Plight Itinerary: Aeromobility and the Spatio-Cultural Politics of Precarious Language in Filipino Labour Migration

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Abstract

Airport spaces are typically characterized by surveillance, security, screening, and social sorting. Transitional and liminal in nature, these mega-infrastructures are witnesses to millions of passengers (travellers, labour migrants, and refugees) as they traverse these halls and gateways toward leisure, livelihood, and even safety. While passenger and aircraft statistics are fundamental to airport studies, scholars are focusing on a vital aspect that makes airports efficient transport infrastructures of the modern world: mobility. In this paper, I investigate aeromobility, a multi-layered term pertaining to "mobility-systems, norms, embodied practices, and lifestyle discourses" that intersect with socio-cultural implications occurring within aviation spaces and air transportation in general (Zuskáčová, 2020). Particularly, I examine digital contents created and published by Filipino labour migrants focusing on their lived experiences and narratives inside international airports. Through the use of precautionary language, content creators utilize a specific language of precarity that assures other Filipino migrant workers a safer and more secure experience while traversing airport spaces. Ultimately, I argue that this deployment of precarious language eventually fosters solidarity and movement towards reclaiming their identities as part of the global workforce.

Keywords: Aeromobility, Airport Spatial Culture, Labour Migration, Travelogues

1. The Language in Aeroportality and Aeromobility

> "Airports are spaces that represent the policing power of the sovereign state, that contain the dangerous or risky elements of the unknown, and that render certain mobilities visible and others impossible or invisible. The trick of the modern airport is to present immobility as mobility, stagnancy as efficiency, and incarceration as freedom."
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> — Mark Salter

Modern airport spaces have been studied through socio-political and spatio-cultural lenses and how these infrastructures produced tensions and dynamics, particularly in terms of global mobility (Aaltola, 2005; Adey, 2007; Huang, Xiao, & Wang. 2018; Kellerman, 2008; Pascoe, 2001; Pearman, 2004; Salter, 2007; Schaberg, 2012). Thus, countless trajectories for possible explorations are offered as various aspects of these mega-structures of flight are investigated. This paper specifically explores the intersectional points and critical junctures wherein three aspects are assessed: location, language, and labour. By analysing the experiences of labour migrants in international airport spaces through their utilization of precarious language in their travelogues and social media contents, I argue that the airport as a site of surveillance, screening, and security mobilizes the production, circulation, and consumption of these narratives that establish a network of solidarity and a kind of security for other Filipino labour migrants. In other words, the utilization of a precarious language in content creation establishes a collective warning for Filipino labour migrants regarding the actual risks they experienced when traversing these international gateways. The convergence of these three aspects offers a glimpse of how languages, movements, and infrastructures inform each other and teases out a specific kind of cultural politics in the narratives that are circulated and consumed online.

The relationship between airport infrastructures and cities progressed exponentially over the past century. For one, international airport terminals are considered a microcosm of globalized cities (Cidell, 2015). Furthermore, the imperative for a city to possess an efficient and massive airport gave rise to aerotropolises or airport cities. An aerotropolis is an urban design or strategy that highlights the significance of an airport as the central locus that dictates transportation infrastructure planning and the larger urban mobility of a city (Banai, 2017; Kasarda, 2015; Ndaguba, Cilliers, & Ghosh, 2022). It integrates airports and its surrounding areas into "one planned and integrated urban development area" (Introduction, para. 1, Ekaputra & Simamora, 2024). Thus, airports are priority developments when cities aim to strengthen their global status and visibility. As the physical landscape of air transportation

progresses to accommodate global mobility through expansive, extensive, and expensive airport infrastructures, consequences to passenger movements rely heavily on surveillance, screening, and security. These aspects affect the overall experience of passengers transiting within the liminal walls and temporal halls of international airports. Thus, contemporary air travel is redefined by the spatial and social relations experienced by passengers at any given point of contact inside these sites of transience. However, passenger movement and their overall airport experiences also depend heavily on several factors: ethnicity, class, gender, and even religion. The complexity of airport designs and the inherent spatial politics occurring within these infrastructures gave rise to a particular field that investigates movements, dynamics, and rhythms inside airport terminals and other ancillary locations connected with the aviation industry: aeromobility.

