They [Singaporeans] assume we [Filipinos] finished our course just as a diploma [as they did]”. What is worse, Lance came to assume an assistant nurse position by crossing the Philippine-Singapore border. I met Lance for an interview when he had just been reclassified as a staff nurse. He told me that he had not shared with his friends in the Philippines his work experience in Singapore, because he was doing a ‘not-so-staff-nurse’ job. He said that he was not ashamed of doing hands-on work like bathing patients and changing their diapers, but he was still conscious of how his friends would think of

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\textsuperscript{164} Nanyang and Ngee Ann polytechnics provide a three-year diploma course. Nanyang Polytechnic now provides a two-year accelerated diploma in nursing for mid-career switchers. A staff nurse with a diploma may pursue an advanced diploma with one of the polytechnics or undertake an Australian conversion degree programme (O’Brien et al., 2007).
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\textsuperscript{165} The Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies, National University of Singapore, was founded in 2005, and its undergraduate nursing degree programme was commenced in August 2006. Only two batches of graduates have entered the workforce.
\end{flushright}
him. As he put it, “[s]ome people think it’s not achievement on your part”. Despite his downgraded position as an assistant nurse, Lance believed that he was able to apply what he had learnt in the Philippines in the hospital for which he was working. When asked how his migration had affected him, Lance mentioned, “Professionally I think I have been able to contribute what I have learnt in my country to how they work here. Actually there are so many different ways [of doing work]”. Lance also responded to the lower societal recognition of nursing work in Singapore by emphasising the higher qualification of Filipino nurses as a whole and the collective superiority of Philippine nursing: “In my country, we need to take the board exam. We need to take a degree”. What becomes clear is a distinction between us (Filipino degree holders) and them (Singaporean diploma holders). Lance was also familiar with nurses’ training and education in other countries:

Nurses from Myanmar take a nursing course only for two or three years. So, it’s just a diploma course for them. You don’t [even] need to take the board exam. In Myanmar, they just have to serve their country. That’s it. Then, they will give you a certificate [to practice]. … Chinese have a choice; you either take a course for two or three years or continue [as a degree].

Philippine nursing leaders consider the higher qualification of Filipino nurses as an advantage that Filipino nurses would enjoy in the international labour market. The ASEAN member states signed the Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) in Nursing Services in December 2006 to “facilitate mobility of nursing professionals within ASEAN” (ASEAN, 2006). In the ASEAN region, Singapore, along with Malaysia, are the major importers of non-citizens in the healthcare sector (Manning

166 I assume that a licence to practice is issued to nursing students once they provide service for a certain period of time.
et al., 2007). Padilla, Philippine Professional Regulation Commission Commissioner, said that Filipino nurses have the competitive advantage in the Southeast Asia region because of higher educational and professional standards in the Philippines (Ortiz, 2008). As in Singapore, nursing was introduced in the Philippines during the colonial period. But, the development of nursing has been more advanced in the Philippines. Philippine nursing followed the patterns of the professionalisation of US nursing, and nursing schools gradually raised minimal educational requirements for admission in the 1920s and 1930s (Choy, 2003). The Filipino Nurses Association (FNA) was established in 1922 (Choy, 2003). The University of Santo Tomas College of Nursing, the first college of nursing in the Philippines, was established in 1946. Stasiulis and Bakan (2003, 125) note that the implementation of a mandatory degree programme for nursing in the Philippines since 1981 “made Filipino nurses more ‘desirable’ labour exports to foreign countries”. The table below shows the major occupational classification of OFWs. From the Philippine perspective, Filipino nurses deployed are classified under the category of ‘professional, medical, technical & related workers’ (see Table 7.1).

Staff nurse Rowena shared with Lance the same sentiment. She said: “We don’t have such a thing as a diploma [in the Philippines]. Here education is based on UK, so they have this diploma – only two years’ course – to become a nurse (emphasis

167 The FNA was renamed as the Philippine Nurses Association (PNA) in 1966.
168 She was recruited to Singapore as an assistant nurse in 2002, and returned to the Philippines after finishing her two-year contract to give birth to her son. She was again recruited by another hospital as an assistant nurse in 2005. She was promoted to a staff nurse in 2008.
added). For that reason, Rowena was not very enthusiastic about the offer by her manager to take up an advanced diploma in Singapore. In explaining her lack of interest, she said:

I don’t see why I should be studying for an advanced diploma when I am myself a degree holder. I am not a diploma holder. I don’t see any advantage on my part because I am a degree holder. If I want to study, I will get masters’ [degree].

She underscored that a nursing qualification obtained in the Philippine is in effect highly regarded because it is a degree. While their professional identity is being compromised in Singapore, Filipinos who received their nursing education in the Philippines stress their superiority to nurses educated in Singapore. However, this way of boundary making further denigrates the nursing workforce in Singapore and consequently the value of their own labour.

Table 7.1 Land-based OFWs by major occupational category, 2005 and 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major occupational group</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional, medical, technical &amp; related workers</td>
<td>63,941</td>
<td>47,886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative &amp; managerial workers</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>1,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical workers</td>
<td>5,538</td>
<td>15,403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales workers</td>
<td>4,261</td>
<td>8,348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service workers</td>
<td>133,907</td>
<td>138,222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural workers</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>1,349</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

169 Both Nanyang and Ngee Ann Polytechnics provide a three-year diploma course, but Nanyang Polytechnic has a two-year accelerated programme into a diploma of nursing for graduates holding a diploma or a degree.

170 The number of deployed OFWs as new hires.
The reaction of nursing aide Alberto, when asked about the perceived effects his migration had on Singapore, is also indicative of the extent to which he felt his labour was valued in Singapore. Alberto paused to reflect and then expressed his difficulty in drawing a linkage between his migration and Singapore, because he is just one person. He asked me to clarify whether I wanted him to explain the linkage between his migration and Singapore as a whole, and then asked whether it would be ok for him to focus on his nursing home. His reaction in this case differed from his reaction to my question about the perceived effects his migration had on the Philippines. Without hesitation, Alberto brought up the brain drain issue. Cecilia also pondered to answer the question on the relationship between her employment and Singapore, and explained to me the perceived linkage as below with some uncertainty:

Here in Singapore … you see a lot of foreigners … maybe for them it’s nothing new. I don’t know what difference it [my presence] makes for them. I don’t know, but they need foreign workers. They need me.

Alberto’s and Cecilia’s responses are markedly different from those of the respondents in the IT field in the preceding chapter who strongly asserted the

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171 Like Alberto, staff nurse Maya also found it difficult to draw a linkage between her migration and Singapore, while promptly responding to the question about the perceived effects her migration had on the Philippines.
significance of their presence (labour) in Singapore. Alberto did not have any work experience as a staff nurse in the Philippines. He was qualified only for a nursing aide position in Singapore. Alberto had been in Singapore for less than a year when I met him for an interview. He was still struggling with his working conditions and the tasks he was expected to do as an aide. When asked if he found any difference between the Philippines and Singapore in terms of work, Alberto said that tasks assigned to him were different because his positions in two countries were different. Even if he was a voluntary nurse in the Philippines, as he put it, he was “still a nurse”, whereas in Singapore he found himself “just working as a nursing aide”. In 2009, a ‘three-month’ training programme was rolled out in Singapore to train people who will work as nursing aides in primary healthcare institutions. So, nursing degree holder Alberto was being treated as being equal to Singaporeans who had completed a three-month training programme. To the extent his status was degraded in Singapore, Alberto strongly identified himself with his status in the Philippines: For instance, the brain drain claim that he agreed with values his labour despite its negative connotation. Alberto said that nurses in the Philippines are treated as “someone who has a high position and is respected” or “almost equal as doctors”. He added that people show “big respect” to nurses when they see those in nurses’ uniforms in shopping malls. As I probed by asking how he felt in Singapore, Alberto responded: “Here? I don’t feel anything”. While Filipino nurses experience a

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172 By and large, Filipino IT workers and nurses I talked to did not know much about the working or living conditions the other group was situated in. Nevertheless, what I observed from the discussion with the few is that IT workers are aware of their superior position in Singapore in comparison with nurses. Two IT workers mentioned that nursing is not a highly regarded profession in Singapore. For instance, Gerard has a brother who studied nursing, and he would not recommend his brother working in Singapore as a nurse.

