**ARTICULATING A DIASPORIC METHODOLOGY:**

**Challenges in Seeking Participant Visibility and**

**Researcher Self-Reflexivity**

This paper examines what I call diasporic methodology, a methodology that the intersecting dynamics of diaspora, migration and dislocation as they affect Filipinas in Ireland. In an attempt to negotiate the different constructions of race, class and gender differences, and how economic and cultural geographies affect these differences, this methodology aims to understand the complexities of migration through the participants’ experience, which transforms the experiences of oppression into an application of theory. Because a majority of Filipina participants work in healthcare, a sector reflecting the growth of gendered labour migration, I used diasporic methodology to pay attention to the dynamics of migration across axes of differentiation, how Filipinas understand their circumstances, interactions, civic participation and sense of belonging. A method that fully addresses the complicated issues involved in the transnational realities of Filipinas and how they intersect with gender and migration is crucial not only to the development of inclusive scholarship, but also to contribute other debates of diasporic populations around the world.

**Introduction**

This paper examines what I call *diasporic* *methodology*, a method I developed while conducting research on analyzing the intersecting dynamics of diaspora, migration and dislocation as they shape the construction of “home” for Filipinas in Ireland. The research examined the contradictions involved in Filipinas’ migration to Ireland, the institutional challenges they face, the dichotomous landscape of Irish/Other and strong anti-immigrant rhetoric prevalent in contemporary public discourse in Ireland. In an attempt to negotiate the different constructions of race, class and gender differences, and how economic and cultural geographies affect these differences, this methodology aims to understand the complexities of migration experiences through participants’ experience, which transforms the experiences of oppression into an application of theory. This methodology has the potential to expand frontiers of research on marginalized groups while simultaneously problematizing the role of the researcher in a diasporic context. In this particularly application, this research addresses the case of Filipinas, who have been historically underrepresented and their diverse circumstances rendered invisible. A critical understanding of the complicated issues involved in the transnational realities of Filipinas and how they intersect with gender and migration is crucial not only to the development of an inclusive Irish society and scholarship, but also to contribute other debates of diasporic populations around the world.

This paper addresses the implications this has for researchers handling inclusivity, belonging and their own issues in the field. I first discuss diasporic methodology and its application. Next, I discuss the design of the methods employed and challenges faced in gathering research, which includes research conducted in Ireland and the Philippines. The study used a variety of methods, allowing different opportunities to gather and analyze data from Filipinas in a variety of circumstances. As diasporic methodology is self-reflexive, I explore the insider/outsider relationship and how being a Filipina/Thai American affects the research.

**Diasporic Methodology**

Filipinos came to Ireland primarily as recruited healthcare professionals during the years of the economic boom. Filipinos are well recognised for their place in the health and domestic industries in Ireland, with 62% of its population working in the health and social work sector. I chose the Greater Dublin Area as the research site because it has the highest concentration of Filipinos in Ireland with 63%[[1]](#footnote-1). Census data from 2002 reveals that there were 4,086 Filipinos in Ireland (1,412 males and 2,674 females) at that time. According to the 2006 census, there are 9, 548 Filipinos in Ireland (3,933 males and 5,615 females). In both 2002 and 2006, Filipinas made up 65% and 59%, respectively[[2]](#footnote-2). However, the Honorary Philippine Consulate and key leaders in the Filipino community estimate that there are more likely 18,000-20,000 Filipinos in Ireland.

My study focused on Filipinas, as migrant women have been historically underrepresented in migration research due to the tendency to focus on male migrants and industries and their relationships to globalisation, free trade, economics and policy (Bhattacharjee 1997, Pyle and Ward 2003, Piper 2004, de Jesús 2005, Lie and Lund 2005). Also, research on Filipinas tends to focus on prevalent images of Filipinas as domestic workers, sex workers and mail-order brides (de Jesús 2005). I focus on women to disrupt these tendencies as their experiences in the diaspora yield stories from multiple subject positions and circumstances. My focus on women is not to discount the thousands of Filipino men living and working abroad, nor to deny the importance of their migration and their circumstances.

I used a diasporic framework to pay attention to the dynamics of migration across axes of differentiation, how Filipinas understand their circumstances, interactions and civic participation, particularly Brah’s notion of diaspora space (1996). Diaspora space provides a conceptual vehicle to analyse the making of home in the diaspora. Because the dynamics of migration extend far beyond just the migrant and her/his family, it is crucial to pay attention to diaspora and diaspora space, “the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes” (Brah 1996: 181). Working with diaspora space also complicates existing migration scholarship, with approaches still employing a sendentarist bias, where belonging is often linked rootedness to either the home or destination country. These discourses insufficiently address the myriad of dynamics that occur in migration stories and the intersectionality that arises from different aspects of differentiation (see e.g. Anzaldúa 1987, hooks 1990, Mohanty 2003, Kurien 2005, Chu 2006).

In examining the dynamics of diaspora, migration, home and dislocation, I apply diaspora space through what Weis and Fine’s call “revealing sites for possibility” (2004). This methodology can be employed with qualitative and quantitative methods. They recommend a broad approach in their designs in composition for methodology, which entails full compositional analyses (a mapping of the community or institution being studied), fracturing analyses (analysing the community or institution through power relations), counter analyses (compare and contrast fracturing analyses with other lines of analysis) and historic trajectory (providing historical context) (2004). These frameworks render visible dynamics at play and “dislodge the dominant course” through its “commitment to framing and/or reframing questions of theory, policy, and politics from within sites of contestation” (2004: xx-xxi). Because of the specific use of diaspora space in this study, I call my approach *diasporic methodology*.

Diasporic methodology focuses on the understanding of social interactions of diasporic subjects, their perspectives and shared meanings, where patterns of learned behaviour and language are studied for meaning. It is concerned with detailed accounts of experience, beliefs and social rules within a diasporic group. The methodology also frames participants’ experiences against the backdrop of globalisation with attention to political and historical specificity (Brah 1996, Mendoza 2006, Braziel 2008). I aim to apply theory and transform it into practice, as the lives of Filipinas in Ireland have strong pedagogical value.

Following Weis and Fine’s revealing sites for possibility, theory renders visibility and thus, so must one’s methodology (2004). Diasporic methodology is participatory in nature so that participants as well as the researchers have opportunities to reflect on their experiences. In order to reveal sites for possibility, participants need to have opportunities to recognize that paradigms are reinforced in laws, culture and are performed by our very selves as we respond and perceive in ways that are influenced by the very social and cultural conditions that situate us. Participants should not be forced or coerced into reflection, for they might not recognize it as necessary; the agency of participants and the research question must remain at the forefront.

The concerns of diasporic methodology are highly feminist, bringing notice to the significance of the depth of the interrelations between one’s social, cultural and psychic experiences (Patton 2002). Butler, regarding feminist critique, says that we should “explore the totalizing claims of a masculinist signifying economy, but also remain self-critical with respect to the totalizing gestures of feminism” (Butler 1990)(1990: 13). Through engaging in subversive tactics, feminist theory displaces naturalized and reified social constructs (including those it may itself instantiate), argues for basic human rights and places women in a pivotal role. Feminists of colour have long critiqued the legacy of whiteness that dominated second wave feminism, a movement that organized itself along a binary gender division of male/female.

Diasporic methodology takes into account varying aspects of gender and diaspora and recognises that experiences are kaleidoscopic. This method includes the centre from which one operates, as well as the milieu of social interactions one navigates. It aims to understand the complexities of migration experiences through participants’ experience, which transforms the experiences of oppression into an application of theory. Creswell notes that the researcher that uses a participatory framework begins with a specific issue such as inequality or oppression and takes it as a focal point for the research. As this method allows for participants to help design questions or collect data, participants are involved in their advocacy or allowed agency:

Within these knowledge claims are stances for groups and individuals in society that may be marginalized or disenfranchised. Therefore, theoretical perspectives may be integrated with the philosophical assumptions that construct a picture of the issues being examined, the people to be studied, and the changes that are needed (Creswell 2003: 10).