Aeromobility can be understood as a multi-layered concept that pertains to "mobility-systems, norms, embodied practices, and lifestyle discourses" that intersect with socio-cultural implications occurring within aviation spaces and air transportation in general (Zuskáčová, 2020). Particularly in the fields of humanities and social sciences, Claus Lassen adopted the term and operationalized it alongside mobile knowledge workers, which eventually introduced it to the scholars focusing on mobility studies. It was established as a key term of the mobility turn and ultimately became an independent field of research (Cwerner, Kesselring, & Urry, 2009). As the skies reopened in 2022 after the COVID-19 pandemic, the travel-hungry public coined a specific term – revenge travel – that denotes the enormous demand from people to spend time on local and foreign trips. As the world welcomed travellers who confronted restrictions for almost two years, families, relatives, and friends were reunited and tourists began revisiting their bucket-lists of destinations. This also meant that airports had to review and reinstate their operations, particularly those airport hubs envisioning their return to 'normal statistics' while incorporating the permanent changes brought by the pandemic. In the Philippines, this return to travel also meant several issues arising from passengers getting offloaded by airport immigration officers. From long interviews causing passengers to miss their flights, to inappropriate documents being requested by the immigration officers, these narratives became 'viral' in social media and revenge travellers began questioning themselves: is it still worth travelling when (airport) authorities can easily exploit their power and further accrue unnecessary expenditures?

This is just one of the countless narratives of harassment and exploitation occurring inside airport spaces. Specifically, Filipino labour migrants are susceptible targets for these kinds of nuisance, mainly for profiteering. While these stories are not new, the pandemic

mobilized various individuals and communities to take to social media their issues, problems, and frustrations, from the most mundane to the extraordinary. The pandemic years saw the rise of content creation, shared through various social media platforms. The 'click-and-share' culture online gave birth to viral videos, garnering millions of views in just a few hours, and reaching unprecedented range, impact, and even influence. This article specifically explores and analyses the language utilized by Filipino labour migrants who are also content creators when sharing their precarious experiences inside international airports. By investigating the dynamics of infrastructure, movement, and labour, and the tensions that they produce, I argue that precarious language as utilized by labour migrants through content creation morphs into a language of solidarity and credibility as migrant communities learn to rely and trust these platforms based on their own airport experiences and narratives. Ultimately, what begins as experiences of risk, danger and insecurity reflected through language usage become foundations of safety, solidarity, and security for the larger community of labour migrants.

2. Contextualizing the Itinerary, Tracing the Trajectory

This paper builds upon a number of critical studies that analysed, examined, and interrogated the concepts of airport spatial culture, precarious aeromobility, and the politics of language usage in the process of content creation in various social media platforms. Three vital aspects are triangulated in this study: the space, the movement, and the language. Particularly, I investigate the consequences when these elements are mobilized through a common factor: *precarity* or precariousness. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, precariousness is a state of instability or the persistence of uncertainty, insecurity, risk and danger (Oxford University Press, n.d.). Moreover, precarity is described as "a variety of vulnerabilities…and their links with global (urban) transformation" (Stuvøy, Bakonyi, & Chonka, 2021, p. 153). Given the liminal and transitory characteristics of an airport, precarious situations are typical occurrences. However, it can be argued that these precarious circumstances are consequences of paranoia due to historical events: the terroristic attacks of 2001, infamously known as the September 11 or 9/11 attacks, wherein two aircrafts were hijacked and eventually crashed into the World Trade Center in New York City; several airport bombings around the world such as Brussels Airport in Belgium, Istanbul Ataturk Airport in Turkey, Jinnah International Airport in Pakistan, Domodedovo International Airport in Russia, and Kabul Airport in Afghanistan, to name a few; and even the staging of protest demonstrations in airport terminals as seen in Thailand's Suvarnabhumi International Airport in 2008, the student-led protests in Hong Kong

International Airport in 2019, and just recently, the total shutdown of Kenya's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi. While these events admittedly shaped the stringent, almost draconian, policies inside airports for the last thirty years, even the fundamental movements of migrants, crossing boundaries and time zones, affected the overall experience of the airport. In this section of the paper, I trace some scholarships that engage with the concept of precariousness and how it is deployed in airport spaces and aeromobility, and ultimately, how these aspects inform and are informed by the cultural politics of language usage and production through the experiences of labour migrants.

