

2023

International Colloquium on Literary and Cultural Studies



29 March – 1 April, 2023
Hotel Nanta, Jeju, Korea

*Mobility in Islandic
Geographies and Textual
Representations in Literature,
Culture, and Media Forms*

Organizers_  **AMH** Konkuk University
Academy of Mobility Humanities



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2023

International Colloquium on
Literary and Cultural Studies (CLASS)

**“Mobility in Islandic Geographies
and Textual Representations
in Literature, Culture, and Media Forms”**

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“Mobility in Islandic Geographies
and Textual Representations
in Literature, Culture, and Media Forms”

Nanta Hotel, Jeju, March 29th - April 1st, 2023

ORGANIZED BY

CLASS, AMH, Kritika Kultura, UNITAS

HOSTED BY

Academy of Mobility Humanities

SPONSORED BY

Konkuk University, National Research Foundation of Korea

• Program for the 2023 CLASS •

Jeju Island, Korea • March 29 – April 1, 2023

March 29	
14:00-15:00	Registration
15:00-15:20	<p>Opening Ceremony Welcome Remarks: Inseop Shin (Konkuk University) Moderator: Taehee Kim (Konkuk University)</p>
15:20-15:50	<p>Keynote Speech Maria Luisa Torres Reyes (University of Santo Tomas) "CLASS Mission-Vision: the Teacher and the Scholar" Moderator: Taehee Kim (Konkuk University)</p>
15:50-16:10	Coffee Break
16:10-17:25	<p>[Panel 1] Educational and pedagogical uses of research Mobility Studies and Island Studies Moderator: Maria Socorro Q. Perez (Ateneo de Manila University)</p> <p>Genevieve L. Asenjo (De La Salle University), 'Remaindered Life' in Philippine Islands in Five Contemporary Philippine Novels in English Ma. Socorro Q. Perez (Ateneo de Manila University), The Bagobo Epic Tuwaang: A Synthesis of Maritime Southeast Asia and the Archipelagic Ied Veda R. Sitepu (Universitas Kristen Indonesia), The Indonesian Maritime: The Reality of the Tale of the Sea</p>
March 30	
09:00-09:30	<p>Keynote Speech Inseop Shin (Konkuk University) "The Island Literature Museum in Korean" Moderator: Taehee Kim (Konkuk University)</p>
09:30-11:10	<p>[Panel 2] Mobilities in literature, culture, and media forms from the perspective of island studies Moderator: Jinhyoung Lee (Konkuk University)</p> <p>Joyce L. Arriola (University of Santo Tomas), Communication as a Mobile Field: The Critical Dialogue and Exchange Between the Vatican Doctrine on Social Communication and Secular Communication Sciences Jooyoung Kim (Konkuk University), <i>Youtube</i> Narrative from Uninhabited Korean Islands Joel David (Inha University), Chaotic Waters and Well-Tempered Specters: The Philippines as Source of Overseas Labor Jaeun Lee (Konkuk University), Mobility Meets Island: Robert Smithson's <i>Floating Island</i></p>

“ Mobility in Islandic Geographies and Textual Representations in Literature, Culture, and Media Forms ”

11:10-11:30	Coffee Break
11:30-12:45	<p>[Panel 3] Mobilities in literature, culture, and media forms from the perspective of island studies Moderator: Joel David (Inha University)</p> <p>Jinhyoung Lee (Konkuk University), Mobility Necropolitics and Harmless Islanders Paulus Sarwoto (Sanata Dharma University), Caliban Discourse from Shakespeare to Contemporary Java Myungsim Yang (Konkuk University), Representation of Jeju Island in <i>Zainichi</i> Literature</p>
12:45-13:50	Lunch Break
13:50-15:55	<p>[Panel 4] Textual representations of islandic geographies from the perspective of mobility studies Moderator: Maria Luisa Torres Reyes (University of Santo Tomas)</p> <p>Taehee Kim (Konkuk University), Islandness as a Global Sense of Place: Focused on the Animated Film <i>Moana</i> Sri Mulyani (Sanata Dharma University), Reading the Island of Bali in K'Tut Tantri's <i>Revolt in Paradise</i> Hope Sabanpan-Yu (University of San Carlos), By the Sea: Intertidal Relationships in Temistokles Adlawan and Gremer Chan Reyes Susanne A. H. Sitohang (Universitas Kristen Indonesia), Is There Really "Sea" In Me? A Survey of How Indonesian Young Students Perceive "The Sea" Yeonhee Woo (Konkuk University), Geopolitical Configuration of 'Okinawa' in 'Post-War' Japan</p>
15:55-16:15	<p>Closing Commentary Commenter: Vince Serrano (Ateneo de Manila University)</p>

