

Introduction

Constructing “The End”

Pastor Andrés caught the attention of the Spanish-speaking congregation of Seoul’s Nazarene Church—the majority of whom were undocumented migrant workers from Peru—when he compared their lives in Korea to a party that was about to end. “You are afraid of Peru,” he told them.¹ “The problem is that we are too comfortable here [in Korea]. But now it’s time. We are ready. *It’s over. The party is over.*” He meant that the Peruvians’ work in Korea (mostly doing manual labor in factories or selling jewelry on the street) was both easy and inconsequential in comparison to the work that lay ahead of them—working with Nazarene to start a mission in Peru and converting their friends and families to Protestantism. Unlike much of the congregation, Pastor Andrés had a valid visa to be in Korea, which also allowed him to travel freely in and out of the country. He had just returned from a trip to Peru. “Peru is a field of disaster,” he said. “Those are your compatriots and families who are suffering.” As he told it, the very economic and spiritual salvation of Peru was at stake, and the migrant workers in Korea were the only ones who could save it.

On this August afternoon, the chapel was filled with men, women, and a few children, and as was usual at this evangelical church, most of the adults sat in their own pews to maximize their concentration on the day’s sermon. Although they had been sitting with their spiral notebooks open for over an hour, ready to take notes on what would now be their second sermon of the day, I did not see anyone move to write down what the pastor said. Nearly all of the Peruvian migrant workers I met in Korea told me they preferred Korea to Peru—mainly because Korea had more employment opportunities, and it was safer and cleaner than the neigh-

borhoods where they were from in Peru—but I would have been surprised to hear any of them refer to their lives here as being anything like a party.

The part of Pastor Andrés's statement that seemed to make the parishioners uncomfortable, however, was not that life in Korea was a party, but that their time in Korea was *over*, that they had reached "*the end*." Nazarene church leaders and the Peruvian parishioners had laid plans to build a new religious center called Cristo Vive in the city in Peru where many of the parishioners came from. It seemed Pastor Andrés knew that the Peruvians had little hope for remaining in Korea, so he wanted the migrants to return to Peru as quickly as possible to begin the new mission. While the Nazarene Peruvians were enthusiastic about Cristo Vive and considered themselves to be leaders of the new mission, they had no intention of leaving Korea any time soon. Some Peruvians had been in Korea since the mid-1990s, and despite declining earnings, being separated from their families, and living under a constant threat of deportation, they did not want to return to Peru where they saw themselves as having even fewer opportunities for work and travel. In fact, rather than making plans to leave, many Peruvians I knew were making plans to bring their family members to Korea, not just so they could make money, but so that they could do things like "learn the value of work," convert to evangelical Protestantism, and study to be pastors or find a route to a new migration destination. No matter their plans, and despite the fact that they could be detained and deported at any time, "the end" seemed like a long way off. However, delaying the end—and their return to Peru—came at a cost.

For example, that morning when I arrived at the church for the main Korean-language service, I said hello to Ximena, a woman from a poor *pueblo joven* of Lima, and immediately noticed that she looked distraught.² Just a few days earlier, we had spent the afternoon hanging out in her apartment in Seoul while she cheerfully evangelized to me and told me about her life in Korea. Her apartment was so tiny that the platform just inside the front door—which in typical Korean style was also where she kept all of her shoes—doubled as the shower. She showed me how it worked on our way out the door. "I just move all the shoes and hang up the curtain." Then she pointed out the nozzle attached to the wall and the drain on the floor. The toilet was communal and located in a small building away from the apartments. She liked her small apartment though and felt lucky to have a place for her young daughter, who had been born in Korea, to play and sleep. However, this morning at church, when I asked her if she was OK, she started to cry. "I am worried about my children in Peru," she said. She had two young children in Lima whom she had left in the care of her mother. She sent them money for school, clothing, and food but had not seen them since she arrived in Korea four years earlier. I was immediately concerned that they had gotten sick from swine flu, which was moving through Peru at the time and had infected the children of another woman I knew.

"They aren't sick," she told me. The problem was that she had just had a fight with her mother on the phone about how to raise them. Like many Nazarene members, Ximena had recently converted to Protestant Christianity and now in addition to worrying about her children's financial welfare, she was also suspicious that her mother was not raising them to be good *Cristianos*.³ She felt angry but helpless to do anything from Korea. However, even with these problems, she felt an urgency to stay. Only in Korea could she give herself enough time to complete plans she had started: saving money for her family, finishing her training to become an evangelist, and converting others.

Ximena was not alone. Although 2009 had been a difficult year for all Peruvian migrants in Korea, few wanted to leave. Starting in September 2008, when the effects of the global financial crisis hit Korea, there had been a sharp increase in the number of deportations of undocumented migrants, a decrease in jobs, and an unpredictable conversion rate between the Korean won and the US dollar that made the remittances migrants sent home worth much less.⁴ A common topic of conversation among the Peruvian migrant workers I knew in Korea—whether I saw them in Protestant churches with Peruvian congregations, like Nazarene or Friendship Ministry, or at Catholic Masses, or in Fandango salsa club—was how, in the face of rising deportations and the economic crisis, they found it increasingly difficult to support themselves and their families in Peru. While they had originally come to Korea looking for a temporary place to make money, through the course of their migration those plans had converted into something new. Rather than prompting them to leave, the threat of "the end" had intensified their efforts to stay in Korea and realize their new plans.