173 Upon the completion of training, they are awarded Workforce Skills Qualifications Higher Certificate in Healthcare Support (Nursing Care).
significant downgrading of their qualification, and their work is not being socially
recognised in Singapore, many seem to find an opportunity to reconnect to their
valorised status via the brain drain discourse. Sharing the opinion of Alberto, Joanna
argued: “In the Philippines, the [nursing] profession is like a white collar job. … If
you are a nurse in the Philippines, they will say, ‘Oh, she is a nurse. We must respect
her’”. Despite the fact that her departure as a company nurse did not in effect have
any impact on the public healthcare system in the Philippines, she also strongly
agreed with the draining of the nursing profession: “A shortage of nurses in the
Philippines… That affects our country because nobody will take care of patients.
Nobody will take care of sick people”.

To the earlier question about the relationship between his employment and Singapore
(his nursing home), Alberto said that as a degree holder having completed a four year
course, he is far more qualified for his current position, so that the nursing home
benefits from his knowledge. Although he was having a hard time in adjusting to his
new role as a nursing aide, Alberto developed his interest in psychiatric nursing
while taking care of the elderly in the nursing home. He was hoping to pursue further
studies and become a nurse educator when he returns to the Philippines. Not only
does Alberto want to share with students his experiences in Singapore, but he also
wants to advise them on their careers so that they can make informed decisions. He
said that he would suggest to his students not to downgrade themselves when they go
abroad:

I am already a nurse there. I am only a nursing aide [here]. If you are
already a nurse and are going abroad, you should be a nurse. You don’t
have to downgrade yourself.
Alberto’s plan is filled with nationalistic sentiments. Here, Aguilar’s (2004, 105) argument is instructive: “Excluded from the dominant society, … the labour migrant is propelled into a reappreciation of national identity and belonging”. Alberto’s voice reinforces the Philippine state-centred construction of the citizens’ overseas employment as being associated with national development.

In the face of structural factors that undermine the value of their labour in Singapore, the respondents stressed their contribution by internalising the Singapore state-envisioned economic project of which they are part. Jonathan started his career in Singapore in 2008 as a healthcare assistant because he had two years’ experience in a small hospital in the Philippines. Considering that only a certificate is needed for Singaporeans to become a healthcare assistant, nursing graduate Jonathan found his current downgraded position “very detrimental” on his part. He was aware of significant financial gains for Singaporean hospitals importing foreign trained non-citizen nurses, because, as Jonathan noted, foreign trained nurses are “twice cheaper” than local nurses. Yet, instead of passively accepting the discourse that defines him as ‘cheap labour’, Jonathan emphasised the value of his labour in Singapore by referring to the Singapore state policy on medical tourism. Since the early 2000s, the Singapore government has put in place strategies to make Singapore a regional medical hub and to promote medical tourism by undertaking significant investment in hospital infrastructure (ASEAN - ANU Migration Research Team, 2005). In 2003, Singapore launched SingaporeMedicine, a multi-agency government initiative to promote Singapore’s medical tourism, in order to tap into the demand for healthcare services of the region’s growing population. The number of foreign patients visiting Singapore reached 400,000 in 2006, and the Economic Review Committee (ERC) projected a target of one million medical tourists per year by 2012 (Lee, 2010). In
2009, $S299 million has been set aside to train workers in the healthcare sector and recruit nurses, doctors and allied workers into it (EnterpriseOne, 2009). Jonathan argues that Filipinos’ fluency in English is certainly beneficial to hospitals in Singapore because “Singapore – we all know – caters not only to Singaporeans but [also foreigners]”. His hospital, what he described as a ‘US-based’ company, provides service to patients from all over the world, including Asia, Europe and the US. He believed that English proficiency matters because communication is “very much important in delivering care”. Jonathan’s belief is similar to what the POEA advertises as one of the traits of Filipino nurses:

With a good command of the language, he/she [Filipino nurse] is able to communicate effectively with his/her employer, co-workers, and most importantly, with his/her patient or ward.

Scholars also note that: “In the case of outflows from ASEAN countries, the proficiency of Filipinos in the English language is an important element in the movement of nursing professionals, considering that communication is vital in patient care” (ASEAN - ANU Migration Research Team, 2005, 11). When their contribution to Singapore was highlighted, the respondents ironically found themselves encountering the brain drain discourse. I highlighted in Chapter 4 that Jonathan expressed his grief in explaining to me the deteriorating Philippine healthcare system, and considered his remitted money as compensation for the country’s loss. He further stressed his allegiance to the Philippines by stating: “If we are here outside the country, we stand for the Philippines”. Struck by his statement, I

Lance also pointed out that Filipinos are good communicators. As he sees it, Filipinos does not necessarily speak ‘good’ English, but their English is clear. This point was also raised by the respondents in the IT field when they compared themselves with Indian counterparts working in Singapore.
enquired whether he felt he was representing the Philippines. He agreed and added: “Same with you. You come here. You represent South Korea”. As I had never felt that way, I pondered what made the difference between his world and mine. My experience of studying and working abroad was without the burden of representing South Korea whereas Jonathan’s sentiments were drawn from the Philippine state’s (and its partners’) relentless pursuit in maintaining the quality of OFWs. As discussed in Chapter 3, this is further exemplified in the Code of Discipline issued in 1983 that states Filipino migrant workers’ duties to the Philippine nation, employers and host countries. Rodriguez (2010, xxi) argues that the state expects migrant workers to be “exemplary representatives of the nation abroad” while being valorised as heroes.

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The Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2003 highlighted the presence of Filipinos in Singapore’s nursing sector. Jonnel Pabuayon Pinera, a Filipino employed by a nursing home in Singapore, died on 30 April 2003 during the SARS outbreak, while closely assisting a 90-year-old SARS patient who also died of the disease. On the 38th National Day in 2003, the Singaporean government awarded the Medal of Valour to Pinera. Lim Kheng Hua, Singapore Ambassador to the Philippines, stated in his 38th National Day message:

> This year, we pay special tribute to the many heroes in our fight against SARS, in particular, the Filipino nurses and health professionals who contributed significantly to the overall effort. They pitched when it counted, and many of them even volunteered to pull extra shifts. To these heroes, *Maraming Salamat* (many thanks)! (Lim, 2003)

This speech corresponds with the Philippine state-led construction of heroes and heroines. In the news release of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE),
Labour Secretary Patricia Santo Tomas is quoted as saying that this honour bestowed by the Singaporean government on Pinera also honours the Philippines and OFWs (DOLE, 2003). The lived experiences of Filipino nurses recruited to Singapore somewhat contradict this rhetoric of heroism.

Non-citizens recruited as nurses and allied workers (healthcare assistants or nursing aides) are issued with an S Pass and a Work Permit respectively. As discussed in the previous chapter, Work Permit holders – in contrast to Employment Pass holders – are subject to a number of restrictions. S Pass holders – considered by the Singapore Ministry of Manpower as lacking some attributes of ‘professionals’ – also encounter more restrictions than Employment Pass holders. The range of restrictions imposed symbolise the Singapore state’s reluctance to acknowledge the value of foreign trained nurses’ labour. Both Work Permit and S Pass holders need to undergo a medical examination when directed by the Controller, and their work pass will be revoked if they are certified “medically unfit” (Singapore Ministry of Manpower, 2010a). They are not permitted to bring their families to Singapore.

