LABORED BREATHING

Geonarratives of Filipino Irregular Migrant Workers in Dutch Urban Spaces of Death

MASTER'S THESIS
Leonardo Miguel Garcia
Master in Urban Studies (4CITIES)

Supervisor: Dr. René Kreichauf
Second Reader: Ana Dresler
September 1, 2024

ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)

Undocumented or irregular migrant workers (IMWs) from the Global South have been risking their lives in order to pursue a dream of a better one in global cities. While they remain a crucial labor force in these cities, they continue to endure a life of informality, violence, and exclusion. This research aims to conceptualize and expose these as spaces of death in global cities or urban necropolis and investigate how IMWs perceive, navigate, and contest these spaces. Bridging Robinson's racial capitalism with Mbembe's necropolitics, this study argues that death for the racialized surplus labor not only refers to direct loss of life, but also being expelled into the global reserve labour exposed to abject conditions bringing them closer to death. This research is based on the case of Filipino IMWs engaged in insecure working conditions, precarious housing, and threat of deportation within the urban landscape of the Netherlands - a country historically reliant on migrant labour that has now become one of Europe's strictest nation-states for immigrants. By utilizing geonarratives, a place-based storytelling approach, along with interviews, mental mapping, and participant observation, I reimagined their stories and spaces through the lens of life and death. This study argues that the urban necropolis for Filipino IMWs is produced through three scales of spatialities: (1) displacement from their home country (2) bordering and relocation in global cities, and (3) dispossession and invisibilization in their everyday geographies. Urban necropolis is not a fixed spatial entity but a transient and hidden condition that is manufactured by racial capitalism to extract capital from Filipino IMWs. It is characterized by shadowed and asphyxiating everyday spaces including settlement, workplaces, mobility, and public spaces exposing them to physical harm, social exclusion, economic deprivation, social insecurity, and restricted mobility. Despite this, Filipino IMWs are able to breathe life into the urban necropolis by renegotiating and reclaiming the spaces of death and transforming them into spaces of community, collective resistance, and hope. This highlights the fluidity of the socio-spatial distinction of necropolis with biopolis emphasizing the survival and struggle that foregrounds the politics of life within death. This research calls for strategies to enhance visibility for migrant populations, integrating them into efforts to cultivate livable and productive urban environments.

Keywords: necropolitics, racial capitalism, violence, global cities, irregular migration, migrant workers, geonarratives

ABSTRACT (GERMAN)

Undokumentierte oder irreguläre Arbeitsmigranten (IMWs) aus dem globalen Süden riskieren ihr Leben, um in den globalen Städten ihren Traum von einem besseren Leben zu verwirklichen. Obwohl sie eine wichtige Arbeitskraft in diesen Städten sind, leben sie weiterhin in einem Leben der Informalität, Gewalt und Ausgrenzung. Diese Forschung zielt darauf ab, diese als Räume des Todes in globalen Städten oder als urbane Nekropolen zu konzeptualisieren und aufzuzeigen und zu untersuchen, wie IMWs diese Räume wahrnehmen, sich darin bewegen und sie anfechten. Indem sie Robinsons rassischen Kapitalismus mit Mbembes Nekropolitik verbindet, argumentiert diese Studie, dass sich der Tod für die rassifizierte überschüssige Arbeitskraft nicht nur auf den direkten Verlust des Lebens bezieht, sondern auch auf die Vertreibung in die globale Reservearbeit, die sie elenden Bedingungen aussetzt, die sie dem Tod näher bringen. Diese Untersuchung basiert auf dem Fall philippinischer IMWs, die unter unsicheren Arbeitsbedingungen, prekären Wohnverhältnissen und der Bedrohung durch Abschiebung in der urbanen Landschaft der Niederlande leben - einem Land, das historisch auf Arbeitsmigranten angewiesen war und heute zu einem der strengsten Nationalstaaten Europas für Immigranten geworden ist. Durch den Einsatz von Geonarratives, einem ortsbezogenen Ansatz zur Erzählung von Geschichten, sowie durch Interviews, mentales Mapping und teilnehmende Beobachtung habe ich ihre Geschichten und Räume durch die Linse von Leben und Tod neu erfunden. In dieser Studie wird argumentiert, dass die urbane Nekropole für philippinische IMWs durch drei räumliche Dimensionen erzeugt wird: (1) Vertreibung aus ihrem Heimatland, (2) Abgrenzung und Umsiedlung in globalen Städten und (3) Enteignung und Unsichtbarmachung in ihren alltäglichen Geografien. Die urbane Nekropole ist keine feste räumliche Einheit, sondern ein vorübergehender und verborgener Zustand, der vom Rassenkapitalismus hergestellt wird, um Kapital aus philippinischen IMWs zu gewinnen. Sie ist gekennzeichnet durch verschattete und erstickende Alltagsräume wie Siedlungen, Arbeitsplätze, Mobilität und öffentliche Räume, die sie körperlichen Schäden, sozialer Ausgrenzung, wirtschaftlicher Deprivation, sozialer Unsicherheit und eingeschränkter Mobilität aussetzen. Trotzdem gelingt es den philippinischen IMWs, der städtischen Nekropole Leben einzuhauchen, indem sie die Räume des Todes neu verhandeln und zurückerobern und sie in Räume der Gemeinschaft, des kollektiven Widerstands und der Hoffnung verwandeln. Dies unterstreicht die Fluidität der sozio-räumlichen Unterscheidung zwischen Nekropole und Biopolis und betont das Überleben und den Kampf, der die Politik des Lebens innerhalb des Todes in den Vordergrund rückt. Diese Forschung fordert Strategien, um die Sichtbarkeit der Migrantenbevölkerung zu erhöhen und sie in die Bemühungen um eine lebenswerte und produktive städtische Umwelt zu integrieren.

Stichworte: Nekropolitik, Rassenkapitalismus, Gewalt, globale Städte, irreguläre Migration, Arbeitsmigranten, Geo-Narrative

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

"*Nandiyan kami pero hindi kami nakikita parang mga multo*"
[We are there, but we are not seen, like ghosts.]
(Interview, Salvacion, Filipino irregular migrant worker, 2024)

In Dutch cities, undocumented or irregular Filipino migrants live and work in plain sight. They endure spaces of fear and precarity all in pursuit of a better life abroad. Making up around half of the estimated 50,000 irregular migrants in the Netherlands, Filipino irregular migrant workers (IMWs) are among the most vulnerable workers in the nation (Balod, 2020; Van der Heijden et al., 2020). Running and cycling around cities everyday to work in cleaning, childcare, and construction, the lives of Filipino IMWs are fraught with risks including constant threats of deportation, insecure housing conditions, and social exclusion (Siruno, et.al., 2022). To live, Filipino IMWs must remain hidden and their existence in the urban shadows, haunting as ghosts, must be kept secret.

Regional and national policies in the European Union (EU) are increasingly prioritizing expedited deportation and removal procedures for individuals with undocumented or irregular immigration status. Since 2018, the European Commission has pushed for the improved enforcement of the 2008 Return Directive, aimed at expelling "illegally staying third-country nationals," raising concerns about the potential escalation of coercion and control tactics directed at irregular migrants (European Commission, 2018). The Netherlands has also intensified the implementation of "hard" and "soft" measures that make it exceedingly difficult for 'unwanted' irregular migrants to integrate and access pathways to residency, citizenship, and social services (Leerkes & Van Houte, 2020). This is evident in the Dutch deportation regime's strict migration control policies, including Forced Return and Assisted Voluntary Return programs, and state policies like the De Koppeling Wet (Linking Act), which restricts irregular migrants' access to the formal labor market, social benefits, education, and healthcare (Van Der Leun, 2006). Coupled with the recent rise of populist movements from the far-right coalition government in the Netherlands espousing anti-immigrant sentiments, the country has only stood to its reputation as a 'reluctant country for immigration' (Rath, 2009, p.674).

The labor of irregular migrants has played an integral role in shaping urban landscapes worldwide at the expense of their well-being. Sassen (2001) suggests that in capitalist globalization, urban economic cores of Global North nations recruit from the large and growing low-wage, informal service labor from the Global South to maintain the lifestyle and infrastructure of their transnational operations and professional labor sector. Several cases have revealed that irregular migrants, particularly from the Global South, are stranded in 3D jobs: dirty, dangerous, and demeaning employment in global cities while facing structural discrimination, stigmatization, and alienation (Kathiravelu, 2020; Lindio-McGovern, 2013; Merrill, 2011). In the past decade, labor organizations and migration scholars have reported that a combination of vulnerabilities such as race, gender, education level, and status have subjected migrant workers to abuse, maltreatment, trafficking, and exploitation (Verite, 2021, Willen, 2007; Schreiber, 2018).

Drawing from these accounts, this study intends to foreground the stories of Filipino IMWs underpinning the urban spaces in the Netherlands. I focus on emphasizing how their racialized labor are perpetually exploited to extract profits to the point of violence and death. As an entry point, this study integrates two key conceptual frameworks: racial capitalism and necropolitics. Building on Robinson's (2000) analysis, I examine how the labor and bodies of Filipino IMWs are reorganized for capitalist accumulation facilitated by the entrenched racial hierarchies of Global South and Global North. This study also builds on Mbembe's (2003, p.27) concept of necropolitics, which pertains to a sovereignty's "capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not." Necropolitics not only subjects people to death or direct physical violence but is also related to exposing marginalized populations to 'slow violence' or perpetual and often hidden conditions of suffering such as incarceration, economic deprivation, and social insecurity, effectively bringing them closer to death (Mbembe, 2003; Nixon, 2011; Davies et al., 2017).

To bridge these concepts and enroll its analysis on urban landscapes, I employ McIntyre and Nast's (2011) concept of necropolis and biopolis. Necropolis refers to the 'impoverished and invisible spaces of negation and social death' produced by the 'dispossession and hyper-exploitation' of racially-stratified surplus labor populations, originating from Global South nations (McIntyre and Nast, 2011, p.1467). Biopolis, on the other hand, is based on Foucault's (1978) concept of biopolitics, which refers to spaces that are governed and designed to 'foster and conserve sovereign life,' often flourishing in the wealthier nations which extract massive 'latent and floating labor forces' from the racialized surplus populations of the South (McIntyre and Nast, 2011, p.1467). Extending this concept to urban and migration research, I propose conceptualizing an urban necropolis or spaces of death emerging from a biopolis or a Global North city navigated by racialized migrant laborers, in this case Filipino IMWs, and produced through various scales of deadly spatialities such as displacement from their homelands, expropriation of their bodies and labor, and everyday geographies of violence and invisibility. This urban necropolis thrives on the dispossession of Filipino IMWs and engineered by racial capitalism to control and discipline not just their labor but their entire existence.

Taking this into consideration, the study examines the following question: How do Filipino irregular migrant workers navigate the Dutch urban necropolis? To operationalize this, the following sub-questions are posed:

1. How does the urban necropolis for Filipino IMWs emerge?
2. How and where does death manifest for Filipino IMWs in the urban necropolis?
3. How do Filipino IMWs subvert the urban necropolis?

The data from the research were collected using various methods that reflect the geonarratives, specifically, the place-based and grounded experiences of Filipino IMWs. This includes physical and online semi-structured interviews, mental mapping, and ethnographic methods such as participant observation. This approach is applied to focus on the accounts of Filipino IMWs residing in Randstad

Holland, the Netherlands' mega-city region connecting four major cities: Amsterdam, Den Haag, Rotterdam, and Utrecht including the suburbs and towns in between. However, this study, does not specifically analyze each case per city due to (1) the notion that social death and violence are not confined in a single contained space but manifests across urban spaces, (2) the transient and mobile nature of Filipino IMWs concerning their settlement, workplace, and networks, (3) the coalescing urban function and organisation of Dutch cities, and the (4) risk of revealing personal and locational data of the participants. Instead, this study focuses on mapping embodied experiences across the Dutch urban landscape, adopting a relational approach and focusing more not on the actual location of necropolis but on the urban experience and "stories-so-far" of Filipino IMWs unconstrained by material structures and boundaries of the city (Massey, 2005; Thrift, 2007).

This research offers substantive contribution with regards to theory building and empirical support to the expression of racialized migrant labor, necropolitics, and its convergence on urban scale (Lopez, 2020; McIntyre and Nast, 2011; Ortega, 2020). This study propels interrogating precarity and violence against irregular migrants beyond the realm of socio-cultural aspects but also cuts through the workings of the capitalist system producing life and death conditions for 'disposable and racialized bodies and spaces of global proportions' (McIntyre and Nast, 2011, p.1468). Despite the emergence of irregular migration discourses in the Netherlands and in EU for the past decade, analysis on the structural accumulation from their labor power and precarity is often overlooked. Moreover, in a time wherein informal labor and migration underpins the sustenance and growth of global cities, urban necropolises for migrant workers will continue to proliferate. Given this, an urgent task for urban researchers is to expose and destabilize its emergence and forward strategies on creating cities that serve as 'space for a politics of critique that refuses a governmentality that abjects those displaced' (Darling, 2017, p. 192).

This thesis consists of four main sections. First, the literature review discusses the context of irregular migration internationally and the role and vulnerability of Filipino migrant workers in the global labor market. Next, the theoretical framework of this study bridges several themes of analysis on global cities, racial capitalism, and necropolitics. The third section further discusses geonarratives as a methodology and research approach, considering the context of this study's participants, study area, and my positionality as a researcher. Then, I introduce the aspects assembling a Dutch urban necropolis which historicalizes Dutch attitudes towards immigration, analyzes the current migration regime, and examines the specific situation of Filipino IMWs in the Netherlands. The results and discussion section outlines emerging themes from the data collected, presenting results and analysis organized around the three sub-questions of this research. Finally, the conclusion emphasizes the conceptual and empirical contributions of this research to broader urban and migration discourses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review provides an overview of diverse studies on irregular migration and Filipino migrant workers. First, I examine irregular migration by exploring various debates and pathways that propel irregularity. It also delves into the literature that analyzes the precarious conditions faced by irregular migrants, highlighting their exclusion and invisibility within societal frameworks. Then, I present the systemic exploitation of Filipino migrant workers, particularly focusing on how racialization influences their role in the global labor market. I also emphasize the vulnerabilities that shape the migration experiences of irregular Filipino migrants.

Irregular Migration

Irregular migration, which was broadly defined as the movement of individuals to a country without proper legal authorization, has become a central topic in both migration studies and political discussions over the past decades. The literature has grown significantly in various directions since the 1970s, given its complexity, scale, and rapid emergence, making irregular migration a key subfield within migration studies (Echeverría, 2020). In 1997, the United Nations' population division (as cited in Düvell, 2006, p.16) had already dubbed irregular migration as 'one of the fastest growing forms of migration in the world.' Three decades later, estimates showed that irregular migrants constituted 15% to 20% of the global migrant population, translating to approximately 30-40 million individuals worldwide (Spencer & Triandafyllidou, 2022). Studies documented the impact of irregular migration on Global North regions and countries, which were common destinations including Europe, ranging from 3 million to 5.3 million since 2014 (Passel & Krogstad, 2023). Moreover, the increase in refugees and asylum seekers, which more than doubled globally between 2003 and 2014, further complicated the landscape of irregular migration (UNHCR, 2015). However, McAuliffe & Koser (2017) pointed out that grasping the actual scale of irregular migration had become a contentious theme due to the very nature of irregular status that often existed outside of official channels, the variety of routes into irregularity, definitional issues, and rapid status changes.

Contextualizing Irregularity

Discourses on irregular migration commonly start with the interrogation of the terminology and the call for a humanizing and consistent portrayal to avoid perpetuating the culture of violence against these migrants. Several terms such as "illegal" and "unauthorised" migration were highly debated given that they carried stigmatized connotations due to their association with criminality (Hamlin, 2022). Düvell (2006) uncovered that in earlier European literature, migrants without work or residence permits were labeled as 'nuisance foreigners' and 'unwanted migrants'. They were also often depicted as 'undesirable aliens, fugitive offenders, the mad, the destitute, and continental agitators,' with their deportation seen as beneficial to public welfare (Couper and Santamaria, 1984; as cited in Düvell, 2006, p.26). Bosworth and Guild (2008, p.1) noted that "the unknown and the undocumented are not just unwanted" but increasingly associated or stigmatized as "dangerous" individuals. Several scholars

instead advocated for terms such as "precarious migratory status", "liminal legality", or "semi-compliant migrants" to encompass the attempt of irregular migrants to follow regulations but were constrained by bureaucratic hurdles pushing them towards irregularity (Goldring et al., 2009; Menjívar, 2006; Ruhs & Anderson, 2006). The binary of legality was also contested by scholars emphasizing that "illegality" was a construct of state-imposed categories serving as the basis for "illegalizing" migrants and not migrants outrightly doing something 'illegal' (De Genova, 2019; Jacobsen et al., 2021; Kraler, 2009). Legality was often arbitrary given that being in a country without the required papers, as the European Commission (2021) noted, would "not be a criminal offence but an administrative infringement". There was no general consensus on the term for irregular migrants, but in this study, I primarily use the term "irregular migrants" and interchangeably use "undocumented migrants" to align with terminology used by international human rights institutions (Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants, 2017)

Scholars recognized the complex task of categorizing migrants due to the fluidity of their status and the wide spectrum of paths through which they could become irregular. Gordon et al. (2009) distinguished irregular migrants into five broad categories and Triandafyllidou & Bartolini (2020) later provided a more detailed and nuanced classification, covering specific conditions under which migrants might lose their legal status or enter irregularly (See Table 1). Düvell (2011) noted that effective border controls meant that many irregular immigrants usually fell into categories who originally entered legally but now resided illegally due to expired or invalid permits of tourists, workers, students, or au pairs, then proceeded to work without authorization. However, some scholars perceived these categories as often very temporary and dynamic given that their statuses were transitory due to the constant struggle in navigating bureaucracies (Darling, 2017; Jacobsen et al., 2021).

	Paths to Irregularity
Gordon et al. (2009)	- entered without any type of legal visa - overstayed visas - worked without permits - rejected asylum seekers - children of undocumented parents
Triandafyllidou & Bartolini (2020)	'working tourists' and those with temporary conditional permits who might be expelled for contract violations - individuals who lost their residence status because they no longer met the conditions (e.g., unemployment, completion of studies) 'tolerated' individuals who did not have a regular status but could not be removed due to lack of agreements with the country of origin or other logistical issues - persons who entered illegally but were registered with public authorities despite being denied asylum

Table 1. Paths to Irregularity

Preserving Regularity

Literature documenting the evolution of migration into its irregular forms revealed that irregular migration is fundamentally a political and social construct expressing the idealized view of a nation's composition. Historically, migration was largely unregulated, reflecting humanity's inherent migratory nature driven by the need to seek better living conditions and opportunities (Massey et al., 1999). Düvell (2006) provided a foundational understanding in the development of irregularity in response to the political and economic dynamics of governance, particularly in Europe. According to their study, the notion of "illegal immigration" first surfaced when states in the late nineteenth century began enforcing rules governing the entry and residence of foreigners, targeting specific groups deemed politically, morally, and socially undesirable. The roots of institutionalized immigration control can be traced back to the 1920s. In the United States, this period saw the criminalization of the term 'illegal aliens.' while in Europe, Belgium's 1920 Immigration Act formalized the concept of 'illegal entry,' targeting immigrants deemed undesirable (Caestecker, 2000; Ngai, 2003, as cited in Düvell, 2006). They also particularly noted how the post-World War II era, marked by great labor market demand and major recruitment schemes, saw a shift in the treatment of irregular migrants, driven by nation-building efforts and economic protectionism. Initially, "spontaneous migrants" who migrated independently outside official recruitment programs were tolerated and could easily regularize their status, but by the early 1970s, regulations in countries like France began penalizing and illegalizing even the undocumented migrant workers (sans papiers) (Düvell, 2006). In the mid-1980s, the European Community recognized "illegal immigration" as a policy issue following the recession and further strengthened external borders while promoting free movement within the community (Miller, 1995, as cited in Düvell, 2006).

Migration scholars delved into the interplay of structural factors and migrants' autonomy that drove irregularity. Classical economists such as Todaro (1969) noted that there were inescapable "push and pull" forces from both the sending and receiving ends of migration that fundamentally shaped the patterns of migration flows. On the other hand, scholars refuted this model arguing that it overlooks the complexity and autonomy of migrants and their decisions based on perceived opportunities and risks (McAuliffe and Mence, 2017; Haas, 2011). This was in no way, however, inattentive of the power-relations influencing migrant movement but just highlighted resistance and struggle as constitutive elements of a migrants' agency and migration itself as a political act (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015). Nevertheless, current research often overlooks the broader context of global capitalism when examining irregular migration especially for the case of those who purposefully choose being undocumented to work abroad. The transformation of irregular migrants into surplus labor and their navigation of social and economic dynamics in destination countries and cities remain underexplored.

Literatures have also problematized the current intensifying securitization of irregular migration, noting that instead of halting irregularity, such measures often exacerbated it. At the end of the Cold War, securitization of migration has intensified, shifting the focus from territorial security to prioritizing the security of its 'rightful citizens', leading to limited legal migration channels and

increased border controls (McAuliffe & Mence, 2017). Brochmann and Hammar (2020) proposed that control operated along two dimensions: external and internal, referring to border control and domestic governance, respectively; and formal and informal, which encompassed state policies as well as other social mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. External control included the mechanisms of 'border externalization' or extending surveillance systems and risk analysis with third countries, constructing border control architectures such as walls, detention and deportation systems, employing biometric technology, and the militarization and deployment of police forces (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015; Mountz et al., 2013; Jones & Johnson, 2016; Soto, 2018; Stenum, 2017). Internal controls such as return policies supplemented the limits of enforcement of external controls. In the EU, for instance, the Return Directive of 2008 provided rules on return, removal, detention, and re-entry of irregular migrants and was regarded as an 'essential ingredient' of immigration policy (Triandafyllidou & Ilies, 2010). Meanwhile, Chauvin & Garcés-Mascareñas (2020) suggested that various internal controls within countries routinely excluded irregular migrants from most services, welfare support, and documentation. In some cases, conditional access to migrant data was allowed to regulate and predict the population's behavior over the need for deportation (Chauvin & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2020). Critiques of enforcement practices prompted governments to introduce supplementary and corrective measures, such as regularization programs. However, these initiatives also faced criticism for their time-limited amnesties and unclear pathways for individuals meeting specific criteria (Ambrosini, 2013). Scholars argued that these mechanisms of control, instead of stopping irregularity, drove migration further underground and pushed migrants to take riskier routes, which also led to 'fatal journeys' (Brian & Laczko, 2014; Jones & Johnson, 2016).

Existing research on irregular and forced migration primarily focuses on the nation-state and its role in controlling and regulating this movement which often overlooks the complex and dynamic nature of urban spaces. Darling (2017) argued that the city is not merely a passive backdrop but a dynamic arena where power struggles and negotiations take place. By integrating urban geography into this field of research, it will allow for a more in-depth exploration of urban informality and the politics of presence, which are crucial to the experiences of irregular and forced migrants. This will reveal the dual role of cities as mechanisms for social, political, and economic regulation and space for humanitarian support towards these migrants.