Several writers, such as hooks, Anzaldúa, Moraga and Lorde directly challenged feminist writings that excluded the experiences of women of colour and, through their work, developed transformative epistemologies that are more inclusive than first and second wave feminist writings.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Like Weis and Fine, I call for researchers to be aware of their social locations and be “grounded, engaged, reflective, well-versed in scholarly discourse, knowledgeable as to external circumstances, and able to move between theory and life ‘on the ground’” (2004: xxi). There must be “situated knowledge,” which “requires that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not as a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and his authorship of ‘objective’ knowledge” (Haraway 2003: 38). It is crucial to remain in a position where the researcher can confront her intellectual and social spaces, connecting with herself, participants and the readers, engaging in an ever-constant dialogue. To work this way is to put ourselves in a place where we are open, working from and within multiple contexts, representations and webs of power.

**Applying Diasporic Methodology**

While my participants had prompts in the interviews and exercises in the workshop, they were able to contribute their own thoughts and feelings about the topic, allowing them to decide on the topics they wanted to discuss. The combination of exercises and discussion in the workshop is highly participatory, allowing the lived experienced to come through and the participants to speak and analyse their own experiences. This is of critical concern, as participants are able to place themselves within contemporary political and historical moments. Diaspora should be looked at as historically contingent, “that is, an ensemble of investigative technologies that historicise trajectories of different diasporas, and analyse their relationality across fields of social relations, subjectivity and identity” (Brah 1996: 180). This methodology pays attention to contested spaces, as not all experiences will be the same.

Diasporic methodology contributes to the visibility of underrepresented groups. In this sense, it is not neutral. It seeks to disrupt narratives, the rhetorical canon, by remaining “openly ideological” of prevailing paradigms (Lather 2003). It problematizes colour and privilege through a commitment to sharing, examining and criticising material and symbolic articulations. As the researcher, I sought to confront dominant narratives and problematize my social location and experience, as this affects the research process. In embracing the position that there is no neutral research, “we no longer need apologize for unabashedly ideological research and its open commitment to using research to criticize and change the status quo” (Lather 2003: 190). I grounded my study in the context of Irish migration, Filipino migration, and the juncture where these two meet among complex relations of power. Fine writes:

When we write essays about subjugated Others as if *they* were a homogeneous mass (of vice or virtue), free-floating and severed from contexts of oppression, and as if we were neutral transmitters of voices and stories, we tilt toward a narrative strategy that reproduces Othering on, despite, or even “for.” When we construct texts collaboratively, self-consciously examining our relations with/for/despite those who have been contained as Others, we move against, we enable resistance to, Othering. (1998: 139)

I remained committed to a grounded and self-reflexive approach, aware of my participants’ and my positionalities. Anzaldúa asserts: “It is only when she is on the other side and the shell cracks open and the lid from her eyes lifts that she can see things in a different perspective. It is only then that she makes the connections, formulates the insights” (1987: 71). In order to recognize the practice of Othering, one must transform the way one sees oneself. One must look beyond the mirror, beyond, between and among boundaries. I look to diasporic methodology to validate the margins, the ways people make meaning and enact social practices as they cross borders. Haraway argues:

Feminists don’t need a doctrine of objectivity that promises transcendence, a story that loses track of its mediations just where someone might be held responsible for something, an unlimited instrument of power. We don’t want a theory of innocent powers to represent the world, where language and bodies both fall into the bliss of organic symbiosis. We also don’t want to theorize the world, much less act within it, in terms of Global Systems, but we do need an earthwide network of connections, including the ability to partially translate the knowledge among very different–and power-differentiated–communities. We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance of life. (2003: 25)

In order to allow participants to speak for themselves, I used the technique of storytelling with the semi-structured interviews. Ladson-Billings observes that storytelling is also a method that critical race theory sometimes uses to analyze myths and stereotypes that seek to put other races down. She quotes Delgado saying, “‘Critical race theorists…integrate their *experiential knowledge*, drawn from a shared history as ‘other,’ with their ongoing struggles to transform a world deteriorating under the albatross of racial hegemony’ (pp. 1864-1865; emphasis added)” (Ladson-Billings 2000: 264). Hall adds, “Words are nothing to play with; they are acts of creation. Storytelling is a responsibility, an art form, a legacy through which we honor our origins even as we fear betraying them in the act of revelation” (Hall 1996: 242). Storytelling demonstrates the power of personal stories and the multiple lenses and perspectives through which a story can be told. The power of personal narrative, of first person accounts, told through dialogues, narratives, poetry, or other types of literary modes and genres, have a valid place in scientific research. These traditions tend to favour objectivity, where the epistemological racism that exists in research paradigms dominates academia and scholarship, where norms are so deeply saturated into public thought that the authority of these paradigms appears self-evident and soon become the only legitimizing form for telling the truth (Ladson-Billings 2000: 259).

In *Borderlands*/*La Frontera*, Anzaldúauses the feature of storytelling to not only negotiate the tensions between multiple roles and levels of reality, but also to reveal the epistemological racism and colonizing discourse that is embedded in ethnographic history, where the researcher identifies an “other” and analyzes them through his/her supposedly “objective” standpoint. Working with discourses of race and ethnicity “is not merely to ‘color’ the scholarship. It is to challenge the hegemonic structures (and symbols) that keep injustice and inequity in place” (Ladson-Billings 2000: 271). Personal stories of denial, resistance and struggle as well as explorations of home and borders, attest to the power of one’s own narrative, which challenges hegemonic structures and demonstrates how the personal is strongly tied to social and political violence around assumptions of race, class and gender as well as immigration, sexuality, class, reproduction and unemployment.

Storytelling is valuable in demonstrating how “the same phenomenon can be told in different and multiple ways depending on the storytellers” (Ladson-Billings 2000: 268). The benefits of storytelling are not only for scholarship, but also for the research subject. Naming one’s own reality validates experience and experiential learning. For Filipinas in Ireland, this is crucial, as their visibility is limited, if not absent. Naming one’s reality is essential to diasporic methodology as it allows for participants to be their own narrators and speak the intricacies of their lives. Through this, participants have opportunities to recognise their positionality through their own autobiographies or autoethnographies, as well as interact with the reseacher’s narrative.

Some views of storytelling and/or autoethnography discuss them as invalid forms of research. Autoethnography may appear as too self-indulgent (Sparkes 2002) and a “forbidden narrative” (214) where “objectivity” is normalized and is considered the only legitimate form for the truth (Ladson-Billings 2000:259). Anzaldúa recognizes this, arguing that that the spirit and soul are missing from Western culture: “in trying to become ‘objective,’ Western culture made ‘objects’ of things and people when it distanced itself, thereby losing ‘touch’ with them. This dichotomy is the root of all violence” (1987: 59). Haraway agrees: “All Western cultural narratives about objectivity are allegories of the ideologies governing the relations of what we call mind and body, distance and responsibility. Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object” (2003: 28). It is with this in mind that diasporic methodology works in aims of disrupting the privilege of normativity; in naming one’s reality, one validates and engages the pedagogical value of diaspora and its intersections with hegemonic power.

Storytelling is a highly intuitive process that can be viewed as a form of social action (Freire 2003). In staking a claim against racial hegemony, the storyteller clarifies the issues that are vital to members of one’s community, which can also be used as a basis for collective study (Anderson *et al.* 1994: 17). Through storytelling, one can also work the hyphen (Fine 1998), or in other words, “to discuss what is, and is not ‘happening between,” within the negotiated relations of whose story is being told, why, to whom, with what interpretation, and whose story is being shadowed, why, for whom, and with what consequence” (1998: 135). As well, storytelling is useful to any study of performative acts of belonging. Storytelling and performance are both symbolic and material artefacts, which offer opportunities to study the symbiotic engagement of community, notions of place and belonging. With storytelling and performance, there is an acknowledgement of that power is involved in the construction of race, ethnicity and identity. Public discourse can make use of storytelling and performance; it need not stay just within the community. Participants can also give a voice to their past, their histories, and their current social locations through their personal experience. Such articulations give power to the marginalised.