March 31

11:00-13:00	Field Work (Jeju National Museum)
13:00-15:00	Lunch Break
15:00-17:00	Field Work (Jeju 4-3 Peace Park)

April 1

09:00-10:00	<p>CLASS Meeting Moderator: Maria Luisa Torres Reyes (University of Santo Tomas)</p>
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Chaotic Waters and Well-Tempered Specters: The Philippines as Source of Overseas Labor (Draft)

Joel David

Inha University

joelsky2000@yahoo.com

The year 2022 was regarded as historically significant for Filipino film observers, as a Filipina performer, Dolly de Leon, made waves in annual foreign-film competitions, even winning a prize from the Los Angeles Film Critics Association. To be sure, several predecessors had also won major prizes before her, including the Cannes Film Festival best actress award in 2016 (for Jaclyn Jose in Brillante Mendoza's *Ma' Rosa*) and the Venice Film Festival's Volpi Cup for best actor in 2021 (for John Arcilla in Erik Matti's *On the Job 2: The Missing 8*), not to mention several other foreign film-festival prizes during the past millennium for National Artist Nora Aunor.

What made the 2022 contender special was twofold: first, the vehicle she appeared in, Ruben Östlund's *Triangle of Sadness*, won the top prize at Cannes; and second, she was virtually unknown even in her home country, since she appeared in mostly theater productions and supplemented her income by accepting minor roles in film and television. Less well-known, except to the most ardent film buffs, is the fact that another Filipina performer, the slightly better-known Chai Fonacier, appeared in another European movie, Lorcan Finnegan's *Nocebo*. Although *Triangle of Sadness* was a generously budgeted production for an art-film entry, in contrast with *Nocebo*'s smaller cast and circumscribed locales, their Pinay performers both portrayed overseas migrant workers. More serendipitously, the places where their characters exert enough influence to intervene in their narratives resemble the places they grew up in and left in pursuit of work: i.e.,

islands – an apparently deserted one in *Triangle* and Britain in *Nocebo*.

Philippine Migrant Workers

The phenomenon of Philippine migrant workers, officially termed Overseas Filipino Workers or OFWs, began as a stop-gap economic measure (National Economic and Development Authority) that eventually proved too beneficial for its own good. Unlike, say, the case of South Korea, which had deployed workers to then more-advanced states like Germany under its own overseas development program during the 1960s with the express purpose of raising funds to upgrade the country's infrastructure and initiate industrialization projects (thereby terminating the program when these goals had been met), the Philippines operated under the more amorphous goal of maintaining the local economy's ability to service its increasingly onerous foreign debt. The even graver crisis that resulted from the international and local business officials' response to the assassination of opposition leader Benigno S. Aquino Jr. made the deployment of OFWs a more urgent priority.

The collapse of the dictatorship installed by the first Ferdinand Marcos presidency counted the fact that Filipinos had to travel overseas in order to find productive employment, as one of the regime's many failures, one of several corroborations of the country's regression to less-developed status. For this reason, all the post-Marcos Sr. presidents included the discontinuance of labor export as one of their campaign promises. Benigno Aquino III, son of the woman who ousted Marcos and served as the first post-martial law president, claimed that the Philippines's rise as a major business process outsourcing (BPO) center was his contribution to stanching the outflow of Filipino workers. The reality that the one million call-center employees (in contrast with the documented number of OFWs approaching twice that number – see Mapa) comprise largely top-university graduates fluent in English, relieved from having to relocate abroad but still working for foreign companies, merely affirms the fact that BPO companies are essentially overseas employers who were persuaded to relocate their work centers in the country of their prospective and relatively privileged hirees. In fact, the success (so to speak) of the Philippines's OFW system has made it a model for other countries that are considering setting up their own labor-export programs.