Excluded, Invisibilized, and Commodified

There is a growing scholarship using qualitative research and ethnographic analysis to explore the vulnerabilities of irregular migrants' everyday lives. De Genova (2019) examined how the concept of migrant 'illegality' and the ever-present risk of deportation perpetuated nation bordering in the private spheres of irregular migrants. Campos-Delgado (2016) highlighted the scenarios and practices obscured by the macronarratives of migration securitization. For irregular transmigrants, border control extended throughout their entire journey, challenging the traditional notion of fixed borders. Madsen (2004) investigated how Mozambican irregular migrants in Johannesburg conducted self-policing to avoid crime, police abuse, and deportation. By establishing a code of conduct, these

migrants created a self-regulated community that offered some level of security and protection. Tsoni (2016) also provided insights on the state of liminality as a form of sustained social exclusion for irregular migrants, characterizing the precarious existence of migrants who never became fully incorporated into a society and remained "liminals" or outsiders. Willen (2007) brought forth a critical phenomenological approach in understanding the legal status, socio-political condition, and modes of being of the 'othered' irregular migrants in Tel Aviv amid the mass arrests and deportation campaign, turning them into wanted criminals. This study contributed to the intricate and descriptive view of the fear and survival tactics embedded in the bodies, time, and spaces, including public spaces and homes, or what they generally referred to as the 'lifeworlds' of irregular migrants (Willen, 2007). Schreiber (2018) utilized photographic self-representation of undocumented workers in the US to portray the snapshots of the "undocumented everyday" and construct an alternative image of the stigmatized undocumented population by showing the work they did, how they lived, their homes and livelihood, and showing the human beings they are.

The dichotomy of invisibility and hypervisibility has profoundly shaped the lives of irregular migrants. Goldberg (1996) and Chavez (1998) framed visibility and invisibility as a major theme in unpacking the layers of 'erasure and powerlessness' of irregular migrants and how invisibilization 'constrained them to the periphery' and deprived them of access, opportunity, and basic labor rights, rendering them to "shadowed lives." This effectively illustrated the struggle of irregular migrants under the structures of invisibilization, encompassing schemes such as reduced wages, coercion, denial of services, and neglect of their social and economic contributions in the nation (Villegas, 2010). More recent studies such as Ambrosini's (2013) investigated the caregiving sector in Southern European cities and examined how irregular migrants experienced invisibility while going through daily personal struggles and difficult living conditions. Sigona (2012) indicated the social impacts of legal status on irregular migrants in UK cities, revealing how legal invisibility constrained social interactions and community integration. Simultaneously, they were also subjected to 'hypervisibility' in the eyes of the state, often casting them as threats to societal order, leading to moral panic among citizens that legitimized public castigation, heightened scrutiny, and created demands for the state to eliminate them (Segarra & Prasad, 2024). Moreover, drawing from theories of modern slavery, Segarra & Prasad (2024) argued that the conditions faced by irregular migrants resembled those of modern slavery due to the institutional denial of basic rights and agency, enabling and sustaining the exploitative and invisibilized labor conditions. Consequently, irregular migrants exist in a perpetual state of precarity, unlike regular workers who enjoy relative stability, given that they remain irregular even beyond their work hours, excluded from the usual avenues of rest and social reproduction due to a pervasive set of institutional exclusions (Robinson & Santos, 2014). Building on these studies, my research further explores the spatial manifestations and varying intensities of vulnerability experienced by irregular migrants which cuts through various scales, temporality, and actors. Building on these studies, my research extends the exploration of how dynamics of invisibility and hypervisibility, as well as the everyday precarity of irregular migrants, manifest spatially. By mapping patterns of vulnerability and their concentration or disparity, particularly within urban landscapes, my work emphasizes the extent to which micro-bordering and invisibilization are embedded in their environments.

Filipino Migrant Workers

The Filipino labor migration exemplifies an extreme form of transnational labor mobility and recruitment of transient labor forces. The Philippines is one of the world's largest labor-exporting countries with over 10 millions Filipinos or roughly a tenth of the country's population are living abroad in 200 countries worldwide (Commission on Filipino Overseas (CFO), 2024). The Philippine government defines these Filipino migrants into three categories namely, permanent, temporary, and irregular migrants (see Table 2) (CFO, 2014). Recent data shows that the deployment of OFWs reached a historic high of 2.3 million in 2024 that are primarily engaged in low-status or 'elementary' occupations, encompassing street vendors, construction and factory workers, cleaners, domestic helpers, and agriculture laborers. (Department of Migrant Workers, 2024; Philippine Statistics Authority, 2023). The majority of land-based Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) are employed in Asia, particularly within Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. In these countries, Filipino migrants are predominantly employed under the kafala (sponsorship) system. This system legally ties a worker's migration status and residency to their private employer for the duration of the contract. Since the kafala system falls under the jurisdiction of interior ministries rather than labor ministries, it often results in limited legal protections for workers (Robinson, 2022). Meanwhile, the Philippines has also been among the top suppliers of sea-based labor, deploying 400,000 seafarers every year since 2017 (VERA Files, 2023).

Category	Definition
Permanent migrants	Filipino immigrants who have established long-term residence in their destination countries, including those who are legal permanent residents or have acquired citizenship in those countries. These individuals have usually fulfilled the legal requirements for permanent status and have integrated into their new communities.
Temporary migrants	Often referred to as Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), these individuals are documented workers who are employed abroad, either in land-based or sea-based occupations. Temporary migrants, including their dependents, typically stay in their host countries for six months or more.
Irregular migrants	Encompasses individuals who lack valid residence or work permits or who have overstayed their visas. Irregular migrants may include those who entered their host countries without proper documentation or who have stayed beyond the permitted duration of their visa.

Table 2. Categories of Filipino Migrants. (CFO, 2014)

Filipino migrant workers are also an emerging leading source of foreign labor in many European countries accounting to over 368,000 in 2019 especially in countries such as United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, and Spain (Verite, 2021). Au pairs, who lives with a host family to provide child care and assist with light household duties in exchange for room, board, and a stipend or allowance have also

been an emergent mode of migration (Stenum, 2011). Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands are the leading destination countries for Filipino au pairs since 2012 (CFO, 2024) Meanwhile, irregular migrants, according to the CFO's 2013 stock estimate, make up nearly 13 percent of the total Filipino migrants, or over 1 million individuals. Major destinations include labor-receiving countries such as the United States, Canada, Hong Kong, and Singapore, as well as GCC countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar. In Europe, irregular migrants number over 160,000, with Italy, France, and the United Kingdom being the most common destinations. Western European countries such as Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands also host significant numbers, ranging from 2,000 to 5,000 irregular migrants.

Filipino migrants have been a principal contributor in boosting the growth and development of the local economy. They bring in over US$20 billion of remittances every year in the past decade accounting to about 8% of the country's annual gross domestic product (Central Bank of the Philippines, 2023). Their financial contributions to the economy have led the Philippine government to dub them as the nation's "new heroes" (San Juan, 2009). However, scholars argue that this narrative justifies the longstanding 'era of labor export' and unhinges the state's responsibility on the sacrifices these heroes have to suffer for (Encinas-Franco, 2015; Parry-Davies, 2020).

'Brokered' and Racialized Labor

Colonization and institutionalization of labor export is a precursor to Filipinos becoming a globally exploited human resource. Sharma (1984) documented how the early expressions of migrant labor began during the Hispanic rule in the 14th century when the first Filipino seafarers migrated to Guam, Indonesia, and Mexico via trading ships going down the Manila-Acapulco galleon route. Under the rule of the United States in the 1900s, Jung (2002) discussed how Filipinos, as the 'inferior colonized race,' became the primary source of "cheap labor" for Hawaii's sugar plantations to fulfill the needs of a seasonal migrant workforce. Le Espiritu (1996) also noted that the availability of cheap and compliant Filipino agricultural workers, coupled with their unrestricted migration status, positioned them as the preferred source of labor for the United States. Following this, Rodriguez (2010) examined the business and political dynamics of the Philippine state as a "labor broker," investigating its role in preparing and mobilizing the migration of Filipinos seeking work abroad. Rodriguez detailed how a neocolonial form of the government, aligned with U.S. interests, adopted structural adjustment policies from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These policies, which mandated trade liberalization and labor contractualization significantly influenced the contemporary migratory process of Filipinos. In line with this, in 1974, the Philippine government established the Labor Code of the Philippines, which provided the framework for an active overseas deployment of Filipino labor and served as a stop-gap measure in the mounting debts to the IMF and World Bank, as well as escalating unemployment. The IMF and World Bank lauded this policy and its increasing institutionalization over the years, given that it aligned with their "migration as development" approach and presented it as a 'win-win' situation for both labor-receiving and labor-sending countries (Pina-Delgado, 2013 as cited in Francisco & Rodriguez, 2014). However, scholars challenged this

prevailing notion of labor migration as a natural occurrence for development (Geiger & Pécoud, 2013; Lindio-McGovern, 2013). Instead, viewing it as a product of neoliberal globalization further reinforcing the stranglehold of the Global North in a developing country that hinders the expansion of its local economy and national industrialization. Robinson and Santos (2014, p.4) contended that labor migration in the Philippines could be considered a form of "coerced labor," as it is not purely voluntary but rather a consequence of the "structural violence" inherent in the system.

A growing body of literature also emphasized how the export of Filipino migrant labor is underpinned by racialization assigning them to role-specific, low-paying, and mostly gendered sectorrs. Scholars contended how this racialization process started with the Philippine state acting as a "manager" of labor migration and strategically 'brokered' its population as a crucial economic asset molding their identities into 'docile' and 'subservient' roles aligning it with the global demand for cheap labor (Rodriguez, 2005). Guevarra (2014) further explored how the state and private recruitment agencies in the Philippines used 'racial branding' to market Filipino women as 'workers of worth,' 'supermaids,' and 'extraordinary workers' to leverage their competitive advantage in the global labor market. Labor-receiving countries and cities then favored and stratified the Filipino migrants into deregulated and often deskilled roles in healthcare, domestic, and maritime industries; more so filling up the "dirty, dangerous, and demeaning/difficult/degrading" jobs in the market (Ruiz, 2014; Rodriguez, 2007). Lindio-McGovern (2003; 2013) also closely examined the feminized and segregated employment of Filipino women in domestic and service work in major global cities such as Rome, Hong Kong, and Singapore.

Vulnerabilities of Filipino Migrants

The state's relentless drive to export vulnerable Filipino workers abroad often exposes them to organized crime and corruption, blurring the line between the nation's "modern heroes" and modern slaves. Despite being hailed as the "gold standard" and "migration champion" of migration management, numerous reports and literature have exposed the pervasive exploitation of migrant workers in the Philippines (Lee-Brago, 2024). The exploitation of migrants commonly starts with exorbitant fees for migration documents such as passports, police and medical clearances, and placement fees. According to Verité (2021), an international labor organization, employment agencies and sub agents in the Philippines and transit countries often charge illegal and excessive recruitment fees that can reach up to PHP 500,000 (EUR 8,850) leading workers into significant debt. They also identified deceptive recruitment and contract substitution schemes where employers frequently failed to honor key contract terms such as work hours, wage rates, and payment schedules. Bautista and Tamayo (2020) noted various social difficulties faced by Filipino migrant workers upon integration, including cultural differences, discrimination, homesickness, job burnout, and inadequate support systems for legal and health concerns. Reports have also indicated that Filipino workers, especially those who are working in low-skilled industries, are vulnerable and commonly face verbal, physical, mental, and sexual abuse particularly women who are suffering 'fourfold of discrimination and vulnerability' to these conditions (Verité, 2021; Villalba, 2002). In 2020, according to data provided by

the Philippine Overseas Labor Offices, there were over 23,000 documented cases of contract violations involving the maltreatment of OFWs. Filipinos in the domestic jobs are reportedly to be one of the most vulnerable migrant workers often facing dehumanizing conditions (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

Tragically, death is also an imminent threat for Filipino migrant workers. In 1995, Flor Contemplacion, a Singapore based Filipina domestic worker and mother of four, was hanged after being unjustly accused of murder (Amnesty International, 1995). Her death was significant in the labor migration history of the Philippines sparking a massive outcry among Filipinos in the government's failure of taking care of Filipino migrant workers abroad (Rodriguez, 2002). Three decades later, death still surrounds the lives of Filipino migrants. This is exemplified by the recent cases of Joanna Daniela Demafelis in 2018, Constancia Lago Dayag and Jeanelyn Villavende in 2019, and Julleebee Ranara in 2022 who were all part of string of murders by their own employers in Kuwait (Migrante International, 2023). A 2022 report of Vital Signs Partnership suggest that roughly 10,000 migrant workers from South and Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, die every year in the Gulf countries, more than half of which are unexplained. Being the leading destination for Filipinos, comprising around half of the total OFWs working in Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Qatar, they are exposed to the a despicable pattern of violence and abuse. Recent data from the Department of Foreign Affairs underscore the constant encounter of Filipino migrant workers with death and violence: 81 OFWs are currently on death row, 27 have died of foul play in the last 10 years, and thousands have fallen victim to labor trafficking and inhumane working conditions (Fernandez, 2023; Porcalla, 2023). While existing reports and literature have documented the exploitation of Filipino migrants, they often portray this vulnerability as a static condition tied to destination countries, resulting in a fragmented narrative. My research fills this gap by tracing their migration journey, highlighting how different stages of this journey reveal varying scales of exploitation. This approach not only examines the socio-legal exclusion and violence faced by migrants but also uncovers how their plights are part of a systemic scheme designed to extract profit from their everyday vulnerabilities.

Towards Irregularity

Despite the Philippines being considered a 'model for labour export and management', a significant number of Filipino migrants still find themselves working without legal documentation in various countries at risk of expulsion (Rodriguez, 2010, Siruno & Siegel, 2022). Crossing transnational borders undetected has become a common practice for Filipinos, the repetition forced a monicker - "TNTs" or "*Tago ng Tago*". This term, as Montoya (1997) aptly translates, means "perpetually hiding", capturing the constant concealment of their status and the need to evade authorities for their survival.

The primary sources for delving on these experiences have largely been institutional and media reports. In Europe, for example, recent reports highlight the exploitation faced by Filipino irregular migrants. These include wage theft, harsh working conditions, passport confiscation, inadequate living

conditions, restricted communication and mobility, and a lack of legal protection (Beltran, 2023; Carvalho, 2024; Simons, 2023; Beltran & Haaij, 2023). Many migrants become irregular by overstaying visas after leaving an employer, overstaying tourist visas, or, in some cases, being trafficked. Recent studies by Carvalho (2024) and Verité (2021) have identified an underexamined trend of Filipinos using Poland and the Czech Republic as gateways to seek better opportunities in Western Europe, particularly in Belgium, Germany, France, and the Netherlands. Additionally, anecdotal evidence suggests that some Filipino seafarers choose to abandon their ships in port cities and remain as undocumented migrants in various countries, though precise statistics on this phenomenon are lacking (Evita, 2012). The academic literature on Filipino irregular migrants is notably sparse, with only a few scholars exploring their experiences across various destination countries (see Table 3). Existing studies largely address themes such as exclusion, criminalization, legal and social vulnerabilities, and agency and recognition, often focusing on the impact of nation-state governance. This thesis aims to extend the analysis by focusing on the everyday geographies of violence and resistance experienced by Filipino irregular migrants. I will examine these dynamics within the urban landscape and include a longitudinal study that tracks the violence they encounter from their departure from the Philippines to their arrival in the destination cities.

Scholar	Country	Focus
Montoya (1997)	United States	The economic motivations behind undocumented migration to the U.S. and the identity struggles arising from assimilation.
Willen (2007)	Israel	Neglection and treatment as "wanted criminals" upon the shift of government policies in the 2000s that involved mass arrests and deportations.
Fresnoza-Flot (2011)	France	Role of the church in supporting irregular migrants highlighting its dual function as a social institution.
Villa and Mani (2013)	Japan	Vulnerabilities in the legal system and significance of informal networks, NGOs, and advocacy groups to navigate these institutions.
Vilog & Piocos III (2021)	Italy and United Kingdom	Exacerbated vulnerabilities during the COVID-19 and the role of migrant organizations in creating "safe spaces" for these individuals
Siruno, et al., (2022)	Netherlands	Agency and personal recognition strategies to create discursive spaces among migrant collectives
Basilio (2023)	United States	Moral dimensions of Filipino irregular migrants' decisions regarding marriage for legalization in the U.S., emphasizing moral agency and community pressures.

Table 3. Studies on Filipino Irregular Migrants

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, I define the key concepts employed in this study to explore the racialization of Filipino IMWs and their relegation to spaces of death. First, I discuss racial capitalism and its intersection with the production and management of racialized labor in global cities. Next, I examine necropolitics, focusing on the various forms of death experienced by workers and its relevance to spatial and urban studies. To integrate these concepts, I introduce the notion of "urban necropolis" to analyze the urban environment as a socio-spatial arena where racialized labor is subjected to conditions of death, while also considering the potential for contestation and resistance that can transform these spaces into sites of life and survival.

Racialized Migrants in Global Cities

The phenomenon of labor export from the Global South has become a focal point of inquiry for scholars investigating the relationship between capitalist accumulation and migrant labor populations. Foundational to this discourse is Marx's Capital (1867), which argues that the expansion of capital depends on the violent separation of labor power from its social relations, creating a "pauperized reserve army of labor." This reserve army, increasingly alienated from the active labor force, experiences harsher conditions as the intensity of the labor they are subjected to escalates. Building on this, Cedric Robinson (2000), in his work on Black Marxism, introduced the concept of racial capitalism. He argued that capitalist accumulation has historically depended not only on the exploitation of land and resources but also on entrenched racial hierarchies that enable the reorganization and hyper-exploitation of labor from colonized and impoverished regions of the Global South to the metropolitan countries of the Global North. Nast (2011) further supports this analysis, suggesting that capitalist and colonial forces deployed racial dynamics to confine workers from specific ethnicities and geographies to the peripheries of the labor market in advanced capitalist economies. Here, these workers remain disenfranchised and controllable, ensuring that capitalist economies sustain high levels of profit and economic growth at the expense of their labor.

The transformation of global capitalism has further integrated racialized migrant labor into the political and economic governance of Global North nation-states. William Robinson and Santos (2014) argue that central to this is the rise of the Transnational Capitalist Class (TCC) and transnational state bureaucrats who operate across global boundaries. These actors have driven the restructuring of the world economy, liberating capital from nation-state restrictions, eroding labor-capital relations, and dismantling labor protections. This framework has facilitated the creation of free trade agreements and neoliberal policies, displacing millions and creating an ever-growing pool of unemployed and underemployed individuals who become commodified like raw materials. However, states must still maintain control over migrant working populations, reinforcing their vulnerability and limiting their rights. This divide between immigrants and citizens is perpetuated by criminalizing immigrants and employing "revolving door" immigration policies to adjust flows

according to capital's needs (Robinson, 2014). In line with this, Melamed (2015) suggests that capitalist states have "seemingly infinite creativity" in executing racialized violence that adapts and evolves in various forms, extending beyond simple racial discrimination to more structural forms of social control. Melamed argues that this racial violence is a core component of capitalist accumulation, creating conditions that commodify entire bodies, not just labor power. Reddy (2011) developed the notion of "racial cruelty," where the state exercises its monopoly on legitimate violence, enacting excessively cruel measures against those deemed a threat due to their racial identity.

Looking closer to the core, racial capitalism has deeply seeped in the urban governance of migrants such as bordering and informalization of housing and employment that it facilitated the emergence of precarious and invisibilized yet profitable settlements and workplaces (Kreichauf, 2023). Contextualizing this, Sassen (2001) argues that in the era of capitalist globalization, urban centers in the Global North rely heavily on low-wage, informal, and racially marked labor to sustain the infrastructure and operations of their transnational and professional sectors. The economic restructuring of major global cities, marked by the decline of traditional manufacturing jobs that were either automated or relocated, has coincided with a rise in employment opportunities within the service sector. This shift has created a divided labor market with a demand for both highly educated professionals and low-skilled, compliant workers. These positions are often filled by migrants from the Global South, contributing to growing social and economic stratification within these urban spaces. Several studies have shown that racialized labor often fills labor market gaps in destination countries, particularly in "3D jobs" (dirty, dangerous, and difficult industries) that require low-skill, low-prestige, and low-pay labor, which native workers often shun (Kathiravelu, 2020; Kassa, 2018; Fullin & Reyneri, 2011; Spencer & Triandafyllidou, 2022). These jobs are frequently found in exploitative "hidden economies," such as seasonal sectors, domestic work, and caregiving, which thrive on undeclared work to minimize costs. Fields and Raymond (2021) further argue that the creation of value in these spatial contexts is deeply intertwined with the production of racial difference. This process involves sorting and segregating social groups into distinct geographical areas, thereby facilitating racialized expropriation and reinforcing existing inequalities. This is compounded by the relentless policing and state surveillance that extend to their mobility, accessibility to services, and spatial exclusion that ultimately transform them into optimal reserve labor pool of that could be enslaved by the city and capitalist system to profit.

Necropolitics and Spaces of Death

The dynamics of life and death within specific spaces have become a central focus for post-colonial scholars critiquing global governance systems and power structures. In interrogating the governmentality of the European nation-building, Foucault (1978) introduced the concept of *biopolitics*, a form of power aimed at controlling, managing, and regulating populations deemed legitimate to live and thrive. Biopolitics has been employed as a framework for various urban interventions that focus on enhancing the quality of life by providing essential resources such as food, shelter, care, social services, and comfort (Di Muzio, 2008; Jha et al., 2013; Kroll, 2021; Rutland,

2015). However, there are governance contexts where the objective is not to sustain life but to expose entire populations to death. Achille Mbembe (2003) radicalizes this conceptual gap by introducing *necropolitics*, or the "politics of death." He explains that alongside the power to control life, there exists a parallel power to control death. Necropolitics describes a system in which power assigns differential value to human life: the closer one aligns with the status quo of power, the more their life is valued; the farther one is, the more disposable and precarious their existence becomes. Populations subjected to these conditions live in a "death-world," a space where vast groups are reduced to the destroyed and devalued status of "living dead" (Mbembe, 2003). Mbembe (2003, p.21) suggests that the condition of this population mirrors that of slavery, characterized by three layers of loss: "the loss of home, the loss of rights and social services, and the loss of political status". In line with this, Banerjee (2008) introduced the term "necrocapitalism" to describe the economic and political practices that to accumulate profit, it determines whose lives are expendable in the pursuit of capital. While this concept focuses on resource extraction and privatization of war in developing counties that lead to environmental destruction and displacement of communities, it could also pertain to the unregulated and flexible labor export industries that subject people to violence and death.