Pastor Andrés's sermon was not the first time I had heard someone declare that Peruvian migration to Korea had ended. The first time was in 2004, after I had finished a four-year term of teaching English in South Korea. I received an email from a Peruvian friend in Seoul telling me that the Korean government had put an end to Peruvian migration. "Peruvian migration to Korea is finished," she wrote simply. "*Ya se acabó*. It's over." This was right when the Employee Permit System (EPS), Korea's nationality-based quota guest worker program, was being implemented, and it was becoming apparent that Peru would not be included.⁵ Peruvians and other migrant workers (both undocumented and those with valid temporary E-9 unskilled labor visas) were ordered to leave Korea in order for the government to start the new policy with a clean slate. Under the EPS, "unskilled" migrants were required to leave the country, and then only certain documented migrants would be allowed to return with new temporary work visas. The policy was part of creating "the end," a clear point in time where undocumented migration would cease to exist and documented migration would begin.

"The end," however, kept moving forward, as many undocumented workers—including Peruvians—refused to leave the country despite the efforts of

immigration officers to round them up and deport them. The implementation of the Employee Permit System—and the exclusion of Peruvians—was a particular kind of imagined “ending” that united the various players concerned with the story of Peruvian migration to Korea: specifically, the Korean Ministries of Justice and Labor (the creators and enforcers of the Employee Permit System), the Catholic Church in Seoul (the church with the longest experience in helping migrant workers in general and Peruvians in particular), the numerous Korean Protestant churches that began Spanish-language ministries specifically targeting Peruvian members in the 2000s, and Peruvian migrants. For all groups involved, “the end” was a place in time that was constantly under construction, but whose looming presence had inspired people to develop new possibilities for the future. They each had stakes in creating different endings, and those stakes created a sense of urgency that was productive for making changes.

MIGRANT CONVERSIONS AND GLOBAL PLANS

This is an ethnography of conversion and global plans—not only of converting from one religion to another, but also of converting ends into beginnings, of converting unexpected migrations into predestined routes, and of converting impossibilities into previously unimaginable possibilities. It considers what happens when the global plans and desires of people from vastly different legal positions, geographic origins, and economic means converge through religious, policy, and labor channels. This book follows a community of Peruvian migrants as they attempt to navigate the global world from their positions as undocumented migrants in South Korea or potential/former migrants in Peru. It examines how the Peruvians who form a small and yet resilient group of “temporary” laborers in South Korea live unauthorized lives and refashion their identities as they are permanently in transit in global labor and religious circuits. It shows how migrants, churches, and policy makers contribute to the formation of new routes, blockages, and precarious global subjectivities in both hidden and established transnational networks between Asia and Latin America.

Peruvian migrant workers first came to Korea in large numbers in the mid 1990s on the heels of a larger return migration of ethnically Japanese Peruvians to Japan. Many Peruvians lacked the family history, money, and documentation to enter Japan—and other popular routes for Peruvian labor such as the United States and Spain—through authorized routes, yet they still wanted to work abroad. Korea first emerged as an ideal transitory destination because of its proximity to Japan. It was also one of the few countries with a visa-waiver agreement with Peru, which allows Peruvian citizens to enter as tourists without having to apply for a visa prior to arrival. Most early migrants originally planned to save money and travel elsewhere, but found well-paying factory jobs in Korea’s newly booming economy, overstayed their three-month tourist visas, and funded the migrations

of their family and friends. By the early 2000s, there were more than 4,000 Peruvians in Korea—just a fraction of the total estimated 243,363 migrant workers in Korea at that time (ethnically Korean Chinese and Han Chinese made up the largest numbers)—but a larger number than other groups of non-Asian migrant workers.⁶ There are also Peruvians in Korea who hold student and professional visas, but according to estimates by the Peruvian embassy made in 2007, they only accounted for about 15 percent of the total number of Peruvians in the country.⁷

While the Peruvian community may seem small, given the difficulties of their journeys and that they are ineligible for work visas in Korea, the community stands out as being unique, fairly large, and with impressive staying power. Unlike the more numerous groups of migrants in Korea, Peruvian migrants were neither ethnically Korean nor even Asian and had to fly sometimes for over forty-eight hours to arrive (since the September 11, 2001 attacks, they cannot transit through the United States, Mexico, or Canada without a visa, so travelers must fly around the other side of the world, through South Africa). However, outside of the sending communities where the majority of Peruvians in Korea come from, the migration flow is not well known in either Peru or Korea.

