

**Negotiating Expatriates' Identities within the Saudi Healthcare  
Context**

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## Abstract

This study investigates how skilled female Catholic Filipino healthcare practitioners negotiate and perform their identities—including religious, gender, and socioeconomic aspects—within the conservative Sunni cultural context of Saudi Arabia. Addressing a gap in migration studies, particularly in non-Anglophone and Global South contexts, the research highlights the unique identity dynamics of this under-researched group.

Adopting a poststructuralist approach and Goffman's dramaturgical framework, the study employed qualitative methods, including interviews, focus groups, workplace observations, and diary entries. It explored how participants performed 'front stage' professional identities in public settings and "backstage" private identities in more personal spaces. Language was identified as a critical tool in navigating cultural and workplace norms.

Four themes emerged: (1) **Gender identity**—Participants adapted to local gender norms in professional settings but resisted these norms privately, asserting their identities through bold expressions and challenging traditional roles. Filipino core values—*Kapwa* (shared self), *lakas-ng-loob* (bravery), and *kusang-loob* (free will)—shaped their actions and motivated them to inspire change among local women. The findings also highlighted a gender role reversal within migrant families, with female breadwinners leading migration and male partners adapting to domestic roles. (2) **Religious identity**—While most aligned with Sunni norms in workplaces through the adoption of Islamic language and dress, participants maintained strong Catholic identities privately, drawing strength from Catholic and Filipino virtues, such as bravery (*lakas-ng-loob*), to endure hardships faced. (3) **Socioeconomic factors**—The tradition of remittances and gifts (*balikbayan* boxes) and the construction of a 'heroic' migrant identity (becoming a *Bayani*) appeared internally defined, and rooted in familial and social recognition. Respondents emphasised their role as providers and adventurers, presenting a front-stage image of success and resilience to family and friends back home, motivated by the Filipino virtue of *utang-na-loob* (debt of gratitude), whilst concealing challenges they faced. Participants were predominantly disparaging of government narratives of *Bayanis*, perceiving these to be constructed to increase overseas migrant contributions to national GDP. (4) **Linguistic influences**—Language played a dual role,

with Arabic enhancing workplace integration and sense of professionalism, but was resisted in personal spaces to maintain religious distinctiveness.

The findings reveal how Filipino migrants construct hybrid identities shaped by superdiversity, connectivity through technology, and cultural adaptation. It also indicates that a sense of belonging is difficult to establish given restrictions to residency pathways in KSA, and challenges of reintegration back home in the Philippines.

This research contributes to migration studies by expanding understanding of female migrants' identities in non-Anglophone contexts. It offers insights into the intersection of national identity, media narratives, and government policies on migrant experiences while addressing the broader dynamics of identity fluidity in global migration. Practical implications include the need for tailored cultural and linguistic training to support integration in conservative workplaces. Future research is recommended to examine identity negotiation in other conservative faith communities and explore the performative use of language and identity work across diverse sociocultural and economic settings.

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## Glossary of Arabic Words

Allah	Islamic word for God. God is genderless according to Islamic theology.
Alhamdu lil Allah ala Asalamah	Thank Allah for your health/safety
Allah yashfeek	May Allah heal you
Bismillah	In the name of Allah
Eid ul Adha	Religious celebration in Islamic calendar. This festival takes place during the pilgrimage season in honor of Prophet Abraham sacrifice.
Eid ul Fitr	Religious celebration in Islamic calendar. This festival starts at the end of the holy month of Ramadan.
Hadiths	Prophet Muhammad's sayings. Haiths are the second source of Islamic law. Islamic law
Hajj	Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca which is the fifth pillar of Islam.
Insha Allah	Allah willing
Jazaka-Allah khayr	May Allah reward you with good
Ka'bah	A building at the center of the holy mosque in Makkah
La bas	Don't worry

Qiblah	The direction of Ka'bah in Makkah. This is where all Sunni Muslims face when praying.
Qur'an	Muslims' holy book. Muslims believe it is a direct revelation from God through the holy spirit to prophet Muhammad. There is only one copy of the Quran consisting of 114 chapters which are written by eyewitnesses of the prophet.
Ramadan	The ninth month in the Islamic calendar. Ramadan is a holy month where Muslims start to fast daytime for the whole month.
Salah	Islamic prayer.
Sejadah	Prayer mat.
Tahor	It will purge your sins.
Taraweeh	Specific night prayers held during the holy month of Ramadan.
Wudu	Islamic procedures for cleansing parts of the body which is a type of ritual purification or ablution. This is usually done before praying.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction and Background: Global Migration and Study**

### **Context**

*When I am alone in the dark trying to sleep, I feel better about myself, my identity, because now I am a Bayani, an overseas hero, because I helped my parents get a better life....I feel they are secured, I don't show my kids things are hard in the Philippines, I just tell them we are saved, we will live a better lives (Suzanna).*

*I must work here and send money to my parents to support them... They rely on this money. I am proud to support them (Becky)*

### **1.1 Introduction**

The present study examines Catholic Filipino migrants working as healthcare practitioners in Saudi Arabia, the 'cradle of Islam.' This chapter begins by exploring global migration trends, emphasising the growing number of Filipino migrants worldwide. The Philippines' position among the top 20 origins of migration is highlighted using UN data, followed by an analysis of the top 20 migration destinations, focusing on the Gulf countries and, specifically, Saudi Arabia.

The chapter addresses the socioeconomic factors influencing migration by examining the top 10 countries for remittance sending and receiving, demonstrating Filipino migrants' significant contribution to the Philippines' GDP. It also explores migration waves in the Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, which heavily relies on migrants, especially in the healthcare sector where the study respondents are employed.

The discussion then shifts to Saudi Arabia as the study's context of reception, covering immigration policies, social regulations in the labour market, housing norms, political and economic structures, racial hierarchies, public opinions, and the role of Sunni Islam and the Islamic canon. Particular attention is given to the unique positioning of Christians and Christianity in Sunni Islam, as understood through the Qur'an and the Hadiths, which is pertinent to interpreting the study's findings.

The chapter also addresses the increasing complexity of migration and migrant identities, identifying research gaps and outlining the study's aims. It concludes with the research questions that guide this investigation.

## 1.2 Worldwide Migration

Worldwide migration occurs for various reasons, including war, job opportunities, climate change, social or recreational factors, and more. Faist (2000) emphasises that socioeconomic factors significantly influence migrants' decisions to settle abroad. Faist identifies key motivations for migration, such as improving wealth, status, comfort, freedom, and autonomy, as well as seeking adventure, joining family or friends, escaping oppression, or enhancing one's life or society (Faist, 2000, p.37).

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM), a UN agency, tracks global migration trends. Its 2020 World Migration Report reveals that the number of migrants grew from 84 million in 1970 to 271 million in 2019 (IOM, 2020, p.21), demonstrating a substantial increase in the last five decades (see Table 1).

*Table 1.*

*International migration 1970–2019 (IOM, 2020, p.21)*

Year	Number of migrants	Migrants as percentage of the world's population
1970	84,460,125	2.3%
1975	90,368,010	2.2%
1980	101,983,149	2.3%
1985	113,206,691	2.3%
1990	153,011,473	2.9%
1995	161,316,895	2.8%
2000	173,588,441	2.8%
2005	191,615,574	2.9%

2010	220,781,909	3.2%
2015	248,861,296	3.4%
2019	271,642,105	3.5%

### 1.2.1 Top Origins and Destinations of Global Migration

Figure 1 reveals the top 20 origins of global migrants, published by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs at the United Nations (DESA, 2019).

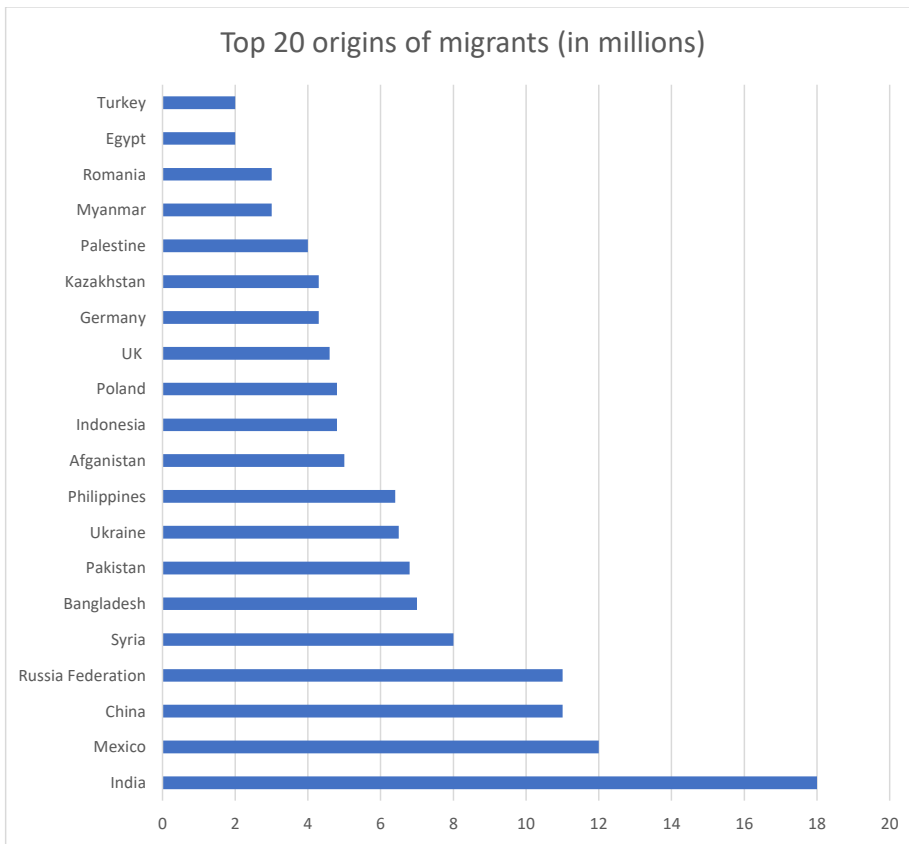


Figure 1: Top 20 Origins of International Migrants (2019) (DESA, 2019)

The Philippines was ranked ninth in 2019 (Figure 1), at 6.4 million citizens. This is just over a third of India, from which 18 million citizens migrated.

The same report also published information on the top 20 destinations of international migrants (Figure 2).

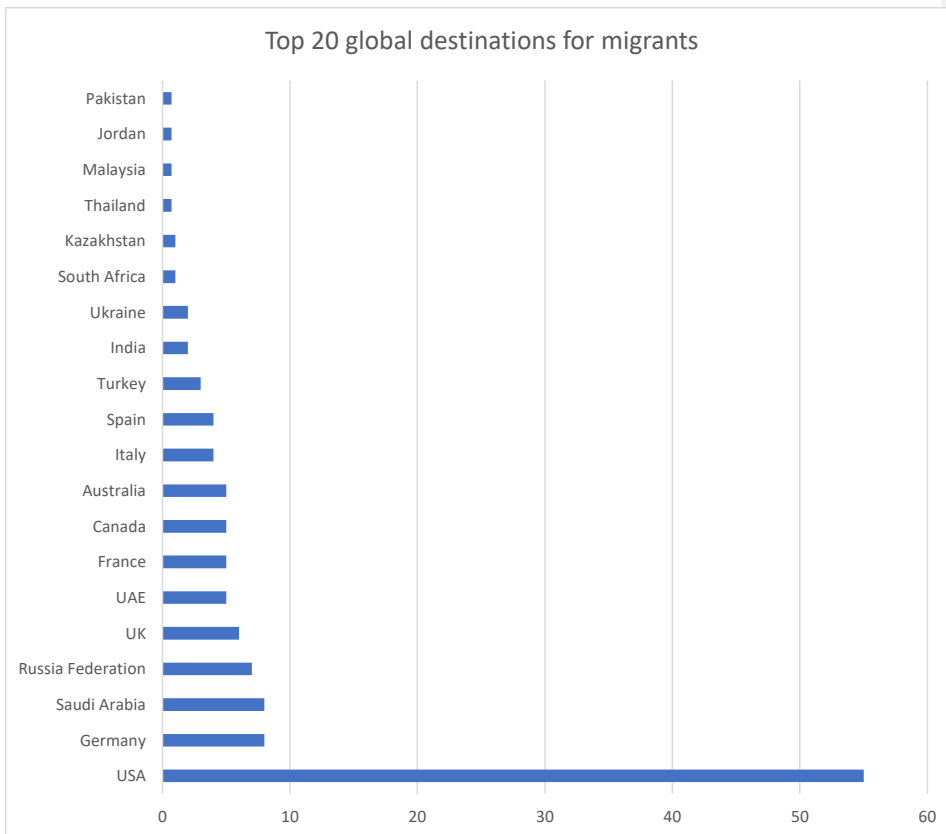


Figure 2. Top 20 destinations of international migrants (2019) (DESA, 2019)

The USA was the most popular destination, with the KSA ranked third in 2019 (Figure 2). Understanding these migration figures helps contextualise the respondents and setting of the

current study. I will now present the number of overseas Filipinos in the Gulf countries, particularly in the KSA.

### 1.2.2 The Philippines: One of the Top Countries Receiving Remittance from Migrants

The Philippines, the country of origin of all participants in the present study, receives significant remittance from its overseas citizens. According to 2019 World Bank statistics, 33 billion US dollars were sent to the Philippines in 2018 (Plaza et al., 2019). The literature refers to the 'new work order', a term coined by Gee et al. (1996), where people migrate for work. Table 2 shows the top 10 countries receiving remittance (in US dollars) in 2018, according to the World Bank report (Plaza et al., 2019).

Table 2.

Top 10 countries receiving remittance (current USD billions) (Plaza et al., 2019)

2005		2010		2015		2018	
China	23.63	India	53.48	India	68.91	India	78.61
Mexico	22.74	China	52.46	China	63.94	China	67.41
India	22.13	Mexico	22.08	<b>Philippines</b>	<b>29.80</b>	Mexico	35.66
Nigeria	14.64	<b>Philippines</b>	<b>21.56</b>	Mexico	26.23	<b>Philippines</b>	<b>33.83</b>
France	14.21	France	19.90	France	24.06	Egypt	28.92
<b>Philippines</b>	<b>13.73</b>	Nigeria	19.75	Nigeria	21.16	France	26.43
Belgium	6.89	Germany	12.79	Pakistan	19.31	Nigeria	24.31
Germany	6.87	Egypt	12.45	Egypt	18.33	Pakistan	21.01
Spain	6.66	Bangladesh	10.85	Germany	15.81	Germany	17.36
Poland	6.47	Belgium	10.35	Bangladesh	15.30	Viet Nam	15.93

The report highlighted that Filipinos are ranked fourth globally in terms of remittance sent home, following the Chinese, Indians, and Mexicans. According to official reports from the Philippine

government, overseas Filipinos make a significant contribution to the country's GDP annually, with remittance peaking in 2006 at 10.4% of the national GDP. As the table shows, the Philippines has remained in the top 10 for 13 years.

### 1.2.3 Saudi Arabia: One of the Top Countries Sending Remittance

*When the plane landed at the airport in Saudi. It was mixed emotions. I was both anxious and excited to work there and see what is Saudi Arabia (Kate)*

Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries remain among the top countries sending remittance to other countries for nearly 20 years, as shown in figures from the World Bank report (Plaza et al., 2019) reproduced in Table 3.

Table 3.

*Top 10 countries sending remittance (current USD billions) (Plaza et al., 2019)*

2005		2010		2015		2018	
USA	47.25	USA	50.78	USA	61.86	USA	67.96
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	<b>14.30</b>	<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	<b>27.07</b>	UAE	40.33	UAE	44.37
Germany	12.71	Russia	21.45	<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	<b>38.79</b>	<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	<b>36.12</b>
Switzerland	10.52	Switzerland	17.76	Switzerland	25.40	Switzerland	26.60
UK	9.64	Germany	14.68	China	20.42	Germany	22.09
France	9.48	Italy	12.89	Russia	19.69	Russia	20.61
Republic of Korea	6.9	France	12.03	Germany	18.03	China	16.18
Russia	6.83	Kuwait	11.86	Kuwait	15.20	Kuwait	13.76
Luxembourg	6.70	Luxembourg	10.65	France	12.79	France	13.50
Malaysia	5.68	UAE	10.57	Qatar	12.19	Republic of Korea	12.86

Having shown the relation between the Philippines and the KSA regarding current migration, I now discuss overseas Filipinos in general.

### 1.3 Overseas Filipinos

The Philippines is located in the far east of Asia (Figure 3). It has a population of 101 million, 92% of whom are Christians. The Philippines is the largest Catholic country in Asia with about 80% of its population being members of the Roman Catholic Church.



Figure 3: Map of the Philippines

Official statistics from the Philippine government report over 10 million Filipinos living abroad, with non-official estimates, such as Jureidini (2019, p.77), suggesting the number could be as high as 15 million. Of these, nearly 50% are permanent emigrants, 41% are temporary, and 9% are irregular migrants (those without official authorisation or residence documents). Women, the focus

of this study, make up around 60% of overseas Filipinos, primarily aged 25–34. Table 4 presents the latest figures from the Commission on Filipinos Overseas report (COF, 2018).

*Table 4*

*Population of overseas Filipinos by continent (COF, 2018)*

Rank	Continent	Permanent	Temporary	Irregular	Total
-	World Total	4,869,766	4,207,018	1,161,830	10,238,614
1	Americas	3,782,483	250,733	280,260	4,313,476
2	Africa	4,198	49,003	5,835	59,036
3	Asia (West)	7,748	2,308,086	173,595	2,489,430
4	Asia (East and South)	288,894	841,228	538,705	1,668,827
5	Europe	421,891	286,371	157,925	866,187
6	Oceania	364,552	104,430	5,510	474,492

The table shows the locations of 10 million Filipino migrants, with Saudi Arabia in Asia (West). According to Bello et al. (2004, p.4), over 10% of the Filipino population are overseas migrants, driven by high levels of un- and underemployment and a lack of job opportunities (OECD, 2017, p.91). Emigration particularly affects the private sector, including the health sector, with women more likely to migrate for work. Female healthcare professionals form the study group for this research. However, migrants often hold lower-skilled jobs abroad than their qualifications suggest (Asis and Battistella, 2013; Battistella and Liao, 2013). Budach and Saint-Georges (2017) noted that Filipinos' adaptability enhances their employability globally. Their economic contribution is significant, and the Filipino state promotes them as 'modern heroes' for this reason (Rodriguez, 2010).

Allan and McElhinny (2017) highlighted that Filipino workers' linguistic skills contribute to the global demand for skilled labour, exemplified by the rise in call centres in the Philippines, from two in 2000 to 1,000 less than a year later (Salonga, 2010). They also pointed to virtual migration, where workers in outsourcing companies follow British and American time zones without physically being in those countries. Allan and McElhinny (2017, p.91) argued that these workers' performances, while linked to another nation, show the adaptability and success of Filipino

workers, with language and cultural knowledge being valued. I will now focus on migrants in the KSA and Gulf countries.

#### 1.4 Migrants in Saudi Arabia and Adjacent Gulf Countries

The term ‘Gulf countries’ refers to six Islamic nations: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, located on the Arabian Peninsula. According to Hamza (2018), these countries are in constant need of human resources. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) notes three major waves of migration: the first after the 1960s oil boom, the second in the 1970s, and the third in the 1980s. Migrant workers make up a large proportion of these populations, with 90% of Qatar and UAE's populations being migrants, and significant numbers in Bahrain (50%), Kuwait (two-thirds), and Saudi Arabia (one-third) (Al Shehabi, Hanieh and Khalaf, 2015). Gulf countries remain top destinations for Filipinos, as reported by the Filipino government (Al Shehabi and Hanieh, 2019; De Bel-Air, 2014; Hamza, 2018; Shah, 2018; Thiollet, 2011). Table 5 presents the top 10 destinations for overseas Filipinos, according to the Commission on Filipinos Overseas report (COF, 2018).

Table 5.

*The population of overseas Filipinos by country (COF, 2018)*

#	Country	Filipino population
1	USA	4,089,570
2	Saudi Arabia	938,490
3	United Arab Emirates	679,819
4	Japan	325,000
5	Australia	293,770
6	Kuwait	279,000
7	Malaysia	245,000
8	Qatar	240,000
9	Singapore	203,243

10	United Kingdom	200,000
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The table shows that five of the top ten destinations for Filipinos are Islamic countries, with four of them being Gulf countries: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Qatar. Additionally, Malaysia, another Islamic country, is a significant migration destination for Filipinos. The table indicates that Saudi Arabia is the second most popular destination for Filipino migrants, with 938,490 migrants, following only the United States.

### 1.5 Migrants in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has a population of 34 million, with 13 provinces, and a notably young demographic, as half of its residents are under 25. There are 13 million migrants in the country, making up 38% of the population, while Saudi nationals number 21 million. According to the latest official figures from the Saudi General Authority of Statistics (GAS), Indians constitute the largest migrant group (19.4%), followed by Pakistanis (14.5%), Bangladeshis (14.4%), Egyptians (14.3%), and Filipinos (11.3%). The 2018 COF report (section 1.4) stated that there were 938,490 Filipino migrants working in Saudi Arabia (a figure likely to have increased since then).

#### 1.5.1 Human Resources in the Saudi Healthcare System

The healthcare sector in Saudi Arabia, like many other sectors, relies heavily on migrants. The latest report from the Saudi Ministry of Health reveals that 42% of healthcare practitioners are migrants. Out of 300,699 healthcare practitioners, 126,005 are migrants, while 174,694 are Saudis. Of the 58,955 doctors, 37,386 are migrants (63.41%), and 21,569 are Saudi doctors (36.59%). In nursing, 74,402 out of 139,798 nurses are migrants (53.22%), with 65,396 being Saudi nurses. Consequently, Filipino healthcare workers are likely to find employment quickly in Saudi Arabia, where the public is accustomed to being treated by migrant practitioners.

### 1.5.2 Public and Private Healthcare Services in Qassim

This study was conducted in Buraydah city, the capital of Qassim province (Figure 4). Qassim province is one of 13 provinces that constitute the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (see Figure 5).

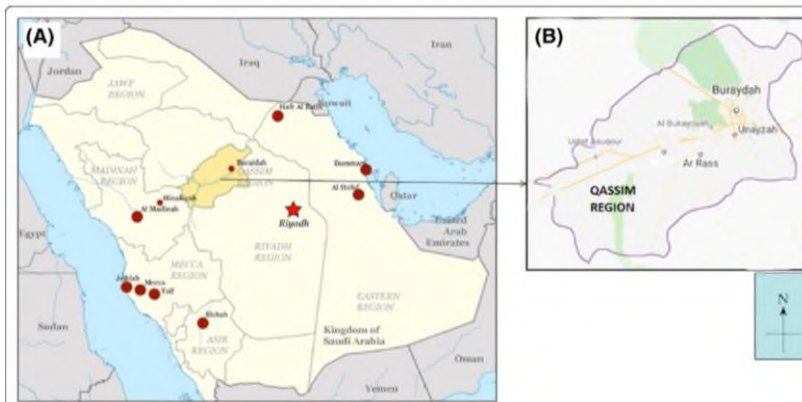


Figure 4: Qassim province in the KSA (Source: Saudi Ministry of Interior)



Figure 5: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Qassim province has a population of 1,215,867, with 928,491 Saudis and 287,376 migrants, according to the 2018 GAS report. The city of Buraydah, with a population of 590,300, consists

of 445,956 Saudis and 144,356 non-Saudis. The city has six public hospitals with 1,475 beds, employing 840 doctors (254 female, 586 male) and 2,173 nurses (1,607 female, 566 male). There are also 61 general practitioner clinics with 253 doctors (98 female, 137 male) and 338 nurses (210 female, 128 male). Buraydah has three private hospitals with 263 beds, employing 193 doctors (68 female, 125 male) and 451 nurses (389 female, 62 male). The city also has 12 private dental clinics and 55 private general practitioner clinics with 460 doctors (208 female, 252 male) and 475 nurses (431 female, 44 male). Notably, there are more male doctors than female doctors, and more female nurses than male nurses in both public and private sectors. The next section explores the Saudi context to better understand how migrants experience their journey to and time in the country.

### **1.6 Saudi Arabia: Context of Reception**

*In first week in the clinic...Everything was new to me, the language, the culture, the dry heat, people around here. Before in my life, I never was in this situation, ever before in my whole life*  
(Kimberley)

The context of reception for migrants in Saudi Arabia (KSA) is shaped not only by the country they arrive in but also by the opportunity structures they face, including immigration laws, labour markets, housing markets, racial hierarchies, and public opinions (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001, 2006). These opportunity structures and constraints, as they argue, play a determinative role in shaping migrants' integration outcomes. For Filipino migrants to KSA, these structural factors—ranging from legal frameworks to societal perceptions—are central to understanding their experiences and the ways in which they navigate their new environment.

There are two distinct groups of Filipino migrants to KSA: skilled and unskilled workers. Highly skilled Western migrants (usually 'white' and often termed 'expatriates' instead of migrants – forming a specific category of migrants) often enjoy better living standards and a more favourable reception compared to migrants from the Philippines and other countries (Gashaw, 2021). Despite this, all migrants in KSA, regardless of skill level, have fewer social rights compared to citizens, such as limited access to family benefits, pensions, and unemployment or disability benefits. The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX, 2020) places KSA at the bottom of a long list of countries in terms of migrant rights, with most areas deemed 'unfavourable' or 'critically

unfavourable.’ The only area where KSA fares better is family reunion, as foreign residents can bring their families to the country. Portes and Rumbaut (2006) highlight how such structural limitations, including limited legal and social protections, can hinder the integration of migrants in their host societies.

Despite these challenges, recent reforms in KSA have improved migrants’ access to employment injury protection, making them theoretically entitled to the same rights as citizens in this regard (Lowe and Khater, 2023). The main form of social protection for migrant workers is the end-of-service indemnity (EOSI), a lump sum paid upon the termination of a contract (International Labour Organisation, 2023). However, immigration regulations, particularly the Kafala system, remain a significant barrier to migrant rights. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) discuss how immigration systems that tie migrants’ status to employers, such as the Kafala system, reinforce inequalities and limit migrant workers’ opportunities to escape exploitative conditions. Under the Kafala system, migrants’ residency is tied to their employer, and private employers exercise control over their legal status. This sponsorship system can be highly exploitative, with workers requiring employer permission to change jobs or terminate employment, even in cases of wage non-payment or abuse (Robinson, 2022).

The Kafala system also impacts migrant workers’ access to healthcare. While those employed by the state receive free healthcare, private employers are required to provide private health insurance, which can result in a system of employer-liability arrangements that are difficult to monitor and enforce (Migrant Rights, 2023b). This situation can lead to discrimination against workers with declared conditions, such as pregnancy or chronic illness, as well as informal hiring practices that further undermine migrants’ rights (Lowe and Khater, 2023). Furthermore, migrants face challenges in lodging complaints against mistreatment, as they are required to leave the country upon termination of their contract (Lowe and Khater, 2023). Portes and Rumbaut (2006) would likely interpret these legal and institutional constraints as key factors that shape migrants’ social and economic integration outcomes in KSA, making the reception context far more challenging than it would appear based on country-of-origin alone.

The legal framework that governs migration from the Philippines to KSA includes various protections for migrants, particularly in preventing employers from charging recruitment fees or

deducting wages. However, the level of protection Filipino migrants receive is still not equivalent to that of Saudi citizens. While Filipino migrants are supposed to undergo medical health checks and orientation on employment conditions before leaving the Philippines, the effectiveness of these protections in practice remains uncertain (Agreement of Labor Cooperation for General Workers Recruitment and Employment between the Department of Labor and Employment of the Republic of the Philippines and the Ministry of Labour and Social Development of KSA, 2017). Additionally, updates in 2022 led to agreements on better safeguards for Filipino migrants, such as allowing workers to change employers in cases of abuse and providing insurance coverage for non-payment of wages (Freedom United, 2022). Portes and Rumbaut (2001) argue that these types of legal protections can play a role in reducing the vulnerability of migrants, but they also note that the enforcement of these protections is critical to their success.

The rapid development of the Saudi economy has driven a demand for migrant labour across various sectors, including construction, healthcare, hospitality, and domestic work. However, the influx of migrant workers has highlighted challenges related to housing. Many migrants, particularly those in unskilled roles, face overcrowded and substandard living conditions, as demand for affordable, quality housing exceeds supply (Neal, 2023). While the Saudi government has taken steps to improve housing options for migrants, these efforts predominantly focus on organised accommodation for skilled workers (Ranghieri and Owen, 2021). This organised accommodation provides adequate amenities and is more likely to be accessible to skilled workers, such as the participants in this study. In contrast, unorganised housing is overcrowded, lacks basic services, and is often unsafe, which was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when the virus spread rapidly in such conditions (Ranghieri and Owen, 2021). Portes and Rumbaut (2001) would argue that these housing disparities reflect broader issues in the reception environment, where migrants' social and economic integration is shaped by their access to housing, which, in turn, is influenced by market dynamics and public policies.

Racial hierarchies and skill-based discrimination also affect migrant workers' experiences in KSA. Skilled migrants, particularly from Western countries, may face less discrimination and racism than unskilled migrants from countries like India or the Philippines (Gashaw, 2021). However, despite their origins, Filipino migrants generally face less discrimination due to their positive image in Saudi Arabia. As many Filipino migrants are highly educated, skilled, and proficient in

English, they are generally viewed more favourably than migrants from other regions (Magliveras and Al Qurtuby, 2023). Portes and Rumbaut (2006) explain that racial hierarchies can affect migrants' experiences in the host culture, as public attitudes towards different ethnic or national groups can shape their access to opportunities and their social reception in the host country. Moreover, whilst skilled, the participants in this study (healthcare workers) are still 'othered' – not necessarily seen as stereotypical (white, Western) 'expatriates' or migrants – and therefore may face different forms of racism within local racialised hierarchies. It is possible that this 'othering' of skilled Filipino migrants forms a significant reason why they are excluded from pathways to permanent residency, or at least find the criteria practically impossible to achieve. Their skill level and medical/healthcare qualifications therefore do not eliminate ongoing and perhaps pervasive processes of othering and this can significantly impact on their sense of 'belonging' in a host country, as found by some researchers (Parreñas, 2001; Sampaio, 2015).

This was also found by Medina (2016) in his exploration of the experiences of Mexican immigrants in the US compared with those who return to Mexico. He examined how the social and cultural reception of immigrants in host societies, as well as the policies in place, affected their psychological and social integration, well-being, identity and sense of belonging, concluding that immigrant well-being is significantly shaped by the degree of acceptance or exclusion they face in the receiving community. Additionally, the study highlighted how national identity evolves in the context of migration, both for migrants adapting to new identities in their host country and for those returning to their home country with altered perceptions and experiences. Medina's findings suggest that immigrant experiences are not just about economic factors but also deeply influenced by social and cultural integration, as well as the political climate of both the host and home countries. The study emphasises the importance of understanding immigrant incorporation as a dynamic, context-dependent process influenced by both external factors (such as community reception and policy) and internal factors (such as identity construction and the quest for well-being).

The social and cultural climate in KSA remains highly conservative, particularly regarding gender roles and expectations. While female migrants, particularly from the Philippines, are not subject to the same strict surveillance as Saudi nationals, they still face challenges related to gender norms (Magliveras, 2019). Public behaviours, such as dress codes and segregation between men and

women in public spaces, continue to shape the daily lives of migrants. However, reforms under Vision 2030, such as lifting restrictions on women's ability to drive and work, have started to change the dynamics for female migrants in KSA (Ghafour, 2018). While gender inequality persists, there is a gradual shift towards greater participation by women in the workforce, with women's employment expected to increase to 30% by 2030 (Expatriate News, 2022). Nevertheless, gender pay gaps and restrictions on mixed-gender workplaces remain significant barriers for many female migrants. According to Portes and Rumbaut (2006), gendered opportunity structures in migration contexts play a significant role in determining the social and economic outcomes for women migrants, making the reception context even more critical for their integration.

The political context in KSA also contrasts with the democratic governance in the Philippines. KSA is an authoritarian monarchy, where freedom of expression, protest, and critique of the government are strictly prohibited. Public punishments, such as beheadings, still occur for various offenses, even for non-Saudis (Human Rights Watch, 2023). However, the government has shown a degree of flexibility, allowing some reforms, particularly in terms of gender equality (Shelton, 2023). These reforms have not extended to migrant workers' rights across the board, but they do reflect a shift in the country's political climate that affects all residents, including migrants. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) note that political systems can greatly influence the extent to which migrants are able to assert their rights and access opportunities, which is especially true in contexts such as KSA, where authoritarian governance places significant constraints on public expressions of dissent. Moreover, whilst women outpace men in terms of migration from the Philippines, and may be considered 'skilled' migrants (like my participants) instead of domestic workers, the segregated nature of much of conservative KSA may mean these women face significant gender discrimination, segregation and even misogyny, both in and outside of the workplace (Salhi, 2024). This can impact the way they are seen and see themselves, thus affecting their identities, at least in this context.

In conclusion, the opportunity structures and integration in KSA, shaped by immigration laws, labour market dynamics, housing conditions, and racial hierarchies, significantly influence the experiences of Filipino migrants, making the context of reception a critical factor in determining their overall well-being and social, economic and legal opportunities/outcomes in KSA (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001, 2006). The continuous reforms and changing social climate in KSA may offer

some improvements, but challenges remain, particularly for unskilled and female migrants. Understanding these opportunity structures helps illuminate how Filipino migrants navigate life in KSA, balancing their legal, social, and economic realities.

### **1.7 Christians, Christianity and Sunni Islam in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

*Have faith, be strong, be with God. You know your faith helps you be strong. When I am home I read the Bible sometimes and it feels like it is talking to me during hard times (Kimberley)*

One critical feature of KSA as the context of reception for female Filipino migrants is its status as the cradle of Islam; 95% of the population adheres to Sunni Islam. There are two major sects in Islam, Sunni and Shia, with Sunni Muslims comprising 80-90% of the global Muslim population, and Shia Muslims making up 10-20% (Diamant, 2021). This sectarian divide shapes daily life in KSA, where Sunni practices and laws influence both public and private spheres, which can be isolating for Filipino migrants arriving for the first time. While Sunni Islam is dominant, there are various denominations, such as Shafi, Maliki, Hanafi, and Hanbali, which shape different interpretations and practices of Islam (Maggiolini, Plebani and Redaelli, 2020). Additionally, there is a significant non-Muslim community in KSA, including Christians, Jews, and others, due to the large migrant population, which can offer a more diverse experience for Filipino migrants.

Christian populations in KSA have increased, reaching 4% in 2015, mainly due to the influx of migrant workers from South and Southeast Asia (Johnson and Zurlo, 2015). This shift has impacted the religious landscape of the Gulf, with some migrants rediscovering their religiosity in the region, introducing more regular collective religious practices (Baggio, 2020). The views of Sunni Islam on Christianity, especially regarding figures like Mary, Jesus, and the Bible, are important to understand in relation to the position of Catholic Filipino migrants in KSA. This understanding is rooted in the Qur'an and the Sunnah (Hadith), the two central sources of Sunni teachings, which offer insights into the treatment and acceptance of Christians and Christianity within the Sunni faith.

#### **1.7.1 The Qur'an**

The Qur'an, Islam's holiest book, is considered a direct revelation from God to Prophet Muhammad via the archangel Gabriel. Written in the original language of revelation by the Prophet's companions, it has circulated in a single version for over 1,400 years. Comprising 114 chapters and over 604 pages, the Qur'an has remained unaltered, with all Muslim sects agreeing on the divinity and credibility of its 6,236 verses, though interpretations may vary. This contrasts with other sources of the Islamic canon, where different sects may question or reject parts of the text in formulating religious arguments.

### ***1.7.2 The Hadiths***

The second source of the Islamic canon is the Sunnah or Hadiths, a collection of the traditions, actions, and sayings of Prophet Muhammad. It is here that different sects first began to question or debate the authenticity of Muhammad's words, leading to varied interpretations. The Sunni world places significant emphasis on the Sunnah, with dedicated books that preserve the Prophet's Hadiths. To understand how Sunni Muslims view Mary, Jesus, and the Bible, it is important to explore Sunni theology, which will also help illuminate how Christians are positioned within the ultra-conservative context of this study. Direct quotes from the Qur'an and Hadiths are commonly used in Saudi Arabia, and the study will examine how Catholic migrants perceive, utilise, or reject this religious repertoire, particularly in interactions with local patients in this conservative Sunni setting.

### ***1.7.3 Christianity in Sunni Theology and Creed***

The core of Sunni theology is monotheism, emphasising the unique status of one God. According to the Qur'an, the Aqidah (creed) of believers requires belief in six theological pillars: God, angels, sacred books, prophets, the Day of Judgement, and the divine decree. Islam also has five pillars: the testimony of God's oneness and Muhammad as his last messenger, prayer, charity, fasting during Ramadan, and performing Hajj to Mecca (if financially, physically, and mentally able). These pillars are fundamental acts of worship. Islamic theology focuses on faith, not practice, and teaches that sin is an individual acquisition, not inherited. The Qur'an briefly addresses the original sin, stating that Adam "slipped," repented, and was forgiven by God.

### *1.7.3.1 Mary, Jesus and the Bible in the Qur'an and the Hadiths*

The three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) share common elements, with Muslims viewing Islam as an extension of the other two (Hoover, 2009; Hughes, 2012; Kunset and Thomsen, 2015; Stroumsa, 2015). The Qur'an mentions many prophets and messengers common to Christianity and Judaism, including Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, and stresses belief in these figures and their sacred books as core to Sunni Islam (Hugh, 2000; Lewis, 2001; McDowell and Walker, 2013). The Qur'an directly links itself to previous sacred texts, such as the Torah and Gospels, and positions Islam as a continuation of Judaism and Christianity (Donner, 2006; Wheeler, 2002).

While the Abrahamic faiths share practices such as prayer, fasting, and ethical teachings, the Qur'an highlights that these practices are not exclusive to Islam, reinforcing the connection between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. The Qur'an specifically mentions the importance of Jewish and Christian figures and beliefs, shaping Sunni Islam's view of Christianity. In this study, we examine how the Sunni canon positions Christians, including Catholic Filipinos, within this framework.

The Qur'an also highlights Jesus's miracles, including his birth and first miracle in infancy, and his special relationship with Mary (Qur'an, 3:45-49). It describes Jesus's mission to confirm the Torah and deliver the Gospel as guidance (Qur'an, 5:46). These references demonstrate the significance of Jesus, Mary, and the Gospels in Sunni Islam, influencing how Christians may be viewed within this religious context.

### *1.7.3.2 The Positioning of Christians in Sunni Islam*

In Sunni Islam, Jews and Christians are regarded as *Ahl al-Kitab* (People of the Book), distinct from non-believers (*Kafir*), with special religious allowances such as permitting interfaith marriages. The Qur'an refers to them as 'those given the Scripture before you' (5:5) and praises Christians in 5:82, describing them as 'the most gracious' due to their piety. According to Hadiths, Prophet Muhammad stated his closeness to Jesus, asserting that no prophet came between him and Jesus (Sahih Muslim, Book 43, Hadith 190).

Mary, the mother of Jesus, holds a highly revered status in Islam. The Qur'an describes her as the most honourable woman, with an entire chapter devoted to her, more mentions than in the Gospels, and significant references to her family (Al Imran). Some Sunni scholars argue she could be considered a prophet, citing her communication with Gabriel, the most sacred angel in Islam (Qur'an, 3:42). Given Mary's prominence in Sunni Islam, Catholics who venerate her might find respect in Sunni contexts, such as Saudi Arabia, although it must be acknowledged that whilst religious texts revere Christian/Catholic figures, this may not necessarily correspond with views and behaviours of locals in KSA (i.e., Muslims) towards Christian Migrants.

### **1.8 The Complexities of Migrants' Identities**

*I knew life will be difficult in the beginning, but I enjoyed this adventure even though it was not easy for me. I am proud to cope and succeed... It was a challenge. This is what overseas Filipinos do. We are warriors (Tina).*

This study adopts a poststructuralist framework, viewing identities as fluid and dynamic (Baxter, 2012; Blackledge et al., 2008; Block, 2006; De Fina, 2016; Duff, 2015; Norton, 2000). It explores the complexities of migration and identity, particularly through Vertovec's (2006) concept of superdiversity, which highlights the increasing diversity and unpredictability of migration. The study of migration has grown significantly since 1990, with scholars advocating for more complex global perspectives (Block, 2017). However, most research has focused on the Global North, with fewer studies on migration and identity in the Global South, especially in Saudi Arabia (Hurst, 2017). Given the large migrant population in KSA, more research is needed to understand how cultural and religious differences impact identity.

Migration is driven by diverse factors, from economic opportunities to displacement due to conflict or climate change (Faist, 2000). Badenhorst and Makoni (2017) highlight the scale of migration, with migrants from different religious backgrounds moving to countries such as the United States, Saudi Arabia, India, and Israel. The migration of Catholic Filipinos to conservative Islamic Saudi Arabia therefore raises questions about how cultural and religious differences shape their identities – especially women's identities, given the differing views and treatment of women in both cultures.

Recent studies have focused on identities in mobility, noting the unprecedented complexity of identities in migration (Hua and Canagarajah, 2017; Zhu Hua, 2017). The relationship between migration, identity, and language requires further exploration, particularly how migration shapes identity under complex conditions (Block, 2017). Qualitative research methods, such as interviews and observation, are useful for examining these complex issues in migrant communities (Blackledge and Creese, 2017a). Vertovec's concept of superdiversity further illuminates the complexities of migration patterns (Blackledge and Creese, 2017b).

### ***1.8.1 Superdiversity***

The term superdiversity, coined by Vertovec (2007), describes diversity within diversity in societies, highlighting the increasing complexity of migration. As Blommaert and Backus (2013) noted, migration is now more widespread than ever, facilitated by modern transportation and communication. Vertovec observed that migration to the UK, particularly to London, has made the city superdiverse, with residents from 179 nations speaking around 300 languages. He argued (Vertovec, 2007) that migration is now driven by mobility and unpredictability, with migrants increasingly connected to their home countries due to globalisation and technology (Budach and Saint-Georges, 2017).

Superdiversity challenges traditional views of assimilation, as migrants today maintain strong cultural and religious ties to their home countries (Budach and Saint-Georges, 2017). In superdiverse communities, migrants blend linguistic and communicative resources, adding further complexity to sociolinguistic issues. This concept aligns with poststructuralism, acknowledging the fluid and dynamic nature of identity (Budach and Saint-Georges, 2017). Despite the growing importance of migration, research on identity and migration, particularly in contexts like Saudi Arabia, remains limited (Zhu Hua, 2017). The complexity of migration challenges traditional binary categories such as immigrant vs. local, highlighting the need for deeper exploration of identity in a globalised world (Zhu Hua, 2017). Zhu Hua advocates for examining how migration impacts identity and how new identities emerge through processes of mobility and change; in this study, the extent to which female Filipino migrants integrate and assimilate to KSA religious,

social and cultural norms, compared with how far they remain attached to their home culture (and familial/social ties and relationships) is unclear, especially in a 24-hour world with instant communication/technology devices and quick, easily accessible transportation across the globe.

### **1.9 Research Gap and Study Aims**

In the literature review chapter, I demonstrate that the majority of identity research involving migrants comes from the Global North, as noted by Hurst (2017). Fewer studies have focused on GCC countries and KSA, which are part of the Global South and differ significantly from Western cities (Hurst, 2017). As Ochs, Schieffelin, and Duranti (2012) emphasised, there is an ongoing need to explore a broader range of contexts outside North America and Europe. Studies in the Anglophone world have often focused on male migrants, with fewer studies on female migrants, particularly in the Global South (Zhao et al., 2023). Those that do exist (e.g., Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2024) call for migration studies to be decentred from Global North knowledge and Eurocentricism in a bid to fully understand experiences of migrants amongst the Global South (which is diverse and increasingly superdiverse in itself). Therefore, the current study, which focuses on skilled female migrants in conservative Sunni contexts such as KSA, aims to contribute to the small but growing literature base exploring how skilled female migrants navigate gendered practices and local norms in this setting.

Norton (2000), a poststructuralist feminist, has stressed the need to study female migrants' identity negotiations, as has Lee (2015), who highlighted the importance of understanding how women construct identities in new contexts. Menard-Warwick (2009) called for research into the dynamic relationship between language and gender identity construction, particularly in under-researched contexts, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2024) dedicates an entire chapter in its most recent Worldwide Migration Report to gender dimensions and gendered challenges throughout the migration cycle that must be considered when discussing female migrants' identity construction and negotiation. This study responds to those calls by exploring how Filipino female migrants perform their identities in KSA, particularly in relation to local gendered norms.

Women dominate the migration trajectory of overseas Filipinos, which contrasts with global migration trends, making this group significant for study. The study focuses on Catholic Filipino women in KSA, who face gendered challenges and negotiate their identities through language use in a conservative Arabic-speaking context. Language plays a critical role in these identity negotiations, as the respondents are non-native Arabic speakers, with English as their first language. The study examines how the use of the host language intersects with their gendered identities, responding to calls for research on the relationship between language learning and identity shifts (Lee, 2015; Menard-Warwick, 2009). Menard-Warwick (2009) supported the use of qualitative research in such investigations. In the current study, this is a promising approach for exploring how respondents perform their gender identities while interacting with conservative Saudis, to observe how highly skilled migrants in a multicultural workplace respond to both religious and gender practices within the contexts' local norms.

Timpe-Laughlin (2019) also called for further research on *skilled* migrant women outside Europe, North America, and other Western contexts. This study takes up that challenge by exploring how skilled female Filipino migrants construct their identities in the multicultural and conservative Saudi environment, using their medical workplace setting as a backdrop to observe some identity negotiations, performances and practices. The workplace provides a valuable setting to observe some (brief) interactions and identity negotiations between migrants and locals, which may offer some insight into the challenges of adapting to new norms and practices in professional environments.

Most studies within Saudi workplaces focus on *Saudi* men and women (e.g., Al-Asfour and Khan, 2014), with few examining the identity negotiations of migrant women. This study, by focusing on skilled Filipino migrant women in a Saudi workplace, aims to contribute to understanding the challenges and dynamics of identity negotiation in this context. As Mak and Chui (2013) argued, new norms in unfamiliar contexts can create communication challenges for migrant workers. By exploring these challenges in the Saudi context, this study contributes to the literature on the intersection of language, identity, and gender for migrant women.

In the Saudi context, where migrants play a significant role in the healthcare sector, this study has the potential to inform training and orientation programmes for new migrant workers. It may also

help to improve the understanding of cross-cultural dynamics between migrants and local patients, co-workers, and managers. Gatekeepers participating in my study are eager to explore the study results, since they seek to invest in and expand their private clinics in the Saudi thriving healthcare market. One of the gatekeepers has already started the construction of a second branch and is looking to hire more practitioners, thus is seeking clarity on the experience of their current and future migrant staff as they adjust to and navigate the complex world of identity negotiation within their setting. I will explore how far respondents' feel equipped for their migration experience, particularly their identity and linguistic adjustment (or assimilation), given that there are few resources available to them to learn about this Saudi context prior to migration. Some respondents, which will be discussed in the findings, stated that they relied on informal YouTube vloggers as well as few Filipino online forums to learn more about this context. Only one respondent had attended an orientation seminar before coming to Saudi Arabia, which raises the question of the lack of such orientation for others. With the Saudi government's 2030 plan aiming to increase the foreign population, the findings could benefit future migrants and employers in similar conservative settings. The study may also help novice migrant practitioners be informed about different norms when working in unfamiliar medical contexts.

A key outcome of this study is a deeper understanding of the experiences of skilled female Filipino migrants, particularly in terms of identity negotiations and linguistic challenges. The findings may provide valuable insights for future migrants, employers, policymakers, and healthcare institutions in Saudi Arabia and similar contexts. Additionally, the study may help improve workplace dynamics and provide more informed orientations for new migrant workers in the Saudi healthcare sector.

### ***1.9.1 Research Questions***

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1- How do participants perform their identities within the Saudi context?
- 2- What can be found from participants' observations and narratives about their identity negotiations within the host culture?

- 3- What is the role of the host language in female Filipino migrant identity negotiations?
- 4- To what extent did the use of the host language affect the construction of participants' gender identity, if at all?

### **1.10 Conclusion**

This chapter began by discussing global migration patterns, highlighting the top origins and destinations, as well as countries receiving the highest remittances and those migrants frequently send remittances from. It then focused on Filipino migrants, particularly in Gulf countries, and the Filipino population in KSA. The experiences of migrants in Saudi Arabia were explored, addressing factors such as housing, political and economic context, immigration regulations, and local norms that may be unfamiliar to Filipino migrants. A discussion on Sunni Islam in the Saudi context followed, including the positioning of Christians in Islam, covering topics like Mary, Jesus, and the Bible in the Quran and Hadith. The chapter then explored the complexities of human migration through Vertovec's concept of superdiversity. Finally, the research gap, study aims, and research questions were outlined, concluding with a summary of the research questions.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### 2.1 Overview

This chapter first focuses on providing a thorough exploration of identity in order to investigate and settle upon a definition for this concept. This includes a review of the historical underpinnings of identity, how it has been defined, the social constructivist view of self-identity formation, individualisation and the role of individual agency, and factors affecting the social construction of identity formation. This chapter goes on in section 2.3 to explore performativity theories that underscore the idea of identity as something that is done or enacted, not something that one *is* (i.e., doing not being), particularly drawing on Goffman's theories, before unpacking issues surrounding belonging and migration in identity formation in section 2.4.

Following this, in section 2.5, I discuss the constitutive role that language plays in identity construction, drawing on performativity theory and the poststructuralist paradigm. This includes considering the effects of language learning on constructing, de-constructing and reconstructing human identity. After discussing gender identity, I will focus on the relation between gender identity and language, including its connection with language learning after migration in different contexts around the world. This will help to demonstrate the research gap this study aims to fill since there is a need for more research on migrants, particularly women, outside the Anglophone world. I will then discuss the link between certain languages and religion, focusing on the relation between identities and religious language. This is needed since the fieldwork was conducted in a conservative Saudi Arabian context of Sunni Islam, focusing on Filipino women working as healthcare practitioners.