2.1 Understanding Airport Space as a Milieu

Airport infrastructures in themselves are not dangerous spaces. The insecurities and risks emerge from the massive impact these mega-structures have on national economies or how these architectural works have become not only iconic landmarks but direct symbols of nations and states. For instance, Adey describes an airport as the foremost example of "architecture of spectatorship" (2007, p. 517). He counters the traditional notion of airports as spaces of constant flow and transition and argues that inside these infrastructures, passengers are "made relatively immobile [and] encouraged to dwell and stay within specific areas of the airports space" (Adey, 2007, p. 517). This commercial and managerial assemblage of the airport reflects the imperatives toward creating "relatively stationary passengers" that are eventually consumed by shops and restaurants (Adey, 2007, p. 522). Even the corporeal identities of passengers morph inside airports. Pascoe (2001) categorically mentions the airport's liminal facet, stating that airports "functions as a national frontier…in the middle of a country" (p. 34). Kasarda and Lindsay (2011) extend Pascoe's arguments to airport *inhabitants*, positing that passengers traversing airport terminals are "structurally invisible in the land of 'nowhere' because they are in between countries and time zones" (p. 97). This manifestation of the airport as a liminal site eludes the notion of the 'border', producing a unique dimensionality that goes beyond the spatial and the temporal, modifying the way passengers experience this transport infrastructure.

Transit time is based on mobility, efficiency, and consumption inside the airport. Thus, the bodily movements of dwellers inside airports are affected by policies of security and surveillance occurring inside these sites. This relationship between spatial configuration and bodily movements is further explored by Gordon (2005, p. 238), positing that architects design the legibility of modern airports, shopping malls, and penitentiaries under the same template. To connect the precariousness of airport spaces to mobility occurring inside these sites,

Kellerman argues how "international airports constitute, above all, spaces of highly explicit expressions of authority by several bodies, expressed through the terminal environment, its operations, and through authority-generated flows" (2008, p. 162). In a way, this rigid hierarchy of authority lends absolute power to those who are in position to enact policies inside airports. Hence, these spaces are constructed, literally and figuratively, in such a way that passengers, as reflected by their movements, allow themselves to be subjected to almost punitive airport policies because it is an institutionalized mode of surveillance masked by security-assurance. This spatial complexity is then manifested in an insecure and unstable mobility, particularly for passengers who are more vulnerable than others, such as labour migrants.

2.2 Aeromobility and Precariousness

Airports are continuously studied through the frameworks of mobility studies (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Cwerner et al., 2009). Specifically, aeromobility has been established as a separate field of inquiry in exploring the relationship of infrastructures and movement. While numerous interdisciplinary frameworks have been adopted in further understanding this field, the paper focuses on Zuskáčová's sentiment that mobility scholars must "open it up as a concept with socio-cultural implications" in order to rethink aeromobility and engage with various trajectories and opportunities for further exploration (2020, p. 5). As a crucial node of mobility-systems, aeromobility is described as "an assemblage of travellers, aircraft, and infrastructure, together with the countless other components, their relations, rules, signs, and various actors that constitute a dynamic complex system" (Urry, 2007, p. 118). This qualifies aeromobility as a collection of elements and factors that are linked, connected, and dependent on each other, but at the same time, interacts with other complex systems (Zuskáčová, 2020, p. 9).

In his book entitled *A Week at the Airport: A Heathrow Diary*, de Botton describes airport passengers and its 'inhabitants' as "creatures of appalling fragility and vulnerability" (2009, p. 101). In a way, this substantiates Salter's argument when he qualifies and evaluates airport spaces as political and politicized sites where mobility and security intersect and a primary infrastructure where "legal and practical elements of the policing of movement" occur (2007, p. 49). This authoritative nature of an airport is also explored by Kellerman, describing many airport terminals as reflective of glamorous aesthetics, inspiring leisurely atmosphere, but actually operating within "several levels of strong authorities" that "coerce both positive and punitive powers on passengers, as well as on workers at international airport terminals, bringing about compulsory behaviour by large numbers of people" (2008, p. 166). Airport

movement also perpetuates a certain level of screening where "the smoothness of one's entry and exit represents one's position in the political community" (Aaltola, 2005, p. 275). Given these factors, mobility can be expressed and understood through immobility. Adey extends this argument by stating that in assessing airport spaces and movements, "immobility is just as fundamental to [understanding] the airport process" (2007, p. 532). Zuskáčová recognizes the inherent relationship of movement, infrastructures, and policies and concurs with Adey's position by stating that the "ever-increasing yet still selective accessibility of air travel in contemporary society (re)defines the spatial and social relations [occurring inside airports] at all scales" (2020, p. 4).