Performance and storytelling involve communicative interaction. The participatory nature of performance and audience allows meaning to be contested. Conquergood references Turner, who argued for opening ethnography out of a system of structures: “The language of drama and performance gave him a way of thinking and talking about people as actors who creatively play, improvise, interpret, and represent roles and scripts” (2003: 362). Performance and storytelling need not be mutually exclusive, for one can blur the boundaries between the two. Both reveal sites of tension and contradictions in one’s experiences. Because performance and storytelling understand participants as active agents in the construction of the knowledge of their community, the researcher analysing performativity can catalyse standpoints from which social action; change and a desire for visibility are possible. Because of their participatory approach, performance and storytelling are apt for diasporic methodology. Diasporic methodology is an *expression* of dislocation, a bridge between theory and practice and all the moments that come in between. Participants are seen as the experts of their own lives and active agents in the construction of their stories..

As feminist researchers emphasise, collaboration and establishing non-hierarchical relationships, allow and require strong levels of rapport with researcher and the researched (Knowles 2006). Because many of their stories obtain contradictory and ambiguous dislocations, rich with the emotional residues of migration processes, researchers must pay attention to the role of emotion in relationships that are developed, for emotion is central to the research process. While positivist researchers may argue that emotion should not interfere in the research process, emotion does not wipe out the theoretical. Instead, emotion can be used as a basis for collective action: “As we make the invisible visible, others resist seeing. As we learn to work together, collaborative, we are a threat; that threat does not go unnoticed” (Anderson *et al.* 1994: 102). This connection is central to diasporic methodology to reveal moments that often remain hidden.

Finally, it can be easy to write qualitative descriptions without political context or without making known the structures that shape people’s lives, omitting that the individual day-to-day is connected to larger social institutions (Weis and Fine 2004). But, without doing so, the reasons behind social inequality remain hidden:

It seems clear that researchers, as public intellectuals, have a responsibility to make visible the strings that attach political and moral conditions with individual lives. If we don’t few will. Rendering visible is precisely the task of theory, and as such, must be taken up by method (2004: xxi).

**Integrating Sites of Power into Methods**

To gather a critical understanding of the complicated issues in the transnational reality of Filipinas, we must hear Filipinas’ own stories so that they could exercise their own agency. As such, the project employed a purely qualitative approach, seeking to bring the lived experiences of Filipinas to the forefront by allowing them to speak and analyse their own experiences. As diaspora space includes fluid concepts such as race, ethnicity, power and transnational identity, a qualitative approach with multiple methods allows participants to discuss in different settings the various sites of contestation that they negotiate on a daily basis–from experiences in the home, workplace and social life to casual interactions.

The project is inductive and data led, a process that was comprehensive, systematic and not rigid (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). This research is conducted *with* rather than *for*, as Fine, hooks, Anzaldúa and other feminist writers would advocate. In this manner, power is integrated into the research as the design encourages collaboration from members of the Filipino community; action and research are one in the same. Filipinas in Ireland live an Irish experience, and by this I mean living and participating in Ireland, yet an “Irish experience” different than that of white Irish women. It is this existence that needs analysis, the experience of crossing physical borders and navigating cultural ones, negotiating symbolic and material struggles of identity and community, situated within webs of power.

### Data Sources

The blend of individual in-depth interviews, a workshop, participant observation and a focus group allows the researcher to enter at different points of the research, thus allowing participants to tell their own stories in multiple settings. Coffey and Atkinson write: “Analysis is not about adhering to any one correct approach or set of right techniques; it is imaginative, artful, flexible, and reflexive. It should also be methodological, scholarly, and intellectually rigorous” (1996: 10). With this in mind, I work to remain close to my aim, to highlight and problematize their experiences through their own stories.

While each of the participants had their own specific circumstances, there were many common themes that emerged from their migration stories. Overall, 55 individuals participated in the study over the course of 14 months, from January 2008 – February 2009. I gathered data through a combination of methods, using a series of individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews; a workshop; participant observation; and a focus group. This combination employed a participatory and transformative practice with participants. In placing this in an Irish context, paying attention to the current status of Ireland as a “new” immigrant receiving country and to its history of emigration, as well as to the Philippines as a country encouraging labour emigration, it is fitting I apply diasporic methodology.

Of the 55 individuals involved in the study, all are Filipino and are from different parts of the Philippines. While many came directly from the Philippines, some came from other countries, such as United Arab Emirates and China. I interviewed 18 individuals in Ireland in-depth, 15 participated in the workshop in Manila and 22 participated in the focus group. Participants had a wide range of age, profession, immigration statuses and migration stories. While this study seeks to understand the experiences of Filipinas in Ireland, this is not a representative study. As reliable data on the composition of Filipinos did not exist at the time of the research, I purposefully chose these participants and methods in order to have as broad and diverse a sample as possible. Patton writes: “The logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding. This leads to selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth. Information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful* sampling” (2002: 46, author’s emphasis). Thus, this research can reflect a more comprehensive picture across a range of experiences and offer different insights into how Filipinas understand home and belonging in Ireland.

Informed by previous studies such as the Migration and Citizenship Research Initiative’s report “Getting On: From Migration to Integration” (2008) and the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland report “Private Homes: A Public Concern” (2004), I first conceptualised the research with the following thematic categories and integration related codes: security, belonging and settling; and economic, social, political, and cultural.[[4]](#footnote-4)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Thematic Categories/ Interview Sections** | **Inclusion-Related Codes** | **Indicators of Integration** |
| Migration Story | Settling | Economic/Social/Political/  Cultural |
| Work/Occupation | Settling | Economic/Social |
| Participation in Ireland on the day-to-day | Security | Economic/Social |
| Home/making and Participation | Belonging | Political/Cultural |
| Practices and Identification | Security | Social/Political/Cultural |

These codes were derived not only from the reports, but also literature situated in diaspora, home and belonging in Irish and Filipino contexts (see e.g. Gray 1997, Bonus 2000, Parreñas 2001 and 2008, Hidalgo and Patajo-Legasto 2004, Manalansan 2004, Ignacio 2005, Feldman 2006, Hickman 2007, Fanning 2009). Across the interviews, workshop, participant observation and focus group, participants and I discussed their migration stories, work experiences, participation and practices (not necessarily in that order). It is important to note that many of these codes and indicators overlap, but are categorised in the above manner so as to organize and execute the study effectively.

### Gathering Data

**Interviews**: Eighteenin-depth individual interviews with Filipinas were conducted between January and October 2008. With the exception of one interview in Galway, all interviews were conducted in the Greater Dublin Area. Participants were recruited through community organisations, snowballing and personal contacts made during the course of the research. As mentioned above, individuals were selected through purposeful sampling in order to reflect a broad range of experiences across age, immigration status, profession and length of time in Ireland. Below are three tables of the 18 participants broken down by status, profession and country of residence prior to arrival.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Status** |  |
| Working Visa | 6 |
| Work Permit | 4 |
| Green Card | 1 |
| International Student | 2 |
| Citizen | 3 |
| EU Resident | 1 |
| Religious | 1 |
| **Total** | **18** |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Profession** |  |
| Nurse | 9 |
| Retired | 1 |
| Nanny/Domestic Worker/Assistant | 3 |
| Carer | 1 |
| Student | 1 |
| Architecture | 1 |
| Religious | 2 |
| **Total** | **18** |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Place of Residence before Ireland** | |
| Philippines | 14 |
| Hong Kong | 2 |
| Saudi Arabia | 1 |
| United Arab Emirates | 1 |
| **Total** | **18** |

Participants ranged from ages 18 to 71 and came from 13 different provinces in the Philippines. Those who lived in China, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates continue to work in the same professions in Ireland. With the exception of the two participants who arrived in 1978 and 1999, one who married an Irish citizen while they were both living in the Philippines, two who came as dependent students and one missionary, 13 participants came as a direct result of active recruitment for labour in the Philippines, which began in 2000.[[5]](#footnote-5) Below is a table of the years of arrival.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Year of Arrival** |  |
| 1978 | 1 |
| 1999 | 1 |
| 2001 | 3 |
| 2002 | 3 |
| 2003 | 5 |
| 2004 | 1 |
| 2005 | 2 |
| 2006 | 1 |
| 2007 | 1 |
| **Total** | **18** |

All interviews were conducted in person, face-to-face in a location of the participants’ choice. Interviews, for the most part, were conducted in each participant’s home. In some cases, due to scheduling conflicts, interviews were conducted outside the home. All respondents were asked similar questions so as to look for patterns, moments of convergence and differences among participants. With a semi-structured approach, participants had the opportunity to narrate their lives as much as possible. Allowing them to participate in the construction of their knowledge allows the contribution of participants’ values, identifications and practices to be part of research praxis, as well as their insight into informal practices of their community that may be invisible to the researcher (Weis and Fine 2004).