In section 2.5.3 (as well as in previous sections), I discuss human agency and the notions of conforming and subversion. These respectively imply adopting and accepting new/different norms in host cultures after migration and, on the contrary, resisting and rejecting them. This is important given that it is essential to recognise the limits of human agency in identity formation, creation and performance, given structural factors and norms at play, especially if attempting to cultivate a sense of 'belonging'. I then turn in section 2.5.4 to discuss the intersection of language and gender with power, focusing again on language learning after migration, before focusing on the notion of investment (Norton, 2000), which is crucial in identity negotiations as well as in the area of

language and identity. In section 2.6 I discuss migration, before concluding the chapter by drawing the strands of the literature together.

## 2.2 Identity Formation

*I can tell you when I am at home looking at my dresses, and thinking about which to chose?...I ask myself which does better represent me? Which one represent the real me? So I always chose what I like to wear, things I like when I have guests in my flat...So, I chose to wear bright colours always, I don't like black colour here...You know black Hijab Abaya, you know, when I am at home getting dressed. I ask myself does this represent me as a Filipina? Then I find myself choosing bright colours before going out... so I wear something that represent me and my identity, I don't like to be like others here (Jessica)*

### 2.2.1 The Chronology and Historical Underpinnings of the Search for Self-Identity

Understanding 'identity' in the twenty-first century requires exploring how the concept of the 'self' has evolved over the last century and a half. May (2013) notes that the 'founding fathers of sociology'—Marx, Durkheim, and Weber—focused on the negative effects of capitalism, particularly on individual identity, with Marx describing 'alienation,' Durkheim 'anomie,' and Weber 'living in an iron cage.' All three argued that modern society distanced individuals from themselves and that their lives were increasingly controlled by external forces (May, 2013).

Marx ([1844] 1970) contended that industrialisation led to alienation as individuals lost ownership over their labour, and the division of labour further distanced workers from self-affirmation. This view is critiqued by Hochschild (2011), who argues that people use strategies, such as emotional attachment to their work, to counter this alienation. Durkheim (1893) suggested that the division of labour in modern society created anomie, as shared norms dissolved in a more specialised society, leading to social disintegration (Burkitt, 2008). Weber took an interpretive approach,

arguing that capitalism, through its repetitive, rule-governed nature, reduced individuals to mere cogs in a machine (Poggi, 2006).

These classic theories highlight the pessimistic view of modern capitalist society, which was once seen as more cohesive and stable. It arguably suggests that identity was more predictable and stable over the life course. However, post-industrial societies are now characterised by diversity, with service and knowledge economies, equality advancements, and changes in family structures. Some modern theorists, like Adams (2007) and Beck (1992), describe a fragmentation of identity, with individuals becoming more narcissistic and isolated. May (2013) however critiques these theories for being top-down, ignoring the agency individuals may exercise in navigating these changes.

Giddens (1991) argues that the search for self-identity is a modern issue tied to Western individualism and capitalism, suggesting that pre-modern cultures did not emphasise individuality. In late modernity, identity is characterised by reflexivity, trajectory, embodiment, authenticity, and self-development (Giddens, 1991). However, while these features are useful in understanding identity in modernity, the exact nature of identity remains unclear, highlighting the need for further exploration in contemporary sociological thought.

### ***2.2.2 Definition of Identity***

Most sociologists agree that identity is difficult to define, often only becoming evident during times of crisis or insecurity (Lawler, 2014). The term 'identity' comes from the Latin *identitas*, meaning 'sameness' (Jenkins, 2014). The Oxford English Dictionary provides two main definitions: 1) identity as 'the sameness of objects'; and 2) identity as continuity over time, which helps define distinctiveness (cited in Jenkins, 2014, p. 37). Jenkins (2014) also adds that identity can refer to classification or attachment to someone or something, such as a group or ideology.

Jenkins (2014, p. 21) defines identity as the human ability, rooted in language, to understand 'who's who' and 'what's what'. This involves mapping the social world and understanding one's place within it, both individually and collectively. Identity is not something an individual possesses but enacts (Brubaker, 2004). It is shaped by hierarchical power struggles and inequalities, not a

neutral process (Jenkins, 2014). Overall, identity is about understanding oneself and others, influenced by mutual recognition (Jenkins, 2014, p. 37).

Lawler (2014) defines identity as involving both public roles (e.g., gender, race, nation) and a personal, reflective sense of self, which aligns with Venn's (2006) dual view of identity as both category and subjectivity. However, some (e.g., Wetherell, 2008) argue that this view risks suggesting a 'real' self, which contrasts with a more socially constructed self, a duality explored by theorists like Mead and Goffman.

The term 'identity' is debated; some (e.g., Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Malešević, 2011) find it confusing and ambiguous. However, Jenkins (2014, p. 34) contends it is necessary to describe human processes of recognising 'who's who'. Identity is often defined in terms of sameness and difference (Jackson, 2002), where 'sameness' links individuals to others with shared characteristics, while 'difference' emphasises uniqueness. Categories of identity can be unstable and socially generated (Lewis et al., 1982), and they do not fully determine self-perception (Lawler, 2014).

The issue of difference relates to essentialism, the idea that identity is based on an innate essence, a view widely criticised in sociology. Lawler (2014) argues that this belief, rooted in Western thought, was compounded by theorists like Mead (1934) and Goffman (1968), who distinguished between personal and social selves. However, these theorists actually emphasised how identity is 'done' rather than 'owned', thus arguing that identity is inherently social, constructed through interaction within groups.

### **2.2.3 Social Constructivism and Poststructuralism: The Formation of Identity Through Social Forces**

*We Filipina ladies always think about our abilities and free will kusang-loob  
...We can make initiatives to change others and change things...You see, we call it  
kusang-loob, you see, through voluntary acts...it's part of our self and identity,  
you see, it means to take your own initiative, and not wait for something to  
happen, do it yourself (Francesca)*

Developed in the early to mid-20th century, structuralism in the social sciences, largely a positivist movement, posited that unobservable macrostructures have significant effects on human behaviour and expression, creating common meanings. Blackburn (2008, p. 353) explained structuralism as the belief that phenomena are intelligible only through their interrelations, constituting a structure behind observable variations. Saussure in linguistics, and Jakobsen and Lévi-Strauss in anthropology, rejected human agency, asserting that understanding, experience, and behaviour are shaped by societal structures, often attaching fixed, binary meanings to things (Deleuze, 2002).

Derrida (1966) was among the first to critique structuralism, and philosophers like Bourdieu and Foucault contributed to the rise of poststructuralism, which views meaning as fluid and socially constructed (Barker, 2010). Poststructuralism has dominated identity research, rejecting the idea that identities are fixed or pre-determined, instead seeing them as dynamic and negotiable (Baxter, 2012; Blackledge et al., 2008; Block, 2006; De Fina, 2016; Duff, 2015; Norton, 2000). Basely (1980, p. 132) argued that individuals are in a continuous process of construction. Poststructuralism's anti-essentialist stance contends that identities are constantly shaped by social forces (King, 2008; Pennycook, 2001), framing identity as socially constructed and 'projected' through language (Chew, 2014, p. 51). May (2013, p. 47) further asserts that the 'self' reflects group membership, emphasising the relational nature of identity, shaped by social interactions rather than being an inherent possession (Lawler, 2014).

Identity is constructed through primary and secondary socialisation and ongoing interaction (Jenkins, 2014). Primary identities, formed in childhood, are often more resistant to change, while others are more malleable (Jenkins, 2014, p. 73). Carr (1961, p. 25) noted that individuals are shaped by society from birth, learning language and thought from their environment. Cooley's (1902) concept of the 'looking-glass self' suggests that identity is relational, based on how we think others perceive us. Mead (1934, p. 164) also proposed that the self is formed through interactions and cannot be separated from others.

Norton (1997, p. 410) defined identity as how individuals understand their relationship to the world across time and space, a view shared by this thesis, which combines Jenkins's (2014) understanding of identity as the human ability to recognise 'who's who' and Lawler's (2014)

notion of identity as both public roles and a personal sense of self. This aligns with Jackson's (2002) view of identity as both based on sameness and difference. This conceptualisation sees identity as socially constructed and fluid, not fixed or predetermined.

Yet the role of agency in identity remains debated in the literature. May (2013) and Calhoun (2003) argue socially constructed identities are generally ascribed as a result of categories like ethnicity and gender. However, May (2013) and others (e.g., Miller, 2008) suggest individuals have some agency to choose which influences to follow. This indicates that, while social structures significantly shape identity, individuals retain the ability to reject or adapt societal demands for their own purposes (Adams, 2007, p. 21). The rise of postmodernism, explored in individualisation and psychosocial fragmentation theses, suggests new freedoms in how individuals shape their identities.

#### ***2.2.4 Individualisation and 'Precarious Freedoms'***

The individualisation thesis highlights the freedom individuals have in shaping their identities, as emphasised by Beck and Giddens. Postmodernism is seen as liberating individuals from traditional societal structures, allowing them to choose their lifestyles and shape their biographies based on personal choices, rather than predefined categories (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 4). However, Beck and Giddens also acknowledge that despite these freedoms, individuals remain shaped by external forces, such as social institutions (Beck, 1992, p. 90). May (2011, p. 20) suggests that individuals must integrate these norms into their lives through actions, leading to 'precarious freedoms', where new freedoms are balanced with standardisation and social control (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 16). Giddens (1991, p. 81) argued that while lifestyle choices are significant, they must be made within the limits of available options, underscoring the tension between freedom and social control. Barth (1981, p. 89) and others criticise the idea that choice equates to freedom, pointing out that 'choices' often come with marginalisation, particularly for women, ethnic minorities, and disabled people, who lack the resources to exercise reflexivity (Adkins, 2004; Lash, 1994).

Critics also challenge the individualisation thesis and Adam's (2007) psychosocial fragmentation thesis. May (2013, p. 33) argues that these theories present a false dichotomy between past and

present identity, depicting the self as isolated, which ignores the interdependence of individuals and their relationships with others (Esteva and Prakash, 1998, p. 44). Furthermore, May criticises the distinction between personal life and social structures, suggesting that these spheres are permeable and interdependent (Sandywell, 2004). This understanding helps explain the role of 'identity work,' where social norms and laws shape our sense of self by maintaining predictability in social interactions (Garfinkel, 1967; Young, 2005). These norms, when breached, cause discomfort, yet over time, they become internalised, reinforcing the self.

Jenkins (2014) challenges the notion of an autonomous, essentialist identity, arguing that it is a Western construct used for oppression. The idea of autonomy is critiqued by thinkers like Althusser, Foucault, and Bourdieu, who suggest that it is an ideological illusion that obscures the reality of social control. Ultimately, identity creation is seen as a dynamic process influenced by both social forces and individual agency.

### ***2.2.5 Merging the Different 'Selves'***

Many sociologists recognise the complex relationship between social forces and individual agency. Jenkins (2014, p. 106) asserts that 'society is a conversation between people; the mind is the internalisation of that conversation; the self lies within and between the two.' The self is shaped by both internal and external factors, creating a tension between self-identity and ascribed identity. This tension mirrors Mead's distinction between the 'I' and the social 'me,' which is resolved through 'reciprocity of recognition' from others (Melucci, 1996, p. 32). When belonging is denied, identity can be reaffirmed through solidarity with others.

Some, like Furedi (2004), argue that too much emphasis is placed on the personal 'I', especially with the rise of therapy culture, which focuses on personal emotional issues rather than collective action. May (2013, p. 20) suggests this emphasis on 'I' creates separation, with 'we' identity becoming weaker. Jackson contends this focus on 'difference' neglects 'sameness.' However, identity involves both self-development and social interaction.

Jenkins (2014) draws on Barth, Goffman, and Mead to outline three 'orders' of identity: 1) the individual order (embodied identity, such as gender), which is formed in childhood and is resilient to change; 2) the interaction order, which is shaped by social interactions and how others label us;

and 3) the institutional order, which involves social patterns and group memberships. The internal self (individual and interaction orders) is influenced by the external person (interaction and institutional orders), with one's external definition of another shaping their internal identity, meaning both are interconnected (Jenkins, 2014, p. 85).

### *2.2.6 Factors and Categories Influencing the Social Construction of Identity*

Identity is a fusion of the personal 'I' (individuality) and the 'me' (internalised societal attitudes), largely shaped by social constructs. Lawler (2014) identifies several factors that contribute to identity formation: 1) narrative; 2) kinship; 3) the discourse of autonomy and self-improvement; 4) the unconscious; 5) categories; and 6) performance.

**Narrative** plays a crucial role, as identity is constructed through personal stories, shaped by experiences, memories, and relationships. These narratives provide continuity and meaning, influenced by changing circumstances and relationships (Hacking, 1994; Lawler, 2014).

**Kinship** influences identity by shaping primary identities, which are more rigid, and through familial relationships that help individuals frame their self-understanding (Jenkins, 2014). In Western cultures, families are central to identity formation, often emphasising biological traits and individuality (Schneider, 1968). In contrast, other cultures, like the Melanesians, view identity as emerging from relationships (Strathern, 1988).

The **cultural discourse of autonomy and self-improvement** in the West emphasises individual choice, self-help, and self-actualisation, suggesting that self-work is central to identity creation (Giddens, 1991; Lawler, 2014; Wallerstein and Blakeese, 1989;). This reflects a shift from external control to internal regulation, with Foucault's ideas of self-surveillance and the 'self' as a project (Foucault, 1977).

The **unconscious** is shaped by early experiences, such as familial interactions and societal norms, contributing to ontological security and trust (Lawler, 2014; May, 2013). Early childhood experiences, such as consistent caregiving, influence one's ability to develop a continuous sense of self-identity (Jenkins, 2014).

**Categories**, such as nationality, ethnicity, and gender, are integral to identity. These are often socially constructed and play a role in distinguishing ‘us’ from ‘them’ (Jenkins, 2014). While some categories are embodied, such as gender, others, like ethnicity, are more fluid and context-dependent (Barth, 1969). National identity, for example, is reinforced through symbols and rituals (Billig, 1985).

However, categorisation is critiqued as reductive, as it oversimplifies identity and ignores its multifaceted nature (Yuval-Davis, 2010). Acceptance within a category, such as ethnicity, requires more than just possessing certain traits; it involves performance (Barth, 1969; Brubaker, 2004). Ethnicity, for instance, is not fixed but is cognitively constructed and actively performed (Brubaker, 2004). As Jenkins (2014, p. 31) states, identity and categorisation are social constructions: ‘groups are real if people think they are,’ and identity is an ongoing performance, not a static possession.

### **2.3 Performance: Identity as Doing, Not Being**

*When I look at myself and how things are here, I start saying kusang-loob you know...kusang-loob is pushing me help set a good example for ladies here, also I mean other girls (Kimberley).*

*I am careful inside the clinic about patients...We, I mean, we should not irritate patients...you should respect the culture and maybe try to change them, not in the clinic, maybe after, that’s why I like to tees my Saudi friends after work when we are out, I know Islam is not like that it is the culture (Suzanna).*

*When I am out dealing men here I mean not patients outside the clinic...I show them I am different [with] strong eye contact...I raise my voice. I’m like Lakas-ng-loob (Britney).*

Various perspectives explore identity as a ‘performance’ shaped by one’s social world or ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1977a). This habitus requires following different ‘rules’ for successful performance, with Bourdieu terming it a ‘feel for the game’. Crossley (2006) suggests individuals engage in

imaginary dialogues with 'generalised others' to consider potential responses to their actions. Though social forces shape behaviour, individuals still play an active role in performing actions, sometimes for the approval of others.

Erving Goffman, in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), used theatrical metaphors to illustrate how individuals create performances to gain others' approval ('impression management'), projecting competence and morality in specific contexts, thus avoiding feelings of guilt or shame (Scheff, 2006). The goal is a 'successful performance of an acceptable self' (May, 2013). When control slips, individuals engage in 'face work' to repair the presentation, while also helping others save face. Goffman described an 'on-stage' self, crafted for others, and a 'backstage' self, where performance is less deliberate, aligning with Mead's (1934) notion of a personal 'I' and social 'me'.

Critics, like Garfinkel (1967), argue that much of human behaviour is unconscious. Judith Butler's (1990; 1993) work on gender performance shows that identity is ingrained through repeated behaviours, making them feel 'natural'. These repeated actions contribute to identity creation. While Butler's theory focuses on gender, it can be applied broadly to identity formation, where societal norms and rituals are internalised to the point of unconscious performance.

Some critics, including Gergen (1999) and Tseëlon (1992), claim Goffman's work polarises a 'true' and 'false' self, with the 'on-stage' self seen as manipulative. However, this can be understood as different 'versions' of the self in varied contexts. Garfinkel (1967) suggested individuals also perform for themselves, internalising a 'generalised other' to craft a coherent identity narrative that feels real (May, 2013).

Shotter (1993) argued that individuals need to feel their actions are moral, not just appear acceptable to others. Failure to live up to expectations can result in feelings of guilt or shame. Identity narratives can become fragmented when individuals adapt their behaviour to fit in, as seen in migrants changing their mannerisms to integrate into different social settings (Rogaly and Taylor, 2009). Social media adds complexity to this dynamic.

Lawler (2014) countered that the 'off-stage' self is not necessarily a true identity but part of how individuals understand themselves and others. The performance of identity becomes integrated

into personality through repetition, even when alone. As Lawler (2014) noted, ‘performing identity is an inevitable process’, part of being part of the social world. While identity performance may sometimes be for the benefit of others, it is not inherently fraudulent.

While identity is shaped by repeated performances, this process can be deterministic. Social interactions reinforce roles that are difficult to challenge. For example, social norms like gendered spaces (e.g., male/female toilets) solidify role expectations. Giddens (1991) argued that dress, a symbolic display, also reflects self-identity.

Gender provides a relevant example; Budgeon (2011) argued that neoliberalism and individualisation have falsely presented women as liberated from stereotypical femininity, while they are still expected to fulfil traditional roles (e.g., the ‘good mother’) or face social repercussions. Giddens (1991) observed that women entering the workforce encountered social environments shaped by male stereotypes. Those with more resources, such as money and social class, have greater freedom to make identity choices without as many negative repercussions. However, gender remains a ‘performed’ identity, reinforced by framing devices, and even non-traditional performances become entrenched in one’s sense of self.

### ***2.3.1 Theoretical Framework: Goffman and Performativity***

Performativity theory underpins this thesis, aligning with the social constructivist and poststructuralist paradigm. Mead and other social psychologists view the ‘self’ as emerging through reflexivity, shaped by an internal dialogue between the personal ‘I’ and the social ‘Me’, highlighting the role of language in identity construction (Howard, 2000).

Gecas and Burke (1995) identify four orientations in the conceptualisation of self and identity: social structural, situational, intrapersonal, and biographic-historical. Goffman is placed in the situational category, focusing on how the ‘self’ emerges in face-to-face interactions. His work aligns with both the micro-level intrapersonal perspective and the social structural approach, represented by Talcott Parsons (1951), who emphasised role relationships in group contexts. The situational approach views self and identity as negotiable and fluid, in line with poststructuralism. Goffman (1959; 1974) emphasised how social situations are framed by structural forces, which

shape role definitions and actions. This reflects the interaction between structure and agency in the creation of self and identity, as also outlined in Jenkins' (2014) three 'orders' of the world.

Goffman's Frame Analysis (1974) suggests that 'frames' structure understanding and actions in social situations, implying the presence of overarching norms. His view of role theory highlights how identity is shaped not only by individual actions but also by the broader societal expectations of these roles (Goffman, 1974). He acknowledged that individuals must often conform to these structural forces to manage impressions and gain acceptance.

Goffman's 'front stage' and 'backstage' selves offer a framework for understanding identity. He suggested that consistent actions over time contribute to one's identity, but did not perceive a 'stable sense of self', instead proposing that different versions of the self emerge depending on the context (Goffman, 1974). This view aligns with my understanding of identity as fluid, socially constructed, and dependent on context.

Goffman's theory is crucial to this thesis for two reasons. First, it positions identity as a social construct, not an essential trait, which aligns with my understanding of identity. Second, it integrates both structural forces and individual agency in how identity is performed, presented, and understood. This perspective acknowledges that while identity is fluid and negotiable, norms surrounding specific situations and groups shape how individuals navigate their roles. This is especially relevant to migrants, who may perform different 'selves' in public and private spheres. Migrants may adjust their behaviour and presentation of self to fit local norms in the host culture, affecting their identity over time in both public and private contexts. This resonates with Lawler's (2014) view of identity as both a public manifestation and a personal, reflective sense of self.

Thus, Goffman's dramaturgical theory, aligned with my poststructuralist, anti-essentialist, and social constructionist view of identity, is the theoretical framework for understanding how identity is generated, understood, and negotiated by Filipino migrants in a Saudi context. The concept of 'belonging' is then explored to deepen the understanding of how identity is performed, particularly for migrants in a new social setting.

## **2.4 Identity and Belonging**

*There are big differences in culture and religion around here. I am not used to live in a very religious atmosphere. People are conservative here (Kate).*

Conceptualising identity often involves discussions of belonging, which for some are inseparable: 'identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others' (Weeks, 1990, p. 88). Loader (2006, p. 25) suggests that 'who am I?' is synonymous with 'where do I belong?', and May (2013, p. 79) views belonging as the extent to which individuals use identity categories to understand themselves. May defines belonging as a sense of ease with oneself and one's surroundings (2011, p. 368), while Miller (2003, p. 215) argues that belonging is ontological, a fundamental part of identity that shapes who we are, whether we are conscious of it or not. Miller (2003, p. 218) describes belonging as a state of being that fosters wellbeing and fits one's existence in the world. This is significant for migrants in the study, who have moved from the Philippines to Saudi Arabia.

Miller (2003) identifies three types of belonging: connection to a group, historical tradition, or specific place. Drawing on Kierkegaard (1988), she defines belonging as being in 'correct relation to one's community, history, and locality', an integration of self in a fitting, authentic way (Miller, 2003, p. 219). Belonging is not innate but something created (Miller, 2003, p. 220). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943; 1954) and Baumeister and Leary (1995) underscore belonging as a universal, essential need.

Antonsich (2010, p. 6) conceptualises belonging as both a feeling of 'home' and a discursive resource that constructs or resists socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion. 'Home' is defined as a 'symbolic space of familiarity, comfort, security, and emotional attachment' (hooks, 2009, p. 213; Antonsich, 2010, p. 7), linked to a sense of rootedness (Savage et al., 2004) and attachment to place (Gustafson, 2009). Antonsich (2010, p. 7) identifies five factors influencing place-belongingness: autobiographical, relational, cultural, economic, and legal.

Autobiographical factors, such as past experiences and residence, shape a person's connection to place. Savage et al. (2004) note that 'incomers' who choose to live in a place may experience elective belonging, aligning their life story with their chosen location based on factors like culture or quality of life. Relational factors, including significant social ties, are key to belonging.

Baumeister and Leary's (1995) 'belongingness hypothesis' suggests that positive, stable relationships foster a sense of belonging. Cultural factors, especially language, are crucial, influencing the sense of belonging by defining 'us' versus 'them', while also fostering kinship and community (Antonsich, 2010). Economic factors, such as employment, can enhance belonging by providing a stake in a place's future (Yuval-Davis and Kaptani, 2008). Finally, legal factors, including residency and citizenship, are essential for security and a sense of belonging (Alexander, 2008), particularly for migrants whose legal status may affect their connection to a place (Fenster and Vitzel, 2006; Nelson and Hiemstra, 2008; Yuval-Davis and Kaptani, 2008).

#### ***2.4.1 Belonging, Identity and Migration***

Place-belongingness may not always equate to 'identity', but in contexts where belonging becomes politicised, it can merge with both group belonging and identity (Lovell, 1998, p. 1). Antonsich (2010, p. 12) argues that 'politics of belonging' often overlap with identity politics. Belonging is spatial, linked to landscape and culture (Trudeau, 2006), and is mobile, involving various forms of movement between being at home and away (Urry, 2000, p. 132). The politics of belonging involves both those seeking to claim belonging and those with the power to grant it, as societies can either welcome or reject newcomers. A lack of belonging can lead to displacement, isolation, alienation, and loneliness (hooks, 2009, p. 24).

Even if political belonging is granted, a sense of place-belongingness may not follow: May (2013, p. 81) notes that leaving familiar contexts destabilises self-perception. This resonates with Goffman's 'framing device' and the concept of habitus. Taylor (1989) argues that to feel recognised, one's authenticity must be acknowledged. Sporton and Valentine (2007) confirm that belonging arises when individuals feel valued and able to express their identity in a new community. Society may deny belonging if migrants are seen as 'other', as dominant groups often equate belonging with sameness, excluding difference (Antonsich, 2010, p. 15). For example, many countries require active assimilation (e.g., language, culture, religious affiliation) to grant citizenship, enabling migrants to perform a self that aligns with the host nation's norms (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 209).

Migration, especially with modern telecommunications, can pluralise place-belongingness and identity, creating hybrid and transnational identities (Ehrkamp and Leitner, 2006; Warriner, 2007; Zevallos, 2008). Eade (1994) found that young Bengalis in Britain experienced identities shaped by multiple influences, leading to tension between personal and social identities. Some migrants in Eade's study faced rejection of their claim to belonging, feeling disconnected from both their home and host countries. This fragmentation of belonging can be exhausting, leading to 'hybrid identities' that challenge allegiance to nation states (Eade, 1994, p. 387; Fortier, 2000, p. 97). May (2013, p. 109) highlights that cultural belonging is often seen as singular, with migrants expected to choose one identity.

Some migrants may feel a lack of belonging in both place and time, generating a longing for the past, what Raj (2003) calls a 'myth of return' (p. 170). Bissell (2019) and Diprose (2008, p. 36) argue that belonging, like identity, requires constant renewal, being temporally and spatially open to change and new circumstances. This reveals the performativity of belonging, which shifts over time and context.

#### ***2.4.2 Performativity of Belonging***

Sociological studies of belonging, like identity, increasingly view it as a process rather than a static status—something one does or becomes (e.g., Ilcan, 2002; May, 2013; Mee, 2009). Belonging is socially constructed and relational (Kumsa, 2005), and its performative aspects have been explored by various scholars, emphasising how belonging is enacted at both individual and societal levels (Bell, 1999; Bell, 2009; Duruz, 2002; Fenster, 2005; Fortier, 1997; Instone, 2009; Lovell, 1998; Mee, 2009).

Bennett's (2014) phenomenological work shows that belonging is often unconscious, performed through everyday practices like habitual connections to specific places. Aspers (2004) highlights that families and places form webs of meaning, enabling repeated actions. Bell (1999) explains that the performativity of belonging involves normalising codes that materialise the community or group.

To belong, individuals must align their behaviour with societal or community norms, often unconsciously, unless their belonging is questioned. In new environments, such as host countries

for migrants, claims to belonging may be rejected in daily interactions (Eade, 1994; Wemyss, 2009), impacting self-esteem and identity (Griffiths, 1995; Weedon, 2004). Migrants may adapt their appearance, behaviour, and language to conform to group norms, engaging in repeated acts that help claim belonging, aligning with local values (May, 2013, p. 108; Meinhof and Galasinski, 2005).

Religion can play a complex role in migrants' sense of belonging. For example, Dupré (2008) found that religious identity helped preserve ethnic or national identity and facilitated transnational belonging. Borup and Ahlin (2011) showed that religion was crucial for Vietnamese migrants' identity in Denmark, while Valero Matas et al. (2012) noted its significance for migrants from Latin America, Morocco, and Africa. Diehl and Koenig (2013) found that for Polish and Turkish migrants in Germany, religious practice initially declined but was later revived to reclaim identity. Papademetriou et al. (2016) observed that despite hostility, religion fostered links between minority groups and helped mitigate the stress of adaptation, contributing to collective belonging.

However, belonging is not entirely within an individual's control, as it depends on inherent aspects like gender. A woman may feel she belongs in a group of women due to shared gender identity, yet some may feel belonging in the company of men, highlighting the complexity of belonging and identity. Antonsich (2010, p. 19) observed that contemporary societies are characterised by multiple forms of belonging, which interact differently across space and with varying permeability of identity boundaries. This underscores how belonging may be performed in different contexts and situations, feeding into broader sociological research on identity and belonging.

## **2.5 Identity and the Performativity of Language**

*I grew from very few Arabic words to say religious blessings. I have had patients coming from the clinic and telling me the way you talk touched our souls, we will continue our treatment with you. They liked hearing the blessings and compliments.*

*Such is the power of language (Suzanna).*

The poststructuralist paradigm views language as integral to identity construction, with Foucault (1984) rejecting structuralist binaries such as male/female and rational/emotional. He argued that discourses shape and regulate identity, allowing individuals to perform and construct their

identities through various discursive positions. Scholars like Butler (1990), Ford (2006), and Norton (2000) highlight the role of language in identity projection and construction.

Studies on language learning and identity often explore the link between pragmatic language use and identity, particularly in different cultural contexts. Taguchi (2019) emphasised the need to understand this relationship globally, noting how language learning involves adopting sociocultural norms and projecting different ‘selves’ (Duff, 2012). Pragmatics connects linguistic forms to social actions, and language use in these contexts helps construct identities (Taguchi and Roeber, 2017). Diao and Maa (2019) argued that pragmatic learning reflects the construction of identity.

The poststructuralist perspective on identity as dynamic, alterable, and context-sensitive is crucial in studies of language learning and identity (Block, 2007; Norton, 2000; Shi and Langman, 2012). Taguchi (2019) noted that language learning goes beyond grammar to include learning how to project particular identities, influenced by the norms of each social context. This view aligns with Bourdieu’s concept of performing ‘the rules of the game’ (Pennycook, 2004).

Goffman’s and Austin’s theories of performativity also apply to language and identity. Language performs actions, not just conveys statements (Austin, 1962). Performative acts, such as marriage vows or legal declarations, help construct identities (Joseph, 2004). Pennycook (2004) and Butler (1990) further argued that identities are always in the process of being performed through language within specific cultural contexts.

Performativity has been instrumental in understanding how linguistic practices bring identities into being (Ehrlich, 2001; Menard-Warwick, 2009; Pennycook, 2004). In the context of migrant workers, speech acts reflect the interplay of cultural norms and language in identity construction (Cheng, 2012). This is particularly relevant in conservative settings, like Saudi Arabia, where migrant health practitioners’ identities are shaped by cultural and religious norms. The framework of performativity is useful for interpreting how identities are performed in response to these contexts, guiding both methodology and analysis in studies of language and identity.

### ***2.5.1. Language and Gender Identity***

*I realized that women speak differently here than what I am usually used to in the Philippines. One more thing I noticed here is that women don't laugh boisterously. Women also don't talk too loud in public. There are always loud voices when women talk in the Philippines (Francesca).*

*Filipino women shouldn't lower their voice when speaking... I am raised differently... I should raise my voice when speaking... My parents raised me to be strong... you see... always and anywhere (Bonnie).*

The literature suggests that language learning is a continuous process that influences identity construction and negotiation (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000). Language plays a key role in shaping the self, as learning a new language can lead to changes in how migrants perceive themselves and how others perceive them (Pavlenko, 2001b). This highlights the importance of exploring migrant identities in diverse contexts. Taguchi and Roeber (2017) noted that the field's increasing focus on identity stems from a social turn (Block, 2003), acknowledging the role of social factors alongside cognitive approaches. Learning a language is inseparable from identity formation and transformation (King, 2008; Pennycook, 2001, 2004), as it transforms what people can do and who they can become (Pavlenko and Norton, 2007; Toohey, 2005).

The intersection of language learning and gender identity is an important area of exploration. Butler's work, influenced by Goffman (1959), demonstrates that language learning can allow individuals to perform gender differently in new contexts. Diao and Maa (2019) showed that language learners may adopt or resist different gender identities using language creatively. Studies such as those by Langman (2004) and Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) explore how language learning involves taking on a new voice linked to gendered practices (Busch, 2012). Siegal's (1994, 1996) study of Western women learning Japanese shows how participants resisted gendered language forms to construct a more 'Western' identity. Similarly, Bucholtz (1999) demonstrated that language can contribute to constructing gender identities, challenging static beliefs.

Jones (2016) highlighted studies on female police officers and managers using language to perform and negotiate gender identities in the workplace. This dynamic is particularly relevant for migrants

navigating host cultures. Gender role shifts, like those seen in Lao women (Gordon, 2004), reflect how language learning impacts gender identity. Migration often leads to a clash of gender ideologies, especially in multicultural contexts (Piller and Pavlenko, 2001; Shi, 2006), making language learning a key element in gender identity transformation. Skapoulli's (2004) study of a migrant girl in Greece shows how language use can help negotiate different gendered selves in various contexts, exemplifying the fluidity of gender identity across spaces.

Ibrahim (1999) and Menard-Warwick (2009) explored how migrants use language to negotiate gender identities in new cultural settings, highlighting the role of language in identity construction. Vitanova (2005) discussed how migrants abandon previous identities, as language learning facilitates the creation of new professional identities. Norton (2000, 2013) emphasised that language is essential for migrants to negotiate their social identities and gain access to social networks. As Lee (2015) noted, language learning is central to the reconfiguration of gender roles, especially for migrant women navigating new gender norms.

The need for more research on migrant women's gender identities, particularly outside Anglophone contexts, is evident (Menard-Warwick, 2009; Lee, 2015). Studies by Norton (2000), Menard-Warwick (2004, 2008), and Lee (2015) have stressed the importance of exploring how gender identities are reshaped through language learning in diverse, non-Anglophone contexts. This highlights the significance of studying migrant women's experiences as they engage with new gender ideologies and languages.

### ***2.5.2. Language and Religion***

In this section, I will explore the connection between language, religion, and identity, particularly in a conservative Sunni context. The study assumes that language, including religious language, has a performative nature. Religious language from both Sunni and Catholic canons plays a significant role in identity performance and negotiations with conservative locals. Badenhorst and Makoni (2017) argue that religious language helps shape identity and preserve community identity, with Arabic particularly tied to religion. Joseph (2016) and Woods (2006) highlight the importance of religious identity, noting that religious languages like Hebrew, Greek, and Arabic hold sacred value. Omoniyi and Fishman (2006) further stress the 'power of sanctified languages' and how

religion is considered incomplete without the right language. Woods (2006) adds that changes to religious language often provoke strong reactions from believers.

Joseph (2004) points out that religious linguistic repertoires mark religious identity, with language signalling membership in a specific religion. Dzialtuvaite (2006) found that language played a crucial role in shaping the religious identity of Lithuanian migrants in Scotland, while Chruszczewski (2006) observed similar patterns in Jewish groups. Joseph (2006) also highlighted the connection between language and religion among bilingual Christians in Lebanon. Myhill (2006) argued that religion, rather than language, is key to shaping national identity in religious contexts.

Souza (2016), drawing on Vajta (2013), showed how language is linked to religious identity in Alsace, where Lutheranism aligns with German and Catholicism with French, even amid secularisation. Chew (2014) explored how religious language constructs identity, noting that Arabic, as the 'authentic language' of the Quran, holds performative power in religious contexts. Badenhorst and Makoni (2017) discussed Arabic's role in preserving community identity, linking it to religion more closely than English, which has become secularised over time.

Blackledge and Creese (2017b), building on Blommaert and Backus (2013), introduced the concept of linguistic repertoires as a means to highlight identity. Migrants use these repertoires to align with specific discourses and identities, shaping their self-presentation in various contexts. Rampton (2014) and Wortham (2001) emphasised how language helps people 'become' selves, highlighting the performative nature of language in identity formation.

The concept of performativity, particularly Austin's theories, is useful for understanding identity negotiations in conservative contexts. Repertoires play a significant role in this study, where the religious linguistic repertoire (Islamic canon) used by medical practitioners will be explored. The relationship between religious linguistic repertoires and identity in conservative Sunni medical workplaces, particularly among Filipino Catholic practitioners, remains underexplored. This study will examine how these practitioners navigate the use of religious language in a conservative context and how language is used in identity negotiations to either conform to or subvert social and contextual norms.

### *2.5.3 Using Language to Subvert or Conform in Identity Negotiations*

Blommaert and Rampton (2011) argued that people adopt different linguistic forms to align or disaffiliate with groups, performing or playing with signs of belonging. Ishihara (2019) highlighted the importance of agency in language and identity studies, defining it as the capacity to act and negotiate identities, encompassing both compliance and resistance (Ahearn, 2001). Agency, as defined by Taguchi and Roever (2017), involves individuals using language to create new social positions, contesting norms when they conflict with their desired social identity. Diao and Maa (2019) noted that learners' agency can manifest in creativity and subversion, intentionally rejecting norms. Ishihara (2019) further explored how language learners negotiate identities and resist language uses that conflict with their cultural values. This resistance can reflect contradictions between home and target language cultures (Diao and Maa, 2019).

Rampton (2017) emphasised the subversive use of language as learners challenge, resist, or reject norms. According to Duff and May (2017), acceptance or resistance of norms can be seen as exertions of agency, with learners presenting themselves in particular ways that reflect social identities (Diao and Maa, 2019). Taguchi and Roever (2017) argued that learners do not blindly conform to norms, instead rejecting them when incongruent with their cultural values. This highlights how identity negotiations, involving both conformity and subversion, are integral to language learning (Butler, 2004; Deutsch, 2007; Rampton et al., 2002).

Ishihara (2019) argued that language learners discursively negotiate identities, rejecting fully adopting native-speaker norms. González-Lioret (2019) noted that learners may resist adopting target culture norms due to their own experiences and views. Studies by Barron (2003) and DuFon (1999) showed that learners may reject local norms because of different identity traits, consciously resisting them (Vidal and Shively, 2019). Zhu Hua (2015, 2017) demonstrated that learners resist certain identities when language learning, such as an Argentine participant resisting the Spanish identity despite speaking Spanish.

Holmes and Riddiford (2011) and Butler (1990) suggested that individuals engage in acts of subversion and resistance when negotiating gender identities. Blackledge and Pavlenko (2001) stressed the importance of language in identity negotiations, showing that some identities, like gender or religious identity, may be negotiable or un-negotiable for different individuals. This has been explored in studies of migrants, such as Giampapa (2004), who found that some participants resisted imposed identities, while others negotiated gender or religious identities. Ishihara (2009, 2010) documented resistance to language uses that conflicted with learners' identities in Japan, illustrating the role of language in performing unique identities.

Gendered identities can also undergo transformation in different contexts (Griori, 2014), with individuals resisting dominant ideologies while constructing their gender identities (Preece, 2006). The capacity for negotiation, subversion, and conforming is crucial in understanding identity formation, especially in language learning and migration contexts. This highlights the dynamic interaction between language, power, and identity.

#### ***2.5.4 Language and Power***

Shi and Langman (2012) emphasised Pavlenko's (2001b) findings, which highlight the symbolic power of linguistic resources, providing access to better education, employment, and social mobility, enabling identity reconstruction. Austin's theory, though insightful on the performative nature of language, does not fully address power dynamics in today's neoliberal world, where language becomes a tool for skilled migrants. Menard-Warwick (2004) noted that successful language learning enables migrants to gain power and reshape their identities, a perspective supported by Norton (2000), Skilton-Sylvester (2002), and others, who stressed the need to explore under-researched contexts, including Saudi Arabia. Ehrlich called for global research on the relationship between gender and language learning.

Noels, Yahsima and Zhang (2012) linked the surge in identity-focused studies to poststructuralist critical perspectives (e.g., Block, 2007; Norton, 2000), noting how migrants negotiate identities to belong to the host community, aiming to gain power and status. Gordon (2009) defined gender and language ideologies as cultural systems influencing social and political power, referencing studies

by Irvine (1989) and Gal (1989), who showed how language ideologies are linked to power struggles, particularly in the context of gendered roles during migration.

Gendered language ideologies following migration remain underexplored, though research is growing (e.g., Camino and Krulfeld, 1994; Cha, 2005). Migration can disrupt traditional gender roles, such as shifting the breadwinner role, sometimes linked to language learning. This shift can lead to familial conflicts. Gordon's (2004) ethnographic study on Lao women in the USA revealed that improved language skills led to economic independence and power, causing gender role shifts that some male partners rejected, as they lost access to traditional power structures.

Similarly, Ui (1990) found Cambodian women in the USA gained economic independence, shifting traditional gender roles, while McMahon (2001) noted how learning English empowered Japanese women, offering new gender identities. Menard-Warwick (2009) referenced Rockhill's (1993) study on the Latino community, where men had more access to language learning, while migrant women faced family pressures, including domestic violence, preventing educational advancement.

Goldstein (2001) highlighted how Portuguese migrant men had better opportunities to learn English in the workplace, contrasting with women, who were more likely to remain on production lines. This shows how language access is linked to power and social mobility. Gordon (2009) argued that language is central to acquiring or maintaining power, a concept explored further in the next section, where Norton's (2000) investment construct is discussed.

#### ***2.5.5 Investment (Norton, 2000)***

To explore the relationship between gender identity, power, and language learning, I now discuss the investment construct (Norton, 2000), which builds on ideas from Weedon (1997) and Bourdieu (1977a, 1977b, 1986, 1991) about cultural capital and social power. Norton (2000) theorised how power influences discourse through social institutions and practices (Kramsch and Uryum, 2012). In her influential study of migrant women in Canada, Norton criticised the focus on language learning processes over the individuals learning the language. She examined five migrant women

from various countries (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Peru, Vietnam) in different workplaces, leading to her concept of investment. Unlike motivation, which is psychological, investment focuses on an individual's agency, identity, and meaningful engagement with the expectation of gaining economic and symbolic rewards. Menard-Warwick (2009, p. 32) noted that language can help individuals access more societal resources.

Norton's social constructivist approach assumes that humans are social beings (Norton, 2000; 2013), and thus qualitative methods are more appropriate for studying investment than quantitative measures of motivation, as they capture the complexities of language learners' experiences. Migrants learning a host language may face identity-related dilemmas that influence their investment, even if they are motivated. Investment considers migrants' accumulation of economic, cultural, and symbolic status, which grants them power in the host country. It also reflects how religious, gender, or national identity can impact their language-learning experiences, particularly if they face rejection based on these identities. This is a crucial aspect not fully addressed by the psychological concept of motivation that prevailed before Norton's work. In essence, investment integrates human identity with language learning, influencing how migrants construct their future selves.

Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009) argued that investment links the language learner's identity with their context, meeting the need to explore the ambivalent relationship between learners and their desire to learn the target language. They noted that learners invest in a language to gain symbolic and material resources, which enhance their cultural knowledge, identity, and future aspirations. Kim (2001) added that investment explores the socially constructed relationship between learners and the language, with the goal of gaining access to resources. Having discussed language, identity, and power in migration, I will now turn to Filipino migration, language, and identity.

## **2.6. Filipino Migration, Language and Identity**

Previous sections have discussed the politics of belonging, especially for migrants, and it is not the intention here to cover old ground. However, it is important to understand that migration can have substantial implications for an individual's identity, including the way it is

presented/performed, and their use of language. For example, Menard-Warwick (2009) critiqued the restrictive ways in which migrant women were trained, such that professional training for women may sometimes emphasize the avoidance of certain personality traits in the target host culture. An example of this comes from Jacobs-Huey (2003), who investigated how African American cosmetology students were trained. She noticed that aspiring hairstylists were trained to 'avoid loud voice' (2003, p.277) and to speak indirectly to clients, while also being very polite and soft-speaking in order to 'become hair expert' (2003, p.277). Female students were also subjected to sexist phrases like 'ladies are seen, not heard' (2003, p.283) while undergoing training. Whilst there is limited research specifically on the training of female Filipino migrants in healthcare sectors, it is useful to understand the Filipino migrant context and explore the message put out by the Filipino government of migrants as 'the new heroes' (*'mga bagong bayani'*) to ascertain the impact that this may have on the identities of my participants (Rodriguez, 2002a; 2002b; 2015).

The literature has been criticized for placing a strong emphasis on only investigating the dynamics of language and identity inside 'classroom, study abroad programs, and homes of heritage speakers, leaving many sites and communities under-explored' (Diao and Maa, 2019, p.139). Diao and Maa specifically referred to workplaces as useful arenas where the identity and language performances of migrants can be investigated, given they provide spaces for migrants to interact with the public of a host culture. They also pointed out that there is a need to explore this sort of 'socialization in the workplace' (Diao and Maa, 2019, p.139). Workers undergo a linguistic process during their workplace socialisation, where they learn and utilize an appropriate and adequate linguistic repertoire to help them succeed and do their job efficiently (Mark and Chui, 2013). This seems to be a 'priority' for migrants to help them 'interact smoothly' with members of the host culture (Timpe-Laughlin, 2019, p.413).

The experience of Filipino migrants and how their language and identity may change in the host culture, in this context, in the KSA, is pertinent to study given the increasing demand for skilled Filipino workers in many Anglophone contexts in the world; they have been called the 'servant of globalization' (Parreñas, 2001, p.2) due to their adaptability as well as their efficient linguistic skills, which make them ready to work at almost any time and anywhere (Allan and McElhinny, 2017). When people relocate, they are able to pick, choose and use the language according to the

new context in which they live and work (Zhu, 2015). This helps them in constructing their identities. People can choose ‘linguistic means contingent to context’ to enact their identities, as argued by Zhu (2015, p.79).

Excelling in their given workplace is an important factor for many Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), who have been encouraged to see themselves as modern-day heroes through sending remittance back home to their families. The phrase *Bagong-Bayani* was coined by former president Corazon Aquino in 1988 to not only herald OFWs for the sums of money sent back to the Philippines (boosting the country’s GDP), but because they are figures of resilience. The personal sacrifices OFWs make in enduring often less than desirable working and living conditions, as well as homesickness and displacement, have meant they are portrayed as national heroes in their home country (Eugenio, 2023). The Central Bank of the Philippines (Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP)) moreover released figures demonstrating that by the end of 2022, remittances from OFWs rose to a record high of US\$36.14 billion (Xinhua, 2023), accounting to almost 9% of the country’s GDP. This was predominantly due to cash remittance from the US, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Britain and Qatar; this overseas remittance increases consumer spending, which constitutes 75% of the Filipino economy.

Female Filipino OFWs are likely to experience the cultural and religious changes in the context of reception on a daily basis; as Magliveras (2019) points out, everyday life in KSA is organised and governed according to a conservative interpretation of Islamic scriptures. When first arriving in KSA, Filipinos are unsure of their social position, with limited understanding of the language, and social norms and practices unfolding around them in their daily lives. The smells and noises are different (there are often mixed groups of men and women chatting and the sound of karaoke in the Philippines), and the repeated sound of the Azan (call to prayer) that can be heard around the clock is alien to Filipino OFWs (Magliveras, 2019). In the KSA, there are public spaces for ‘*shabab*’ (men) and ‘*aleayila*’ (families, or women). As with any transnational women, Filipino women that travel without their spouses have limited opportunities to mingle with the opposite sex, regardless of one’s station. The experience of women, however, was found in Magliveras’ (2019) qualitative study to vary; the experience of the dress code/norms, the visual separation between men and women, was alienating for some, intensifying their feelings of isolation,

surveillance and loneliness, whilst other women found it liberating, giving them freedom from objectification and a sense of safety. Those that lived on compounds felt less restricted by gender segregation norms, given they were able to mingle with who they wanted, when they wanted, within the compound gates, and those that came as married couples were able to obtain support from their spouses and spend more time socialising. Yet free time was not always welcomed; once the working day was over, aside from eating, shopping, and spending money on entertainment, there was little to do, and with the frugal existence of many participants in Magliveras' (2019) study, spending money was not an option.

One seminal, mixed-methods study on the experience of Filipino migrants in Italy and California was conducted by Parreñas (2001). She found, similarly to Hall (1990), that a conjuncture-based identity is generally present in Filipino migrants, who, in Cartesian fashion, lose their unified sense of identity and, given the 'multiple axis of domination' (Parreñas, 2001, p. 12) that exist, develop a cross-national, or transnational alliance. Parreñas (2001, p. 12) refers to the 'dislocation' experiences as a result by Filipino migrants, which is often intensified when individuals migrate overseas, leaving their family behind. In the present, participants were either single or married with children and travelled with their core family members to the KSA, thus presenting a divergent view from Parreñas' (2001) finding that many women in particular migrate from the Philippines to escape abusive relationships. Yet Parreñas' (2001, p. 12) highlights that 'the dislocation of migrant Filipina domestic workers include partial citizenship, the pain of family separation, the experience of contradictory class mobility, and the feeling of social exclusion or nonbelonging in the migrant community'. Whilst the subjects in the present study are not domestic workers, Parreñas (2001) found that most of her participants were highly educated, often skilled professionals that took lower status, lower skilled positions in KSA, such as domestic work (housework and caring duties in private homes), because it paid far better than professional roles in the Philippines.

Parreñas' (2001) findings are a useful investigation of Filipino migrants' experiences abroad, albeit in different contexts to the KSA, which naturally impacts on their overall experience and potential sense of belonging and identity shifts. In fact, Parreñas (2001) argues that migration is both a site and process of subjectification, meaning that individuals are led to observe, analyse and interpret themselves as subjective containers and conveyers of possible knowledge (Stewart and

Shamdasani, 2014). As will be seen shortly, the reasons why Filipino migrants seek work in KSA (or other countries) are varied and numerous, often primarily driven by financial gain, but also for adventure, career advancement, or to escape familial pressures, abuses or poverty. These desires are then met with the realities surrounding migration, both in terms of infrastructural constraints and different norms, rules, practices and languages on the ground, limiting their agency (also found by Barber, 2008). The dislocations thus experienced underscore the experience of migration from the perspective of the migrant subject, comprising of, 'the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of self and her ways of understanding her relations to the world' (Weedon, 1997, p. 32, cited in Parreñas, 2001, p. 31).

It must be noted that her study, conducted in the late 1990s, took place before the widespread access to and development of Internet and mobile technology; for example, she talks about monthly printed multinational publications such as *Diwaliwan* and *Tinig Filipino*, magazines for migrants, that connect Filipinos to their home country through showbiz news, short stories and reader contributions, with articles such as 'I want to go home, but where is home?' delineating the sense of displacement amongst its transnational migrant readership. Today, the ease of calling and travelling home that accompanies globalisation, as well as the more progressive gender laws that have recently been passed in the KSA, may mean Filipino migrants in this setting do not feel quite as displaced as they may have done in the 1990s, or perhaps their displacement takes on a different form or quality than participants in Parreñas' (2001) study.