The intersection of necropower and other forms of violence reveals how governance not only enacts physical death but also perpetuates prolonged suffering among the marginalized leading to their increased vulnerability to death. Mbembe (2003) extended this argument by asserting that necropower not only leads to physical death but also imposes profound, often hidden suffering on marginalized populations, drawing them closer to death. This concept aligns with Agamben's (1998) notion of *homo sacer*, where sovereign power reduces individuals to mere biological existence, stripping them of rights and making them vulnerable to violence. Agamben (1998, p. 9) contends that modern societies create a "state of exception" in which certain lives are reduced to what he calls "bare life"—a state where individuals can be subjected to violence or death without consequence, their existence unacknowledged or unprotected by the community or legal structures. These individuals occupy a liminal space, neither fully integrated into the polis (the community) nor entirely excluded from it. Shewly (2013) expanded on this by describing these lives as being under the law's authority yet without its protection, rendering them "extremely inferior" to lives that are politically and socially recognized. Such lives exist in a realm where violence, exclusion, and death are pervasive, unchecked, and operate outside of the usual legal or moral norms. In addition to physical violence, which inflicts harm through direct bodily contact, structural violence also exists by denying individuals basic necessities and constraining their mobility (Galtung, 1969). This aligns with Nixon's (2011) concept of "slow violence," described the prolonged, static, and institutionalized violence that marginalized groups endure from birth. Tyner (2019), in his work Dead Labor, further explores this angle by focusing on the concept of "premature death". He emphasized that many workers experience prolonged states of dying due to precarious conditions of labor and life, where the risk of death and injury is heightened by a lack of access to basic necessities. This death is not merely a singular event but a process that begins when vital bodily functions start to fail leaving individuals in a state of being "partially alive." Orzeck (2007, as cited in Tyner, 2019) adds another dimension by arguing that both the nature of one's labor and their societal position contribute to a dual vulnerability to death. The inability to secure basic

necessities like food, water, and shelter due to unemployment or insufficient wages face heightened precariousness, making them highly susceptible to harm or death. Even those employed may work in dangerous conditions, pushing them from a state of precariousness into one of critical precarity, where the risk of death becomes imminent. Moreover, Davies et al. (2017) suggested that authorities' neglect and abandonment constitute deliberate forms of brutality and conferring someone to their deaths, referring it as 'violent inaction', illustrated by how state authorities actively obstructed EU refugees' access to formal assistance forcing thousands to live in dangerous informal camps.

Understanding spaces associated with death has been an emerging focus especially in geography. Scholars have conceptualized necrogeography which examines the spatial dimensions pertinent to death, dying, mourning, and bereavement. For instance, this is concerned with the agency of the deceased, manifested through burial sites and monuments, shapes the physical landscape and cultural practices, or "necroscapes," of the living, influencing how societies commemorate the departed (Nash, 2018; Semple & Brookes, 2020). However, I pay more attention on how Mbembe (2003) used necropolitics to describe the political making of spaces and subjectivities that weaves through the situation of life and death. In his work, he perceived camp-form areas such as refugee camps, prisons, suburbs, and favelas as spaces created to govern unwanted populations (Mbembe, 2008). These spaces are often precarious, militarized, or highly controlled to provide a prevailing opportunity to kill and render populations to be managed through their exposure to deadly dangers and a life of pain. He illustrates this with the construction of townships and hometowns under the apartheid regime in South Africa where necropolitical spatial control was starkly evident. These spaces legally restricted Black land ownership and residence in areas designated for whites which enforced a system of spatial and social apartheid.

Studies have further explored how necropolitics targets marginalized groups, often racialized and working-class communities, within urban settings. Scholars have enrolled the lens of necropolitics to interrogate Black communities, refugee camps, informal settlements, and relocation sites as spaces of violence and death through various means such as killings, incarceration, economic deprivation, and uninhabitable resettlements (Alves, 2013; Davies et al., 2017; Jha, 2023; Ortega, 2020). Ndjio (2006) explained the transformation of African cities into necropolises, characterized by heightened insecurity, pervasive violence, and a palpable sense of decay. Similarly, Alves (2013) interpreted São Paulo as a black necropolis, highlighting the dehumanization and devaluation of black lives within a racialized framework of citizenship. Meanwhile, Ortega (2020) introduced the concept of "necroburbia," which delineates the peri-urban spaces of relocation sites around Metro Manila where marginalized informal settlers and low-income urban populations are relocated. These spaces often perpetuate structural violence, marked by precarious living conditions, economic instability, lack of livelihood opportunities, and substandard quality of life. The study underscores how necrospaces offer a false promise of progress and development, luring marginalized populations with improved life opportunities that seldom materialize. He elucidated the deception, exploitation, negotiation, manipulation, and coercion inherent in necropower's operation. Contributing to this discourse, Jha (2023) explored "necrosettlements" in Mumbai, emphasizing the racialized spatiality and life-threatening conditions

faced by the urban poor, particularly within the context of neoliberal urban redevelopment and governance.

Bridging Racial Capitalism, Necropolitics, and the Urban

Race is deeply embedded in mechanisms of control and domination, determining the distribution of life and death among populations. Mbembe (2003, p. 17) argued that, more than class, racialization has been an ever-present force orchestrating the death of foreign peoples. He suggested that methods of racialized violence and execution in contemporary contexts have evolved into highly technical, impersonal, and efficient processes that are carried out quietly and swiftly. Global cities are fertile grounds for further interrogating these intersections. To draw connections between racial capitalism and necropolitics, McIntyre and Nast (2011) introduced the concepts of necropolis and biopolis to analyze the spatial processes underpinning racialized hierarchies. These concepts help interrogate the movement and treatment of racialized labor populations within a geographical entity, highlighting their dehumanization and disposability. The necropolis is described as "a space of negation and the socially dead, produced by expropriations and alienations" of lives and labor, whereas the biopolis represents the dialectical relationship with necropolis, characterized by spaces designed to sustain and cultivate nation-state populations (McIntyre & Nast, 2011, p. 1467).

The relationship between necropolis and biopolis is not simply oppositional but forms a spatial dialectical unity embedded in the racialization of migration. McIntyre and Nast identified two socio-spatial distinctions that illustrate the fluidity and merging of biopolitical and necropolitical boundaries. The first is bio(necro)polis, where the biopolis draws its life force from the necropolis as "necropolitan migrants" who are dislocated and streamed into the biopolis to fill peripheral labor shortages, thereby making "the biopolis a site of accumulation through dispossession" (p. 1481). Necropolitical migrants are drawn from stagnant surplus populations, or those with insecure and cheapened employment from the Global South. These individuals, whose numbers far exceed the capacity of their home nations to sustain them, are effectively marginalized and discarded by the capitalist system, becoming, as Yates (2011, p. 1680) describes, "excreted little more than human waste." The second is necro(bio)polis, which describes the annexation of the biopolis to the necropolis through the flow of biopolitical capital into the necropolis, sustaining the lives of "racialized others." This process also centers on the biopolitical role of reproduction among necropolitan women, ensuring the supply of surplus populations. Meanwhile, as the necropolitan migrants within the biopolis grow substantially, biopolitical measures are implemented to ensure their survival, barely enough to keep them within their labor pool.

To foreground the precarious, violent, and deadly experiences and spaces produced by racialized capitalism for IMWs, I use the concept of necropolis as an entry point to discern these aspects. This approach allows me to interrogate the extent to which capitalism infiltrates the bodies and everyday lives of racialized labor, from their precarious origins in the necropolitan spaces of the Global South to the biopolitan urban centers of the Global North. I conceptualize urban necropolis as the urban spaces

of death, violence, exclusion, and precarity created, regulated, and maintained by racial capitalism to exploit racialized labor for capital accumulation. This is not a fixed entity imposed on racialized IMWs but rather a fluid and transient condition produced through the multiplicity of experiences and multi-scalar spaces of alienation, dehumanization, and dispossession facilitated by racial capitalism. Drawing on Mbembe (2003, p. 21), in the urban necropolis, surplus labor populations, particularly irregular migrant workers, are under conditions that mirror slavery, characterized by three layers of loss: "the loss of home, the loss of rights and social services, and the loss of political status." These losses are borne through three spatialities: (1) displacement from their social ties, communities, homes, and families; (2) relocation and bordering in global cities; and (3) dispossession and invisibilization in their everyday geographies. These spaces at different scales are not overt nor easily detectable. Necropolitan migrant workers keep these spaces hidden to survive and thrive, but at the same time, racial capitalism renders these invisible to facilitate further accumulation. This journey is marked by a deliberate mechanism of exclusion and constant fear of death in everyday spaces, compelling them to sell and endanger their bodies while living in the shadows (Chavez, 1998).

The existence of necropolitan migrants within the urban necropolis is marked by a liminal fluidity between life and death. Racialized migrant workers also produce the necro(bio)polis through the annexation of the biopolis to the necropolis by streaming capital back to their necropolitan origins. Even as they remain entangled in the logics of racial capitalism, they engage in a biopolitical strategy that nurtures life in their necropolitan origins through remittances and investments, ensuring that their necropolitan existence in the Netherlands contributes to a livable future for themselves and their families. Additionally, I conceptualize this space as a distinction produced through persistence and reclamation of life within the urban necropolis. Despite oppressive conditions, racialized irregular migrants transform these environments into sites of survival and resistance, where they actively carve out spaces of life. Through collective formations and personal renegotiations, they breathe life into their necropolitical spaces, turning them into biopolitical urban interventions focused on reclaiming rights, identities, and life-enabling resources such as safe shelter, fair workplaces, freedom of movement, social services, and a sense of belonging. These actions allow them to resist reduction to bare life and reclaim urban spaces that counter the forces of racial capitalism (Agamben, 1998). At the same time, they simulate a life in which they can regain their 'lost homes, rights, and status,' becoming visible once more (Mbembe, 2003).

To fully capture the emergence of the urban necropolis for Filipino IMWs, I integrate the concepts of racial capitalism, necropolitics, and everyday shadowed geographies (see Figure 1). This integration follows their migration journey from (1) being necropolitical migrants originating from a necropolis and being excreted as racialized surplus labor into the biopolis, to (2) experiencing daily subjugation to necropower and racial capitalism that cuts through within various invisibilized micro-geographies in the biopolis, such as their settlements, workplaces, modes of mobility, and even the spaces from which they are excluded; and finally, to (3) highlighting the signs of life that emerge from these shadowed geographies, coalescing with the urban necropolis through the renegotiation of spaces and streaming life through capital back to a necropolis.
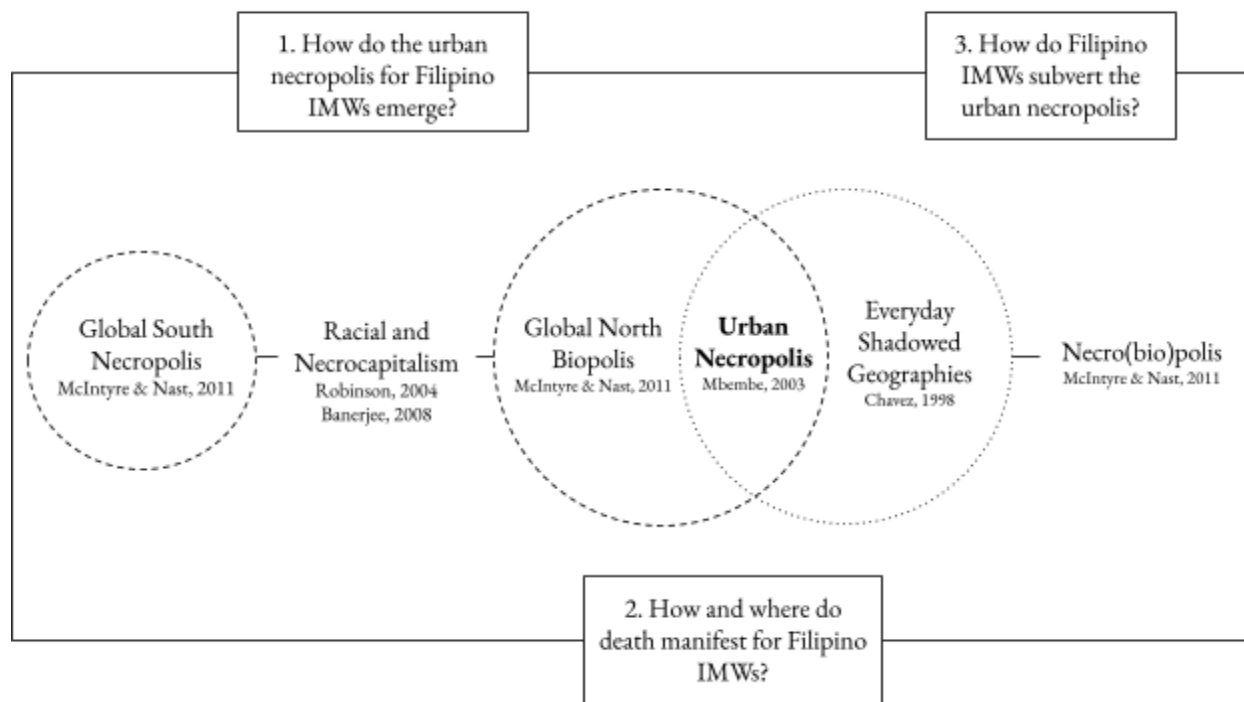
Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

Utrecht, Netherlands (2024)

METHODOLOGY

This section details the characteristics and practical implementation of the methodology used in this study. First, I describe the grounded and abductive approaches employed to inform my inquiry, theory, and analytical construction. Next, I discuss the significance of the ethnographic approach for studying vulnerable populations, such as Filipino IMWs. I elaborate on how ethnography intersects with place-based storytelling through geonarratives, emphasizing its importance in understanding the varied scales of experiences. I also explain why the Netherlands was selected as a case study, highlighting its relevance for investigating irregular migration and detailing my approach to its urban landscape. Following this, I outline my data collection methods, including recruitment and networking with organizations and participants, conducting interviews, and mental mapping. Finally, I address the ethical considerations, author's positionality, and the timeline of this thesis project.

Grounded and Abductive Approach

This research engages in the grounded iterative process of abduction, which involves moving back and forth between empirical data and theoretical framework to develop my hypotheses. According to the Douven (2021), abduction, as developed by Charles Sanders Peirce, is a 'stage of inquiry in which we try to generate theories which may then later be assessed.' While contemporary scholars link abduction to the "context of justification," which involves sharp distinction from developing theories during the discovery phase and then evaluating these theories for empirical testing, Peirce viewed the process as an 'ongoing and inseparable moment' (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). Abduction is also considered a complementary process to inductive and grounded constructivist approaches, emphasizing a reflexive, interactive, and iterative process of data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2009). Timmermans and Tavory (2012) argue that abduction should be central to theory construction, rather than merely an adjunct to inductive approaches. They outlined a grounded abductive approach involving three key processes: revisiting, defamiliarization, and alternative casing, all of which were closely followed and employed in this study. This critical approach provided the research with space for a theory-laden nature of observation, countering the biases of "naive empiricism" that could "contaminate" the analysis, while also avoiding the pitfalls of a "logico-deductive" approach, which can force data into preexisting theoretical frameworks, potentially leading to theories disconnected from substantive social life (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012, p.169). More importantly, a grounded abductive approach creates a conducive environment for doubt, permitting the modification and development of the theoretical framework based on unexpected empirical findings, and running hypotheses through a loop of induction and deduction for validation (Locke et al., 2008).

The initial conceptualization of my study began after meeting Filipino victims of human trafficking in Belgium. In July 2022, Belgian police found 65 Filipino workers among 174 illegally employed at a Borealis factory in Antwerp (Beltran, 2023). Underpaid and misled about their wages and permits, they faced uncertainty in housing, employment, and daily sustenance, highlighting their social

marginalization. This encounter led me to examine their experiences through the lens of social death, hypothesizing significant deprivation and marginalization among these migrants. My inclination towards this theory was influenced by my previous activist work in the Philippines, where I viewed migrant labor export as a life-and-death issue. This perspective was further shaped by a research project that documented the lives and deaths of Human Rights Defenders in Negros Island, Philippines, through the concept of necropolitics (De Guzman et al., 2022). The situation of the Filipino migrants prompted me to revisit and reevaluate this concept, revealing how their experience approaches death from a different theoretical standpoint. By engaging in participant observation and informal interviews, I was able to refine my theoretical understanding. However, when formal data collection began in November 2022, I encountered unforeseen communication issues with participants.

During this period, I engaged with a migrant organization in the Netherlands and lived among Filipino migrants, including those without legal status. These interactions highlighted the need to focus on their struggles and power dynamics, prompting a shift in my research focus. Reassessing necropolitics was essential, as the conditions for irregular migrants in the Netherlands were better than anticipated and their experiences varied across Dutch cities. This prompted questions about the applicability of necropolitics and urban scholarship. Observing Filipino irregular migrants revealed aspects of their social death in different forms and contexts. This experience required refining concepts and theoretical links, aligning with Timmermans and Tavory's notion of "adding surprising pieces to the puzzle" (2012, p.177). The research challenged initial theoretical assumptions and emphasized the intersection of their urban experiences with global capitalism and racism, ultimately shaping the concept of the urban necropolis for irregular migrants. This study reflects a recursive process of revisiting stories and refining theoretical understanding.

Ethnographic Research of Irregular Migrants

Ethnography and Irregularity

Ethnography is an invaluable approach for engaging and sensitizing the "complicated, often anxiety-ridden, and frightening realities" of vulnerable populations such as irregular migrants due to its immersive and reflexive nature (Willen, 2007, p.1). Staring (2009), in his research of irregular migrants in the Netherlands, suggests that ethnographic approach provides in-depth insights into the hidden lived experiences of these migrants. McGranahan (2014) underscores the importance of researchers developing "ethnographic sensibilities" to critically examine the intricate ways in which social relations and contradictions within communities are formed, maintained, and contested. Building on this tradition, Pacheco-Vega and Parizeau (2018) recognize the increasing ethical complexities and responsibilities involved in studying particularly vulnerable populations and introduce the concept of "doubly engaged ethnography" as a response. This approach extends traditional ethnographic methods by integrating academic rigor and immersion with a commitment to addressing the broader structural inequalities faced by communities. Following these scholars, ethnography allowed me to ground myself in the experiences, sensations, and subjectivities of everyday life of irregular migrants locally configured

in the Dutch urban landscape while also intersecting multi-scalar processes that relegated them to these conditions. According to Pacheco-Vega and Parizeau (2018), a "deeply embedded ethnography" involves reflecting on the researchers' positionality, ethical responsibilities, and the real-world implications of their work. These considerations became a constant self-reflective struggle throughout the implementation of this research. Ensuring that I provided "meaningful, engaged scholarship while retaining and ensuring respect and care for the communities" involved was crucial (Pacheco-Vega and Parizeau, 2018, p.1).

Ethnography and Geonarratives

This study adopts a relational ethnographic approach to explore the multiscalar, transient, and hidden lived spaces of the migration journey of Filipino IMWs from their transition to Philippines to the Netherlands and their everyday in the coalescing nature of Dutch cities. Unlike traditional ethnographic studies that often emphasize the specificities of individual cases or locations, relational ethnography provides a means to understand the interconnectedness and co-constitution of social phenomena across different spatial and temporal scales. This embraces a Lefebvrian perspective, viewing spaces and scales as actively produced through situated, embodied material practices and their associated discourses within these confines (Lefebvre, 1991). Massey (2005) also argued that places could be understood as nodal points of connections in wider networks of socially produced space, conceived through social relations and interactions unbounded by any enclosure. Drawing from these, Hart's (2006) work on critical ethnography and relational comparison challenges conventional notions of "place" and "space" as fixed and separate entities and argued that this approach reveals how local and global processes are interconnected and mutually constitutive, rather than separate or hierarchical. Critical ethnographies thus provide insight into the complex power dynamics and relational processes shaping different sites and scales, moving beyond 'isolated case studies' to a broader analysis of these interconnected phenomena (Hart, 2006).

In line with this, I used geonarratives as a foundational approach for data collection and analysis, focusing on the multiplicity and relational aspects of spaces experienced by Filipino IMWs. Palis (2022, p. 1277) defines geonarratives as "place-writing—subjective stories that define, portray, delineate, emphasize, expand, rewrite, and imagine a place. It is world-making grounded in realities and emotions specific to the individual in relation to class and other identity politics and markers." This approach facilitated the 'unmapping' or the reimagination of visible and hidden aspects of urban spaces such as homes, workplaces, public places, and transportation from the perspectives and relations of Filipino IMWs to these spaces. This also facilitated a grounded articulation of 'emergent emotional and performative aspects of their spaces' such as body policing, bordering, distanced care, and homemaking, particularly as I worked on conceptualizing a socially constructed place of urban necropolis in the Netherlands (Palis, 2022, p. 1278).

The choice to focus on the geonarratives of Filipino IMWs across Dutch cities, rather than investigating a city-level case individually, is driven by four key considerations. First, the concept of the

urban necropolis is grounded in the understanding that social death and violence in the micro-geographies of the Netherlands are not confined to a single administrative boundary but manifest across multi-scalar spaces. Second, the transient and mobile nature of Filipino IMWs, who often navigate shifting settlement patterns and workplaces necessitates a methodology that reflects the fluid and dynamic nature of their lives. Third, the ethnographic research showed that Dutch cities share urban functions and organizational traits that impact Filipino IMWs in interconnected ways, leading these workers to experience cities as part of a convergent urban system rather than as distinct entities. Lastly, protecting the safety and security of participants is crucial and disclosing specific locations or personal details could endanger them. By examining experiences across different urban sites, the study aims to highlight how various cities are interconnected through broader socio-spatial processes and how these connections create specific socio-spatial relations that influence the lives of irregular migrants. This approach also brings together different spaces of irregularity that, while interrelated, are often kept separate in daily life.

Case Selection

Irregular migrants in the Netherlands represent a significant portion of the migrant population that remains marginalized and excluded from national discourse. The exact number of irregular migrants in the Netherlands is still unknown, but there are roughly 23,000–58,000 irregular migrants according to the latest estimate from 2017–2018, with almost half residing in Amsterdam. (van der Heijden et al., 2020; Municipality of Amsterdam 2021). They mostly consist of applicants and already rejected asylum seekers, as well as those who entered the country legally with visa and work permits and then overstayed. It has also become apparent how IMWs are dominating exclusively the undeclared household services especially in the larger Dutch cities staffed by individuals from Latin America, Eastern Europe, West and North Africa, or Southeast Asia (van Walsum, 2016). Van Walsum (2016) observes that while there is anecdotal evidence suggesting that undocumented immigrants have been working in Dutch households at least since the 1990s, research on this topic remains sparse. Mainstream and policy-oriented researchers in the Netherlands have consistently overlooked the illegal employment of many immigrants in domestic work (Nieborg, Wijers, and Goderie, 2007; as cited in Van Walsum, 2016). Similarly, the few quantitative studies on undeclared domestic services in the Dutch market have largely ignored the significant role played by immigrants in this sector (De Ruijter, 2005; SEOR, 2004).

For selecting the area to focus on for this study, I follow where the networks and participants are leading me. Initially, I intended to focus solely on Filipino IMWs in Amsterdam, Den Haag, and Utrecht due to the presence and potential of collaborating with migrant activist organizations in these cities. However, I soon realized the limitations of this approach. Many Filipino IMWs do not reside within these city boundaries because of high rent costs and rather live in the adjacent towns which are more affordable but still accessible for work. To capture the broader urban experiences of these Filipino IMWs, I expanded my focus beyond the cities themselves, ensuring the study was not restricted to city boundaries. All the Filipino IMWs who became my study partners live, work, and are immersed in the

region known as Randstad Holland (See Figure 2). Randstad is a crescent-shaped cluster of the four largest Dutch cities which are Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht, along with adjacent towns. This area has become a key focus for migration due to its dynamic urban landscape, its position as a global city in the urban hierarchy, and the concentration of both regular and irregular migrants (Janssens, 2015). Moreover, the Randstad houses more than half of the country's irregular migrant population nearly a quarter of all migrants in the Netherlands (CBS, 2022). This region is crucial in the Netherlands as it highlights the interconnectivity and interdependence of political, cultural, and financial capital, as well as international gateway functions like the port of Rotterdam and Schiphol Airport. It also boasts a cosmopolitan labor force, making it one of Europe's most prominent polycentric mega-city regions (MCRs) and a dynamic 'global city' (Cardoso & Meijers, 2020; Shachar, 1994).