At the end of each interview, after summarizing the participant’s experience for her so as to make sure I have not misunderstood or misinterpreted her story, I asked each participant to think about what she would say if she had the opportunity to speak directly to the Irish government. This gave participants the opportunity to reflect on their experiences as well as to further discuss challenges and strategies that relate directly to their position in Irish society.

**Workshop:** As Filipinas in my first three interviews indicated, the Philippines is home and where they hope to return in the future.[[6]](#footnote-6) Because migration and globalisation call into question the idea of home and what it means to be “at home,” I pursued this research in the Philippines, the country many Filipinos still call “home” and feel “at home”. As such, I used preliminary findings from the first three interviews and participant observation to explore in further detail the symbolic meanings of “home” in the Philippines.

I conducted a one-day workshop that focused on the relationship between notions of home, Filipino labour migration and transnational networks in conjunction with a non-governmental organisation based in Manila. The rationale in collaborating with the NGO is due to the NGO’s commitment to building sustainable communities; its history of advocacy and research for migrant workers and their families; and its on-going dialogue with the marginalised, non-governmental organisations and other institutions.

Workshop participants included returned migrants, family members of migrants currently working abroad and a woman planning to emigrate with her family. Through two open-ended exercises and discussion sessions, the workshop explored some of the facets of migration, including adaptation in the destination country and transnational behaviour. In being mindful of a participatory project, I felt it was incredibly important to work with the NGO’s goals in addition to my own research. The workshop prompted questions of home and its impact on the migration experience, providing a framework for understanding migration and its complexities for Filipino migrants and their families. The research added to the NGO’s work in building a sustainable community with remittances, for the workshop opened up new interpretations of home and how community is linked to it.

The workshop was introduced with a presentation of my research and key findings to date. This contextualised the purposes of the workshop and the different circumstances in which people migrate. As mentioned above, Weis and Fine’s (2004) assertion that researchers have a responsibility to uncover political and moral conditions that situate individuals’ lives continued to drive me. In order to employ a method in which participants could enter the discussion at different levels of engagement, I designed two exercises with guided questions on particular themes in order to generate discussion. Each exercise was followed by a summary session to draw on the details discussed in each group. The combination of the exercises and follow-up discussions was to allow narratives of migration to come through in different ways. Discussions were structured around themes regarding how a sense of belonging is tied to the integration of migrants in the destination country, the importance of remittances and the significance of social networks. As the impact of migration is multidirectional and transnational, the workshop contributed to the overall project by not only addressing some of the many expressionsof diaspora, but also exploring in depth other meanings of belonging from Filipinas in the diaspora.

**Participant observation:** In addition to the in-depth interviews and workshop, I gathered data through my participation in numerous occasions, including meetings, church gatherings, parties and other social events, whether organised by individuals or groups. While I sang in two Filipino choirs through most of the data collection, I also had been participating through informal interactions in Filipino food stores and making contacts in Filipino restaurants since October 2005. Through these occasions, whether day-to-day or larger social events, I watched and took note of how these activities served as symbolic spaces for Filipinos to articulate their needs and commonalities, to make real the representations and acts of their lives. This bears resemblance to Bonus’s study of Filipino Americans in Southern California (2000), as mentioned above and in previous chapters. I immersed myself in formal and informal settings, in Filipinos’ spaces of belonging to be as close to a natural setting as possible (Adler and Adler 1998). In formal settings, I freely disclosed my position as a researcher. In more informal spaces, I did not disclose my researcher position, as when attending someone’s birthday party, it did not seem necessary to share my identity as a researcher, although when asked, I freely disclosed. This did not provoke negative reactions from Filipinos. In some cases, it allowed me to make more contacts, find other research participants and develop close relationships with them.

Throughout the research, I maintained what Adler and Adler call the “active membership role,” which applies to researchers who become involved in the setting’s activities, take part in responsibilities and values of the group, but are not fully committed (1998: 81). This is not to say that I am not fully committed to my research. The distinction between an “active membership” role and “complete membership role” is that I maintain a distance from my participants through my student immigration status and my nationality (United States), which grant me different rights and entitlements in Ireland. It is not possible, therefore, for me to fully grasp and immerse myself within the research, although I can share in similar procedural experiences of the visa renewal process and registration fees as well as cultural and political experiences through processes of identity, community and belonging. Patton adds emphasis to this point, that social, cultural and political factors can limit the degree to which one can participate in the research process (Patton 2002).

While some may argue that participant observation is not rigorous, participant observation provides unobtrusive access and is close to the phenomenon being studied. This is one of its strengths. In addition, when used in combination with other research methods, participant observation fills in gaps and is another form of triangulation (Adler and Adler 1998). My participation in the research brought significant insight and depth to the data collected through the research process. I remained self-conscious of my part in the process. Delamont writes:

It is essential to be as self-conscious about the construction of texts as one is about the processes of interviewing or doing participant observation. The permeation of all aspects of the research process with reflexivity is essential. Each researcher is her own best data collection instrument, as long as she is constantly self-conscious about her role, her interactions and her theoretical and empirical material as it accumulates. As long as qualitative researchers are reflexive, making all their processes explicit, then issues of reliability and validity are served. (2002: 9)

It is essential for researchers to critically explore and interrogate and try to understand their own histories and experiences in order to deepen awareness of their study. Peshkin argues that even with ethnographic research, “personal factors penetrate all points of the research process” (2002: 268). Fieldworkers bring at least two selves into the research site: the research self and the self in everyday situations. With participant observation, for example, we cannot surrender to personal interests; “The human *I* is there, the I that is present under many of the same political, economic, and social circumstances as when one is being routinely human and not a researcher” (2002: 270). One must be mindful as the mind cannot split into compartments and operate from one of them nor block a part of the self from entering the research process.

**Focus Group:** Twenty-two people participated in the focus group. I conducted the focus group with members of a Filipino community organisation in Dublin in February 2009. Because of the number of people involved, focus groups “reduce the researcher’s control over the interaction, making focus groups a relatively ‘egalitarian’ method” (Wilkinson 2004: 181). This focus group served as a method of triangulation to validate the initial analysis, as it is used in conjunction with other methods. For Patton: “The logic of triangulation is based on the premise that no single method reveals different aspects of empirical reality, multiple methods of data collection and analysis provide more grist for the research mill” (2002: 556). I presented findings from my initial analysis from in-depth interviews, the workshop and participant observation using grounded theory, which is data-led, “inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents” (Strauss and Corbin 1990: 23) and comes from “the real world” instead of the space of a laboratory or the university (Patton 2002: 11).

As interviews are only one method of gathering data to understand participants’ lives, focus groups allow an opportunity to not only gather other ways of seeing,but also allow participants to be observers and be active in the construction of the knowledge of their community. Delgado Bernal stresses that a primary objective is to include participants to avoid the researcher claiming authority of participants’ experiences (2001: 628). After presenting my findings, I asked focus group members for their initial feelings about my findings. This offered a space to comment on how I have interpreted Filipinas’ lives as they have unfolded around them, as I have understood them within and among historical contexts, social constructions and racial barriers. The focus group encourages the group to be open to their own insights.

I chose this organisation because of their active commitment to work for political recognition. The focus group took place towards the end of one of their meetings, which provided a context to talk about the Filipino community. This allowed participants to not only discuss my findings, but also served as a prompt for them to bring their descriptive notions of their community to an analytical framework. During the discussion, two participants asked me to articulate with them the findings of Filipinos in the hopes of mobilizing Filipinos. Other topics discussed included forging a common voice for Filipinos and gaining recognition from the Irish government as an official “community.”