Female OFWs in the KSA may experience a different kind of existence, especially women in low-paid jobs, who are significantly more likely to experience abuse, overwork, challenging working conditions, rape or even murder by employers and host country residents. This was made explicit in the Gender Promotion Working Paper No. 8 from the International Labour Office, which stated:

Gender-based discrimination intersects with discrimination based on other forms of 'otherness' – such as non-national status, race, ethnicity, religion, economic status – placing women migrants in situations of double, triple or even fourfold discrimination, disadvantage or vulnerability to exploitation and abuse (cited in Villalba, 2005, p. iii).

Whilst the participants in the present study are professional healthcare workers, and therefore not placed in the category of low-paid, low-skilled menial workers, it is possible that the participants will either know someone that may either fall into this category and is subject to this kind of treatment or discrimination, or may experience it themselves outside of the workplace. Their status as professional working women abroad, moreover, does not automatically protect or prevent them from experiencing this kind of behaviour or abuse in or outside of the workplace. The risks attached to all overseas workers from the Philippines indicate the sacrifices and altruistic motives of these migrants, often placing their family's economic welfare above their own safety. It champions the narrative and mental representation that prevails that these OFWs are self-sacrificing subjects; this is represented in 'tear-jerker' films such as *Caregiver*, *Milan*, and *Transit*, which depict suffering martyrs, longing to return home, but buoyed by their status as overseas providers. It is also depicted in advertisements, such as for consumer products such as Google and Coca-Cola, as well as international phone cards, shipping companies, and banking apps (Rodriguez, 2015).

This is supported, in part, by a recent empirical study exploring Filipino and Indonesian migration experiences in KSA (Magliveras and Al Qurtuby, 2023). This qualitative research, involving formal and informal interviews with 17 Filipinos and 16 Indonesians (both professional and working-class migrants), revealed that many Filipinos feel as the main breadwinner, they cannot return to their home country, given the importance of family and their direct economic dependence on the migrants. Reyes (2015) supports the idea that the family is embedded in both Filipino and Christian values, generating a sense of 'shared self' (or *kapwa*) that becomes central in prompting where and how Filipinos live. The participants in Magliveras and Al Qurtuby (2023) frequently discussed sacrifice and love, core features of Christian cosmology (Kearns, 2008; Daly, 2009); like Christ, 'to express love, one must sacrifice' (Magliveras and Al Qurtuby, 2023, p. 558). The virtues of *loób* and *kapwa* are central drivers for those experiencing hardship, the former meaning one's rational will in Tagalog, and the latter meaning the sense of shared identity (both tribal and Christian) (Reyes, 2015). Magliveras and Al Qurtuby (2023) concluded that, for their participants, family was part of the milieu of *kapwa*, and cited Reyes' (2015) suggestion that, 'the unpayable debt or *utang-na-loób* to a family is an essential part of their sense of self' (Magliveras and Al Qurtuby, 2023, p. 559). The responsibility to repay this debt, and sacrifice one's own self to repay

the debt to those that sacrificed for them, parallels the Passion of the Christ, who also sacrificed himself ‘for the collective’ (Reyes, 2015, p. 167). Overseas foreign workers from the Philippines, then, like Christ, gain hero-like qualities, through *utang-na-loob*, sensing their family members as a part of themselves, giving them the strength to sacrifice the things they may truly want to, Christ-like, ‘pay back the unredeemable debt to their families’ (Magliveras and Al Qurtuby, 2023, p. 559).

Yet the notion of the self-sacrificing martyr has been challenged by various researchers. In fact, migration for work overseas may be far from a last resort; rather, it is often depicted as ‘Filipinos’ ultimate ‘opportunity’ (Guevarra, 2010: x) – for both men and women. Roces (2021) for instance interviewed over 70 Filipino migrants, and found that OFWs from the Philippines still consider themselves heroes, but not martyrs; rather, they have become agents of change in their new environment (as well as back home), challenging and changing the status quo both in terms of fundamental social (and economic) institutions and entrenched traditional norms. This idea is also promoted by Rodriguez (2010), who, through her ethnographic research, found that the Philippine government has commodified and glamorised the export of migrant workers, touted as ‘flexible labour’, offering specific welfare and economic rights to migrant workers in return for obligations to their home state. Rodriguez (2010) refers to the Filipino government as a labour brokerage state, which has actively prepared, mobilised and regulated citizens for overseas labour. Yet this ‘regulation’—this state control—is increasingly being challenged with the rise in ‘transnationalized citizenship’; Filipinos gaining citizenship overseas and the increased globalisation of citizenship rights ‘has enabled migrants to make various kinds of claims on the Philippine state’ (Rodriguez, 2010, p. 341), leading to transnational political struggles and a more empowered ‘national hero’. Given the proposed subtle shift away from a self-sacrificing martyr to an empowered national hero prevalent in both men and women from the Philippines, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of how female OFWs from the Philippines perceive themselves, and in what ways they may (or may not) consider themselves to be heroic ‘agents of change’.

There is literature exploring the role of governmental infrastructure and policy as the driving force behind migration; one interesting example is that of James Tyner, who uses a Foucauldian framework to argue for the ‘discursive production of migrants through the apparatus of state bureaucracies’ (Tyner, 2004, p. 19; cited in Martin, 2015). He outlines the discursive shift away

from Filipino labour being portrayed by the state as a sacrificial resource towards the expression of labour migration as self-actualisation. The freedom of movement Filipinos can enjoy is championed by the state, depicting their decision to move abroad as ‘liberating, empowering, a personal choice made in the context of full understanding of the risks and rewards’ (Tyner, 2004, p. 49). Guevarra (2010, p. 51) however argues that this ‘freedom’ is attached to neoliberal political philosophies, meaning states retain fewer responsibilities for the social risks involved, transferring them to the individual instead. Both Guevarra (2010) and Rodriguez (2010) however agree that the ‘social image’ attached to labour migration is activated to generate an ‘ethos of migration’, which is wielded by the Filipino government to market OFWs across the globe.

This is supported by other findings from Magliveras and Al Qurtuby (2023); their qualitative study revealed one major theme underpinning the Filipino migrant’s decision to work in KSA as adventure and career advancement. This was more common amongst younger Filipinos, who were more likely to ‘romanticise the idea of traveling abroad and seeing the world’ (Magliveras and Al Qurtuby, 2023, p. 553), perceiving working abroad to be a ‘rite of passage to becoming independent economically’ or adulthood more generally (Magliveras and Al Qurtuby, 2023, p. 54). They also indicated their belief that they could fast-track their careers, some even seeing working in KSA as a stepping-stone towards working in the West. Whilst this latter motive did not appear to be a reality for any participant, participants in some fields did experience career advancement in their home country, predominantly dental assistants and nurses. However, other professionals (accountants and site engineers) found that their careers did not advance on returning to the Philippines, with friends that had not left appearing to progress to higher positions with better pay. Yet Parreñas (2001, p. 30) also found that female OFWs in particular were, in the receiving country (Italy and the US, in her study), more likely to ‘experience a certain degree of gender liberation because of their greater contribution to household income and participation in public life’ than back in the Philippines. It is unclear how far this freedom and gender liberation extends to the experience of OFWs in the KSA, however, given the ultra-conservative nature of this receiving country.

The perceptions of Christian Filipino migrants towards KSA appeared to be directly tied to their working situation and employers’ attitudes towards them in Magliveras and Al Qurtuby’s (2023) study:

If they have adequate living conditions, salaries and support, then they feel very good about their sojourn. Alternatively, OFWs are willing to sacrifice their everyday living conditions for economic benefits. If employers do not pay them on time and they cannot send support home, then they deem their experiences useless because (1) they cannot support their families economically and (2) their suffering was all in vain (Magliveras and Al Qurtuby's, 2023, p. 560).

For overseas foreign workers, KSA is perceived to be a liminal place, thus intrinsically linked to the workplace; a contract ends, the sacrifice finishes, and the Filipino returns home to honour and heroism. Thus, the question of how far Filipinos integrate into KSA society, how far their lives and experiences there are shaped by Saudi Sunni culture, remains unanswered. This is explained by Magliveras and Al Qurtuby (2023, p. 562) who expound the temporary nature of KSA:

For Filipinos, Saudi Arabia is a temporary, liminal space. It is a place that contributes to improving their families' welfare and a place where young adults can grow up and find their place in the world. As seen from interviews and discussions, KSA is a stepping stone to other places or as a place to help them become more competitive at home. However, the Kingdom is a place where they do not belong. It is a place where the ends justify the means. In this case, all the Filipino participants expressed their role and work as a sacrifice in Saudi Arabia, becoming beloved and expressing their love, through sacrifice for the good of the family, community and country.

The uniqueness of the present study is that it is situated within a conservative Sunni context that still attracts migrants from all parts of the world (with different religious affiliations), and in which few studies have been conducted on identity and language. When we join a new culture, we may need to understand the 'norms', including workplace norms, associated with daily life; as Holmes (2005) pointed out, 'joining a new workplace entails learning how to use language to negotiate new meaning with new colleagues' (2005, p.348). The workplace is also a useful public space where identity and linguistic negotiations between migrants and host country citizens can be observed and studied.

Drew and Heritage (1992) and Timpe-Laughlin's (2019, p.414) studies argued that language used by OFWs within a host culture is linked to identity construction. Timpe-Laughlin continued by claiming that learners 'have to acquire the knowledge and the linguistic means necessary to use target language appropriately... they have to take into account communicative situation, power and solidarity needs as well as different types of knowledge of target language norms and then skillfully tailor what they say accordingly'. Linguistic and pragmatic competence are crucial for success within both the workplace and subsequently the wider society in a host or home culture. Therefore, conducting observations of migrant women in public spaces, such as workplaces, within their new host culture provides fertile ground to study how their identities may be performed, and how language learning and performance may contribute to this.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

The literature review highlights the need for this study, given the lack of research on migrant women outside Anglophone contexts. The study will contribute empirical findings on Catholic Filipinos in a Sunni context. It explores the conceptualisation of identity, focusing on how identity is socially constructed and performed within societies. Reflexive individuals' agency over their identity is limited by categorisation, with early parenting and social groups profoundly influencing self and social identity. The performance of identity, especially for migrants claiming belonging, and the limits of this performance in constructing identity and belonging, have been examined. Goffman's (1959) Dramaturgical theory has provided the core theoretical reference for the thesis. These insights are crucial for understanding how female Filipino migrants in Saudi Arabia construct their identities and negotiate belonging, using language to perform gender and religious identities in the host culture. The limited literature, especially on the Saudi context, further justifies the need for this study.

The chapter also discusses how humans resist, accept, or adopt norms through subversion or conformity. Gender, power, and language post-migration were explored, including Norton's (2000) work. The connection between identity, language, and migration was unpacked through a discussion of Filipino migrants and the 'migrant hero' concept, highlighting the experiences of female Filipino migrants in Saudi Arabia. Gaps remain in the literature, with most research

focusing on domestic workers or migrants leaving families behind, and outdated studies failing to account for the evolving Saudi-Philippine relationship and changing gender segregation laws, which may affect female professional migrants. The next chapter will justify the methodology and methods used in this study.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter first explores the rationale for using a qualitative study design to address the research questions and investigate participants in their workplace. It justifies the selection of qualitative methods for data collection, discussing how validity and reliability are conceptualised in qualitative research. The chapter proceeds to examine the data collection process, including focus groups, observations, fieldnotes, diaries, and follow-up interviews. Reflexivity, particularly regarding the male researcher's position, is then discussed, along with ethical considerations. Finally, the choice of thematic analysis as the analytical method is justified, noting its prevalence in qualitative research.

### **3.2 Qualitative Research**

As Zhu Hua (2017, p.117) asserts, identities are 'performances, constructed and negotiated through interactions' (cf. Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998; De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg, 2006), a perspective aligned with qualitative methods. These methods are favoured for examining identities in real-life contexts, as the literature consistently demonstrates (e.g., Norton, 2000). The poststructuralist paradigm, which views identities as fluid and dynamic, is central to this study, and a social constructivist approach is adopted to explore how identities are performed in specific interactions. In this context, qualitative methods are essential to capture the complex, ongoing processes of identity construction. This study follows Goffman's (1959) notion of identity as performed rather than inherent, reinforcing the choice of qualitative methods to observe identity in action.

Language plays a pivotal role in identity construction, particularly in the interactions between Catholic Filipinas and conservative Sunni Muslims in public spaces. This study views language as performative, in line with Austin's (1962) argument that 'we do things with words.' Qualitative research provides a richer understanding of identity negotiation, particularly when exploring

migrant experiences. As highlighted by Blackledge and Pavlenko (2001), language is instrumental in identity negotiation, making qualitative methods particularly appropriate for this study's aims.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

Here is a brief overview of how the data was collected:

1. Approached gatekeepers and the Saudi Ministry of Health to obtain permission to approach the practitioners and patients.
2. Approached participants to identify myself and discuss the study with them.
3. Obtained permission and consent to recruit the participants and highlighted remittance payments.
4. Notified patients of my presence and obtained permission and consent from them to participate in the study.
5. Started focus groups and asked respondents to write diaries.
6. Started observations and took fieldnotes.
7. Collected diaries from participants.
8. Conducted follow-up interviews.

#### **3.3.1 Gatekeepers**

The study took place in two dental clinics in Buraydah, Saudi Arabia, after gaining approval from clinic gatekeepers. Dr Khaled Khames, a university lecturer and clinic director, and Ibrahim Saleh, a businessman and clinic owner, both supported the study. They viewed it as an opportunity to understand the dynamics between Filipino practitioners and Saudi patients, hoping the findings would contribute to improving clinic practices and expanding their recruitment of Filipino dental practitioners.

Both clinics primarily served Saudi patients, making them ideal for examining identity interactions between migrant practitioners and local clients. Patients were informed of the study via the clinics' messaging systems, and individual consent was obtained before participation.

### ***3.3.2 Respondents: Catholic Medical Practitioners from the Philippines***

The sampling criteria targeted female Filipino Christians with English as a second language and who were working as dental practitioners in a conservative Saudi Muslim context. A total number of 16 respondents participated in the study (3 dentists and 13 dental nurses). After approaching the respondents and explaining the study, I highlighted the payments for participation in the study. I then provided them with practitioners' information sheets (see Appendix 1) and practitioners' consent forms (see Appendix 2) to read, asking them to decide on their participation and then sign to indicate their consent. Following this, I approached the patients to provide them with patients' information sheets (see Appendix 3) and patients' consent forms (see Appendix 4).

#### ***3.3.2.1 Meeting Respondents***

I planned to hold a general 'icebreaker' meeting at the beginning of the data collection period, followed by the focus groups; the aim was to stimulate feelings of mutual identification between myself and the respondents, minimise the chance of unequal power relations, cultivate an atmosphere of honesty and openness and build personal rapport. I started by joking about the extreme Saudi heat, which is different to the weather in the Philippines. We shared stories of homesickness and cultural shock (given I have lived in the UK for several years whilst studying), difficulties, joy, fun and leisure, as well as careers and future possibilities, including my wife's experiences abroad. While this research is funded by Qassim University, I emphasised my identity as an independent Saudi Ph.D. student with almost nine years' experience of studying in the USA and UK. I highlighted my research interests in language and identity at Newcastle University and Qassim University and showed some pictures of me and my family in Saudi Arabia, the USA and the UK, discussing our experiences of living in American and British cultures as an expatriate/migrant.

The meeting helped me introduce myself and my educational background, explain the project, highlight the payment, highlight the advantages of the possible outcomes of the project for other new migrants coming to work in Saudi Arabia, and to reassure and put respondents at ease. I also highlighted that this study may help Saudi and Filipino policymakers facilitate better

understanding of migrant practitioners' experiences. This is especially relevant given that currently Saudi Arabia is among the top 10 destinations for overseas Filipinos. I told the respondents that the study may also build better working conditions, greater understanding of cross-cultural differences, and facilitate a better relationship between migrants and Saudi patients and co-workers. I shared that the data may reveal how experienced migrants dealt with and coped with this context.

Respondents were made aware that their identities and any specific details that might betray their identities would be anonymous or changed. I also reassured them that they had the right to opt out of the study at the beginning of the fieldwork or at any other time, without giving a reason. If they decided to withdraw, they were assured that there would be no negative consequences and that only I would know about their withdrawal. I wanted to convey that, whilst the gatekeepers were fully supportive of this study, my allegiances predominantly lay with the participants; I was on their side, happy to hear about any experience they had, positive or negative, with their contributions remaining fully confidential.

### 3.3.2.2 Respondents' Ethnicities and First Languages

Respondents ( $n=16$ ) came from two ethnic groups, Tagalog and Ilocano, both of which originate from the northern parts of the Philippines (Table 6). The first language of the Tagalog respondents was Tagalog, while Ilocano was the first language for respondents from the Ilocano ethnic group.

Table 6

#### Participant Details

	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> language</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Time Spent in K.S.A.</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Marital status</b>
<b>1</b>	Becky	Ilocano	Ilocano	25	2 years	Dental Nurse	Married with children
<b>2</b>	Jackie	Tagalog	Tagalog	35	3 years	Dental Nurse	Married with children
<b>3</b>	Kimberly	Tagalog	Tagalog	40	1.5 years	Dentist	Married with children
<b>4</b>	Francesca	Tagalog	Tagalog	38	2 years	Dental Nurse	Married with children
<b>5</b>	Natalia	Tagalog	Tagalog	30	7 months	Dental Nurse	Married with children

6	Amber	Tagalog	Tagalog	32	3 years	Dental Nurse	Married with children
7	Suzanna	Tagalog	Tagalog	36	3.5 years	Dentist	Married with children
8	Ashly	Tagalog	Tagalog	29	2.5 years	Dental Nurse	Married with children
9	Jessica	Tagalog	Tagalog	30	2 years	Dental Nurse	Single
10	Rose	Tagalog	Tagalog	45	3 years	Dentist	Married with children
11	Juliana	Tagalog	Tagalog	22	8 months	Dental Nurse	Single
12	Bonnie	Tagalog	Tagalog	33	2 years	Dental Nurse	Married with children
13	Tina	Ilocano	Ilocano	36	2 years	Dental Nurse	Married with children
14	Brittney	Tagalog	Tagalog	26	8 months	Dental Nurse	Single
15	Julia	Tagalog	Tagalog	23	9 months	Dental Nurse	Married
16	Kate	Tagalog	Tagalog	24	7 months	Dental Nurse	Single

Respondents and gatekeepers asserted that the best time to observe patient interactions was at the beginning of patients' visits.

### 3.3.3 Observations

Observations and fieldnotes have helped researchers record specific practices deemed fundamental in the field in general, as well as having significance for my research questions. For example, observations were used to observe newcomers in host cultures, where researchers explored if integration was taking place and whether there was subversion, conformity, alignment or misalignment with local practices and norms. Performativity acknowledges participants' subversion or conformity to local norms in different cultural milieus. This necessitates the use of observations and other qualitative methods in the study context. The dental clinics provided me with two different groups of people interacting together, which is part of the uniqueness of the study (i.e., local Saudis in the heart of the KSA interacting with respondents who are racially, ethnically, religiously and linguistically different). Very little is available in the literature about such respondents in these contexts, which motivated me to combine as many tools as possible to gather as much as data I could.

Observations and fieldnotes are among the commonly used methods in qualitative research (Athens, 2010). They are an essential element of a successful study, helping to produce a clearer picture of the setting for the researcher and readers (Emerson et al., 2005). Conducting observations and compiling researcher fieldnotes was thus one of the early steps that could help to provide thick descriptions of the social phenomenon (Beuving and De Vries, 2015). A researcher begins by making 'descriptive scratch notes', which are often 'raw, indirect impressions that resemble those made by a passing visitor as a travelogue' (ibid, p.85). Goffman (1989, p.130) described observation as being 'close to [participants] while they are responding to what life does to them... and to see things the way they ordinarily are'. During observation, a researcher can formulate and develop their questions within and from the fieldwork. They can then use observations to help guide them during the interviews.

Since this study contends that language has a constitutive role in identity construction, I decided to observe and listen to the language used in practitioner–patient interaction in this context, to see what might be learnt from these brief interactions at the beginning of appointments. This was needed because this is part of what constructs respondents' gender and religious identities while interacting with conservative Muslims. There was the possibility of a creative use of language, which may indicate conforming or subverting, accepting or resisting local norms. The use of observation may add some originality to the study and contribute to the field.

Not only does a researcher need to be prepared for the process and techniques of observation, but they also need to be mentally and physically prepared for the whole social interaction and well rested because 'settings and situations and interaction can be notoriously messy and complicated, with lots of things happening at once; your own role may be less clear-cut and will probably be subject to more frequent negotiation and renegotiation than if you are an "interviewer" and you may involve yourself in your setting for lengthy period of time' (Coffey, 1999, p.1). Coffey also pointed out that fieldwork is emotional, personal and identity work, and an observer should be asking what specific things they need to look at: for example, talk, interactions, appearance, embodiment/physicality, layout and spatial elements, and procedures. They need to be intellectually and practically prepared prior to an observation by linking research questions to their observations in the field, as Coffey further discussed, to make quick and strategic decisions about exactly what to focus on in the social interaction taking place.

During my research in KSA, I had to decide what to focus on in the present moment and what to focus on next. I needed to be able to decide how to respond or behave, what to record next, to whom I should focus my observations, to whom I should speak next, and what was the next step. During social interactions, I was required to capture the actions and reactions in interaction between Catholic practitioners and Sunni locals. I needed to be flexible to a level that allowed me to report the dynamics of the scene in front of me to my readers. I had to write my notes as quickly as possible because memory fades away (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), which is why I chose to write most of my notes in Arabic. The speed and ease I enjoyed while writing my notes in Arabic helped me capture pivotal moments. After conducting the observation and writing my notes, I translated these notes into English before discussing them with my supervisors. The notes were crucial during the interview phase before proceeding to data analysis and other later stages of the study. I also used the English language to write some notes. For example, I deliberately chose to write down the English words, phrases and sentences I heard uttered by respondents. While the respondents used English with their colleagues, they often used Arabic with clients, except for those who could speak English.

An observer must choose the right time, place and space for their observations, which has a clear effect on what they will observe (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The place should be practically and feasibly accessible, which necessitates discussing the observation phase with gatekeepers and participants. Since I am not a dental practitioner and do not have full knowledge of these contexts, I discussed these matters in advance, and it was settled that I would observe 5-10 minutes of the start of consultations and procedures within the dental clinics. Whilst this was not a significant amount of time, I proposed to conduct multiple observations of each participant in different appointments, to assess whether any patterns could be established in their behaviour and language towards local clients and to their colleagues (usually Saudi dentists).

Moreover, I considered my role during the observations (covert, overt, participant as an observer, observer as a participant etc.); I opted for a participant as an observer role, and was an overt observer rather than a covert observer, yet I conducted the observations before the initiation of any patient treatment, meaning that I would be observing the early minutes of client-practitioner

interactions. This helped patients be aware of my presence and my aims and objectives. As part of planning my observations, I needed to stay as neutral as possible while maintaining distance as an observer within a dental setting where patients are consulting with practitioners. It also helped patients decide whether or not to participate in the study if they felt comfortable about my presence. As an observer, I needed to consider my own demeanour, which includes thinking about my presence and what this might bring to the social interaction (e.g., the impact of either being aggressive, reticent, opinionated, or talkative) (Coffey, 1999). It also involves being aware of what impression the observer may create, and to be ready for different people's reactions, responding appropriately on the spot. I will later discuss reflexivity in detail in section 3.5.

Planning my observation to coincide with the beginning of the patient–practitioner interaction was also approved by my supervisors. This timing helped me to avoid observing medical/clinical treatment, which is not my area of interest; instead, my focus was on the dynamics of the natural human social interaction between participants. This may help to generalise the results to other public spaces and workplaces where conservative Sunnis are interacting with other migrants. I aimed to witness, explore and observe interactions at a raw, primitive level. Possible patient–practitioner interactions included but were not limited to conversations, introducing themselves to each other, English greetings, Sunni religious greetings and practitioners' responses, chat, jokes and humour, dentists' comments and suggestions, agreement and disagreement, gestures, dress and body language. All of these aspects motivated me to plan my observations to take place during the initial minutes of the patient–practitioner interaction, and the practitioners confirmed that they preferred this timing. I wrote some of my fieldnotes inside the consulting rooms and then expanded and completed them in the outside waiting area.

#### *3.3.3.1 Gaining Acceptance*

I aimed to work towards being accepted by patients, practitioners, staff and everyone else in the study context. This included identifying my boundaries in order not to cross them in order to build trusting relationships (Mason, 2017). Being a product of the context of the study helped me gain rapport with my fellow Saudis, which helped me to be accepted as a local researcher working with a British university. Almost all locals were eager to help me as someone affiliated with Qassim

University, which is one of the city's prestigious institutions. Through my local knowledge, I was aware of most of the gender, religious and linguistic norms within the study context. I was able to identify who welcomed me and those who did not.

In terms of the respondents, gaining acceptance and establishing rapport was more difficult, as a male Saudi researcher. I had to work hard to try to put the respondents at ease in the study setting; this included elements such as using pseudonyms rather than respondents' real names to ensure anonymity. Given that respondents' true names would not be cited in the study, this may have helped them to participate more freely. Gatekeepers' acceptance and enthusiasm is a major factor in encouraging respondents to participate. In the current study, the gatekeepers held a meeting with the respondents, showing them that participation in my study would facilitate improvements in their workplace institution. Yet again, I was keen to ensure that the participants avoided feeling coerced to participate by impressing upon them that it was their choice and there would be no negative repercussions or judgement if they opted not to participate.

### *3.3.3.2 Taking Fieldnotes in the Observational Setting*

As an observational researcher, it is important to develop listening skills, balancing talking with listening, as well as observing, recording data and making fieldnotes. I attended relevant training sessions at Newcastle University to assist with this (see Appendix 5) and to tailor each of the aforementioned skills to help me capture the necessary data to answer my research questions. While observing every valuable interaction in the setting, I needed to also write my fieldnotes efficiently. Emerson et al. (2001, p.353) pointed out that:

Fieldnotes are: writings produced in or in close proximity to 'the field'. Proximity means that fieldnotes are written more or less contemporaneously with the events, experiences and interactions they describe and recount... Fieldnotes are a form of representation, that is, a way of reducing just-observed events, persons and places to written accounts. And in reducing the welter and confusion of the social world to written words, fieldnotes (re)constitute that world in preserved forms that can be revised, studied and thought about time and time again.

I decided beforehand about the format of the fieldnotes (e.g., whether I would jot them down into a notebook or on scraps of paper, record them electronically using an iPad or iPhone, or paste in other material). I chose to write my fieldnotes in two different notebooks; one was intended to monitor my own thoughts, feelings, beliefs and emotions, while the other was used to observe what was actually happening between respondents, patients and the entire social phenomenon. I separated them in order to be as reflexive as possible and to help improve the validity and reliability of the study. This helped me remain as neutral as possible while also being aware of my own self, keeping track of my own ideas regarding the social interaction.

When examining the investigated problem, the researcher should be open to discoveries. As Givens (2008) argued, the researcher should also be sensitive to everyone and everything. They should employ creativity and intuition to observe every possible and related aspect. Moreover, Givens (2008) stated that a researcher should eliminate or 'relinquish' ideas that are not supported by the collected data. All of these insights should be made while maintaining a balance between observing and note taking.

A major point warranting clarification is the fact that even though the respondents in my study were female, I was not the only male within the clinics as there were other males there (staff members, patients, dentists and workers). This could be counted as a positive, since it may have decreased the effect of a single potential patriarchal figure. Being the second, third or fourth male, and so on, meant that I may have not totally destabilised the observation with my Saudi male presence, whose presence may already have had an effect on the interaction. The time spent on each observation did not exceed 5 minutes at the start of the consultation and hence my presence did not interfere with patients' treatment. I did not interrupt the consultations as I was only writing in my notebook and observing; I did not ask questions or interfere with practitioner-patient interactions. Moreover, I did my best to ensure that practitioners and patients were not inconvenienced.

#### ***3.3.4 Diaries as Written Narratives***

As part of its overall qualitative design, this study employed narrative inquiry, which differs from narrative research. I chose this approach because narratives are just one source of the data (Barkhuizen, 2017). Narrative inquiry is narrower than narrative research; in the latter, large-scale narrative data are collected, discussed, and analysed, whereas narrative inquiry allows researchers to focus more specifically, such as asking respondents to write about a specific event (e.g., a particular career, post-COVID-19, or post-parenthood). Therefore, I asked respondents to write diaries about their journeys to live and work in Saudi Arabia. They were asked to write around 500 words every two weeks for three months, resulting in six diaries each. The written narratives could include their cultural adaptation experiences, from recruitment in their home country to moving to Saudi Arabia.

Recent identity studies within a poststructuralist paradigm (e.g., Baxter, 2012; Blackledge et al., 2008; Block, 2006; De Fina, 2016; Duff, 2015; Norton, 2000) have used narratives to investigate language and identity. Scholars suggest that written and oral narratives are powerful tools for exploring identity (Bakhtin, 1981; De Fina et al., 2006; Wortham, 2001). Block (2009) argued that narratives allow researchers to hear participants' inner voices. While interviews provide oral narratives, written narratives, such as journals and diaries, offer additional data and have become a popular data collection method in applied linguistics (Barkhuizen, 2011, 2020). Narratives help humans make sense of life experiences, preserve memories, and reflect on the past and future (Kramp, 2004).

Atkinson (1992, p.8) defined narrative as narrating 'one's experience of life as a whole, highlighting the most important aspects'. This is relevant for this study, as respondents were asked to reflect on significant thoughts and feelings in their diaries. Botha (2015, p.35) cited Godoson and Sikes (2001) defining narrative as 'an individual's account of his or her lived experience over time... located in the processes and power dynamics of its socio-cultural context'. This is important for understanding performativity, considering the specificity of each context, including socio-cultural factors. One way communicators perform identities is by narrating experiences (De Fina et al., 2006; Georgakopoulou, 2002, 2008), involving not only *what* is narrated, but also *how* it is narrated, and to whom.

Narratives offer a window into participants' lives, providing insights that might not be accessible to observers (Bakhtin, 1981). Identity can be explored through the life stories participants narrate and the way they describe their lives (McAdams et al., 1996; Polkinghorne, 1988; Somers, 1994), especially when focusing on specific contexts or social phenomena. They allow participants to highlight key events related to identity negotiation or other social phenomena (Block, 2007; Menard-Warwick, 2009). Diaries in this study allowed respondents to express themselves without my presence, reducing the potential influence of my own identity, especially when interacting with female respondents (see reflexivity section). The aim was to capture any information not addressed by other data collection methods and to explore how participants categorised themselves and others, aligned or distanced themselves from certain groups, and maintained group membership (De Fina, 2015).

Narratives are particularly useful in poststructuralist research, which views language as constitutive of identity (Bamberg, 1997). Narratives allow researchers to examine how participants define and position themselves and others in their context. Norton (1997, p.410) defined identity as 'how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their responsibilities for the future'. This aligns with Pavlenko's (2001a) study of written narratives from migrants to the USA, where she explored how language learning affected identity. She found that participants negotiated various identities, including religious and gender identities, through their language learning. Pavlenko advocated for written narratives as crucial data for exploring the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of identity. Similarly, Barkhuizen (2020) supported using thematic analysis to explore identities in narratives in applied linguistics research; the things people discuss, and how, can prove incredibly useful insights into how identities may be constructed and performed, even to the narrator themselves.

#### *3.3.4.1 The Use of the English Language in Data Collection*

The Saudi medical sector relies heavily on migrants and hence English is the lingua franca for the main multinational and multiethnic medical and healthcare units and teams. No medical staff (specifically no non-Saudis) are appointed in the Saudi medical context unless they are able to use

English – including dental clinics. More specifically, the Saudi Ministry of Health requires migrants to have received their medical education in English. Hence, I recruited respondents who fulfilled this criterion, which partly justifies the study’s reliance on English in diaries and in all other phases of the study. English is the second language for all respondents, as well as all other practitioners working in the clinics. The use of English could be a strength for the generalisability of the study to other workplaces. It may help other skilled migrants coming to work on Saudi soil, especially those who will be definitely using English in diverse workplaces while dealing with locals. This may also interest readers of this study who are working in similar Sunni contexts scattered across the globe.

### **3.3.5 Focus Groups**

Focus groups are often used in language and identity research. They differ from traditional interviews in that the researcher acts as a facilitator rather than an interviewer (Prior, 2018). The researcher guides the discussion using a set of topics, observing how interactions unfold and how issues are conceptualised, worked out, and negotiated (Mason, 2017, p.72). Participants discuss their viewpoints with each other (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015; Kitzinger, 1995), often producing deeper and richer data (Holliday, 2002). The icebreaking meeting before the focus groups helped introduce key topics (e.g., homesickness, cultural shock), gaining acceptance from respondents before they shared their experiences in the focus groups and individual diaries. This acceptance was vital for capturing their individual voices in the writing.

As Holliday (2002) noted, trust between researcher and informants is crucial. I saw the focus groups as an opportunity to build trust with respondents early in the study, before collecting diaries and conducting observations. This helped me navigate my main challenge—my status as a Saudi male researcher, which is further discussed in section 3.5.

In planning the focus groups, I aimed to use open-ended questions to encourage discussion among participants (Kitzinger, 1995). Focus groups aim to uncover participants’ views through interaction (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). Smaller groups of four to eight participants are preferred, as they encourage more effective participation (Kitzinger, 1995; Liamputtong, 2011). I conducted three focus groups (60 minutes each), with the first two groups consisting of five participants and the

third having six respondents. Smaller groups are easier to recruit and ensure all participants contribute (Kitzinger, 1995; Liamputtong, 2011).

I ensured all participants contributed by taking notes and managing the conversation. Time management was particularly important, as I tend to be talkative, and I needed to avoid allowing one participant to dominate the discussion. Researchers are advised not to over-direct discussions to minimise their impact on what is said. After each contribution, I checked my list of names to ensure all voices were heard.

In these small groups, participants shared their perspectives on living and working in Saudi Arabia, using Arabic and interacting with local patients. I collected basic personal information, including age, origin, ethnicity, language, length of residence in Saudi Arabia, and profession. I asked about their experiences from the moment they accepted work in Saudi Arabia, discussing their first days, weeks, and months. Topics included language learning, using Arabic, their job duties, and their overall experience in Saudi Arabia. We also covered integration, including how they celebrated personal events, practised their religion, and attended religious ceremonies. Gender was another key topic, where I asked about perceptions of gender roles in Saudi Arabia and how cultural norms affected interactions with local patients. Finally, I asked how they maintained connections with their heritage, family, and friends while living in Saudi Arabia.

### ***3.3.6 Follow-up Interviews***

In this study, follow-up interviews were conducted after reviewing respondents' diaries, fieldnotes, and completing observations. I carried out 16 semi-structured interviews, each lasting 40 to 60 minutes. The interviews, held at the end of the data collection phase, were recorded and transcribed for later analysis. These interviews aimed to address the research questions and delve deeper into the themes emerging from the diaries. The earlier observations and fieldnotes helped shape the follow-up interview phase, as detailed in the empirical chapters.

I chose to conduct these interviews at the end for several reasons. Firstly, it allowed me to gather in-depth data by asking detailed questions about respondents' interactions with patients, observed behaviours in the clinical setting, and insights from their diaries. The interviews aimed to enhance

understanding of respondents' identity performance and clarify why they performed their identities in ways that either aligned or misaligned with surrounding norms. This phase also provided a chance to resolve any ambiguities from the diaries, observations, or fieldnotes. Researchers must remain sensitive to alignment and categorisation during these negotiations, as participants adjust their cultural schemata or reject categorisations (Zhu Hua, 2015, p.64). I aimed to understand why respondents engaged in certain practices (e.g., gendered, religious, or cultural) and whether they did so to "accept, avow, display, ignore, reject or disavow memberships" (Zhu Hua, 2015, p.73).

Holloway and Jefferson (2000) argued that each respondent's experience is unique. For example, I noticed that some respondents used a religious linguistic repertoire while others did not. I asked those who did use it why, and those who did not why they chose not to or did not notice it. Interviews often involve asking participants to talk through specific experiences (Mason, 2017, p.72), so I began with an open mind, acknowledging that the respondents were likely to have experiences far removed from my own as a Saudi male. I made it clear that their responses might contradict my personal religious beliefs and cultural norms, and assured them that such contradictions would not be judged or shared. I emphasised that their experiences and beliefs were respected.

As Mason (2017) suggested, interviews should be flexible, allowing for organic shifts in direction based on the conversation. I was prepared to ask probing questions to further the research goals, but also to adjust if an interviewee seemed uncomfortable or diverted from the topic. I focused on identifying patterns or unique responses, as each participant's experience was distinct. This flexibility ensured the interviews remained focused on the study's objectives.

Conducting interviews at the end also allowed me to build rapport with participants through previous observations. This helped mitigate potential bias from my identity as a Saudi male researcher, enabling respondents to become more comfortable with me before discussing personal experiences. Building trust was key to encouraging open and honest responses.

Follow-up interviews also offered an opportunity to refine my interviewing skills (Mason, 2017). I focused on being a good listener, maintaining a balance between talking and listening, and

ensuring that I did not steer the conversation away from the study's objectives. I practiced these skills with peers before conducting the interviews, which helped me become more effective.

Ethical considerations were also central to the interview process. I ensured that participants understood their right to refuse to answer any question without consequence. They were given adequate time to reflect and respond thoughtfully, and I reassured them that their experiences would be respected without judgment. As Mason (2017) recommended, the interviewer must be attuned to both verbal and non-verbal cues, adjusting their approach accordingly. This helped ensure that I remained sensitive to any shifts in mood or response during the interviews.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

This study uses Goffman's (1959) concept of performativity to explore identity performances through the analysis of language (oral and written narratives). By examining how respondents perform their identities, the study aims to show how they construct and present themselves within this context. Unlike studies in fields like gender studies, which may focus on observable or physical embodiments, this research centres on language and how it reflects identity. Although multiple data collection methods are used, this does not set the study apart from others in language and identity research, which similarly rely on participants' narratives to explore the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of identity. I will first discuss triangulation of the data, followed by an explanation of thematic analysis and its theoretical foundations.

#### ***3.4.1 Triangulating the Data***

Campbell and Fiske (1959) and Webb (1966) were among the first to advocate triangulation in qualitative research, a practice continued by scholars such as Berg (1995) and Glesne (2006). Triangulation is seen as good practice in qualitative methods (Berg, 1995; Glesne, 2006), as no single method can fully capture the complexities of empirical data. Schuh (2009) argued that triangulation helps researchers use multiple data sources within one study. Cohen and Manion (2000, p.23) described it as an attempt to map human behaviour from more than one standpoint,

and Dezin (1978) defined triangulation as mixing multiple methods of data collection, which is useful when one method reveals only part of the phenomenon.

Dezin (1978) identified several types of triangulation, including investigator triangulation (multiple researchers or observers), theoretical triangulation (testing multiple theories), methodological triangulation (using multiple research methods), and respondent triangulation (gathering data from different respondents). This study employed methodological triangulation (multiple data collection methods) and respondent triangulation (16 participants). Other types of triangulation discussed by scholars such as Hammersley (2004) include validity checking (using multiple methods, like interviews and observation, to answer a single question), indefinite triangulation (returning to respondents to discuss observations, similar to member checking), triangulation for complementary information, and epistemological triangulation (combining different epistemologies).

The benefits of triangulation in qualitative research include increased confidence in the data, innovation, improved validity, and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, as noted by Dezin (1978) and Schuh (2009). Triangulation also challenges existing theories and allows for integrating new ones, offering a clearer understanding of the research subject (Thurmond, 2001). In this study, triangulation helped provide richer data, reduce subjectivity, and address my role as a Saudi male researcher collecting and analysing data. By diversifying methods, I was able to mitigate my own biases and subjectivity. Additionally, since the interaction under investigation is not well understood, triangulation allowed for a broader exploration of the data, revealing insights that may not have been captured by one method alone. However, triangulation is not without drawbacks, the most significant of which is its time-consuming nature (Thurmond, 2001). Yet this was deemed a small price to pay for the overwhelming benefits it engendered.

#### ***3.4.2 Thematic Analysis***

Qualitative data analysis involves organising data into categories, descriptive units, and patterns, while identifying relationships among them (Brewer, 2000). I chose Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of thematic analysis, which suited the multiple data collection methods used. This approach allowed for a comparative exploration of all the data using an established scholarly tool.

Barkhuizen (2020) supported thematic analysis for qualitative data involving narratives, noting that identities can be explored through oral or written narratives. Applying this method to the empirical data helped me identify key themes from the respondents' inner voices, centred around three main themes: religion, gender, and language. While there was significant overlap, these themes revealed dominant trajectories in the respondents' identity negotiations (constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing), as shown in the empirical chapters.

The data analysis process resembled piecing together a jigsaw puzzle. Before discussing the thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), I will briefly touch on its origins in Kaplan's (1973) cumulative analysis and pattern explanation, as well as in grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

#### *3.4.2.1 Cumulative Analysis and Pattern Explanation (Kaplan, 2017)*

Kaplan (2017) discussed what he termed cumulative analysis and pattern explanation, which are used to analyse qualitative data. An explanation, as Kaplan (2017, p.329) argued, is 'often contrasted with description, as telling us, not merely what happens, but why'. In order to be able to explain any given data, an analyst needs to be familiar with the data and the whole explored phenomenon. One way to gain familiarity with qualitative data is reading it extensively. After extensive reading, the analyst can reach a level of familiarity required to explain the data. Familiarity 'helps us achieve explanation, but it does not necessarily help us have one', as Kaplan (2017, p.331) argued. Kaplan (2017, p.332) went on to advise analysts to use his model in the following extract:

The pattern model may more easily fit explanations in early stages of inquiry, and the deductive mode; explanations in later stages.

This quotation shows that before we can deduce something from the data, we must finish explaining it, which means that the latter is a first stage of analysis while the former is a second stage. The above quotation indicates an order of the analysis stages in Kaplan's model. I will show later in this chapter how this is similar to what the thematic model (Braun and Clarke, 2006) suggests. More specifically, Braun and Clarke (2006) stressed familiarity at the beginning of their

model. Describing the pattern model, Kaplan (2017, p.333) argued: ‘Something is explained when it is so related to a set of other elements that together they constitute a unified system’; this model resembles Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis. He continued by noting that ‘we understand something by identifying it as a specific part in an organized whole’. Kaplan referred to any recurrent patterns as cognitive patterns in which ‘relationships are fundamental, as well as some notion of closure: wholeness, unity, or integration’ (2017, p.333). In order for the researcher to conduct analysis using Kaplan’s tool, the analyst needs to ‘discover interconnections’ (p.334) in the first place. Kaplan (2017, p.334). continued:

For the pattern model, objectivity consists essentially in this, that the pattern can be indefinitely filled in and extended: as we obtain more and more knowledge it continues to fall into place in this pattern, and the pattern itself has a place in a larger whole.

The above quotation shows that Kaplan’s model is dynamic by welcoming any addition that expands the patterns found as we analyse more data. As Kaplan (2017) stated, when the analysis finds a pattern that does not fit with any pre-existing pattern, s/he needs to create a new pattern in the form of a cognitive map. In this map, everything should make sense in relation to everything else; when it does not, the map needs to re-drawn or extended. Kaplan (2017, p.336) continued:

Every explanatory pattern is a fragmentary map of a limited territory; we aim to fill in details, and to fit it together with other fragments. As we pursue these aims, moving always into new territories, we subject the map to continuous test.

Kaplan thus advised analysts to be dynamic by being able to fit fragments together, urging them to be constantly vigilant for the evolution of the data. After shedding some light on Kaplan’s work, I will next discuss grounded theory before introducing thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), which is the method I used to analyse my data.

#### *3.4.2.2 Grounded Theory*

As Braun and Clark (2006) argued, thematic analysis has its origins in grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Grounded theory is used in qualitative studies to develop a theory that is grounded in the data. The objective of applying grounded theory is to help researchers construct theory from data. It involves building a theory or a hypothesis by collecting and analysing the data. This is done through applying inductive reasoning or an inductive approach. In this approach, grounded theory does not test any existing hypothesis or theory; instead, it helps researchers in building a theory from data. It helps researchers who do not want to include any presumptions in their studies. This means that grounded theory does not give researchers a chance to test a hypothesis. Instead, the analyst is required to inductively analyse the data, meaning that the analysis is built from the ground up rather than being imposed from above. This can lead to the discovery of a theory from the bottom up, building generalizations and inferences from the data. Grounded theory has been used in qualitative studies (Charmaz and Henwood, 2007; Galvin, 2005; Hallberg, 2006; Mills, Bonner and Francis, 2006; Torres and Hernandez, 2007; Whiting, 2008). Scholars have also used grounded theory to investigate identities (Galvin, 2005; Lambert, 2013; Roderick, 2010; Torres and Hernandez, 2007).

Applying grounded theory includes writing initial notes and developing codes and categories. The researcher tries to excavate the data by searching for patterns, similarities and variations. The act of searching for such patterns in grounded theory explains why it has been argued that thematic analysis has its origins in grounded theory (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This step (i.e., searching for patterns) as well as the coding process in grounded theory are designed to help analysts identify and unpack similarities and differences, as well as discrepancies or paradoxes in collected data while constructing the theory. Having discussed thematic analysis and pattern analysis, I will next discuss thematic analysis, the method used to analyse my data.

#### *3.4.2.3 Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)*

Thematic analysis is a way of generating patterns of meaning from qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is defined as ‘a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It organizes and describes your data in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this, and it interprets various aspects of the research topic’ (Braun

and Clarke, 2006, p.79). They were motivated to produce their model by their view that thematic analysis was ‘a poorly demarcated, rarely acknowledged, yet widely used’ method in qualitative research (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.77). However, this is incorrect, since Kaplan (2017) provided a clear road map to do so in qualitative research. Nonetheless, other scholars welcomed the renewed focus, stating that thematic analysis ‘has recently been recognized as a method in its own right’ (Joffe, 2012, p.210).<sup>1</sup> Next I will discuss the six phases of thematic analysis according to the model proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Table 7 shows that thematic analysis consists of six phases, which are discussed individually in relation to Braun and Clarke’s (2006) model.

*Table 7*  
*Phases of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.87)*

Phase	Description
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	

<sup>1</sup> The success of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) model resulted in its widespread use in qualitative research; it has now been cited almost 130,000 times according to Google Scholar.

6. Producing the report:	<p>Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells, generating names for each theme.</p> <p>The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid and compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research questions and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.</p>
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In order to code raw data, the researcher starts with extensive reading of all the collected data. This helps them to become more familiar with the collected data before starting the thematic analysis.

*Phase 1: Familiarizing yourself with your data*

Thematic analysis begins with familiarisation, a critical step in most qualitative methods. Researchers must immerse themselves in the data through extensive reading to understand its content, meaning, and context. This active engagement allows researchers to grasp not only what the data contains but also why it is presented in particular ways. Transcribing the data, as in the present study, can enhance this process. Braun and Clarke (2006) highlighted that researchers who collect and transcribe their own data gain a deeper understanding compared to those who delegate these tasks.

Initial readings may feel overwhelming, particularly if the data appears unhelpful or lacks expected findings (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Multiple readings are essential to overcome this challenge. By the end of this phase, researchers should have critically and analytically engaged with the data, preparing them for the next step: reflection and generating codes.

Braun and Clarke (1996) cautioned against forming themes prematurely during this phase. Instead, the focus should remain on understanding the data. Although researchers may note potential ideas

for codes or themes, these should be explored in Phase 2. Initial impressions often reflect surface-level insights, so coding should only begin after careful reflection (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

#### *Phase 2: Generating initial codes*

This phase involves systematically identifying meaningful elements in the data, referred to as "codes." Braun and Clarke (2006, p.88) defined codes as features of the data that are of interest to the study. Drawing from Boyatzis (1998, p.62), codes represent the smallest meaningful segments of raw data. Generating codes is a fluid, iterative process. Codes can evolve as the analysis progresses, reflecting the dynamic nature of Braun and Clarke's model. Analysts are encouraged to revisit and refine code lists, ensuring all relevant data is organised into coherent groups (Tuckett, 2005). Codes serve as building blocks for broader themes, developed in Phase 3. Braun and Clarke (2006, p.89) advised using tools such as highlighters, coloured pens, or notes to identify patterns. Researchers should code inclusively, capturing data that may initially seem unrelated to their questions. Unexpected or seemingly irrelevant data could later prove significant as themes develop.

#### *Phase 3: Searching for themes*

Once coding is complete, researchers identify and organise related codes into themes. This phase involves clustering similar codes and reviewing coded data within each cluster to ensure coherence (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.89). Techniques such as mind maps or tables can help visualise connections between codes and themes.

Themes are not fixed; codes that initially seem unrelated might develop into important sub-themes or even primary themes later in the analysis. Negative or contradictory data should not be dismissed, as it can offer valuable insights. By the end of this phase, researchers should have a preliminary understanding of the significance of each candidate theme.

#### *Phase 4: Reviewing themes*

This phase focuses on refining themes to ensure they accurately represent the data. Researchers must assess whether themes are coherent, relevant, and distinct. Irrelevant or overlapping themes may be revised or removed, while some themes might need further division into sub-themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.91). Analysts should critically evaluate the quality and boundaries of each theme before finalising them.

#### *Phase 5: Defining and naming themes*

With themes finalised, researchers define and name them to capture their essence. This involves identifying what each theme represents and how it relates to the broader analysis. Theme names should be concise and engaging, giving readers a clear sense of their focus (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.93).

#### *Phase 6: Producing the report*

The final phase involves compiling a report that convincingly demonstrates the validity of the analysis. The report should include clear, coherent, and engaging narratives supported by vivid data extracts (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.93). Researchers must choose examples that illustrate their themes effectively, providing a compelling account of the data.

### **3.5 Reflexivity and Trustworthiness**

This section discusses reflexivity and trustworthiness, followed by an exploration of how I reflexively managed my identity as a researcher, focusing on two key aspects: a) my identity as a Saudi male; and b) my religious identity as a practising Sunni Muslim.

Qualitative research aims to examine and understand social phenomena that cannot be fully captured using quantitative methods. While qualitative approaches allow for the collection of rich, detailed data, they also introduce the risk of subjectivity. Researchers play a central role in data collection and analysis, and their direct interaction with participants can influence outcomes. This

poses challenges in maintaining objectivity, as results may be shaped by personal bias or perspectives. Therefore, researchers must strive to minimise bias throughout the research process.