Data Collection

Ethnographic Methods

To unearth the experiences of irregular migrants, I employed ethnographic methods inline with Pacheco-Vega and Parizeau (2018)'s doubly engaged ethnography, and draw upon five non-consecutive months of ethnographic field research including participant observation, informal conversations, and two mental mapping activities within the community of Filipino IMWs. Immersion and engagement were central to the methodology; rather than relying solely on questionnaires, I participated actively in various aspects of the migrants' lives. This included everyday conversations, interacting on their activities, attending organizational meetings, and observing living conditions. For example, I assisted an irregular migrant couple in meeting the requirements to return to the Philippines and also participated in several social gatherings where updates on the status of irregular migrants and Dutch handling of these issues were shared. These interactions provided valuable opportunities for building rapport and trust among the community, allowing migrants to share more about their migration journeys. Observations and reflections were recorded as unstructured field notes.

Recruitment and Networks

The selection of participants from the Philippines for this research is grounded in practical considerations. Conducting research with Filipino IMW presents significant challenges, particularly in terms of locating, engaging, and building trust with them. As such, the use of snowball sampling was particularly effective as it leveraged the established networks within the migrant community, facilitating access to participants who might otherwise be hard to reach. In this case, my personal connections within the Filipino community were instrumental in establishing initial contact and overcoming these barriers. Initial contacts were obtained with two key organizations: Migrante and Filipino Migrants in Solidarity (FILMIS). Migrante is an international network of grassroots organizations dedicated to advocating for the rights and well-being of Filipinos living abroad.
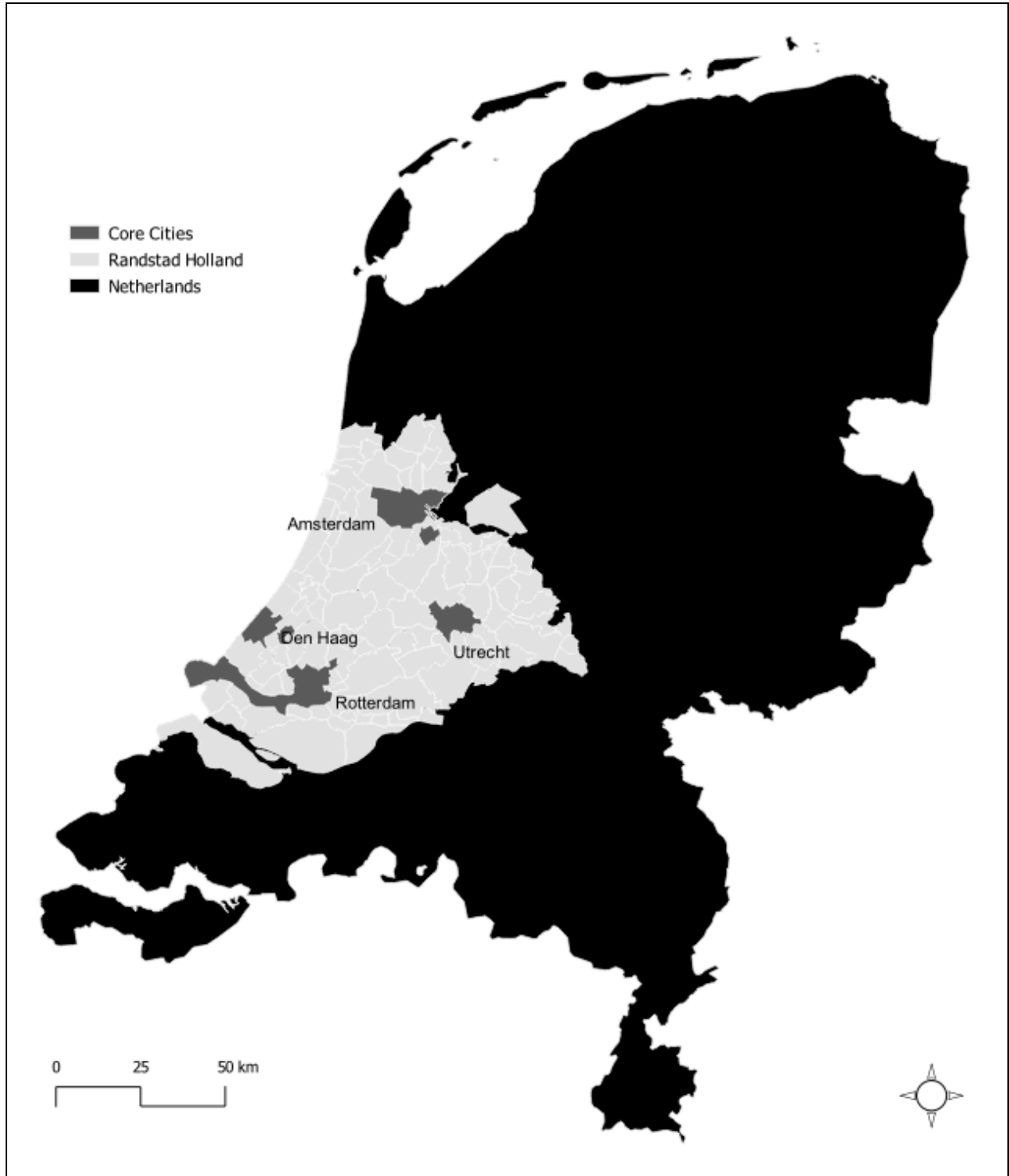
Figure 2. Map of the Netherlands with the core cities of Randstad Holland, based on Rouwendal & Levkovich (2016). Map by Author. Sources: GADM

Their extensive network, which includes chapters in Utrecht, Amsterdam, and Den Haag, was crucial for initiating contact with participants for this study. Meanwhile, FILMIS is a non-profit organization in the Netherlands that focuses on advancing Filipino culture, education, and human rights within the migrant community.

Participant Profile

The selection of Filipino IMWs as the focal point of this research stems from their significant presence in the Netherlands, where they represent one of the largest groups of irregular migrants constituting an estimated 30,000 of the 50,000 irregular migrants in the country (Balod, 2020; Soraya, 2012, as cited in Siruno & Siegel, 2023). Filipinos offer crucial insights into the dynamics and challenges of irregular migration, providing a richer understanding beyond more commonly studied groups such as Moroccans and Turks. Participants were selected based on one or more of the following criteria: (1) entered the country without an official visa; (2) entered legally with a tourist visa but overstayed; or (3) entered legally with a work permit visa but left their employers.

The participant profile is diverse, encompassing a wide range of backgrounds and experiences (see Table 4). The group includes eight women and four men, aged between 27 and 67 years. Their previous occupations were also varied, including roles such as teachers,managers, shopkeepers in the Philippines and even working abroad as domestic helpers, seafarers, and construction workers. All participants now hold low-skilled jobs in the Netherlands such as cleaners, kitchen helpers, gardeners, babysitters, etc. Participants have resided in the country for varying durations, ranging from 1 year to 23 years. Many entered the Netherlands on tourist visas, while others used work-related visas or arrived through systems like the Kafala system. A common experience among participants is their migration from other Schengen countries or directly from their home countries using various visas, followed by a transition into low-skilled employment. The majority of participants indicated that they anticipated transitioning to undocumented status upon arrival which is consistent with the findings of Siruno et al. (2022) regarding other Filipino IMWs.

Apart from the Filipino IMWs, I also conducted interviews with the representatives of Filipino migrant organizations based in the Netherlands which are Migrante and FILMIS. For Migrante, I was able to connect with three of their chapters from Amsterdam, Den Haag, and Utrecht.

Participant Pseudonyms	Age	Civil Status/ Family Status	Previous Occupations	Occupation in the Netherlands	Duration of Stay	[Initial] Mode of Migration to the Netherlands
George	42	Married; with 2 children	Construction (Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Morocco, Poland)	Cleaner, Construction	1 year	Moved from another Schengen country
Cardo	35	Married; with 2 children	Manager (Philippines)	Cleaner	6 months	Moved from another Schengen country
Angel	39	Unmarried;with a child born in the Netherlands	Shop Teller, Staff of a Government Agency (Philippines)	Cleaner, Kitchen Helper	12 years	Au Pair Visa
Sky	27	Unmarried	Restaurant Supervisor (Philippines)	Cleaner, Cook	3 years	Tourist Visa
Ivana	30	Single	Domestic Helper (Hongkong)	Cleaner	4 years	Tourist Visa
Paolo	31	Unmarried	Seafarer (Greece-based company)	Cleaner, Gardening, Paint	4 years	Seafarer Visa
Felisa	46	Separated; with two children	Teacher and Call Center Agent (Philippines); Domestic Worker (HongKong)	Cleaner	10 years	Tourist Visa
Salvacion	55	Single	Restaurant Manager (Philippines)	Cleaner, Babysit	21 years	Tourist Visa
Hannah	67	Widowed; with three children	Domestic Helper (Saudi Arabia)	Cleaner	21 years	Kafala System
Karen	45	Married; with two children	Unemployed	Cleaner	10 years	Tourist Visa
Cecile	51	Separated; with two children	Company Clerk (Philippines)	Cleaner, Dog-Sitting	19 years	Tourist Visa
Grace	44	Married; with four children	Caregiver/Housewife	Cleaner	7 years	Tourist Visa
Justine	35	Single	Teacher (Philippines) Domestic Worker (Singapore)	Cleaner	7 years	Au Pair Visa

Table 4. Participant Profile

Interviews

The research involved conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews in colloquial Filipino. Participants consented to audio recordings of the interviews, which ranged from 1 to 3 hours in duration. These interviews were conducted both in-person and online, with additional follow-up sessions as needed. A combination of closed and open-ended questions allowed participants to freely share their experiences. The first set of interviews with five Filipino IMWs and two Migrante chapters from Amsterdam and The Hague was conducted in person between December 2023 and January 2024, in various cities and towns across the Netherlands. The second set, involving six Filipino IMWs and two organization representatives from FILMIS and Migrante Utrecht, was conducted between February and July 2024. These interviews were held over the phone via online platforms such as WhatsApp, Messenger, and Google Meet, after relocating to Spain.

Ensuring participants' comfort during these online interviews was crucial, so I maintained flexibility in the setup, language, and level of formality. Building rapport in a virtual environment posed unique challenges, as scholars suggest that online settings can hinder the development of rapport and intimate interview relationships due to the lack of shared sensory experiences. Nevertheless, the online interviews were designed to be informal and welcoming, allowing participants the freedom to choose their session locations and present themselves as they felt most comfortable.

The questionnaire examined various aspects of life for Filipino IMWs in the Netherlands. It gathered a brief overview of their lives in the Philippines, including their working and living conditions. The questionnaire then explored their relocation process, job satisfaction, and well-being. It identified challenges specific to irregular migrants, such as access to settlement, healthcare, education, jobs, and legal issues. It also covered social dynamics, coping mechanisms, interactions with locals, discrimination, and involvement with support networks. (See Annex for the questionnaire)

Mental Mapping

Mental maps, or cognitive maps, are internal representations of the external world that individuals create in their minds. These maps include spatial relationships, landmarks, and routes, which help people orient themselves and navigate their environments. The aim of this activity was to bring hidden stories to light, particularly by visualizing narratives that often go untold. Palis (2022) refers to this as geonarrative mapping which serves as a practice of 'unmapping,' where subjectivities and cartographic stories are highlighted and emphasized. This approach foregrounds an alternative mode of storytelling that centers on the emergent, emotional, and performative aspects of these narratives. The initial plan was to conduct a mental mapping activity with all Filipino IMWs who agreed to participate in interviews. However, due to their time constraints and the limited duration of my data collection, only two participants, Salvacion and Cecile, were able to take part. Nonetheless, the two mental maps yielded from the online workshops were profound and rich critical to add a layer of visualization to their spaces.

The mental mapping activity was conducted via WhatsApp and Messenger, with detailed instructions and live support provided to the participants. The online format was intentionally designed to be informal and welcoming to encourage participation. The mapping process involved three flexible steps: (1) creating a basemap, (2) drawing features, and (3) overlaying symbols and stories. Participants used pens, coloring materials, and paper. I emphasized that the aim was not to produce an accurate or professional map but to visually represent the safe and unsafe spaces in their communities. Once the maps were completed, participants shared their work by holding it up to the camera, followed by detailed explanations of their drawings. During these discussions, they were encouraged to elaborate on the emotions they experienced while creating the maps and to reflect on their personal connections to the spaces they depicted.

Data Analysis

In line with my abductive approach, I employed an abductive grounded theory method for qualitative analysis. This approach blends theory testing with theory building, beginning with initial coding schemes and adjusting them as new patterns and themes emerge. Coding played a crucial role in transitioning from raw data to thematic ideas. This process involved multiple cycles of refinement and reclassification, while continuously linking codes to my theoretical framework. Through this iterative approach, I identified repetitive patterns and actions within the data, enriching my understanding of participants' geonarratives. To start, I created a deductive codebook based on my initial observations from my encounter with irregular migrants guided by the concept of necropolitics, developing major codes to explore through the interviews, mental maps, and field notes. For the mental maps, I identified specific markers that correspond to experiences and concepts aligned with the interview codes (Palis, 2022). My thematic analysis began with a shortlist of three provisional codes: "Before Migration" "Life in the Netherlands," and "Breathing Life in the Netherlands." These codes were aligned with my research questions, focusing on themes such as the emergence of a necropolis, spaces within the necropolis, and subversion of the necropolis. From this initial set, I expanded my coding to include descriptive codes that labeled data according to content and topics discussed by participants (ex. "Rent" "Housemates," "House Hunting," and "Characteristics"). I organized these detailed codes into broader categories and labeled statements related to specific spaces ("Settlement"). This process was iterative, involving both the summarization and complication of data to deepen my analysis. I remained open to emerging themes, such as new forms of social death like "Evasion Strategies" which initially seemed to fit under the theme of subverting the necropolis. Similarly, I faced challenges categorizing some themes like "Point of Entry" which I initially placed within the theme of death in the Netherlands but later regrouped it with the emergence of the necropolis to emphasize the precarity of the migrants' journey and border controls before their experiences in the city. As a result, some of my first-cycle codes were later subsumed, relabeled, or dropped in the succeeding cycles of coding. Figure 3 presents the final coding scheme I developed.

Throughout this process, I engaged in manual coding using Google Docs, outlining themes, annotating, and highlighting significant quotes. This method provided me with a deeper familiarity with the data nd the coding process. I employed lumper coding, which focuses on capturing the essence of a phenomenon rather than delving into fine-grained details. This approach involved a "search and seizure operation" to identify the core elements of their narratives, rather than conducting a line-by-line analysis (Stern, 2007).

Migration Journey			Life/Death in the Netherlands			Subversion of Death	
Life before NL	**Allure of NL**	**Mode of Entry**	**Settlements**	**Workplace**	**Mobility**	**Reclamation**	**Streaming Life**
Precarity in PH	Human Rights	Tourist	Black Contract	Domestic Work	Public Transport	Housing	Remittance
Precarity as OFW	Wage Disparity	Au Pair Program	Landlord Eviction	Wage & Workload	Cycling	Workplace	Investments
Gendered OFWs	Networks	Inter-Europe	Policing	Gendered Work	Public Spaces	Public Spaces	Retiring in PH
Insufficient Wage		Escape	Housemates	Policing	Travel in Europe	Travel in Europe	
			Evasion Strategies	Health Insecurity	Returning to PH	Alliance-Building	
				Deprofessionalized	Repatriation	Visibility	

Figure 3. Coding Scheme for Data Anaysis.

Ethical Considerations

Ethnographic research especially for irregular migrants may pose a greater risk of exploitation compared to other approaches given that it could be perceived as surveillance of inadvertently aid state enforcement. To address this, I ensured that I represented participants' experiences with the utmost care, especially when addressing sensitive issues like policing and violence. While some irregular migrants viewed sharing their stories as an act of advocacy and an effort to raise awareness about their situation, I was mindful of those who were hesitant to disclose their lives. Avoiding the sensationalization of their plight was crucial to prevent further harm and to ensure that their stories were presented with empathy and respect. My goal was to highlight their resilience and agency, portraying them as they wished to be seen and treated, and conveying a sense of hope rather than despair.

It is also important to note that I had immersed myself in the lives of several irregular migrants before deciding to pursue this research, blurring the start and end of the ethnographic process. Consequently, I had to critically assess the information to which I had access, particularly their personal spheres. This involved asking permission to write about specific aspects of their work and everyday lives while balancing engagement with avoiding exploitation and being extractive in our relationships. I ensured that informed consent was a priority and participants were fully aware of the purpose and scope of the research. Anonymization and the use of pseudonyms were also implemented to protect their identities.

Establishing relationships with new participants required preliminary interviews with migrant organizations that closely work with and engage with them. This was essential to build trust and safeguard their safety during interactions in their activities and spaces. Ensuring that my presence was supportive rather than merely extractive required constant self-reflection and a commitment to respecting their dignity and autonomy. For IMWs, who already endure demanding work hours and constant anxiety, it was crucial to manage their participation in interviews and research activities carefully. I took steps to accommodate their schedules and ensure their safety, prioritizing their well-being by meeting them in places where they felt comfortable and secure. During the interviews, we intentionally omitted requests for full names, home addresses, and employer details. Participants were assured that they had complete control over the information they chose to disclose or keep private. I also respected the participants' autonomy by acknowledging their right to decline participation in interviews or additional research, even though this restriction impacted my data collection methods, such as limited participants for the mental mapping.

I also carefully considered the broader societal implications and potential negative consequences of the research, including how institutions such as the state or the media might use or interpret the results. Ultimately, being ethical towards the Filipino IMWs entails a commitment to addressing the factors that contribute to their vulnerability. This includes challenging the stigma they face, advocating for changes in policies that complicate their work and lives, and confronting the systems that perpetuate social and economic inequalities (Pacheco-Vega and Parizeau, 2018).

Author's Positionality

This research is deeply informed by my position as a Filipino activist researcher, shaped by my upbringing and academic formation within the marginalized spaces of the Philippines. Growing up in a family with two migrant workers, I have a firsthand experience of having family members working abroad which profoundly shaped my understanding of the tension between the migrant struggles and the lives it feeds. Exploring the urban experiences of Filipino IMWs, my perspective is influenced by my national democratic values. I view migration as a symptom of systemic issues, rooted in the semi-colonial and semi-feudal conditions in the Philippines. These conditions extend their influence overseas, affecting both the social and spatial dimensions of the labor force that the country exports. This lens guides my approach to understanding and articulating the systemic forces that systemitically banish Filipino IMWs to death.

The shared cultural and linguistic background has fostered a deeper empathy with the Filipino IMW community and facilitated a comfortable environment for them to express their lived experiences. Despite familiarizing myself to the everyday of Filipino IMWs after living in the Netherlands for five months, I acknowledge the privilege of my documented status and recognize the limitations of my understanding of the exploitative and precarious conditions they live in. This also affects how despite I feel confident navigating this sensitive area, I am aware that their willingness to share their experiences comes with a risk of exposure. Participants often withhold certain details to protect their anonymity

and safety, adding layers of complexity to my understanding and documentation of their stories. Their narratives challenge my initial assumptions about irregular status leading to certain forms of social suffering and reveal a more nuanced reality that does not always align with stereotypical views of vulnerable or activist migrants (Siruno et al., 2022).

This research while comprehensively discussing microgeographies of Filipino IMWs, my role as a male researcher engaging predominantly with female domestic workers presents a limitation in further engaging with gender intersected issues and nuances. While I address themes of exploitation, immigration status, and race, I acknowledge the need for a more nuanced exploration of how gender intersects with these issues. Furthermore, engaging with the lives and stories of Filipino IMWs, particularly regarding themes of death, trauma, and violence, has been emotionally taxing. Listening to their stories and being immersed in these harsh realities has at times made me feel as though I was reducing their lives to mere data. However, rather than suppressing these emotions, I used them to deepen my commitment to understanding the grip of capitalism on my people, wherever they may be, and to strengthen my resolve as a scholar-activist contributing to broader movements for social justice.

Timeline

The thesis project spanned across multiple semesters, beginning with the development of the research proposal from February to June 2023. Subsequently, from July to December of the same year, the focus shifted towards extensive reading and refining the research design, particularly regarding case selection which shifted to focusing on Filipino IMWs in the Netherlands. Starting in January 2024, the project entered the active phases of data collection and literature review. From February to July, these activities ran in parallel with the commencement of data analysis. From July to August, the focus gradually shifted towards finalising both data collection and analysis, while also progressing with the writing of the thesis.

Utrecht, Netherlands (2024)

ASSEMBLING THE DUTCH URBAN NECROPOLIS

Drawing upon the literature on racial capitalism and necropolitics, I deploy the concepts of necropolis and biopolis to critically examine the governance of life and death among racialized migrants in the Netherlands. By conceptualizing the Netherlands as a biopolis, a society that historically accumulates capital from the labor and resources of necropolitan migrants, I reveal how its migration regime has consistently fluctuated between periods of conditional acceptance and outright exclusion. This oscillation has exposed racialized migrants to various forms of exploitation and marginalization and created fertile ground for the emergence of urban necropolises for Filipino IMWs.

Biopolis Built on Migrants

Throughout its history, the Netherlands has meandered between periods of welcoming openness and being a racialized, reluctant, and ambivalent country of immigration (Van Der Leun, 2006; Weiner, 2015). This shifting approach to migration reflects what Robinson and Santos (2014) describe as a "revolving door" of racialized ambivalence, where the acceptance of migrants is adjusted according to the nation-state's needs for accumulation. The early 20th century witnessed significant shifts in Dutch migration patterns, driven by factors such as colonial independence, labor shortages, and an influx of asylum seekers, all of which deeply influenced Dutch attitudes toward migrants. Immigration to the Netherlands slowed considerably during this period due to rapid industrialization in neighboring countries and stricter border controls by the Dutch government. Following these events, the Netherlands saw a large influx of immigrants from Suriname and Indonesia after their independence in 1949. At the same time, the demand for unskilled labor led to the recruitment of guest workers from Mediterranean countries, Turkey, and Morocco. These workers were initially expected to stay temporarily and return home once their jobs were completed (Van Meeteren et al., 2012).