The fact that the importation of workers into Singapore’s nursing sector is highly regulated influences the lives of Filipino nurses in Singapore in a multitude of ways. Filipino nurses recruited to Singapore sign a two-year contract with their respective employers. So, fear of losing a job – implying a return to the Philippines – keeps

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175 Nurses were employed on Q2 pass prior to the 2004 policy change.
176 S Pass holders who earn a basic monthly salary of $S2,500 can bring their spouses and children to Singapore.
migrant nurses in a subservient position. Sharon’s comments exemplify this situation:

The way I understood when I came here, it’s like: “Don’t answer back. If you answer back, they will send you to the Philippines”. It stuck in my mind. So, when they said “why you do this, why you do that”, I still kept quiet. I didn’t say any word. I cried every day for six months.

Filipino migrant nurses working as assistant nurses or healthcare assistants in hospitals, and also those recruited as nursing aides in nursing homes, are keen to obtain a staff nurse position after they arrive in Singapore. They have to sit for the SNB licensure examination to be reclassified, but the opportunity to do so is limited because it requires the sponsorship of employers who evaluate their performance. For this reason, the expression “given a chance” was frequently used in Filipino nurses’ narratives about their future in Singapore. Their labour rights are conditioned by this obviously unequal power relationship between non-citizen employees and citizen employers.

Cecilia was recruited in 1997 as a healthcare assistant because she did not have ‘enough’ work experience in the Philippines. She worked as a volunteer nurse there for three months after graduation. Because it was difficult to get a job, Cecilia was hired to provide home nursing for a ninety-year-old patient for six months. After that, Cecilia worked in the hospital for a year. When she arrived in Singapore, Cecilia was assigned to an out-patient clinic. After her two-year contract, she hoped to be

177 Nurses usually have to pay a placement fee to a recruitment agency, so losing a job has a financial repercussion. The service fee of the POEA regulated agencies should not exceed a job applicant’s one month salary, but I also obtained information that one agency asked an job applicant to pay about 87,000 Philippine pesos (approximately $2,400) for a healthcare assistant position in Singapore. Issues relating to recruitment agencies are sensitive; some nurses did not wish to, or were reluctant to provide me with the name of an agency through which they were deployed to Singapore.
upgraded to an assistant nurse. However, she was told that in-patient experience is required for her to sit for the SNB license examination. She remembered the entire experience as “quite tough”, as she had to talk to the director of nursing to ask for the transfer to the in-patient unit. It took an additional six months before she became an assistant nurse. Cecilia was not happy with the first workplace because promotion was slower than she expected. She moved to another hospital in 2003, and regained her qualification as a staff nurse in 2004 after working for seven years in Singapore.

The difficulties she experienced explain why she called her overseas employment (to send money home) as a “sacrifice”, an expression often used by the Philippine state to stress the heroism of Filipino migrant workers. The following message of OWWA Administrator Carmelita Dimzon to mark the Migrant Workers Day in June 2009 is a case in point:

> On this day, we salute and honor them, the Pinoy Expats … who make the difficult decision to leave home and seek work abroad at great sacrifice (emphasis added). (Gaitano, 2009)

Another example is Secretary of Foreign Affairs Alberto Romulo’s (2009) message to commemorate the 111th Philippine Independence Day, published in OFW Pinoy Star, which says, “…let us remember the sacrifices of Filipino global workers who are important pillars for the economic security of their families and the continued progress and development of the Philippines and their host country (emphasis added)”. The Philippine state rhetoric of sacrifice well expresses the hardship Cecilia had in Singapore.

Filipino nurses recruited to ‘unpopular’ facilities like nursing homes are more vulnerable than those working in hospital settings. Nursing homes facing acute shortage of staff are desperate to keep their employees. The respondents working in
nursing homes reported that their employers made them enter a bond in exchange for sponsoring them for upgrading to assistant nurse or staff nurse. Recruited by a Singaporean firm in 2006 to a nursing home, Grace was reclassified as an assistant nurse in 2009, and entered a bond with her nursing home. In order to understand why non-citizen nursing aides take the risk of entering a bond with their employer, we need to consider an obvious structural constraint. Because of the SNB rule that requires foreign-trained nurses applying for an assistant nurse position in the hospital to have work experience in the hospital setting, Filipino ‘nursing aides’ are unlikely to have an opportunity to shift to another workplace in Singapore. Remaining with their employer is the only way for them to become an assistant nurse in Singapore. Joel, an assistant nurse employed in a nursing home, also reported that he will be asked to pay some $S10,000 if he leaves his job before his bond period ends.

Two male Filipinos employed in nursing homes, Alberto and Joel, were living in their respective workplaces. For this reason, Alberto’s work hours were sometimes blurry. One day, a nursing home resident passed away at night while he was asleep. His female co-worker on the night shift was not able to lift and move the patient’s body to the holding room, so she woke him up at two a.m. for his help. His next duty started at six a.m. Although his contract states that he works eight hours per day, his work hours are normally extended to 12 hours. In Joel’s nursing home, he was living with an eight p.m. curfew. Playing the electric guitar, Joel is active in his church group, but his social and cultural activity had been constrained by this restriction imposed by his employer. At the time of being interviewed, Joel was looking for a job in the hospital for a number of reasons, including the freedom of mobility. As noted, Joel is required to pay $S10,000 if he breaches his employment contract. Filipina nurses employed by a private nursing home told me that their cross-border
mobility was restricted by their employer, who confiscated their passports. The nurses were not advised on the purpose of confiscation. This practice contravenes Ministry of Manpower regulations which state that: “Employers should not retain their foreign workers’ passports without their consent” (Ng, 2010). Where documents have been handed over for safe-keeping purposes, according to the Ministry, employers should return passports upon the foreign worker’s request (Ng, 2010). Consent, however, may not be entirely voluntary considering the unequal relationship between Singaporean employers and their non-Singaporean employees.

Like the respondents in the IT field, most respondents in the nursing field considered taking up permanent residency or had already taken it for job security or mobility. In Rowena’s hospital, permanent residents need to give one-month notice to leave a job, while non-residents need to give two-months notice if they want to avoid a month’s salary deduction. Work Permit holders are not permitted to apply for permanent residence. This means that Filipino nurses recruited as healthcare assistants or nursing aides on Work Permits have to acquire an assistant nurse position before they get a chance to apply for residency. However, sometimes applying for permanent residence is not simply the individuals’ ‘choice’ due to other structural factors, such as the immigration regime that ties non-citizen workers on work passes with a particular employer, constraining their choice. The application does not require an employer’s sponsorship, but the form has a section that needs to be completed by the applicant’s employer. Grace was recruited on Work Permit and was holding an S Pass at the time of the interview. She told me that she had not applied for residency, because she believed that her employer has the final say about whether and when she can apply. Joel, recruited as a nursing aide, was given a chance to sit for the SNB licensure examination and became an assistant nurse after completing his initial two-
year contract. However, he had to sign a two-year contract which includes a condition that he would not apply for permanent residence. Joanna was recruited as a healthcare assistant, and had completed her two-year contract on Work Permit and another two-year contract on S Pass before she applied for permanent residency. Joanna’s employer was not supportive of her application, so she and her co-workers went to the ICA without informing their employer. In the previous chapter, I showed the ease felt by IT worker Roberto in the process of applying for residency. The following is how assistant nurse Joanna described the residency application process:

They told us to write a letter, and then why you want to apply. When I submitted [my application] to them, I passed! I don’t know why. I prayed over. (She laughs.) A lot of us became a permanent resident that time [in 2003].