In quantitative research, procedures are designed to mitigate bias and misinterpretation. In qualitative research, however, achieving neutrality requires a focus on reflexivity. Reflexivity involves explicit self-evaluation, as Packer (2011) describes, and refers to the researcher's critical reflection on their own role in the research process. Clancy (2013, p.13) defined reflexivity as the "proactive, explicit evaluation of the self," while Gilbert and Sliep (2009) noted its role in understanding how beliefs and actions are formed. Reflexivity entails "thinking about what you are thinking about" when investigating a problem (Takhar and Chitakunye, 2012, p.20). This reflective practice enhances researchers' awareness of their role and its impact on the study (Gobo, 2008).

Takhar and Chitakunye stressed that a strong understanding of reflexivity is vital for successful research. Building trust with respondents is essential, and reflexivity helps distinguish participants' voices from the researcher's own. In this study, I carefully monitored the influence of my Islamic and male identity, particularly given the differing values, norms, and beliefs of the respondents. Maintaining this awareness was critical to preventing bias in data collection and analysis.

Shaw (2010, p.47) argued that reflexive researchers must foster personal awareness throughout the research process. This is an interactive and ongoing task that spans the entirety of the study. In my case, recognising and acknowledging my biases and beliefs was the first step in mitigating their potential influence. Carney (1990) recommended the use of reflexive journals, which I found invaluable during data collection and analysis. This practice supported greater authenticity and helped me focus on participants' voices rather than my own. To further minimise bias, I relied on diaries instead of structured interviews to reduce the potential influence of my presence and control over respondents' answers.

Mason (2017) emphasised the importance of monitoring one's thinking throughout the study. Researchers must remain mindful of how their beliefs may shape research design and questions. This reflexive approach ensures participants' perspectives are interpreted accurately. Reflexive

qualitative researchers are prepared to navigate these challenges, avoiding the mistake of overemphasising their own experiences and emotions, as cautioned by Gobo (2008).

Given my position as a male Muslim raised in the context of this study, I constantly questioned my approach, asking whether my findings reflected the respondents' experiences or my own perspectives. This reflexive process included maintaining diaries, engaging in self-reflection, and seeking feedback from supervisors and peers. These practices helped enhance the study's validity and reliability while preventing me from imposing personal judgments on the social phenomena under investigation (Gobo, 2008; Holliday, 2002; Packer, 2011).

To further elaborate on my reflexivity, the following sections will discuss: a) my Saudi male identity and b) my religious identity as a practising Sunni Muslim.

### ***3.5.1 Reflexivity and the Choice of Thematic Analysis: A Sunni Saudi Male Exploring his Context***

Selecting thematic analysis allowed me to reflexively address my subjectivity as a Sunni Saudi male researcher within my natural context. To ensure the analysis was data-driven, I avoided designing the study around a hypothesis. This choice enabled me to confront my beliefs, ideologies, norms, and practices (e.g., gender, religious, linguistic, cultural), as well as my potential biases, pride, and prejudices. Thematic analysis supported the inductive approach of the study, allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than being imposed by pre-existing theoretical frameworks or researcher categories.

As Braun and Clarke (2006, p.83) describe, the inductive nature of thematic analysis involves 'a process of coding the data without trying to fit into a pre-existing coding frame, or a researcher's analytic preconceptions. In this sense, this form of thematic analysis is data driven.' Thematic analysis provided a valuable framework for mitigating bias, helping me distance myself from the data during analysis. I regularly reflected on how my identity—specifically my religious identity as a Sunni Muslim and my gender identity as a Saudi male—might influence the study. Acknowledging these aspects of my identity was critical to minimising their potential to compromise the results. Conducting a reflexive study was not only a professional objective but

also aligned with my personal and religious aspirations, with the hope of eventually publishing the findings as a book.

### ***3.5.2 A Researcher who Happens to be a Sunni Saudi Male***

Acknowledging my identity was the first step towards addressing its implications for the study. To facilitate this process, I kept two notebooks: one for fieldnotes and another as a personal journal to document my feelings, beliefs, and reflections, including those related to my gendered and religious identity.

In my personal notebook, I began by reflecting on my positioning as a Sunni Saudi male towards a) Christians and b) non-Mahram women (women outside my immediate family). According to my Islamic faith, these women are categorised as non-Mahram, meaning marriage to them is not prohibited. This understanding informed how I positioned them both religiously and socially. Documenting these reflections helped me monitor and critically assess my own biases from the outset of data collection.

I also examined Sunni gendered practices, particularly regarding interactions between men and women outside their families. For example, Sunni women are advised to avoid speaking publicly unless necessary and to respond quietly when addressed. Men and women are expected to dress and behave modestly. These norms from my hometown highlighted differences between local practices and those of the Catholic respondents. Recording these reflections enabled me to remain conscious that what was normative for me might not align with the norms of my participants. This awareness aligned with the study's paradigm, which views identities as socially constructed through interaction.

Throughout the study, I documented my personal reflections on these differences and their implications in my personal notebook. This practice was vital for maintaining vigilance and ensuring the authenticity of my interpretations. The next section discusses my appearance while conducting the study.

#### ***3.5.2.1 Managing my Appearance as a Saudi Male during Data Collection***

Reflexivity involves introspection and an awareness of the researcher's relationship with participants, data, and the studied phenomenon (Ryan, 2005). Researchers must continuously monitor their actions throughout the study. From the literature, I recognised that observation inherently influences those being observed (Kaplan, 2017, p.136). Acknowledging this and discussing it with participants enhanced both their awareness and my own during the study.

To address my gender identity as a Saudi male observing female migrants, I sought to minimise the potential influence of my appearance. Avoiding the traditional Saudi male dress—the Thawb (ankle-length robe) and Shomagh (headscarf)—was an intentional effort to prevent reinforcing a patriarchal image and highlighting a gender power imbalance. Initially, I planned to wear a neutral "medical uniform" (e.g., scrubs) during observations in the clinic to reduce these influences. However, this was not permitted by Saudi health authorities, as I was neither a healthcare professional nor a student, and it risked creating a misleading impression.

Instead, I alternated between wearing formal Saudi attire and Western sportswear. This reflexive strategy helped me manage my identity as a Saudi male collecting data in my home context. Respondents occasionally commented on my clothing, which opened discussions about my experiences living abroad and marked me as someone distinct from typical locals. I believe this differentiation reinforced my identity as a researcher rather than a conventional member of the local community, creating a more neutral rapport with participants.

#### *3.5.2.2 Personal Experience as a Migrant in the UK and the USA*

As part of addressing my identity as a Saudi male, I discussed my nine years of study in the USA and UK with participants. Sharing how these experiences broadened my understanding of different belief systems and gender norms helped contextualise my approach to interacting with women from various backgrounds. My initial exposure to these differences occurred during my master's studies in the USA, and this perspective further developed during my time in the UK.

This personal journey allowed me to explain my position as a researcher, including the fact that my thesis is being supervised at one of the world's top 150 universities and will be accessible to non-Saudi and non-Muslim readers. This transparency helped to establish trust and convey the global relevance of my work.

### ***3.5.3 A Sunni Muslim Researcher***

Having discussed previous concerns, I will now extend the discussion to explore aspects of my religious identity as a Sunni Muslim and how this potentially threatened to affect the study. I will also outline how I recognised and addressed these issues. Before embarking on this research, I acknowledged that exploring migrants in my hometown could expose me to criticism, mockery, or, to a lesser extent, praise of Saudi practices, including Sunni religious and gender norms. I embraced this possibility even before applying for a Ph.D. degree, recognising that such feedback was inevitable in the heart of Saudi Arabia.

As the study progressed, I realised that evidence of respondents conforming to or subverting local practices increased the originality and contribution of my work. This awareness allowed me to welcome such findings rather than avoid them. My commitment to producing a reflexive and transparent account for future migrants further helped me manage the interplay of my identity as a practising Sunni Muslim and a proud Saudi conducting this research.

I openly acknowledged my background to respondents, explaining that the study was not solely for a Saudi or Muslim audience. Respondents were informed that I was conducting the research as a Ph.D. candidate at Newcastle University, supervised by British academics, with the aim of publishing findings accessible to a global audience. This transparency reinforced that my purpose was to document their experiences without bias or censorship.

I also shared how my time in the Anglophone world shaped my understanding of different faiths. During my nine years in the UK and USA, I interacted with people of diverse beliefs, including Christians, Jews, Hindus, and Atheists. I recounted attending churches, engaging with priests, and reading the Bible and Torah, which, as a Sunni Muslim, I revere alongside the Quran. These

experiences helped me appreciate the shared humanity of people of different faiths and cultural backgrounds. Respondents admired this openness, often asking me about life in the West and how it shaped my identity as a Sunni Muslim.

To address the intersection of my faith with the data, I used a personal notebook to reflect on my religious beliefs and linguistic practices. For instance, I recorded my frequent use of religious phrases such as *Insha Allah* (God willing) and *Alhumdu lil Allah* (thank God). This self-monitoring was crucial when similar phrases were used by Catholic practitioners, prompting me to observe respondents' reactions and avoid overlooking these moments. This practice also alerted me to the potential influence of religious language on identity performance within medical contexts.

These observations introduced unexpected complexity to the study. I had not anticipated the prominence of religious linguistic repertoires in healthcare settings or their potential impact on identity performances. Recognising this, I added a deeper layer of analysis and incorporated literature on the relationship between performativity and religion into the study.

#### *3.5.3.1 Negotiating Power Relations*

I previously discussed efforts to minimise power imbalances between myself and participants. To build trust and rapport, I took actions such as an icebreaker meeting, remaining neutral and friendly throughout the study, reassuring participants about their rights, and altering my dress style to appear less patriarchal. However, power imbalances inevitably influenced the study. One issue was the gatekeeper's support for the study, which may have led participants to feel obligated to join, fearing repercussions under the Kafala system that ties their status to employment. Despite my efforts to assure them that participation was voluntary, it is likely some still felt pressured.

Participants were compensated for their time, which could have been seen as coercive. While I aimed to distribute payment at the beginning to avoid any sense of obligation, participants may have still felt 'contracted' to stay in the study due to the exchange of money. I reiterated their right to withdraw without consequence, but the financial element might have led some to feel they had to remain positive about their experiences in Saudi Arabia to ensure continued payment.

In addition to modifying my dress, I also adjusted my language and body language to maintain professionalism while being friendly. I sought to avoid being overfamiliar, which could have seemed suspicious or alienating. However, in sharing my experiences abroad, I may have inadvertently appeared intimidating. Some participants grew quiet upon seeing my university IDs, possibly in awe of my credentials or travel opportunities. I was careful to balance openness and professionalism, as different participants responded differently to my actions and words. I avoided physical contact, maintained eye contact, and oriented my body towards them, which I believed was customary.

Navigating the balance between appearing relatable, as a globe-trotting individual, and maintaining professionalism, as a conservative Sunni Saudi male, required constant self-awareness and reflection throughout data collection and analysis. My goal was to empower participants by expressing gratitude for their contributions while remaining neutral and professional. Despite my efforts to address power imbalances, it is likely some participants still felt them due to my position. These challenges highlight the importance of reflexivity regarding positionality before, during, and after research, not just in data collection but throughout all stages of interaction with participants (Shaw et al., 2020).

### **3.6. Concluding Thoughts Surrounding Reflexivity**

Acknowledging the concerns previously discussed helped me clarify to respondents that I was aware of my flaws and striving to be as reflexive as possible. This also aligned with one of my key personal objectives: to help others live better lives. I believe this study can benefit migrants, healthcare practitioners, gatekeepers, business owners, decision makers, governments, and health institutions, both in this context and in similar ones across the Sunni world. This motivation led me to reflexively record and share respondents' experiences to provide clarity on the context for my readers.

By recognising these concerns, I also mitigated a potential clash between my identity and that of the respondents. I believe that further studies in similar contexts (e.g., conservative Jewish and

Christian settings, like Israel or certain towns in the US and Australia) are needed to foster better understanding among people. Huntington (1996) argued that religious identity and culture are key sources of conflict, but I feel he overlooked how religion is often manipulated by political actors to perpetuate conflicts. Unlike Huntington's (1996) view, I believe most such clashes are driven by neoliberal and geopolitical motives for control over global resources.

Through this study, I aim to achieve my second personal objective: contributing to human knowledge by understanding how identities are negotiated. This reflexive approach could also assist those working in similar conservative Sunni contexts worldwide. Given the scarcity of studies in such settings, this research helps fulfil my goal of conducting an original academic study that contributes to the field and aids fellow academics. Being recognised as a researcher in academia is a highly valued objective for me.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I explained why I chose to conduct a qualitative, triangulated study in order to meet my research objectives. I shed light on the research design, participants and data collection procedures. Then I provided details of the data analysis. Following this, I discussed how thematic analysis helped me improve the reflexivity of the study. I then reflected on issues and concerns linked with reflexivity and my own identity as a Sunni Saudi male. The next chapter will introduce the first empirical chapter in this thesis.

## Chapter Four: Gender Identity after Migration

### 4.1 Introduction

Thematic analysis has shown four prevailing themes in the collected data; gender, religion, socioeconomic factors, and language. I chose to discuss each one of these three themes in a separate chapter. I begin by discussing gender (the first theme), followed by religion in chapter Five and socioeconomic factors impacting identity post-migration in chapter Six. Chapter Seven then picks up on some issues surrounding language and identity formation. The present chapter, then, focuses on gender, one of the main themes found in the data. Within the discussion, I shed light on how the respondents performed their gender identity in this conservative Saudi context, and where respondents differed regarding the local gendered practices that were noticed and observed by the respondents after migration.

The observed gendered practices were classified into two subthemes: macro-level and micro-level gendered practices. The macro-level gendered practices include the most visible/salient gendered practices noticed by the respondents in the conservative context of the study, such as dress code, segregation and segregated institutions. Less salient gendered practices, classified as micro-level gendered practices, refer to what the respondents noticed about how local women perform their gender identities in this conservative context. For example, the respondents noticed that local women lower their voices when speaking, speaking more quietly and not drawing attention to themselves vocally. Some respondents chose to subvert (i.e., resist) local gendered practices (i.e., by ignoring or actively rebelling against these norms) when they were perceived to clash with the respondents' gender identities, whereas other respondents chose to conform (i.e., adapt) to local gendered practices (e.g., by lowering their voices within their workplaces, something that was briefly observed amongst participants and discussed by some in their interviews), leading to considerable individual variation among them.

This chapter also highlights the ways in which the front stage and backstage 'self' or gender identity is presented by participants in different contexts, including work and other social situations. The way many participants deliberately flouted local gender norms, including dress and

behaviour, was discussed with respect to various Filipino values and virtues, including *kapwa* (a sense of shared self with other women), *lakas-ng-loob* (feeling and acting brave or with courage), *kusang-loob* (voluntary acts, acting out of one's free will, in this case to attempt to make a change) and being a female *Bayani* (or hero). Interestingly, there was a feminist thread running through these virtues that inspired or motivated participants to act or demonstrate their perception of equality to Saudi women (and men); however, this did not extend to their performances inside the workplace, where this was not perceived to be appropriate, as shall be seen. Finally, the gender role shifts that occurred in many of the participants' families (those who travelled to KSA with their spouse and/or children) and the maternal identity of some of the participants is explored as another means of better understanding how they performed their gender identity in this context.

#### **4.2 Macro-level Local Gendered Practices Post-Migration: Dress and Segregation**

The empirical data shows that the respondents noticed and reported gendered aspects found in the context. Diary entries in the early days and weeks post-migration revealed that the respondents witnessed local gendered practices, and the thematic analysis showed that the respondents used gendered practices to indicate the chasm between their home culture and their experiences in the post-migration context.

Section 4.2.1 reveals the visible/salient gendered practice of dress, noticed by the respondents, before section 4.2.2 explores their observations surrounding segregation.

##### **4.2.1 Dress**

The thematic analysis shows that the most visible/salient macro-level gendered practice in the data is gendered dress code, to which they had different responses, and varied levels of adherence to front and backstage. As Kate expounded in her diary:

When the plane landed at the airport in Saudi. It was mixed emotions. I was both anxious and excited to work there and see what is Saudi Arabia. Actually this is my first time to be there. I really wanted to visit or live in another country. I want to see

other countries. I want to be able to immerse and blend in and see other cultures, tradition and beliefs....it was so awkward for me that all girls were wearing abaya and hijab. I remember wondering how it feels like wearing a dress code which is loose and flowy with the face cover.

(Kate's 1<sup>st</sup> diary)

As shown above, Kate noticed the different gender dress code the moment she landed at the airport. Her early observations in her diaries tended to revolve around gendered practices in KSA; this is present in all other diaries, where participants wrote similar entries. These observations were the first to be made, chronologically speaking, in the diaries, as respondents clearly noticed the visible demarcation of women, given local women were wearing the hijab and abaya. These observations appeared to be attempts to understand how gender identities were performed in the host culture by local women, and how their own gender identities might be impacted as a result.

In the context of the study, part of the official female medical uniform is a hijab or scarf. All of the respondents wore this clothing while working in the two clinics. They were not required to wear it outside their workplace. The respondents were notified about this requirement before coming to the KSA and employment agents in the Philippines discussed it with them. Their employment contracts stated that this is the norm in the clinics at which they accepted job offers. Thus, the respondents viewed the hijab as part of their professional practice and tended to view this part of their medical uniform as helpful given their employment in a conservative context. Whilst the gendered practice of covering women's hair can be found in the Bible (there are multiple verses in the Bible asking women to cover their hair), the respondents did not make any references to the Bible when it came to gendered dress. However, some respondents did state that covering the hair is a medical practice in some non-Muslim countries in certain hospital jobs (for example, for some female medical practitioners in the USA and the UK, wearing a hair covering is part of the medical uniform, unlike for their male co-workers). This could be a way of participants attempting to normalise the requirement for hair covering by acknowledging its existence in non-Muslim, Western countries, perhaps rendering it a more acceptable practice to incorporate into their daily working lives in KSA.

The dress code of KSA was discussed by respondents in different ways; some elaborated on their view of the medical uniform adopted, whereas others appeared to discuss disliking dark colors worn by local women. Others expressed dislike for modest dress worn by local women more generally. Interestingly, all respondents reported a feeling of dislike when inside the clinic because of the medical uniform/dress they are required to wear, compared to outside the clinics where they are not required to wear the medical uniform. Some claimed that the medical uniform inside the clinic restricted them from expressing themselves as different women (i.e., Filipino women), which means they did not feel patients differentiated them from other women such as other Muslim female co-workers (Saudi, Syrians, Egyptian and Sudanese). They therefore felt that the medical uniform does not give them the freedom to dress how they want and therefore express their gender identity. Respondents reported that dressing as Filipino women outside the clinics, both in other social (front stage) situations and at home (backstage self), is the point where they can start to distinguish themselves from other women, affording them a feeling of freedom (dress wise). They asserted that they have a lot more freedom in the way they dress outside of the clinic, unlike inside the clinic where they feel more restricted and painted as being similar to all other women (including Muslim women). For example, Jackie stated:

Outside the clinic you see, out there I can be myself more and I dress what I want...  
for example, I don't like the medical uniform because it restricts us women from  
dressing what we want.

Here, Jackie stated that she can 'be herself more' when not wearing medical uniform, which perhaps takes away a sense of individuality, as well as counters known gender norms through the requirement to have her hair covered. Perhaps dress for this participant is a means by which she is able to more fully express her gender identity (without the constraining medical uniform). Respondents also reported that they felt different after changing out of the medical uniform backstage:

Jackie: I think I feel I am back to normal after work when I am home.

Researcher: how?

Jackie: I don't like to medical uniform.

The sense that Jackie feels 'back to normal' suggests she feels somewhat 'abnormal' in her medical uniform, as though her true self is not (re)presented, and she can more 'relax' once she has changed out of this back home.

Another disliked local gender norm is wearing the dark colours (e.g., black and dark brown) that are generally worn by local women. The data showed a tendency to want to be different to local women by wearing bright colours outside the clinic, to best convey their gendered identity to others. As Jessica stated:

I can tell you when I am at home looking at my dresses, and thinking about which to chose?...I ask myself which does better represent me? Which one represent the real me? So I always chose what I like to wear, things I like when I have guests in my flat...So, I chose to wear bright colours always, I don't like black colour here... You know black Hijab Abaya, you know, when I am at home getting dressed. I ask myself does this represent me as a Filipina? Then I find myself choosing bright colours before going out... so I wear something that represent me and my identity, I don't like to be like others here.

Respondents such as Jessica chose to challenge the gender norms in public, outside of the workplace at least, by wearing bright colours that they feel represent their 'true' identity. This presentation of self feels linked to Jessica's identity as a Filipino woman, thus her gender and national identity appear intertwined. She not only wants to represent her culture, but wants to convey the cultural norms surrounding 'woman' that exist back home, which are starkly different to that of Saudi women, who wear dark colours and do not appear to want to attract attention to themselves. Bright colours may serve the opposite purpose, however.

Clothing has long been understood as a means by which identity and meaning can be conveyed to a viewer (Barnard, 2002), generating what DeCoursey (2017) calls a 'semiotic sparkle' (p. 16) of exciting social and aesthetic meanings. Clothing details, including colour choice, can convey class, gender, material and religious subcultures (Barnard, 2002), 'characterise the wearer's relationship

to established codes of behaviour, and exhibit ideological stance (Crane, 2000)' (DeCoursey, 2017, p. 16). Thus, clothes are inherently linked to the presentation of identity: 'Visual cues and codes provide ideals for how people perceive themselves ... Many of these codes consolidate the bedrock of culture they live in' (Morris, 2006, p. 13, cited in DeCoursey, 2017, p. 16).

Whilst Western interpretations tend to perceive the abaya as symbolising subjugation (Ajrouch, 2007), societal exclusion (Meer, Dwyer and Modood, 2010) and oppression (Maira, 2009), Islamic discourse tends to position women's dress as a necessary symbol of modesty (El-Guindi, 1999). In the Qur'an, demands for modesty require that women wear loose, opaque clothing that covers the entire body to hide its outline and inhibit any expression of sexuality. Whilst various designs exist, and more flamboyant, colourful abayas are increasingly being introduced in recent years in KSA (DeCoursey, 2017), most are predominantly black, often as a symbol of spiritual purity or as a means of not attracting attention to oneself – a cornerstone of modesty.

Modesty is defined as either a) freedom from vanity or conceit; or b) propriety in dress, speech or conduct (the Merriam-Webster dictionary, 2004). The following verse from the Qur'an is often quoted to promote female modesty:

And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their (sexual) modesty; and that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty save to their husbands, or their fathers or their husbands' fathers, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical desire, or small children who have no sense of sex; and that they should not stamp their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O believers! Turn all together towards Allah, that you may attain bliss. (Qur'an 24:31).

This verse clearly depicts the need to hide 'their beauty and ornaments' and to 'draw their veils' across their bodies to deflect attention. DeCoursey (2017), using qualitative Appraisal analysis,

investigated what 147 young professional Saudi women think of the abaya, and found that the black colour so often worn in KSA was deemed to ‘make a female look more elegant and classy. Not only that but also, the black colour can make one look thinner’ (p. 21). Interestingly, therefore, the black colour was perceived to be beneficial for some participants in DeCoursey’s (2017) study; yet Filipino participants in the present study did not appear to see an advantage to the black colours so often worn by other Saudi women and that comprised their medical uniform. Thus, they deliberately wore bright colours to draw attention to their difference, as migrants, in social situations outside of the workplace in KSA, and to perhaps reclaim a sense of authentic gendered identity that must be hidden in the workplace through their medical dress.

The dislike of the modest dress code adopted by local women was highlighted by various respondents, who observed and noted that local women predominately dress modestly when they are outside. All respondents rejected wearing the abaya and hijab when outside the workplace in KSA. Respondents are not required by law or any authority to wear a specific dress or dress code (e.g., Hijab nor Abaya) anywhere inside KSA, but they are aware that women generally in KSA (not only migrants) are asked to dress modestly and not to wear revealing dress. The data showed that when respondents are alone at home, preparing to go out, they actively want to dress differently to local women. Julia stated:

When I am alone preparing to go out, what goes into my mind is, I must confess, all I want [is] to be different outside, not like Saudi women... So I go, ok. I am not like them, I am different.

Julia here highlighted her desire to be perceived to be different to Saudi women, and has to remind herself that she *is* different, as perhaps a way to feel better. She may feel that the way she dresses and presents herself in social situations, including work, does not accurately convey her sense of gender identity, and she must either seek small ways she can highlight the differences she perceives to exist between herself and Saudi women, or continually remind herself of these differences to help alleviate any tension she may feel between the way she wants to dress/present herself, and the way she feels she ought to dress/present herself for the context.

One particular area Julia, and other respondents, appeared to resist was the modest dress code in this conservative Saudi context, particularly the need to cover one's body with loose clothing. Julia stated: 'I hate flowy dresses, I like to wear tight dress when I am out I don't like modest flowy dresses', whereas Becky said: 'I must confess I don't like modest dress, I like revealing clothes...I do not like to dress modestly especially in the summer'. Thus, the local dress code for Saudi women appears to conflict with the way they both like to feel and look – both Becky and Julia want to reveal their bodies through tight clothing, meaning that in order to comply with the strict dress expectations for a semblance of modesty in migrants, they must conform to an extent, perhaps through covering their bodies more than they would like. These particular respondents prefer to 'perform' their gender identity through arguably showing their 'beauty and ornaments', instead of hiding them, as the Qur'an dictates for Muslim women. Thus, they experience a sense of tension and dislike when dressing for the Saudi context, between what they want to present, and the more conservative dress code they must abide by in order to continue to live and work in the KSA without negative repercussions. they

#### **4.2.2 Segregation**

Another macro-level gendered practice noticed and discussed by participants is segregation. The respondents noticed segregated institutions, such as banks, saloons, schools and universities and other facilities. They discussed gazing in surprise at segregated establishments, and respondents were surprised to see segregated lines or queues for women only, such as in restaurants.

The traditional concept of separating female and male space is common in almost all Islamic societies; Maududi (1991) states, it is prohibited for women "to sit in the same gathering together with men and stare at them, or look at them in a manner which may lead to evil results". Moreover, research suggests that in KSA, women can often use segregated spaces to their advantage, as a place where they can make decisions and exert their will. Sadi and Saricimen (2010) revealed that women often dominate schools and universities, shopping malls, restaurants, spas and parks, given that approximately 75% of the female population is married but unemployed; this means that shopping and consumerism has become a significant leisure activity for Saudi women (Rambo et al., 2009). These women own more than 30% of brokerage accounts and 40% of family businesses

(Al-Kahtani et al., 2006), and with this wealth comes great spending power; perhaps the segregated nature of KSA society facilitates this more freely for some Saudi women.

Magliveras' (2019) exploration of Filipino OFWs experiences of gender segregation revealed mixed findings; some highlighted loneliness and a sense of isolation as a result of gender segregation, including men, who stated that they could not talk to other men the way they could confide in women. Female Filipinos in this study, whether married women in KSA without their families, single women, or women accompanied by their spouses, overwhelmingly disliked the sense of risk they experienced when meeting friends for celebrations or when presented with an opportunity to interact with platonic male friends. This was influenced by one's living accommodation given that the few Filipinos that resided in the migrant-dominated compounds were afforded greater freedom to congregate and interact with whomever they pleased, whenever they wanted. Thus, segregation was deemed to lead to loneliness and emotional challenges for many participants, generally leading to comparisons with situations in the Philippines, and their ability to freely meet and eat with friends and family. However, some participants in Magliveras's (2019) study enjoyed the segregation, meaning it meant more family time and encouraged women to meet together more frequently in small gatherings.

#### **4.3 Micro-Level Gendered Practices Observed Post-Migration**

The micro-level gendered practices noticed by the respondents after migrating to the host culture revolved predominantly around the tendency for local women to lower their voices in public when speaking. With a few exceptions, the respondents noticed that their own voices were louder than those of local women when speaking. This is a less salient gendered practice performed by local women, hence why it has been categorised here as a micro-level gendered practice. A good example of a respondent's observations of this gendered practice can be found in Francesca's diaries. She wrote:

I realized that women speak differently here than what I am usually used to in the Philippines. One more thing I noticed here is that women don't laugh boisterously.

Women also don't talk too loud in public. There are always loud voices when women talk in the Philippines.

(Francesca's 2<sup>nd</sup> diary)

In lowering their voices and not laughing boisterously, Francesca draws comparisons between her understanding of women's conduct in KSA compared to the Philippines. Another example comes from Britney's diaries, where she pointed out in her fifth diary that 'women are so loud in the Philippines but here women are so quiet'. Moreover, Becky noted that a few patients think she is angry when she speaks because of her loud voice. She stated in her interview that a patient asked her, 'Why are you shouting?' Furthermore, one of the respondents (Julia) stated she was informed by other medical practitioners about this gendered practice; her co-worker (an Egyptian female nurse) told Julia to listen carefully to women because female patients do not raise their voices. One of the potential reasons for this lowering of the female voice in local Saudi women is to not draw attention to themselves, and to demonstrate the virtue of modesty that is encouraged in the Qur'an, as noted earlier. As Syed and Ali (2006) noted, shyness is deemed an 'ornament' of modesty, whereas 'a woman who is not shy may be perceived as too blunt to be modest' (p. 190). She may therefore bring shame to her family if she violates any social or religious norm – including one that contradicts social norms surrounding modesty, such as attracting attention to herself by 'laughing boisterously' or speaking too loudly, as Francesca noted. This norm has clearly become so ingrained in KSA culture that Becky, who perceived herself to be speaking 'normally' (for her), was accused of 'shouting' by a patient.

#### ***4.3.1 Conforming to or Subverting Local Gender Norms***

Both macro-level and micro-level observations of local gendered practices feed into what has been found in the literature. The literature indicates that when people migrate (or simply move to a new context), they may notice new and different gendered practices in the new context. People then can identify what is acceptable and what is not through 'intelligible ways of doing gender', as asserted by Preece (2006, p.178). She continued: 'In this sense, gender is not an attribute or property of an individual but accomplished through repeated acts.'

The respondents noticed both macro- and micro-level gendered practices, which helped them in observing how gender is performed. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013, p.4) echoed Butler's performativity theory by asserting that gender is 'produced, reproduced and indeed changed through performances of gendered acts.' As asserted by Griori (2014, p.303), individuals 'can undergo significant transformations in gender performances as they cross geographical borders and engage in social activities.' She indicated that gendered identities may undergo such transformation in different contexts. Individuals may, in fact, resist or adopt dominant practices while performing their gender identities in a frontstage context, that is, in public, when with others, or when 'on stage', as Goffman (1959) would term it.

This was demonstrated respondents given their differing views and responses surrounding the enactment of their gender identities in social interactions with patients. Not all participants noticed the gendered practice of females lowering their voices (Kate, Ashley, Jessica and Suzanna), whereas others noticed this local gendered practice and chose to conform to local norms by lowering their voices (Francesca, Jackie, Julia, Natalie, Amber, Julianna and Britney). Others, however, noticed this gendered practice and chose to subvert it through resisting it (Becky, Rose, Bonnie, Tina and Kimberley).

For those that did not report the micro-level gendered practice of local Muslim women lowering their voices, it may be that they saw (or heard) nothing in this respect that challenged their own gender identities, perhaps because this was their own way of presenting their gender identities front and backstage in their home and host cultures. Some participants however not only noticed the gendered practice of women lowering their voices; they were found to conform to this local gender norm, presenting/enacting a gender identity that conformed to local norms during social interaction with patients in this conservative Saudi context.

The interviews showed that lowering vocal volume was to help them appear 'normal', to avoid being perceived as strange, weird or abnormal, compared to local Saudi women. In her interview, Natalie stated: 'I don't want to be screaming if they [Saudi female citizens] speak this way'. Jackie similarly stated in her interview that 'you don't want to be the loudest in the room with patients'.

The gender identity for these participants can be considered negotiable, since they accepted conforming to this local gender norm within a work context at least.

The literature in the field of language and identity has shown similar practices in other workplaces; in particular, similar results have been found in studies focusing on white women within the Anglophone world (e.g., McElhinny, 2001; Mullany, 2011). For example, in Chapter Two (section 2.4.1), it was outlined that Jones (2016) commented on a seminal study by McElhinny (2001) exploring gender and language among US police officers in Pittsburgh, USA. McElhinny (2001) demonstrated that the female police officers ‘altered their voice to index a cool, professional identity’ (Jones, 2016, p.216). This took place in social interactions in the workplace. Jones (2016) also drew on Mullany’s (2011) study, which explored how female managers performed their gender identities in three major British retail companies. She found that female managers were ‘using language which indexes assertiveness or power – [but that] attributes which would classify most male managers as successful – tend to be negatively evaluated [when performed by women]; by failing to conform to gendered norms... they are often judged to be scary or domineering’ (Jones, 2016, p.216). In not challenging this gendered norm in their front stage presentation of ‘self’, some of my respondents adopted an arguably more ‘modest’ female identity (as this practice does not seem to apply to their male colleagues or patients) that is more acceptable or expected for women in KSA. Attracting undue attention may lead to negative outcomes for the female migrant; thus, conforming and cultivating an appropriate professional persona in her front stage self at least may be more important than demonstrating any gender identity previously established in the Philippines. Gender identity is not fixed (McDowell, 2017), therefore, and some of my respondents may use language and communication tools to *demonstrate* a specific gender identity (e.g., modest, compliant) in specific contexts, even if this identity is contrary to her gender identity in other contexts (e.g., backstage, or in non-work contexts).

McDowell’s (2017) discussion of gender identity negotiations in the workplace concurred that, ‘People can challenge gendered expectations, giving language an especially important position in the study of the performance of gender practices....the performance of one’s gender may not be the overriding goal. Constructing and demonstrating one’s professional identity may be more important.’ McDowell (2017) noted therefore that language may be used to construct a gender

identity that is appropriate to context, in order to convey an appropriate 'professional identity', aligned with a social constructionist approach. It also supports Zhu Hua's (2017, p.118) assertion that there is an 'unprecedented level of complexity of identities' in migrant research.

Some respondents however (Becky, Rose, Bonnie, Tina and Kimberley) enacted their gender identities differently; after noticing micro-level gendered practices, they chose to subvert local gendered norms by, for example, not purposefully lowering their voices or wearing modest clothes/colours in this conservative context. In the interviews, for instance, some participants commented that lowering their voices was perceived to clash with their gender identity. Kimberley stated that, 'I am a different woman', while Becky noted that 'I do not need to speak like Saudi women here'; Rose further stated that 'I don't want to sound like Saudi women'. A good example comes from Bonnie's interview in the extract below:

Researcher: Your diaries show you have noticed that local women lowered their voices when speaking?

Bonnie: Yes

Researcher: Since you have noticed this, did you speak like them... I mean by lowering your voice?

Bonnie: No

Researcher: Great, can you please tell me why?

Bonnie: I am like... I won't be copying women around here... when they speak... You know... I am not like them... I am a Filipino woman...

Researcher: Great, and this means what?... I mean... can you help me understand more?

Bonnie: Yes... I feel... Filipino women shouldn't lower their voice when speaking... I am raised differently... I should raise my voice when speaking... My parents raised me to be strong... you see... always and anywhere.

Bonnie clearly resisted lowering her voice because of both her national and gender identity, as a Filipino woman. Bonnie explicitly pointed out the differences between her gender identity and that of local Muslim women in KSA; in actively not 'copying women around here' and in her claim,

'I am not like them... I am a Filipino woman', Bonnie appears to distance herself from local women and the gendered practices they embody to demonstrate their gendered identity in public. She highlighted the conflict that the practice of lowering her voice would create with the views generated of 'woman' taught to her during her upbringing. She believes she should 'raise [her] voice when speaking', perhaps to draw attention and give credit to her views, and to demonstrate the strength that her parents instilled in her. She appeared to infer she equated quiet, lowered voices with weakness, something that did not tally with her idea or experience of being either Filipino, nor a woman, and therefore she was unwilling to present her gender identity in this way in public (front stage) so as not to convey this sense of weakness (or modesty?). Being 'acceptable' in public was clearly less critical than being 'authentic', for Bonnie. This highlights how far gender identity may be altered, finessed or presented in social interactions in this conservative context by some, but not others; it indicates the active nature of identity as something that is 'done', as one can 'copy' other women, or choose not to. Identity is not something that one 'is' or possesses, therefore; it is negotiable, depending on one's values and priorities.

Similar findings can be seen in Siegal's (1994) study of adult Western women who had moved to live in Japan. The study showed that the new/different gender norms and ideologies that these women experienced after migrating to the Japanese context played a role in how their gender identities were performed and presented. Female Japanese gendered practices were observed and noticed by the participants (i.e., Western women) as clearly distinguishable from male gendered practices, acts and norms. As discussed by Duff (2012), Siegal (1994) noticed that the adult Western women 'resisted the highly feminized polite forms of language involving high pitch and other feminized intonation and lexical and grammatical conventions as well as non-linguistic dispositions (e.g., bowing deeply)'. These practices 'clashed with language and gender ideologies from their own cultural backgrounds [Western] and experiences and that independent, strong Western women should not adopt and perform these aspects' (Duff, 2012, p.574). The subverting of local gender norms in host culture by some participants in the present study is a clear demonstration that their gender identity, for many migrant women, is non-negotiable, despite the potential professional benefits it might bring to conform to these local norms. Yet overall, the vast differences in the ways in which participants *responded* to the ways they saw local women behave help us understand how migrants' identities show 'tremendous fluidity and dynamism in both

practices and ideologies rather than static adherence to or rebellious departure from traditional norms' (Menard-Warwick, 2009, p.23).

Interestingly, during my brief observations in clinic of interactions between participants and patients, I witnessed the way in which these female gender subverters were positioned/perceived. They were described by patients in a distinctive way, using specific Arabic words such as *Mistarjilah* (mannish), *Rojoliah* (masculine) and *khashnah* (rough/not soft). When I asked these patients why they used these words to describe their healthcare practitioner, they unanimously stated that this was because they spoke in a loud voice. This indicates that subversion (i.e., not conforming to expected gender norms surrounding lowering the voice) affected how a small number of patients positioned their practitioners' gender identities. This highlights the stark difference between men and women in KSA in terms of the way they are expected to 'present' themselves (their front stage selves). It also echoes the field of semiotics (Ireland, 2003); the 'sign' is the pitch/tone/volume of the voice, yet the 'signified' (what the sign signifies) refers to not only the physical sex (male/female) of the speaker, but also other qualities associated with that person (being 'rough' or 'soft', perhaps emotionally or physically?). Thus, the meaning imbued in how quietly or loudly one speaks goes beyond simple volume; in desiring to be heard, in the KSA, a woman is deemed unfeminine, and by proxy the antithesis – manly or masculine. It is unclear whether the participants in this group knew they were being described or positioned by some patients in this way, or knew and were unconcerned about this positioning, viewing authenticity in terms of enacting their gender identity as more important than acquiescing to social expectations. Regardless, this further underscores just how performative gender can be.

Butler (1990, p.43), for example, defined gender as:

the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, a natural sort of being.

Her concept of gender being performative, 'always a doing' (1990, p. 33) is similar to Goffman's concept that the 'self' can be modified in its presentation in different spaces. These subsections

have helped me to answer calls made by scholars interested ‘in instances where individuals resist, negotiate, change or transform themselves’ (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004, p.20). The respondents clearly exerted their human agency differently, thereby demonstrating the complexity and the fluidity of their identities in the explored context. Their justifications regarding subverting or conforming to local gendered practices highlight the different trajectories of their human agency and the fluidity of their identities in the Saudi cultural context. It also reveals how far their gender identity is presented differently backstage in KSA, when out of the public eye; this matter shall be explored next.

#### **4.4 Front Stage versus Backstage Selves**

Using Goffman’s theoretical framework assists in unveiling the various ways that respondents seek to present and enact their gender identities both front stage and backstage. This has included their dress sense and style outside of work, as well as the way they conduct themselves vocally by lowering their voices (or not) in and outside of work. Discussing respondents’ front and backstage selves in this realm has shed light on some participants’ reported rejection and dislike of local gender norms, as well as underscored the presence and importance of a number of Filipino core values and virtues that are linked to respondents’ gender identities (*Kepwa, Lakas-ng-loob, Kapwa* and *Kusa-ng-loob*).

There therefore appeared to be a clear demarcation for most participants in terms of their front stage and backstage sense of gendered ‘self’; it must be noted that this ‘front stage’ self was altered further when in the workplace setting, which, it should be highlighted, is one of the primary reasons (if not *the* main reason) that participants were in the KSA in the first place. Thus, abiding by many (if not all) of the expected norms and practices surrounding gender (uniform, language, lowering of voice, etc.) was deemed pivotal for the success of many participants. Indeed, all respondents reported that they act differently than usual when surrounded by patients inside the clinic, compared to other social situations or when at home. For example, respondents reported a professional and medical commitment that patients should be put at ease/relaxed in the clinic, since the workplace is a healthcare provider where people receive treatment. Hence, most chose to adhere to expected gender norms and be respectful of the local culture. Whilst not all participants

lowered their voices, which was noticed and negatively commented on by some patients, as discussed, the adherence to other gendered practices (uniform, covering hair, showing empathy etc) was perceived to be warranted in this context.

For example, respondents generally indicated their view that Saudi culture and religion should not be criticized, mocked nor resisted when patients undergo medical treatment and hence they chose not to do so inside the clinic while interacting with patients (this is also part of their medical education and training where gender, religion and culture issues should not destabilised by the medical practitioner who has a different belief in this regard). As Suzanna stated:

I am careful inside the clinic about patients...We, I mean, we should not irritate patients, I mean medically speaking, you should respect the culture and maybe try to change them, not in the clinic, maybe after, that's why I like to tease my Saudi friends after work when we are out, I know Islam is not like that it is the culture.

Another example comes from Rose who asserted that it is only 'after work' that she acts 'normally' (for her), as during work, her normal gendered conduct might 'irritate patients'. This infers that, like Suzanna stated, inside the workplace, they feel as though they 'act abnormally', that is, in a way that counters the version of their 'self' that they may present to others outside of work, or when alone. As Suzanna highlighted, she enjoys teasing her Saudi friends when socializing with them, about their culture, perhaps with a view to 'changing them'. However, challenging norms, such as gender norms, does not appear to have a place in the workplace, according to these participants; rather, they feel they must/should abide by the expected social and gender norms and practices most appropriate for this healthcare setting, in order to facilitate relaxation for patients.

Yet outside the workplace there was a different narrative. Participants, as mentioned previously, did not intentionally lower their voices, even if they did in the clinic, either at home or in other public spaces in KSA. They rejected this presentation of self, given that many asserted that a Filipina woman is not quiet; rather, she is the opposite – extremely vocal when it comes to her identity as a woman. This tallied with the loud, bright clothing that most wore in public spaces and at home. The lack of visibility and presence of women in KSA more generally, whether that means

through dressing modestly, segregation and having separate lines for ladies in restaurants and many other places, fewer women in most occupations, and less women in higher positions in different institutions, was commented upon by participants as highly undesirable.

This view can also be found on websites and forums designed for and created by migrants, such as Filipinos, to share more openly their personal (perhaps often hidden) views regarding gender in KSA. These sites share knowledge about different contexts that Filipinos may move to for work, to help them become accustomed to the ways in which they may differ to a Filipino's home culture and experience. Francesca, for example, reported that these websites and forums discuss KSA as a new context where the culture is different and thus, by extension, so is the gender and the gender norms. She reported reading discussions about many things in KSA, including religion and gender-related issues such as dress and dress code.

Perhaps one of the most salient ways of understanding how the participants' gender identities were performed and understood differently backstage compared to front stage is through the Filipino virtues/concepts of *kapwa*, *lakas-ng-loob*, *kusang-loob*, Female *Bayani* and maternal identity, all of which are discussed presently.

#### **4.5 The Concept of *Kapwa* (A Shared Self)**

The concept of *Kapwa* (shared self) is only associated with gender in respondents' data. *Kapwa* is a Filipino core value that is 'recognition of a shared identity, an inner self, shared with others' (Enriquez, 1992; 2007). It combines two words in the Filipino language of Tagalog: *ka*, meaning union with anyone and anything, and *puwang*, a small space or gap (Penaflor, 2023). Whilst the word also refers to peers and fellow men or women, in the context of this study, participants used the word to refer to other women. Respondents view all women inside KSA to be included in their *Kapwa* (shared self) concept and appeared to believe that this encourages them to often think about local women, gender norms in the city and gender-related issues in KSA more generally. For example, Rose in her interview asserted:

Rose: As women we share a lot with all women in the world. We share being women together, we believe in *Kapwa*.

Researcher: What's a *Kapwa*?

Rose: It's a shared self, I see, I think about them.

Respondents seemed to believe that *Kapwa* unites them with other women, making them want to show solidarity with local women by attempting to help change the status quo by any possible means. Their sense of shared self with other local Saudi women makes them desire to make a change to help promote women's rights by setting good examples, modelling how women might behave and can behave in different countries/cultures. Amber and Tina for example linked *Kapwa* with thinking about other women and their gender identities in KSA. Amber stated '*Kapwa* make me think and care about Saudi women here', while Tina declared 'We Filipinas care about other ladies here'.

Another example comes from Jackie's interview, where she revealed a private, backstage desire to want to help other women in KSA to achieve equality, citing *Kapwa* as the reason for this:

I always think about women everywhere in the world. In the Philippines we have a virtue called *Kapwa*... it's a virtue meaning we humans have a shared identity, you see, a shared self, it makes me think about women here a lot and the change in women's rights...It's a very good change in KSA women's rights. So *Kapwa* makes me think of concerns about local girls and ladies...I can't help it, when I am alone, I keep thinking about them...It makes me think and have concerns about women, and then I like to make a change (Jackie).

Whilst respondents are aware that the Saudi government is becoming more progressive and has announced its new 2030 vision, including more rights guaranteed to women, respondents appeared to believe that even greater change is desirable and possible. These contemplations often took place privately, perhaps indicating the significant impact the stark, visible gender divide between men and women and Filipino women and local women have had on respondents. For example, Juliana commented:

Juliana: When I'm alone I think about women and gender here a lot...I don't like gendering things here, you know, I mean I am woman too.

Researcher: What do you mean? Gendering things?

Juliana: Segregation, I know it's less now, but you still have separate lines everywhere...less women in different jobs and positions...you know gendered things here...I mean, we share with them the gender, we Filipinas we believe in *Kapwa* I told you about it...So we are not selfish, we think about other women, you see, we want them to live better.

The participants, such as Juliana, clearly perceive local gendered practices to be unfair, unequal, or in some way requiring change, perhaps indicating their view that they are oppressive in nature. It is true that the freedoms afforded to local women (in terms of dress, segregation, and other behavioural and social norms) may be perceived as more restrictive compared to the more relaxed cultural norms in the Philippines, given the conservative Islamic nature of the context. In order to therefore bring about change, participants perceived they must be united with their local Saudi friends, raising awareness about their rights. As Jackie noted:

Jackie: I searched Wikipedia to know how gender is viewed here and how women exercise their rights....The change in women's right is, I mean, it's a good change by the way...we Filipinas care about other women here.

Researcher: Yes.

Jackie: We have a Filipino thing called *kapwa*...we teach it our kids.

The virtue of *kapwa* therefore appeared to motivate participants to help encourage change among local women in the midst of a governmental reform on women's rights. One means of enacting their private, backstage views is through visibly presenting/enacting the concept of *lakas-ng-loob* in public.

#### **4.6 The Virtue of *Lakas-ng-loob***

Reference to the Filipino virtue of *Lakas-ng-loob* was made by respondents, who repeatedly linked it to their sense of gender identity. *Lakas-ng-loob* refers to being and staying brave, or having ‘guts and courage’ (Vitto et al., 2020). Yet despite Vitto et al. (2020, p. 108) finding that *lakas-ng-loob* is ‘a core concept of a theoretical construct used in understanding Filipino social psychology’, there is very little research on this term, especially linking it to Filipino migrants. It is inherently linked to identity as, with *loob* meaning ‘self’, it refers to inner bravery, and an understanding of self-as-brave.

This is visible when respondents specifically associate being brave (*lakas-ng-loob*) with their gender identity, such as when Julia stated: ‘I am woman I am brave *lakas-ng-loob* everywhere’, ‘I am brave enough to show others here how I dress outside my house’, ‘I was born brave *lakas-ng-loob*’. Respondents have associated *lakas-ng-loob* with bravery in dressing differently outside work, as means by which they can express their ‘strong’ gender identity. Therefore, showing a brave and strong gender identity of a Filipino woman who dislikes local gender norms is manifested through intentionally dressing different to Saudi women in public spaces, revealing an agenda in their front stage presentation of gender. Respondents therefore show they are agentive (not silent nor passive) in their choice not to follow local gender norms outside the clinics (e.g., voice, modest dress, wearing dark colors) and so forth, which is spurred on by the virtue of *lakas-ng-loob*. This was aptly demonstrated by Natalie who in our interview stated:

So I thought must be brave, I mean braver, you know *lakas-ng-loob*...I can be strange in how I dress or speak when I am out in the city...So I say to myself I as a Filipina am brave...*lakas-ng-loob* help me take people’s gazes when I am outside, that’s fine (Natalie).

Juliana also argued that *lakas-ng-loob* helps her not only to feel or ‘be’ strong (her words), but to *stay* strong, as we can see here:

Juliana: *Lakas-ng-loob* helps me be a strong woman and stay brave.

Researcher: How?

Juliana: Because it makes the *loob* be stronger, in the inside, inside of me, my identity becomes stronger as a woman.

researcher: How, can you explain more?

Juliana: Because I can try to change gender stereotypes here, I mean by dressing differently.

It appeared as though Juliana perceives there to be strength in her perception and demonstration of a female gendered identity. This involves ‘showing’ other women (and men) that it is possible (and desirable?) to dress differently, a brave thing to do in such a conservative context. This is made possible by the virtue of *lakas-ng-loob*, something echoed by Ashley:

Ashley: When I think about myself, I remember *lakas-ng-loob*.

researcher: What does it mean?

Ashley: You know *lakas-ng-loob* means bravery. I can be brave, a brave woman.

researcher: I see.

Ashley: It also means strength and strong inside and brave self or you can say identity...so basically, I have power to use personally...but I don't have power on other Saudi women of course...I am not scared to not wear what I want as a woman. You know we have this belief *lakas-ng-loob*. You can't change what you can't control.