Despite the Dutch government's tightening of immigration policies in the 1980s and its expectation that guest workers would leave, migration from Turkey and Morocco persisted. Many migrants, both legal and undocumented, settled in older, poorer neighborhoods in cities like Rotterdam, The Hague, and Amsterdam (Rath, 2009; Van Meeteren et al., 2012). However, Bruquetas-Callejo et al. (2007) argue that the Netherlands' claim of being closed to migration, particularly from labor-sending countries, is more rhetorical than factual. Policies such as the Labour of Foreign Workers Act (1979-1996) and the Labor of Aliens Act continued to facilitate the entry of workers deemed essential to address ongoing labor shortages. During this time, terms like "autochtonen" (indigenous Dutch) and "allochtonen" (non-native and often non-white residents) were introduced, further alienating migrants from Dutch society (Weiner, 2014). This distinction reinforced the perception that being "Dutch" equates to being "white," thereby conferring special privileges and hindering the social acceptance of non-European immigrants, despite their shared language, culture, and citizenship. In the 1990s, while some political refugees were warmly welcomed—marking the Netherlands' fourth wave of migration—many groups faced reluctance or outright discouragement, a trend that has hardened in

recent decades (Van Meeteren, 2012; Rath, 2009). Rath (2009) notes that the fluctuating patterns of slow immigration and extensive emigration have shaped a Dutch mindset that views post-war and current immigration from the Third World as a "mistake" and an "anomaly to be discouraged." While the Netherlands, as a thriving biopolis, increasingly depends on and benefits from the labor of marginalized and exploited migrants from necropolitan backgrounds, these migrants also view the nation-state as a means to support their own survival.

Cruelty of Biopower

Over the past three decades, the Netherlands has increasingly implemented restrictive measures and campaigns to disincentivize irregular migration by limiting migrants' legal and social access to essential services along with tightening immigration controls. The national government has introduced several "discouragement policies" aimed at marginalizing irregular migrants by reducing their settlement options and restricting access to the welfare state through heightened "internal borders" (Staring, 2009; Van Der Leun, 2006). In the early 1990s, the Netherlands began linking social insurance numbers (SOFI) to legal residence status. In 1993, a law was enacted requiring employers to verify the legal status of new employees, with current fines of €4,000 for private individuals and €8,000 for businesses per illegally employed immigrant (Walsum, 2016). Another key measure was the 1998 Linking Act, which tied access to social services to legal residence status, thereby restricting irregular migrants' access to state-sponsored services like social benefits, healthcare, housing, and education (Van Der Leun, 2006). In the 2000s, the Netherlands further intensified its immigration controls by enhancing border security, implementing stricter measures against illegal trafficking, and revising the Aliens Act to expedite asylum procedures (Van Der Leun, 2006). However, it is important to note that illegal entry or stay is currently not punishable under Dutch law (Broeders, 2009). Detention for irregular migrants is treated as an administrative issue rather than a criminal one, with enforcement prioritizing individuals who disturb public order or engage in criminal activity. Irregular migrants are typically held in special detention or expulsion centers rather than regular prisons, a measure designed to facilitate their expulsion from the country (Van Kalmthout et al., 2005, as cited in Broeders and Engbersen, 2007). Leerkes & Broeders (2010) argue that immigration detention in the Netherlands serves not only as a tool for expulsion but also as a means to manage public anxiety through a symbolic assertion of state control. Additionally, irregular migrants are effectively barred from visiting their countries of origin, as doing so would expose their status to border authorities, resulting in a minimum five-year ban on re-entering the EU. Van Walsum (2016) notes that this enforced separation from their families is often the "most painful" consequence of their irregular status. Moreover, pathways to regularization are virtually non-existent, and the number of applications has decreased as immigration services now immediately detain migrants who submit unqualified applications (Van Meeteren, 2012).

The Netherlands, with its rising racist sentiments and increasingly strict assimilation and immigration policies, has become a critical site for examining how necropower is exercised and how spatial classifications are applied to migrant populations. The country faces growing racist sentiment, particularly towards those practicing Islam, driven by the rise of populist and right-wing movements

like the Partij voor Vrijheid (Party for Freedom, PVV) led by Geert Wilders. Wilders promotes anti-immigrant rhetoric, claiming that the "Dutch are victims of their own tolerance towards ungrateful migrants" (Ghorashi, 2014). Despite its reputation as a multicultural and multiracial haven, Dutch society continues to exhibit clear stratification between the "white Dutch insider" and the "minority outsider" (Weiner, 2015, p.576). Mepschen (2019, p.2-3) suggests that Dutch society perceives the presence of "minoritized and racialized outsiders" as a threat, which shapes the exclusionary migration landscape by displacing the "others" while reinforcing the homogenous image of a "hardworking Dutchman". Drawing on Stumpf (2006), scholars have also elaborated on the concept of "crimmigration" in the Netherlands, where the boundary between immigration enforcement and criminal justice is increasingly blurred (Staring & Timmerman, 2021; Van Der Woude et al., 2014). This phenomenon extends beyond the legal domain, positioning minoritized migrants as 'outsiders,' 'criminals,' 'threats,' and 'dangerous others.'

The Netherlands has emerged as one of Europe's strictest nations regarding irregular migrants, with immigration policies increasingly shifting towards a 'thick enforcement regime' aimed at deporting 'unwanted' migrants (Leerkes & Van Houte, 2020). While the country tightens its grip on immigration, it simultaneously grapples with labor shortages in low-paying, physically demanding sectors. This discrepancy has led to an increased reliance on foreign labor, echoing the characteristics of past guest worker programs (Castles, 2006). Notably, recent estimates suggest that over 200,000 Dutch families employ undocumented workers, primarily in domestic roles such as cleaning, maintenance, and construction (Beltran and Haiij, 2023). Staring (2009) notes that the Dutch government has increasingly restricted legal pathways for foreigners to settle and has implemented stricter measures to prevent irregular migrants from accessing welfare benefits. However, it is important to recognize that the governance of irregular migration in the Netherlands operates on multiple levels, with distinct roles for national and local governments (Siruno & Siegel, 2023). National authorities focus on maintaining a strict and selective immigration policy, emphasizing border control and immigration management. Meanwhile, local governments, particularly at the city level, are more directly engaged in addressing the needs of irregular migrants such as housing, education, and food (Beltran & Haiij, 2023). This dichotomy directs attention to how the broader migration regime influences urban spaces and reveals the extent of social exclusion faced by migrants and minorities, particularly those with irregular status. This is a clear case of 'racial cruelty' where the state exercises its monopoly on legitimate violence and enacts excessively cruel guised as a biopolitan measure against the irregular migrants (Reddy, 2011). I posit that these conditions have already fostered an "urban necropolis," where differential rights, various forms of subjugation, and even extreme measures are imposed upon the lives and spaces of irregular migrant workers in the Netherlands.

Necropolis for Filipino IMWs?

Irregular migrants in the Netherlands encounter a range of precarity and slow and structural violence that increasingly draw them towards death and social death including exclusion to social services and basic human rights, immobility, precarious living conditions, and constant surveillance. Kox et al.

(2020) extended this understanding and examined the Dutch migration control system, finding that it extends penal power in ways that make irregular migrants feel punished through deprivation of healthy living conditions, restricted social and geographical mobility, and denial of citizenship. Other scholars such as Teunissen et al. (2014) found that irregular migrants in the Netherlands often view their precarious living conditions as a significant factor affecting their mental health. They face barriers to accessing healthcare, such as stigma around mental health, lack of trust in general practitioners, and practical issues like fear of prosecution and financial constraints. Meanwhile, Amer and Leung (2022) explored the themes of "(in)visibility and (im)mobility" among irregular migrants in Dutch public spaces, emphasizing how racialization leads to prejudiced surveillance and shapes migrants' experiences and resistance strategies. Their study highlights how strategic invisibility, while offering some protection, may limit mobility due to increased risk perceptions.

Looking closer at the situation of Filipinos IMWs in the Netherlands reveals the complex interplay of necropower, particularly in how they face precarity on three fronts: their irregular legal status without rights and protections, their role as surplus labor within a global city, and their existence as informal, racialized workers in an increasingly exclusionary country. They navigate this paradox of existence wherein the benefits they receive with a biopolis such as livable wages, fair work treatment, and a sense of peace and safety serve as lifelines that tether them to living in precarious circumstances. Filipino IMWs experience a level of tolerance in which they are not systematically targeted for potential immigration law violations (Beltran & Haiij, 2023). However, this tolerance is situational and varies on a case-by-case basis, largely depending on the discretion of the state and police authorities. It is a temporary and conditional leniency rather than a guaranteed protection. They still face multiple layers of precarity such as housing displacement, informality of their work, the invisibility with services, and the displacement and confinement these individuals endure to survive. Siruno et, al. (2022) revealed that Filipino IMWs deal with constant fear of detection, prompting them to adopt various strategies such as frequently changing residences, paying in cash, and always carrying their passports. While these practices are burdensome, they are often considered minor inconveniences compared to the greater hardship of being separated from their families in the Philippines, particularly during times of crisis when returning home is not an option due to their irregular status. Siruno & Siegel (2023) also covered how the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated their already precarious situation, as social distancing regulations and work-from-home mandates that led to widespread job losses when homeowners ceased employing them. This crisis further underscored their exclusion from formal social safety nets, as some food banks and vaccination rollouts began requiring documentation, effectively cutting off support for undocumented migrants. It was only until migrant groups and domestic worker unions petitioned migrant support from the government that services were slowly granted (Beltran & Haiij, 2023).

Siruno et al., (2022) also highlights signs of life within the precarious conditions of FIlipino IMWs discussing strategies for gaining recognition and fostering collaboration within migrant groups. In addition, despite being largely unregulated and not formally recognized as productive work, domestic labor offers Filipino IMWs a form of economic integration through flexible hours, relatively high wages, and reduced exposure to immigration enforcement. This sector enables Filipino IMWs to

maintain a low profile in cities like Amsterdam and The Hague, thereby minimizing the risk of apprehension and deportation. Despite these prolonged and hidden sufferings along with the static and institutionalized violence, many UMDWs continue to prefer life in the Netherlands, valuing the country's respect for human rights and the relative peace and safety they experience even without legal status (Siruno et al., 2022). While Filipino IMWs continue to find ways to sustain themselves and integrate economically through informal channels in the Netherlands, these experiences still reflect an unsettling blur of boundaries between survival and systemic neglect. The boundaries they cross between life and social death as exemplified by COVID remain fragile, and this precarioussituation calls for a critical reassessment of their vulnerabilities and a focus on the empirical and spatial hinges of an urban necropolis.

Amsterdam, Netherlands (2024)

COMMEMORATING THE DEPARTED

In examining how Filipino IMWs navigate the Dutch urban necropolis, I delve into the various forms of violence and social death they experience throughout their migration journey and how these manifestations of necropower permeate their everyday geographies. This analysis uses geonarratives to locate and spatialize violence and death as experienced by IMWs. This section examines particularly their experiences across different scales: from international migration routes and the journey in between, to the local settings of home, labor, and other spaces within the urban necropolis, and finally to their unbounded spaces of renegotiation and resistance.

Journey of Necropolitan Migrants

This subsection delves into the migration journey of Filipino IMWs from the Philippines to the Netherlands. First, I describe the economic and social conditions in the Philippines and other destination countries Filipino IMWs have been to. Second, I contrast this with the hope and aspiration that many Filipino IMWs associate with the Netherlands. Then, I document the dangerous and clandestine pathways these migrants navigate to reach the Netherlands.

Precarious Origins

The lives of Filipino IMWs are characterized by pervasive uncertainty, inadequate wages, and a challenging quality of life, both in the Philippines and abroad. Many of these individuals find themselves trapped in a cycle of poverty and instability, struggling to meet basic needs for themselves and their families despite relentless efforts. For example, Angel held various jobs in the Philippines, including as a secretary and bookstore staff. Yet, her income was insufficient to support her parents and younger sister who was still studying. She also sought to escape the harsh realities of living in a necrosettlement in Quezon City, an area constantly threatened by displacement and demolition: "*I really wanted to leave the Philippines because I was struggling with life in the slums. You have no money, and the place you live in is dire and devoid of opportunities.*"

When they venture abroad, Filipino IMWs often encounter precarious employment and harsh working conditions that mirror or even exacerbate the struggles they faced at home. Many are not first-time migrants, and their previous experiences abroad are similarly riddled with danger, isolation, and exhaustion. Cecile, a mother of two, applied for jobs in Dubai and Hong Kong but was deterred by reports of severe mistreatment and abuse of domestic workers in these common destinations for Filipinos:

> "*At that time, there were many executions in the Middle East, especially in Dubai. I also read about Filipinas being raped or abused there. In Hong Kong, my friends told me it was very hard.*

You had to be mentally strong. It felt like slavery. I weighed my options—should I go home with little income, or stay and earn more but face the risk?"

Paolo, who worked as a seafarer for five years, recounted doing 'dirty, dangerous, and difficult' jobs while earning only around EUR 1,300, while his supervisors, who did less strenuous work, earned twice as much. He described the working conditions as harsh and unsafe, with tasks often performed without proper safety measures: "*We hardly got any sleep. There was a time when a ship from another company needed its logo changed. We had to climb without proper equipment, with our lives literally hanging by a thread.*" His reflection, "*I had one foot in the grave,*" encapsulates the necropolitical reality of his work—where life is precarious, and death is a looming possibility.

Some Filipino IMWs are also funneled into racialized and gendered domestic work in other countries (Guevarra, 2009; Tungohan, 2021). Ivana, who worked as a domestic worker in Hong Kong, described their experience: "*They controlled everything you did; they ordered you around. You could be working until midnight. Others had it even worse. I can say that among the millions of OFWs from the Philippines, I was one of the luckiest.*" Hannah, a mother of seven, worked as a domestic worker in Saudi Arabia in 1998. She endured significant hardships, including working nearly 12 hours a day without any days off. Despite the workload, Hannah was paid only EUR 228 per month, significantly less than the EUR 320 stipulated in her contract. She recounted the harsh realities of her working conditions and the deep motivation driven by the need to provide for her family:

> "*When I was new in Saudi, my finger got caught in the door. They didn't take me to a doctor. My finger was almost severed; it got stuck in the automatic door. But you can't just give up on work. I felt the pain in my chest, wanting to scream, but I couldn't do anything. We needed to survive. I didn't want them to experience a life where you only eat biscuits all day and drink water for dinner. There came a time when my child was about to die and we couldn't get into the hospital. I had to push myself to work abroad. I endured all that because I didn't want to go back to the Philippines. I couldn't bear to see my children suffering.*"

George, who worked in construction both in the Philippines and abroad, shared how even increased earnings in Qatar and Saudi Arabia were insufficient to escape poverty. In the Philippines, he worked long hours and earned around PHP 550 per day, totaling up to PHP 13,200 (approximately EUR 210) per month. His experience abroad in Qatar and Saudi Arabia was similar, with only a slight increase in salary to PHP 30,000 (about EUR 470) per month. As George noted, "*If I were alone, this would be a good income, but if I want to give my children a better life, it isn't enough.*"

These narratives reveal that for many Filipino IMWs, the Philippines itself embodies a necropolitan state, where human life is a cheap commodity, and the prospects for survival amidst poverty are grim. Their decisions to seek a better life abroad are not merely voluntary but a forced response to the structural violence driven by unstable employment, severe wage disparities, and poor quality of life. For them, remaining in the Philippines equates to a "death sentence" (Hudson, 2011; as cited in McIntyre

& Nast, 2011). Many have experienced being 'brokered' to other global labor markets, particularly Filipino women who were assigned to the racially and gendered roles of domestic work (Guevarra, 2009; Lindio-McGovern, 2013) These forces compel people from the Global South to seek labor in the Global North, only to be further exploited and expropriated (Robinson & Santos, 2014). This suggests that the necropolis does not begin when Filipino IMWs arrive in the Netherlands. Rather, it is a fluid and dynamic condition imposed by racial capitalism to extract surplus labor population from one death zone to another, further alienating and controlling their labor (Robinson, 2000). The necropolitical violence that Filipino IMWs seek to escape often follows them to their destinations. Whether in the slums of Quezon City, in the ships on international waters, or in the households of Saudi Arabia, the necropolis persists as a space where life is precarious, labor is exploitative, and survival is a continuous negotiation with death. Thus, Filipino IMWs become necropolitical migrants whose migration is less about seeking opportunity and more about survival. They are absorbed into a global labor system that preys on their desperation and marginalization, deepening their economic insecurity and social exclusion.

Promised Land

"*A better life.*" This is a sentiment repeatedly uttered by Filipino IMWs when describing why they wanted to move to the Netherlands to work. For many Filipino IMWs, Europe, particularly the Netherlands, represents a land of economic opportunity, social welfare, human rights, and tolerance where one could aspire to enjoy a prosperous life or earn a life for their families back home. Cardo, who was self-employed as a contractor for a government agency, faced significant debt that forced him to give up his business and consider working abroad. He initially saw Europe as the ideal destination, believing that "*the money is here.*" Sky, who began working as restaurant staff, believed that his opportunities in the Philippines were limited, with earnings of only PHP 300 (around 14 Eur) per day. In contrast, the promise of earning EUR 14-16 per hour in the Netherlands made Europe particularly alluring. As Sky noted, "*Europe means money, money, money. When I was young, of course, I dreamed of going to Europe. It felt like the American Dream*".

Many Filipino IMWs express a preference for life in the Netherlands due to the country's reputation for respecting human rights and the relative peace and safety they experience despite their lack of legal status. This stands in contrast to their experiences and stories from other destination countries. Cecile reflected on her expectations of working in Europe compared to Dubai:

> "*The Dutch and Europeans aren't like that. They don't abuse people. They really practice human rights here. What's mine is mine. I felt more prepared for Europe because the pay is better. Although it's risky, I thought it was safer than Dubai, where I might also be exploited.*

Meanwhile, Grace was drawn to the Netherlands largely due to its relative tolerance towards irregular migrants, particularly because her relatives had already established themselves there. Her aunt, who had lived as an irregular migrant in the Netherlands for over two decades, paved the way for other family

members. Currently, seven family members reside in the Netherlands, including Grace and her husband, who remain undocumented. This long-standing presence of her family has become a testament for her that the Netherlands is relatively open and safe. As Grace shared: *"Netherlands is not that dangerous. You won't get deported right away. I know everyone here. Every time my parents called, I saw they were surrounded by familiar faces. Everyone seemed to be doing fine."* Her family's immediate integration into Filipino organizations that support undocumented migrants helped them establish their lives much easier in the Netherlands. While the situation is challenging, it has become a normal part of their lives.

The Netherlands presents itself as a land of opportunity, offering the biopolitical conditions of social security, economic prosperity, and chance to a better life. It is a space where these migrants can sustain their lives primarily through wages. Although it presents itself as safe, tolerant, and just, this study argues that the Netherlands is a site of biopolitical deception. The harsh realities faced by irregular migrants, while often invisible and normalized by both the general public and the migrants themselves, reveal a stark contrast between the Netherlands' image and the brutalities experienced by its migrants. It is also an inherent trait of necropower facilitated by the global capitalist system to lure and deceive marginalized populations into conditions under the guise of opportunity to facilitate its accumulation (Ortega, 2020). For irregular migrants, even the relative improvements in conditions offered by a Global North nation-state like the Netherlands represent a significant enhancement compared to their previous experiences, providing a semblance of life amid their marginalization.

'Fatal Journeys'

Many Filipinos become irregular migrants by overstaying their visas and working without proper documentations, often with the tacit support of local employers. Upon arriving in the Netherlands, some individuals shift from their initial status as tourists to seeking informal employment. Grace, for example, entered the Netherlands on a tourist visa, initially traveling to Copenhagen, Denmark, before taking a bus to the Netherlands. She also explained that her relatives also entered on tourist visas but were invited by prospective employers. Grace described her initial experience in her new location as positive, largely due to the presence of her family and familiar faces:

"The first month was okay because my family was here. I was aware from the beginning what my work and life would be like here. There's no turning back to the Philippines once you're here. I initially planned to stay for just three years to save up and get by."

Similarly, Ivana also arrived on a tourist visa, finding the embassy process straightforward, with officials only requesting the necessary documents. However, at the immigration checkpoint in the Philippines, she faced more scrutiny:

"When you're at immigration, you have to go through them, and they ask a lot of questions, some unrelated to your trip here. I saw someone who was a direct hire bound for Canada. They gave him a hard time and even tried to extort money from him."

Many Filipino IMWs initially enter the Netherlands as au pairs. Once their au pair period ends, they often seek to extend their stay by transitioning to other forms of residence or employment. Despite being classified as a non-working role, the au pair program often results in conditions that resemble domestic work, with long hours, low pay, and a lack of legal protections. Angel, who also entered the Netherlands through the au pair program, found the role challenging, particularly as she was responsible for taking care of three children: *"I worked from 8 AM to 5 PM at my employer's house, but sometimes the hours would extend. When you're new, you have to prove yourself."* Angel also noted that her previous employer allowed her to babysit for other families at night. As her contract neared its end, Angel felt that she wanted to stay to continue earning more and supporting her family: *"My employer asked me, 'Do you want to stay here? But you won't have papers.' I told them I was scared. They offered to bring my sister over to take my place while I moved to another house."* The au pair program has been documented to target young women from the Global South, such as the Philippines, subjecting them as ideal candidates for gendered domestic work devoid of basic labor rights, fair wages, and job security while local host families benefit from ther labor (Guevarra, 2014).

Other Filipino IMWs have navigated more complex and dangerous routes to secure entry into the Netherlands. George's journey, like those of many others, involved crossing multiple European borders, starting in Eastern Europe which has become a common entry point for labor migrants in recent years.

"I entered Poland and applied through a website for urgent hiring. Within a month, I left. The people trafficked to Belgium were my friends and acquaintances. They lived in the Netherlands but worked in Belgium. Their visa was from Poland, but they didn't have a permit for the Netherlands. So every day, they crossed the border, and one day, they were caught. For myself, I went first to Spain and worked in a restaurant. I stayed there for a year, and then I came here. My Poland visa had expired. I didn't stay in Spain because the pay was very low—8 hours of work for EUR 20 without papers."

George eventually relocated to the Netherlands in search of better income prospects, highlighting the wage disparities within Europe that attract irregular migrants.