A significant feature of the OFW phenomenon is the fact that the majority has always comprised women (over 60 percent as of latest count, per Mapa). The figure contrasts with those of other labor-exporting countries: the overall global trend is in fact in reverse, with 60 percent of international migrant workers comprising men (ILO Department of Statistics 21). This has led to a number of complications for Philippine domestic arrangements, not to mention several cases of abuse stemming from the gender vulnerability of the typical OFW. Nevertheless the persistence of labor export, with the willingness of Philippine citizens to migrate to foreign countries for work, would not succeed as well as it did if it were not complemented by the generally appreciative welcome of the participating host countries. A glance at historical developments in the Philippine nation-state will help provide some insights into the receptiveness of native culture to the prospect of relocating for the sake of enhancing, maximizing, and/or instrumentalizing one's personal productivity.

Historical Incipience

The relatively recent history volume by Patricio N. Abinales and the late Donna J. Amoroso, titled *State and Society in the Philippines*, opted to depart from previous accounts by challenging the conventional wisdom that the country, while still a long way from nationhood, was a nonentity prior to the arrival of Western colonization. In looking more closely at pre-Hispanic records, they determined that social organizations, administrative functions, and collective objectives were all already in place in the archipelagic region that was subsequently – and arbitrarily – parceled out among European colonial powers, starting with Spain and its territorial claim to the Philippines.

What gave Western observers the impression that the island group had no unifying identity, thereby making the people “ready” for colonial tutelage, was the fact that community arrangements seemed unstable, with population groups constantly ready to be uprooted depending on the larger interests of ruling powers and their constant need for manpower. In fact, labor remained in short supply throughout the region, necessitating occasional exchanges of subjects, whether forced or negotiated. Chieftains of fairly stable areas would ensure their share of committed toilers by arranging for indentured servitude (also misperceived by Westerners as similar to their practice of enslavement), usually as a means for the subject to repay significant material or political assistance extended by the prospective master (Abinales and Amoroso, “The Philippines in Maritime Asia to the Fourteenth Century”).

Hispanic colonization sought to provide order and stability to the islands claimed for (and named after) King Philip II, but only wound up perpetrating a different type of precarity. Governing authority was wielded by religious orders, competing with the colonial state’s tax-collection program. Understandably the citizens wound up devising various means of evading or renegotiating these impositions (including banditry, and later, insurrection) – unless they happened to be selected for conscript labor (Abinales and Amoroso, “New States and Reorientations, 1368-1764”). Further instabilities wrought by the US’s violent usurpation of colonization prerogatives after the Philippine anticolonial revolution managed to oust the Spaniards, followed by the Japanese occupation and a neocolonial dictatorship still beholden to American patronage, made any possibility of working for more affluent employers alluring, if not the only available realistic option.

The dominance of Filipinos in the service and health professions (SEI-DOEST 10-11) may be ascribed to the significant number of women applying to overseas positions; the trend may be tracked directly to the failure of the country’s final major authoritarian experiment – i.e., the military dictatorship of Marcos Sr. Signs of resistance could be observed in Philippine popular culture even before the assassination of Aquino galvanized an antidictatorship protest movement. When the country opened up, so to speak, to personalities and observers in global cinema via the government’s high-profile international film festival in the early 1980s, Philippine movie artists provided a series of antiauthoritarian material, usually depicting women resisting patriarchal figures. (Marcos himself foregrounded the issue by casting his bid for re-election against Aquino’s widow as an instance of his putting her in her supposedly rightful domestic place.) While recognizing that no single cause can be determined for the population’s predisposition to empathy and nurturance, we may also be able to speculate how such an orientation became a cultural necessity in the face

of the constant possibility of living under threat of abuse or displacement, with the prospect of relocation often turning out to be the best among limited, unsatisfactory options.

Out-landishnesses

The first point to raise about the appearance of OFW characters in Western cinema is that these were not the first instances of Filipinos showing up in overseas samples, even in Western films. As an American colony, the Philippines was effectively (though unofficially) treated as the backwater extension of Hollywood. American film practitioners realized, early enough, that the expense and trouble of traversing the Pacific could yield a wealth of locales and talent at shoestring production budgets. Understandably, though more rarely, Filipino film actors would cross in the opposite direction in a hopeful (though almost never realized) bid for mid-level stardom.