Again in this example it becomes clear that *lakas-ng-loob* appears linked with discussing their gender identity as women that, by virtue of being from the Philippines, are different to other local women in KSA. Not only do they want to exhibit bravery in demonstrating this difference, it appears to, in part, come from a sense of *kapwa* or shared sense of self and solidarity for Saudi women that may not feel able to dress in a way they desire, such as in colourful clothes or in not covering their hair.

*Lakas-ng-loob* is also mentioned when reporting the act of challenging male dominance outside the clinics. This means that these respondents report and link the virtue of *Lakas-ng-loob* with

attempts/acts to challenge men, or the patriarchy, outside the clinic, by sounding more authoritative when in shops, restaurants and cafes:

Britney: When I am out dealing men here I mean not patients outside the clinic...I show them I am different.

Researcher: How

Britney: Strong eye contact

Researcher: Ok. What else?

Britney: I don't know, I mean I raise my voice. I'm like *Lakas-ng-loob*.

We can see here an example of respondents intentionally being more authoritative outside the clinics when dealing with local men, presenting a challenge to traditional, local gender norms in the way they conduct themselves. This was contextualized as an example of *lakas-ng-loob* by Britney, evoking her inner bravery and strength as a woman to assert her own culturally-shaped idea of gender within a highly patriarchal, conservative context. In flouting traditional gender norms, such as making eye contact and raising her voice, she is presenting a bold statement via her own conceptualization and enactment of gender. This is highlighted by Rose, who stated: 'I confess I wish men can change here not women, that's why I challenge them in shops here'. Her goal in challenging them is to change them, somehow, towards perhaps accepting that women can meet them as equals, instead of as subservients (as she perceives it).

#### **4.7 The Virtue of *Kusang-Loob***

Data under the gender theme also revealed the importance of another Filipino virtue, *kusang-loob*, meaning acting voluntarily or spontaneously, acting from one's freewill or acting willfully. De Castro (1997; 2018) asserts that *kusang-loob* is similar to free will in that, if an act is to have any moral worth in the Philippines, it is to be done voluntarily, from *kusang-loob*. It was particularly linked to gender and gender identity by participants, and meanings of *kusang-loob* include the following from respondents' data: a) acting voluntarily, spontaneously, acting from your freewill, acting from your own accord, wilfully; b) not being motivated by the mere anticipation of payment

and reward from others; c) using one's own initiative; and d) one must be motivated by positive feelings like sympathy, charity and love.

*Kusang-loob* was present when respondents discussed acting wilfully to raise awareness among local women to show them what Filipino women can do (e.g., women can work, and not only housewives or stay-at-home mothers even after they have had children, or when urging local women be stronger, louder and more authoritative in public spaces, or showing local women their attitude with men, and encouraging local women to aim for higher positions and break the Saudi glass ceiling), hoping that these acts may inspire local women to change their behaviour. This shows how respondents report being agentive (not silent nor passive) from a sense of *kusang-loob*, aiming to try to lead a change amongst women (*voluntarily and freely*) to change gender stereotypes and help women become more visible in society. Therefore, when respondents narrated their lives as women in KSA, *kusang-loob* appeared both when they were in social situations (front stage) as well as backstage, when alone and thinking about gender and women post-migration.

For example, when discussing *kusang-loob*, Natalie stated that she chatted with a Saudi lady about her view that 'women are not housewives, they should work'. Jackie on the other hand mentioned that she urged a friend to change her perception of women, voluntarily telling her, 'women can work in men's jobs that's normal now everywhere in the world'. When Britney discussed her gender identity tied in with *kusang-loob*, she states purposefully telling a Saudi lady, 'to aim at higher positions and break glass ceiling'. These examples show *kusang-loob* in action in accordance with their own gender ideals and understanding.

Here is an example to illustrate how respondents want to act freely and voluntarily by showing themselves as a good example of strong women who can challenge men:

Kimberley: When I look at myself and how things are here, I start saying *kusang-loob* you know...*kusang-loob* is pushing me help set a good example for ladies here, also I mean other girls.

Researcher: Who do you mean? Which women and girls?

Kimberley: Saudis.

Researcher: I see.

Kimberley: They can challenge men.

Researcher: Challenge men in what?

Kimberley: In jobs, you see...few women work in some jobs dominated by men here...So they can challenge them in these jobs and be equal to men...As a woman I remind myself when I am alone *kusang-loob*. I can help and make a change.

Here it is clear that the concept of *kusang-loob* provides a strong moral imperative for women such as Kimberley to present their own gender ideals and identity to others in KSA society, so as to bring about the change she perceives to be necessary. She clearly would like to see more women in male-dominated workplaces, and, as a healthcare provider, would like to set a good example/be a role model that working is possible. This provided a common theme throughout other interviews. As Juliana commented:

Juliana: I don't think there is enough women in different jobs here...I feel I must make a move and help make the change...Out of my freewill as a woman.

Researcher: I see.

Juliana: We call it *kusang-loob* ...You know *kusang-loob* is an important Filipina value...Very precious to us, when you act freely to help others.

Here it is notable that Juliana asserts *kusang-loob* is an important 'Filipina' value – Filipina being the gendered term referring to a female from the Philippines. In this way, she is inherently linking the concept of freewill to her position and identity as a woman. Her use of the term 'Filipina' is interesting in itself; Barber's (2000) ethnographic research on Filipino women's migration and their agency explored the highly gendered nature of labour migration from the Philippines from men to women. In the early 1980s, men comprised the majority of land-based Filipino labour migrant whereas, as Go (1997) reveals, by 1994, women made up 60 % of neophyte migrant workers leaving the Philippines, predominantly in domestic roles. Given this reality, Barber (2000, p. 400) claimed that:

The word “Filipina” has undergone a shift in meaning. Once proudly (and sometimes controversially) mobilized discursively by Philippine feminists and others who wished to distinguish Philippine women from the generic Filipino, “Filipina” is becoming negatively coloured by the demeaned class and status connotations accorded paid domestic labour.

Interestingly, Juliana is not the only participant to use this term to refer to her gender and national identity. Francesca also, in our interview, commented:

Francesca: We Filipina ladies always think about our abilities and free will *kusang-loob* ... We can make initiatives to change others and change things... You see, we call it *kusang-loob*, you see, through voluntary acts.

Researcher: What do you mean by *Kusa-ng-Loob*?

Francesca: It’s part of our self and identity, you see, it means to take your own initiative, and not wait for something to happen, do it yourself. We Filipina women do a lot of sensing, I must say... There is a lot of sensing, we sense what’s around us, especially gender. I do this, I do a lot of sensing about gender and religion and money. Then, *kusang-loob*, I mean we take our own initiative to do the right thing. You should do the right thing even if it sound strange.

Researcher: Like what?

Francesca: Like many jobs are for men only here, few women work in these jobs here. So I chat with women about this, make a change, when I am out of work out with friends... other women because they may hear me and change... especially after women’s rights here are given by the government. So I want to help to lead a change here in local women. Things change so *kusang-loob*. Do the right thing, do it voluntarily for other women.

The above exchange highlights various gendered ideas and ideals. Reclaiming the term ‘Filipina’ indicates a kind of special power afforded only to women from the Philippines, in their ability to ‘sense’ their context/surroundings, perhaps highlighting the *kapwa* or shared sense of self that they enjoy. This is extended to other women, including Saudi women, through *kusang-loob*, in their

desire to do the ‘right thing’ and take the initiative to instigate change. This appears to be a moral obligation, to voluntarily ‘do the right thing’ for other women, via vocalising her thoughts and opinions regarding the status of Saudi women, especially in the workplace, even if it ‘sounds strange’ or could potentially risk ostracising her from Saudi society.

The notion that *kusang-loob* can be wielded to generate change for Saudi women – through interacting with and witnessing ‘Filipina’ women – was also expounded by Natalie. She stated:

Natalie: When I sit alone and read about culture.

Researcher: Which topic do you read about?

Natalie: I must say gender and religion here, especially when I first came here...I read about women in Islam, it’s different than here. If you look at women here, I think culture is affecting them more, I mean stronger than faith here...It is not Islam it’s culture, making women not visible not heard...So I thought I am a Filipina women, I can act on my own freewill you see, and make a change here. We call it *kusang-loob* you see.

Researcher: I see but, what do you mean by make a change? Make a change in what?

Natalie: Gender, I mean in gender, how women can dress outside or talk with men...I mean I chat with Saudi friends about this and I dress differently outside to make them see.

Again, here there appears to be a moral obligation for Natalie to use her status as an outsider to *kusang-loob* – voluntarily act to inspire change in the gender relations within KSA, which, she believes, stem from culture, not Islam per se. She is clear to point this out to me, either for fear of offending me and my religious beliefs as a Sunni Muslim, or because she genuinely believes that it is the culture – not the religion – that is restricting female freedom to wear what they want and speak to men.

#### **4.8 Embodying the Female *Bayani***

All respondents report that being hero in the eyes of their families and loved ones after moving to KSA was extremely important to them. This is discussed in greater depth as a separate theme in Chapter Seven. However, the concept of specifically being perceived (or perceiving themselves as) a female *Bayani* or hero remained at the top of their personal dreams and achievements. In other words, becoming a female *Bayani* (hero) as a result of moving to this conservative Saudi context makes them very proud of themselves as women. This appeared to be pivotal to respondents' gender identities and appeared to be linked to their feminist ideals and desire for change, interlinking their concepts of *kapwa* (shared sense of female self), *lakas-ng-loob* (feeling and being brave) and *kusang-loob* (taking the voluntary initiative to act to do what is right).

Respondents appeared to believe this to be at a crucial time in Saudi history to present, in their front stage selves, a female *Bayani*, giving an additional layer or dimension to the concept of their heroic identity in their own eyes (as well as local women's eyes). Ashley commented:

The best thing happened to me here in Arabia is being a hero, a female hero...I am a *Bayani*, I mean a female *Bayani*, a woman people see and think she is a hero she is not afraid of being different. A *Bayani* woman who can dress differently in this city, not like other women here...This makes Saudi women see how other women in the world are. A *Bayani* woman here help Saudi women see different women in the world, I feel a *Bayani* can show other women here that a *Bayani* Filipina can view gender differently. I mean in a different way, more liberal, freer. The best thing I will ever achieve is to be a lady *Bayani*, a female *Bayani* around other women.

It is interesting that her sense of heroic identity was inextricably linked to her female identity, so much so she continually corrected herself and linked the two. It appeared as though this conveyed a sense of a 'warrior', a beacon of change for other women, unafraid (evoking a sense of *lakas-ng-loob*) to go against the cultural grain in KSA. This appears to be an ultimate goal for Ashley, who also uses the term 'Filipina' to describe herself, the 'best thing' she can 'ever achieve'. This is heroic, for Ashley, to lead a change and make women more vocal about their own needs.

#### **4.9 Gender Role Shifts and Maternal Identity in the Homestead**

Scholars have argued that part of what may happen when people (and more specifically couples and families) migrate is that people sometimes ‘redefine gender identities’ (Gordon, 2004, p.437) when crossing to different contexts. Gordon related this to socioeconomic reasons resulting from immigrant women suddenly earning more money than their male partners. This is an under-researched dimension in current studies in Middle Eastern contexts. Gordon argued that this disturbance of traditional socioeconomic structures means that men lose ‘access to traditional sources of power’. Language learning is linked to this disturbance, as better linguistic abilities can lead to more income in host countries, which eventually leads to more power. In Chapter Two (section 2.6), I discussed Rockhill’s (1993) study on Latin American migrants in the USA. The study showed how Latino men prevented their female partners from learning and improving their target language abilities after migrating to the USA. This is linked to power relations within these families and gender role shifts. Rockhill’s (1993) study indicates how learning the host language may potentially increase opportunities for enacting and constructing different gender identities after migration. Other actors (i.e., male partners) may take steps to limit this since it will make women independent from their male partners. This was also supported by Gordon’s (2004) ethnographic study, which found that when Lao women learned English to find work in the USA, this led to some family tension after a shift in gender roles. This means that women were able to find more jobs and hence obtain more power compared to men who, as a consequence, were forced to stay at home more. Gordon (2004) pointed out that after these women learnt the language, both their lives and relationships changed. She continued: ‘Lao women have gained greater economic independence and decision-making power within the family’ (2004, p.440). This was not accepted by all the male Lao partners, eventually leading to some domestic disturbances.

However, nothing of this sort was documented with the Filipino medical respondents who migrated with their male partners to the KSA. Instead, the respondents stated that their male partners were supportive. Furthermore, some Filipino medical respondents drew strength from their maternal identity, while other respondents drew strength from their male partners. They reported that their male partners supported them to learn more Arabic and to invest further in their professional roles; thus, they had a better chance of establishing themselves professionally (and

socially) in this ultra-conservative context thanks to the support of their male partners. This is the opposite pattern to that observed by Rockhill (1993) and Gordon (2004).

A good example is the case of Kimberley, whose husband supported her shift to the primary breadwinner. He spent most of 2019 homeschooling their son, preparing meals and doing the laundry instead of working. She stated that he suggested doing this since as a white-collar (i.e., skilled medical practitioner) worker in the Saudi context, she would make more money than him, as he was a blue-collar worker (labourer) who, in the Saudi context, would earn a lower wage job than Kimberley in the KSA. He suggested remaining jobless for most of that year and to educate their son according to the Filipino educational system. This contrasted with their roles in the Philippines, where Kimberley's husband was working while she was not able to find a job as a medical practitioner. In short, this practitioner's male partner appeared to embrace this post-migration identity enactment, contradicting Rockhill's (1993) and Gordon's (2004) studies.

This appeared to be the same in most cases within the respondents, where participants' male Filipino partners were the breadwinners before moving to the KSA, wherein a gender role reversal/shift occurred. Unlike their wives, respondents' male partners struggled to find jobs, because they were not regarded as skilled migrants after coming to the KSA, and fewer knew Arabic; moreover, in some cases, the lack of childcare meant that the male partner took on this responsibility. Many participants also chose not to enrol their children in the Saudi educational system, since Arabic is the medium of instruction, which contrasts with the Filipino system. Nevertheless, male partners were reported to support their wives during this gender role shift, supporting their female partners' aim to accumulate more power in their future selves, including the respondents' language-learning journey, which was a difficult and time-consuming task that had to be fitted into a busy lifestyle. A good example would be Julia, who stated that her Filipino partner knew it was hard but supported her and kept telling her that she could do it 'if she just focused and worked hard so that she can keep her job and achieve their dreams in the future'. Respondents became the breadwinners of their families, something that was accepted by their male Filipino partners, and enabled them to perform the identity of a heroic female migrant who builds her life while also sending remittance and helping others. Naturally, it may be that participants did not share with me the difficulties or tensions they encountered in their marriages and private

relationships, given that, as a Saudi male, this kind of intimate shared knowledge between men and women is unusual or not the social norm in KSA. Moreover, this study only focused on the female participants/migrants, not their male partners, whose views are lacking. Therefore, it is unclear just how far the gendered role shifts that occurred as a result of the move to KSA impacted the gender identities of participants; did they feel more empowered? Did their partners feel emasculated in anyway? Were (some of) these women still picking up most of the domestic work and emotional labour back home, as many feminist theorists assert occurs when women enter the workplace (labelled the 'dual burden' by Ann Oakley (1974))? These are questions that remain unanswered by this study.

Maternal identity was indeed a prevalent theme for some participants. The findings of Norton's (2000) seminal work asserted that when female immigrants (who are mothers) face difficulties and obstacles, they may 'draw strength' from their maternal identities when constructing their identities. This eventually helps them in overcoming obstacles and difficulties. Similarly, in the present study, all of the respondents who are Filipino mothers drew strength from their maternal identity while constructing their post-migration heroic female identities. It also helped them to overcome difficulties such as homesickness, a busy lifestyle, working in different environments, the need to build a successful professional career, and finally to boost their efforts in adjusting to this new context after migration. One example comes from Suzanna, who explained the difficulties she encountered during her early days while feeling homesick; she asserted in her diaries that what kept her moving forward was the love of her 'kids' to help make 'their future better'. This highlights just how far that, despite the gender role reversal that had occurred in her family, she placed emphasis on her work to provide for her children as a mother.

#### **4.10 Conclusion**

The theme of gender was highly prevalent in the data, with gendered differences between Saudi males and females appearing more prominent to the participants than differences between males and females in their home countries (or even within their families in KSA). These gendered differences and norms surrounding 'woman' in KSA were both significant (e.g., macro-level, such as segregation and dress code) and subtle (including lowering the voice, which some participants

did not even notice). At all levels, there were participants that adhered to/adopted these local gendered norms and practices, with more modest dress and altering their speech so as not to draw attention to themselves, whilst other participants deliberately flouted these norms, sometimes in the workplace, in a bid to ‘show’ Saudi men and women that there is and therefore *can* be a different presentation and conceptualisation of ‘female’ in this setting.

Thus, there appears to be variation in the way that participants enacted their gender identities post-migration both front stage (and within that, different presentations in various front stage social settings, such as at work or when out with friends) and backstage. Moreover, for some, gender identity was intrinsically intertwined with their national identity, the idea of being a *Filipina*, especially clothes and demeanour, where participants often wanted to ‘represent’ themselves and their identity through bright colours, perhaps more revealing clothing and through being more direct, loud and boisterous in public (certainly comparative to Saudi women). Much of this appeared to stem from their upbringing, with parents instilling a sense of strength as a woman into participants, which clashed with their view of Saudi women’s modesty and lowered voices in particular (which, interestingly, was perceived as weakness or subservience). Whilst most (although not all) abided by the expected norms within the workplace, even deliberately attempting to ‘fit in’ (or at least, not stand out) so as to put patients at ease and appear more professional, outside of work it was another story – there were deliberate, considered attempts to stand out, and address what they saw as a power imbalance between the genders in this setting. This occurred as mentioned through both dress and demeanour, as well as through speaking with Saudi friends about their rights, and holding themselves (independent, working women) up as role models for local women.

Participants evoked various Filipino virtues to assist them in this, including *kapwa* (they felt as though they stood in solidarity with local women, and therefore sought to assist them in their perceived inequality), *lakas-ng-loob* (which gave them the courage to stand up for what they believed in, to wear different dress, to attract attention and to be assertive with Saudi men), *kusang-loob* (they were inspired to use their initiative and voluntarily show local women what it means to be a female Filipina, to bring about change, and do what they believe to be right), and the concept of being a Female *Bayani* – a warrior, a hero, a trailblazer, perhaps. These virtues – again

intrinsically tied to their national identity – helped them enact or present their gender identity where possible when interacting with others (notably, this was *not* deemed possible for most in the workplace). Thus, it appears that their gender identities are performed in some ways similarly to how they were/are at home, in the Philippines, yet perhaps they are even more heightened or considered (the participants certainly seemed to agree they thought about gender and women a lot, when alone) due to the stark differences perceived between themselves and local Saudi women. This might be in an effort to assert their own gender identity; the ‘presentation’ becomes more considered, more important.

Perhaps one of the most interesting ways that, post-migration, their gender identity may have changed is through the gender role shifts that seemed to occur for some participants that travelled to KSA with their families. Some participants that predominantly had domestic responsibilities (and were unemployed) at home found that they were the breadwinners in KSA, and their husbands became stay-at-home fathers and homeschoolers. Whilst the participants that experienced this commented that their husbands were extremely supportive, it has been noted that, quite possibly, the participants were not as forthcoming about intimate details regarding their spousal relationships and home set-up given my position as the researcher.

Overall, this chapter reveals how the respondents performed gender in specific, intentional and intelligent ways in this cultural milieu. The next chapter discusses the next theme found in the data, religious identity. The next chapter also shows divergence among the respondents when religious identities were negotiated in this context, including how some respondents utilised the religious repertoire in performing their identities.

## Chapter Five: Religious Identity in a Post-Migration World

### 5.1 Introduction

Following the discussion of gender in the previous chapter, this chapter discusses the major theme of religion and religious identity. Through the lens of Goffman's (1959; 1968; 1969) dramaturgical theory, I highlight how the respondents enacted their religious identities within social interactions, as well as 'backstage', when alone or with close, trusted family members. This may help readers to understand how the respondents' religious identities were negotiated, presented and performed in a similar way to their gender identities.

The chapter first discusses the presentation of religious identity within the front stage (social interactions) (sections 5.2 to 5.5), before further exploring the way respondents enact (or embody) their religious identity backstage. Consideration of the front stage presentation of religious identity includes investigating what respondents' data show about the conservative Saudi city where they live after migration (e.g., loud prayer calls five times a day, Ramadan, Hajj, and the extremely religious (Islamic) atmosphere in the city) and respondents' religious practices (i.e., Christian practices) within the conservative Saudi context of the study. Revealing how the respondents discussed local (Islamic) religious practices sheds light on their post-migration lives, demonstrating how much knowledge they gained about the context in which they now live and work.

Following this, I discuss the ways in which some respondents acquired and used a specific religious (linguistic) repertoire by working with experienced practitioners (both Muslims and non-Muslims) to perform their professional roles when providing healthcare services to conservative patients, and the impact this had on their (religious and other) identities. The origins of this specific linguistic repertoire are discussed, including where each term of the repertoire comes from (within the Sunni canon). The role this played in respondents' front stage 'selves' is explored. The respondents are also placed into three categories: respondents who used such a religious repertoire, respondents who intentionally rejected the use of such a repertoire with patients, and respondents who neither used nor knew such a repertoire (yet did not appear averse to using it when introduced

to the idea). The perceived impact this repertoire had on local patients' positioning of participants of Catholic practitioners is also explored. How far participants' religious identities are negotiable (or not), dependent on context, is also discussed, referencing Giampapa (2016) and Lytra's (2016) work (see Chapter Two, section 2.5.1).

Subsequently, from 5.5 onwards, the way that religion appears to marry both front and backstage selves in participants' religious identity is explored. I discuss the seeming transition reported by respondents towards greater personal religiosity post-migration, with increased gatherings and praying as a religious minority inside KSA. The way respondents communicate about religion with their family in the Philippines (online), and the demonstration of their transition to becoming more religious (e.g., posting more religious content (i.e., Christian) online (front stage) and the tendency to listen to more Christian music than pre-migration (backstage), is also analysed. Finally, the way that the participants discuss their Christian beliefs and experiences of challenges and hardships, and how they cope when alone (backstage) as a result of the difficulties they may experience in the KSA – including praying, looking to Jesus as a role model, and evoking the virtue of *lakas-ng-loob* – are explored.

Whilst much of what is discussed, especially latterly, relates to the backstage self, it must also be remembered that the very words and presentation of 'religious self' during our focus groups/interviews, and even within the diaries to an extent, constitutes a form of front stage presentation of religious 'self' or identity. Participants, even during their discussions of backstage activities, behaviour, beliefs and attitudes, are shaping and negotiating their presentation of religious identity to me, as the researcher, and are therefore ultimately (albeit often un/subconsciously) attempting to shape my perceptions of their 'self'.

## **5.2 Locals' Religious Practices**

The focus groups revealed the respondents' awareness that they were living and working in a conservative Saudi cultural context, which was accompanied by various locally observed practices. Most participants appeared aware from the beginning of their journey in the KSA that Qassim is more culturally conservative than other Saudi provinces, given that all participants had already

visited cities like Riyadh (the capital city) or Jeddah (a city on the Saudi west coast) due to international airports being located there. Some were informed about the conservative nature of Qassim by other experienced migrants. Yet this ‘knowledge’ did not seem to prepare all participants for how this conservatism was manifest in reality, in terms of religious practices. One theme in the data highlighted by all participants is Islamic prayers. The respondents narrated the fact that people (including co-workers) stop everything and pray when prayer is called. With the exception of Becky and Tina, all respondents narrated this in their diaries with seeming admiration of the spiritual and religious atmosphere that dominates the context. The diaries, for example, showed how Ashly and Rose listened eagerly to prayers during their early days, as this was a new religious practice in their post-migration lives. Jackie, Julia, Francesca, Natalia, Amber, Kate, Ashly and Jessica described looking out the window at work, pondering how businesses can close and operations cease immediately when the call to prayer came. This was described as a culture shock, providing an insight into how conservative local Muslims practise their religion, especially as most participants noted that they had never had close Muslim friends before. This aligns with Magliveras’ (2019) and Parreñas’ findings that some women found the Muslim laws and community practices in KSA alienating and dislocating, whilst others found them exciting, even liberating.

Natalia, Amber, Kate, Ashly, Jessica, Rose, Juliana, Bonny, Brittney and Kimberly reported in their diary entries that during their first weeks, they would stop to observe the action of praying when patients prayed within the clinics, although they did not participate themselves. Moreover, Natalia noticed the religiosity of the city where people stop everything, ‘even while shopping in malls’, to pray. Some participants indicated that they subsequently became interested in exploring and reading about Islam and Islamic prayers on the Internet given their immersion in this context, subsequently learning more about the Islamic faith as time went by. In her diaries, Julia stated:

The major thing I noticed here is how conservative Saudis are. They take their religion seriously, ... I never had a chance to be close to [the] conservative Muslim community, what really caught my attention was Saudis’ devotion on praying five times every day diligently. Even my doctor would stop a few minutes just to pray regardless if we have a patient waiting or not. I also witnessed some patients while at the waiting area they go in

one corner and pray. They bring a small carpet and go to one side if the *Salah* [prayer] or prayer room is full.

(Julia's 3<sup>rd</sup> diary)

The above extract shows that the respondent noticed the religiosity of the context through the level of daily repetition involved in performing one religious practice (i.e., praying five times a day), and were ready with their own equipment at any moment, should the prayer to call sound. The 'seriousness' of religion in KSA, then, was evident, and prayer appeared to be the most salient religious practice noticed by the respondents. This devotion is compared by some of the respondents to the devotion of Filipino Christians. Natalie, for example, stated the following:

[T]hey are very religious, having the time to pray to Allah every now and then. I really respect them for that... in my country, not everybody is as dedicated. I mean we are also praying but I observed that the Arab people are more constant and more devoted.

(Natalie's 2<sup>nd</sup> diary)

Natalie perceived that, though religious, people in the Philippines are less devoted to their faith than local Saudis, manifested in the specific religious practice of praying. The potential shock of this reality is not something that some respondents felt prepared for, as highlighted by Kate:

There are big differences in culture and religion around here. I am not used to live in a very religious atmosphere. People are conservative here I was told that when I was in Riyadh.

(Kate's 4<sup>th</sup> diary)

Working in such a conservative atmosphere appears to be a new experience for Kate; she may not have been prepared for this through her workplace induction or in the sessions she received pre-migration back home.

Interestingly, the thematic analysis showed that the respondents' keen awareness of local religious practices coincided with the nurturing and performing of their own religious identities as Christian

migrants in a conservative context, placing them (sometimes) in stark contrast to the locals, behaviourally speaking. Some respondents, therefore, sought to differentiate themselves from the locals by witnessing local religious practices and rituals and subsequently presenting/performing their own religious identities through different practices and rituals. Others, however, engaged in local religious practices and rituals, as participants viewed them, learning about Islam potentially as a means of acculturation.

### **5.3 Learning about and Immersion in Local Religious Practices and Rituals**

The data shows how many participants perceived working in Saudi Arabia as an adventure, living in a place where people practise another religion. It was an opportunity for Christians to explore and observe the lives of Sunni Muslims and Islam itself. The data include, for example, practitioners' observations of Islamic festivals like Ramadan, Hajj and Eid ul Fitr. Working in this context provided them with an insider's perspective and experience in the heart of Sunni Islam. Much of this was new and therefore exciting for participants, as very few had Muslim friends back in the Philippines, yet in spending some time in the KSA, they had the opportunity to get to know Sunni Muslims intimately. They were able to ask colleagues about Islam, and Islamic ceremonies and events were also viewed as opportunities to find out more information. The practitioners' data reveals that they shared an adventurous and exploratory spirit, and a determination to explore and learn about this context, which would help them to achieve their goal of staying and working for longer in this country.

#### **5.3.1 Catholic Migrants Experiences of Ramadan, Eid ul Fitr and Eid ul Adha**

Muslims observe *Ramadan* (the holiest month in the Islamic calendar) every year. Before the data collection began, the latest Ramadan that respondents had experienced was in 2019, and thus, respondents in the main appeared aware of the specific religious practices associated with this month. For example, the respondents narrated a religious practice called *Siam Ramadan* (the act of fasting during Ramadan from sunrise to sunset), which changes the working hours within the clinics. Another example was participants' reference to *Taraweeh* (specific prayers during Ramadan), which distinguishes that month from others for migrants witnessing and observing the

city. With the exception of Tina and Becky, the spiritual atmosphere of Ramadan was discussed by all respondents.

According to Kate's 5th diary entry, for example, there is a sort of religious spirituality for locals during Ramadan: 'Ramadan is very spiritual to them'. The respondents reported listening to Quranic recitations during the long Ramadan prayers. The diaries show that the respondents were aware of a second major religious ceremony: *Eid ul Fitr* (a major religious celebration that comes at the end of Ramadan), often marking this major religious ceremony in their calendars because of the national holiday associated with it. There was also mention of another Islamic celebration, *Eid ul Adha*, which coincides with the annual Islamic pilgrimage to *Mecca*.

The respondents specifically anticipated these religious events and ceremonies because there is a break from work for a couple of days, since they are marked as official holidays in Saudi calendars and subsequently, all clinics are closed. Migrants are also entitled to enjoy these days as holidays, in addition to their annual fully paid leave of 30 days. Thus, these religious holidays were eagerly anticipated by all respondents. In changing the working hours and granting public holidays, participants were, in effect, 'enacting' or at least observing the cultural and religious practices by abiding by the associated customs and practices. This was, however, welcomed by all, given that it granted greater personal and leisure time to participants.

#### 5.4 Religious Repertoire

The thematic analysis revealed the presence of a specific religious repertoire in the data, used both personally (backstage) and professionally/socially (front stage). Within the empirical data, participants used a number of words within the religious linguistic repertoire relating to Sunni Islam. The repertoire found in respondents' diaries included *Allah* (God), *Salah* (prayer), *Masjid* (mosque), *Wudu* (abolution), *Sejadah* (prayer mat), *Taraweeh* (specific extra prayers only practised during Ramadan), and finally *Qiblah*, which means the direction of *Mecca*.<sup>2</sup> For example, Jessica stated: 'Saudis are very dedicated to pray to *Allah*' (Jessica's 6<sup>th</sup> diary), using *Allah*, the Arabic

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<sup>2</sup> All of these terms are included in a glossary at the start of the thesis.

word for God, instead of simply the Catholic word 'God'. This is an example of the respondents adopting the Islamic repertoire when writing about their post-migration lives.

It is important to mention points where the two faiths intersect in the data. The respondents noticed some common aspects between Christianity and Islam. For example, they noticed that Mary or Mariam is a common name in Saudi Arabia. They also noticed that many patients are named Abraham, Moses or Jesus (Issa). This made them aware of the common ground between Christianity and Islam. Reading more about the faith made them aware of the presence, stories about and belief in other Christian and Jewish figures in Islam (almost identical to Biblical narratives), making the respondents curious about this faith and resulting in further reading. Perhaps it also provided a level of comfort given the concepts, words and religious figures may not have been in such stark contrast between Catholicism and Islam after all. Arguably, this might mean their own Catholic religious identity was not so alien/different to the religious identities presented to them by Muslims in this context after all. Adopting the word 'Allah', for example, may not generate as much tension for a Catholic used to using the word and concept of 'God' in their daily lives than it may be for an atheist, who has no belief or understanding of 'Allah' whatsoever. However, this remains to be seen.

The respondents not only used Islamic repertoire when discussing issues in the focus groups and diaries, but stated that they also used religious repertoire in the professional context. This is discussed presently.

#### ***5.4.1 Professional use of the Religious Repertoire with Patients***

While observing the respondents, I noticed that some respondents utilised a religious linguistic repertoire with patients in this context. This repertoire, which appeared to be learnt by working with Muslim practitioners as well as experienced non-Muslim practitioners, was used with patients in order to express empathy or sympathy, and to put patients at ease while treating them. It did not appear to constitute a religious act of worship; it seemed it was only used to comfort and reassure patients for medical and professional purposes. Yet regardless, it still appeared to be a means of presenting a religious (or professional) identity to patients, demonstrating their front stage

presentation of self. Its very existence addresses Diao and Maa's (2019) assertion that the interaction between language and identity has been underexplored, especially for migrants in the workplace, p.139).

The religious repertoire can be seen in Table 8, which shows that the religious repertoire used by the respondents originated from within the Islamic canon, together with details of the meaning of each religious repertoire.

Table 8  
*Religious Repertoire Used by Filipino Practitioners in Saudi Clinics*

<b>Religious repertoire used</b>	<b>Source and meaning according to the Islamic canon</b>
<i>tahor / tahor insha Allah</i>	If Allah wills, pain/sickness will purge your sins. It also means 'never mind, may this (sickness) be a purification of your sins'. This repertoire comes from the Hadiths (Hadith number 3616).
<i>la bas</i>	Don't worry, no harm done. This is from the Hadiths (Hadith number 5662).
<i>la bas inshallah</i>	No harm done, God willing.
<i>la bas tahor</i>	Sometimes used combined together meaning 'No harm done, it will purge sins'.
<i>alhamdulillah ala salamah</i>	Thank God for your health/safety.
<i>allah yashfeek</i>	May God heal you. This is from Hadiths (Hadith number 2138).
<i>bismillah</i>	In the name of God. This is from Qur'an (11: 41). This is also in the Hadiths (Hadith number 8712).
<i>jazaka-Allah khayr</i>	May Allah reward you with good. This is from the Hadiths (Hadith number 2035).
<i>Insha Allah</i>	God willing. This is from the Qur'an (18: 23).

As shown in the table, there are two main sources of the repertoire discussed in this subsection: the Qur'an and the Hadiths (refer to Introduction, section 1.6.1). Yet not all respondents used this repertoire. The respondents can therefore be classified into the following three main groups, which reveal interesting features associated with their religious identities:

- A- Respondents who adopted the religious repertoire. This included Jackie, Francesca, Amber, Ashly, Rose, Bonny, Kimberly and Suzanna.
- B- Respondents who actively rejected the use of the repertoire. This included Becky, Jessica and Tina.
- C- Respondents who were ignorant of (neither noticed, knew or used) the religious repertoire. This included Julia, Natalia, Kate, Juliana and Brittney.

These groups, their use of religious repertoire and how this links with the negotiation and presentation of their religious identity, are discussed forthwith.

#### ***5.4.2 Group A (Religious Repertoire Adopters)***

Religious repertoire adopters revealed that they learned the religious linguistic repertoire while working with experienced practitioners, who used it with patients. This concurs with findings from Mark and Chui (2013) that workers undergo a linguistic process during their workplace socialisation, where they learn and utilise an appropriate and adequate linguistic repertoire to help them succeed and do their job efficiently. This seems to be a ‘priority’ for migrants to help them ‘interact smoothly’ with members of the host culture (Timpe-Laughlin, 2019, p.413). Religious repertoire was used for specific reasons. For example, some respondents (Jackie, Francesca, Ashly and Bonnie) stated that they used it to sound empathic/sympathetic with patients. Amber, Rose, Kimberly and Suzanna similarly reported that they used this repertoire to help them comfort patients and put them at ease. Use of this linguistic practice as part of their professional roles when working with conservative patients appeared to demonstrate a religious identity, or respect for and observance of the Muslim religious identity. The respondents believed that conforming with and using such a repertoire in this context helped them professionally. As Amber commented in her interview:

Researcher: You remember while [I was] observing we talked about your use of specific religious phrases and words?

Amber: Yeah.

Researcher: This is interesting to me because you use some religious words or phrases like *Tahor* and *La bas*.

Amber: Yes.

Researcher: Can you first tell me how did you learn these religious phrases?

Amber: When I first came here, I heard Muslim doctors and nurses using them around here...They told me... they are Islamic...It basically means... this will purge your sins ....wish them health ...these phrases medical staff use with patients.

Researcher: Do you remember who was using them in front of you?

Amber: I think I was working with [an] Egyptian coworker.

Researcher: So, I think there were Muslims?

Amber: Yes ...They were using them a lot.

Researcher: Great, can you tell me why would you use these religious words and phrases? It is interesting to me because you are a Christian and you know I need to understand why?

Amber: I know ... I feel it helps me with patients, you know ... put them at ease...most patients are conservative here, you know.

In the same vein, other evidence was found in the diaries showing the respondents discussing such a repertoire. Kimberly's diaries reveal the following:

I was first assigned to work with an Indian doctor. I have good memories working with him. He was so elegant in teaching me some Arabic. The Arabic numerals was the first thing he taught me then some words and how to pronounce them properly. I also learned some religious phrases we use with patients.

(Kimberly's 3<sup>rd</sup> diary)

The above extract discusses how knowledge of a religious repertoire was passed down from an experienced Indian practitioner to a Filipino respondent. The act of learning 'some religious phrases' then became linguistic practice with patients. Here is another example from Bonnie's diaries:

Since I am working in the medical field, this means I am facing Saudi patients (the majority of patients were Saudi nationals). Religious language is the key to build rapport with patients.

(Bonnie's 5<sup>th</sup> diary entry)

This rapport is emphasised by Suzanna's diaries:

I grew from very few Arabic words to say religious blessings. I have had patients coming from the clinic and telling me the way you talk touched our souls, we will continue our treatment with you. They liked hearing the blessings and compliments. Such is the power of language.

(Suzanna's 2<sup>nd</sup> diary entry)

The above extract shows that the religious repertoire performatively used with patients was not only noticed and appreciated by patients; this specific linguistic repertoire was touching for them, encouraging them to further their treatment with this clinic. The power that language possesses to leave marked impressions on others was noted by Suzanna therefore. It also indicates that her adoption of religious phrases grew to 'blessings', an enactment of a 'religious' (even if not authentically Muslim) identity, for the benefit of others; this appears to be the ultimate presentation of her front stage self – a self that respects, uses and even abides by Islamic conventions, practices and ideals (even if belief in Islam is not present) – for her own purposes, in this case, to potentially appeal to conservative local patients as a personal migrant and a professional healthcare worker.

The idea that identity is performed (in this case, religious identity) to advance or assist in one's career was highlighted by Duff (2008, p.255): 'people's career trajectories are now quite dynamic and in some fields precarious... people learn new ways of speaking, writing, interpreting, and representing meaning through expanding repertoires of semiotic and communicative tools, for new purposes and audiences and with new networks of colleagues'. Timpe-Laughlin (2019, p.413) further discussed the important role language plays when practitioners interact with patients within medical contexts. She argued that newcomers to workplaces 'undergo a type of linguistic workplace socialization'. She reported a study conducted by Dahm and Yates (2013), which

explored immigrants working in Canada as medical practitioners. The study found that these immigrants, like participants in the present study, utilised language to help them in ‘expressing empathy, which functioned as a way for practitioners to appear professional and approachable’

The religious repertoire is tailored and performatively used for medical interactions in this conservative context; respondents in this group were careful to point out that using this religious repertoire did not clash with their Catholic Christian identity, as it is not accompanied by a change in private, personal (backstage) beliefs. Rather, it is employed to show locals that they were tolerant, considerate and open to other cultures and faiths as overseas Filipino migrants – perhaps to counter potential rejection from patients. Respondents in Group A are all Tagalog Filipinos, unlike Group B, who are Ilocano Filipinos. Thus, respondents in Group A related the adoption of religious repertoire to their upbringing, arguing that they were brought up as considerate of everyone surrounding them whatever their faiths and identities are.

The question of how respondents in Group A felt about potentially being positioned as Muslim practitioners by patients, through the ‘performance’ of an Islamic identity via religious repertoire, was met with indifference – they did not seem to mind. The pretence, or presentation of Islamic identity, did not appear to interfere with their feelings towards their actual Catholic religious identity. The literature notes that identity performances and negotiations include adjustments by participants to ‘apply and refine their cultural schemata, and orient to, assign, or reject categorizations’ (Zhu Hua, 2015, p.64). Zhu Hua (2015) pointed out that participants can ‘accept, avow, display, ignore, reject or disavow memberships assigned to them by others. They can also claim or appropriate memberships of groups to which they do not belong’ (Zhu, 2015, p.73) – just as participants in Group A may have appeared to do to patients through using Islamic repertoire. They did not resist being positioned as Muslim practitioners, which gave them membership to a group they do not really belong to – perhaps this was intentional, to help them, as migrants, ‘align with some voices, discourses and ways of being, and to distance themselves from others’ (Rampton, 2014, p.276). Perhaps their need to distance themselves as migrants is greater than their need to align with Catholicism in the workplace, leading to them taking on ‘different linguistic forms’ (Blommaert and Rampton, 2011). It is clear that the religious language played a role in how some patients positioned their practitioners. Thus, it is evident that ‘rather than being an

ancient, static text', religious language in fact serves a palpable purpose in the present, 'as a flexible, dynamic linguistic resource for performative identity acts' (Badenhorst and Makoni, 2017, p.278). Perhaps the presentation of an empathetic professional and/or migrant identity in this social environment is more salient than the authenticity of their religious identities during these moments.

#### **5.4.3 Group B (Religious Repertoire Rejectors)**

Respondents in this group were found not to use the repertoire with patients even though they were very much aware of the expectations surrounding its use. They reported that despite witnessing the religious repertoire used by co-workers, they did not want to use it with patients themselves, aligning with González-Lioret's (2019, p.339) assertion that language 'learners may not want to fully adopt' the target culture's norms 'because of their own experiences, social position, beliefs, and views of themselves and the target community'. Becky and Tina stated that using this form of language is associated with a Muslim practitioner identity, and that if they used such a repertoire, it would index/signal a religious identity and associated set of beliefs that they did not possess. They, therefore, intentionally reject using that repertoire in this workplace. For example, Tina stated 'I don't want them [patients] to think I am a Muslim... we are Christians... you know... I'm a Christian'. Tina in this way resisted any construction of a Muslim practitioner identity. Becky similarly pointed out her rejection of the Muslim practitioner identity. Tina and Becky are the only respondents in the study who are from the Ilocano ethnicity, which could account the non-negotiability of their religious identity. When discussing such rejection, Tina and Becky noted that they are proud Filipino Christians. Becky, for example, stated that as a Christian, 'I was brought up as to be a proud of my faith... I don't need to use Islamic phrases'. This suggests there may be a felt element of rejecting, undermining or betraying her Catholicism if Becky were to adopt Islamic phrases and repertoire instead. It perhaps highlights the integral link perceived by some participants between Arabic and religious identity (Badenhorst and Makoni, 2017), as though Arabic is a badge of Islam; by contrast, as Peek (2005) asserted, religious people can use their religious language to highlight/index their religious identity – this may the case of Tina and Becky, whose use of English and deliberately abstaining from using Arabic signals *their* Catholic identity.

Jessica was also part of this group who rejected the use of the religious repertoire. She is a Tagalog Filipino, unlike Tina and Becky. Even though Jessica knew the phrases that are often used in her workplace setting, she simply did not think that she needed to use any religious language with patients: 'I feel... I don't need these phrases... no need to use them'. She stated she focuses on the medical treatment, not the way she speaks to patients. Both Becky and Tina's resistance against using the religious repertoire was a means of performing/presenting their authentic religious identities, rejecting any enactment and construction of a Muslim identity.

Lytra (2016) stated that people can and may in fact resist certain identities, especially after migration. Lytra (2016, p.138) stated that a 'speaker's choices to use, or not to use' certain phrases or words is sometimes 'tied to' their identities, helping them to negotiate and construct new identities after migration. These identities, some participants were clear, did not include a Muslim membership, and therefore they rejected any kind of language that could 'mark' their identity as belonging to Islam (supporting Joseph's (2004), Dzialtuvaite's (2006) and Chruszczewski's (2006) findings from studies exploring the intended use of language with respect to religious identity). Arguably the (Catholic) religious identities of resisters of this religious repertoire could have greater salience to Group B than Group A, as Group B actively did not want to present a Muslim identity (or be perceived to be Muslim as a result of their front stage workplace performances). This seemed very important to them, and was less of an issue for Islamic repertoire adopters (Group A). This also aligns with the idea that even though the religious linguistic repertoire is old (dating back about 1400 years), it is deemed live and affective by participants, contributing to how local patients positioned their practitioners, and is thus performative in some contexts (Rosowsky, 2012), whether that means adopting it, or resisting its use.

#### ***5.4.4 Group C (Religious Repertoire Ignorance)***

The respondents in this group did not know about, notice or identify the religious repertoire used by other practitioners with patients, and hence did not use it. When asked about this repertoire, Natalie stated that 'I am not sure', and Britney answered, 'I don't know these phrases'. Similar to Group A in this chapter, this group also shared that they do not mind being positioned as Muslim practitioners, unlike Group B. When compared to other respondents in this study, members of

Group C are the most recent practitioners to work in KSA, and therefore less experienced in, with less exposure to, language commonly used with patients. They reported that they would not hesitate to use any phrase or language that would help them in their professional roles, even if it meant being positioned by patients as Muslim practitioners. Their ignorance of/lack of experience with religious repertoire in the social context perhaps underpins their ready acceptance of a Muslim identity (in the eyes of others); they did not appear to have any emotional reaction to using Islamic language/phrases, unlike resisters in Group C.

### **5.5 Becoming More Religious Post-Migration**

Many respondents reported becoming more religious after moving to this ultra-conservative context inside KSA, which was manifest in both their front and backstage identities. Religion and faith also appear to play a major role in assisting respondents to overcome life's difficulties, particularly in terms of their migrant journey, now that they live thousands of miles away from home. This included gathering with other Catholics to worship (in person and online), demonstrating their faith to others, especially family back home, engaging with Christian content online, and relying on their personal faith when times are hard.

#### ***5.5.1 Coming Together to Worship***

Along with other Christians in Buraydah, respondents reported gathering to pray, singing together and reading from the Bible. This takes place every now and then since it is hard to organise this weekly. Prayer takes place secretly on Sundays after work, given that whilst it is not illegal to be Christian/Catholic in KSA, it is not permitted to outwardly show any expression of faith (Open Doors, 2022). Such acts can, for migrant workers from low- and middle-income countries (India, Africa and the Philippines, for example), result in detention and deportation (Open Doors, 2022). Such gathering and interaction with other Christians appeared to enable a social enactment of their religious identities, fuelling the strength of their religious beliefs through group membership, encouraging them to want to get closer to God and the Bible. Here is an example from Juliana's interview:

Juliana: We like to pray together in our accommodation...You know there is no Churches in this country... You know when you don't have a Church, a place to worship, it makes you pray harder...Because we are a minority here, so it makes us stronger together. I know it's strange, but it makes me enjoy praying, enjoy your faith more. I know I am more religious now than before. I felt this inside of me.

Researcher: Ok, what do you mean by before.

Juliana: Before coming to Buraydah, before knowing I mean, before knowing how is it for a religious minority with no place to worship...I feel I am closer to Jesus here.

It appears from Juliana's interview that being part of a religious minority brings a sense of strength and power to the group and greater personal enjoyment of faith activities (such as praying). Perhaps there is an element of excitement gained from the secrecy surrounding worship, or perhaps it is because ties/bonds between group members are strengthened, providing a sense of belonging. This appeared to be echoed by Rose:

The feeling of being away from my Church makes us search for God, and be closer to him and stronger. The look on other Christians here...The love to our faith, the devotion to God, the dedication to the Bible and the faith is positively...contagious...I mean we feel the religious vibes or energy together and become stronger each time we meet to practice our faith...It gives energy, when we look at each other, you see, we feel we are a minority that keeps its faith, the look at each other is, it's so sweet, I feel better religiously, I used to enjoy praying before, but here it's better, I, it feels better (Rose).

This example suggests that coming together as a religious minority inside KSA has helped enhance their feelings towards, enjoyment of and belief in Catholicism, more so than pre-migration. Rose's reference to 'looking at each other' – the religious presentation and performance of others – also brings enjoyment, indicating the significance of the front stage self in presenting a religious identity to the group. Kate also described this, stating, 'we look at each other's eyes as strong believers who keep their faith, the look in their eyes and the reflect[ion] of my image as a minority practicing a faith is energetic'. Here Kate references a sense of shared or group identity – they observe one another engaging in religious practices and reflect one another's 'image' back,

essentially reinforcing their own religious identity through this shared practice. Kate gains energy from this process; it appears to affirm her own sense of self, both front and backstage.

Yet some respondents reported that given the lack of places for Catholic worship and the lack of touchstones/reference points to Catholicism in KSA (e.g., no priests or Bishops, no Catholic art, sculpture or literature), they were pushed to change how they worshipped, through attending online ceremonies, services and prayers as a substitute for in-person/live gatherings. Francesca stated:

It's not easy to stay religious away from your local church and priests you know well...you try to stay focused on your own business and...I mean trying to be attached to your faith with no Church around...That feeling, you know, the feeling I have no Church around, made me pray harder here, because I miss my Church, I started to attend online prayers and ceremonies...this made me stay prayed up, you know, when I think of it, I am now a better Catholic now. When I am alone attending online ceremonies and prayers, I feel my soul is religious satisfied, even better than before coming to Buraydah (Francesca)

This reveals that collective worship is not simply an in-person, front-facing endeavour; it can be performed alone, backstage, unseen, with only the knowledge that others are collectively worshipping at the same time around the world via these online services. This personal choice to commit to worship, to 'perform' religious practices for no one but herself to see, led to greater personal belief for Francesca. Perhaps there was still a sense of collective worship via the online service, which gave Francesca the sense of a group membership, strengthening her faith.

### ***5.5.2 The Demonstration of Faith***

Respondents stated that they read the Bible more after arriving in Qassim, often because of homesickness, or because of the 'religious atmosphere' of the context; some, like Kimberley, stated in her interview that she never read the Bible more often than during her early days in KSA. Reading the Bible was something that happened alone and with others, and it appeared that there

was a palpable demonstration of faith both surrounding and amongst participants. For example, in Kate's interview she stated:

Kate: I watched everything here, I mean, like I'm studying Saudi Arabia...the city here is religious...People are very conservative. You know I am a believer...and I like to see people loving God. Seeing people fast Ramadan and go for Hajj, I like it. I became more religious here.

Researcher: How?

Kate: I don't know what was going with me. I started to search for the Bible and read it.

Also, I mean you know, I went to practice my faith more here. I think the religious atmosphere around here helps, I mean, you know encouraged me.

Researcher: What do you mean by religious atmosphere?