Additionally, some Filipinos enter the Netherlands through less conventional yet more elaborate, riskier, and costly methods. Sky explained his entry into the Netherlands through a more unconventional and risky route due to his lack of proper documentation and formal visa options. Eager to join his partner, Angel, who also lacked the proper documentation to sponsor him, meant that a standard visa application was not feasible for him: The easiest process is to do everything *"under the table."* To facilitate his journey, Sky worked with an intermediary who arranged his travel through

Malta, a strategic move within the Schengen area that allowed for easier movement between European countries. He paid approximately PHP 600,000 (around EUR 10,000) to an agency, which covered various costs including the purchase of a ticket to Malta and a bribe to the immigration officers to bypass the controls in the airports. Upon arriving in Malta, Sky spent a week there before continuing to the Netherlands:

> *"We went through an offloading process. The connections of the agency called me at the airport, asking me what I was wearing, and I told them a hat and a blue t-shirt, and an immigration officer would pick you up. They'd ask you some questions, but you'd be allowed through right away."*

Some Filipino IMWs experiences also revealed how transitioning to irregularity is not just a choice but a forced response to escape necropolitical conditions. Paolo's decision to *"jump ship"* and disappear in Rotterdam highlights how irregularity becomes a strategy of survival. His departure was not merely a quest for better-paying land-based employment but an act of escape from the dehumanizing conditions on board. He noted that seafarers are generally allowed to disembark and explore port cities. *"It was a blessing in disguise that we traveled to the Netherlands. I decided to leave at the Rotterdam port. I didn't inform the company or our captain,"* he recounted. His partner in the Netherlands picked him up from the port, and since port security only checks those entering and not those leaving, they managed to slip away unnoticed, effectively disappearing:

> *"The company incurred significant costs trying to search and rescue me. They even suspected that my partner either hid me or killed me. It was difficult because even though my family called to confirm that I was safe, according to the Netherlands' system, I was still listed as missing."*

Hannah's, who was brought to Den Haag under the Kafala system, exemplifies the harsh reality of legalized trafficking that strips her of human rights and autonomy. Despite a contract promising €320 per month, she was paid only €220 and worked 12-hour shifts with no days off. *"I only ate what was left from their meals. I even had to scavenge bread from the trash. Because they were tightening food restrictions, I saved the ends of loaf bread to have breakfast,"* she added. The oppressive conditions, marked by a lack of insurance, communication, and basic necessities, pushed her to persuade her employers to hire her two children, each earning just $300 a month. However, witnessing her children's suffering ultimately broke her resolve to stay. This moment gave her the courage to leave the diplomat's household with her children. With the help of fellow Filipinos, they orchestrated their escape:

> *"Leaving the house, it was a five-minute walk from the meetup place. At 5 a.m., the taxi arrived. I said, 'Can you please bring us to the central station?' I didn't know where it was. The driver said, 'Oh, this is the Den Haag central station.' In my joy, while still in the taxi, tears began to fall. We felt like caged birds finally freed,"* she recounted. *When they arrived at the Central Station, they were met by members of the Filipino community who welcomed them warmly. "I cried because*

they greeted and welcomed us. A Filipino asked if we were new to Den Haag, as they had never seen us before. I said yes, we were new here, as if coming from a different world."

The migration of Filipino IMWs is not merely a matter of choice and physical relocation, but a transition into being commodified bodiesstripped of their identities and reducing them to labor molded into racialized and informal roles in the urban landscape of the Netherlands. (Robinson & Santos, 2014) They were thrust into 'fatal journeys' marked by fear, informality, and escape, navigating dangerous and precarious forms of migration (Brian & Laczko, 2014; Casas-Cortés et al., 2015). The mechanisms of state surveillance, policing, and infrastructural warfare designed to control and manage migration do not eliminate irregularity but rather push it further into the margins. This ushers in the pervasiveness of exploitative and often informal schemes of capital accumulation that extract profit from the migration journeys of Filipino IMWs. Their transfer is often facilitated by job recruitment agencies, local Dutch employers, and under-the-table actors, ranging from immigration intermediaries to organized illegal travel networks, all of whom prey on their precarity and desperation either to secure cheap labor or to extract profit from their transactions. When they denounce their status and their legality, it has become a conscious 'act of martyrdom' where they overcome the pain of being robbed of their homes, their lives, and their liberty (Mbembe, 2003). Their bodies, once merely objects to be safeguarded from danger and death, are now stripped of power and value living with an abstract rights and existence. Moreover, the Filipino IMWs disappearance into the shadows is emblematic of the way necropolitical violence pushes them into increasingly precarious and dangerous situations (Chavez, 1998; Leerkes et al., 2007). However, these stories also reveal the fluidity of such acts as moments of resistance using the limited agency they possess to carve out a new chance at life. For many, the choice is stark: endure the necropolitical violence at home or risk death through illegal passage to uncertain futures abroad.

Manifestation of Death in Urban Necropolis

This section explores the different spaces of Filipino IMWs that collectively spell the precarity, exclusion, and social death of Filipino IMWs in the Netherlands. First, I explore the intersection of housing precarity, exploitation, and constant surveillance creates a living environment that is not only financially and socially insecure but also deeply harmful, both physically and psychologically. Second, I focus on the complex and often invisible, exploitative, and insecure nature of their labor particularly within the domestic service sector. Lastly, I highlight the restriction of Filipino IMWs in their mobility due to the pervasive fear of detection and deportation, ultimately reshaping their sense of identity, belonging, and home. Here, I exposed that the urban necropolis is not merely an abstract notion of violence and death but a tangible, pervasive force that rendered Filipino IMWs to a "bare life" in urban spaces (Agamben, 1998). As they navigate the daily spheres of home, work, public places, and mobility marked by exceptionality, they encounter a dishonorable death in the form of prolonged, static, and institutional violence that renders them into perpetual exclusion and invisibility (Nixon, 2011). Racial capitalism has employed necropower to become a methodical force that penetrates and lingers in the

urban spaces of Filipino IMWs. Beyond mere survival, it pushes their lives to its most diminished form for the maximization of their labor for capital accumulation.

Haunted/Hunted House

Filipino IMWs live in Dutch settlements governed by fear, exploitation, and constant uncertainty. The home, which is supposed to be a sanctuary and a basic human need, has been constantly denied and a site for potential danger due to their status. In the Netherlands, individuals without a residence permit do technically have the right to rent accommodation, but there are significant limitations. For instance, they are barred from renting a house without housing permits which are often needed for certain types of social housing or regulated rental properties. Some landlords also ask for proof of income for rental agreements that many irregular migrants struggle to secure due to the informality of their work. This often forces them into more precarious situations such as subletting from a main tenant. The lack of formal agreements and documentation in their housing further exacerbates their vulnerabilities. Angel noted that the primary challenge for undocumented individuals is securing stable housing:

> *"The biggest struggle is finding a place to live; work ranks second. Work is easier because there's a network that keeps going. But finding a place to live, you can't just rely on networks. Sometimes it takes a year. Housing is a huge problem for the undocumented. Sometimes the landlord gives you only three months, so you end up sleeping on a friend's sofa."*

While some Filipino IMWs manage to secure decent housing, others endure exorbitant, overcrowded, and dehumanizing living environments. Many turn to a practice known as a "*black contract*" which refers to informal and often exploitative rental agreements that undocumented migrants enter to save money by distributing rent among themselves and to avoid detection by authorities through informal living arrangements. These agreements typically involve expensive rents for substandard accommodations. Migrante Utrecht noted that these homes, which might collectively cost between EUR 2,000 to 2,500, are often shared by six to eight people. To create a semblance of privacy, tenants even resort to putting up makeshift dividers. Privacy is a luxury they cannot afford. Even the most basic spaces like living rooms and kitchens are shared among multiple tenants limiting their personal space and dignities. Cecile illustrated the severe overcrowding and lack of privacy for Filipino IMWs in some Amsterdam housing situations.

> *"In Amsterdam, a few years ago, there's a house where five people lived in a single living room. It's like a hospital. There was no privacy, and the house had only one bedroom. The couple staying in the bedroom pays EUR 700. The five others only have curtains for privacy. Their cabinets are beside their beds. They each paid EUR 200. Although the kitchen has a door, half of the living room also serves as the dining area."*

This exploitation extends beyond financial abuse and includes the skewed power dynamics between Filipino IMWs and their landlords. For some, they had to deal with aggressive landlords who exploit

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their position of power to intimidate and abuse irregular tenants. Migrante Amsterdam shared the story of another Filipino IMW, Julia (a pseudonym), who has been staying in the Netherlands undocumented for 30 years. She and her 7-year-old child were evicted by their landlord in the middle of the night without recourse or explanation. As Migrante explained: *"They were kicked out for no reason at all. The landlord just showed up and maybe he was in a bad mood. Since they are undocumented, they were too scared to fight back."*

Even after securing a home, Filipino IMWs face constant threat of police raids and surveillance. Salvacion's description of the anxiety she feels when *"anytime someone knocks"* captures the pervasive worry of a life on constant alert even at the confines of their houses. She recounts a distressing incident where the police conducted an inspection just a week after their apartment was robbed. She suspected that the thief, who had access to their details, may have reported them and other undocumented individuals to the authorities:

> *"The place we were staying at, my aunt's house, was knocked on at 8 in the morning. We ignored it because my aunt was sleeping and told us to ignore it. Others suggested it might be preachers. The doorbell rang every 20 minutes until 11 o'clock. When my aunt finally opened the window, the police were outside and called to her. We had trained my aunt to say that they couldn't enter without a warrant. They asked why, and she felt like they knew she was hiding undocumented people. She refused to let them in without a warrant. We managed to escape through the back door, which led to a storage room. My aunt almost passed out. I said to myself then that it wasn't my time yet to be sent home."*

Cecile's experience encapsulates the profound sense of dislocation and hypervigilance that defines the lives of Filipino IMWs. In her mental map, Cecile conveyed this sense of impermanence vividly. Since 2005, she has lived in 21 different places, illustrating her experience by drawing numbered boxes rather than actual houses. This represents the transient nature of her connection to any place she has called home (see Figure 4). She recounted a particular incident of policing in one of these houses that made her move out:

> *"One time, I was alone in the house at night. I saw lights outside and thought they were firefighters. I didn't turn on any lights in the house to stay hidden. When they knocked, I immediately crawled from the living room to my bedroom. I had a large suitcase that I hid in. I fit inside, zipped it up, and hoped they wouldn't find me. If they knocked, I knew they could enter, but not without a court order. They left a note saying they would check the house the following day because illegal drugs were being sold on our street. I spent the whole night in the bag. The next day, I went to my friends to cool down. Then, after a few days, I started looking for a new place and moved out immediately. Whatever's left in the house, I did not go back to get it."*

Even when Filipino IMWs are not involved, the conditions of the neighborhood they reside also adds another layer of vulnerability of being swept up in broader police actions. Moreover, this is not just a

story of someone going to the extreme lengths they must go to avoid detection, but it is also reflective of the intense psychological distress they endure even at home.
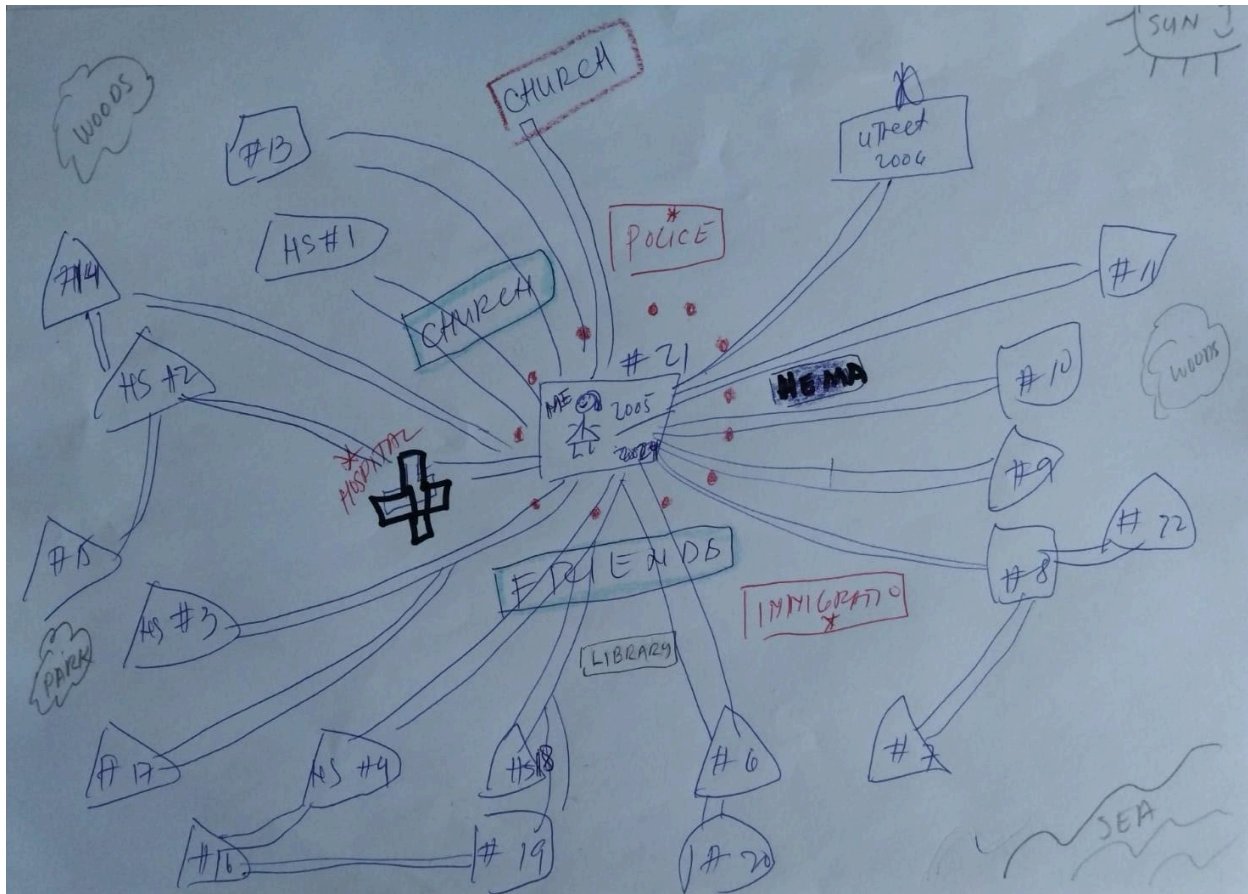

Figure 4. Cecile's Mental Map

Angel's narrative also illustrates the hazardous living conditions Filipino IMWs endure. She shared her experience of living in a house for 13 years with several housemates, including her sibling, all of whom were undocumented. Once the police suspect a house of sheltering irregular migrants, it becomes marked and a target for future inspections. Her story highlights a specific incident involving an elderly housemate who was hospitalized after a bicycle accident. When the police came to investigate her roommates' whereabouts, they questioned Angel about her identity and residency:

> "I told them she lived here, but I didn't know her personally. I told them I didn't know the other people living here. I also provided the owner's information. But I was terrified, trembling with fear. I was worried they would ask for my ID. My child and sibling were both undocumented too. They didn't find any passports. I knew they would keep coming back to this house. So we decided to leave. I found a new place, but by then, I was paying for two houses because I was on a black contract here. My housemates were single, so it wasn't as dangerous for them, but for the three of us, it was."

Driven by fear, even the act of reclaiming personal belongings from that home became a desperate high-stake operation carried out in the cover of the darkness to avoid detection. As Angel recounted: *"Every night, we would go back to get our things because the others in the house said the police were watching it. Out of fear, I was able to carry the refrigerator and the washing machine myself."* They would go home around midnight to get their belongings but due to police presence they could not get close to the premises. To avoid drawing attention, they resorted to discreetly moving their belongings one trash bag at a time. *"One of our housemates started putting our things in garbage bags and tossing them in the trash so we could collect them later. We looked like Christmas trees with all the bags hanging off us. It was incredibly stressful,"* she added. Filipino IMWs dealing with the looming threat of eviction always prepare themselves to flee and uproot their lives at a moment's notice. Ivana shared about how minimizing possessions simplifies the process of relocating. With this, they can move quickly and the logistical stress of packing and transporting items would be more manageable. *"I advise people (Filipino IMWs) not to have too many belongings because you'll end up moving all the time."*

These police visits and surveillance instilled a profound psychological stress on Filipino IMWs that has impacted their everyday habits and be on constant alert. Sky explains: *"The fear of surveillance is something deeply ingrained in us, stemming from all the experiences of Filipino IMWs."* In response, Angel shared that they have developed certain practices just to keep hidden and safe:

> *"After that incident, even hearing police sirens or seeing their lights makes me panic. I developed trauma from it. Even the slightest noise makes my heart race. We always keep one light off in front to make it look like no one is home. Every time before we leave, we peek outside first and then quickly run. Also, I have a key ready in my bag for the storage room. If the police come, they would ask first of the search warrant. This gives me time to hide."*

Similarly, Salvacion discussed how heightened vigilance has become a way of life:

> *"When the doorbell rings, I think it's the police. We have a code with our cousins and friends—three rings mean someone we know is visiting. One ring means it's an outsider. I still check the window when the doorbell rings."*

Policing has become so invasive that Filipino IMWs adopt various strategies such as wearing a disguise and minimizing their existence (Madsen, 2004). As Angel shared: *"When the police came looking for me, they described me as blonde. I even dyed my hair brown to avoid being recognized."* Additionally, social gatherings are approached with caution. As Paolo said: *"I have a lot of rules—minimize noise during parties, keep windows closed to avoid prying eyes. You can't predict what neighbors might think or report."* In some other cases, the presence of documented individuals within the settlements of Filipino IMWs serves as a protective measure to mitigate suspicion. As Paolo explained: *"It's fine to have many*

people around if some of them have papers. Those without papers just stay unofficially. The documented individuals help cover for the undocumented ones.”

To keep a roof on their heads, Filipino IMWs hinge on informal networks and meticulously planned strategies. Their accounts revealed this tactic of *"cooling off"* where they temporarily relocate which can involve staying with friends or renting another space until they are certain that their original residence is no longer under surveillance. Ivana's reliance on a friend for temporary shelter after a police encounter highlights the critical role of community support:

“I stayed with a friend who was taking care of their employer's house. It was crucial to have that temporary refuge. We would also hang out at McDonald's, asking Filipino acquaintances if they knew of any available houses.”

Policing extends beyond external forces even to the people within the household. Filipino IMWs face a fragile trust with their housemates adding to their insecurity. Sky articulated this risk: *“The hardest part is when fellow Filipinos, especially those who are documented, threaten you.”* Trust is a scarce and highly valued commodity in the Filipino IMWs already precarious situation. Angel shared another experience that further elaborates on this. *“I took in a documented friend. They lived here but didn't want to pay their share. Then, they threatened to call the police on us. I was evicted because I had no papers.”* This mistrust fosters a hostile environment where even personal relationships at home can become a source of risk.

The constant displacement has instilled a deep sense of dislocation and rootedness among the Filipino IMW community that is evident even in their everyday interactions. As Salvacion shared, *“You will learn how to make white lies. If someone asks your address, you would not just give it to them.”* As noted by Migrante Den Haag, Filipino IMWs often use public transportation routes as a proxy for an address which are either unavailable or too risky to use: *“It's amusing because the conversation among the undocumented about where they live often revolves around which tram or bus line they use. For example, when asked where they live, they might say, ‘Tram 1. Bus 6.’”*

Filipino IMWs have been systematically isolated and segregated from formal housing options, facing discrimination that bars them from accessing quality and affordable housing (Melamed, 2015). In Dutch cities, where housing is an overstretched resource, they are relegated to leftover spaces and remain exploited for profit (Fluri et al., 2022; Fields & Raymond, 2021). The exclusion of Filipino IMWs from the formal housing market has given rise to an informal housing economy, where private landlords exploit their precarious status. These landlords profit from the migrants' lack of options, further deepening their financial and social insecurity. Compounded by their status, they are vulnerable to constant dislocation and dispossession by various agents of necropower, including the state, their landlords, and even those who hold regular status. These conditions create an urban necropolis within their domestic spaces, where death looms primarily from structural exclusion from a space that could offer rest and social reproduction, and the constant fear that it could be taken away

(Galtung, 1969). The physical and psychological strain they experience from policing and bordering has transformed each unexpected knock and every unfamiliar doorbell into a source of fear, making each house uninhabitable—a form of institutional and slow violence they must endure every day (Nixon, 2011). Being stripped of their right to homes has exposed them to the constant threat of displacement and uprooting, leaving them never fully integrated into the biopolis nor entirely excluded from it (Agamben, 1998).

Work Behind Closed Doors

Filipino IMWs in the Netherlands navigate an informal, racialized, and gendered labor market that operates beyond the reach of regulation and legal protection. Working within private domestic spaces, their challenges ranging from exploitative wages and long hours to health risks, lack of social security, and erosion of self-worth remain behind closed doors. As an undocumented migrant, they are not legally allowed to work. A lot of people work in the informal labour market, however in theory, Dutch labour law is still applicable, which means that rules about minimum wages, payment during illness, and days off should be respected. However, as Migrante Den Haag noted, *"As an undocumented migrant, you face greater risk for exploitation. Moreover, domestic work is not officially recognized as work, making it highly susceptible to exploitation. It's treated merely as household chores."*

Filipino IMWs fill a segment of the Dutch labor market, primarily in domestic service sectors which includes cleaning, caregiving, childcare, petsitting, and cooking, among others. The workplaces of Filipino IMWs span a variety of private and commercial residential settings including houses, flats, bed and breakfast hotels, and even houseboats. Despite the low status often associated with these jobs, there is a consistently high demand for Filipino workers. Migrante Amsterdam attributes this demand to their English proficiency and cultural stereotypes that cast them as *"hardworking, diligent and agreeable"*. Some also points out the meticulous attention Filipinos put into cleaning, which is often referred to as *"kudkod"* (or "scraping"). Hannah illustrates this: *"Sometimes, even if I don't need to do it, like cleaning the balcony where there are leaves, I'll clean it up so that the employer will be impressed when they see it's spotless."* Many Filipino IMWs have also had an experience in domestic work in other countries that gives them leverage on the experience of carrying out these works more efficiently.

Moreover, Filipino IMWs are also the cheaper option compared to professional cleaning services. When asked about how the Dutch perceive Filipino cleaners, Migrante Den Haag responded, *"The Dutch are happy because it's cheap. The work is thorough, and they never complain."* A quick look at online cleaning services reveals that the cost of deep cleaning a small apartment (50-80 sqm) by a professional cleaner can range from €32 to €45 per hour for 4-8 hours of work (Urban People Cleaning NL, Gleaming Company NL, Mr Fix NL). Other companies, such as House Cleaners NL, adjust their rates based on factors like the property's size, condition, and location, with deep cleans starting at a minimum of €800. In contrast, Filipino IMWs offer their services at a fraction of this cost, earning higher hourly rates ranging from €15 to €20, without additional charges for transport or VAT, and they perform extra tasks like window cleaning or scrubbing floors which are services that

typically incur extra fees with professional cleaners but at no additional charge. For regular cleaning, Filipino IMWs charge the same rate whether working in rural areas with lower demand or in urban centers like Amsterdam and Rotterdam, despite the higher living costs of their clients.

Domestic work has also embedded gendered expectations which is largely perceived in the Netherlands as suitable only for women. Angel's observation that men face difficulties in securing work by themselves because domestic work is seen as *"women's work"*: *"It's hard for men to find work here because it's cleaning. It's okay if you have a female partner. They prefer women."* In addition to domestic work, Filipino IMWs also fill part-time roles in bustling areas like Scheveningen, a popular beach destination. Here, the seasonal demand for extra labor in restaurants and tourist shops provides temporary opportunities for flexible work. Migrante Den Haag describes this as an *"open operation"* where local government awareness of these practices does not necessarily translate to enforcement.