2.3 The Language of Precarious Work within the Migration Experience

Given the dynamics of expanding airport infrastructures and the statistics of migration and mobility, the eventual rise of how language and linguistics intersect with these two fields was necessary. As Borlongan posits, language is situated at the core of migration (2023, p. 38). It is considered not merely a tool in understanding migration contexts, but more importantly, "a vehicle, a means, a force, which allows greater prospects for mobility, diversity, sustainability, and prosperity" (Borlongan & Lim, 2024, p. 2–3). I wish to further argue that language is indispensable in understanding the spatio-cultural politics of any form of mobility as experienced within specific locations and sites. While the ideal end-goal for migration is for the improvement of the quality of lives, it cannot be denied that the precarious nature of migration is also reflected and reflective of the language utilized by those who experienced insecurity, danger, and risks in attaining better economic status.

The concept of precariousness is widely linked to "instability and insecurity" (Beattie & Randell, 1998). Given the rising predominance of precarious work worldwide, numerous scholarships aimed at establishing frameworks to further understand the concept. At the onset, precarious work is qualified as work that is insecure and unstable, limits the decision-making of employees and workers for better labour conditions, and restricts protection from abuses and harassments in the workplace (Bosmans et. al., 2016; Kalleberg, 2009; Spreitzer et. al, 2017; Tompa et. al., 2007). Simkunas and Thomsen (2018), following the theoretical frameworks of precarious work, explore the relationship between migrants' experiences of precarious working conditions and how they coped and survived these moments through social and cultural resources. With these converging and diverging ideas, the relationship of precariousness and labour can be classified into three: *precarity of work* (experiences related to uncertainty and insecurity about one's immediate and long-term occupational future), *precarity at work*

(people's experiences of uncertainty and instability in safety and security at work), and *precarity from work* (uncertainty and instability people experience from a job that consistently fails to provide for their own and their family's basic needs) (Allan, Autin, & Wilkins-Yel, 2021).

Tracing the relationship of language-usage and the realities of precarious work through locational and situational experiences, these concepts are important in framing the object of inquiry in this paper. This paper considers all these established ideas of precarious work and extends it to the initial precarious experiences of labour migrants inside airport spaces. It is vital to establish these qualifications of precarious work in order to possibly expand it and include the tumultuous and turbulent journey from the home airports (departure points) to the host airports (destination points). Through the works of selected Filipino content creators, the paper operationalizes and complicates the dynamics and tensions occurring within these aspects of location, labour, and language.

3. Departures and Arrivals, Precautions and Warnings

Air travel is considered the most dominant means of international travel. Such a preeminent mode of movement, coupled with the complex systems of aeromobility, situates flying "as the normal international mode of travelling" (Adey, Budd, & Hubbard, 2007, p. 774). Thus, air travel or flying is now considered a *normal* mode (norm) of international travel rather than an exception that was reserved for the elite (Zuskáčová, 2020, p. 10). While scholars of aeromobility praise the mundaneness of air travel as a "global phenomenon" (Adey, 2008; Høyer, 2000, p. 155), the positive experience of air travel is still highly selective and only familiar to the higher echelons in the social hierarchy. This points out to the reality that there are still macro-regions, states, nations, and countries that can be described as 'aeromobile' but the precise experiences of efficiency, safety, and prioritization are vastly different. Hence, Hingham and Font argue that some regions, cities, and countries are more 'aeromobile' than others (2020, p. 7). I wish to expand this assertion and posit that some passengers are more 'aeromobile' than others. Specifically, in this section, I highlight the airport experiences of overseas Filipino workers during departures and arrivals, both in their home and host countries, and how their use of language, reflected in their travelogues and social media content indicates the precarious nature of their aeromobile bodies.

The latest UN International Migration Report classifies the Philippines as part of the top ten countries of origin with the largest diaspora populations. This culture of migration only

emerged in the last 40 years with the stimulus of the government encouraging people to work abroad.[1] The country's rapid upswing of migration, the one that eventually started this phenomenon, began in the 1970s through a "high demand for labour in the oil-rich Gulf countries" (O'Neil, 2004). The movement of Filipinos to foreign countries, starting with this "brain drain," steadily increased, with the general migratory pattern reverting to non-settlement arrangements and/or guest worker status. In 2023, the Philippines was the fourth largest recipient of remittance globally, with remittances accounting for 9% of the country's GDP. Given the numbers of Filipino migrant workers across the globe, it can easily be deduced that they also have a collection of narratives, stories, and experiences traversing the harshest of infrastructures built to function as a sifting machine: the modern airport.