Kate: I mean prayer is called 5 times a day. I hear that. Also, Ramadan season, it's just pushed me more to religion. I think, in the Philippines. I think we are becoming less religious, not like here. I like being more religious from inside, it makes me calmer and stronger in life too. I enjoy praying here with other Filipinas and chatting about our faith, and reading the Bible here.

There is a sense that the surrounding religious atmosphere of Qassim, and the continual reminders of the importance of religion via frequent calls to prayer in the city, bleeds into the religiosity of Kate; she too feels 'more religious', not only in terms of connecting and worshipping with others, but 'from inside' too (her backstage presentation of self).

This demonstration of faith extends to those back home, for some participants. For example, Jessica wanted to show her parents that she was committed to her Catholic faith and they should have no concerns about her converting:

Jessica: My parents are very religious, very Catholic, they gave a copy of the Bible before coming here. They keep worrying about my faith

Researcher: What do you mean?

Jessica: I mean they think I might leave my faith and convert to Islam. A lot of Filipinos convert to Islam here. So I like, to show them, you know, I show my parents I am still religious, keeping my faith and my Bible with me all the time around here...You know, they like to see me as religious as I was in the Philippines...It makes them feel better. Be connected to the faith, reading the Bible. I send them Christmas cards, you know.

Jessica alludes to the fact that a large number of Filipinos convert to Islam inside KSA; her parents clearly regard this possibility negatively. Thus, to help reassure her parents, Jessica likes to 'show' she is a committed Catholic, talking about her faith, sending Christmas cards, and so on. This was also important to Ashly, who stated 'I like to let my parents know I will keep my faith forever'.

Another method adopted to demonstrate this to others in the Philippines includes consuming and posting Christian/Catholic content online, on various social media sites, platforms and via messages to family back home. This constructs and cements their Catholic identity to others, but also appeared to demonstrate their greater religiosity post-migration to themselves, especially as it often started to happen after moving to this Sunni ultra-conservative context. For example, Amber stated:

During my first days here, I post a lot of religious posts on Facebook...some pictures of verses, some verses from the Bible...To help me and people like me be closer to God, and become more religious. Last time I posted something from John and Corinthians...It tells us to be strong and patient in the face of difficulties. I also like to post some wise phrases we use...Ahh, yeah, 'pray hardest when it's hardest to pray'. This helps me get myself together when I am alone, you know (Amber).

Bonnie discussed how her increased consumption of Christian religious media content strengthened her sense of group membership to the Catholic faith:

Bonnie: I think I become more attached to my faith now...More religious than before, When I was in the Philippines... You know before coming to Buraydah.

Researcher: How did you know you became more religious, what do you mean by that?

Bonnie: You feel it, you know...I read more about my faith, I listen to Christian songs more. I watch more religious programmes and YouTube clips than before. And I post more. Now, than before. I feel, I know I listen to religious songs now....Yeah I feel songs bring us closer to God. Stay blessed and loved. Also I started following priests on social media I never did this before.

Researcher: Which social media?

Bonnie: Twitter

Bonnie: Its weird, I never thought about this before

Researcher: Why? Why you say it's weird?

Bonnie: Because I retweet priests' tweets and give them likes, I, you know, more than ever in my life.

It appears as though Bonnie's actions take her by surprise, as though she has never considered or noticed her increased online religious behaviour/activity before. This activity not only enables her to feel 'closer to God' but appears to engage her in, and allow her to feel closer to, a community she is far away from. This increased engagement could be one of the reasons why she feels more religious than before she came to the KSA. This sense of surprise is also conveyed by Britney, who also described it as 'weird':

Britney: I started posting more Christian content online [on TikTok] after coming here.

Researcher: You did not do this before?

Britney: No, I was less attached to my faith.

Researcher: Why?

Britney: I don't know, it's weird, I began to think about my faith more after coming here. I started to think more about, you know, my faith, my prayers...The Bible. I read it more than before, before leaving the Philippines and coming here.

Another example of a participant that attempted to make sense of why she was so much more engaged online than she was prior to migrating to KSA came from Juliana:

Juliana: I used to skip short religious videos before but now I don't, I post them

Researcher: What do you mean by before?

Juliana: Before moving here from the Philippines.

Researcher: I see, ok, where do you post them? Which platform?

Juliana: Facebook and Twitter

Researcher: What do you mean religious videos?

Juliana: You know Christian priests giving advice. Then I thought their words resembles me, my journey...I changed, I was weak and poor then I changed here...From being poor to have money and from being not very religious to being more religious, and religiously committed to my faith, from being weak to being strong.

Researcher: How can religion help you when you are in a difficult situation in this life?

Juliana: Provides calmness in your life, you feel secure, you see, and safe even in hard times...I heard a priest saying God uses hardships for our own benefit. Hardship helps us understand Christ's sufferings. It makes you stronger in life. It makes you, you know, closer to God. You keep asking him to guide you...Until you are saved, so I post this to others now...To help them be stronger in life and never be weak.

Juliana discusses here that she found religion, and specifically Christian teachings, to be more relevant, more resonant with her own experience, post-migration, and that the sense of 'calmness', safety and security she experienced as a result of her strengthened faith is something she wished to share with others in her friendship/family circle online. Social media sites like Twitter (now X) and Facebook can provide platforms for individuals to construct and demonstrate their identities to others; what we post provides a sign, a 'badge' of our identity, through our actions and words. Perhaps this demonstration of self, of religious/Christian identity, has become ultimately more important because of the conservative Muslim context Juliana finds herself in; something that did not differentiate her from her family/friends back home (Catholicism) is now something she must actively work hard to maintain, given that group membership is not a given. She has gone from being part of the in-group to being in the minority, an outsider living amongst the 'out-group', meaning she must work harder to establish and display/present her identity, to herself and others.

She can no longer afford to ‘skip’ videos online that are salient to her sense of self; she now needs them to help reinforce this sense of self, in a context that could so easily undermine/swallow/subvert any action to perform her identity. It may also be that, given the secrecy with which Catholicism appeared to be worshipped with others, posting content online provides an outlet or means by which identity can continue to be performed and presented front stage, to others, given they may feel many locals would chastise or frown upon them by going against the religious norm. Thus, even though they are physically/geographically far away from their Christian ‘audience’ and friends, posting online facilitates the presentation of religious self for others – perhaps especially because this kind of practice is also prohibited in KSA (Iwayama, 2019). It also supports Vertovec’s (2006) concept of superdiversity given the apparent complexity of migrant’s identity trajectories and journeys.

Research however on how far migrants’ religious identity changes, and their religious adaption to the host country, remains inconclusive. Studies of Muslims in Europe have revealed that religiosity increases or remains stable, whilst generally it declines for Christian immigrants (e.g., Diehl and Koenig, 2013; Drouhot and Nee, 2019; Guveli, 2015; Güveli and Platt, 2011; Lewis and Kashyap, 2013; Maliepaard, Gijsberts, and Lubbers, 2012; Platt, 2014;). One explanation for this may be that religiosity transmission from parents to children may be stronger in Muslim families compared to Christian families (Khoudja, 2022). Therefore, the findings in the present study conflict with some of the current literature, given most participants claimed they became *more* religious – more committed to their Catholic faith – post-migration. This literature conflict could stem from several reasons; most research on Christian migrants has been conducted in secular countries, not Islamic countries, where the patterns of religiosity may differ. Secondly, it may be that participants in the present study were overstating the extent to which they had become more religious for my benefit. Thirdly, it could be that, migrating to an ultra-conservative Islamic country, such as KSA, actually strengthens previous religious commitment precisely because of the potential persecution of Christians in this context: feeling persecuted and alienated may strengthen commitment to a previous community where one felt welcomed and accepted. Challenges within the migratory journey may also contribute to greater reliance on one’s faith community. This was found by Marshall (2018), who surveyed over 200 and interviewed 130 Filipinos in Canada; she stated, ‘people said they really needed their religion as migrants. That

provided them with the anchor' (cited in Ruck, 2019). This is discussed in due course. Finally, it may be that, as some participants commented, being in a deeply religious country (compared to a secular country) provides regular reminders of faith-based practices, which could encourage faith-based practices amongst participants/migrants (albeit practices from a different faith altogether).

### **5.6 Faith as a Source of Strength**

Respondents reported that when facing difficult times in their post migration lives (e.g., language barrier, new environment, new workplace, new co-workers and staff, another culture in another part of the world), faith and religion help them to feel stronger. This is echoed in the literature; Iwayama (2019), in a qualitative study involving interviews with 20 Filipino overseas workers residing in an unnamed Islamic state, found that:

Christian overseas foreign workers situated in an Islamic host country that prohibits and punishes religious practices by non-Moslems risk their lives by practicing their faith albeit clandestinely since religion acts as a source of strength, a form of amusement, a form of motivation to become a better person, an anesthetic that numbs the physical, emotional and mental strains, a source of networks and a method of knowing God for Christian overseas foreign workers in the said Islamic State (Iwayama, 2019, p. 55).

The above findings echo that of the present study. During the early days and weeks in the KSA, all respondents reported that being a new member in a team (and not knowing the language, as well as other factors) made them feel weak, tired, anxious, lost and worried. Faith appeared to provide a sense of refuge, allowing them to rest and recover backstage before presenting a 'strong' identity once more in their front stage selves, in their social interactions (especially in the workplace and with family back home). The language of 'strong' and 'weak' became common themes, with God providing this source of strength when they felt they lacked it. Kimberley's interview illustrates this:

Kimberley: I remember I felt weak and lost and tired here, but I managed to rise again.

Researcher: When, did you feel tired and lost?

Kimberley: In first week in the clinic...Everything was new to me, the language, the culture, the dry heat, people around here. Before in my life, I never was in this situation, ever before in my whole life. When I go home after work I feel weak and useless, I know I look strong but I'm not. We, I, you know, I was raised as a Catholic, we can endure hardship...I must be ready to what life throws at me.

Researcher: How?

Kimberley: Have faith, be strong, be with God. You know your faith helps you be strong. When I am home I read the Bible sometimes and it feels like it is talking to me during hard times. It changes my status. My vibes, I become more positive less negative.

Kimberley reveals several things in the above extract. She suggests that 'image' and 'looking strong' can be deceptive, not betraying how one really feels inside. She also alludes to the idea that Catholics have a sense of identity as resilient, able to endure hardship, perhaps a cultural phenomenon. Finally, Kimberley outlines the personal strength she gained from her faith, which manifested itself in changing her perspective, outlook and state of mind; she became more optimistic, and perhaps gained a sense of energy to help her tackle the challenges she faced.

The reliance on the Bible when they are alone appeared to provide many respondents with a source of strength and connection to Catholicism. Bonnie stated:

When get back to my place after work and I was feeling useless and tired...because I was new, I knew nothing, I need help at work every now and then...I remember finding some quotes from the Bible which helped me be stronger and think positive about my situation. You know we have some key verses on hardships when you face them...I believe Timothy 4:5, it basically tells Christians to be strong and endure hardship in life. Endure every hard thing in life in general. A believer must have an ability to endure adversity and hardships. We believe God is lovingly using hardships in believers' life for enhancement. I mean God is using difficulties in believers' life

to...to enhance their relationship with God, make it, you know, deeper, make it stronger and deepen it. You become stronger, better believer (Bonnie).

The Bible is almost personified, 'speaking' to participants through the words it contains to assist them through, as seen in the above extracts, helping them to think more positively about their circumstances. The strength drawn from engaging with Catholicism appears to feed into their sense of self when alone, how far they feel able to endure hardship, how religious, resilient and 'strong' they are. This strength seems to come from the 'inside' as a result of the 'teachings' Catholicism imparts. Here is an example from an interview with Julia:

What helped me keep going during bad times was faith...my Catholic faith...when you are alone in your house, sitting thinking about how to get over things, it helps. It teaches us to be patient. We must be patient when we, when you face problems in life. It also teaches us to be strong from inside in order to overcome them. It teaches us to be strong and patient. It teaches you to be ready for what life brings to you, you must be strong.

The 'requirement' to be strong in Julia's interview, where being weak is not an option, is interesting. It suggests that being a Catholic requires that individuals align themselves with the ideals and commands of Catholicism, to continue to adopt that religious identity both front and backstage. There appears to be a belief that when facing challenges, God's plan to change them from the inside; whilst participants (as seen earlier) drew a sense of group membership, excitement and belonging when enacting their religious identities with others, it is when alone, when no one is present in their backstage setting, that their perspectives on a difficult situation changes, often from remembering and drawing strength from verses or quotes. This was echoed by Natalie, who stated: "When God is shaking you, he is preparing you to fly". I usually remember this quote when I am alone. God is with you. This speech, the words made me a better believer, I think better when seeing, I mean hearing this.'

The dichotomy between the front and backstage presentation of religious identity is directly addressed by Becky in our interview together:

Becky: You know, your faith helps you from within, I mean from the inside

Researcher: How?

Becky: I, you know, God look[s] on the inside, people look at the outside, you see. I, you know, I when I'm alone I felt tired and weak after coming here for the first time. But when I am home I pray hard, I feel being strong because I charge my soul with my faith. My faith helps me be stronger both inside and stronger outside, and this makes me better outside. I feel different every time I pray alone at home.

Here, Becky insinuates that it is necessary to nurture one's own sense of self when alone, backstage, in the privacy of one's home, so as to gain the strength to present the kind of 'self' one wants to present to others. Like an electronic device, Becky's soul needs 'charging' at home, her religious identity needs to be enacted privately, so that she can recreate this identity whilst on stage, in view of others. She also highlights that God sees 'inside', thus indicating that for her at least, nothing is ever truly private; her private sense of self is constantly under surveillance and witnessed by God, and she communicates with him through prayer and scripture. Therefore, the omnipresence of God may feed into her religious identity, potentially providing a sense of company and comfort even when alone.

### **5.7 Paralleling Jesus' Sacrifices with Participants' Own Sacrifices**

The teachings of the Bible appeared to provide a sense of the need to endure hardships, sufferings, difficulties or sacrifices, in the same way that Jesus did. This lesson appeared to be learnt prior to coming to the KSA, but was reinforced post-migration. Thus, there appeared to be an association between Jesus's sacrifices, suffering and hardships and their journey to migrate to the other part of the world, and this association seemed to strengthen many respondents' sense of religious commitment and identity. As Jackie in her interview stated:

When I am alone thinking about myself, I remember Jesus sacrifices...As a Catholic I learned a long time ago that you may face difficult time[s]...And you must have faith...You must do your own sacrifices like Jesus...I always remember him when,

you see, I mean when I am struggling, and feeling awful, I try to remind myself, you see... Because you must sacrifice, sacrifice your time, you must do a lot of sacrifices. Then I started feeling calmness of the faith, and I felt being more I mean very religious myself (Jackie).

Hardship appears to be a prerequisite to a stronger sense of faith; Jackie says 'you must sacrifice' several times to reinforce this point. This inevitability brought her a sense of calmness, perhaps that things were outside of her control and therefore she could simply accept and face these challenges. The sacrifices made by Jesus appear to provide lessons and even a role model to participants like Jackie, perhaps showing that these 'tests' facilitate an opportunity for growth and development, both when alone and when with others. The idea that suffering has a positive purpose was highlighted by Julia, who in her interview commented:

I now know God uses suffering to make us stronger... stronger like Jesus...when you go through new experiences, you see, you grow. Before I did not know suffering and going through new experiences makes you grow...I knew this before but now I experienced it. I felt I had nothing but God, I need to get closer to God. He saved me, [the] closer to God [the] stronger you are. I have never felt so religious like after leaving my home country.

In fact, these challenges and the sacrifices required are almost painted as a privilege by Becky:

Becky: What helped me cope here after moving was faith. I mean religiously, the Bible reminds us about Jesus' sacrifice.

Researcher: In what way?

Becky: You know most of us may suffer in life. Even Christian figures like saints and Prophets suffered on earth and face difficult times. It tells you, you are not alone, I, you know, we are not alone. When I lay back on my bed after a tiring day, I, you know, I remember, when I am alone...

Here Becky suggests that when she is alone, she is not *really* alone, as she is part of a much larger group, one populated with high status individuals such as prophets and saints, as well as believers like herself. It may be that she draws comfort from remembering that: a) others, ‘even’ high status Catholics, endured hardship, like herself, meaning that status has no bearing on how much sacrifice is required of a believer; and that b) she is almost privileged to be part of this group, as though sacrifice is a requirement for group membership, and that suffering provides a sense of similarity between her and Jesus as she lies on her bed at home. This similarity provides a sense of ‘closeness’ to God as a result of his assistance when Natalie faced challenges. She stated in our interview:

You face difficulties, but God helps you pass them. I get to know the Lord more now after stumbling and struggles...when I am alone I think more about him after he helped when I struggled. I changed, I’m more religious now.

Respondents reported thinking of Jesus more often than before coming to KSA. Rose, for example, stated that ‘God and Jesus are always on my mind here, more than before, I keep thinking of him when I [am] alone thinking about lifting myself up in hard times’. Respondents saw Jesus (and other Christian figures like saints and prophets) as figures helping them to establish and clarify their backstage religious identities:

We Christians have figures, we look up to in this life...we love Jesus, we look up to him like a figure, who suffered and sacrificed a lot. You start to look at them differently, know them more, be closer to their legacy. I started, I mean, now I think of him more than before. You start to look at your faith differently, I mean, because it help[s] you...It helped me, when life is hard and things go down...you start a life here, this makes me think of Jesus more...And my religion more than ever before...I look up to him and welcome hardship...Anything hard in life may change, I mean, may turn into ease and joy...Just thank God. I know I’m now, I became more religious after coming here (Bonnie).

Jesus appears to be a more prominent figure in Bonnie’s life and mind as a result of the challenges she has faced during and post-migration.

### 5.8 *Lakas-ng-loob* and Inner Strength

The Filipino virtue of *lakas-ng-loob* was mentioned by all participants; it refers to being and staying brave, or having ‘guts and courage’ (Vitto et al., 2020). Yet despite Vitto et al. (2020, p. 108) finding that *lakas-ng-loob* is ‘a core concept of a theoretical construct used in understanding Filipino social psychology’, there is very little research on this term, especially linking it to Filipino migrants. In the present study, *Lakas-ng-loob* was seen to be an element of participants’ ‘selves’ that went hand-in-hand with their Catholic Filipino identity, especially post-migration. This Filipino virtue seemingly played a pivotal role in encouraging the change from weakness to strength, especially in the face of new experiences and hard circumstances. *Lakas-ng-loob* was discussed as something that was especially prevalent for Catholics. As Suzanna stated:

Basically, we believe, when we are weak, when we don’t have power on a certain situation like weather. You don’t have power to control weather...when we are weak, and don’t have power on any circumstance, I remind myself when I am sitting alone that I don’t have power over everything. I say *lakas-ng-loob* to be strong, coz I can’t control things. And so a Christian like me, must be strong, I must be strong, in life, you can’t change what you can’t control, just be strong and stay strong to face things in life (Suzanna).

The idea of acceptance and letting go of control appeared to be prevalent here, and is evoked when participants are feeling weak and tired due to the hardships experienced. This is nicely explained by Britney:

Britney: We believe in few virtues and ideas that helps us in difficult times.

Researcher: Like what?

Britney: Let me think, I think, like *lakas-ng-loob*.

Researcher: What does it mean?

Britney: It’s like a proverb, a saying it means, it’s a virtue a Filipino virtue, it means strength and being strong and bravery from inside, from your self...This virtue

helped me go through difficult times safely. You know when I am alone tired or feeling weak I remember *lakas-ng-loob*. It gives you this deep faith that all will be well. You will be fine and succeed... You know, make you stop worrying... be calm and strong and focus... *lakas-ng-loob* is very valuable coz it helps a Catholic be brave, you see... when being exhausted and tired, a Catholic can change and be strong... I must be strong and brave from the inside to rebuild myself over and over in life.

Britney appears to indicate that the Filipino virtue of *lakas-ng-loob* is helpful for, or perhaps pivotal to, a Catholic's sense of strength and identity. The idea that this sense originates from inside the 'self' indicates a baseline level of resilience, courage and fortitude to weather any storm, that Filipino Catholics can call upon during moments of challenge, uncertainty and difficulty; this appears to give Britney the ability to 'let go' of worry and anxiety for the future, and of control, evoking the idea of fate in her description that 'it gives you this deep faith that all will be well'. This handing over of control to a higher strength or power is resonant with the concept of handing over control or power to God as Catholics, as noted earlier. Thus, *lakas-ng-loob* and Catholicism do appear to be intertwined for participants; strength comes from inside, which may in turn come from (or 'be') God. It is something that may be enacted front stage, in front of or with others, or evoked privately and quietly, behind closed doors (backstage). Either way, it appears to be highly beneficial to participants, forming part of their sense of self and thus their religious, Filipino identity. This in part conflicts with Parreñas' (2001) finding that, when migrant Filipinos relocated to Italy and California, often lost their unified sense of identity, predominantly because of the 'multiple axis of domination' that exist, meaning they (Parreñas, 2001, p. 12) developed a cross-national, or transnational alliance. In the present study, whilst the sense of dislocation Parreñas (2001) discussed was present in the culture shock experienced by some of the participants, the concept of *lakas-ng-loob*, mentioned by all participants – as well as other Filipino virtues such as *utang-na-loob*, perhaps indicates a kind of unified sense of Filipino identity, which continued despite migration. The linking of these virtues with Catholicism could perhaps go some way towards accounting for this, providing a deeper sense of unification for some, due to their faith; this cannot be claimed for all participants, however, given that whilst most had a stronger sense of faith post-migration, some did not seem as forthcoming in this respect.

## 5.9 Conclusion

This chapter has explored various aspects of the participants' religious identity, especially how it has changed since moving to the KSA. Most respondents claim they became more religious after moving to the KSA, for a variety of reasons, including the increased religious atmosphere of Qassim, with the continual call to prayer and dedication of locals; this devotion was compared to a relatively reduced devotion to Catholicism back home, and many of the participants appeared unprepared and/or impressed by the locals in their conservatism as a result. This learning opportunity (for Islamic beliefs and culture) was perceived by many as an adventure, and they embraced many of the rituals, including speaking religious repertoire with patients and observing public/religious holidays in KSA. Not all participants adopted the religious repertoire however, feeling as though this compromised their identity (especially in the eyes of others); they preferred to be viewed as staunch, committed Catholics, with their commitment demonstrable by their refusal to engage in Islamic repertoire, even when it might be expected or pleasing for locals/colleagues.

Becoming more religious post-migration was demonstrated/presented in a variety of ways, both front and backstage, including worshipping with other Catholics in-person (the secrecy of gathering together to pray to and worship God appeared to heighten the excitement, sense of adventure and sense of group membership for many) and privately, online. Sharing one's religious identity with others, such as when speaking with family members or via posting content online, also appeared to strengthen their sense of self as Catholic, providing a 'badge' of identity for some. Yet their faith was generally also strengthened privately, when alone, especially when experiencing suffering and hardship post-migration. The migratory journey for many presented many difficulties and challenges, which often led to the private, continued recognition of (and reliance on) God, Jesus, and inner strength (*lakas-ng-loob*) as a result. Discovery and reliance on these coping strategies presented opportunities for growth and development, a changed mindset towards greater optimism about the future, and greater trust in a higher power, given they could not control outcomes themselves.

The increased performances, presentations and enactments of Catholic identity, especially as a result of difficult times post-migration, seems to indicate a greater commitment to this faith for many; others seemed to indicate greater ‘religious’ identity more broadly, through learning about Islam, socialising with locals, and their adoption of Islamic repertoire – even to the point that locals might perceive them as Muslims. This is something that some participants were unconcerned about, especially as it often meant their professional roles were enhanced through locals viewing them more positively. Either way, a greater sense of ‘religious identity’ – whether Catholic or otherwise – was perceived in all respondents, throughout their diaries and interviews. Naturally, this presentation of a more ‘religious self’ may have been solely or partially for my benefit, for some/many participants, and it is critical to bear this in mind, especially as some participants explicitly commented that they were happy to be viewed as religious, and even Muslim, if they believed it assisted them in their roles. This may even be true for participants in their roles as respondents; a desire to please a Saudi Muslim researcher, such as myself, whilst they lived and worked in KSA, cannot be underestimated.

## Chapter Six: Socioeconomic Factors

### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss three main subthemes found in the data regarding various socioeconomic factors experienced by respondents following their move to KSA. This includes discussing certain issues that shed some lights on the respondents' views of KSA as a context of reception. It begins by highlighting the phenomenon of what respondents call *balikbayan*, specific gift boxes sent by overseas Filipinos to their relatives each year, which is arguably related to their front stage presentation of the self, providing a specific image of the financial prosperity and generosity of the participant to their family back home. Next, I move on to discuss respondents' backstage self by shedding light on what respondents call *utang-na-loob* (a Filipino virtue that means debt of gratitude). I then address what respondents call *Bayani* (meaning heroes or patriots). This is followed by discussing respondents' awareness and perspectives surrounding the ways in which the Filipino media and government construct and disseminate a 'heroic' identity for overseas Filipino workers, and their preference to be perceived as *Bayanis* in the eyes of their families. The chapter then moves on to considering the ways the respondents perceive applying for new Saudi permanent residency, which appeared to be strongly linked to their front stage presentation of the self as *Bayanis*. This is framed in the light of the participants' views of both the benefits and drawbacks of KSA as a context of reception for Filipino migrants, before the chapter is then concluded with the main findings summarised.

### 6.2 Sending *Balikbayan* Gifts Boxes: Overseas Filipino Traditions

I have discussed earlier that there is continuous contact between respondents and their families in the Philippines, afforded by modern technology. This not only includes sending money home to parents, brothers and sisters; respondents also described sending what is known as *balikbayan* (gift boxes) to their families in the Philippines. *Balikbayan* are usually sent by overseas Filipinos back to family members in their hometowns and villages; in fact, the word *balikbayan* itself means 'returning home'. Respondents discussed wanting to continue this tradition for a variety of reasons,

including maintaining connections and a sense of presence back home, but also to construct a positive image of themselves to family members. This can be seen in the following extract between myself and Natasha:

Natasha: I usually send some gift boxes to my parents...we call them *balikbayan* gift boxes...I send them home every year.

Researcher: And why are they sent?

Natasha: I need to maintain connection with my roots.

Researcher: What you mean by roots?

Natasha: My family and my elders and you know, these people.

Researcher: Ok, how does it make you feel?

Natasha: Balikbayan gift boxes is a tradition for us.

Researcher: You mean Filipinos?

Natasha: Not all Filipinos, I mean overseas Filipinos...It helps us maintain connection with our families...we should keep this tradition going you know.

Researcher: Why?

Natasha: Because it helps us be in touch with them, the gifts can help make me stay visible over there, in their lives thousands [of] miles away...and maintain connection with them using these gifts...usually overseas Filipino make sure to do this...it feels good to do this as well as sending them money.

Researcher: Ok, don't you think that sending money every month to your family is enough?

Natasha: No... I feel *balikbayan* is a must additionally.

Researcher: Ok, why?

Natasha: Because we love them very much, we Filipinos love them... also I feel I'm there with them when I send balikbayan gift boxes to them...I feel good about myself and my image over there when not there...you know I am away and absent, *balikbayan* make my image present over there.

This extract demonstrates Natasha's feeling that gift boxes are firstly an expected part of being an overseas Filipino migrant, a tradition that is important to maintain, to demonstrate love, connection

and commitment to the family. It is interesting Natasha uses the word 'roots' to describe her family members, bringing forth an image of a tree, with the roots remaining steadfast, immovable, the life-force from whence she came. It also evokes the image of age, of something older and therefore precious, familiar and possibly wise, which she confirms with her explanation of roots to mean her 'elders'. The idea that she wants to keep touching base with her 'roots' and honour them with gifts also confers a symbolic meaning, wherein she wishes to confirm and reinforce her Filipino identity in her context dominated by Saudis.

The sending of balikbayan gift boxes could also arguably convey a sense of the 'front stage' self as discussed by Goffman, given Natasha's comment that she wants to establish a specific image back home, and to maintain a form of presence through these presents. Whilst Natasha did not overtly say so, sending balikbayan gift boxes can be a means by which Filipino migrants please family members, encouraging them to think positively of them even though they are absent. This can be seen in the way Natasha speaks about establishing a positive 'image', to feel 'good' about herself (because of this positive image in the minds of the balikbayan gift box receivers). In this sense, it highlights the importance of the crafting of an idealised presentation of the self to others, a 'front stage' self that potentially carries a positive image of a successful, loving, generous, thoughtful and dutiful family member. Sending balikbayan gift boxes containing 'exotic' overseas gifts and treats for others that have not experienced Saudi culture can also bring joy to respondents given that they are anticipating creating delight and wonder in their family members through the different items the boxes may contain. It can give a flavour of the respondents' lifestyles in KSA, carefully constructed to perhaps indicate their new prosperity, maturity and expanded horizons, even if they themselves (in reality) cannot afford to indulge in or enjoy the kinds of items that the balikbayan gift boxes may contain. Sending money, according to Natasha, is not enough; perhaps it does not construct the image of herself that she wishes to present and promote, it is not visible enough, compared with the balikbayan gift boxes. The meaning of balikbayan as 'returning home' offers a clue as to the significance the box holds; the meaning of the gift box surpasses the physical items it contains. Rather, it is emblematic of the sender themselves, the box 'returning home' in their stead, a colourful reminder of not only the sender's existence, but their newfound, exotic identity and prosperity abroad.

This image constructed conflicts with the ‘backstage self’ that the respondents indicated they often hid – another version of their reality or identity, betraying the hardship and challenges they had experienced and continue to experience in their time in KSA. For example, Julia stated that, when phoning her family in the Philippines:

I don’t tell them about small, trivial hardships and difficulties of starting a new life in the other side of the world...like starting a career, building a career and learning Arabic...I don’t tell them about this, I just smile and laugh with them...I tell them jokes.

Julia did not want to show her family the whole picture in terms of her life in KSA, or allude to the difficulties she experienced. This narrative was typical of other respondents’ experiences, as they also claimed they ‘hid’ some of the hardships they experienced. Respondents stated they would lie on their beds at night mulling over and attempting to solve these ‘secret’ challenges, such as the hectic schedules of medical practitioners (a recurrent theme among respondents), their lack of leisure time, or lack of finances to spend on personal care and food. One particular example given by several participants was the difficulty of learning Arabic (discussed later in chapter Seven); many spent much of their free time working hard on their target language to boost their professional image and service. However, respondents stated they were reluctant to discuss these hardships with their family and friends over the phone; often, respondents timed phone calls so they could eat with their family, and when probed for why they refrained from discussing many difficulties related to their migration to KSA, respondents often state that these calls provide a moment of joy. Therefore, they did not wish to ‘lower the mood’ by divulging what they saw as insignificant details surrounding the difficulties they face at work or with Arabic. This aptly highlights the backstage self as discussed by Goffman, the ‘self’ that few people are ‘allowed’ to see; the idealised version of their self is more often presented, especially to family members back in the Philippines, to communicate prosperity, fun, freedom, and happiness, via money and gifts sent back home, and through the presentation of self over the phone.

This coincides with research on this topic. The literature (e.g., Agaton, 2017; Garcia, 2021; Ferrer, 2011) indicates that Filipino migrant workers often refrain from disclosing hardships to their families due to cultural expectations such as *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude, discussed presently) and the pressure to fulfil their roles as providers. This cultural norm discourages revealing struggles, as migrants aim to preserve an image of success and avoid burdening their families with worry or guilt. By withholding details of their challenges, they maintain familial harmony and continue meeting expectations of financial support, even at the expense of their own well-being. It also ensures they maintain the image of a *Bayani*, a hero, in their family's eyes (see 6.4).

For example, in *The Burgers' Paradox: Migration and the Transnationalization of Social Inequality in Southern Ghana*, Nieswand (2014) examines how migration impacts social inequality within Ghanaian transnational networks. The study focuses on Ghanaian migrants, referred to as 'burgers,' who are perceived as wealthy and successful abroad. This perception contrasts with the economic and social challenges they face in host countries, such as precarious employment and limited integration.

Nieswand introduces the concept of the 'burger's paradox', which highlights the discrepancy between migrants' actual socioeconomic conditions and the elevated expectations of their communities back home. Migrants often feel compelled to maintain an image of success by sending remittances and participating in conspicuous consumption to fulfil social obligations, even when it strains their finances. The study reveals that this dynamic perpetuates social inequality by reinforcing hierarchies based on transnational mobility and material wealth.

Similarly, Schmalzbauer (2005) examined how Honduran migrants, who live in a state of 'transmigration' between their home country and the US, relate to the American Dream and consumer culture. The study explores how these migrants navigate the promises of upward mobility and material success often associated with the American Dream while contending with the realities of their migrant status and economic struggles. Schmalzbauer's research highlights the complex ways in which Honduran transmigrants internalise the American Dream ideology, recognising its potential but also grappling with its contradictions. While they aspire to material success, their experiences in the US often challenge this ideal, as many face low-paying, unstable jobs and limited upward mobility. Thus, consumer society shapes migrants' identities and

**Commented [A1]:** • Agaton, S. I. G. (2017). *Vantage Points of Utang na Loob*. *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 3(1), 60–64.  
• Garcia, M. (2021). *An Examination of the Trauma Filipina Migrant Workers Face*. *Access\*: Interdisciplinary Journal of Student Research and Scholarship*, 5(1), Article 2.  
• Ferrer, C. J. (2011). *Filipina Domestic Workers: Building Communities of Trust Across Borders*. *Race, Poverty & the Environment*, 18(1), 6–8.

**Commented [A2]:** Schmalzbauer, L. (2005). *Transamerican dreamers: The relationship of Honduran transmigrants to the ideology of the American dream and consumer society*. *Berkeley journal of sociology*, 3-31.

aspirations; the ideal of consumption and material success is highly appealing, yet is simultaneously frustrating given that migrants are often unable to fully participate in it due to their marginalised status.

By exploring the interplay between migration, social expectations, and inequality, both Nieswand (2014) and Schmalzbauer (2005) shed light on how migration reshapes social structures and identities in both the home and host societies. This ethnographic study provides valuable insights into the complexities of transnationalism and its implications for social inequality. This dynamic underscores the emotional labour and psychological toll involved in migrant work and the complexities of transnational family relationships.

### **6.3 *Utang-na-loob* (Debt of Gratitude): A Filipino Virtue**

One significant reason underpinning the sending home of monies and gifts is the Filipino virtue of *utang-na-loob*, a debt of gratitude that is felt particularly towards one's elders in the Philippines. This is clearly demonstrated by the following extract from Kimberly's interview:

Researcher: why you do all that? Send all the gifts and the money every now and then?

Can you help me understand more?

Kimberly: Yes, it is because the *utang na loob*

Researcher: What is that?

Kimberly: It's a Filipino virtue...We believe in some Filipino virtues and values like the *utang na loob*

Researcher: what does it mean?

Kimberly: *Utang-na-loob* literally means debt of gratitude...we think it is an obligation to those who did us favors...Especially family, parents, older brothers and sisters, because they help you a lot, you can't stand alone when you need them they will help in your early life, and when you are financially good, when you have money you must pay them back and help them...it's a debt of gratitude *utang-na-loob*.

This exchange clearly highlights the need to ‘repay’ the favour of provision given to respondents during their upbringing and early life. This cultural trait, unique to Filipinos, encapsulates not only an eternal debt of gratitude, but literally translates as ‘a debt of one’s inner self’ (de Guia, 2005). It appears to form a significant element of the Filipino identity, which is perhaps magnified for migrant Filipinos, given the reversal of fortune. In earning more money in KSA, there is an eternal debt to be paid, a part of the ‘self’ to be given back to the family, that ‘lent’ the individual the initial finances and resources that culminated in the individual being able to migrate abroad in the first place. This includes finances and resources that enabled the individual to eat, study, grow, and play back home, that provided the necessary education and health, and facilitated the required skills/training and even money for the overseas work application and travel and so on. In being significant contributors to the person the respondent is today, the family is owed part of that same ‘self’, and this debt of gratitude is shown through both physical acts (balikbayan gift boxes, money wired home every month) but also through an attitude, one that does not betray or demonstrate hardship to family members or make them feel ‘bad’ or guilty in any way for any challenges the individual is experiencing in KSA. There is no ‘burden’ experienced in attempting to repay this unrepayable debt, especially as the ‘favour’ that engendered it in the first place is almost unquantifiable. As de Guia (2005) suggested, the internal dimension of ‘*loob*’ distinguishes *utang-na-loob* from the more general idea of *utang* (debt), which means *utang na loob* is more powerful and fundamental than Western ideas of owing someone a favour. It belies the Filipino *kapwa* notion of shared personhood or shared self, that is at the heart of the Filipino values system (Aguila, 2015). In evoking a sense of giving back to a shared personhood in the family, *utang-na-loob* is not a selfless ‘burden’, but a way of building something far greater than the individual ‘I’ that provides the foundation for many individualistic cultures.

Interestingly, whilst there is a sense of imperative underpinning the language surrounding *utang-na-loob* from some participants, this is also accompanied by a sense of burden, as can be seen in the extract from Jackie:

So I must pay them back, try to provide them with everything I can after moving to KSA...It is an obligation to pay back someone who has done favors to you like parents

or family ...So I should help them its *utang-na-loob*...You should always remember those who always helped you.

Words such as ‘must’, ‘should’ and ‘obligation’ here could betray a sense of difficulty or secret desire not to experience such hardship as a result of *utang-na-loob*, or the notion that *utang-na-loob* is a chore, a bit of a burden; however, it could simply be that the participant did not have the English to convey this sense of deep rooted need to repay debts of gratitude without using such language.

There was, however, in some participants’ interviews, a sense that there was pride in engaging in *utang-na-loob*, perhaps of being heroic in this endeavour. For example, Ashly stated:

I would like to be the one who secured many things immigrants want to their families [like] better life, better housing, better healthcare, free education, social benefits, and on and on...we must [be] grateful to our families, we call it *utang-na-loob*.

Here, Ashly suggests that she wishes to be ‘the one’ responsible for improving the life of her family back home – perhaps the sense of being or cultivating the image of being the sacrificial hero, is in some subconscious way designed to engender a sense of gratitude in her family members, or at least elevate her status back home. The idea of becoming a *Bayani* (Filipino hero) is familiar to many respondents, as shall be seen in the next section.

#### **6.4 Becoming a *Bayani*: A Filipino Hero**

The heroism attached to being a *Bayani* is discussed in the literature (Guevarra, 2010; Roces, 2021; Rodriguez, 2010; 2015), and was echoed by the respondents in various ways, ranging from the way they spoke and felt about themselves, the way their families viewed them, and the way the Filipino state and media portrayed them as overseas foreign workers (OFWs).

The literature shows that there is a greater trend towards male migrants (unlike female migrants) positioning themselves as heroes by using a clear authoritative agentive voice (sharing the

perspective that they are able to overcome the hardships of migration and build their lives and that of their families after migration). Male migrants in different communities have also been positioned as heroes due to the patriarchal norms within their communities, in which they are viewed as breadwinners. However, the data from my study reveals that female Filipinos also use a clear authoritative voice to exert their agency at overcoming the hardships of migration during their journeys. Being a successful overseas Filipino therefore meant more than mere professional success – it meant being able to overcome adversity, which is discussed forthwith.

#### ***6.4.1 Becoming a Bayani: A New Identity***

Finding a secure job was the first difficulty that the respondents succeeded in overcoming in order to construct their future selves. When the respondents discussed their early days and weeks after moving to the KSA, they described difficulties such as being complete strangers, feeling homesick, missing family and friends, coping with a new team in an unfamiliar context and atmosphere, trying to blend in with a multicultural team, cultural shock, a different language and the extreme Saudi weather, which is hot and dry. Distance from family, friends and home was also stressed when narrating about this period of time. The respondents also discussed that they experienced stress, embarrassment, a sense of failure and frustration (specifically related to the language barrier within their workplace), adding another layer of difficulty during the early weeks. The respondents' migrant identities began to be reconstructed as heroic migrants as a result of overcoming all of aforementioned hardships.

Learning the host language (discussed in the next chapter) was the respondents' most difficult achievement. This achievement is highlighted in the data as the cornerstone enabling them to reconstruct a post-migration heroic identity on Saudi soil. A good example comes from Bonnie's fourth diary: 'My hardest achievement here is learning the language'. This is echoed in Jackie's second diary: 'The hardest thing I faced here was language. I'm proud to be able to use Arabic with my patients... Learning Arabic was very hard'. The respondents stressed the hard, exhausting, deliberate and time-consuming process of language learning, which took place during and after working as a busy medical practitioner.

The notion that in being an OFW in KSA, the Filipino respondents were becoming or had become a *Bayani* (hero) given the challenges they encountered, was echoed by most. This appeared to profoundly impact their sense of self. For example, Suzanna stated:

When I am alone in the dark trying to sleep, I feel better about myself, my identity, because now I am a *Bayani*, an overseas hero, because I helped my parents get a better life....I feel they are secured, I don't show my kids things are hard in the Philippines, I just tell them we are saved, we will live a better lives.

Suzanna here suggests that her self-esteem (feeling 'better about' herself) has improved given that her sense of worth to her family, and her family's financial situation and quality of life has increased. Her identity has become intertwined with not only her actions (being able to send money back home through working in the KSA), but with a deeper sense of who she is. She states that 'now I am a *Bayani*' – she does not say, now I have *done* X, Y or Z. Yet the actions themselves, spurred on by family, friends, and the Filipino state (Guevarra, 2010), are the cause of her newfound sense of heroic self, and the subsequent satisfaction and reassurance she 'feels' as a result about both her own sense of self and the family situation. Interestingly, she also alludes to the idea that identity is 'done', as has been argued in this thesis through performativity theory; she does not 'show' or 'tell' her children of Filipino hardships, especially given that her own parents are now, thanks to her actions, able to live more comfortably. However, her language, and the things she tells her children, belie her sense of being a 'saviour', the hero: in telling her children 'we are saved' and 'we will live better lives', she could be telling them, 'I have saved you; through coming to KSA to work, I am a *Bayani* – I have given you a better life'. This sense of responsibility, being the cause of this change for both the previous and next generation, clearly generates a felt sense of pride and happiness in Suzanna.

Being a *Bayani* is intrinsically tied to the ability to send remittance back home, repayment in kind for *utang-na-loob*. The respondents considered themselves lucky to have secured three-year or four-year contracts in a part of the world where the salary is higher and therefore remittance to the Philippines is more substantial, rewarding them for their efforts and outweighing any difficulties and struggles. Moreover, higher remittances are earned because taxes are relatively low in Saudi

Arabia compared to Europe or North America (Buswell, 2024), which the respondents took into consideration when searching for jobs in the medical sector.

The respondents highlighted that supporting their families is worth the difficulties and struggles that came with living away from their home country as an OFW. Hence, they positioned themselves as proud and self-sacrificing overseas heroes. A good example is found in Suzanna's third diary, in which she stated, 'I will do everything to support my family and my children'. This was echoed in Becky's sixth diary, in which she argued: 'I must work here and send money to my parents to support them... They rely on this money. I am proud to support them'. We can see her sense of pride resulting from her parents' heavy reliance on her earnings. Other respondents highlighted their sacrifice, as exemplified by Becky: 'I sacrifice my income to my family. Family is what matters at the end' (Becky's 6<sup>th</sup> diary).

Sending remittance to help others in the Philippines appears to be the driving force behind the initial move and the decision to stay in KSA. As Amber stated in her diary: 'I use the money to improve my family's life. We are all here to serve this goal. Our determination to give our parents and families a better life is the number one priority' (Amber's diaries). We can see here that the primary role of the remittance was to improve the overall quality of life of her family, yet this included both her own children and her wider family in the Philippines. This 'improved quality of life' was discussed in various forms by respondents, and can be thematically categorised as the goal to: a) build a better life, b) secure a better job, c) be financially stable, d) build or buy a house in the Philippines, e) start a small business in the Philippines, f) secure future investments, g) secure children's education, h) be a better parent, i) help others (e.g. parents, other family members, friends and so forth). Section 1.2.2 of the introduction outlined just how much overseas Filipinos contribute to the Philippines' GDP; the respondents supported this figure, claiming they were sending 25% to 50% of their income to their families in the Philippines, indicating both the sacrifice and contribution they made to others, complementing – even fuelling – their construction of a heroic migrant identity.

There were also other characteristics and behaviours that contributed to the construction of a new *Bayani* identity in their own eyes. Thematically speaking, the respondents started to position

themselves as heroic migrants when discussing the prevailing difficulties they encountered post-migration and how they conquered them, often by constructing a ‘warrior’ identity. Some respondents asserted that warriors are migrants who are able to face and deal with any difficulty or hardship. Suzanna in her diaries for example stated: ‘I live as an overseas Filipino, it is like being a warrior because it is hard to succeed and make a living when you leave your country’ (Suzanna’s 5<sup>th</sup> diary). Simply surviving in this new life is directly associated with the identity of an overseas Filipino ‘warrior’. This is echoed in Ashly’s sixth diary, who also drew strength from her maternal identity when constructing a Filipino warrior identity, by stating that she is a ‘warrior mom’ in the KSA. The word ‘fighters’ is used by Kate in her diaries, yet the sentiment remains the same: ‘Filipinos are fighters overseas... Everything is new to us. We needed to learn about everything from scratch’. In this example, navigating the new KSA environment was almost a battle that these OFWs needed to ‘fight’ to tackle. The ability to enter into war/battle and overcome these challenges clearly engendered a degree of pride in respondents, with Tina writing:

I knew life will be difficult in the beginning, but I enjoyed this adventure even though it was not easy for me. I am proud to cope and succeed... It was a challenge. This is what overseas Filipinos do. We are warriors (Tina’s 5<sup>th</sup> diary).

Moreover, this extract shows Tina’s use of the plural form ‘we’ to refer to the collective identity of Filipino ‘warriors’, rather than the singular form used in Suzanna’s example.

The warrior/fighter identity, which feeds into the *Bayani* identity, is complemented by the notion of ‘strength’ as a characteristic of the *Bayani*. Natalia wrote: ‘you should be strong to work outside your comfort zone, especially in a nation that is very different from yours’ (Natalia’s 1<sup>st</sup> diary). Natalie here argues for the need for strength, possibly physical strength, in being an OFW, but, like that of being a warrior/fighter, more often it is mental and emotional strength and resilience that is required to navigate and cope with challenges. Other respondents (Kate, Rose, Juliana, Kimberley) also highlighted the need for strength. A good example comes from Kate’s second diary, in which she discussed that she is a ‘strong’ person; despite writing that she ‘struggled for weeks’ with the hot weather and the different language, she continued by stating: ‘I never gave up’. Being strong enabled her to overcome physical, mental and emotional challenges.

Courage, bravery and adventure, appear to be traits linked to the Filipino people more generally by respondents. This is echoed by Jessica, who stated that ‘it takes a lot of courage to migrate and be successful’ (Jessica’s 3<sup>rd</sup> diary), and Amber, who narrated her early days in the KSA by stating that ‘even if we don’t know what lies ahead, we still give it a try’ (Amber’s 1<sup>st</sup> diary). Bonnie stated: ‘We like to try new things. We have that kind of spirit as Filipinos’ (Bonnie’s 2<sup>nd</sup> diary). Here both Bonnie and Amber used the pronoun ‘we’ to refer to all overseas Filipinos as having an adventurous, courageous spirit that perhaps makes them worthy of their new identity as *Bayanis*; it is how they see themselves, a rule of thumb by which they live. Francesca discussed in her second diary that even though her post-migration life was initially difficult (because of the language barrier and the different culture), she was always ‘confident’ and ‘brave’ (Francesca’s 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> diaries). Becky shared this perspective, stating that she has a ‘brave motto’ in life, which helped her learn about this context and hence succeed after migrating to live and work in an unfamiliar context where everything is different. In her diary, Jackie stated that in order to be successful in life, ‘my motto is do not be afraid to ask’. This enabled her to learn, grow and gain experience every day following her migration to the KSA. Britney discussed that she needed to be a brave and curious Filipino to adapt in her new context. She stated: ‘this country is different... I was brave enough to ask a lot of questions about everything. I want to build my experience. I am a new nurse’ (Britney’s 4<sup>th</sup> diary). Thus, being brave was a necessary attribute to grow as a person, to become the *Bayani* that she now was, in both the eyes of herself, and of others.

Naturally, the concern arises as to whether Filipino OFWs view themselves in such a way, or essentialise their characteristics, because culturally they have been conditioned to do so, through a carefully curated discourse designed to maximise exports of Filipino workers to the world. This was argued by Constable (2007) in their study of maids in Hong Kong (including Filipinos); they assert that migrant maids are commodified by being essentialised as possessing ‘innate’ desirable qualities. Loveband (2005), in *Positioning the Product*, which explores the ‘export’ of Indonesian migrant women workers in Taiwan, also underscores the extent to which the desirable characteristics of Indonesian women, that are likely to ‘sell well’ in a market such as Taiwan (docile, peaceful, obedient, quiet) are typified and projected by the Indonesian state so as to commodify this labour force. Polcano (2017) highlights the role others (specifically the state) has

in dictating the ‘comparative advantage’ of Filipino workers as a temporary migrant workforce over OFWs from other cultures/countries, through being essentialized as possessing numerous desirable qualities. However, whilst this calls into question the agency of OFWs, Constable (2007) assert that this commodification is arguably often used to the OFWs’ advantage to secure contracts: ‘They are not simply subject to institutionalized power...rather, they are implicated in a field of discursive power in which they both contest and contribute to alternative versions of reality’ (p. 203). Yet it does raise questions surrounding how far participants’ perceptions of themselves as *Bayanis* presents a full, accurate account of their identity, or whether there are other forces potentially shaping these qualities and this sense of self as a *Bayani*. This is explored further in the following sections.

#### **6.4.2 A *Bayani* in the Eyes of Others**

This inner identity change, the backstage self, appears to be aligned with the frontstage presentation of self, with various respondents stating they heard their family members calling them a *Bayani* before they had even left for KSA. Natalie, for example, reported hearing her sister calling her a *Bayani* when she told her she accepted the job offer and planned to come to KSA. Respondents discussed that a *Bayani* is strongly associated in Filipino culture with an overseas Filipino.