There is a clear difference in the ways Roberto and Joanna described the process. The respondents often explained that acquiring residency did not mean settling in Singapore. Permanent resident Lance put it this way: “I applied for PR just because it would be easier for me to transfer to another hospital. I applied for the convenience it will give me”. As highlighted at the outset of this chapter, Singapore was the easiest option available to most respondents. But, they in fact hoped to move to other traditional immigration countries. Some nurses I spoke to had pending applications for jobs in Canada or the US. The Singapore government is also aware that Singapore has become a transit point for migrant nurses (Economic Review Committee, 2002). While considering strategies to develop Singapore as a

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178 Rowena prepared for and passed the US National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) while working in Singapore. Her agency in Singapore sponsored a one-week review. A Filipino professor from a well-known university in the Philippines came to Singapore to give some pointers to two dozen nurses preparing the NCLEX, most of which are Filipino.
destination for patient care in 2002, the ERC suggested that the best way to retain non-citizen nurses who tend to migrate to the US or Europe was to give them the right to bring their family. In 2004, the then Minister of State Balaji Sadasivan explained that the S Pass “will benefit many foreign nurses by allowing them to bring in their dependents”, which “may help to retain good nurses” (Sadasivan, 2004). He also mentioned that the government was considering reducing the waiting time for “good foreign nurses” to obtain permanent residence (Sadasivan, 2004). Though the government is interested in keeping non-citizen nurses by turning them into permanent residents, many Filipinas interviewed, including those having acquired residency, continued to contemplate migration to another country, because they believe that the remuneration and working conditions of nurses are better in other countries. Because Lance was recently reclassified as a staff nurse, he believes that he has earned a better chance to migrate to another country. Singapore would, as he puts it, ‘lose’ him if he decided to move to another country, but he said: “It’s ok with me. It doesn’t really matter because I never thought of settling here”.

This trend, however, may further weaken the position of Filipino nurses in Singapore. As discussed above, the SNB rules result in a situation where Filipino migrant nurses work under the direction and supervision of Singaporean nurses with inferior qualifications. Oftentimes, their opportunities for career advancement have been curtailed by the unequal power relationship between them and their Singaporean

179 S Pass holders earning a basic monthly salary of $S2,500 can bring their spouses and children to Singapore, but foreign-trained nurses recruited to Singapore rarely receive that level of salary.

180 Some of them have relatives having already settled in the US or Canada. The US is an attractive destination for nurses in the Philippines not just because of the Philippines emigration history but also because of their potential higher earnings in the US.
employers. Sharon believed that there is a glass ceiling that limits the career opportunities of Filipino nurses:

But the problem is that they don’t promote a Filipino as being a nurse manager here. [Regardless of] how good you are, the maximum they can give you is a senior staff nurse – even [when] you are better than your nurse manager.

The continued out-migration of Filipino nurses may provide evidence to support the claim that foreign trained nurses should be kept at the lower level of the nursing workforce. Legal scholar Daryl Lim (2005) argues that the response of the Singapore state to a shortage in the nursing workforce, including recruiting foreign nurses ‘en masse’, is simply a short-term solution. ‘Foreign dependence’ in nursing may sabotage the nation’s future, because, in his view, foreign nurses are in Singapore “only by their short term financial interests” (Lim, 2005). He claimed that many of them, who are below 30 years of age and likely to be single, are geographically mobile (Lim, 2005). Citing Tan’s (2003) study, Lim (2005, 40) argues that Singapore has not seen an ‘exodus’ of these foreign nurses, despite their mobility and more lucrative deals offered by ageing European nations, because,

Many foreign nurses come from China and South-east Asia. Except for Filipinos, many often struggle with simple English, lack proper professional training and culturally uncomfortable with making a quantum leap into what is literally, a new world for them.

To put it another way, Filipino nurses – fluent in English, equipped with professional training and culturally comfortable with ‘mobility’ – are more likely to move. Lim’s suggestion (2005, 40) is to make a two-tier system that “groom[s] local nurses to be case managers and nurse clinicians, leaving generic nursing to the large number of foreign nurses on short term contracts”. 
In the preceding chapter, I introduced the voices of a few Filipino IT workers expressing the hope of changing the existing imagery of the Philippines as the nation of domestic workers. It is their valorised status in Singapore that produces such voices. The discussions in this chapter demonstrate the ways in which Filipino nurses become downgraded and their labour becomes undervalued in crossing the Philippine-Singapore border. This explains why no respondents in the nursing sector claimed that they were contributing to the ‘high-class’ image of the Philippines. Being aware of their downgraded social status in Singapore, Filipino nurses continue to (discursively) find a way of ‘professionalising’ their occupation through different techniques; one of these techniques is, as discussed, emphasising their superior qualification in comparison with Singaporean ones. Another technique is identifying themselves with other Filipino professionals; for instance, in response to the brain drain claim, Jonathan highlighted the financial contribution of professionals to the Philippines, referring to ‘IT professionals’ and ‘nurses’ as examples. What I also pointed out in Chapter 6 is a difference in the narratives between men and women IT workers. This is also the case in the nursing sector. None of the male nurses brought up the ‘maid’ issue which appeared during the interviews with women nurses. This section highlights the experience of Filipinas who have become racialised ‘others within’.

Nursing’s subservient position to medicine, well documented in the history of nursing, is also evident in Singapore. A study shows that nurses in Singapore felt trapped in their roles as doctors’ handmaidens because they carry out the orders of doctors (Lim, 2005, Tan, 2009b). This hierarchical doctor-nurse relationship also
affects how patients and patients’ families view nurses. Because nurses are “often perceived as working under the operational control of doctors”, it is also difficult for them to get recognition and respect from patients and their families in Singapore (Lim et al., 1998, 280). Scholars also point out that nurses experience escalating levels of stress from increasing public expectations for ‘quality’ healthcare services (Lim et al., 1998). Many respondents described Singaporean patients and patients’ families as “very demanding”. Joanna describes the attitude of Singaporeans in the hospital as follows:

They don’t even care for their own relatives. They give all [the work] to nurses. They don’t want to change a diaper for their mom. They don’t want to feed their mom. They say to themselves that: “We pay you, and you have to do your job”.

Joanna moved to Singapore in 1999 to support her father who was suffering from heart-related illness. Because she worked as a school and company nurse for three years, her work experience in the Philippines was not recognised by the SNB. So, she was hired as a healthcare assistant, and was paid a monthly salary of $500. Joanna was surprised when she arrived in Singapore because,

…people here don’t have a high regard for nurses. They treat us as a professional maid, something like that (emphasis added). It’s true. I was hurt.

Her expression ‘professional maid’ aptly describes Filipina nurses’ ambivalent position after migrating to Singapore. Some Singaporean nurses and nursing students also noted the public and self perception of nurses as ‘high class maids’ (Tan, 2009b). However, the term ‘maid’ must be read in relation to Singapore’s non-citizen labour importation programme. As discussed in the previous chapter, because of Filipinas’ high visibility in the domestic work sector, this term has become associated with Filipinas in the minds of Singaporeans (Aguilar, 1996). In the narratives of Filipinas
employed in Singapore’s nursing sector, it is evident that they were also conscious of ‘other’ Filipinas serving Singaporeans in their homes. Grace recollected her work experience as a nursing aide:

Some Singaporeans treat you nicely. Some… [She hesitates] You know? Here, you do everything – all the dirty things like mopping the floor, cleaning the table, cleaning plates, bathing patients, changing diapers. Some [patients/relatives] are very good. For others, the way they talk to you is like [talking to] their maid (emphasis added).

Grace’s comments point to the fact that her work as a nursing aide was very similar to ‘dirty work’ that domestic workers perform in the homes of Singaporeans, so that she was easily mistaken or treated as ‘their maid’. According to the Guidelines for Nursing Homes published by the Singapore Ministry of Health, nursing aides are required to do a range of domestic chores, including bathing and grooming residents, serving meals and drinks to the residents and cleaning the ward, the dining hall, equipment and utensils (Singapore Ministry of Health, 2002, 6). Many Filipinas working in both nursing and domestic work sectors experience a de-skilling or downgrading of their qualifications:

Actually, if you interview some maids here in Singapore, they are all professionals. They leave their profession as a teacher [having completed] a four years’ course. They studied a lot. They gave a lot of money for their education. Then, they work here only as a maid (Joanna, emphasis added).