### Validity

Villenas warns researchers of unintentionally acting as a colonizer when they claim authenticity of interpretation: “As ethnographers, we are also like colonizers when we fail to question our own identities and privileged position” (1996: 713). In light of this, I constantly interrogated my privilege as a doctoral researcher. In order to not act as a colonizer, I used multiple methods for gathering data and a focus group for member checking. In this section, I discuss the validity of the research design using Lather’s guidelines for a systematic approach to triangulation and reflexivity and Anderson *et al.*’s (1994)guidelines for practitioner research.

Lather (2003) offers four empowering guidelines for conducting openly ideological research to guard the researcher from distorting logic: triangulation, construct validity, face validity and catalytic validity. First, with **triangulation**, the researcher uses multiple measures including data sources, methods and theoretical schemes. This project uses in-depth interviews, a workshop, a focus group, participant observation, data from the Central Statistics Office, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, from NGOs in the Philippines, and literature across several disciplines. These are used in combination to check and verify trustworthiness and encourage the participation of the research participants.

For **construct validity,** Lather argues that the creation of the study must have its roots in theory construction (2003). Weis and Fine (2004) would agree, saying that scholarly discourse must guide the research process. The research looks at the theory of diaspora, feminist and critical race theory to examine the formation of identity and community and processes of migration. These theories correspond to and underpin the experiences of Filipinas in Ireland. They are not used with an arbitrary application. Additionally, much of the literature concurs that Filipinas are a highly marginalized group, signalling the added importance of participatory research.

**Face validity** is integral and is another way of establishing data credibility. One way of doing this is through member checks, or that which makes sense at face value. Face validity is achieved in this study through the focus group, wherein I presented preliminary findings for discussion with members of the Filipino Community in Crumlin.

Lather asks researchers to be reflexive, calling for projects that not only empower the researched, but also “advance emancipatory theory building through the development of interactive and action-inspiring research designs” (2003: 186). This project seeks to do so as understandings of home are linked to day-to-day processes as well as macro-level politics. Through the research design, participants have several opportunities to discuss their experiences and move from a descriptive narrative to an analytical process, encouraging critical analysis of the self. Also, in the conclusion of interviews and exercises in the workshop, I summarized participants’ experiences to ensure I interpreted their stories effectively, thus allowing them to participate at different levels. As such, the research design has **catalytic validity,** Lather’s last guideline. Catalytic validity calls for a transformative approach and the empowerment of participants, that they have a self-understanding and hopefully self-determination through their participation in the research (2003). Because the topic of home is politically charged, the participatory nature of the design also encourages not only empowerment, but also mobilization. This research is tied to action through its ongoing dialogue through constant contributions by participants.

The openly ideological research that Lather stresses is similar to what Anderson *et al.* (1994) suggest in their article on practitioner research. In addition to triangulation, construct validity, face validity and catalytic validity, Anderson *et al.* offer democratic validity, outcome/external validity, and process validity. Through these categories, empowerment is conceptualised as “a sense of ownership of the process” (1994: 95). While Anderson *et al.*’s direction is towards educational praxis, what is important is that research and action are one process. Additionally, there is pedagogical value through collaboration.

There is **democratic validity** as the study builds upon construct validity through the inclusion of multiple perspectives across age, immigration, profession and migration circumstances. Including suppressed voices is an essential step in the transformation of a system of domination into one that is socially and culturally equitable where equity is attainable for all members.

The research project also has **outcome validity**, because at the core of the study is the aim of giving marginalized voices a space to understand their experiences and make them known. While a composite picture of Filipinos in Ireland is not the point, what is essential is the continual rethinking of how dislocations affect the everyday experience. Participants can address their experience, and thus the distribution of power in contemporary Ireland. Giving voice to the effects of institutional and interpersonal dislocations does not happen through rethinking alone, but also through reclaiming the past that dominant ideologies strongly seek to erase. This alone is successful for self-determination. And, several stages of research allow several new perspectives to emerge.

**Process validity**, which looks at the adaptability of the research, is dependable through the use of mixed methods. As well, the narratives in which participants share, in both Ireland and the Philippines, speak to one another. Participants can assess levels of emotion, tension, circumstances and similarities and contradictions through each other’s stories. In this sense, there is also **dialogic validity** among participants, between participants and their own experiences, and between researcher and participants.

Through reflection of the participants on their own and each other’s experiences, there exists a dialogical relationship, which is important to those in the borderlands. Inquiries of the self are not necessarily self-contained. One’s personal narrative has philosophical observations and discursive power:

Individuals may largely control the processes of recalling and interpreting past events, this process is also a social activity influenced by people with whom the individual interacts. Therefore, the autobiographical project disputes the normally held division of self/other, inner/outer, public/private, individual/society, and immediacy/memory. (Sparkes 2002: 216)

As Sparkes’ view of the self is relational, it challenges the idea of self-indulgence. Personal experiences are not just individual experiences, they are also social. The personal is at once public and political through the self exercising agency. Anzaldúa writes: “I am the dialogue between my Self and *el espíritu del mundo*. I change myself, I change the world” (1987: 92). Narrative implies a way of knowing that is relational. There exists a space between the teller and the audience, as the story is not only written for the self, but for a particular audience (Sparkes 2002: 218). This is particularly important for enacting the political implications of the research.

**Challenges in Data Collection**

My role as a researcher of Filipino descent affects the way I am perceived, and thus, how I conduct research. As a daughter of a Filipina, I am part of the Filipino diaspora. My familiarity with cultural practices growing up in a Filipino community in Chicago and my own family’s story of migration lends credibility to my position as a researcher, which has helped me to gain trust and access to Filipinos in Ireland. However, while this was an important entry point, it has also been a source of conflict. My inability to speak Tagalog, the national language of the Philippines, has distanced me from my participants. I am mindful that being born to migrant parents is an important part of my social location, but not a foregrounding measure for the ways in which I conduct research. In other words, my heritage and my connections with migration, and my own migration story, have brought me both connections and heartache throughout the research process. As my subjective experience affects the research process, I constantly assessed progress towards my research question and exercised self-reflexivity. Harding writes:

We need to avoid the ‘objectivist’ stance that attempts to make the researcher’s cultural beliefs and practices invisible while simultaneously skewering the research objects’ beliefs and practices to the display board...Another way to put this point is that the beliefs and behaviors of the researcher are part of the empirical evidence for (or against) the claims advanced in the results of research (Harding 1997: 165).

It is crucial to remain honest and ideologically open. I remain mindful, as I seek political and social visibility for Filipinas from the margins to the centre, and that the research conducted was based at a university, an institution of power. Harding reminds me that even though there are similarities and differences between my research participants and myself, I must remember to stay close to my aim. My aim, through this collaboration, is to render visibility to Filipinas through a critical understanding of their processes of homemaking in the context of borders, diaspora, race, class and gender.

### **Positionality as a Filipina-Thai American International Student**

My story, which is one of many, sits in an interesting position for me, for as I worked on my doctoral research on home and diaspora, aside from my fieldwork, I often sat in my academic bubble of terminology, hiding among books and journals. But as I took these works and reflected on them to bring depth and understanding to my own everyday lived experience, the gap between theory and practice – almost a cliché at this point – became clear. It is the everyday practices and interactions against the backdrop of my student status that affected me deeply.

Prior to arriving in Ireland, I lived in the United States. I was born in Chicago to two migrant parents, one from the Philippines and the other from Thailand. It might be easy to say I am Asian American. However, I have many problems with calling myself Asian American. Naming myself as such, in the US, calls attention to my position in being a minority, wherein “American” often refers to someone who is of European descent. I frequently referred to myself as a woman of colour, and for me, this asserted my position as a visible minority, as someone who is aware of my position in society, one that is in solidarity with other minorities, but not calling attention to my specific ascribed racial or ethnic background.