3.1 Discontent as Content: Social Media and the Platform Economy

The Philippines is considered to be one of the highest users of social media in the world. According to the Digital 2024 Global Overview Report, there were 86.98 million internet users in the Philippines at the beginning of 2024, while the internet penetration stood at 73.6% (Kemp, 2024). Out of this number, there was an estimated 86.75 million Filipino social media users, equating to 73.4% of the total population (Kemp, 2024). This only reflects how Filipinos utilize social media platforms in the production, circulation, and consumption of information, narratives, and experiences. In this section, I explore how social media and the industry of content creation are utilized by Filipino labour migrants in sharing their precarious experiences inside airport spaces.

Overseas Filipino Workers or OFWs is a term referring to Filipino migrant labourers, people with Filipino citizenship who reside in another country for a limited period of employment. Over the years, due to the frequency of their air travels, OFWs have been the prime target for various iterations of exploitations inside airports. For many OFWs who are also content creators who gained hundreds of thousands of followers worldwide, they began utilizing their social media platforms and their established digital reach to raise their discontents and disappointments when traversing airport spaces. This platform labour, initially considered as a "viable solution to unemployment and emerges as a highly attractive work

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[1] In 2023, there were about 2.33 million registered overseas workers from the Philippines and majority are female domestic helpers. Tagged as modern-day heroes, these labour migrants are significant contributors to the Philippine economy for decades. Despite the decreasing rate of unemployment, a continuously increasing number of Filipinos have chosen to find employment abroad due to higher salaries and better benefits provided by foreign employers. This, in turn, provides an additional income source for the Philippines, as migrant workers consistently send remittances, both in cash and in kind, to support the needs of their families back home.

option in the context of poor labour conditions and lack of employment opportunities," also became a part-time work for other labour migrants while at the same time voicing out their frustrations (Soriano, Cabalquinto, & Panaligan, 2021, p. 84). Upon examining some of their published contents either in Facebook, YouTube, or TikTok, I noticed that most of their contents highlighted the familiar plight of labour migrants abroad: harassment and violence, unjust living standards, mental wellness issues, information about new policies concerning foreign labour, and of course, exploitation inside airport spaces. Interestingly, several of these mistreatments that target OFWs occur inside airport spaces in their home country, the Philippines.

Salter (2007) argues that "airports are spaces that contain dangerous aspects of the unknown…that render certain mobilities visible and others impossible or invisible" (p. 53). For OFWs, the familiarity of the airport space that they traverse frequently is also haunted by possibilities of new scams and tactics of profiteering. This is another manifestation of the liminal characteristic of the airport, specifically for the lived experiences of OFWs – it is both familiar and unfamiliar – the knowledge of possibilities and probabilities that harassment can occur but not knowing when or how it is going to happen. Numerous cases of harassment and exploitation of OFWs reflect their visibility and inherent vulnerability inside airport spaces. This is also noticeable with the general attitude of OFWs towards airport spaces. While it is true that airports are the iconic gateways for labour migrants to pursue their dreams and aspirations for a better life abroad not only for themselves but for their families, their bittersweet farewell upon departure or their ecstatic joy upon arrival is immediately turned into anxiety as they pass through immigration or customs. The ironic part here is that while the country is aware of the impact these OFWs contribute for the national economy, not only do they neglect the rights and safety of Filipino labour migrants, the state also functions as the main culprit who engineers these schemes and tactics that sustain these exploitative and abusive airport scams. In a way, the infrastructure of the airport is weaponized to enact authoritative acts to subject OFWs into submission.