Joanna, employed in the nursing sector, is seen as a ‘professional maid’ in Singapore, whereas many Filipina professionals are employed as ‘maids’ in the homes of Singaporeans. Both Joanna and ‘other’ Filipinas hold a Work Permit that limits their labour and social rights in Singapore. Despite the shared migratory journeys that resulted in downgrading and/or deskilling, Joanna distanced herself from her co-nationals working as domestic workers. She pitied Filipina professionals working in Singapore as domestic workers, as reflected in her expression that they work “only as
a maid”. Obviously, there is a difference between the two groups of Filipinas. Domestic workers are not protected by the Employment Act\textsuperscript{181} and cannot change their immigration status. Meanwhile, Filipina nurses recruited as healthcare assistants will be issued with an S Pass when they acquire an assistant nurse position. Paradoxically, however, by differentiating herself from ‘other’ Filipinas in this way, Joanna contributed to the construction of domestic chores, which she was herself required to perform in the public sphere, as having less value. This, in turn, supports the prevailing discourse that undervalues their gendered work.

The exclusion experienced in Singapore made Grace clearly see the consequences of being a citizen of a Third World country. Aguilar’s view (2002, 431) is instructive as he claims: “In their liminal state, the reflective thoughts of labour migrants make them recognize objective differences between the country of their current residence and the homeland with its perceived shortcomings”. When she was young, Grace regularly interacted with nurses in her neighbourhood, which influenced her decision to take up a nursing course. She also believed that she would be able to go to the US, where her relatives are settled, when she acquired nursing qualification. After she failed in the qualifying examination for the US, Grace saw a nursing aide job in a Singapore’s nursing home as an opportunity. Despite the fact that she chose nursing with the hope of migrating to the US, she responded to the brain drain claim by arguing that people would be prepared to stay in the Philippines if the government provided better-paying jobs:

\textsuperscript{181} The discussion above shows that the labour and social rights of some Filipino nurses were often violated although the Employment Act is applied to them.
I know that our country also needs skilled workers, but we also need money to support ourselves. … Our country belongs to the Third World. If we stay there – skilled workers don’t leave the country, development will become faster. [She whispered.] Maybe it’s the government’s fault.

As noted in Chapter 5, Grace was ambivalent about how her own overseas work was related to the Philippines as a whole. She chose not to fully embrace the state-led discourse on the interconnection between remittances and the Philippine nation. Grace constructed her migratory experience as a process of being “mature” or something she had to do regardless of whether she liked it or not. I would suggest that her reluctance to fully embrace the well-known Philippine state rhetoric is a way of voicing her dissatisfaction with an authority seemingly incapable of pulling the country out of this “Third World” status.

7.4 CONCLUSION

Filipino nurses recruited to Singapore must get a license to practice nursing in Singapore, and not all foreign trained non-citizen nurses are qualified to take the licensure examination because of the sponsorship requirement. The majority of Filipino nurses are recruited to Singapore to take up lower level positions or the occupational niche in the nursing sector. The undervaluing of their work is also inscribed into its non-citizen importation and immigration regime that fixes them with certain work pass categories which, in turn, determine their labour and social rights and their eligibility for residency and citizenship. The respondents in the nursing sector live with contrasting discourses that define their labour: On the one hand, they live with the brain drain discourse travelling across the Philippine-Singapore border that stresses the value of their labour; on the other hand, the positioning of nursing as an semi-professional occupation and the structural constraints that limit their labour and social rights in Singapore all underrate their
labour. The brain drain discourse sits ironically with the respondents’ bitter migratory experiences in Singapore. While their labour was being undervalued, they emphasised their superior qualifications and/or contribution to Singapore that reinforce the brain drain discourse. The experiences of Filipina nurses in particular have been shaped by the dominant discourse about Filipina workers in Singapore, due to the similarity of their work. The respondents are encouraged to think about their Filipino identity within these multiple discourses which surround them.
CONCLUSION

This thesis explored the ways in which Philippine national identity is brought to life in the minds of ‘skilled’ people born as Filipino citizens currently living and working in Singapore. The number of working-age individuals born in one country and living in another country increased from 42 million in 1990 to 59 million in 2000 (Docquier et al., 2006). Today’s world population has a higher level of mobility potential. More people move across national borders and form new types of settlement and cross-border connections. In particular, the bearers of particular skills have constituted a significant share of this cross-border population movement, as industrialised countries have made it easier for ‘skilled’ non-citizen workers to enter as settlers or temporary workers as part of their economic planning. Political leaders and business communities have also made efforts to liberalise the temporary movement of service providers under the Mode 4 of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). On 15 December 1995, during the 5th ASEAN Summit in Bangkok, Thailand, the ASEAN Economic Ministers signed ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services aimed at eliminating restrictions to trade in services. The Labour Ministers of the ASEAN countries declared “the importance of coordinating initiatives for greater labour mobility and related skills enhancement within ASEAN, in the context of increasing integration of trade and services” (ASEAN - ANU Migration Research Team, 2005, 1). As of April 2010, five MRAs had been concluded. However, the migratory experiences of all ‘skilled’ workers are not equal.

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182 Mode 4 is the term to define the temporary movement of natural persons, who move to the territory of another World Trade Organization Member to deliver a service.
This thesis contributes to the ongoing scholarly efforts to understand the social dimensions of ‘skilled’ labour migration, by focusing on nationality and citizenship as important elements shaping the migratory experiences and perspectives of ‘skilled’ workers. Most people of the world are born as the citizens of one nation-state. National forms of imagination have become normalised in our daily lives (Billig, 1995). ‘Skilled’ workers move between nation-states not only as the bearers of skills but also as the national citizens of one nation-state. This thesis highlights the ways in which national identity is brought to life in the minds of the ‘skilled’ national citizens who originate from developing countries, as they cross state borders to labour.

This thesis discussed the discursive practices of linking migration with development that continue to couple the national citizens of developing countries living and working overseas with their home nations. The overseas employment of the citizens of developing countries, and their cross-border familial and/or affective ties, are constructed as being associated with the development processes of their home countries. The practices of framing migration and development often underline their nationality or national origin, and divert attention from the heterogeneities amongst people grouped together. While a voluminous literature has been produced to examine the relationship between migration and development or to construct the national belonging of migrants originating from developing countries, the voices of people who have become the targets of this nationalising process are rarely heard. This thesis explored how this process is experienced by the targeted group of people by virtue of their nationality. In Chapter 1, I demonstrated that this homogenising/nationalising process is fraught with ambiguity: ‘Skilled’ migrant workers are simultaneously constructed as delaying and (potentially) contributing to their home countries’ development. ‘Skilled’ migrant workers become non-citizens
as they cross state borders to labour. It is a host society’s labour and immigration regimes which ‘re-define’ the labour of non-citizens, based on how they contribute to its nation-building process. This thesis has explored the perspectives of migrant workers who came to symbolise the visions of two nations.

The Philippines provides a good case to discuss the migration-development nexus, because the discourses that exist in the Philippines have actively interacted with the global dialogue on migration and development. As a matter of fact, the Philippines has taken an important part in shaping the global dialogue. The unique history of labour migration from the Philippines – the active state engagement – has spurred debates amongst different actors concerned with whether the government’s stand on the overseas employment of its citizens would be beneficial for the Philippines. After 30 years of the state-facilitated cross-border labour mobility, individual citizens’ employment beyond the shores of the Philippines has become the subject matter of debate about what the Philippine nation is becoming. Although the state has promoted deterritorialised nationalism (Basch et al., 1994), the territorial boundaries of the state still play a central role in the nation-building process. Therefore, the discussion on migration and development focuses largely on the welfare of citizens remaining in the Philippines. Filipino migrant workers continue to be reminded of the fact that their overseas work and familial and/or affective ties – mainly financial – maintained across borders have implications for the welfare of people in the Philippines.