Although job opportunities for Filipino IMWs exist, securing work often depends on a referral system. Paolo reflected that this reliance on connections makes the initial phase of working in the Netherlands particularly challenging for those without established social capital or networks:

> *"The first few months were really hard because it was a new life. Square one. Work-wise, it was difficult because I didn't know anyone. I had to find networks. You have no friends, no acquaintances. How do you increase your work? But as time goes on, people start to know me, and they recommend me to their friends."*

These jobs Filipino IMWs engage with are within the landscape of what they refer to as "black jobs" which are informal or illegal employment that operates outside the bounds of tax payments, pension benefits, and legal protections that help minimize their visibility to authorities. White jobs in contrast are types of work which are documented and taxed, providing some degree of security but also subject to stricter regulation and lower take home pay. Angel described the advantage of working in black jobs: *"The benefit of not having papers is that we can ask for a higher salary because we're not paying taxes."* Karen, however, highlights the irony many face balancing immediate financial gains with the lack of legal status: *"Some people have papers but no money. Others have money but no papers."*

Due to working with 10-20 houses per week, Filipino IMWs could reach €2000 to €2500 per month which is roughly 20% or higher than the minimum wage in the Netherlands, this income does not compensate for the lack of security and benefits. Salvacion reflected on this, saying, *"We can ask for our salary, in my experience. Sometimes I even add to it because they're not paying for my pension. We're really at a loss."* The absence of social security, insurance, or health services is another significant concern, as Sky pointed out: *"There's no insurance or health service, but we need money for the Philippines. What if we can't work? What about our family?"* This variability in wages is partly due to their undocumented status and the nature of domestic work which is not a recognized work in the Netherlands which limits their ability to negotiate better wages or benefits. Additionally, the informal nature of black jobs means that Filipino IMWs are paid in cash, which poses its own set of

vulnerabilities. As Angel noted, *"Since undocumented workers don't have bank accounts, they receive cash or 'black money'. But this is precarious because it's prone to loss, theft, and if the police catch them, they won't recover any hidden money."* The absence of formal employment records also means workers have no recourse if they are underpaid, mistreated, or suddenly lose their jobs. Jannette further explained, *"All your work is under the table."*

Despite the informal and concealed nature of domestic work, Filipino IMWs also reveal certain vulnerabilities and could still be exposed to policing and threats of deportation. Cecile highlighted the risks associated with domestic work:

> *"We also face the risk that if something goes missing, we will be blamed. We had an experience where a ring went missing, supposedly from the grandmother. It was just misplaced, but the worker was reported, arrested, and deported. When she was called in, the employer and police were already there, and she wasn't given a chance to explain. She had a family relying on her in the Philippines. If your employer reports you or you're caught by the authorities, you go straight from the police station to immigration jail, and then your papers are processed for deportation."*

Migrante Utrecht recounted another instance when cleaners are vulnerable to policing even at workplace and their employers cant do anything about it:

> *"An undocumented worker went to the house she was supposed to clean. Because she had the key, she simply opened the door. A neighbor who saw her reported her. Maybe a racist. Then the police came. They called the employer, who said that the worker was just cleaning for her. The worker admitted that she was undocumented. The police said, 'We don't handle this, you should be with the immigration police.' Initially, we thought she was just taken to the police station, but when we called, she was already at immigration."*

The employer's response, while acknowledging the worker's role, does not necessarily protect her from legal repercussions. Employers might be aware of the worker's status but often lack the means or willingness to provide assistance in legal matters, leaving workers exposed at the mercy of both their employers and the general public. Salvacion expressed her frustrations about this: *"I'm so conflicted. Why would they gave us a key, then treated us like criminals. Criminals who are let into the house?"*

The absence of standardized work arrangements leaves these workers vulnerable to inconsistent pay and unpredictable work hours. Employers often exploit the undocumented status of Filipino IMWs, using the threat of deportation as leverage to suppress wages and impose unreasonable work conditions. Migrante Den Haag highlighted that this dynamic is reinforced by the workers' limited ability to negotiate, as fear and lack of legal protection often force them to accept substandard pay and rushed work conditions:

> *"Let's say €20 is the hourly wage, and you have to finish the work in 5 hours. If there's extra work that really needs to be done, and you need more time, some kind employers will allow it. But it's*

hit or miss. There are also situations where they say you have 4 hours, and you have to get everything done in those 4 hours, even if the pay is low. But in all these cases, if undocumented workers aren't aware that they can assert their pay, they won't do it. Even if the employer knows the situation, they won't give more if it's not asked for. If you don't speak up, they won't give it to you. They'll just shrug. They're not really ignorant of workers' rights or how not to discriminate, but if you don't show that you know the law or that you can negotiate, they won't do anything either."

Due to the instability of their work, which often relies on informal and verbal agreements, Filipino IMWs face the constant threat of sudden income loss. In response, they have developed a grueling work routine where they juggle multiple jobs across different locations within a single day. Most of them attend to three to five different homes each day and ranges from 10 to 20 houses weekly on a rotational basis. Their lives often revolve around work, with many IMWs on-call seven days a week, ready to accept jobs whenever they arise. Paolo spoke about the desperation that drives them to accept any available job, regardless of how low-paying or difficult it might be:

"In the beginning, whenever work was available, I grabbed it immediately. What mattered was having an income. Some would pay just €11 per hour. You don't think about how hard the job is or how low the pay is. On weekends, I would help with picking up balikbayan boxes. I'd take extra work in gardening, painting—anything."

There is also a clear awareness among Filipino IMWs of the temporary nature of job demand, particularly during the *"crisis season"* in the summer months when employers go on vacation, often staggered across cities for up to six weeks. Cecile explained that during this period, the *"no work, no pay"* system leaves these workers with no income, forcing them to save rigorously and work double time beforehand: *"During this time, we start saving up for rent, bills, and food."* The lack of safety nets exacerbates this situation, especially during emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. Salvacion recounted: *"COVID-19 was extreme for work. I didn't expect its effects. The two-month lockdown meant no work, and I felt lost during that time. Because of the 'no work, no pay' system, we were severely affected."*

The physical and mental toll for Filipino IMWs of long working hours cannot be overstated especially in a workplace that demands repetitive and strenuous activities. The intense work schedule, coupled with inadequate rest and constant physical strain, has severe health impacts on Filipino IMWs. This grueling routine also disrupts their work-life balance, leaving little time for personal life or rest. Cecile expressed the exhaustion this lifestyle causes: *"I have no rest. It's rare to get a break on weekends. My daily routine is work, home, eat, sleep."* Worse, when Filipino IMWs fall ill, there are no sick leaves or health coverage to rely on. As Cecile shared: *"If you're sick, you don't get paid. If they're sick, you also lose income. But you still have to work. It's scarier to go home without any savings. It's a hand-to-mouth existence."* Hannah highlighted the precarious situation of Filipino IMWs when it comes to accessing healthcare services:

"By law, everyone should have access [to healthcare], but in practice, when you go to the hospital without an ID or residency card, in principle they're not allowed to turn you away, but what happens on the ground is that they tell you to leave."

Furthermore, the phenomenon of deprofessionalization is a reality for many Filipino IMWs where individuals with professional backgrounds back home find themselves doing manual labor removed from their previous careers. Karen, a former Banking and Finance major, reflected on her experience:

"Look at me now, I'm scraping floors. If I worked in a bank, I would only earn PHP 15,000 a month. Now, I earn EUR 15 per hour. In a day, I can work 10 hours, sometimes straight through the entire week. When I first arrived here, I was really crying because it was hard to accept that this was all the work I had. Most of us here are former teachers, former construction operators, now just cleaning. It's hard at first; nothing is easy. Honestly, I didn't even know how to clean properly before. Cleaning here is different from back home; here, you really have to scrub. It's hard at first, but you get used to it."

For the higher pay, they sacrificed their professional identity and some of them even questioned their self worth.

Racial capitalism has consigned Filipino IMWs to cheap, informal, insecure, and precarious workplaces to sustain the spaces and lifestyles of Dutch professionals and expatriates, literally and metaphorically scraping the city clean to keep it functional for accumulation and life (Banerjee, 2008; Sassen, 2001). The Netherlands and other global cities have reorganized Filipino IMWs into racially marked and hyper-exploitative labor markets where they remain disenfranchised and controllable (Robinson, 2000; Nast, 2011). Not only are they subjugated under a particular stylization of race and gender that entrenches them in peripheral jobs, but their irregular status has also funneled and legitimized their appointments to hidden, slave-like workplaces where their labor can be extremely devalued (Segarra & Prasad, 2024; McAreavey, 2017; Robinson & Santos, 2014). Their workplaces are key arenas of the urban necropolis, where they are exposed to "dirty, dangerous, and difficult/degrading" conditions, stripped of their identities, and deprived of fundamental workers' rights such as proper wage compensation, healthcare, and rest, pushing them into a prolonged state of dying from perpetual injury and illness (Fullin & Reyneri, 2011; Orzeck, 2007; Tyner, 2019). Both the labor and societal position of Filipino IMWs in the Netherlands expose them to dual vulnerabilities, making them highly susceptible to harm and death.

Tiptoeing Around

Filipino IMWs endure varied ways in which their mobility is severely constrained due to their status. Bordering, policing, and exclusion mainly characterize their experience in the public transportation to cycling, navigating public spaces, travelling within Europe, or back to the Philippines. They find

themselves walking in a thread of precarity between the need to move and socialize and the fear of exposure and apprehension. What should be simple commutes, walks, and leisure have become calculated journeys that demands vigilance and caution. Their restricted mobility also extends to the difficult decision of returning to the Philippines, where longing for home conflicts with the need to continue providing for their families and themselves. What should be a simple choice of going back home have become a risky and high-stake decision they has to mean ending their stay in the Netherlands.

The public transportation in the Netherlands, which has undeergone a digital shift, has not only limited the ability of Filipino IMWs to move but also exposed them to heightened surveillance during routine checks. The transition from the old paper-based system to the OV-chipkaart has exacerbated the challenges faced by undocumented migrants in the Netherlands. Unlike the *strippenkaart*, which could be easily purchased and used without personal identification, the OV-chipkaart requires a Dutch address and a bank account for digital credit top-ups. Grace highlighted that this shift to a cashless, digital system has created significant barriers for undocumented workers who lack the legal and financial infrastructure needed to navigate this system and eventually have difficulties in accessing public transportation: *"If you're undocumented, you don't have a bank account. And tickets now mostly require cards; you rarely find places that accept cash. Without a card, you can't buy a ticket, and then you have to worry about the police checking."* Hannah recounted: *"When they started replacing it, there was chaos among the undocumented."* Cecile observed that the heightened surveillance in some cities such as Den Haag adds to the tension:

> *"Security is not the same in Den Haag. The police are more visible there. There are more frequent checks on buses and trams compared to Utrecht. The police can even enter the trams because they're not too crowded. When the tram doors open, they check everyone coming out."*

For many Filipino IMWs bicycles offer an alternative to public transportation and became a common and cost-effective way to get around. However, cycling, which for most of the Dutch society is a mundane daily activity has become an anxiety-driven mode of transport for Filipino IMWs. Migrante Amsterdam noted that undocumented individuals often face fines for minor infractions, such as not having bike lights or using a phone while biking. When stopped, if they cannot provide an ID, authorities will ask for alternative documentation and an address to send the fine. Ivana recounted her partner Cardo's encounter with the police illustrates how this risk. Cardo's use of a bike with a throttle which he installed to make his commute to work easier and faster going from 25km/hr to 45km/hr, became a liability when the police noticed the device and immediately stopped him (See Figure 5):

> *"As soon as he parked his bike, the police were already there, asking him if he knew his bike was illegal. One officer was lenient, but the other was strict and demanded his ID. He was followed to the house where we were staying. As he was entering the stairway and opening the door, they called out to him. While he was unlocking the door, they stopped him. One of the officers was kind, but the other one was tough. The kind one said to let it go because they were in a hurry, but the*

tough one insisted on seeing his ID. So he went inside and got his passport. The police searched the house, and the owner told them Cardo was only there for one night, just staying over."

The encounter left Cardo and Ivana feeling vulnerable, they decided to vacate the property quickly, using their one-month deposit to move out. They packed their belongings and relocated, fearing that the police might return.

Figure 5. Cardo's red bike equipped with a throttle.

For Filipino IMWs, the fear has ingrained a sense of caution and hyper-awareness that govern how they behave and move in public transport, public spaces, and interact with local populations and authorities. They have developed survival practices that are molded through years of visceral fear that dictated self-imposed restrictions and regulations on their mobility further. Salvacion describes how she is in a constant alert when she travels:

"It's hard when you have no documents. Every step you take, you have to think carefully—crossing the street, getting on a bus. You have to follow all the rules. You need to know the bus schedule at dawn. It's dangerous if there's a random control on public transport. If you get caught without checking in, and you don't have a bank account or VSN (Citizen Service Number), they'll forward you to the police."

Cecile highlighted the cautious strategies she employs to minimize the chances of encountering the police or being reported:

"I'd wear a headset so it wouldn't be obvious. If I avoided eye contact, they got more suspicious. When I first started, I tried to avoid them. I would cross the street or turn a corner. If there was an inspector on the bus, I would get off at the next station. For five years, I did that. Even if I checked in, I'd still be nervous, wondering if I made a mistake. It's not advisable for me to wander around the streets. I might get reported to the police, and my record could be in every city. So, it's just home-work-home-work."

Even seemingly mundane activities, like walking in the streets, for Filipino IMWs, become fraught with danger if they result in interactions with law enforcement. The requirement to stay alert, even in situations that are typically associated with relaxation and enjoyment illustrates the relentless nature of the fear that undocumented workers live with. Salvacion added that social activities also require vigilance:

"If you want to party, enjoy nightlife, or go bar-hopping, stay away if there's chaos. Don't gossip, or you might get involved. It's automatic; you protect yourself. If you've chosen this life, you must be careful. You're not allowed to get drunk either. If you're groggy, they'll ask where your ID is."

Furthermore, Filipino IMWs are also restricted to travel outside the Netherlands. The opportunity explore new countries has ben one of the appealing aspects of living in Europe for many Filipino IMWs but given their status, their freedom to move across-country is severely constrained. Migrante Amsterdam explains how traveling within Europe for leisure is a common allure for Filipino IMWs, but still presents risk considering they are crossing borders:

"Filipinos enjoy tours. But traveling is risky for undocumented individuals and you can even be charged with human smuggling if you don't have papers. Even if the tour company is licensed, the passengers' lack of documentation makes it dangerous. It's not always clear-cut; what seems lenient one hour might change the next.

The enforcement of immigration laws can vary dramatically especially upon crossing borders and checkpoints could become a thorough inspection space that will leave undocumented travelers vulnerable to detention or deportation. Paoloexpresses the anxiety of a single misstep such as being caught in a leisure trip that could result in losing his 4-year worth of savings: *"It's hard because you want*

to go somewhere, but you're scared of being sent back. Traveling within Europe means you might not be allowed to return, and you risk losing your savings."

For Filipino IMWs, the decision to go back home to the Philippines is a costly and irreversible decision. When they decided to migrate to the Netherlands, they often see it as a *"one way ticket"* being aware that once they leave the country, they may face permanent exclusion from re-entry that would cut off their primary source for livelihood. There are only three routes remain for their return to the Philippines: voluntary surrender, forcefully removed, or repatriated as a deceased body. Their choices of where to go and how to move are subjected to the nation-state's control and securitization that operates in both state policies and everyday practices of policing and excluson (Brogmann & Hammar, 2020). The weight of this sacrifice is heavy especially for the breadwinners which binds them to being entrapped in the Netherlands making the thought of returning home without a secured future unbearable. This is particularly more painful for many women Filipino IMWs who left their families and children in the Philippines has endured the struggle of long-distance care, maternal separation anxiety, and dissatisfaction with how they fulfill their familial duties. Grace's experience sheds light on the burden of feeling like she has abandoned her family, especially her child:

> *"My youngest had heart surgery because he had a hole in his heart. It's so painful that instead of being the one taking care of him in the hospital, I can't be there. If only I had the right papers, I could just fly home. It's much harder being away from family. Even if I had to eat just sweet potato leaves every day, I'd prefer to live that way, working with my children rather than with someone else's child. I really want to go home, but I haven't saved enough. If only I am documented, I could go home. I'd go now.My kid keeps asking me to come home. When he talked about his surgery, he said, 'I'm not brave because you left me.' He was only two years old when I left. I felt like I was being accused of abandoning him."*

Cecile's account deepens this narrative of sacrifice and loss. After her father's death, she was unable to return home, despite spending nearly half a million pesos on his hospital bills and funeral expenses.

> *"Last year, my father died. My employer felt so sorry for me, being alone when my father died. It's terrible; I hadn't seen him for 19 years. I spent almost half a million on his hospital bills and funeral. How could I go home? What would I pawn or sell? How would I give him a decent burial? I just sent the money instead. It's unfair to me. They were with my father, they held him until his last breath. At the funeral, I was only there through video call. Why does it feel like I'm the only one bearing the responsibility? They think that just because you're abroad, life is easy—just remittances and receipts. Sometimes, I wonder how long I have to sacrifice for my family. Maybe until my children are grown. But it's scary to go home without savings. It's even scarier to grow old without security. It's necessary."*

To return home, Filipino IMWs in the Netherlands are left with only three daunting options: voluntary surrender, forced removal, or death followed by repatriation. The process of terminating the

illegal stay of non-EU nationals within the EU is marked by a strict two-step procedure that involves issuing a *"return decision"* followed by a *"removal decision"* if necessary (European Union, n.d). The first step in the EU's procedure is the issuance of a "return decision," which allows a non-EU national to voluntarily depart within a period of 7 to 30 days. This period is conditional and may be adjusted or denied based on perceived risks, such as the likelihood of fleeing or the potential threat to public safety. If voluntary departure is not feasible or ignored, a "removal decision" is enacted, often involving detention. The detention, though supposedly a last resort, highlights the coercive nature of the EU's immigration enforcement. The system allows for detention up to 6 months in specialized facilities, but the use of prison-like accommodations underlines the punitive aspects of the procedure. Additionally, the imposition of entry bans of up to 5 years illustrates the long-term consequences faced by individuals caught in the cycle of irregular migration.

For some Filipino IMWs, the option of voluntary return is seen as a way out. According to Migrante Amsterdam, OWWA members can access a balikbayan program that provides financial assistance upon returning to the Philippines, offering a around PHP 20,000-30,000 (approximately EUR 300 to EUR 500) intended to help them reintegrate to the Philippines. Additionally, programs like the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Voluntary Return offer further incentives, such as covering the cost of plane tickets and providing financial support to help them start anew:

> *"Through this program, IOM will cover the cost of their plane ticket and provide them with EUR 1,800 per adult and EUR 1,300 per child. This is another way for the state to work with an international body to incentivize reducing the number of undocumented people."*

On the other hand, for those who do not or cannot choose voluntary return, the experience of forced removal can be traumatic. Angel's account of her sister's experience in EU detention exposes the harsh realities that often accompany these legal procedures. Detained with her boyfriend, Angel's sister encountered conditions that were not only restrictive but also dehumanizing. Her narrative brings to light the lack of freedom and basic rights within the detention facilities:

> *"My sister saw what life is like in detention. There were many children there who couldn't go outside. They weren't allowed to go home or leave. There were people of different nationalities. They were given one day to talk to their families.In detention, bras weren't allowed. My sister really lost weight. There was no light. It was like solitary confinement. She only went outside to get some sunlight in the morning. My sister was really traumatized."*

After nearly a week, Angel's sister was temporarily released to collect her belongings. Despite the lack of supervision, she chose not to escape, fearing that she was being secretly watched:

> *"I told her to escape since no one was following, but she said she was scared because maybe someone was secretly tailing her. She said not to run away because if you get caught again, you'll end up in prison. But she didn't escape and instead returned to the Philippines because she was already*

scared. For her boyfriend, even up to the point of boarding the plane, they were guarded. They were supposed to be separated. Then, when they got their passports back, there was a stamp on them—they were banned from Europe for 5 years."

Even in death, Filipino IMWs remain ensnared by the same systems of immobility. The capital they generated through years of labor isn't enough to guarantee a dignified end or a final return home. One such case involved a woman who had been undocumented for 25 years and passed away from cancer. Her dying wish was to have her body sent back to the Philippines, but this proved nearly impossible. The cost of fulfilling this was —almost EUR 15,000 including fees for the funeral home and storage at Schiphol airport. Despite some assistance from OWWA and the Philippine embassy, most of the burden fell on community and non-governmental organizations, who stepped in to cover the expenses. *"Three organizations worked together to fulfill her wish, But to say that the embassy helped? That was all on us. So, are they really only there for the paperwork?"*

The biopolitical measures designed to streamline and secure the lives of Dutch citizens have consequently spelled necropolitical consequences on Filipino IMWs. In this biopolitical regime, the state's "seemingly infinite creativity" in executing racialized violence manifests through structural forms of social control that evolve to maintain order (Melamed, 2015). The broader policing and securitization of these spaces have further extended the bordering of Filipino IMWs from everyday spaces such as streets, transportation modes and hubs, public spaces, neighboring countries, and even their home countries (Campos-Delgado, 2016; Jones & Johnson, 2016). This hyper-visibility traps them in a life of perpetual panic, invisibility, and immobility, forcing them to the peripheries of society (Amer & Leung, 2023). Within these spaces, they remain irregular even beyond their work hours, excluded from the usual avenues of rest and social reproduction due to a pervasive set of institutional exclusions (Robinson & Santos, 2014).

Given this, Filipino IMWs are not just physically curtailed for their mobility, but the constant fear and anxiety have restructured their beings affecting how they police their bodies, thoughts, behaviors, and emotions (Galtung, 1969). The internal policing of the body, being constantly aware of its decay, of the life force slowly diminishing, reflects a profound form of death that is dehumanizing and devaluing (Alves, 2013; Ndjio, 2006). As Jones and Johnson (2016) suggest, the militarization of borders and its expansion into even the most microgeographical spaces further manufactures an asphyxiating space for Filipino IMWs. They adhere to an exhausting set of self-imposed rules designed to help them blend in or reduce their presence to the bare minimum. Hiding in plain sight might initially seem as a clever and creative survival strategy to circumvent the cruelty of everyday bordering but this is less about the tactics but more about the gradual erosion of their freedom and agency to move. It has become a strategy born out of their violent separation form social relations, further alienating them and rendering as 'pauperized army of labor' (Marx, 1867). Living within these states of exception, Filipino IMWs are disconnected from the very fabric of life eroding their potential for collective life and further rending them into mere manageable bodies for capital accumulation (Melamed, 2015). Moreover, the active neglect and abandonment by the Philippine government, coupled with the Netherlands' apathy

towards Filipino IMWs, reflects a deliberate form of brutality. This inaction, which leaves individuals in a state of dehumanization, is a form of violence that is as destructive and lethal as more overt acts of aggression (Davies, et al., 2017). By failing to address the vulnerabilities of these workers, both governments contribute to a system that strips them of their dignity and humanity, effectively condemning them to a slow and insidious form of suffering.

Subversion of Urban Necropolis

Filipino IMWs subvert the urban necropolis by actively reshaping the spaces they inhabit, infusing them with life and purpose despite facing exploitative conditions. Their daily survival practices are both acts of resilience and subtle defiance, transforming spaces of alienation into expressions of life and agency. This subversion unfolds in two primary ways: first, through the continuous flow of remittances back to the Philippines, sustaining families and communities; and second, through the renegotiation of spaces within the Dutch urban landscape, where they carve out environments for both survival and belonging.