YouTube content creator Alvin Alvz (@alvinalvz1990) focuses on creating and publishing content that helps OFWs in various aspects of their lives as labour migrants. At the onset, it is evident that several videos are instructional or informational. However, one category focuses on him reiterating news headlines of new harassment tactics against OFWs. Having more than a thousand videos with almost 200 thousand subscribers, he describes his channel as "OFW Updates". The directness and simplicity of his channel description make it easier for other labour migrants to subscribe to his platform. He either reposts news reels or relies on the

content of other labour migrants and proceeds to highlight the significance of these uploaded videos while providing his own reactions on these selected issues of policies, misfortunes, or demise. One of his most viral videos, garnering 693 thousand views and 8,226 comments in a span of five months, is titled *"OFW NA NAHOLD SA CUSTOMS SA CLARK AIRPORT DAHIL SA IPHONE NAGSALITA NA | VIRAL IPHONE CLARK CUSTOMS"* ["OFW who was held at Clark Airport Customs because of an iPhone finally speaks | Viral iPhone Clark Customs"]. Even his usage of capitalized letters invokes urgency and perseverance in spreading awareness. Other videos frequently use the term *mag-ingat* or to be extra careful. It is interesting to explore how the usage of the word *ingat*, which literally means care in Filipino language, morphs from something that is hopeful, especially when it comes from relatives of family members, into something precautionary because of the ominous possibilities that occur inside airports. Considering that most of these Filipino labour migrants are employed under the care industry, it augments another layer of analysis in accessing the politics of care and how it is operationalized through space, experience, and language.

Salter (2007) argues that "the airport, while emancipatory and open for some, represents a locus of anxiety and interrogation for many others" (p. 49). It echoes Balibar's proposition that airports as borders are considered "polysemic" in a way that the porosity or penetrability of the airport is different for different categories of travellers (2002). Produced, circulated, and consumed through various social media platforms via countless content creators, such cautionary language presupposes the portentous experiences of OFWs inside airports. These words of guidance, packaged through urgent and precautionary wordings, signal other migrant workers passing through airports to retain a heightened level of alertness to avoid falling victim into these tactics. However, another layer should be problematized – is it possible for more labour migrants to resist such abuses when they are aware that these airport authorities can easily decide on their fates of a better life for their immediate households? As Salter argues, inside airports, the traveller is the author of one's identity, but not necessarily the final arbiter of his/her belonging or mobility (2007, p. 53). In a sense, the economic body of Filipino labour migrants are examined, assessed, and finally evaluated as the travel document itself. Thus, the moving body of Filipino labour migrants also have the power to verbalize and reclaim their respective memories and narratives inside airports. As Aaltola claims, modern airports have become "repositories of global memory and public ethos" (2005, p. 271). If this is the case, then the master narrative of OFWs and their lived experiences inside airports is that of trauma and abuse. It is only through collective action and resistance, as manifested through exposing the corruptions inside these spaces via a language of urgency, accessibility, and dependability,

can there be a sustained (social) movement against tactics that victimize Filipino labour migrants.

3.4 Language and Platform: Collective Moments, Collected Movements

The concept of interruption and disruption from an otherwise ideal flow of normalcy are frequently the basis of one's spatial experience inside international airports. The movement of people inside these infrastructures of surveillance, security, and suspicion are classified by smoothness and efficiency. For instance, the stop-and-go dynamics inside airports reflect the imperial pedagogy present when passing through such spaces. As Aaltola (2005) posits, "there are places where everybody has to stop and places where only some are stopped. It can be claimed further that the 'stops' signify the presence of a higher authority while the 'goes' indicate a sense that one is authorized, deposited with authority" (p. 274). Hence, when such dynamics get associated with the individual memory inside airports, it reflects a specific kind of transitory experience with the overall flow of the world order. Such movements and mobility can be classified according to pace, viscosity, consistency, and the degree of confinement (Urry, 2000, p. 32). The physical motion of a private person through the various places of an airport corresponds to movement in a shared memory of the world order. This correspondence produces not only specific memories but, more importantly, an acknowledgement of a particular method of recognizing substance, worth and legitimacy. Given these aspects, as reflected through its use in social media platforms of OFWs, what does precarious language speak and how does it ultimately work?

For Filipino migrant workers, whether they are first-timers to leave the country or seasoned labour migrants who have decades of experience traversing airport spaces, every departure and arrival is different, but all the same, anxiety-inducing. This is exactly where the precariousness of their aeromobility is derived from – their identities as labour migrants inform the way they experience unnecessary delays, pauses, and stops inside airports. When authorities interrupt or disrupt the airport flow that is supposedly familiar to OFWs, it creates and recreates tensions and traumas that inscribe a particular spatio-temporal memory that is unique to the airport. This infrastructure of surveillance utilizes authoritative, rigid, and firm language and subjects these OFWs to such languages that ultimately force labour migrants to use defensive language to protect and assure them of a safe and secure passage. As Cabalquinto (2024) argues, Filipino migrants have the capacity to expose hardships in the workplace, make visible their precarious resources and callout exploitative experiences by "capitalising on relatable contents, credibility building, and platform-specific and discursive styles" (p. 15). Looking into

the viral videos of Filipino labour migrants who expose scams and exploitative tactics inside airports that mainly victimize other OFWs, the structure of their content always ends with the idea of solidarity. These oppressive schemes are exposed through simple, easily accessible language, which assures the viewers that these content creators are relatable and reliable. It establishes criticality and consequently, a collective effort to resist and reclaim this site that originally represented their gateway to a better life and at the same time, their eventual return to their homeland.