My study shows that the respondents constructed in different manners their lives in the Philippines and Singapore with regard to their decisions to choose their subject of study and profession and to migrate to Singapore. It highlighted the hopes, desires,
concerns and pains of people crossing borders. Despite their disparate ways of constructing reality, they easily transformed their migratory stories into those of Filipino national citizens. Many research participants used ‘we/us’ and ‘I/me’ interchangeably in responding to my enquiry about their perceived linkages between their migration and the Philippines or Singapore. The heterogeneity amongst individuals was often easily downplayed. In defining the nation as an ‘imagined’ community, Anderson (2003, 6) also explains that, “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion”. In order to highlight the nationalising process of the citizens’ overseas work, this thesis first explored the OFW label, coined by the state to hold together Filipino workers departing for overseas employment and widely used by many actors of the society, including recruitment agencies, the commercial sector and scholars. Some respondents used this particular term in their narratives in constructing their lives in Singapore. They identified themselves as OFWs because they migrated ‘to work’ or ‘to earn money’. Labelling oneself as an OFW is a way of expressing their continued belonging to the Philippine nation and their adherence to the state’s authority to nationalise their migratory stories. However, emphasis on migrants’ earnings sent to the Philippines resulted in the stereotypical image of Filipinos employed in Singapore as money hungry, an image with which some respondents were not comfortable. Often the OFW label first came into the minds of the respondents when they were asked to imagine their relationship with the Philippine nation. However, not all fully embraced this label and some felt awkward in using it. Others refused to label themselves as such or completely rejected it because of the fixed imagery of that label – working abroad to send money to their families in the Philippines. I
argued that their rejection of the label can be interpreted as their struggle to ‘individualise’ their overseas employment. Whether or not the respondents attached this particular label to themselves had little relevance to their current residential status in Singapore – whether they were being registered with the POEA or had already acquired permanent residency in Singapore.

The significance of remittances for the Philippines has been the prevailing discourse concerning labour migration from the Philippines, and many respondents made use of that knowledge in relating their employment in Singapore with the Philippines. The ways in which they described such a relationship differed. In other words, the Filipino origin workers I spoke to embodied the state-sponsored discourse on overseas employment at various levels. Many respondents were aware of the state-citizen relationship established through labour migration and significant state interest in it. While the respondents shared this opinion, their attitudes towards the government and its overseas employment programme also differed. Remittances certainly were commonly discussed amongst Filipinos who work outside the shores of the Philippines for quite different reasons. This thesis highlighted that some respondents internalised the state-sponsored discourse on overseas employment and expressed that their act of sending money to the Philippines constituted their ‘help’ for the Philippines. Other respondents expressed more nationalistic sentiments in constructing their migratory experiences in relation to the Philippines. One of the techniques they use in validating ‘their opinion’ about the importance of remittances for the Philippines is to refer to the state authority or to repeat the state rhetoric about heroism.
The state-led labour mobility in the Philippines initiated the debate on whether labour migration would eventually benefit the Philippines. While the state-sponsored discourse on the citizens’ overseas work prevails, the departure of ‘skilled’ Filipinos for overseas employment has produced an equally powerful countervailing discourse – the brain drain. Many respondents were familiar with the term brain drain itself, and constructed their migration as constituting the brain drain. They interpreted the abstract concept of ‘brain’ in a multitude of ways because, as discussed in the Introduction and Chapter 1, the concept is broad enough to include a range of people. Some respondents in IT believed that migrant IT workers are better qualified than those remaining in the Philippines and this migration ‘selectivity’ has a great impact on the Philippines. The perceived migration selectivity gives the respondents a sense of achievement which, however, reinforces the brain drain discourse. Others constructed their migration as making up the brain drain by comparing themselves with ‘other’ Filipino migrant workers who are not often seen as brains, for instance, mothers-turned-domestic workers. A ‘brain’ was also interpreted as a citizen embodying national investment through education and training. The respondents in the nursing sector considered their migration as constituting the brain drain largely for the reason that nurse migration had been constructed as depleting the Philippine healthcare system. The interview data also shows that the respondents’ views were often shaped by the brain drain discourse rather than their own experience. They did not take notice of their own migratory experiences which might challenge the brain drain claim. This indicates that Filipinos employed in the IT and nursing sectors in Singapore felt the need to deal with this particular discourse travelling across the Philippine-Singapore border, regardless of their own migratory journeys.
In opening this thesis, I introduced the story of doctor-turned-nurse Elmer Jacinto. After reading about Jacinto, economist Aldaba (2004b, 16) wrote,

> From an economist’s perspective, this new doctor is simply maximizing the possible returns from his investments in what we term as ‘human capital’ i.e., the training and education he received. But from society’s point of view his decision is quite alarming when you consider that he is *not alone* (emphasis added).

Having accepted the ‘brain’ label, the respondents had to deal with the fact that they were being part of the ‘drained’. In particular, when nurse migration is depicted as the ‘brain haemorrhage’, all the Filipino origin nurses employed outside the Philippines need to deal with the discourse on the national crisis they symbolise. The brain drain claim – suggesting that the respondents’ individual wellbeing is not in harmony with that of the Philippines – evokes one’s national identity and questions his or her national loyalty. The respondents dealt with the situation in manifold ways, by stressing that their potential and professional aspiration is not fulfilled in the Philippines; or by downplaying the brain drain claim; or by interpreting their departure as a way of ‘sharing’ opportunities with their co-nationals. Others showed their belonging to the Philippines by expressing their empathetic feelings, such as sadness or guilt. As a labour mobility facilitator, the Philippine government also became the target of blame. Their active engagement with the brain drain discourse is the clear indication of normative narratives fostering their sense of national identity across borders.

The state-led cross-border labour mobility in the Philippines has a great level of tension within it. For the ‘skilled’ Filipinos, their employment in Singapore itself becomes a site in which the two competing – and contradictory – discourses sit side by side. The discussion of Chapter 5 shows that the brain drain discourse often
reinforces the state-led one that labour migration benefits the Philippine nation. In facing the brain drain claim, the respondents often brought up the issue of remittances, and constructed their remitted money as a compensation that balances out the ‘cost’. This technique of referring to the alternative discourse was more frequently used by the respondents employed in the nursing field. By re-emphasising the state’s claim that overseas work does serve the interest of the nation, the nurses indirectly affirmed the Philippine state’s authority and legitimacy to represent and envision the nation. In the circle of discourses on migration and development, the state’s position on cross-border labour mobility continues to gain legitimacy. As such, overseas employment for ‘skilled’ Filipinos is not simply a change in place of employment for better opportunities, but also a site in which they are continuously encouraged to think about their national identity. The state-facilitated labour mobility has left a little room for Filipino migrant workers to ‘individualise’ their employment beyond Philippine shores.

Chapters 6 and 7 discussed how the matter of nationality became more salient as Filipino workers were deployed through Singapore’s labour and immigration regimes as non-citizens. The Singapore government has allowed the employment of non-citizens for economic growth, and controlled the number of non-citizens employed in each sector of the economy and in total by requiring non-citizens to obtain a work pass. Today there are three types of work pass, with different levels of restrictions on each classification: Employment Pass, S Pass and Work Permit. One of the key criteria used to determine which type of work pass to issue to a migrant worker is the salary that the job attracts. The government has allowed the settlement of ‘some’ non-citizen workers for the stated economic purpose. Singapore’s labour importation and immigration regime reflects the Singapore nation envisioned by the state, whose
mode of building a nation focuses on economic prosperity. Accordingly, the labour importation and immigration regime has created a hierarchy amongst non-citizen workers entering to Singapore on the basis of their contribution to Singapore in economic terms; this contribution is measured by their salaries. The salary scales of Filipino IT workers and nurses entering the Singapore labour market are different largely because of the ways in which they are deployed to it. Due to the unregulated nature of IT work, impediments to the cross-border mobility of IT workers are not as heavy as those in the healthcare sector (ASEAN - ANU Migration Research Team, 2005). My study shows that the types of work pass they held upon entry to the Singaporean labour market are different. The majority of IT workers I spoke to held an Employment Pass. In the meantime, all respondents in the nursing sector migrated to Singapore on S Pass or Work Permit with a range of constraints on their labour and social rights.