When I moved to Ireland, I found myself using the term “Asian American” after years of finding it extremely problematic. Born and raised in the US, this is not what most people saw when they looked at me. My Filipina/Thai heritage, peppered with Chinese and a pinch of Spanish, stirs curiosity for those who try to identify me. *What are you? Where are you from?* Growing up as a woman of colour in the US, I had become quite adept at reading people’s reactions. But, in Ireland, there was another dimension to these questions. Since my arrival in 2005, I found that once I opened my mouth, when my nasal Chicago accent pushes through, the curiosity of strangers disappears, replaced by *Oh! You are American. I thought you were a migrant.* Or, *I did not mean to offend you.*

These phrases echoed in my head, furrowing its way deep into my chest. *I did not mean to offend you* still remains with me not only because it is laden with assumptions of what it means to be a migrant in Ireland and what it means to be American, but also because it suggests that migrants are inferior and are in an undesired position. These assumptions affect(ed) the way I interact with people. They affect(ed) the way I choose to identify myself, even though I do not think about my identity everyday. The way I called myself, a Filipina-Thai American international student, was a political choice. I aimed to call attention to my different histories, my parents’ histories, my connection with their home countries as well as my rights and entitlements as an international student. I chose to identify myself in different ways depending on the context, as how I identify myself is linked to my own understanding of everything I have experienced, from pride in my cultural heritage to being discriminated against. I used it as a way to highlight my social and cultural history. But I also used the term American, as I felt it is important to challenge people’s assumptions that my Asian heritage signals my recent arrival from Asia.

The first few months I was in Ireland, I found myself avoiding eye-contact as I walked down the street, or I over-enunciated each word so as to not to be mistaken for anything other than American. I know there is nothing wrong with where I come from or where my birth or extended family lives, yet I felt constantly conflicted about how I presented myself and how I was perceived.

My frustration with my identity stems from my own difficulties with my own struggles I experienced in the US. During my teenage years, I wanted to believe I was truly American and not like other children of immigrants. I blamed my fellow Asian American and Filipino American friends for perpetuating negative Asian stereotypes, believing that our path to success was through embracing an “American” lifestyle. For me, this meant I had to shed myself of any gestures, behaviours or enactments that my Filipino friends exhibited; anything that could be read as “Asian.” Yet, I felt conflicted because I still wanted to bond with my friends over our shared experiences of racism and discrimination, and generational and cultural conflicts we may have had with our immigrant parents.

These conflicts were not a constant. They drifted in and out of my life. There were times when my race was highly identifiable, and there were times when my race felt irrelevant. I was a product of my interactions, and what I knew and understood were in reaction to a myriad of cultural constructions embedded in social discourse. All the while I thought I was ever-crossing boundaries, leaping between sides to not get caught. Within my strategies to try to reconcile my frustration, I was unknowingly classifying myself. To exhale my failures and learn from my mistakes, I looked to the sources of my contradictions. For years I stood on the margins, yelling at others. I have learned to listen.

With the lessons learned from my adolescence, I knew that I would have to constantly interrogate my frustrations during the research process. Just because I had a language to understand my dislocations does not mean that I had appeased them. I knew I had to theorise my experience as experience itself is a start for problem posing. The difficulty of unpacking my positionality illustrates, too, the complexities of diaspora, and how deeply saturated colonial mentality was in my thought process. I was acting upon learned behaviors; I was Othering. Moraga, in her essay “The Breakdown of the Bicultural Mind,” says,

Maybe white people are the only ones in this country to enjoy the luxury of being ‘colorblind’ with one another, white people in all the glory of their centrality. Not I. As deeply as I have feared the power of my infinite female darkness, feared my Mexican mutedness, feared my bottomless rage in my brown-skinned lovers, I have feared the mirror of my passivity, my orphanhood, my arrogance and ignorance in the white women I have loved. (1996: 232)

Living with labels and categories has taught me how I can work against whiteness, as it is in knowing and embracing whiteness in my past that I know its power. Labels are just that. If we let them get us down, we as a group will have less of a chance to engage in a collective struggle for equality. In letting my voices come out, I learned not to leave parts of me behind. Instead of keeping myself from flowing, I had to speak and critique. Silence is an enemy. With these struggles in mind, I approached my research. The struggles I experienced during fieldwork in regards to my positionality are further explored in the next section, as it plays out in the way that I interacted with my participants.

### **Intersections with My Own Search for Home**

I am aware that my personal experience and personal history contribute to my understandings and the analytical research process (Delgado Bernal 1998). I recognise that my interactions with the Filipino community are situated within global economic processes and Irish immigration policies. My research is connected to the cultural landscape of integration in Ireland, a diaspora nation where the intricacies of civic and political participation are shaped by legal rights and entitlements (Migration and Citizenship Research Initiative 2008). This interconnectedness is deeply political; my own experience as a migrant, and a daughter of migrants, is unavoidably connected to how I approach my research. Mendoza writes:

Today…not to declare one’s personal stake in the subject of one’s research is to risk political naiveté. Finally the days of the unencumbered, detached, objective, autonomous observer are over; enter the politics of the personal, the grounded, the contingent – heralded unapologetically by that big, bold, capital letter ‘I’ (2006: xiii).

This was by no means undemanding. My fieldwork in Dublin, although rewarding, was emotionally difficult. From my field notes on 30 July 2008, I wrote:

This is an emotional trip that I’m not really sure how to handle. I find myself easily breaking out into tears. On one level, I’m extremely happy to be getting access at the same time as being part of a community – of being part of a Filipino community – but at the same time, the chords hit me so hard.

Looking at the photo of a few Filipinos eating at Supermacs sent me into a whirlwind of memories – my mother taking us to McDonald’s when we were young, how she’d always order Filet O’Fish, how she never said she didn’t like McDonald’s, but here she was raising her children as American; my dad trying different cuisines upon arrival in the US with Uncle Chiati, how they didn’t like Italian food and my dad calling lasagne “monkey vomit”, how we didn’t really understand why he was upset when we’d bring home Italian food or want to go to the Italian restaurant; running into Uncle Ruben at Ponderosa with Kevin and Keith when they were so young--- the loneliness of trying to get by. Trying to create a community around food, to feel at home, to be comfortable in a new space. I saw the picture of a family eating at Supermacs, somewhere affordable, something people do to get by. These are things that people do.

But I must work through this.

I will continue to offer my insights and observations as a way into the community. Today, I realised that speaking about the weather, and learning new words to describe the weather, is one way I can communicate with other outsiders. We are outsiders to Ireland, living and making lives here – we can bond over these things. As superficial as it may feel on one level, it is also something deep and meaningful. We are all struggling to adapt, we are all working hard at feeling ‘at home.’

For me, this excerpt demonstrates some of the difficulties in approaching fieldwork in which I am personally and emotionally invested. Anderson *et al*. stress that practitioners must keep asking themselves what is worth the risks involved and to keep raising voices to help them be heard (1994). However, as I continue the research, I must look for a level of detachment, for what keeps me motivated is that the insights gained from this research are vital to understanding adaptation, adjustment and belonging for migrants in contemporary Ireland.

There were many times where I left my fieldwork crying. Upon hearing Tagalog, I would panic, resurrecting my frustrations from when I was younger. Feelings of being left out, not understanding what was happening, and years of internalising these and other moments of discrimination would jumble, resulting in a ball of anxiety in my stomach. My breathing would shorten and I would feel ill. Below are a few excerpts from my fieldwork journals:

This research is so important to me, but even two days in, it is really hard. This is definitely going to bring up a lot of issues for me. Today, I think it is guilt and difficulty [for] not speaking Tagalog. It is so awkward for me to say, “I don’t speak Tagalog.” (3 February 2008)

Just arrived at Teacher’s Club, 36 Parnell Square. Really want access into the community, but I feel like my language is a really big problem. Sometimes, I wish it was just me and a text. Then I don’t have to go around and do all this. But this is the stuff that drives me, this is the stuff that moves me, this is my life. This is part of my story. There are so many Filipinos here… I hear Tagalog and it hurts me inside. It’s not about guilt, or is it? It’s like 20-some years of identity crisis crammed into a single question: *Pilipino ka ba*?[[7]](#footnote-7) (26 July 2008)

I’m so used to tuning out Tagalog and any other [Filipino] language that I can sit in a room and ignore it. But now, in having to tune it, it hurts inside. Feels like heartache. But it’s something I have to deal with – something with which I must work out…But how much can I used my heritage as an access point? (27 July 2008)

I had a bit of an anxiety attack on the way in – stomach turning, slight cramping. I don’t know the exact cause of my apprehension…I’m going to have to work on my confidence issues – but I don’t know if it’s that. (31August 2008)

The language was a serious issue for me. I know that my own projects made the porous line of insider/outsider more solid. I did not express this to my research participants, for I knew it was a personal issue and I did not want to interrupt them if they wanted to speak in Tagalog. Instead, I kept these feelings to myself and wrote them in my journal and in analytical memos. I often reread the following passage from Patton:

Any credible research strategy requires that the investigator adopt a stance of *neutrality* with regard to the phenomenon under study. This simply means that the investigator does not set out to prove a particular perspective or manipulate the data to arrive at predisposed truths…Rather, the investigator’s commitment is to understand the world as it unfolds, be true to complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge, and be balanced in reporting both confirmatory and disconfirming evidence with regard to any conclusions offered (2002:51).