According to Aaltola (2005), "the airport relates to a larger political context by offering a shared place for remembering and memorizing, and to understand the memory-creating and memory shaping effects of the international airport, the intimate relation between memory, thought and movement is central" (p. 266). This is one of the most important reasons why such a collective effort to resist is imperative – to protect not just the rights of Filipino labour migrants but also to secure their memories by assuring a safe passage upon departure and arrival. These delicate linkages between thought, language, and narrative progress into reifying the once mortifying experience of crossing borders. However, the collective voices of Filipino migrant workers should be able to transcend other noises that drown the immediacy of their plight. While it may seem that they are powerless against airport authorities, the tumultuous narratives of oppression should foreground a jump-off point towards a more nuanced understanding of the power dynamics occurring inside airports.

As airport passengers, Filipino migrant workers adhere to strict and rigid policies that govern their departures and arrivals. This certain "orderliness of people's movements" inside airports is a sign of a global norm that embodies a prescriptive way of aeromobility (Aaltola, 2005, p. 269). While it is true that the power of absolute control and authority ensures an efficient and productive economy of rhythms inside these aviation infrastructures, it also produces spaces of trauma where their supposed security is actualized into moments of precariousness. Tumultuous and turbulent, the scholarship of Filipino labour migration is peppered with traumatic narratives of oppression, abuse, and exploitation. These lived experiences start in airport spaces where they are subjected into absolute authorities where they feel helpless because the urgency to leave is the utmost priority. However, through collective efforts in creating informational and precautionary content that exposes these tactics, OFWs confront the power-holders and slowly (but surely) restore a safe and secure passage, either onwards to their destination countries, or upon their eventual return to the Philippines as returning residents.

From a language filled with precautions and warnings, ultimately, the goal of these content creators is to assure safety and security. In a sense, their employment, mostly under the care industry, returns as another iteration of care that is directed towards their own kind: other Filipino migrant workers. Language, then, reveals another aspect that materializes what OFWs yearn for – the feeling of belongingness and solidarity that is oftentimes ignored due to the nature of their work. The characteristic of airports as "modern terror machines" (Schaberg, 2012, p. 57) is doubly heightened when it is used as a weapon to naturalize acts of harassments and exploitation, thus inducing other modes of fear and dread to Filipino labour migrants. However, Filipinos have slowly learned (out of circumstance) to circumvent the harshness of airports by creating situations that foster solidarity inside airports.

4. Circumventing Systems, Creating Solidarity

Scholarship examining the potentialities and functions that contribute to resistance, solidarity, and organization among content creators is well established (Geelan & Hodder, 2017; Howcroft & Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019; Lehdonvirta, 2016). While this is clear for some OFW content creators, others are simply doing their job as a way of assuring the safety and security of other Filipino labour migrants. For Keller (2019), social interactions and exchanges, even when done through digital media platforms, can enact solidarities among peers. This becomes particularly true with OFWs whenever their stories of abuse, harassment, and exploitations inside airport spaces are put into the limelight. In a sense, their struggles are accorded a collective voice through virtual and digital platforms wherein the production, circulation, consumption are relatively easy and efficient. More than fostering 'entrepreneurial solidarities' (Soriano & Cabañes, 2020) among content creators within the platform economy, these videos also function as uttered and verbalized protests, establishing and organising (albeit virtually) a community of labour migrants who have long been unsatisfied and exasperated from such experiences. This provides OFWs the courage towards resistance, knowing that at any given circumstance of airport harassment and exploitation can easily be uploaded and be the upcoming viral video of a content creator.