The Singapore state proclaimed an open-door policy welcoming professionals or high-income earners. The Filipino origin IT workers I spoke to were well aware of the value of their labour, constructed by the Singapore state as ‘talent’. Many respondents in the IT field repeated the Singapore state rhetoric about foreign/global talent, regardless of their own stories behind a decision to migrate to Singapore. This contributed to perpetuating the rationale for the Singapore state’s particular way of nation building, for instance, by importing foreign/global talent. There are other narratives challenging the Singapore state-sponsored discourse that positions Filipino origin IT workers as talent. Information Technology work is known for its long work hours, and Indians and Filipinos dominate the IT sector in Singapore. In the context of the racialisation of IT work, certain stereotypes of Filipino IT workers have also emerged. For instance, Filipinos are known to be flexible in terms of work hours and
are more likely to go for overtime. They are also seen as cheaper than other ‘racial’
groups, such as Caucasians or Indians. Despite this rupture in the harmonised
construction of Filipino IT workers as talent, the respondents had been enjoying a
range of labour and social rights granted by the Singapore state as Employment Pass
holders. These rights, granted symbolically, represent the Singapore state’s
valorisation of their labour. This valorisation, however, strengthens the brain drain
claim. The brain drain discourse and the Singapore state rhetoric about foreign talent
reinforce each other. The respondents are further encouraged to think about the
Philippine nation in relation to the Singapore nation.

The very different experiences of citizenship rights encountered by Filipino nurses in
Singapore were brought into sharp relief in Chapter 7. Cross-border labour mobility
in the nursing sector is highly regulated. Filipino nurses are recruited to Singapore to
take up lower level positions and the poorly paid occupational niches shunned by
locals. The Filipino nurses were clearly aware of the lower social status associated
with nursing work. The positioning of nursing work as a semi-professional
occupation is also mirrored in the Singapore immigration regime that grants non-
citizens recruited as staff nurses not an Employment Pass (for professionals) but an S
Pass (for the middle-level skilled). The range of restrictions imposed upon the
recruits from the Philippines symbolise the state’s reluctance to acknowledge the
value of foreign trained nurses’ labour. Their labour rights were also often
conditioned by the obviously unequal power relationship between non-citizen
employees and citizen employers. Considering that nursing is gendered labour, this
reflects what Kofman (2007, 132) calls “the gendered outcomes of immigration
criteria”. Skill is, as McNeil-Walsh (2008, 139) claims, hierarchical: “jobs requiring
significant use of information technology occupy higher positions on the skill
hierarchy than those within the caring and education field”. The findings of this thesis also correspond to the ongoing discourse on the knowledge economy that promotes managerial, scientific and technological knowledge as “the driving force of globalization, productivity and wealth creation” (Kofman, 2007, 122). When this discourse enters the immigration regime, it is translated into the following form: Those who do not embody this ‘knowledge’ “cannot benefit the economy of the receiving state, and hence must be prevented from entering its territory” (Kofman, 2007, 122). Even if allowed, they cannot enjoy the same rights as those who fit into the knowledge economy. Kofman (2007) cautions the marginalisation and subordination of people in reproductive/welfare sectors as a consequence of this discourse on the knowledge economy.

In response to the undervaluing of their work in Singapore, the respondents differentiated themselves from their Singaporean counterparts by emphasising their higher qualifications. However, this way of boundary making further denigrates the nursing workforce in Singapore and consequently the value of their own labour. As such, the respondents in the nursing sector were subjected to two contrasting narratives: On the one hand, they were living with the discourses travelling across the Philippine-Singapore border that values their labour; on the other hand, they experienced a significant downgrading of their occupational status and deskilling as they were deployed through the Singapore labour and immigration regimes. The brain drain claim provides them an opportunity to re-connect to their professional identity that was compromised while working in Singapore.

The migratory experiences of Filipino IT workers and nurses were also shaped by the fact that the majority of the Filipino migrant population in Singapore are employed
as domestic workers. These women migrant workers are employed on a special variant of Work Permit, and are not protected by the Employment Act. My discussion in Chapter 6 demonstrated the gendered nature of the benefits of citizenship. This thesis shows different ways in which the dominant presence of Filipina ‘maids’ in Singapore contributed to entrenching the Philippine national identity of the respondents. The IT workers strongly asserted their valorised status as talent in Singapore, because they felt the need to change the long-perceived inferiority of the Filipinos to Singapore that Filipina maids symbolised. What Castles and Miller (2009) call “a new type of class structure” has emerged amongst non-citizen workers arriving in Singapore because of differential treatment of various categories of migrants. The reproduction of their high status amongst Filipino origin IT workers, contrasted with the Filipina domestic workers’ low status, perpetuates the Singapore state-sponsored rationale that disadvantages these women migrants in terms of their labour and social rights in Singapore. As Stasiulis and Bakan (2003, 11) rightly point out, the privileged treatment of some non-citizens in migration processes and policies “create and reinforce the hierarchical nature of national citizenship”. The experiences of Filipina nurses, on the other hand, were shaped by the dominant public perception of Filipinas as ‘maids’. The narratives of Filipina nurses show that they were conscious of ‘other’ Filipinas employed in Singapore and often perceived as degrading the Philippine nation. Their work in lower level nursing positions is very similar to the ‘dirty work’ performed by Filipina domestic workers in the private sphere. There are cases in which the respondents were mistaken for or treated as maids. As Lister (2003, 44) points out, the patterns of inclusion/exclusion that the boundaries create are “gendered and racialised, albeit in ways which reflect specific national, cultural and historical contexts”. Some respondents in the nursing
sector also participated in denigrating the work of domestic workers, which they were asked to perform in the public sphere.

Twenty years ago, Cruz’s and Paganoni’s (1989) research on Filipina migrants and non-migrants showed that the extent of the respondents’ imagined relationship between themselves and the Philippine nation or their host nation was very limited (cited in Tyner, 2004). Cruz and Paganoni (1989, 100-101) argued that “[t]he national and international dimensions are simply overlooked by respondents who are caught up in the process of fleeing from oppressive economic situations, or acting out their own desire for something different and more liberating” (quoted in Tyner, 2004, 118). Following this perspective, Tyner’s (2004) own findings revealed that his respondent Lisa, employed as a performing artist in Japan, also did not comprehend her decision to work in Japan as a dancer in a larger structural context. As Tyner (2004, 118) claimed, “Lisa was not swayed by visions of helping her country, of being a modern-day heroine (emphasis original)”. In sharing with me their decisions to choose a particular course of study and/or profession and migrate to Singapore, all the respondents did so without reference to either state or nation. However, I have demonstrated in this thesis that the Filipinos having crossed the Philippine-Singapore border were subject to multiple and competing discourses ‘(re)defining’ their (and other Filipinos’) labour, and accordingly they were encouraged to think about their Filipino-ness within the space created by these discourses. Nationality, as this thesis has highlighted, is an important factor shaping the subjectivities of migrant workers. The voices represented in this thesis are those of ordinary people talking about their home and host nations.


Tan, S. M. (2009b) *The Creation of the Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies and the Professionalization of Nursing in Singapore*. Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore, Singapore. Master of Social Sciences.