As found in the literature, OFWs report a sort of transformation, becoming a hero in the eyes of their families, partners, relatives and friends (Qurtuby, 2023). Since respondents generally migrated to KSA to support their families, they were transformed from being ordinary adults, parents and mothers to becoming family breadwinners and hailed as *Bayani* (heroes). This conceptualisation was arguably promoted by the Filipino government and media, and the influence of family may limit the agency that OFWs actually possess in determining their futures, as it infiltrates and shapes their desires to migrate. This arguably echoes ideas put forward by Althusser, Foucault, and Bourdieu, and more latterly Jenkins (2014), who suggest that there is limited autonomy in one’s identity – and that autonomy itself is an ideological illusion that obscures the reality of social control, and is used for oppression (in this sense, to encourage an identity as

Bayani, and thus encourage migration, so increase remittance sent back home, which naturally benefits the state's GDP).

As Barber (2000) found in her ethnographic research on Filipino women's migration and agency, the gendered nature of migration meant that Filipino women constantly reconsidered their positions and identity in relation to 'the lives of other people they care about or feel obligated to in Philippine communities... The situation for these and other migrant women is thus in flux and tied to contingencies that are unfolding in two (or more) locations, hence the need for a decentred transnational vantage point, one which captures the connectedness the women feel to things Filipino as they work on new lives in diaspora' (Barber, 2000 p. 401). As discussed previously regarding *Utang-na-loob*, the opinions of others within the family are integral to the sense of 'self' of many Filipinos, including the participants in this study; this echoes Barber's (2000) finding that:

[F]or a woman to be mindful of the well-being of her family, primarily parents but also dependent siblings, fulfils one of the dictates of Philippine femininity. She is a dutiful daughter both in terms of the family and the Philippine state, which has calculated the export of gendered labour into its development policies. And this is what [one participant in Barber's study] finds personally rewarding.

The *Bayani* identity therefore, something that may be coveted by individual participants, is to an extent culturally cultivated, promoted by family members and the state alike, arguably limiting the actual agency that Filipino women have over their choice to migrate – as shall be seen in the next section.

#### **6.4.3 A Bayani in the Eyes of the Filipino Government and Media**

The literature shows that male first-generation migrants in particular may position themselves as heroes in their host cultures due to overcoming adversity, as demonstrated by Pavlenko (2001a) in her data on multiethnic migrants to the USA. If we examine data on Asian migrants, such heroisation of migrant workers is found in countries and cultures adjacent to the Philippines. For example, while Indonesian female migrants (i.e., domestic workers) working in Singapore and

Hong Kong consider themselves heroes, they were also labelled as ‘the heroes of remittance’ by the Indonesian public, as discussed by Irawaty (2022, p. 186). Such a label was promoted by both the society and the state (Irawaty, 2022). Additional evidence of such a positioning of overseas Filipinos was discussed by Rodrigues (2002).

Such a heroic positioning was adopted by the mainstream Filipino media to promote the migration of overseas Filipinos, and is also promoted by the Filipino state in numerous ways. Guevarra (2010) argues in her book, *Marketing Dreams, Manufacturing Heroes*, that the state exercises a specific disciplinary power over migrant workers in the Philippines, to promote the migration of female Filipinos into health, care and domestic labour markets abroad. The goal appears to not only appeal to (potential) migrants themselves, but also to other countries, promoting itself as the ‘home of the great Filipino worker’ (Guevarra, 2010). One of the Philippines’ most prized exports, as seen earlier, female domestic and health workers are essentialised as hardworking, docile, loyal, happy, adventurous and resilient (Constable, 2007; Guevarra, 2010), as are female migrants from other countries (Loveband, 2005); they are marketed as the ideal migrant worker, with a ‘comparative advantage’ (Polcano, 2017), and thus a hero for stepping in and taking low-paid or menial roles that citizens in host countries may not want. As revealed in Polcano’s (2017) mixed-methods study of Filipino migrants to Canada, the desirability of Filipino OFWs is leveraged by the state through demonstrating the comparative advantage of this ‘product’ in other ways, such as training OFWs from the Philippines in the cultural norms of receiving destinations.

It achieves and constructs this ‘hero’ narrative in various ways, not least through newspaper narratives and promotional marketing material, both at home and abroad. It also enacts this through the celebration of Migrant Workers Day on June 7<sup>th</sup>, and OFW Day on December 18<sup>th</sup> – two national holidays set down in Section 19 the Republic Act No. 10022, an amendment to the Migrant Workers Act of 1995. On these days, government agencies ‘join hands’ to commemorate migrants abroad, and local events such as festivals, fairs, exhibitions and screenings often take place on or around these dates (Vista Land, 2023). These events take place across the globe, particularly in countries that have a high Filipino presence; in the UK, for instance, the Migrant Workers Office and Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (MWO-OWWA) London organised the Philippine Embassy’s celebration of Migrant Workers’ Day 2023 on 04 June 2023,

led by Ambassador Locsin. The Ambassador in his speech hailed Filipino OFW as ‘more than modern-day heroes but the saviors of our nation’ given the invaluable contribution they make both economically but also in terms of the welfare of other Filipinos (London Philippines Embassy, 2023). These are just examples of the way in which the deliberate, organised export of labour from the Philippines has been promoted, since dictator Ferdinand Marcos declared it official policy in 1974; more recently, president Ferdinand Marcos Junior (elected in 2022) stated, that whilst it was his “wish” that overseas employment was a choice, rather than a necessity: “It remains a noble calling that our OFWs have answered, requiring great sacrifice” (cited in Simons, 2023).

However, the participants in this study appear to be highly sceptical of the Filipino state’s motives for hailing OFWs as *Bayanis*, and, for this reason, seem unimpressed by the image generated by the media. The data shows that respondents describe themselves as *Bayani* more according to how their families and close friends perceive them, not according to the Filipino media, which they argue, presents a ‘false’ hero. The following extract gives one example from an interview with Suzanna:

I like how TV programmes view us as heroes, but it is not important at all...what’s more important is me being a true hero in my family’s eyes...not as Marvel heroes, strong heroes in movies but fake heroes...you don’t see them helping people outside of the screen...I know government wants media to view us as heroes but I don’t care...I have a commitment to help my family, and be a true hero in their lives (Suzanna).

This feeling, of not caring about the Filipino media or state’s portrayal of them, resounded throughout all interviews; respondents stated that life is not a TV show or a newspaper article. They do not want to be heroes in media’s narratives; what they want instead is to be a ‘true’ hero that is actually able to make a difference in the lives of their family.

The sense that the media and state promote a ‘false’ or ‘fake’ image of a hero was raised by some respondents, who were disparaging of the government narratives within the Philippines surrounding OFWs. Respondents stated that the media work hand-in-hand with the government to

build an image and an identity of an overseas Filipino that is a ‘superhero’. They believe that this is to help the government accomplish its goal of increasing overseas Filipinos’ contribution to the GDP of the Philippines (reported to be nearly 9% of the Philippines’ GDP in 2022 (Lu, 2023), totalling \$31.4 billion cash remittances in this same year (Venzon, 2022)) – an important goal given the negative impact the Covid-19 pandemic had on overseas migration from the Philippines (Opiniano and Ang, 2024). Respondents stated that such heroic positioning in Filipino media is all about money, as can be seen in the following extract with Tina:

Tina: I see [us being described as heroes] in Filipino news reporting stories about overseas Filipinos...But I only care about my parents and my sister calling me a hero.

Researcher: I see...How do you feel about that? About Filipino news and media calling you as hero?

Tina: I don’t believe them...Because they want our money...You know they take a lot of our money we send home to our families...They want money keep coming...So they ask TV programme hosts and newspapers to praise us as heroes.

Researcher: But the money is helping your government.

Tina: Yes, but the government does not help us...What I care about, I want to be a hero in my family not on TV...Family hero is more important than in media, media is always fake, I don’t care about it. You know we are poor and I must be hero and help my family.

Being a *Bayani* therefore is only important, for some respondents at least, in the eyes of the self and the family; they do not appear to acknowledge that the state may actually play a subliminal role in their own perceptions of being a *Bayani*. They perceive that the media and state, in carefully constructing and promoting the image of a Filipino *Bayani*, do so with ulterior motives, according to Tina, with little real care for and interest in the lives of the OFWs themselves. This is perhaps highlighted by some reports suggesting that, within the Philippines, Filipinos can be found protesting outside the Department of Migrants Workers (DMW) in Manila over the plight of OFWs (Dela Pena, 2024; Palatino, 2015), who often face appalling conditions, abuse and low wages, and

receive little governmental intervention or support (arguably, the new Philippine Development Plan, 2023-2028, includes social protection measures for OFWs) (Opiniano and Ang, 2024).

The respondents indicated that the goal of the government narrative of national heroes, and the praise they receive in the media, is to encourage more Filipinos to work overseas to send remittance back to the Philippines to help the economy. In doing so, they recognise it as a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1977), wielding the Filipino culture ('a matter of pride and tied to a sense of self' (Barbour, 2000, p. 403) to exploit current and potential migrants and labour markets. This aligns with Rodriguez's (2010) ethnographic research, finding that the Philippine government has commodified and glamorised the export of migrant workers in its role as a labour brokerage state (actively preparing, mobilising and regulating citizens for overseas labour). The more empowered 'national hero' and 'agent of change' that Rodriguez (2010) found to exist in her participants does not seem to be present amongst respondents, who instead focus on the more personal, familial gains from their role and status as a *Bayani*, and the desire to focus on *utang-na-loob*. Arguably, however, just because participants do not acknowledge the state to play a role in their conceptualisation of themselves as 'heroes', does not mean that it does not play an integral, subconscious role.

Moreover, as McAreavey (2017) found in her research on Polish migrants in Northern Ireland, migrant identities can be dichotomised due to the conceptualisations of themselves as migrants. The stress that can ensue from being perceived and/or depicted as both a 'hero', *and* an exploitable commodity, can cause high levels of dissatisfaction and distress in migrants themselves. In line with work from Goffman (1969) and Jenkins (2014), McAreavey (2017) asserts that 'individuals select a preferred identity that aligns with internal expectations and external influences arising from social interaction and social structures'. Moreover, she claims: 'Interruption in a preferred identity arises between internal standards, subjective meanings and external factors of environment including others' perceptions, socio-political setting and availability of resources'; this is most likely to occur in wider networks, such as transnational contexts. As other researchers revealed before McAreavey (2017), including Burke (1991), Stryker and Burke (2000) and Stets and Burke (2005), this can lead to individual frustration, anxiety and distress due to loss of control and reduced self-esteem. Clearly, therefore, the individual, interaction and institutional

conceptualisations of migrants as both heroes and commodities that serve to benefit others (e.g., the Filipino economy) can mean that migrants' identities shift and change (i.e., it is fluid) depending on time and social situation, leading to multiple identities, and choices about which of those identities feels most aligned with their sense of self, at any one time. It may be that in some circumstances, or at certain times, respondents feel like heroes, warriors, and fighters, worthy of celebration, whereas at other times, they feel as though they are being taken advantage of, or not being given the recognition for their service that they feel they deserve – this latter point is discussed in greater detail in 6.6.1, when discussing how migrants feel about the difficulty in obtaining residency in the KSA. The fact that residency *is* so desirable to respondents, however, is detailed presently.

### **6.5 Family Visa and Permanent Residency**

Despite any hardships felt in the transition to KSA, especially in the first few weeks and months, participants declared that KSA was an attractive option for permanent residency, not only for themselves, but for their immediate families. Unlike some Filipino female OFW, who leave their children behind in the Philippines to be brought up by their extended family, married respondents in this study brought their own families (husband and children) to KSA, since the working visa makes it is easy for married migrants to bring their families as dependents. When it comes to family reunion policies – the ability for separated family members to be allowed to resettle in the host country with the migrant worker – KSA scores most highly in this category above all others on the MIPEx, at 43 out of 100 (for context, the highest scoring country is Brazil at 94/100, whereas the UK is at 29/100).

Respondents discussed a number of reasons encouraging them to apply for – or seek to be eligible to apply for – Saudi permanent residency, such as securing their future working in the Saudi medical sector, and not wanting to uproot young families once again back to the Philippines. Many also stated that if they cannot gain Saudi residency inside KSA, they will try in other GCC countries, like UAE, Qatar or Kuwait, where their work in KSA can help their applications in adjacent Gulf countries. For example, Arabic language proficiency, as well as work experience as medical practitioners, can help their applications be viewed favourable in other GCC countries.

However, their preference appeared to be to stay in KSA, given the benefits respondents perceived it to hold for its citizens. These included financial support from the state, the traditional values of KSA society, career prospects, the safe environment for women, low taxes, positive changes to the judicial system, and more.

#### ***6.5.1 Financial Benefits for Permanent Residents***

As an example of the financial benefits afforded to KSA residents, Francesca stated:

I want my kids to get Saudi residency to have many benefits like free college and monthly salary for students, not happening in the Philippines...also Pension, unemployment and disability benefits (Francesca).

Here, Francesca appears to be highlighting firstly the educational benefits of KSA compared to the Philippines, and seems to be suggesting she is considering a long-term future in KSA as a result. The benefits that residents have compared to migrants on temporary visas is stark, particularly the financial assistance, which brings security, if she were to lose her job, or experience ill health or disability, whilst a resident in KSA. The fact she is discussing pensions also suggests that this is not a benefit that she has now, meaning her working life is not contributing to her subsistence in old age – something that becoming a resident would rectify.

#### ***6.5.2 Parallel Traditional Familial Values in Saudi Filipino Society***

The benefits of residency are not simply financial, however; settling permanently in KSA through obtaining a residency visa appears to be appealing due to some of the similarities participants draw between KSA and the Philippines regarding traditional family values. This is aptly highlighted in the following exchange with Tina:

Tina: I want to apply for residency because of the values here...also like about the city here; I like to raise my children in very traditionalists.

Researcher: Which values do you mean?

Tina: I mean family values...I mean the old-fashioned values about family...I like how teenagers respect their elders here.

Tina: You know I have a kids...I am an old-fashioned mom, I want them to be grow in this city...The values in this city are very traditional, I am very traditionalist; I like to raise my children in a traditional way.

Researcher: What do you mean?

Tina: I mean old fashioned way...I mean I am old school...I like my child to live in society, a society a community where everyone respect the elders....The you see everyone respect the elders. I like it.

Researcher: Great, why?

Tina: My child must respect, be respectful I mean be respectful to elders. It's important to me... And also I will be one day an elder, I want, I want them to respect us

Researcher: I see, so you think Saudis here respect elders?

Tina: Yes, I believe so.

Researcher: Where do you notice this?

Tina: Everywhere... in the clinic, in restaurants...in shops, everywhere, in the malls.

Researcher: Why do you think people here act this way?

Tina: Islam, I think but I am not sure, I think Islamic beliefs asks them to do so...I like it...it made this place like my home, I can live here longer...I am trying to apply for the Saudi permanent residency here.

Respondents such as Tina admire the traditional family values in the Saudi context, which stems from the conservative, Islamic nature of the context of study. Respondents have noticed that the city where they work possesses visible, salient traditional family values that appear to be preserved and cherished, and also seem to be familiar to the Filipinos. Various respondents noticed and commented on how common it was to see local middle-aged men or women accompanying their elders (i.e., older brother, an uncle, an aunt or a parent) to appointments at the dental clinic, where they worked. They also noticed that some local middle-aged men and women still live with their parents in extended family houses. This sense of caring for and respecting one's elders was highly appreciated, and, as Tina mentioned, was believed by some to stem from Islam, drawing parallels with Christianity. The Filipino concept of *utang-na-loob* for example is very similar to an old

Arabian virtue of gratitude to parents and older brothers and sisters. Islam has positively acknowledged these virtues, and the Qur'an and the hadiths of prophet Mohammad specifically instructed Muslims never to be ungrateful, especially towards parents and close family. Just like Filipinos, the Saudi culture has two similar virtue examples, firstly of *Ber al walidayen* (paying the parents back) and *Selat al Rahm* (good relations with family and relatives). These familiar concepts, family values and parallels between Christianity and Islam, made KSA an attractive residency prospect for participants, as did the professional opportunities afforded to them.

### **6.5.3 Demand for Filipino Medical Practitioners in Saudi Arabia**

Respondents are aware that when it comes to skilled migrants (specifically in the Saudi medical sector), Filipinos are highly valued. This is one of the reasons they would like to stay for longer and apply for residency if possible.

Bonnie: When my contract ends...I can find a job the second day in the same city...

You know Filipinos working in hospitals and clinics are valued in the market. I think people here like us as practitioners, I mean patients and employers...You know we Filipinos we are known for masters at what we do...You know being experts. People know we are well educated...We learn fast, we adapt very fast unlike others, speak English properly.

Researcher: Who do you mean by others?

Bonnie: Other migrants, you know Bangladeshis, Indians, Syrians, and other nationalities...You see the market values Filipinos over other nationalities, Jobs in clinics and hospitals... especially here in Gulf countries.

Researcher: Where did you notice this?

Bonnie: In the clinic where I work, and in other clinics in this city and other cities...I think we are just viewed positively in people's eyes...You know we can work with multinational team...we can communicate and work efficiently in diverse medical teams...And other reasons, maybe our educational leave, our English language abilities, we are passionate about our jobs...We work hard, and people know that,

especially employers, and we don't look for trouble. I was thinking if I can earn the residency, I will find jobs everywhere in KSA.

The preference for Filipino migrants by business owners in KSA and other GCC contexts has been sometimes viewed as a type of discrimination against African migrants and other migrants from the Arab world, as discussed in Chapter One. Research does suggest that the Saudi labour market may discriminate against Indian and Black migrants (United Nations, 2018) in healthcare, which is possibly illustrated by the significant proportion of Filipino nurses (30% of the sector) compared with Indian (6%) and Nigerian (5%) nurses (Trines, 2018) – although there may be a myriad of other reasons for this, not least due to the Filipino OFW export policy. One potential reason could be, however, as Bonnie suggests, Filipino healthcare workers are 'viewed more positively' by employers than other ethnic minority migrants in KSA. However, there is limited research to support this; one qualitative study of migrant nurses in a KSA maternity ward, by Karout, Abdelaziz, Goda and Altuwajri (2013) found that both Filipino and Indian nurses were viewed alike by patients; they were preferred because, compared to Saudi nurses, they 'perceived the nurse as a maid or house keeper. From their point of view, the role of nurses is changing blankets, help them to enter the toilet, change bloody under wear, also give them the slippers, clean their perineum, and give the participant her mobile phone. According to [participants], the above-mentioned services are attainable only by nationalities such as Filipino and Indian'. However, Filipino and Indian nurses were viewed equally negatively given their broken Arabic and challenging accents. Moreover, another recent study found that Filipino nurses were more likely to leave their positions in KSA than Saudi or other migrant nurses, citing tensions and discrimination between themselves and supervisors as well as with other co-workers (Alshareef et al., 2019).

This discrimination and racism appears to extend to Black Saudi nationals, who were deemed to be subject to 'stigmatisation and social segregation' by the CDHR (2014) – although as this was ten years ago the situation may have improved since. Thus, it is unclear how far Filipinos may (or may not) be viewed more positively in the Saudi healthcare labour market compared to other migrant nationalities, as indicated by some participants, especially as participants in this study did not directly report possessing or being given greater privileges compared to Indians, African or other Arab migrants working with them in both clinics. Yet it is apparently in some studies that

Filipinos are a highly desirable addition to the KSA labour market given their English education and ethos of hard work (Magliveras and Al Qurtuby, 2023), which is why some (such as Bonnie) indicated that they can find jobs easily. It may also explain why Alshareef et al. (2019) found Filipino migrants were more likely to leave their role as nurses – due to the confidence they had in easily finding another post in KSA.

#### ***6.5.4 Ease of Residency and E-Applications for Migrants in Saudi Arabia***

All respondents commented on the wealth of KSA and the impact this has on its infrastructure, including the way that government services are run. The Saudi government has invested heavily in the way that its services are delivered to the public. A good example was the fast move towards automatisisation and e-government services (which forms part of the goal of the Saudi 2030 vision, set out by the Saudi Crown prince Mohammad bin Salman, of reducing KSA's carbon footprint by going paperless). After the 2030 vision, visiting KSA became much easier through applying online for an e-visa (a 10-minute online application for a 90 day visit/stay) before booking a ticket. This gives visitors including tourists an easy, straightforward experience when deciding to visit KSA, after the Saudi government decided to encourage tourism after years of a strict system that was difficult to navigate (and therefore off-putting) for visitors.

E-government services offered to migrants, for example, include opening civil files after arrival, applying for schools, booking healthcare services, applying for different services offered by all ministries, renewing identity documents, and applying for a driving license, as well as many other benefits provided by the government:

Immigrants can apply for everything online while sitting on the couch...like renew a bank card, also like my driving license...I use the official E-gov app on my phone to do this...no need for long lines for this...it took less than 10 minutes to renew my driving license online [I got it] three days after the online application. This suits my lifestyle. I am busy you know. When I am not I like to rest and be a mom...I like to spend quality time with kids. Unlike in the Philippines, you can't get these services online, you need to be in a long line full of people...It's so bureaucratic over there and

hectic. You need to wait for the doctor in a long line, while here you book an appointment online and come on time. And of course, doctors are busy and there is a lot of people waiting here but it is organised smartly using computers and online apps. This is for everyone here, citizens and migrants (Amber).

The difference between the state systems back home and in the host country were noticed by many respondents, who stated they found waiting times, long lines, the requirement of physical presence in different departments and so on to be a burden in the Philippines. Whilst, as Amber noted, most official Saudi online platforms are designed to provide services not only to citizens and residents, but migrants and visitors too, the ease of applications and administration formed just one reason why many respondents stated they wished to gain residency in the KSA.

#### ***6.5.5 Safe and Security Inside KSA: Migrant Women***

Respondents generally highlighted how safe KSA feels compared to living in cities in the Philippines, a salient subtheme that provided further impetus to remain in KSA reception through residency. Respondents raised the fact that there is low level of crimes in major Saudi cities compared to major Filipino cities and towns, where crime is high. Here is an example from Britney's interview:

Britney: One reason for me to think about residency is safety around here...inside Saudi Arabia it is very safe, police abilities are fascinating. I mean police is visible...police are everywhere, they are just one call away, and they serve everybody equally at the same speed and same reaction.

Researcher: Who is everybody?

Britney: I mean citizens and immigrants...you know Filipino are everywhere and in some country they don't help immigrants like citizens.

Researcher: How do you know?

Britney: I chat with friends in Lebanon and Russia, they tell me.

The swift, fair response by police was noted by Britney, who appeared to perceive that her migrant friends in other countries suffered greater discrimination at the hands of the police, compared to citizens. However, this does counter much research and reports surrounding the unethical treatment of migrant workers, including Filipinos, in KSA in recent years, although in the main this treatment (withholding wages, long hours, passport confiscation, abuse, false contracts, fake agencies and plain theft) appears to be caused by employers, not the police (Pattisson, 2024). The fact that Britney felt safe in KSA, especially compared to the Philippines, is interesting, as she perceives the police to be a symbol of safety, not something to fear. This may not be the experience of all migrant workers, however.

In terms of security, respondents appeared to admire the many cheap, government-backed commodities in KSA, including living expenses and rent. This means respondents often prefer KSA to other GCC countries like UAE, since UAE is more expensive by far when compared to KSA. This means that, in KSA, migrant workers can be thrifter with their money, meaning they can send more money back to their family in the Philippines. For instance, while all respondents' housing is paid for by their contractors, respondents believe if they earn Saudi residency, they can easily rent while working in Buraydah city (the context of the study). According to respondents, the rent prices in KSA is by far cheaper than Qatar, Kuwait and UAE, making KSA an attractive place to settle long-term.

#### **6.5.6 Judicial System**

Respondents discussed the change in migrants' rights inside the KSA; one example raised was the Judicial system and recent change in laws for migrants after the new Saudi 2030 vision was laid out. For example, Julia discussed the improvement of the judicial system. She knew a Filipino technician who filed a case against his employer, who ran an electricity company. The case was seen in the special labour court for migrant workers. The case was very swiftly put before a judge to settle. The Filipino technician won the case and got a considerable amount of money, according to Julia, since the company did not follow the conditions stated in his contract. Notably, the Filipino technician began this process by filling an online application form on the Ministry of Human Resources website, which makes it easier for migrant workers to report breaches of labour

regulations (Ministry of Human Resources, 2024). According to the law, such complaints are passed to the Ministry of Justice, more specifically to the recently established labour courts (in 2018) to rule on employment-related disputes, ensuring that migrant workers have their full rights served, as well as to fight and end any form of exploitation of migrant workers in the kingdom. These courts have jurisdiction over disputes relating to employment contracts, wages, employment rights, injuries, compensation and social insurance claims, among others. These actions by the Saudi government provide just one of the reasons that respondents stated they want to stay in the KSA for longer by applying for Saudi residency.

#### ***6.5.7 Low Taxes for Residents and Citizens***

Another salient theme discussed by respondents is the financial benefits received by KSA citizens and residents. Respondents discussed the comparatively lower living expenses they perceive themselves to spend inside KSA compared to other countries such as Australia or the UK. They assert that if they migrated to other Western countries, or other countries in the GCC (UAE, Qatar or Kuwait etc.), they would not have saved the same amount of money as they have done whilst in the KSA. This formed a significant reason underpinning their intentions to apply for permanent residency in KSA.

Respondents also discussed how easy it is for them to finance things like an iPhone, a laptop, a car and many other commodities. Applying for finance is perceived to be relatively easy via the banks and other financial institutions, as it can all be done online. For example, Natasha commented:

I can finance a washing machine while sitting and watching TV... I don't have to wait in long lines like in the Philippines... I can break the payment to 4 months. I don't need to pay in cash all the amount. I can't do that in my hometown (Natasha).

This ease of obtaining finance for purchases was important to her, as it means she can fit these kinds of jobs into her busy work schedule. The purchasing of relatively cheap, high-quality items, and the lower taxes, have meant that KSA is an attractive option for permanent residency for many respondents. Becoming a resident would undoubtedly impact their sense of self, that is, their

identity; however, actually obtaining this residency proves difficult for most migrants, for a variety of reasons, as shall be discussed in the next section.

## **6.6 Disappointing Reality of Saudi Residency Application**

The following exchange highlights how some respondents feel about the residency scheme in KSA:

Researcher: Can you tell me what made think to apply for the Saudi permanent residency?

Bonnie: Many things...like you know free healthcare, free college education, strong economy...I want my kids to live in a country like this, but I was disappointed by the process and requirement to get the residency. It's not easy for medical staff to get it. So I wanted to get the residency and live here forever but the system disappointed me.

It appears that there is a conflict between the expectations respondents had surrounding applying for residency, and the reality of this process. Respondents highlighted they were happy with announcements in 2019 for new schemes for permanent residency via the Premium Residency Center, established after the new 2030 Saudi Vision to promote and process different residency schemes for migrants. One of the center's objectives is to, 'facilitate and simplify the procedures for applying for premium residency', and as such it launched five new 'products': exceptional competence residency, talent residency, business investor residency, entrepreneur residency, and property owner residency (Premium Residency Center, 2024). However, respondents appeared disillusioned with the process, arguing that it is challenging to qualify for, or gain, any of the newly announced permanent residency schemes/routes offered. There are various reasons for this, as discussed in the following subsections.

### ***6.6.1 Disregard for Medical Professionals***

Respondents have criticised the fact that skilled migrants in KSA (and specifically in medical sectors) are not targeted in any of the new residency routes announced in 2019, despite the ongoing high demand for migrants in the Saudi medical sector. Respondents compared recent Saudi residency laws and regulations to similar residency systems in the UK and other European countries, arguing that a migrant in these countries might be granted residency (and perhaps even citizenship afterwards) if she/he continued to work in this sector for a number of years. Respondents also raised the point that their public service as healthcare practitioners should be taken into consideration; the status of healthcare practitioners and medical staff is highly revered (if not always well-recompensed) in some countries (Witter et al., 2018), especially post-pandemic, given their position as key workers (e.g., De Camargo and Whiley, 2020). It emerged that some respondents felt their position, role and skillset should be rewarded through the ease of which they could obtain residency.

One of the most significant barriers was the significant amount of money they would be required to pay to obtain residency status, regardless of the years spent serving the public in KSA. This is viewed negatively by all respondents in the interviews; Jessica in her interview for example claimed, ‘This is greedy, you need to pay a lot of money for it... I don’t like this’. This is echoed by other respondents, including Francesca, who argued ‘all they care about is money... the system does not appreciate us or the years we spent serving inside clinics and hospitals’. She goes on to state:

Out of 5 new different residency routes, none of them consider years we spent working here.. no residency route. That’s what they told me...I called the center by phone. Imagine no residency offered for medical practitioner who will serve for years in Saudi hospitals and clinics. I served for a long time, I want to apply for residency but they won’t let me (Francesca).

Respondents like Francesca discussed that even though the residency center claims to offer residency for migrants that can help KSA become self-sufficient in terms of human resources, this is still not achieved nor offered to different migrants serving the Saudi community. Respondents criticized the absence of any residency route for those serving in vital, important jobs such as

healthcare, for years. The injustice felt by respondents at this is palpable; they feel their position should entitle them to residency easily, given the ever-increasing demand for trained, skilled medical staff in KSA. Rather, they asserted that the definition of ‘skilled migrants’ predominantly referred to other individuals, such as authors, artists and singers, not nurses and doctors. This means that such individuals are not targeted by this ‘skilled and talented migrant’ route. Therefore, respondents felt that the center is out of the reach of the current migrant community inside KSA, that they do not feel the center is ‘for them’. Such statements are at odds with the claims made by the Premium Residency Center, according to respondents.

It is possible that the lack of official recognition for the important work that respondents do as healthcare workers by the KSA government is at odds with the conceptualisation of themselves as *Bayanis*, or heroes. It is possible that their experience surrounding the difficulty of obtaining permanent residency, including the lack of recognition as ‘skilled and talented’ within the residency routes, impacts their sense of self, both in terms of their presentation of self, backstage and frontstage. They may feel like heroes in some respects or in some circles, particularly in terms of the Filipino government’s conceptualisation of them as OFWs, in the eyes of their family back home, and the benefits they can bring to their loved ones financially; however, they may experience an inner tension if their self-esteem and/or self-concept is impacted by the lack of official recognition by KSA, as demonstrated by the difficulty in obtaining residency.

This echoes McAreavey’s (2017) findings surrounding the impact of tensions from competing conceptualisations of the ‘migrant’ on migrants’ identity/identities, which are multiple, fluid, subject to change, depending on circumstance, context and time. The high demand for Filipino migrants and the ease of application as an OFW on the one hand counters the ensuing difficulty of obtaining permanent residency, and the perception of healthcare workers as not quite ‘skilled’ or ‘talented’ enough to qualify for this residency. They are heroes and very welcome in KSA, but only as temporary workers; it smarts of exploitation, in a ‘we want you, but only in terms of what we can extract from you; we do not intend to repay this service’. In this sense, the relationship is not entirely mutual. Whilst Filipino migrants may appreciate the opportunity to work in KSA to send money back home to family, there are limits surrounding the benefits they can extract from this agreement; it does not feel like a mutually beneficial relationship between the migrant and the

KSA state. With this unequal power balance, the relationship feels somewhat exploitative, and certainly the feeling of unfairness stemming from the difficulty in obtaining permanent residency amongst respondents was palpable. This sense of exploitation or at the very least, power imbalance, could negatively impact respondents' identity. They may put on a brave face and feel as though they are a warrior, a *Bayani*, as they head out for work each day, but their identity may shift slightly when alone, or with family members in KSA (their 'backstage' self); their disappointment regarding the level of recognition received by KSA government conflicts with their recognition by the Filipino state as *Bayanis*, and their self-esteem and sense of control may be impacted as a result (Stets and Burke, 2005).

Furthermore, the difficulty of acquiring residency may mean that Filipino migrants see their engagement with Saudi culture as temporary, and as a result do not fully engage in acculturation processes and practices. Moreover, as a study from Bernado et al. (2022) revealed, Filipino migrant detachment from their heritage culture – which is often linked to hopes and expectations of remaining in their host culture long-term – predicted both increased satisfaction with life, and reduced self-esteem. Therefore, it could be that the limbo-land that the respondents find themselves in does impact both their satisfaction with life and self-esteem in different ways; subordinating their own cultural norms may have some temporary utility, yet may also mean migrants feel disappointed with themselves and their host society, if their efforts are not recognised or appreciated.

### **6.6.2 Expensive Residency Scheme**

The high financial price of applying for Saudi residency presents another significant reason preventing participants from applying. Participants appeared surprised at the significant cost of the one route they are eligible to apply for as healthcare workers, which currently stands at 800,000 Saudi Riyals (SAR) for the unlimited, equating to £170,000, if accepted. The cost to simply apply is 4,000 SAR (£843), which in itself is a significant stretch for many migrants, and the price of a one-year residency plan is 100,000 SAR (£21,000). Respondents unanimously stated that this amount of money was almost impossible to obtain, especially given the money that they send back home each month. As Rose stated:

Rose: I wish I [could apply for residency] but it needs too much money, it is expensive, you must pay 800.000 Saudi Riyals or make an investment.

Researcher: If you have that money, will you apply here?

Rose: Well, if the money won't take me to USA or Canada, I will spend it here to get permanent residency...I want to apply and stay here forever, but they made it hard on us...it is designed for the rich only. It should be based on talent or skillful migrants...because this country needs them everywhere. Hospitals, companies, NEOM, the Line. But they made it hard on talents and skillful migrants. This is greedy, you need to pay a lot of money for it...I don't like this.

This participant raises the injustice surrounding the finances required for residency when, in reality, they perceive that their skillset should be the currency traded for residency. It also illuminates the 'us versus them' mentality present in some respondents' minds regarding their plight against 'the rich'. Rose perceives that life is harder for 'us', for migrants, compared to the 'rich', who are able to access certain privileges (e.g., residency) as a result.

Another example of this comes from Francesca's interview:

Francesca: They want me to pay huge money for residency. I can apply for only one of them. I can't remember the name, what it is called, but it is the expensive one. They know I don't have enough money for that expensive residency. All I can offer is my service to Saudi public. But this is not appreciated by the residency center.

Researcher: Have you called them or raised a complaint?

Francesca: I called them but they said we can't do anything. The only way for me is to get the expensive residency. I have to pay a lot of money to get Saudi residency. Who can pay 800.000 Riyals, no one... I mean I want to stay here when I get the residency, but it's not possible. Let's be honest, it's not made for us – medical practitioners who served the public, even if we served for years, imagine that! Let's face it, it is made only for rich people.

Here Francesca also asserts that residency is out of reach for her, as a migrant with limited funds. Similarly to the idea that lack of recognition of skill and societal contribution as a healthcare worker may impact identity, lack of funds in an abundantly wealthy society such as KSA may also affect respondents' identities as they navigate their migrant experience. In perceiving themselves as wealthier than their families (and possessing the ability to bestow financial aid on needy family members), yet less wealthy than Saudi citizens and residents, may place the

## **6.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has revealed the delicate interplay between the conceptualisations of migrants as heroes in the eyes of self, others and the state, that all work to impact and alter the continually shifting identities of Filipino migrants in Saudi Arabia. The motivations for the sending of gift boxes, and how this may hint at the curation of a front stage self, were also explored, as well as the introduction of *utang-na-loob*, the sense of duty or obligation conveyed by participants towards their family members back home, as part of the Filipino culture. The impact that the prospect of residency has on participants' identity, and the potential benefits and challenges it brings, was also highlighted as a pertinent issue amongst respondents working in Saudi Arabia. Overall, it is clear that constructions of the 'self' in regards to the factors explored above is complex, nuanced and influenced by a myriad of factors, lending OFWs from the Philippines both a sense of agency and determinism over their life course.

## **Chapter Seven: Language and Migrants' Identities in their Journeys to Saudi Arabia**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The data reveals that respondents unanimously invested in learning the host language in order to be positioned as experienced practitioners. Within this chapter, I show I will first discuss how respondents were positioning experienced practitioners in this context before examining how they performed their professional roles within this conservative Saudi cultural context. I will then turn to discuss the role of the language-learning process in the respondents' performance of their professional roles. This will be followed by considering shifts in power and gender roles after migration. After this, I will discuss the relationship between investment in language learning and the respondents' deliberate language learning with reference to the data. Then I will examine subversion, conforming and creative use of the host language.

Following this, I will show the ways in which the respondents felt they gained power and accumulated material, cultural and social resources to assist them in navigating their post-migration identities, which is crucial to understand when scrutinising identities. I will then highlight the respondents' broader desire to increase their intercultural awareness and understanding of this conservative context. This include discussing the respondents' flexibility and adaptability, which coincides with overseas Filipinos' sophisticated reaction to life and the locals in this context. I will then explore the nurturing of the respondents' unique identities in this conservative context, which includes focusing on the superdiversity of current human migration as revealed in the data. Following this, I will explore how the respondents' post-migration lives facilitated the construction of a heroic female identity post-migration with a clear agentive voice (which is a tendency found more in the accounts of male migrants, according to the literature).

### **7.2 The Host Language and the Positioning as Professional Practitioners after Migration**

For the respondents, learning the host language appeared to have a role in how they positioned themselves as practitioners in KSA. While there is evidence that the respondents learned Arabic in order to perform their professional roles, using the host language was also part of resisting a

positioning as an unqualified or unskilled practitioner. The respondents' diaries and interviews revealed that an effective practitioner should learn and use the host language in her/his profession. Learning the host language is linked to power, higher income, job security, career building and so forth (Norton, 2000; Menard-Warwick, 2004; Watson-Gegeo, 2004). The respondents positioned other migrants who know Arabic as professionals, and aimed to perform this identity themselves. This is shown in the following extract:

In the beginning it seemed like learning Arabic is hard but I survived. I would always write down essential conversations and read them again and again after my clinical hours, this way I learn [was learning] every day from just casual conversations inside the clinic. This makes me sound more professional. Patients like talking with [x and x; Hindu practitioners from India], they converse with patients a lot. I learned many Arabic words while working with them. I usually practice Arabic conversations with everyone inside the clinic like patients, clinic staff like Arabic coworkers, office staff, [the] receptionist, and the owner of the clinic.

(Natalie's 2<sup>nd</sup> diary)

We can see that Natalie directly linked using Arabic with being a professional practitioner by stating 'This makes me sound more professional'. She continued by noting that patients 'like' talking with specific practitioners who are able to use Arabic with them. Then she turned to discuss learning the host language.

Furthermore, the respondents discussed that experienced practitioners shared their experience with novice practitioners by giving advice (including on learning a religious linguistic repertoire). Bonnie's asserted:

We are healthcare providers here in Saudi Arabia, it is important to study the language whether it is easy or not. In order for me to be an effective nurse I must learn how to speak Arabic, their language. I must understand it so that I can work easily. I am working as a practitioner here in Saudi Arabia. Most of the professionally skilled foreigners here are very fluent in speaking Arabic even though they are not Arabic speakers originally,

like the Indians. Receptionists can speak both English and Arabic, of course. I worked hard with them and I was able to catch many Arabic phrases.

(Bonnie's 3<sup>rd</sup> diary)

In this extract, learning the host language is linked with being a medical practitioner. By using a cause-and-effect relation, she showed her view that learning the host language leads to professional success.

The following extract is from Francesca's diaries:

I started to practice what I've learned in Arabic with my coworkers and patients. Patients expect me to use Arabic whenever I speak to them, of course. I wasn't expecting I [would] be able to use Arabic so fast with them; this happened quickly during my first days. This made me want to learn more Arabic. This makes us practitioners do our job efficiently and quickly. I asked my doctor to speak in Arabic with me because I see him interacting with the staff and patients in Arabic very well. He was always careful with pronouncing the words slowly so I could comprehend and learn easily.

(Francesca's 5<sup>th</sup> diary)

This extract provides an example of how the respondents also took into consideration patients' expectations of the linguistic abilities of medical practitioners in this workplace. Francesca stated that patients expect their practitioners to be linguistically able to use Arabic with them. This feeds into how a professional practitioner is positioned in this context (from a patient's point of view).

This is echoed in Suzanna's diaries:

We are in a healthcare setting. Good communication is very important in dealing with patients in order to build trust and rapport. That is to promote optimum health to our patients. I must learn the language to effectively communicate with my patients.

(Suzanna's 3<sup>rd</sup> diary)

The extract demonstrates a belief that achieving better communication between patients and practitioners leads to building 'trust and rapport'. This indicates that learning the host language is one way to have 'good communication' and hence provide better health services.

The following extract from Jackie's diaries shows something else:

I have a friend who is working as a healthcare provider. She convinced me to apply to work here. It's her second job working in Saudi now. When I first arrived, the previous Filipino staff [a former Filipino practitioner whose contract was ending and hence Jackie was training with her before replacing her] did not travel yet. Luckily, I was the one to replace one Filipino worker and I met her before she flew to the Philippines. She trained me and gave me advice about work. While she was training me for some time, she told me I need to work hard on my Arabic [language]. I knew it's hard to learn. She said I can do it if I work hard. She was speaking Arabic beautifully with patients. She worked with many Muslim healthcare providers.

(Jackie's 3<sup>rd</sup> diary)

Here we can see how an experienced migrant (non-Arabic speaker) gave advice to a novice practitioner at the beginning of her career in the KSA. Experienced practitioners promoted that migrants devote time and effort to learning the host language. The respondents viewed this as their only missing skill. They viewed deficiency in the host language as potentially problematic because it may lead to them being positioned as unskilled/unqualified practitioners. The respondents did not like relying on others (i.e., experienced practitioners who can use the host language) due to their limited linguistic abilities during the early days after migration. Host language learning is crucial in being able to perform their professional roles (as well as reducing the risk of being positioned as unqualified). The data indicates that the respondents were not aiming to improve any medical skills; instead, their focus was on engagement, interaction and using language properly with patients and staff. They also underlined that the ability to use Arabic is highly valued in the HR and medical sectors in the KSA or the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries in general. The respondents stressed that their Arabic language skills could help them build a CV that would allow them to stay longer and apply for future jobs in this part of the world, linking job security to

proficiency in Arabic. Therefore, they invested (Norton, 2000, 2013) in the host language in order to help them accumulate power in their professional roles. I will next discuss the intentional language learning process.

### **7.3 Intentional Language Learning**

Pavlenko (2001b, p.149) suggested that change and ‘transformations’ often start with the process of learning the target language(s), highlighting the importance of the ‘linguistic device’ in such change. Pavlenko (2001b) argued that reconstructions and ‘transformations’ can be performatively ‘achieved’ (p.149) by participating in social interactions (a social constructivist stance whereby identities are socially constructed), as discussed in Chapter Two, section 2.2.1. The act of learning the host language aids the process of identity reconstructions and transformations. By learning the host language, respondents were able to reconstruct a professional role instead of having a novice one. Above all, the act of learning the host language shows the ‘performative power of language’, as Busch (2012, p.509) argued, to accumulate material, cultural and social resources (see Chapter Two, section 2.4.1). Pavlenko (2001b) argued that after learning the target language, some people may adopt different/new norms after relocating and learning the target language, while others may resist and reject these norms. Unlike the respondents’ unanimous consensus on language learning, which will be shown in the following sections, the gender and religion chapters revealed how respondents varied in how their gender and religious identities were negotiated (some respondents subverted local norms, while others chose to conform to the norms due to their gender and religious identities).

By shedding light on these aspects, the findings will help the field gain a better understanding of this setting. We live in a new work order (Gee et al., 1996) where migration, relocation and mobility are on the rise, as confirmed by UN statistics and official governmental reports (see Chapter One). Lising (2017) stated that there is a growing need to investigate the success of skilled immigrants in different workplaces around the world. As I discussed earlier in Chapter Two, section 2.7, scholars have already explored the role of language in the success of skilled immigrants in various parts of the world (Marra et al., 2009 in New Zealand; Canagajah, 2013 in the UK, US and Australia; Angouri and Miglbauer, 2014 in multinational workplaces; Gunnarsson,

2014 in European workplaces; Hultgren, 2014 in Denmark; Lønsmann, 2014 in Sweden; Piller and Lising, 2014 in Australia), and these studies have demonstrated that the rising global need for skilled immigrants is one reason to study them. However, more research is needed on the Saudi workplace context. More specifically, van de Mierop and Schnurr (2018) discussed a need to explore ‘ways of enacting a professional identity’ in different contexts worldwide (Chapter Two, section 2.7). I have also shown there that the relation between language use and the medical workplace needs more attention, along with more studies in different contexts, as Dahm and Yates (2013) expressed.

Diaries describing the respondents’ early days and weeks in the KSA show how they set their language-learning goal, which required considerable added work to their busy schedules. As shown by the data, the respondents devoted considerable time and effort to learning the language.. The respondents in this study were found to be making a ‘strategic demonstration of their agentive efforts’ (Miller, 2014, p.109) to learn the language. I will next shed light on their language-learning strategies.

### ***7.3.1 Language Learning Strategies***

The data describing their early days reveal how the respondents shared that some novice practitioners started learning Arabic as soon as they accepted a job offer in the Philippines, prior to arriving in the KSA. The data also shows how experienced practitioners helped novice practitioners to learn the host language. Below, I have categorised the language learning strategies used by the respondents to learn the host language in order to enhance their professional roles in the context of the study:

- A- Beginning language learning before or immediately after arrival in Saudi Arabia.
- B- Aiming at securing a colleague who is willing to help with language learning. Respondents were prioritising working with collaborative colleagues who are willing to help with the Arabic language.
- C- Offering language tandem partners where they exchange mutual benefits with co-workers willing to improve their English.

- D- Avoiding working with Filipino practitioners and getting assigned to work with an Arabic-speaking practitioner who can use English.
- E- Taking notes on their smartphones as well as writing notes on paper and sticky notes.
- F- Listening thoroughly to Arabic speakers and then asking co-workers about what has just been said.
- G- While there were practitioners who are Arabic speakers as well as non-Filipino/non-native Arabic speakers (i.e. Indians and Bengalis), the respondents chose specifically to work with experienced Filipino co-workers to help them with the host language using their home language, which facilitates learning the target language. After this step was completed, the respondents went on to work with other practitioners (i.e. Indians, Egyptians, Syrians, Sudanese, Saudis).
- H- A determination to practise Arabic with patients to facilitate and enhance language learning.
- I- A determination to practise and use newly gained vocabulary.
- J- Installing translation apps on smart phones.
- K- Installing English–Arabic language-learning apps on smart phones.
- L- Attending online Arabic-language courses.
- M- Experimenting with voice-chatting apps.
- N- Romanization: Using Roman letters to write and build Arabic vocabulary.
- O- Aiming for proper pronunciation in Arabic. The respondents pointed out how it is not sufficient to learn a new word without learning its proper pronunciation, stress and intonation.
- P- Learning and reading numbers. This is needed both within and outside the clinics. Respondents need this to deal with some paperwork inside the clinic as well as assigning numbers to patients and calling them accordingly. This is also needed outside the medical context (e.g. reading price tags while shopping). Some Arabic countries, including Saudi Arabia and other parts of the GCC, do not use the globally used Arabic numeral system but instead use a numeral system originating from the Indian numeral system, which has been criticized and debated at many levels.
- Q- Some respondents are learning the Arabic alphabet as a first step towards attempting to read the Arabic language. This step is not necessarily needed to do their jobs or to perform

their professional roles within Saudi medical clinics. There is no need to read any paper or file in Arabic to be a practitioner in Saudi Arabia since all of the patients' files are written in English by other practitioners. The reason for this is the fact that most of the staff in Saudi medical contexts are multinational and multiethnic, and rely heavily on English.

- R- Subscribing to Arabic language learning channels on YouTube.
- S- Watching vlogs of experienced migrants' living conditions in Saudi Arabia.

These strategies had significance for the study's findings because learning a language is 'not simply about learning a code, but developing a new identity' (Jones, 2016, p.218). Hence, shedding light on intentional language learning is in fact crucial to my study because there is an opportunity to witness 'the adoption of new social and cultural behaviors and ways of being' (Williams, 1994, p.77). When discussing language, current migration and identity, Badenhorst and Makoni (2017, p.275) stated that 'identity is eternally unstable. Identities alternate, transcend and (re)emerge... identity then is a struggle between becoming and belonging'. However, these arguments are incongruent with the poststructuralist paradigm adopted in this study, which views language as playing a constitutive role in identity construction. Learning the host language thus gives migrants the ability to negotiate and perform identities.

Pavlenko and Norton (2007, p.670) argued that 'learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity... a process of becoming or avoiding becoming a certain person'. Toohey (2005) agreed that language learning is in fact a matter of identity construction. Moreover, Wengner (1998, p.215) stated: 'Because learning can transform who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity. It is not just an accumulation of skills and information'. We will see how respondents viewed learning the host language as a means to gain power. These views support Austin and Butler's claims that language is more than simply a method of communication and, in fact, plays a performative role. The respondents' intentional language learning took place the moment they arrived in the KSA (or prior to this, as some of them indicated), paving the way for them to perform their professional roles.

Since English is valued as an essential skill in Saudi medical contexts, I found that the respondents' Arab co-workers (medical practitioners, receptionists, staff and so forth) were also trying to benefit from the presence of highly skilled migrants by practising their English with Filipinos. Medical students also valued training with such highly skilled migrants, revealing another layer to the benefits gained from the diverse staff in Saudi workplaces. On the other hand, Arab co-workers and trainees also provided respondents with opportunities to learn and practise some Arabic since Filipinos were able to practise their Arabic with them. The respondents highlighted this mutual relationship. Practitioners were keen to know other Arabic-speaking migrants, as shown in the following example:

Every time I have something to ask them [Arabic-speaking co-workers], they will tell me, and in return, I also practise with them English. So far, we are friends with benefits. Whenever we don't understand each other we use English. I think I became more confident in speaking the language after practicing with them.

(Julia's 2<sup>nd</sup> diary)

The above is an example of a linguistic mutual relationship. The extract also shows how English is the final resort when a misunderstanding takes place

#### **7.4 Conforming, Subversion and Creative Language Use**

I will start this section by discussing instances of conforming and subversion found in the study by discussing the divergence among the respondents in their use of Islamic greetings. During the brief observations that I conducted at the beginning of patient appointments, I noticed that all respondents used formal Islamic greetings with patients except for Becky and Tina, who were found to resist the use of Islamic greetings. They replied in English (i.e., Hi, Welcome or Hello) when greeted with Islamic greetings, even though they knew the formal response. This practice was underlined in their interviews:

Researcher: I noticed that you reply with Hi or Hello when patients greet you with *Salam Alikum*.

Becky: Yeah.

Researcher: Very interesting; do you know what is the formal reply for *Salam Alikum*?