With Classical Hollywood recovering from World War II and under threat from more innovative and censorship-free trends from Europe (notably the French New Wave), more practitioners turned to overseas themes and locales for more projects that were both exotic and budget-friendlier. At least two B-movie trends, Blood Island films and women in prison projects, became associated with the Philippines; a major blaxploitation star, Pam Grier, made her name from the latter genre, while an Oscar-winning filmmaker, Jonathan Demme, openly acknowledged his on-the-job training in Roger Corman's Philippine-set projects. The Blood Island series (actually variations on and takeoffs from H.G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, 1896) was read by historian Robert S. Sklar as an allegorical means of critiquing American participation in the Vietnam War; with the pullout of US forces "after the Communist victory [in 1975], it became possible to look back" (335-37).

The Hollywood Vietnam War films then could not be filmed (yet) in the actual setting, so other tropical-set countries were made to stand in, with the most expensive film of all time up to that point, Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), shot in the Philippines. The influx of American film personalities nearly destabilized the presidency of Marcos, when he conducted an affair with the leading lady of the project that was meant to commemorate his since-debunked World War II heroism; when the actress, Dovie Beams, feared for her life after Imelda Marcos got wind of the dalliance, she played surreptitiously recorded audiotapes of her bedroom sessions in order to prove that her claims were true. As a result, Mrs. Marcos was able to demand for extravagant projects and positions from her husband, including an appointment as his successor as well as the staging of the Manila International Film Festival during the early 1980s, from loans secured from the World Bank.

Islandic Survivors

The association of the OFW diaspora with the failed authoritarian gambit of the Marcoses, as well as the latter's enthusiastic patronage of Philippine cinema, provides a logical means of tracking how overseas Filipinos began appearing, with gradually increasing frequency, in overseas film projects. The characterizations were understandably empathetic and, in certain cases, melodramatic even, starting within the immediate Southeast Asian region (Hong Kong then Singapore), expanding through East Asia (Japan but more extensively Korea), before extending to

non-Asian centers. The ideological implications of these positive-image approaches still have to be fully teased out by foreign and Filipino scholars, with the previously mentioned releases of 2022, *Triangle of Sadness* (hereafter *ToS*) and *Nocebo*, suggesting ways of working through the stasis while at the same time demonstrating some possible pitfalls.

ToS drew a certain amount of backlash, inasmuch as it was its director's second time to win the Cannes Palme d'Or (after *The Square* in 2017). The Swedish-born Östlund is regarded as a specialist in satirical thrillers, on the basis of the two films. In fact, his film preceding *The Square*, titled *Force Majeure* (2014), is described as a black comedy even though its only suspenseful incident arrives nearly in the beginning, in order to pursue a critique focused on masculinity. It would be more accurate to view Östlund then as a deconstructor of identity, specifically of class, gender, and race. In *ToS*, he commences with the concerns of an internet influencer couple, Carl and Yaya, who embark on a cruise aboard a luxury ship, unpaid in exchange for social-media exposure. The satire is embodied in the other people on board, from the Marxist captain to a cynical capitalist and a prima-donna matron who insists on her idea of fun for the crew at the expense of their job performance.

Abigail, the OFW character, comes into her own when a storm damages the ship and a pirate attack finally capsizes it. Among the survivors who reach an apparently deserted island, it's Abigail who has the essential survival skills that she presumably acquired from living hand-to-mouth on a tropical island. She realizes that everyone else depends on her and asserts her dominance over the party, including exercising her *droit du seigneuresse* over Carl. Ironically, Yaya supports her out of gender solidarity, but when Yaya discovers that the island is actually an exclusive resort with hidden facilities and promises to continue supporting her upon their return to Europe, Abigail proceeds to approach her with a deadly weapon – upon which the film ends. In this respect, *ToS* is the least open-ended among Östlund's recent work, or contains what nearly amounts to a narrative closure.

The filmmaker's political intent remains front and center throughout the presentation, to the extent where Östlund overrides the expected positive-image depiction of the most Other among the film's characters. *ToS* may also be his most ideologically explicit narrative, even if the foregrounding's verbalization (mainly by the ship captain) is not entirely developed beyond the simplistic observation that, given the opportunity to assume her masters' position, Abigail winds up no different from them. An even more serious critique can be raised regarding the OFW character, which requires a crucial measure of cultural privilege: her response to the sudden (and, we may add, righteous) endowment of power is more recognizably white male than working-class Filipina. In fact, feminists might also be able to bring up the issue of the womanly masquerade (Riviere 35-44), where a woman who constantly contends with patriarchy might perform acts proscribed for her gender but immediately, and by her own initiative, seek ways to compensate for her transgressions in order to preempt any forthcoming retaliation. The more culturally sanctioned way of acquiring and maintaining power would be recognizable to neocolonial strategists: ensure that a dominant but manipulable (male) figure nominally assumes leadership function, so that any dissatisfaction on the part of the followers will not endanger the actual source of power.