First, Filipino IMWs' enable life for themselves and their families back in the Philippines by recognizing their roles as overseas workers and remitting capital such as remittances, property investments, social security insurance and savings into the home necropolis. The maintenance of social ties and the aspiration for a future back home that is constantly severed and threatened by necropower are central motivations for many to keep themselves alive. A significant aspect of their engagement with their home country is the consistent financial support they provide to family members. This sense of responsibility is evident in their regular remittances, ranging from EUR 100 to EUR 1000, which cover various expenses such as internet, electricity, water bills, and educational costs for their families (Siruno et al., 2022). Similarly, investments in property and education reflect their long-term vision. Karen's account highlights this impact: *"We've managed to build a house. Our house used to be wooden, but now it's concrete."* Cecile adds a on her financial commitment with her children: *"My youngest just graduated last month. I don't want my children to depend on me. I gave my life for you; eventually, it will be your turn. Once my obligation is over, it's up to you to manage your lives."*

Social security benefits, insurance policies, and retirement plans are also crucial for many irregular migrants. They contribute to social security schemes both in their host country and in the Philippines, ensuring financial stability upon their return. Ivana, for example, shared her strategy: *"I continuously contribute to the government insurances in the Philippines. I also save 10% to 20% of my income for the future because you never know what might happen."* For some, retirement involves returning to rural areas in the Philippines and adopting a simpler lifestyle. As Felisa highlighted: *"I want to retire in the countryside and do some farming. It's about finding joy in a simpler life."*

Apart from this, Filipino IMWs have skillfully renegotiated their everyday spaces of violence, precarity, and exclusion within the Dutch urban landscape, gradually transforming these spaces into ones of community, advocacy, and resilience. Through strategies such as redefining housing, fostering trust in

workplaces, navigating mobility barriers, and organizing and mobilizing for campaigns, IMWs create and sustain a life where the oppressive forces of capital are temporarily suspended.

For Filipino IMWs, housing transcends the notion of mere shelter; it becomes a vital social hub that fosters emotional and practical support. As Paolo described , *"It feels really good to have support at home even though we're far from our families. The house also helps with homesickness. We're like family here. We feel comfortable with each other."* Cecile also highlighted how the pracarious homes have served as safe and surrogate spaces where they can connect, celebrate, and mitigate the isolation while rehearsing the life back home:

> *"For us, a house is also a place for gatherings. Normally, for birthdays, New Year, and other celebrations, we get together at home. We don't party at places where there are only undocumented workers. We prefer parties at places with documented individuals because if there's a complaint, at least someone with papers will handle it. When invited, we just have a casual get-together with food and conversation. If there's a karaoke machine, we use it. If we have 20 guests, we send out notices saying 'There's a party at our place; you're welcome to join."*

Filipino IMWs have also developed to build trust, relationships, and autonomy within their workplaces increasing their visibility in these spaces. They have mostly nurtured a meaningful relationship with their employers and take on roles beyond becoming a labor but also humanize them into a trusted employee, friend, and company. For instance, the notion of trust extends beyond fair pay and is embodied in the physical symbols of trust, such as house keys. Migrante Den Haag explains this dynamic of recognition that further reduces the slave-like treatment of Filipino IMWs particularly engaged in domestic work as slaves and servants.

> *"Typically, a private person in the Netherlands has five keys: one for the neighbor, one for a sibling, one for a best friend, one for themselves, and one for the house cleaner or helper. Undocumented cleaners in the Netherlands take pride in being part of a Dutch person's close circle if they hold a key. Sometimes, they even compare how many keys they have with their fellow Filipinos."*

In her mental map, Salvacion highlights the key as a symbol of mutual trust between her and her employers (see Figure 6). She conveys her sense of fulfillment through the positive relationships she has developed with her employers and how genuine appreciation from them enhances her work environment, making it feel safer and more welcoming.

> *For me, the key symbolizes my work. I truly cherish my job and invest my heart into it because I care deeply about what I do. When I clean a house, it feels like I am also cleaning my own home. As I finish my work at one place, I return the key to the employer. They often invite me for coffee, as they want to say goodbye properly and have a farewell with me.*

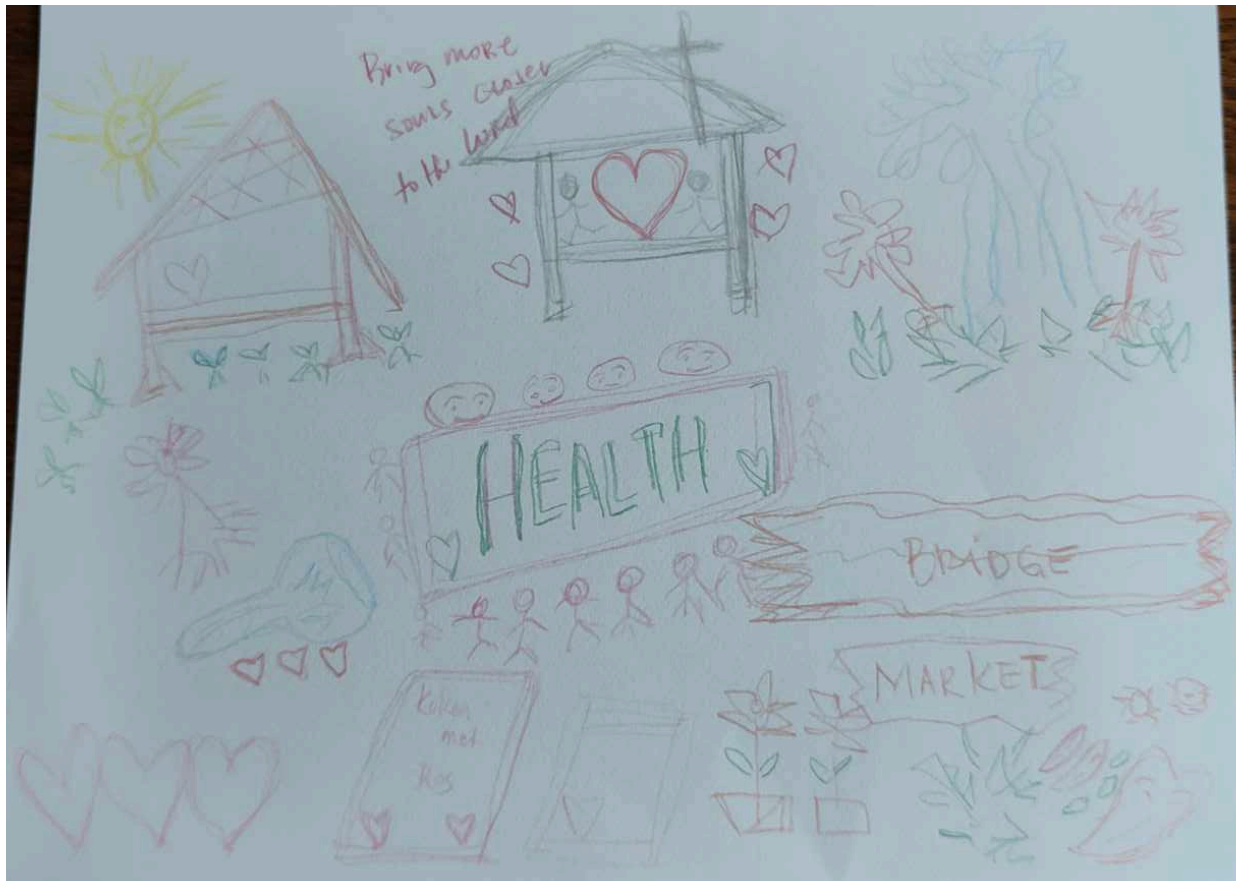Filipino IMWs carry a certain pride in their work that reflects a deeper connection to their duties.

Figure 6. Salvacion's Mental Map.

There is also an increasing shared understanding among Filipino IMWs of the importance of fair compensation and support in their work environments. Paolo described how they practice the value of fair earnings and the collaborative efforts to avoid exploitation:

> *"I helped Lorna (pseudonym of another Filipino IMW) back then who was an undocumented domestic helper from Poland. I understand the feeling of being jobless and having no one to turn to. We look for work where the earnings are shared fairly—50-50 or 40-60."*

Advocacy work also helps to document and address abuses in workplaces. Hannah notes the contributions of Fairwork, an organization that supports trafficking survivors and undocumented workers:

> *"Fairwork consists of volunteers who are trafficking survivors. There's a Filipino core group there. We become coordinators for trafficking victims including Filipinos. Fairwork's role is mostly advocacy, helping migrant workers abused by employers. We use their materials to assist workers*

in documenting their situations, such as hours worked and wages paid, to support complaints if needed (See Figure 7)."

Figure 7. Hannah showing her Fairwork's work log.

Filipino IMWs also use support organizations and strategic mechanisms to overcome barriers to mobility. For instance, Migrante has facilitated access to the Dutch public transport system by registering addresses in Amsterdam, allowing undocumented workers to obtain the necessary OV Chipkaart. Felisa also shared the organized group trips that cater to Filipino IMWs:

> *"There are organizations here that arrange tours. Groups like Kabalikat at Kapamilya [Community and Family] organize trips for around 100 passengers, 3 days and 2 nights, for*

EUR 650. You reserve with EUR 100 and they plan the tour 6 months in advance. The driver only goes to the border and avoids controls. There's some luck involved, and the driver interacts with immigration officers. If you're discreet and just keep the windows open, they let you through. It's a fun experience and cost-effective since you travel together."

The initial fear of public places has also diminished for many Filipino IMWs, reflecting a growing sense of agency and empowerment over time. In her mental map, Salvacion, for instance, drew and shared how she begin to feel more connection to the city and imagine a future where they are fully integrated into society. In illustrating her perception of the city, her mental map revealed a shift from state of fear and alienation to one of belonging. Public spaces for her which were areas of risk and uncertainty or reminders of being an outsider, have become symbolic illustration of her growing comfort and familiarity with the city:

"I'm very happy in the city, especially at Erasmus Bridge, which is quite famous. Whenever I pass by, I remember one Christmas night when it was raining stars. It was so beautiful that I felt I could shout, 'I am here.' The markets here in the Netherlands are also beautiful. When I go to the market, I keep coming back because of the flowers. They're so beautiful. There are also fruits and fish, and that's where I always go. Despite being miles away from the Philippines, I felt deeply touched. It made me appreciate the small places and moments in my life. Now, I'm not afraid in public places. I'll be very happy to share my story when I have papers and can wave my passport at Schiphol."

Filipino IMWs have also navigated bureaucratic and systemic barriers by embedding themselves in various Dutch-based organizations. These accounts reveal how IMWs utilize networks and organizations to overcome obstacles related to healthcare, legal aid, and education, showcasing practical solutions for mobility and community support. For example, *Dokters van de Wereld* (Doctors of the World) has established a system that enables undocumented individuals to access healthcare institutions by registering with their services. This approach is particularly valuable for Filipino IMWs, who often face significant barriers due to their lack of legal documents. The organization's mobile clinics, known as *"zorgbus,"* operate in Amsterdam and The Hague, bringing medical care directly to underserved populations. Stichting Steunpunt Illegalen (STIL) is another key institution for Filipino IMWs, offering a broad range of medical services, including eye tests, dental care, and critical surgeries. Grace's experience highlights the crucial role of accessible healthcare coverage for undocumented migrants. She notes that through CAK Insurance, which partners with hospitals to provide care for uninsurable migrants, she sometimes receives free mammograms and other necessary hospital services. Organizations also play a supportive role in providing educational opportunities for undocumented migrants. Salvacion, for example, received a free education and completed a Bachelor of Science in Global Studies with the support from Foundation Academy in Amsterdam. This tuition-free program helps undocumented migrants improve their qualifications and integrate into their new environment, contributing to their personal and professional development.

Filipino IMWs have increasingly harnessed media visibility, through newspaper and TV interviews, and even research projects, as a tool for amplifying their voices and bringing attention to their plight. By stepping into the spotlight, they are able to gain more recognition, build solidarity, and drive discourse about the situation of Filipino IMWs. Hannah shared her experience and the significance of turning her individual experience into a broader narrative of labor struggle and resistance:

> "When I was interviewed and it was aired on the radio, it felt somewhat insignificant. My friends told me that my story wouldn't be taken seriously unless I came out and made it visible. I needed to show that what was happening was real. I was introduced to Fairwork. I was interviewed and respected by them; they didn't force me to go public until I was ready. I agreed because people said it wouldn't be credible if I stayed silent and hidden. Eventually, a journalist asked if I was ready to come out. I said yes, so they published my story in a newspaper. Fairwork also featured me on TV. This led to continuous exposure and recognition, and my story became a testament of the struggles and survival of modern slavery."

Grace also shared how art, particularly theater, serves as a powerful medium for undocumented migrants to express their challenges and bring attention to their issues. By dramatizing real-life scenarios, their theater group not only raises awareness but also fosters empathy and making abstract or hidden struggles more tangible:

> "We have a theater group that portrays the daily experiences of undocumented individuals. We highlight issues such as being advised to take paracetamol when visiting the doctor, or the difficulty of buying train tickets since undocumented people often don't have a bank account. My husband acts as an employer, and one of our Indonesian companions pretends to have an accident. We have to avoid saying that we work there, because they might get fined. This is what we depict. The feedback is positive because they recognize these issues."

Archiving personal and collective experiences is another critical aspect of Filipino IMWs advocacy efforts. Salvacion shared that they have submitted their stories to the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam where their papers and campaigns are preserved. This archival work by the IISH helps ensure that the experiences of undocumented migrants are documented for future research and public awareness.

Participation in public demonstrations further highlights the active role of IMWs in voicing out their demands and concerns. Cecile recounts her experience in protesting with FNV, a major trade union in the Netherlands:

> "During a demonstration, I was a bit nervous at first. In our demonstration, we were positioned in the middle, surrounded by people with legal papers. When we demonstrate, there are usually

around 2,000-3,000 people. We were protected in the center, and there were also lawyers on standby just in case."

Migrante chapters in the Netherlands and FILMIS emphasize the need for systemic change at both local and national levels, advocating for policies that recognize the rights and contributions of migrants in Dutch society. Central to their campaigns is the ratification of ILO Convention 189, which grants domestic workers the same labor rights as other workers, addressing their vulnerabilities in terms of wages and bargaining power. Additionally, they advocate for the regularization of irregular migrants by creating more accessible pathways to legal status. This effort should encompass a simplified and affordable application process, alongside support services to assist individuals in regularizing their status through long-term and secured permits. Furthermore, policies and practices that criminalize and exclude undocumented migrants, such as the Linking Act, should be reevaluated. Beyond these institutional fixes, the ultimate goal is to address the root causes of migration, enabling Filipino migrant workers to return home by choice, rather than necessity. As Migrant Amsterdam emphasized:

> *"Are you here in the Netherlands to make them Dutch citizens? We see their value more in contributing to the development of the Philippines. That's more important for the revolution back home. We don't see their successful migration as the solution. Their departure is just a symptom of the country's illness. We also have to focus on addressing the root causes of why they leave the Philippines."*

Within the Dutch urban landscape, Filipino IMWs breathe life into their spaces and stories through collective and militant struggle. Salvacion finds a sense of belonging and contentment within these spaces of resistance, reshaping not just their physical spaces but also their encounters with death. She concluded our conversation, *"This is just how life is—just keep fighting. We can't live just with and for ourselves."*

Within the urban necropolis, Filipino IMWs have collectively created and sustained spaces and practices of life that would reclaim their rights, identities, and resources making it possible to live longer and experience the biopolitical conditions in the Netherlands or back home in the Philippines (McIntyre & Nast, 2011). The financial outlets, such as remittances, investments in property, and traditional saving demonstrate their critical role in supporting their communities and families back in their necropolitan origins. Filipino IMWs use their economic resources to ensure an enabling and livable future in the necropolitan spaces of the Philippines. Moreover, Filipino IMWs have engaged in creative and critical acts of personal and relational recognition, community-building, and resistance that extend their lives beyond mere survival and restore some sense of self, agency, and belonging (Siruno et al., 2022). While their life is still ridden with fear, violence, precarity, and exclusion, they resist to be consumed by these limitations and rather cultivate positive conception of their identities and roles in society that would make thriving more manageable.

Through the active renegotiation of spaces such as their homes, workplaces, and public spaces, Filipino IMWs make significant biopolitical interventions against alienation, dispossession, and invisibilization that rendered them into the depths of the urban necropolis. While racial capitalism seeks to reduce Filipino IMWS to mere labor and commodities, isolating them into units of devaluation and powerlessness, the collective and relational subversion of Filipino IMWs with their everyday geographies, communities, and homeland creates a counter-space that transforms the urban necropolis into a necro(bio)polis. The conceptualization of these experiences as a part of an urban necro(bio)polis allows the understanding that these signs of life does not fully negate their experiences of fear, exclusion, and spatial and social death, nor does it automatically integrate them into Dutch society or fully acknowledge their humanity. Rather, it illustrates their resolve and agency to rupture the workings of necropower and struggle amidst despair and death.

Amsterdam, Netherlands (2023)

CONCLUSION

Examining the geonarratives of Filipino IMWs' urban experiences and spaces through the lens of racial capitalism and necropolitics yields three distinctive conceptual contributions: the emergence of an urban necropolis, the deadly socio-economic manifestations of racial capitalism, and the biopolitical interventions of necropolitan migrants. These findings not only enhance the understanding and grounding of these concepts but also bridge them to urban and migration studies. The urban necropolis for Filipino IMWs emerges through multi-scalar processes shaped by racial capitalism through forced displacement from their necropolitan countries, precarious migration marked by bordering and exploitation, and dispossession and invisibilization of IMWs in their everyday geographies in the biopolitan cities. In the urban necropolis, death for Filipino IMWs manifests in their asphyxiating and shadowed everyday geographies of homes, workplaces, public spaces, and mobilities that are fraught with physical and psychological harm, social exclusion and economic deprivation, policing and surveillance, and state neglect. Moreover, urban necropolis is not a fixed spatial entity but a dynamic and hidden socio-spatial condition engineered by racial capitalism to commodify and discipline not just their labor power but their entire being. Filipino IMWs, however, respond through biopolitical acts of resistance such as personal and relational recognition of their values and collective renegotiation of their spaces that breathe life to the urban necropolis. This dynamic challenges the static notion of the urban necropolis and foregrounds the constant tug-of-war between life and death, creating a spatial distinction of necro(bio)polis where spaces of death are renegotiated into sites of hope and life.

I conclude this thesis with a call for more militant and mass-oriented urban studies. As capitalism reaches its late stages, its drive to accumulate by dispossession intensifies, at the expense of the lives of the marginalized, racialized, and gendered working class. Urban studies that seek to counter-map and expose its violence across diverse urban landscapes are critical for expanding our understanding of these hidden but deep-seated inequalities and exploring viable alternatives. The capitalist system is in its final and labored breath, experiencing a slow, painful, and terrifying death. While it tries to drag everyone down with it, the oppressed will continue to resist and turn their graves to demand justice and life.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While this research established urban necropolis as an interconnected condition based on the relational and embodied approach of urban experiences, I also want to acknowledge the unique nuances present in different Dutch cities. Comparative urban studies not just within the Netherlands but across various global cities could provide contextual variations into how local dynamics such as labor market conditions, housing availability, community cohesion, and the intensity of policing affect the formation and manifestations of urban necropolis.

Additionally, I highlight the need for further exploration into how racial capitalism underpins the informal economies that exploit irregular migrant workers. This includes examining the roles of employment agencies, brokers, informal housing markets, and remittance systems as intermediaries that capitalize on the vulnerabilities of these workers. Future research should delve into how these intermediaries operate within the framework of racial capitalism and the specific ways in which they contribute to the exploitation of IMWs.

In this study, I partially employed mental mapping to capture and visualize the hidden geographies of Filipino IMWs. For future research, it would be beneficial to conduct a more comprehensive analysis of the mental maps created in this study and to expand the methodology to include a larger number of participants. An extensive implementation could provide more representation of urban environments and further ground our understanding of how irregular migrant workers perceive and experience different cities. Additionally, integrating other spatial and visual methodologies could offer a creative and accessible means of "making invisible stories visible" (Palis, 2022, p. 701).

I also recognize that my current research primarily focuses on the spatial experiences of Filipino IMWs but does not deeply investigate the intersection of gender with race and migration status. A gendered analysis is crucial to understanding how these intersecting identities influence the experiences of migrant workers, particularly Filipino women. Future studies should examine gender dynamics to further augment the issues such as distanced care and gender-based violence.

APPENDIX

Interview Guide

1. Background and Life in the Philippines:
a. Can you describe your occupation and work in the Philippines? What did your daily routine look like?
b. What was your average income, and how did it influence your lifestyle and financial stability?
c. Can you provide insights into your socio-economic living conditions and overall standard of living?
d. Where were you living in the Philippines, and how would you characterize your housing situation?
e. Did you have family members dependent on you in the Philippines? How did your work impact your family life and relationships?

2. Working Conditions in the Philippines:
a. Describe your typical working hours and the environment in which you worked.
b. Were you satisfied with your working conditions? Did you encounter any health or safety concerns in your workplace?
c. How did your salary in the Philippines compare to your living expenses? Were there any additional benefits or challenges?

3. Expectations and the Move to Europe:
a. What were your expectations before moving to Europe, particularly regarding work and lifestyle? Have these expectations been met?
b. Can you share any memorable experiences from your early days in Europe that left a strong impression on you?
c. How did you secure work in Amsterdam, and what type of job were you initially seeking?
d. Describe your initial experiences in Amsterdam, particularly regarding accommodation and adapting to the weather. Where are you staying now?

4. Current Work and Living Conditions in Amsterdam:
a. What is your current job, and how do your responsibilities differ from your previous job in the Philippines? Is your family with you now, and how did their relocation process unfold?
b. How do you feel about your job now? Has it impacted your physical and mental well-being, especially considering the lack of health insurance? How do you take care of yourself?
c. What safety measures do you take in your daily life, given your undocumented status in Amsterdam?
d. In your opinion, why do you think Filipino workers are preferred in foreign countries? What makes us in demand?

5. Challenges of Being an Undocumented Migrant:
a. How do you navigate access to essential services like healthcare, education, jobs, and transport?

b. Have you had encounters with authorities or the police? How did your employer respond in these situations?

c. Can you describe your relationship with your current employer, including the treatment you receive?

d. Have you faced any legal challenges or threats due to your undocumented status?

6. Social Dynamics, Coping Mechanisms, and Community Support:

a. How do you interact with the locals in Amsterdam? Have you experienced any discrimination or exclusion due to your status?

b. What are your interactions like with other undocumented migrants, especially among those in similar jobs? Are there specific social dynamics within the migrant community?

c. How important are gatherings or organizations to you, and how do you manage the fear of being noticed by authorities?

d. Are you involved with any migrant organizations or support networks? How do you feel about the initiatives proposed for migrants in Amsterdam?

7. Impact of COVID-19:

a. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your life and work as an undocumented migrant?

b. What specific challenges have you encountered in accessing healthcare and other services during the pandemic?

8. Housing, Healthcare, and Education:

a. What has been your experience with housing in Amsterdam? Have you faced challenges with landlords or instances of eviction? How many places have you lived in since arriving?

b. How do you access healthcare services as an undocumented migrant? Have you encountered any health issues, and how do you address them? (Consider mentioning "Kruispost.")

c. How has your undocumented status affected your children's access to education? Are there challenges in pursuing further education for them?

9. Returning to the Philippines and Future Plans:

a. Have you considered returning to the Philippines? What factors might influence your decision to return or stay?

b. What aspects of life in the Philippines do you miss or value the most?

c. Do you have specific goals or plans for your return to the Philippines? How do you weigh the pros and cons of remaining in Amsterdam?

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