I knew I had to continue. And, included in this was my own longing to fit in among other Filipinos. Being close but unable to fully participate made it difficult for me to reconcile my frustrations.

Not everything was heartbreaking. I made many friendships and developed a greater understanding of my parents’ struggles as immigrants to the US. I enjoyed many of the conversations I had with participants and other Filipino community members. I often met children of participants who called me *Tita* or *Ate*[[8]](#footnote-8) and I was readily welcomed into their homes. Only after going to the Philippines to conduct the workshop, as well as meet some of my mother’s siblings who I had not met before did I realise that my frustrations were not only language based, but also part of my own understanding of my parent’s struggles, their own frustrations in being migrants in the US, and my own search for home.

How incongruent portions of my life have been, I thought, and how apt it was for different parts to come together in the Philippines. How silly, I thought, not to have seen these intersections before. Maybe I had not seen all of them in relation to my research because these things are what have made my life–these things that have motivated me to learn–nationalism, colonialism, nostalgia, migration stories, globalization, labour and inequality, all of this is my family’s story, my story. I know that long after the project is complete, I will keep discovering more about the complexity of my research, the depth, and the richness of experience that comes with doing social research, the intensity of emotion, the constant pulling of my heart when looking at the social costs migration brings.

When I returned to Dublin and continued my fieldwork, I re-examined the way that Filipinos would effortlessly switch between Tagalog and English. I knew my job was not to be conflicted that people had forgotten about me, but rather, to recognise that they were adept with fluidity, of embodying their own cultural heritage. In these cases, my weaknesses were also strengths; I was able to better navigate their experiences after having my moments of being an outsider. My projects were personal challenges that created a richer body of research. As well, using personal experience and insights to enter conversations proved fruitful. After mytenth interview, I wrote:

Insider/outsider relationship very poignant when discussing racism. Sharing incidents that we’ve experienced and how Irish people don’t understand when we tell them about our experiences of racism and therefore is difficult helped form a frame of reference for speaking with the participants. Bonding over food is particularly important. Almost everyone wants to talk about food. (10 August 2008)

These are struggles I will continue to face, as I readily identify as a Filipina. I will continue to face these issues in my life, as I am a racialised person. But fortunately, these experiences of heartbreak are few. More often, there have been many wonderful moments since I began working on my research. I have become more comfortable with myself, as I make sense of new formations of myself, I learn more about the importance of learning from my frustrations. Knowles writes that “antagonistic research relationships reveal just as much as consensual ones; they also encourage a more open and reflexive account of the social circumstances in which researchers and informants encounter each other which enhances the research” (2006: 393). While the antagonistic relationship was more with me than with my research participants, what I have learned through the research process is that hidden within these frustrations is the capacity for radical transformation.

**Enhancing Self-Reflexivity**

Through my own stories of my social location, I have come to interrogate my own story of dislocation and its importance in the research. But, I share my personal stories not only because it affects the research process, but also because they have broader meaning beyond the self. Because our own stories are often flawed and difficult, we become “human and believable” (Ellis and Bochner 2000). Narrating one’s story, to make sense and give name to one’s experience, is to realize one’s consciousness. Popkewitz asserts, “The strength of our inquiries lies in the creation of different and critical webs of meaning for judging the appropriateness of our cultural circumstances and in assuming a skeptical attitude towards our words, customs, traditions, and institutions” (1984:193). Narrating one’s life allows opportunities to critically analyse oneself, as it has for me, as one traces the path of meanings in one’s life, revealing what Nora calls “the illumination of discontinuity” (1989:16). Personal experience sits at the intersections of categories and incongruities of power. In turn, categories that are assigned and those that people choose themselves are influenced by discourses of identity and their own histories.

In reflecting on this research, I look to Delgado Bernal to review what she calls cultural intuition, a complex process that is experiential, intuitive, historical, personal, collective and dynamic. The four sources of cultural intuition, which are personal experience, existing literature, professional experience and the analytical research process, are categories that inform theoretical sensitivity, which “indicates an understanding of the subtle meanings of data; and allows for personal and collective experience to be part of the analysis” (Delgado Bernal 1998: 563).

My personal experience, detailed above, shows the personal and emotional investment I have had in the research. This added to the research, but also made it challenging because I am an American immigrant of Filipino and Thai heritage researching Filipinos and meanings of home. Studying immigration, racism, integration, community and identity was incredibly difficult but also rewarding as it affected me personally. What was most difficult was feeling constantly conflicted, for my research is inseparable from my life. I am not capable of being theoretically “on” all the time. My research did not end when I left the office, for embedded in the colour of my skin and the shape of my eyes is a complex history of colonialism and migration, of pride and joy in my heritage, of laughter and sadness, hope and disappointment. I used these moments as pivot points to anchor me through the research process.

As far as existing literature, I continue to ground my work in feminist theory, critical race theory and diaspora space. I draw upon several disciplines, particularly those whose words place race at the centre of understanding identity and community, as well as arguing that multiple subjectivities must not only be validated, but heard and seen. Additionally, I pay particular attention to methodological works that are highly participatory and emancipatory, such as the works of Freire and Fine.

Delgado Bernal mentions that the more professional experience one has, the more insight and knowledge base the researcher has (1998). While I may agree with this on one level, this is also limiting, as there are many different ways outside of the professional world that one can acquire strong insight and knowledge. Also, my position as a doctoral student offered me a position of privilege. Another point in my social location that affected my research is my class position. Coming from an upper middle-class American background, I have had a significant amount of privilege, opportunity and access. Being a native English speaker, I can expect most people to understand me and my accent, and to have many people aware and well-informed about my country and my culture.

Lastly, Delgado Bernal discusses the analytical research process, understanding the interaction between the researcher and the data. In order to enhance the validity of my research, I conducted focus groups to feed back my analysis of the fieldwork in the Philippines and my interviews in Dublin. As aforementioned, this allowed member checks, or that which makes sense at face value (Lather 2003). Weis and Fine add:

Importantly, our notion of compositional studies invites a rotating position for the writer/researcher; that is, compositional studies afford researchers the opportunity and obligation to be at once grounded and analytically oscillating between engagement and distance, explicitly committed to deep situatedness and yet shifting perspectives as to the full composition. Our theory of method, then extends an invitation to the researcher as multiply positioned: grounded, engaged, reflective, well-versed in scholarly discourse, knowledge as to external circumstances, and able to move between theory and life “on the ground” (2004: xxi).

While the focus group served as a way to look for consistencies, inconsistencies do not necessarily mean that gathering data was done incorrectly. Rather, it offers more insights; what is important is to look at the outcome, and if any differences appear, look at why. It does not mean that findings are invalid, but that different types of methods can yield different results (Patton 2002: 560).

In writing this, I realise that I have not completely discovered the ins-and-outs of cultural insider/outsider (nor may I ever), and that my own projects of being an outsider, or mistaken for a different type of outsider, have provoked frustration and anger in me. My challenge, as a researcher committed to social justice, is to continue finding strength to navigate this difficult terrain, to not be upset when I switch off or don’t want to bother. I cannot be irresponsible with my values as well as the assumptions that surround my positionality and my research. And so, I persevere.

**Conclusion**

Throughout the research, I aimed to create a space for Filipinas to discuss their experience so as to put their lives at the centre of exchange. Through the interviews, workshop, participant observation and focus group, the project sought to negotiate power relations by asking participants how they see themselves in relation to global economic restructuring and migration. Using a combination of methods allowed me to examine the intersections of struggle and where my participants and I are situated, as the construction of reality comes out of the unequal distribution of power and privilege. Ideally, this paper will open up new questions for migration research as well as the positionality of the researcher. As a social researcher, it is my responsibility to make sure my research is grounded, especially when my stake in the research process is unavoidably connected.