Blood(y) Island

The title *Nocebo* (understood to be the negative counterpart of placebo) may be taken to refer, at least in part, to the fact that the originating trauma in the narrative begins in Cebu, a city that also happens to be the name of the main island that comprises the eponymous province. The back story unfolds via flashbacks, but the earliest point in the chronology begins on another unnamed island, where as a child, Diana acquires supernatural healing powers when a dying witch passes her animus, a featherless chick, from her mouth to Diana's. Upon growing up, Diana flees the island, along with her husband and daughter, because of insurgent attacks. Settling in Cebu, she works for a garment factory where Christine, an English designer, enforces her production contract by ordering the manager to increase productivity by slave-driving the workers and lock all exits to prevent thefts. Unable to afford day care, Diana brings her daughter to work; when she steps out to buy the child some refreshment, a fire razes the place, killing everyone including her daughter.

Around this time (whence the film plot commences), Christine learns what happened and is haunted by the spectacle of an angry, tick-infested dog, causing her debilitation. Diana meanwhile turns to the OFW option and bids her husband a no-return farewell. She arrives in the third and final island in her trajectory, England; the audience shares Christine's bafflement at her condition and accepts Diana's explanation that Christine does not remember hiring her because of her condition. Christine's husband and daughter are initially suspicious of Diana's presence, but their daughter (obviously a replacement for the child Diana lost) comes around and even eventually connives with the new arrival. Christine experiences a series of debilitating illnesses which Diana always manages to cure, explaining how she acquired her magical ability. When Diana returns after being dismissed by her employers for getting rid of Christine's medication, she reveals to Christine her trauma caused by her witnessing the sweatshop fire and casts a spell that causes Christine to burn up. Diana then takes her own life by leaping from the top of her employer's residence, and her animus proceeds to transfer to Christine's daughter.

What can be immediately gleaned from *Nocebo*'s tale is how it sets itself apart from *ToS*, by providing a careful numeration of the process entailed in *pambabarang*, one of the several versions of witchcraft in the Philippines, associated with the Visayan islands where Diana came from. (Chai Fonacier, the actor cast for the role, also embodies a credible physical representation of the Austronesian native, and was instructed to inflect her English-language line readings with the Cebuano accent.) The *barang* and the rest of Philippine witchcraft practitioners, as well as the precolonial shamans (called *babaylan*), were nearly entirely female, so Euro-American cultural policy included the unmitigated demonization of these groups and their practices, in order to induce the population to convert to the patriarchally compliant Christian religions.

Still in further contrast with *ToS*, *Nocebo* dispenses with several opportunities to harness the coigns of vantage of identity politics. Collateral blame is imputed to the sweatshop manager, who perishes in the fire along with the rest of the workers (the film itself calls for "Justice for all Kentex [slipper factory] fire victims," a horrific real-life disaster, in its closing credits). An even more crucial issue of responsibility centers on Diana's husband, an able-bodied fellow who initially allows Diana to practice her healing abilities, but who persists in his passive role when she flounders, her flow

of patients dissipates, and she has to seek factory employment – even bringing their child with her to work. The figure of Christine is even more problematic, since she also seems compelled to earn more than her husband, and immediately accepts Diana's presence even when her other family members declare their disapproval. After having physically suffered from a number of Diana's spells and turning to Diana for help in each instance, one would not be surprised when she demonstrates remorse upon learning of her role in the tragedy that befell Diana's daughter and coworkers.

One must stop short, for now, from outright advocating for feminist solidarity in this situation, inasmuch as this would entail far more complex analyses of the film text in relation to postcolonial conflicts and globalization issues. The more salient observation to make turns on the admittedly simplistic imposition of two axes: the cultural and the political. *Triangle of Sadness* works out its notion of progressive (European) politics, with the figure of the OFW as its Other, but it arguably succeeds at the expense of overriding the Other's cultural specificities. *Nocebo*, on the other hand, was careful enough in seeking out and upholding its OFW character's native beliefs and capabilities; the narrative's political potential in turn becomes its possibly unintended lack.

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