Becky: Yeah, *wa alikum as salam*.

Researcher: Brilliant, but you don't use it? Do you?

Becky: No... I prefer Hi... or Hello.

Researcher: Very, very interesting, can you tell me why?

Becky: Because it's an Islamic greeting... I feel... I don't think I need to use it... you know... I am not a Muslim... I am a Christian.

Researcher: Interesting

Becky: I don't want them [patients]... thinking... you know... to think... that I am a Muslim.

Researcher: This is really interesting to me.

Becky: I'm like... I am different.

Researcher: Good, very good.

We can see here how Becky (similar to Tina) rejected the use of Islamic greetings in order to resist and challenge undesirable, imposed identities; this is something that Giampapa (2004, 2011) explored, as shown in 2.5. She pointed out that she did not want patients to position her as a Muslim. This is similar to how some Filipino practitioners subverted local gender norms and intentionally resisted them because of their gender identities.

This is an example of how migrants, while learning a host country language, may become more aware of certain norms and performative utterances within a society (as discussed in Chapter Two, section 2.4.1) and decide to adopt or resist them by using language accordingly, or even engage in creative use of the language to perform their gender identities (Siegal, 1995; Diao and Maa, 2019). Tina and Becky's subversion is similar to what Menard-Warwick (2009) found when investigating the gender identities of Latin American immigrants in the USA. Menard-Warwick (2009) asserted that even though most participants wanted to learn the host language, some did not want to be native-like (they actively chose not to be native-like).

With reference to the above finding, as a researcher I am aiming to add to the limited research exploring host-language learning by migrants (e.g., Menard-Warwick, 2004, 2008a, 2008b; Norton, 2000) in globally under-researched contexts. Taking language learning into consideration will help me and my readers to understand how ‘language learning is influenced by and in turn influences identity shifts’ (Lee, 2015, p.175). As Lee continued, this will eventually lead to a better understanding of the ‘dynamic processes and performances through which identity is constructed’ (2015, p.175) in under-researched contexts. She went further by pointing out the growing need to specifically understand immigrant women’s identities in different contexts as well as ‘how the restructuring of identities might intersect with language learning’. The focus on the identity negotiations of female migrants while learning the host language stems from the abundance of studies examining male migrants’ identities within or outside the Anglophone world.

As discussed in 2.5, Blommaert and Rampton (2001, p.5) argued that ‘people take on different linguistic forms as they align and disaffiliate with different groups’. They discussed the need to explore how people ‘opt in and opt out’, as well as ‘how they perform or play with linguistic signs of group belonging, and how they develop particular trajectories of group identification’ (2011, p.5). In the context of this study, it may be that the intentional use of Hi and Hello (as a reply to *Salam Alikum*) is a form of creative subversiveness, intended to resist and reject any chance of enacting the identity of a Muslim practitioner, and instead ‘perform’ their identity as Catholic migrants. However, it may also simply be a form of habit, especially given that locals are likely to understand this popular greeting in English. Alternatively, it could be that participants did not want to overstep, perceiving themselves to be ‘different’, as if adopting Islamic/Arabic greetings/languages may render them imposters, or may seem inauthentic to locals.

I have shown in the literature review that identities and language are inseparable. Language acts are acts of identity, according to Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985). As Tabouret-Keller (1997, p.317) argued: ‘The link between language and identity is often so strong that a single feature of language use suffices to identify someone’s membership in a given group’. Building on the work of Austin (1962) and Butler (1990), Badenhorst and Makoni (2017, p.278) stated that ‘linguistic utterances construct the very world they appear to arise from’. Building on Pennycook’s (2001,

2004) ideas, King (2008, p.233) stated that we ‘must acknowledge’ that learning an additional language is ‘inseparable from identity formation and transformation’. According to Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000), language learning is a never-ending process that affects identity negotiations. The available literature thus indicates that identity construction is a continual process.

### **7.5 Investing in the Host language and Gaining Power**

By investing in the host language (while aiming at staying longer in the KSA or GCC), the respondents were accumulating resources and power and cementing their new post-migration identities. The current study takes these power dynamics into consideration since they are crucial to exploring migrants’ identities. Learning the host language is crucial for strengthening their CVs when building a successful career and continuing to survive as a highly skilled migrant in the KSA or other GCC countries. As Dörnyei and Ushida (2009, p.4) stated:

When learners invest in a language they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will enhance their cultural knowledge, their identity and their desire for the future. Thus, an investment in the target language is also an investment into a learner’s own identity.

In the next sections and subsections, I will discuss how the respondents accumulated and increased different forms of power (material, social, cultural) during their journeys. This will include highlighting respondents’ broader desire to increase their intercultural awareness and understandings about their new context, indicating how learning extended beyond an instrumental need to use language for professional needs; this is a crucial aspect to consider when exploring identities.

### **7.6 Accumulating Power and Increasing Intercultural Awareness Post-Migration**

This section, including a number of subsections, will discuss how the respondents went beyond the instrumental need to learn and speak the host language. They were in fact achieving a level of intercultural awareness and understanding in the heart of the KSA while accumulating different

forms of power (i.e., material, social, cultural). The data shows respondents' eagerness to know more about the KSA as a country in another part of the planet which they had never visited before. A good example comes from Amber's diaries. After discussing progress in her language-learning process, Amber noted the following:

This [language learning] has helped me integrate around here. I did one of the most hardest things in my life by learning the Arabic language so I feel I know Arabian people and Saudis more after learning their language.

(Amber's 6<sup>th</sup> diary)

This extract shows the respondents' need to overcome cultural shock by enhancing their intercultural understanding. Amber expressed how an experienced migrant could help her to learn more about the cultural context. This is in fact a broader form of their learning process that extended beyond the material need to learn the language to further increase their intercultural awareness and understandings post migration. A relatively similar example comes from Britney's diaries:

I am very excited because it is my first time working with new people, different environment and surroundings, another new experience... I was really overwhelmed later that I can answer them. Learning Arabic changed me and made me half Filipino half Saudi.

(Britney's 2<sup>nd</sup> diary)

The above extract shows that the respondent was arguing for the reconstruction of a half-Filipino and half-Saudi identity. The respondent became able to do so only after learning the host language regardless of any other events post migration. This may show the performativity of the language in reconstructing such an identity. Respondents' unanimity in learning the host language was not, however, reflected in previous chapters on gender and religion, where the data revealed how religious and gender identities were often negotiated.

### ***7.6.1 A Different Country***

None of the respondents had worked in the KSA before coming to the two clinics where the data was collected. This was their first experience on Saudi soil. The earliest evidence indicating this can be found in Julia's diaries: 'I have never been to the Gulf before. I had no idea what the KSA is like before considering the job offer' (Julia's 1<sup>st</sup> diary). The focus group discussions also confirmed this.

The thematic analysis revealed evidence of respondents' willingness to meet new and different people in other contexts such as the KSA, the GCC and other countries in the Middle East. This is associated with an acknowledgement that this will involve encountering a different culture. Respondents were aware of the chasm between the Philippines and the KSA before making the decision to migrate. Natalie, for example, stated that 'I had to set my mind that this country is different from mine' (Natalie's 3<sup>rd</sup> diary). This happened while she was in the Philippines prior to accepting the job offer. This sentiment was echoed by others like Suzanna, for example, who stated that 'I needed to reset my mind, everything will be different there like religion or even language and culture' (Suzanna's 1<sup>st</sup> diary). As we can see from this example, the respondents acknowledged the differences in culture, faith and language during their migration journeys, preparing them for encountering differences in the KSA. Furthermore, the focus group discussions indicated that the respondents were unanimously aware that they are in a conservative Saudi context. I will discuss efforts made by the respondents to understand and become acquainted with their new context in the next subsection.

With the exception of Rose, the respondents, regrettably, did not undergo any form of orientation or induction in the Philippines. While in the Philippines, only Rose had attended a session about working in the GCC before flying to the KSA; this was offered by a Filipino job agency. Respondents were eager to learn more about the context and culture, but were also not offered inductions in either of the two clinics. This indicates a need to design inductions and orientations for migrants. However, both gatekeepers have no intention of designing an induction for migrants; they believe this is the responsibility of other organizations such as the Saudi MOH (Saudi Ministry of Health). Although the respondents were willing to use any opportunity to learn more about their new context, they were not given the opportunity to do so at an institutional level. As

a result, the respondents felt a need to read and learn about the KSA themselves, which I will discuss next.

### ***7.6.2 Understanding the Post-Migration Local Context: A Delayed Sophisticated Step***

Migrating to the unknown KSA fostered efforts by the respondents to unpack and understand such a context. Their responses to the differences between the KSA and the Philippines were sophisticated. They were searching for and reading information online while drawing on the knowledge of Saudi friends by asking them about the language, culture and faith, indicating tolerance and openness to others in this part of the planet. Amber stated that as a Filipino she can positively benefit from this experience. She stated that ‘I will be able to learn and gain new ideas’ and then stressed that this will ‘widen knowledge’ (Amber’s 2<sup>nd</sup> diary) about other people. This shows how the respondents were not merely pursuing economic gain in their migration journeys; in fact, they were making efforts to expand their cultural awareness and social circles, to perhaps be able to perform the identity as a well-travelled, modern citizen of a globalised world.

Julia’s diaries provide a useful example of respondents’ early preparedness to attempt to understand the context. Julia stated that she does not hesitate to ask any question about Saudis or Saudi culture. She continued, ‘let’s not pretend we know everything’ (Julia’s 3<sup>rd</sup> diary). Respondents’ willingness to learn about the complexities of this context is a positive feature. Discussing working in the new and unknown conservative Saudi context, Ashly stated: ‘every day is a learning experience about conservative patients’ (Ashly’s diaries). Ashly here provided an example of how the respondents adopted a sophisticated mentality to understand the uniqueness of local patients.

Such attempts to understand the local context may not be surprising given that we are dealing with educated and highly skilled (white collar) migrants. This is also related to the uniqueness of overseas Filipinos in general (as praised in the literature presented in the introduction, section 1.3), who are known for being open-minded, adaptable and fast learners, even in Sunni ultra-conservative contexts (in Chapters Four and Five, I discussed how they responded to the gender norms and the religiosity of the context). Julianna stated that ‘Filipinos are flexible and they can

adjust easily to cultures of other nations’, implying that Filipinos are able to adapt to almost any given workplace globally. I discussed in Chapter Two, section 2.7 how overseas Filipinos have been praised for these characteristics, which are viewed as a global marker of skilled migrants. The Philippines has been referred to as a ‘servant of globalization’ due to several reasons, as stated by Allan and McElhinny (2017). Both gatekeepers echoed what I had discovered in the literature on Filipino migrants. The gatekeepers added that Filipino migrants have a superb reputation in the Saudi medical sector and among conservative local patients. This is supported by the data, which showed them making local friends and expanding their cultural and social knowledge/circles, which will be discussed next.

### ***7.6.3 Gaining Friends***

The data shows that established friendships with Saudi locals after migration. The thematic analysis showed that making Saudi friends in particular was part of their migration journeys in the KSA since the respondents were used to living in Christian-dominated areas in the Philippines (which is the largest Christian country in Asia) before migrating. Respondents knew very few Muslims in the Philippines before migrating to the KSA (with the exception of Julia, who had one close Muslim friend who was a Filipino and not a Saudi). Living in the KSA was the first time that the respondents would interact on a daily basis with local Sunni Muslims while surrounded by Islamic practices. This was also the first time they would work with Muslim medical practitioners, who in turn passed on some religious practices to the respondents, as I will discuss in the religion chapter.

Jessica, for example, stated that: ‘When we go out every Friday to shop and have some leisure time, we meet different kinds of people... It feels nice to know the other’ (Jessica’s 5<sup>th</sup> diary). It does not surprise me, and nor will it my readers, to find evidence of respondents gaining friends as a way to help them understand the new context; as Natalie indicated, ‘knowing Saudi friends helped me understand the culture here’ (Natalie’s diaries). In her diaries, Joanne expressed excitement when local Saudi colleagues (Helah and Sarah) became her friends. She noted: ‘we meet every now and then. I learned many things about Saudi customs. They try to over feed their guests. I joke with them about it’ (Joanne’s 6<sup>th</sup> diary). Joanne here was discussing an old Arabic

custom (i.e., being generous with guests)<sup>3</sup>. This example shows that local friends helped the respondents to increase their intercultural awareness through gaining understanding of a very ancient and local practice.

It is not surprising that respondents' attempts to know 'different kind of people' (Jessica's 5<sup>th</sup> diary) led them towards learning more about the Saudis, and their language, faith and culture. In Britney's diaries, for example, she stated that by knowing more locals, she 'learned many things about Islamic faith and Saudi culture here' (Britney's 5<sup>th</sup> diary). I will next discuss a theme centred on migrants' views on change and adaptation in a constantly changing world.

#### ***7.6.4 Gaining Experience in a Constantly Changing World***

The data provided evidence that the respondents believed that the world (including the demands experienced in their jobs) is constantly changing, making adaptation to such change inevitable. An example can be found in Amber's diaries. She stated that 'change is the only constant in this world, we need to adapt' (Amber's diaries). Being adaptable is something that overseas Filipinos are specifically known for, as discussed in the introduction, section 1.3. Gaining experience in new and unfamiliar contexts is their response to the shift in demand for them as practitioners. For example, respondents had to adapt to the extreme Saudi weather, which is hot and dry. Travelling to work in cities in the Arabian Peninsula was a new experience for all the respondents, who had left the relatively cooler tropical Filipino weather behind.

While acknowledging that they are educated, trained and ready to work in any given medical context that uses English in the world, the respondents did not reject or deny the need to learn from experienced practitioners in the new context. Therefore, gaining experience was one of the themes found in the data describing the respondents' early days in the KSA. Becoming an experienced practitioner was pursued as part of building a successful career. The respondents discussed gaining experience by working with others who came to the KSA before them (both Filipinos and non-

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<sup>3</sup> This custom dates back to before the dawn of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula. One way to show Arabian generosity was by feeding guests, a custom that has been reinforced by the Islamic faith (unlike some ancient customs which were rejected by Islamic teachings and hence disappeared).

Filipinos from different faiths and nationalities). They wanted to gain more experience as time went by in the KSA since ‘things are different when you are already here, when you experience things yourself’ (Rose’s 2<sup>nd</sup> diary). Furthermore, being a novice practitioner who makes mistakes (in the early days after migration) and learns from them was viewed preferably since learning from mistakes is in fact one way to become an experienced practitioner. Becky, for example, commented that ‘we learn more from our mistakes’ (Becky’s 2<sup>nd</sup> diary). This indicates that the respondents were strengthened by experience and practice because they were learning at the same time. This was echoed by Suzanna, who stated that ‘experience is the best teacher’ (Suzanna’s diaries). More generally, Kate stated that ‘Every day is a learning experience to be a better medical practitioner’ (Kate’s diaries), showing how overseas Filipinos view ‘everyday’ work in unfamiliar contexts as a learning experience. These are all examples of how adapting and gaining experience in the Saudi workplace eventually led to the respondents performing their professional role. Having discussed how the respondents viewed interacting with experienced practitioners as helping to increase types of power and prowess in different ways, I will now move on to thematically discuss how they viewed interacting with and gaining Saudi friends in their migration journeys.

#### ***7.6.5 Superdiversity: Nurturing Respondents’ Unique Identity***

Given that the study is taking place during the complexities of current human migration, there is evidence of superdiversity (Vertovec, 2006) affecting the respondents’ journeys in the KSA. This means that while the respondents were in the Arabian desert, they were still connected on a daily basis with their home culture. In order to discuss this, certain points that were thematically found in the data will help me build the argument. The very first thing respondents noticed upon arrival in Saudi Arabia was the quality of the Saudi infrastructure and the available facilities. While respondents noticed and observed a different language and different religious and gender practices being followed, they also reported gazing at airports, streets, buildings, hospitals, city centres, civil facilities and so forth. Furthermore, they noticed the level of E-Gov services provided for Saudis, migrants and visitors (this was praised by the Western academics at in Qassim university whom I worked with). Many services provided by ministries and governmental institutions can be done via the internet without the need for residents (Saudis or foreigners) to visit such institutions.

The respondents noticed the automatization and computerization of some services, such as banking, which contrasted with the long queues they were used to in the Philippines to carry out simple and basic transactions. Such services would never be achieved without high-speed internet. The respondents viewed high-speed internet in the Saudi desert as a major incentive for connecting them to their culture and identity, as Vertovec (2007), suggested, which is a crucial issue in relation to my study as discussed in the introduction, section 1.7. High-speed internet ensures a constant connection with migrants' home culture and hence gives a strong likelihood of nurturing the unique identity of any migrant whenever this service is available in any given context. It enabled the respondents to stay strongly connected to the Filipino identity.

The respondents stressed how they maintained constant and daily contact with their roots – their family, parents and friends – in the Philippines via the internet. The concept of superdiversity (Vertovec, 2006), as discussed in Chapter One, section 1.7, has demonstrated that current migration is more complex than in the past, owing in part to migrants being able to continually stay in touch with their home culture through high-speed internet. This was visible in my study where the respondents maintained continuous (sometimes daily) online contact with others in the Philippines, despite the time zones differing greatly between the KSA and the Philippines (+5 hours). Respondents tried to meet people from home online while having a meal or coffee/tea together (e.g., waking up at 7:30 in the KSA to eat breakfast and chat with someone having their lunch in the Philippines at 12:30). The data indicated that the respondents drew strength from interacting with friends and family members. This contrasts with older migration dynamics in which migrants had no daily and constant connection with their home culture and identity but instead were surrounded only by the host culture, language and native inhabitants of the host country; this has now changed forever due to migrants benefitting from the affordances of technology.

Respondents were also using the Internet to learn about anything strange they noticed in the Saudi context. As soon as the respondents noticed something in this context, they searched the internet to learn about it. They conducted searches about ultra-conservative Sunnis in order to learn more about their patients. For example, the respondents reported that they observed the action of praying and noticed how devoted Saudis are to their faith, which prompted them to look up specific

religious practices such as Islamic prayers. In another example, the respondents noticed that Saudis are devoted to their elderly parents. They were surprised to learn that because of this devotion, some Saudi couples live with their parents, sharing lunches and dinners together.

### **7.7 Front and Backstage Use of Language**

This chapter has shown: a) how respondents observed and evaluated the important role of the host language inside the clinics; and b) the crucial process of learning the host language to have a professionally successful front stage ‘self’ or identity in the workplace. Yet interestingly, this appeared to be where the important use of Arabic ended for participants, who in other social settings and in their backstage selves, at home when alone (or with family), did not desire to use or speak the host language, even with Arabic friends, preferring instead to use English. This generally occurred after sufficient proficiency was obtained in Arabic so as to communicate effectively with patients and co-workers; to establish this competency, participants described using Arabic outside the clinic and naturally spending more time learning the language in the early months. However, fluency does not appear to be the goal for participants; once they felt competent in their use of Arabic for a professional setting, respondents stated they preferred the use of English (even with friends and neighbours) whenever possible (in both front stage and backstage ‘selves’). This includes restaurants, coffees, banks as well as Saudi governmental offices, which offers English as a spoken language inside each department (due to the high reliance on foreign workers).

One of the main stipulated reasons for this is that respondents did not want to be positioned as a Filipino Muslims in this context. Respondents are aware that there are increasing numbers of Filipinos who convert to Islam in the city; the linguistic medium adopted by participants was therefore perceived to represent more than just a communication method – it represented their religious identity. Thus, as Catholic Christians, participants generally stated they did not want to be confused with any other religious identity outside (and even inside, for some) the clinic. The use of English distanced them from the Islamic faith, and enabled them to perform and signal their national and religious identity instead to others. It may also be a means of feeling more aligned with their true selves in such a different (potentially alienating) context; using English could potentially help participants feel more connected to their homeland and their loved ones, despite

being far away. The desire to be different, as migrant Christian women, whenever outside the clinics (after their shift), continues to show up in other empirical chapters in this study.

## **7.7 Conclusion**

This chapter explored the role of the host language in how respondents positioned experienced co-workers. It then discussed the intentional language-learning process migrants underwent after migration to help them perform their professional roles and succeed as overseas Filipinos. This is essential to the study as language plays a key role in identity construction.

Next, I covered language-learning strategies, before examining conformity, subversion, and creativity in the host language. This led to a discussion of language, power, and gender-role shifts in respondents' lives. I explored the concept of investing (Norton, 2000) in the host language to gain power. The chapter then turned to respondents' accumulation of social, cultural, and economic knowledge and power, along with their increased intercultural awareness. I also highlighted their awareness of the conservative Saudi context following migration. Gaining experience in this context is viewed as a valuable skill for adapting to a changing world, especially in terms of job and workplace dynamics. I then discussed the relationship between respondents' unique identities and superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007), illustrating the complexities and unpredictability of contemporary migration. Finally, the chapter addressed the difficulties faced in the early days following migration, where a new language, faith, and culture converged.

## **Chapter Eight: Conclusion**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This chapter summarises the findings of the study, and firstly outlines the major novel findings related to the participants' changing identities within the field of gender, religion, socioeconomic factors and language, before discussing the practical implications of these findings. The first section will begin by discussing the research gap this study was attempting to fill before looking at how this research has answered the research questions. It also discusses superdiversity. The practical implications of the study focus on how the findings might be used to improve the experiences and expectations of migrants, medical practitioners, skilled migrants in conservative Sunni contexts, gatekeepers, decision makers, employees and employers. This is followed by further suggestions for the practical application of the study findings, the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

### **8.2 Exploring Migrants' Identities through Goffman's Dramaturgical Theory: A**

#### **Summary of Findings**

In an under-researched context, the aim of the present study was to explore how female Catholic Filipino practitioners negotiate their identity, and certain facets of their identity (e.g., religious, gender and socioeconomic) in a conservative Sunni Middle Eastern cultural context, the KSA. Many studies have been conducted within the Anglophone world, yet very few exist in other cultural contexts, hence the need for my Saudi-focused study of Filipino migrants. Moreover, whilst there is plentiful research on domestic female migrants, skilled female migrants in the Global South have received less attention. This study therefore aimed to specifically investigate how skilled Filipino migrants in the KSA navigate and perform their identities in this conservative context.

I chose to design this study within the poststructuralist paradigm because it views identities to be fluid, dynamic, multifaceted, multi-layered and subject to change (Baxter, 2012; Blackledge and Creese, 2008; Block, 2006; De Fina, 2016; Duff, 2015; Norton, 2000). The study's methods

needed to be capable of exploring the complexity of human identity in any given context, particularly after migration. Therefore, I designed a qualitative study to explore the respondents' identities, using a variety of qualitative methods, such as interviews, focus groups, observations of their interactions in a social setting (the workplace), and diary entries, to provide a deep dive into the different ways their identity may be presented or performed in different ways, and (potentially) for different reasons (subconscious or declared).

The thesis was constructed through the lens of Goffman's (1959) Dramaturgical theory; this theoretical framework was selected because it accounts for the fact that identities are socially constructed (a social constructivist approach) (Chew, 2014) and also adopts an anti-essentialist approach (King, 2008), whereby identities are neither biological nor pre-given. Thus, identity construction is a never-ending process, as discussed in Chapter Two, sections 2.3 and 2.4.1, and is presented or enacted to both the self and others in different ways; as shown in this study, the 'front stage' (or on stage) 'self' (identity) that was presented to others in social settings differed depending on the context, and also differed further still from the 'self' that was presented or enacted 'backstage', when the participants were alone. It appeared that there were various manifestations of participants' gender, religious, and socioeconomic identities depending on their context and social setting, as well as other identities such as national identity (sense of self as Filipino). Moreover, by applying Goffman's theory, the constitutive role of language could also be explored in constructing and presenting respondents' identities as migrants who were learning the host language while working in the conservative Saudi context post-migration. The language-learning process and what this brought to identity negotiations (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000), as discussed in Chapter Two, was also revealed to be pertinent, as language provided one useful tool the participants could wield to demonstrate their identity front stage (to others).

The next sections present a summary of the study's findings related to gender, religious, socioeconomic and linguistic identities, before superdiversity is returned to, to help make sense of these different identity changes and experiences.

### ***8.2.1 Gender: Respondents' Presentation of Gender Identity in Different Settings***

Respondents noted various differences in their home and host countries regarding male and female expectations and behaviour after moving to the context of the study. This included features such as local women dressing modestly, lowering their voices so as not to attract attention to themselves, segregation and separate lines in restaurants and many other places, and fewer women in higher positions in different institutions in KSA. Using Goffman's framework to explore respondents' own gender identities revealed that whilst some respondents conformed to the expected norms and customs for women, the private dislike for these norms was palpable, with some actively rejecting the enactment of noticed local gender norms in various ways. Exploring front and backstage gender identity presentation and negotiation, both inside and outside clinics (during and after shifts, in various social settings and when at home) meant a wealth of insight was gained into how these women feel about, and present, their female identity to others, and within themselves.

One notable finding was that while respondents were on shift, they reported (and were observed presenting) a professional and medical commitment to put patients at ease, believing that they should (predominantly) conform to local gender norms to relax patients in the workplace. For example, most participants lowered their voices and spoke quietly, as is the custom for Saudi women, when in clinic; yet a chasm clearly appeared between this gendered presentation in the workplace and outside of the workplace. All respondents for instance reported rejecting the lowering of the voice outside the clinic, post-shift, when either at home by themselves (backstage) or in other front stage social situations, such as with friends. Not only was this specific expectation rejected, but it was subverted – some participants talked and laughed more boisterously, possibly as a means of 'showing' Saudi men and women that females did not naturally have lower voices, that women could attract attention and command the space, in the same way as men did.

The discussion of vocal volume and tone with participants led to the discussion of various other actively rejected local gendered norms and customs. For example, participants also clearly wanted to differentiate themselves from Saudi women by dressing differently (when outside of the clinic, where respondents were obliged to wear the dark coloured uniform and headscarf, much to their dislike) through wearing brighter, bolder colours and sometimes dressing less modestly (in tighter or more revealing clothing) than local Saudi women, who traditionally wear dark, flowing hijabs and clothes. The bold colours were often matched by bolder interactions with female friends and

males more generally; some participants reported actively making eye contact and speaking directly/assertively with males, again a behaviour that would spark disapproval of and from local Saudi women, and also discussing female rights and equality with their Saudi friends. Participants often appeared to want to be a 'role model' as an independent working woman, or the breadwinner of the household, which contrasts with the traditional Saudi expectations for women as wives and mothers, especially post-marriage.

The motivation for many participants presenting their female gender identities in this way appeared to often be framed by a discussion of Filipino/Filipina virtues and core values; these were strongly connected with respondents' identities (in the realms of gender) and their front and backstage selves. These virtues included *Kapwa*, *Lakas-ng-loob*, *Kusang-loob*, and the concept of the Female *Bayani*. First, the *Kapwa* concept (a Filipino core value meaning shared self) was described as a lack of selfishness, wherein one thinks about one's self in conjunction with others (i.e., local Saudi women). *Kapwa* made respondents' think more about women and gender in KSA after migration, as many believed they have a shared self with all women inside KSA, leading to sympathy for perceived inequalities and injustices against women. This made many participants desire (in their backstage and front stage selves) to do something outside of the workplace that could help change the status quo by any possible means, through the way they dressed, spoke and interacted with both sexes. *Kapwa* therefore was discussed by participants to show how gender functionated as a connection between respondents and local Saudis women.

A second Filipino core value found in the realms of gender was *lakas-ng-loob* (bravery). Respondents specifically associated *lakas-ng-loob* with their gender identity, discussing their brave gender identity as migrant women often by resisting local gender norms outside clinics. *Lakas-ng-loob* was also associated with challenging male dominance, as shown in the chapter. *Kusang-loob* (meaning voluntary acts and acts freewill) was a third Filipino core value associated with perceived calls to willfully try to help change local stereotypes after moving to KSA (e.g., women can be more than mere housewives or stay-at-home mothers, change men's dominance in certain jobs, breaking Saudi glass ceiling, etc.). *Kapwa*, *kusang-loob* and *lakas-ng-loob* have shown that respondents are agentive (not silent nor passive), particularly outside the workplace, in

the hope they might help change local gender stereotypes, or at least motivate local women to challenge them.

Finally, as was also seen in the socioeconomic chapter, all respondents reported that being hero in the eyes of their families and loved ones as an overseas Filipino was incredibly important to them post-migration. The image of a female *Bayani* (in the realms of gender) was associated/linked with a female that can lead and inspire change in local women, especially after the announcement of the 2030 vision, a crucial time in Saudi women history. Participants perceived this to add an additional dimension to the presentation of gender identity to others, through enacting the part of the female *Bayani* in the eyes of local women's eyes.

In contrast to most current migration trajectories, this study suggests that when it comes to the Filipino migration wave, Filipino women are dominating and leading this migration route. For the respondents in my study, the decision to migrate was initiated, steered and influenced by the women's careers. This contradicts data from other, many of which have noted a 'male exodus' to the USA from Latin America, supported by patriarchal norms facilitating such emigrational trajectories to the USA. The present study, as a result of female migration, revealed a gender role shift in the respondents' lives, which was ostensibly accepted and embraced by Filipino migrant families. The husbands in these families adapted to their wives' professional lifestyles and career demands; they stayed at home, cooking meals and teaching their children, while their wives worked and improved their Arabic linguistic abilities. Whilst other studies focused on other parts of the world may have had the opposite finding, with male partners resisting females becoming the breadwinners, Filipino men reportedly accepted such a gender role shift given their blue-collar status. This meant their earnings would be lower (meaning less economic power) than their female partners, who are white-collar workers in the Saudi context. The Filipino men also appeared to have accepted that their female partners needed to spend time investing in and learning the host language to increase their participation in economic, cultural and social environments and gain power. Whilst the male partners of participants in this study were not consulted, and the female participants' views cannot be corroborated, their suggestion that this gender role reversal was accepted and implemented by the family in KSA provides yet another indication of the fluidity of

identities – in this case, gender identities – in different contexts. The next section discusses this idea in light of the fluidity of the presentation of religious identity.

### ***8.2.2 Religion: Respondents' Front and Backstage Selves in the Realms of Religion***

Overall, respondents had vivid impressions about the religiousness of the Saudi context; markers of the Islamic nature of the state are everywhere, and the loud, repeated public calls to prayer, the possession of prayer mats by patients, the use of religious language, the modest dress of the women, the segregation, and various other features, all played a part in having a marked impact of participants' perceptions of the religiousness of the context. This environment meant that some participants attempted to adopt some of the religious repertoire in their front stage selves, particularly inside the clinics while interacting with patients (the religious repertoire was learned from Muslim practitioners after coming to KSA). The use of such a repertoire (i.e., Sunni canonical repertoire) appeared to alter how patients religiously positioned the Catholic practitioners in the culturally conservative Sunni context, providing new evidence of the performative nature of religious language in the Saudi medical context. The results demonstrate how some patients positioned their Catholic practitioners as Muslims specifically because they utilised an Islamic canon. However, some respondents either did not acknowledge the religious repertoire, or actively resisted it, claiming it clashed with their own identity as a Catholic. This shed light on how certain identities may compete in certain contexts; appearing professional, for some, might be more important than a Catholic identity, at least to their front stage self, which could result in using Islamic repertoire with patients. For others, this was unacceptable to their (perhaps more important?) Catholic identities. Regardless all respondents refrained from using the religious repertoire after work, either when alone in their backstage selves, or when outside the clinics with others in other social situations.

When it came to respondents' practice of their own Catholic faith, respondents reported a personal change in their backstage selves (in their post-migration lives in KSA); all respondents reported becoming more religious after moving to this ultra-conservative Sunni context inside KSA. Respondents report that being a religious minority in the heart of Islam played a major role in becoming more religious. Practicing their faith as a religious minority inside KSA was a new

experience for respondents; both privately, and when with other Catholics, participants reported a sense of joy, fervour and commitment to their faith. Some claimed to be inspired by the religiosity of local Sunnis, especially given the comparisons drawn to the more relaxed attitude and commitment to Catholicism back home. Respondents gathered to pray secretly along with other Christians inside their accommodation, singing together and reading from the Bible, which gave them a different religious experience after migration. It appeared as though being subjected to a life with no designated places of worship (no Church to worship publicly) played a role in this change to becoming more religious in their post-migration lives, when either by themselves or with other Catholics. Furthermore, respondents reported posting more religious content online in different platforms. These posts were viewed by friends and family members in the Philippines. Part of their front stage selves, respondents also reported attending online ceremonies because of the absence of churches. Respondents also noted the increasing numbers of overseas Filipinos converting from Christianity to Islam in KSA.

Finally, the Catholic faith was cited as playing a major role in helping respondents to overcome difficulties in life more generally. Even though respondents reported feeling weak and tired (backstage in their houses behind closed doors), they also reported how the Catholic faith lifted them up and gave them a strength. Thus, there was a general perception that a Christian can endure hardship and difficult times, especially given the hardships endured by role models such as Jesus and other Biblical figures. The strength drawn from such figures and God's words in the Bible more generally appeared to play a role in strengthening participants' backstage sense of resolve to endure and embrace challenges, which was then reflected in a stronger front stage 'self'. As Catholic, participants believed that they should enact a sense of bravery and strength, or the Filipino virtue of *lakas-ng-loob*.

Interestingly, the religious atmosphere and the gendered differences perceived between local men and women had a similar impact on participants, but for different reasons. Both seemed to make participants cling more ferociously to their own conceptualization of gender and religious identity, at least outside of the workplace. However, this was inspired by admiration for the Muslim faith and dedication to practice when it came to religious, yet by a dislike for local gendered practices and norms when it came to gender. Either way, it does suggest that the practices of Filipina

migrants changed in the setting, either becoming more magnified, or weakened, in different contexts in the KSA post-migration.

### **8.2.3 Socioeconomic Factors and their Relation to Identity Post-Migration**

There appear to be various socioeconomic factors that play a significant role in the construction and presentation of Filipino migrants' identities post-migration in this KSA context. This includes Filipino traditions (i.e., sending *balikbayan* or gifts boxes) as well as money back home, a way of constructing the heroic Filipino identity by becoming or playing the part of a *Bayani*. This formed a significant front stage element regarding how respondents presented their identities; they rarely referred to the challenges they faced when communicating with those back home, or the sadness and loneliness experienced. Rather, the opposite was true; they constructed and performed the part of an independent adventurer, working hard and playing hard, taking advantage of all the opportunities that KSA presented. The sending of gifts and money and the presentation of themselves as a *Bayani* appeared to be motivated by the Filipino virtue of *utang-na-loob* (debt of gratitude), which is how respondents try to pay back a parent, family member or a friend for helping them at earlier stages in their lives.

Perhaps it was *utang-na-loob*, a private sense of debt and gratitude, that motivated the sense of pride in being a *Bayani*; certainly, it was not due to the role played by the Filipino government and Filipino mainstream media in constructing an identity and an image of an overseas hero migrant, a super migrant (or servant of globalisation). Whilst migrants are aware of the ways in which overseas Filipinos help the government via increasing remittance and subsequent GDP, this did not seem to be a source of pride. Respondents were fully aware of such narrative or discourse constructed by Filipino media and Filipino government, yet were disparaging of this, claiming this was not their motivation for migrating. Rather, respondents described themselves as heroes/*Bayanis* according to how their family and friends positioned them, claiming this is what mattered most. The participants in this study therefore constructed their heroic identity in a clear agentive voice, whereby they depicted themselves as being able to overcome hardships and succeed as migrants in a new context where another language is spoken. In increasing their social, economic and cultural knowledge and power, providing for others back home, and overcoming hardship,

migrants were assisted to construct this heroic identity. The respondents did this in a clear agentive voice; similar to the findings of Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994, p.75) regarding male Latino migrants, the Filipino women in my study aimed to 'live up the image of a successful migrant', manifested in the Filipino female exodus to global workplaces. However, all noted the limitations on their agency, given the difficulty in obtaining residency without a substantial, almost impossible to attain, amount of money to pay for the permit. Thus, whilst heroes, they still felt as though they had little voice or power, despite the perceived value in their roles as healthcare workers, to remain in KSA as a citizen.

#### ***8.2.4 Language and Identity Construction, Negotiation and Presentation***

The early days and weeks of respondents' post-migration lives in the KSA shows that they positioned their coworkers as experienced due to their linguistic abilities since they can interact with local patients efficiently using the host language. The respondents then worked at learning and improving their own host language skills by going through a deliberate and intentional language-learning phase. They viewed language learning as crucial to positioning themselves as experienced and successful in the workplace, and therefore more likely to be accepted and kept on by the gatekeepers. The study's findings have demonstrated the respondents' investment in learning the host language (Norton, 2000, 2013), which was undertaken in the hope of building a career that would enable them to gain more power, agency and participation in the KSA, was crucial in identity negotiation. However, whilst participants were happy to learn and practice Arabic for the workplace, their use of it in other settings was limited; many reported resisting using it so as not to be viewed as Muslim Filipinos by local Saudis, especially given that many Filipinos are converting to Islam. As can be seen therefore, language learning and use can interact with other identities, such as religious identity.

It can also interact with gender identity and roles. As a consequence of these dynamics and power relations, the study recorded new evidence of the aftermath of a gender role shift taking place within the Filipino migrant community, whereby the women took on the role of main breadwinner from the men; rather than this being rejected, it was embraced and welcomed by the respondents' male partners. Learning the host language eventually makes women less dependent on male

partners and there is evidence in the literature that some male partners within migrant communities view this as threatening their dominant position and their perspective of power. Thus, language can play a key role in identity performance. Language can also have a profound impact on the way one presents and enacts other identities – such as in conveying the *Bayani* identity to others (front stage) such as family members back home so as to give the illusion of success and adventure, and conceal loneliness, homesickness and difficulties. Thus, the exploration of language has revealed a novel insight into the ways in which Filipina migrants discuss their identities in a post-migration context such as KSA.

### **8.3 Superdiversity and Migrants' Lives: The Complexity of Current Human Migration**

The study has taken into consideration the superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007) of current migration. Superdiversity has been highlighted in the literature in relation to exploring migrants' identities and human migration in general. It contends that current migration is becoming more complex and unpredictable. Migrants currently maintain a strong connection with their homeland communities via high-speed Internet services. Even though the respondents have moved from the Philippines, they are still strongly connected to family members and friends back home (via almost daily communication). For example, they were able to celebrate different events (both religious and non-religious events), at least virtually, together with their families and friends in the Philippines.

Migrant identities in particular and human migration in general have therefore changed since the emergence of high-speed Internet and social media platforms. Before the introduction of high-speed Internet, migrants used to be more isolated from their home culture and more immersed in the host culture. This may have facilitated integration into the time and space of host countries, yet high-speed Internet has destabilized this; the strong, continuous connection with the home culture thus nurtures the uniqueness of migrants' identities. This constant contact means the sense of community and familial duty to their home circles is not lost, potentially generating a 'hybrid' identity that can differ between migrants, with some finding themselves more strongly attached than ever to certain elements of their identities that were cultivated back home, perhaps as an anchor to give them a reassuring sense of self in a changing landscape; others however may find that they are able to (or desire to) move away from parts of their identity to embrace new ideas,

behaviours, norms and expectations, generating a new, altered ‘sense of self’. This agentive, active process demonstrates the fluidity of identity, especially in such a superdiverse global context, where migration is becoming increasingly popular and rapid technological developments are occurring at lightening speed.

#### **8.4 Implications**

This study took place within two medical workplaces, enabling me to answer calls by scholars such as Duff (2017) to explore female migrant identities in globally under-researched workplaces, as discussed in Chapter One. Thus, my study addresses a research gap and relates the findings to the literature; however, it also has practical implications for highly skilled migrants, gatekeepers, their employers and decision makers. The study adds to the literature on skilled female migrants in general and overseas Filipinos in particular. Filipino migrants are highly valued in global multicultural workplaces that rely on skilled migrants, including healthcare sectors. They have been termed servants of globalisation due to many factors (i.e., fast learning abilities, linguistic abilities and skills, open-minded and result-oriented mentality, excellent teamwork, adapting quickly etc.), which were discussed in Chapter One. In particular, there are practical applications in linguistic training for migrants entering healthcare settings in different contexts.

Timpe-Laughlin (2019) discussed the important role language plays when practitioners interact with patients within medical contexts. She noted that participants in medical workplaces ‘undergo a type of linguistic workplace socialization’ (2019, p.413). As stated by Dahm and Yates (2013), one of the difficulties facing migrant practitioners around the world is working in an unfamiliar medical system. Dahm and Yates (2013) investigated immigrants working as medical practitioners in Canada. The Canadian medical context resembles the Saudi medical context since it relies heavily on migrants, specifically in the medical sector. As Dahm and Yates (2013, p.22) stressed, practitioners may ‘face considerable difficulties in daily communications with patients’. Part of this dilemma is linked to the language and the different/new norms associated with the speakers of a language. Hence, there is a need for applied linguists, sociolinguists and linguistic researchers to explore medical contexts, which may eventually help in providing better services and inductions for both staff and subsequently patients. Dahm and Yates continued: ‘In addition to the more

obvious language difficulties with vocabulary, grammar... they [practitioners] can also struggle with the less salient but vitally important interpersonal features of language use, such as how to build rapport and show empathy' (Hall et al., 2004; McDonnell and Usherwood, 2008; Pilotto et al., 2007, Tipton, 2005). This does not only relate to the language itself, but insight into the context and culture of the host country, which can possess nuanced (and overt) differences to migrants' home cultures.

My study has therefore answered calls to inform training designed specifically for practitioners who are migrants and non-native speakers of the host language. The findings of this study may inform clinic owners, such as the gatekeepers participating in my study, as well as governmental agencies seeking to send citizens abroad to work. The gatekeepers in my study for example were eager to examine the findings of this study, since they remain willing to expand their private clinics and thus is seeking to invest more money into the recruitment and training of appropriate staff (for example, one of the gatekeepers has already started the construction of a second branch and is willing to hire more practitioners, specifically Filipino practitioners). During the focus group discussions, the respondents argued that there were few resources available to learn about the Saudi context since few social studies have reflected on Filipino migrants' experiences. The respondents stated that they consulted YouTube vloggers and Filipino online forums to learn about the medical workplace in Saudi Arabia. Only one respondent took part in an orientation seminar before coming to Saudi Arabia. She was the first among the respondents to come here and was the only practitioner requested to participate in such a pre-departure orientation. This raises the question of whether these orientations are still running; I believe that they need to be implemented for all prospective employees. There is a chance that such orientations have stopped or been cancelled since all other (more recently arrived) respondents had not experienced them. I tried to investigate this, but no definite answer was obtained. The respondents relied on their individual efforts to understand the different language and norms presented by the KSA context. The findings of this study may therefore be used to inform the training, orientation and/or inductions of highly skilled overseas Filipinos working in medical conservative Sunni contexts. Orientations should be tailored to each migration trajectory with a different set of orientations designed for each context (at least among the top destinations for overseas Filipinos). They must include raising awareness about the different/new gender norms the migrants will face in their workplaces. For example, orientations

must include information on what the respondents noticed about how local women speak (i.e., not laughing loudly and lowering their voices), dress (in dark, modest, flowing garments) and behave (modestly with lowered eyes, often in segregated lines and areas) in conservative contexts. It may also contain information about how and where to worship and what is acceptable or expected in terms of demonstrating religious identity. This may help potential migrants to understand the conservative Sunni context, and indeed encourage consideration of whether this is the right context for them. This insight can also help highly skilled migrants perform their jobs efficiently within medical workplaces where interaction with patients is required. Moreover, the findings of this study may not only be valued in medical workplaces, but also in other workplaces in KSA and similar conservative contexts.

Although the gatekeepers stressed good patient–practitioner communications, they did nothing to facilitate the long and arduous journey of language learning (except for giving the respondents opportunities to mix with English/Arabic speakers). Learning Arabic is a task that may need some guidance from experts and yet the gatekeepers and clinics did not direct the respondents regarding whom to contact and where to go. Migrants often demonstrate the desire to invest in the host language and possess high levels of motivation for learning. This is something the Saudi government should work at facilitating (e.g., ESL classes both at home and overseas, especially in countries that send increasing numbers of migrants, such as the Philippines and Indonesia). There is no directed help for incoming migrant practitioners to assist them in choosing resources such as particular textbooks, dictionaries and smart phone apps. This means that migrants will vary in their language learning strategies and proficiency.

My study may answer practical calls by Filipino journalists like Jun Concepcion, who currently writes a weekly column about overseas Filipinos in the *Manila Bulletin*. He has discussed a number of current issues and difficulties facing overseas Filipinos in different parts of the world, arguing that there is a need for a Filipino think tank to address the difficulties facing 10 million overseas Filipinos who contribute significantly to national GDP. Such difficulties include (but are not limited to) cultural shock, different workplaces, stress, frustration and anxiety (which I found to be strongly related to the language barrier). He specifically touched upon the language barrier encountered by overseas Filipinos working outside the Anglophone world, imploring the Filipino

government to follow the approach of the Indonesian government for its highly skilled migrants heading to Hong Kong and Singapore (where specific language courses are tailored for their new workplaces in the host cultures). Hence, I suggest taking my findings into consideration when implementing intercultural communication orientations (e.g., raising awareness about how gender norms differ globally and the religiosity of certain cultural contexts). This may answer Concepcion's criticism of Filipino agencies providing little help for the integration of Filipinos globally. The study may also help in adding valuable data to start the database he calls for, especially since Islamic countries are among the top destinations for overseas Filipinos. The recorded experiences in this study may help novice practitioners to gain experience, integrate and therefore succeed in achieving their goals for migrating in the first place.

### **8.5 Limitations**

This study has provided novel insights into the ways in which female Filipino migrant healthcare workers enact and present their identities in different contexts in the KSA. Yet despite the recognised value of the study, and the various practical implications that exist, there are some glaring limitations. The validity of the study findings may naturally be comprised by my status as a male Sunni Saudi researcher, especially given the highly religious and gendered nature of the context. It is increasingly clear that, despite the various qualitative research methods used, participants may not have felt comfortable sharing their innermost thoughts and experiences with me. As was noted in the Methodology chapter, my status as a Saudi, and as someone on friendly terms with the gatekeepers (their employers and sponsors), I was in a position infinitely more powerful than they, meaning they may have felt simultaneously obliged to participate, yet been extremely careful in the things they divulged (such as their marital relationships, their interactions with the opposite sex, their feelings towards the workplace, their Catholic practices, and so on). To address this issue, I recommend that this study should be replicated by a female researcher, perhaps one that is not Saudi, but a different nationality and religion altogether (such as a British atheist), to avoid social desirability bias. This may yield different results, including a different gender identity performance in different contexts. Future female researchers may also alter my methods of data collection, such as how I observed the respondents (i.e., overt or covert observations). This may lead to observations and findings that I might not have been able to

witness and record, as a Saudi male researcher. Moreover, given the lack of quantitative methods, it may be that future studies triangulate the results through a mixed quantitative and qualitative study, to establish representative, generalisable data; this can give the proposed implications of the study greater weight.

### **8.6 Contribution of the Study**

This study has answered calls in the field to conduct studies outside the Anglophone world to explore migrants' identities. More specifically, the study has answered recent calls to explore female migrants' experiences. In so doing, the study recorded new evidence of female migrants constructing a heroic female migrant identity post-migration using a clear agentive voice. This is rare in the field, because all evidence shows that this is usually the experience of male migrants, not female migrants. I have provided new evidence in this regard. Moreover, study recorded new evidence surrounding the ways in which female Filipino migrants observe and respond to local gender, religious and linguistic norms; it highlights the vast range of reactions to this, in different contexts, including various front stage situations, as well as privately, backstage, at home. This had an impact on the choices they made, their actions taken, their behaviours, ideas and expectations.

My research also provides insight into the different ways in which post-migration identities are specifically impacted by the Filipino national identity, media, governmental spin, and values. The politicised export of Filipinos for migration has a clear impact on their trajectories, and whilst the construction of a heroic and happy, hardworking Filipino identity (in the eyes of loved ones) was important to the migrants in this study, the role the media and government play in actively constructing this heroic discourse and commodifying citizens for export was not unnoticed – or appreciated – by them. However, the Filipino national identity remained strong; this was never more prevalent than when discussing specific Filipino virtues that shaped their attitudes, beliefs, experiences and decisions surrounding a range of issues, from gender and religion, to the debt of gratitude owed to their family. Thus, this study contributes to the literature in exposing the different ways in which the Filipino identity can significantly impact the identity negotiations of migrants in their host culture.

This study also contributes insights for practitioners in medical workplaces and possibly other workplaces located in conservative Sunni contexts scattered across the Muslim world. Its insights can be widely applicable to various conservative contexts around the world, giving host country gatekeepers a better understanding of the expectations, experiences and needs of their migrant workers.

### **8.7 Further Suggestions and Recommendations for Future Research**

Filipino migrants' identity negotiation in a Sunni context warrants comparative studies in Shia and other conservative faith contexts, including under-researched ones like Jewish Haredim and conservative Christian communities, such as in Australia. For instance, the rising demand for migrants in Australia offers a unique opportunity to explore female migrants' identity dynamics, addressing questions on gender, religious identities, and workplace integration amidst global migration challenges like climate change and conflict.

Further research could examine Western converts to Islam, including gender identity construction, or Westerners married to Middle Eastern spouses, highlighting how local norms influence identity and language in social interactions. Historical orientalists, such as Ludovico Varthema and Richard Burton, who disguised themselves as Muslims to access sacred Islamic sites, provide insights into the performative use of religious language. Investigating their narratives through a poststructuralist lens could explore how identity fluidity and religious repertoires shaped their experiences.

Additionally, non-Muslim spies infiltrating extremist groups (e.g., Danish agent Morten Storm) highlight the strategic use of religious language in identity performance. Modern applications of such performativity, like UK government spokesperson Rosie Dyas's Sunni-centric Twitter discourse, could guide political or influencer communication strategies tailored to specific audiences.

Lastly, context-specific performative repertoires, such as neoliberal financial language on Wall Street, underline the need for researchers to adapt approaches based on sociocultural and economic settings.

## **8.8 Concluding Statement**

The journey to complete this thesis took four-and-half years; during this time, I encountered many challenges, as did my wife, four children, and other members of our extended family. Yet I have also experienced the biggest reward: I have finally found myself as a researcher. I hope this study provides a solid foundation for future work and study, whilst I consider the ways I can contribute further to the field through conducting more research studies in this under-researched context, given my extensive (and growing) knowledge as a citizen of the KSA.

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