Xiang, B. (2004) “Indian Information Technology Professionals’ World System”, in State/Nation/Transnation: Perspectives on Transnationalism in the Asia-


## APPENDIX A] PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

Demographic characteristics of participants in IT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<th>Residential status or citizenship</th>
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Demographic characteristics of participants in nursing

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<td>Shirley</td>
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### [APPENDIX B] INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### A. Personal Background
- Gender (male/female)
- Age
- Marital status (married or single)
- Which family members are still in the Philippines? Which family members are here in Singapore?
- Current occupation
- Length of time (work) in Singapore
- Immigration status (Work pass, permanent residency, Singaporean citizenship)

#### B. Profession and Migration Decisions
- How did you become ___?
- Educational attainment
  - Why did you choose to study ___?
  - Did you have any other subject you were interested in? Why didn’t you choose that subject?
- What made you consider working abroad? When was the first time you considered working abroad? Was there a particular moment? Why Singapore?

#### C. Work Experience
- Did you work in the Philippines?
  - If so, how long had you been employed?
- Could you tell me about your work in the Philippines?
- How did you get a job in Singapore? (Did you use a recruitment agency?)
- Could you tell me about your work in Singapore?
- You worked in two places – the Philippines and Singapore. Is there a difference in terms of work?
- (Perception of IT work or nursing in the Philippines and Singapore)
- How do you think your migration has affected you?
**D. Cross-border Practices and Meanings Attached**

### D.1 Participation in Groups/Organisations in the Philippines

- Are you a member of any informal groups or organisations in the Philippines?
  - What are the main aims and activities of the groups/organisations?
    - How long have you been a member of the groups/organisations?
    - Why did you join the groups/organisations?
  - What activities have you participated in since you came here (to Singapore)? What motivated you to participate in such activities/projects?

### D.2 Participation in Filipino Groups/Organisations in Singapore

- Are you a member of any Filipino informal groups or organisations in Singapore?
  - What are the main aims and activities of the groups/organisations?
    - How long have you been a member of the groups/organisations?
    - Why did you join the groups/organisations?
  - Have you participated in any activities/projects relating to the Philippines? If so, could you tell me some more about the activities/projects? Did the activities/projects require your professional skills? What motivated you to participate in such activities/projects?

### D.3 Sending Money to People and/or Institutions in the Philippines

- Have you personally sent a portion of your savings/earnings to persons and/or institutions in the Philippines?
  - What motivated you to send the money to them/him/her? Did you have a say in how the money should be spent? If so, what made you think that the money should be spent in that particular way?
- Have you made any investment in the Philippines?
  - If so, what kind? What motivated you to invest in the Philippines? How did you decide where to invest? Did you reply on the advice of others? What was your reason for investing your money in that particular way?

### F. Opinions & Future Plans

- In what ways do you think your migration has affected the Philippines/Singapore?
- How long are you planning to work in Singapore? Do you plan to return to the Philippines? Are you considering applying for permanent residency/citizenship?
[APPENDIX C] PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEETS

Dear Sir/Madam,

This is an invitation for you to participate in a research being undertaken by Ms. Seori Choi towards her degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Centre for Asia Pacific Social Transformation Studies (CAPSTRANS), Faculty of Arts, the University of Wollongong, under the supervision of Dr. Ruchira Ganguly-Scraser and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Lenore Lyons. Your participation in this research and the information you provide is for the purpose of Ms. Choi’s dissertation (thesis) and other publications that may arise.

Title

Reassessing the Migration-Development Nexus: A case study of Filipino nurses and IT/computer professionals in Singapore

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the perspectives of Filipino nurses and IT/computer professionals in Singapore on their profession, overseas employment (migration), and interactions with people in the Philippines.

Funding Body

This study is funded by University Postgraduate Award and Postgraduate Research Support from the University of Wollongong and CAPSTRANS Fieldwork Assistance.

Your Participation

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to be involved in approximately one hour interview. With your permission, the interview will be recorded onto a digital voice recorder so that Ms. Choi has an accurate record of what you say. Typical questions in the interview include:

- What motivated you to choose your profession?
- In what ways do you think your migration will affect you/the Philippines/Singapore?
- What kinds of interactions do you have with people in the Philippines?
- What motivates you to have such interactions?

If there are any questions you would prefer not to answer, you do not have to. You may choose to withdraw from further participation at any time for any reason. There will be no adverse effects if consent is withdrawn. The information on you up to that point would be destroyed. You may contact Ms. Choi to discuss any
matter arising from the interview or to clarify or correct the information you provide at the interview.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity**

The information on you will be kept strictly confidential. The interview will be recorded and then transcribed onto a computer. Nobody but Ms. Choi and her supervisors would listen to the interview or read a transcript of the interview. The digital recording of your interview will be stored in a locked secure place at all times and the computer data will be protected from disclosure to anyone. Ms. Choi’s computer will be password protected and a secured Internet server will be used. Copies of transcript will also be stored in a locked secure place. The information you provide will be kept in a locked facility at the University of Wollongong for a minimum of five years after completion of the study and will be destroyed after the storage time.

Anonymity would be guaranteed and a pseudonym (a false name) will be used instead of your real name in a transcript of the interview and beyond in order to protect your confidentiality. Parts of the interview might be used in Ms. Choi’s dissertation and/or publications in a form of journal article and/or book chapter. The research findings might be also reported through conference presentation. But Ms. Choi will not release information that could identify you. Please do not say your real name or confidential information or anyone’s real name during interview because it will be recorded.

**Potential Risks**

We anticipate no risk to you as a result of your participation in this study other than the inconvenience of the time required for you to participate in this research.

**Questions and Concerns**

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Ms. Choi or the Secretary of the University of Wollongong Human Research Ethics Committee at the details below.

**Ms. Seori Choi**

Address in Singapore

Address in Australia

**Secretary**

Human Research Ethics Committee
University of Wollongong, NSW 2522
Australia
Phone: +61-2-4221-4457
Fax: 61-2-4221-4338
Email: research_office@uow.edu.au
[APPENDIX D] CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

Research Title:
Reassessing the Migration-Development Nexus:
A case study of Filipino nurses and IT/computer professionals
Researcher: Seori Choi

I have been given information about “Reassessing the Migration-Development Nexus: A case study of Filipino nurses and IT/computer professionals in Singapore” and discussed this research project with Seori Choi who is conducting this research as part of her degree of Doctor of Philosophy supervised by Dr. Ruchira Ganguly-Scrase and Assoc. Professor Dr. Lenore Lyons in the School of Social Sciences, Media and Communication at the University of Wollongong.

By ticking each box and signing below I hereby indicate my consent to participation in this research project.

☐ I have read the 2-page participant information sheets explaining the purpose of this research project and full information as to what is expected of me as a participant.

☐ I am aware that my participation in this research project is voluntary and I am free to refuse to participate and to withdraw from further participation at any time without repercussions. My refusal to participate or withdrawal of consent will not affect my treatment in any way or my relationship with the University of Wollongong.

☐ I am aware that the security of the information I provide is assured during and after completion of this study.

☐ I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used primarily for Choi’s dissertation (thesis) and also for other publications that may arise in a form of journal article and/or chapter of book. The research findings might be also reported through conference presentation. Any information that identifies me will not be used in Choi’s publications.

☐ I understand that this research project may not be of direct benefit to me and there are no potential risks or burdens associated with this study.

☐ I am willing to be recorded.

☐ I have had an opportunity to ask Seori Choi any questions I may have about this research project and my participation.

☐ I have given a copy of this consent form.

☐ I am 18 years of age and older.
If I have any enquires about this research, I can contact Seori Choi (sc760@uow.edu.au) and/or Dr. Ruchira Ganguly-Scrase (+61 2 4221 3661). If I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way this research is or has been conducted, I can contact the Ethics Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, University of Wollongong on +61 2 4221 4457.

Signed Date

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Name (please print)

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