References

Adler, P. A. & Adler, P. (1998) 'Observational Techniques' in Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (eds), *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* (Thousand Oaks: Sage)

Anderson, G.*, et al.* (1994) *Studying Your Own School* (Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press)

Anzaldúa, G. (1987) *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute)

Bhattacharjee, A. (1997) 'The Public/Private Mirage: Mapping Homes and Undomesticating Violence Work in the South Asian Immigrant Community' in Alexander, M. J. & Mohanty, C. T. (eds), *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York: Routledge)

Bonus, R. (2000) *Locating Filipino Americans: Ethnicity and the Cultural Politics of Space* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press)

Brah, A. (1996) *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (New York: Routledge)

Braziel, J. E. (2008) *Diaspora: An Introduction* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing)

Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge)

Chu, J. Y. (2006) 'To be "Emplaced": Fuzhounese Migration and the Politics of Destination', *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power,* 13 395-425

Coffey, A. & Atkinson, P. (1996) *Making Sense of Qualitative Data: Complementary Research Strategies* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.)

Conquergood, D. (2003) 'Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance' in Lincoln, Y. S. & Denzin, N. K. (eds), *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief* (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press)

Creswell, J. W. (2003) *Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage)

de Jesús, M. L. (ed) (2005) *Pinay Power: Peminist Critical Theory: Theorizing the Filipina/American Experience (*New York: Routledge)

Delgado Bernal, D. (2001) 'Learning and Living Pedagogies of the Home: The Mestiza Consciousness of Chicana Students', *Qualitative Studies in Education,* 14 (5)**,** pp. 623-639

Ellis, C. & Bochner, A. P. (2000) 'Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject' in Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (eds), *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Newbury Park: Sage)

Fanning, B. (2009) *New Guests of the Irish Nation* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press)

Feldman, A. (2006) 'Alterity and Belonging in Diaspora Space: Changing Irish Identities and 'Race'-Making in the 'Age of Migration'' in Yuval-Davis, N.*, et al.* (eds), *The Situated Politics of Belonging* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage)

Freire, P. (2003) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum)

Haraway, D. (2003) 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective' in Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (eds), *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief* (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press)

Harding, S. (1997) 'Is There a Feminist Method?' in Kemp, S. & Squires, J. (eds), *Feminisms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

Hickman, M. J. (2007) 'Immigration and Monocultural (Re)Imaginings in Ireland and Britain', *Translocations: The Irish Migration, Race and Social Transformation Review,* 2 (1)**,** pp. 12-25

Hidalgo, C. P. & Patajo-Legasto, P. (eds) (2004) *Philippine Postcolonial Studies: Essays on Langauge and Literature (*Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press)

hooks, b. (1990) *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press)

Ignacio, E. N. (2005) *Building Diaspora: Filipino Cultural Community Formation on the Internet* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press)

Knowles, C. (2003) *Race and Social Analysis* (London: Sage)

Kurien, P. A. (2005) 'Being Young, Brown, and Hindu: The Identity Struggles of Second-Generation Indian Americans', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography,* 34 (4)**,** pp. 434-469

Ladson-Billings, G. (2000) 'Racialized Discourses and Ethnic Epistemologies' in Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks: Sage)

Lather, P. (2003) 'Issues of Validity in Openly Ideological Research: Between a Rock and a Soft Place' in Lincoln, Y. S. & Denzin, N. K. (eds), *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief* (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press)

Lee, S. J. & Vaught, S. (2003) ''You Can Never Be Too Rich or Too Thin': Popular and Consumer Culture and the Americanizatio of Asian America Girls and Young Women', *The Journal of Negro Education,* 72 (4)**,** pp. 457-466

Lie, M. & Lund, R. (2005) 'From NIDL to Globalization: Studying Women Workers in an Increasingly Globalized Economy', *Gender, Technology and Development,* 9 (1)**,** pp. 7-29

Manalansan (2004) *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press)

Mendoza, S. L. (2006) *Between the homeland and the diaspora: the politics of theorizing Filipino and Filipino American identities* (Manila: UST Publishing House)

Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (2004) 'Private Homes: A Public Concern: The Experience of Twenty Migrant Women Employed in the Private Home in Ireland' (Dublin: Migrant Rights Centre Ireland)

Migration and Citizenship Research Initiative (2008) 'Getting On: From Migration to Integration: Chinese, Indian, Lithuanian and Nigerian Migrants' Experiences in Ireland' (Dublin: Immigrant Council of Ireland)

Mohanty, C. T. (2003) *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press)

Moraga, C. (1996) 'The Breakdown of the Bicultural Mind' in Thompson, B. & Tyagi, S. (eds), *Names We Call Home: Autobiography on Racial Identity* (New York: Routledge)

Nititham, D.S. (2008) ‘Locating the self in diaspora space’, *Translocations: The Irish*

*Migration, Race and Social Transformation Review*, 3 (1), pp. 1-17

Nora, P. (1989) 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*', *Representations,* 26 (Spring)**,** pp. 7-24

Parreñas, R. S. (2001) *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work* (Stanford: Stanford University Press)

Parreñas, R. S. (2001) 'The Partial Citizenship and ‘Imagined (Global) Community’ of Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* 26 (4)**,** pp. 1129-1154

Parreñas, R. S. (2008) *The Force of Domesticity: Filipina Migrants and Globalization* (New York: New York University Press)

Patton, M. Q. (2002) *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (Thousand Oaks: Sage)

Popkewitz, T. (1984). *Paradigm and Ideology in Educational Research: The Social*

*Function of the Intellectual*. (London: The Falmer Press).

Pyle, J. L. & Ward, K. B. (2003) 'Recasting our Understanding of Gender and Work during Global Restructuring', *International Sociology,* 18 (3)**,** pp. 461-489

Sparkes, A. C. (2002) 'Autoethnography: Self-Indulgence or Something More?' in Bochner, A. P. & Ellis, C. (eds), *Ethnographically Speaking: Autoethnography, Literature, and Aesthetics* (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press)

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990) *Basics of Qualitative Research* (Newbury Park: Sage)

Villenas, S. (1996) 'The Colonizer/Colonized Chicano Ethnographer: Identity, Marginalization, and Co-optation in the Field', *Harvard Educational Review,* 66 (4)**,** pp. 276-291

Weis, L. & Fine, M. (2004) *Working Method: Research and Social Justice* (New York: Routledge)

Wilkinson, S. (2004) 'Focus Group Research' in Silverman, D. (ed), *Qualitative Research Theory, Methods and Practice* 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage)

1. According to the Census 2006, there are 5,498 Filipinos in the Dublin area. See “Non-Irish Nationals Living in Ireland”, CSO 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. While there are more women than men migrating from the Philippines, the difference in percentage can be a result of spouses arriving as dependents following the wife’s arrival. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Many feminists of colour critique white Western feminism. Many of these texts, referred to as women of colour feminism, are approached from many disciplines and positionalities, including African, Chicana, Asian, LGBT and many others, some intersecting. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The MCRI (2008) define integration through political, economic, social and cultural indicators. Political indicators begin with immigration status, which begins with entry, which can change during one’s stay in Ireland. With immigration status comes rights and entitlements, thus shaping one’s access to services and level of participation. Economic indicators include education and employment experiences both prior to and after arrival in Ireland and any work or financial related experiences. Social indicators include connections to different communities, whether national, ethnic, religious, or other. Included within this are the nature and manner of relationships and interactions, within migrant groups and with Irish people. Lastly, cultural indicators include national and transnational relationships, values, beliefs and future plans as well as the role of language and behaviours within their networks. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. According to Joseph Reid, an Irish worker/leader in the Filipino Community and worker in the Filipino Cultural Committee, active recruitment began in 2000. Reid took part in recruiting Filipino labour in the Philippines in 1999. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. I conducted the first three interviews with Filipinas living and working in Dublin, Ireland in February 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. “Are you Filipino?” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Tita and ate mean auntie and older sister, respectively. They are terms of respect that are not limited to relation. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)