The language utilized by content creators motivates Filipino migrant workers not only to be passively careful when going through airports, but there are also hints of being actively aware when circumstances of abuse are occurring. In a way, this is a manifestation of the Filipino trait of *bayanihan* that literally translates to community-building through acts of care, unity, and solidarity. It is understood as the spirit of civic cooperation among Filipinos. As

OFWs are continuously bombarded with oppressive factors from all sides, they search and create safe spaces for themselves. Fairclough (1995) argues that "language use is always simultaneously constitutive of social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief…that is, any text makes its own small contribution to shaping these aspects of society and culture" (p. 309). Thus, the language used by content creators mirrors this culture of *bayanihan* that ensures a specific collective wherein these OFWs do not necessarily know each other but the fact that they are all labour migrants, trust is then established. This collective struggle, manifested through the language used in social media videos, becomes a collective movement towards social relationships that reflect solidarity and belongingness.

Over the decades of traversing airport spaces, OFWs learned to reclaim their rightful places. The theory of social-psychological frames, developed by Goffman (1974), offers a tool to understand occurrences when a heterogenous group of people from diverse backgrounds comes together in the political architecture of an international airport. I began thinking about these moments of subversion years ago, when I returned home from Hong Kong for the winter break. Christmas has always been important in the Philippines. Hence, most OFWs opt to use their two to three weeks of annual leave to spend these days until the New Year with their families and relatives back home. OFWs always bring back tons of presents and gifts for their families and relatives that they collected for the whole year. What I experienced years ago while in the middle of a long queue of OFWs checking-in for their flight back to the Philippines for Christmas was something communal. When an OFW passenger exceeds his/her baggage allowance, another person from the line calls out anyone from the check-in queue who still has luggage room and takes on the baggage. They exchanged contact details and eventually returned the goods once they landed and arrived in the Philippines. Check-in counters are known to be strict when it comes to baggage weight. Thus, these are one of the ways where solidarity is articulated, not just through language but a collective will and action to provide change, circumventing the policies of the airport. From a language that assures and verbalizes solidarity, it becomes an action that is reflective of a community that is identifiable with care, not only for employment purposes, but more importantly, a form of care that deploys systems and networks of support, security, and assurance.

For Hemmings (2012), affective solidarity emerges from situated experience and uneasiness in relation to dominant norms and relations of power and can potentially lead to a desire for social transformation. Language is informed by spatial configuration and materiality in as much as lived experiences are affected by policies and authorities controlling these sites. Layers of identity politics, migrant work, and infrastructural logistics complicate our

understanding of language usage. However, the more important aspect within these intersections is the materialization coming from precarious language to actions of belongingness and safety. Without them knowing, these OFWs were able to create affective solidarity that impacted and would impact generations of labour migrants. In a sense, through these digital contents that circulate in social media that are aimed at making the passage of Filipino labour migrants safer and more secure, their baggage, both in the literal and figurative sense, are redistributed to make their solitary endeavour more bearable. Ultimately, the narratives that Filipino labour migrants experience inside airport spaces, as informed by the precarious language deployed in numerous social media platforms, become situations reflecting the moments and movements toward reclaiming their social identities.

5. Destinations and Opportunities

Airports have always been known to be spaces of rigid screening and surveillance to assure passengers a certain sense of security. These aspects contribute to our familiar understanding of an airport milieu. However, passenger movements inside these transport infrastructures differ based on many factors. The mobility of labour migrants and foreign workers, unfortunately, remains as one of the most precarious aeromobilities in this age of air travel and migration. The most usual tactics to exploit OFWs during their departure and arrival occurs while going through and clearing immigration protocols and upon security and customs check. In a sense, this precariousness is also linked with systemic vulnerability. While these stories are already normalized, there are no sustained scholarships pertaining to the precarious aeromobility of OFWs. These narratives are shared within their circles, during moments of communal sharing with other OFWs, with familiar tones of frustration and anger, but oftentimes ending in a collective laughter of helplessness and hopelessness.

While there are countless videos illustrating how the airport is both the saddest and happiest place on Earth, there are a handful of OFWs focusing on creating contents that highlight their precarious aeromobility inside these infrastructures of surveillance. Through their usage of precautionary language that warns labour migrants of numerous exploitative schemes and tactics occurring inside airports, it eventually establishes a more collective voice that prompts solidarity and security through persistent resistance. For now, Filipino migrant workers continue to navigate through tumultuous and turbulent experiences beginning with airport spaces. Through constancy and tenacity in sharing these narratives of harassment,

ultimately, OFWs may reclaim the space of the airport as that which assures them safe passage, every time, all the time. The flight, plight, and fight continue.

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