While Peruvian laborers in Korea may seem like an anomaly—even to the Peruvians themselves—I use the concept of conversion to show how through their migrations, and often because of their legal exclusion, they come to see Korea as a place full of previously unimaginable possibility. Some who convert to a religion or change religions while in Korea even come to believe that their migration was actually predestined from God. I demonstrate that through remitting money and new values about work and religion, they attempt to convert themselves and their families into people who have greater access to global networks. I explore how faced with an end to their time in Korea, Peruvians are inspired to create relationships with others also in transit and surpass their roles as economic migrants to become transnational pastors, lovers, entrepreneurs, and cosmopolitan travelers who create and deepen cultural connections between Asia and Latin America. As Peruvians help carve out social spaces in South Korean churches, factories, and the migrant community, they change the value of their migrations and statuses, and they create a complex and uneven transnational connection from Peru to Korea, thereby challenging and redefining a global hierarchy of nations and migrants.

I use *conversion* as an analytic tool for thinking about the ways movement and imminent departures promote transformative changes for migrants and their communities. I use the frame of conversion as a way to explore people's complex migration motivations beyond economic gain, and how they and their worlds change as a result of their migrations.⁸ I suggest that conversions are processes of self and world (re)making that are sparked and fueled by transnational journeys and negotiations.⁹

I explore the intersections of three types of conversions—with regard to money, religious beliefs, and cosmopolitan plans—to argue that conversions are the way

migrants negotiate the meaning of their lives in a constantly changing context of place, statuses, and relationships and continue to make meaningful impacts on their worlds even when their money has run out. Their contexts are constantly changing because of their own transnational movements and connections between Peru and South Korea, their unstable legal statuses in Korea, their relationships with others also in transit and at home, and their own changing worldviews and plans. As migrants work in Korea, send remittances to Peru, and attempt to influence their worlds on both ends, Peruvians act as *transnational migrants*, or people who “take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns within a field of social relations that links together their country of origin and their countries of settlement.”¹⁰ Focusing on the processes of these conversions and exploring how they are all informed by their positions within transnational journeys not only shows the ways seemingly disenfranchised migrants and their families understand, navigate, and even affect the most powerful of global forces, but also how transnational connections between Latin America and Asia can come to be deepened and redefined through an unauthorized and relatively small migration.

Each of the types of conversion—monetary, religious, and cosmopolitan—happens in a particular transnational social field and within a global capitalist system, a global theological system, and a global discursive system. The overlaps, connections, and disruptions of those fields become visible through the process of migrants moving and negotiating the value of their migrations among these planes.

MONETARY CONVERSION

When speaking of monetary conversion (in Spanish, *conversión* or *tipos de cambio*, meaning exchange rate), I am specifically referring to the fluctuating conversion rate between the Korean won and the US dollar since the 1990s, but especially during the global financial crisis of 2008 when the salaries that migrants earned in won became worth much less when converted to dollars. For example, while in 2006 a salary of one million won converted to about \$900, by November 2008, that same salary was only worth \$666. With prices of food and schooling in Peru staying the same or increasing, even migrants who had managed to keep their factory jobs during the recession found that their remittances had much less buying power. Currency conversion brings the global hierarchy of migration destinations and legality into relief and illustrates the marginality of Peruvians in Korea. While migrants in more mainstream destinations, like the United States, can earn, remit, and spend in the same currency (because there is an infrastructure set up in Peru to process dollars), migrants in Korea must first convert their earnings into a world currency—like US dollars—before they can send them home. Depending on the day’s conversion rate, migrants stood to lose a little or a lot of the value of their earnings in the conversion.

Just as there was no way to get money home without first converting it into dollars, the migrants themselves changed while undertaking their journeys and remitting. Remittances alter these social fields in unexpected ways because money gains meaning and status depending on its context of exchange, and migrants and families do not always share the same "regimes of value."¹¹ When people convert their money to send home, they do more than just move from one currency to another.

RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

By religious conversion (*conversión* in Spanish), I am referring to the significant number of Peruvians who either changed from one religion to another, started attending church for the first time, or experienced a renewal of their faith and church participation while in Korea. Most Peruvians arrived in Korea as either nonpracticing Catholics or Protestants with only high school educations, but since the 1990s, many have converted to or renewed their faith in Protestantism, become leaders in Korean churches, and launched, or planned to embark on, missions to Peru with the support of their Korean churches. Peruvians who identified as Catholics also felt a sense of rejuvenation to their faith in Korea, becoming leaders and/or completing baptisms or confirmations they had missed in Peru as children. By 2009, the Catholic Church offered Masses in Spanish specifically for migrant workers at four locations in Seoul and factory towns in the surrounding Gyeonggi Province, and there were at least four different Protestant churches in Seoul with Spanish-speaking congregations.

Rather than thinking of conversion as the act of experiencing a complete reversal of belief, Diane Austin-Broos writes, "to be converted is to reidentify, to learn, reorder and reorient."¹² Through learning the framework of their churches and experiencing their own migration journeys, some converts begin to reidentify experiences in their past and present—including their failure to make money in Peru, or become pregnant—as answers or signs from God (*respuestas* in Spanish). These respuestas are like epiphanies or clues of information to questions migrants did not even know they had before their journeys (chapter 3). As they shared their respuestas with me, their migration and conversion journeys became intertwined and guided by an effort both to reveal and fulfill the plans God created for them long before they were born as well as to demonstrate to me that they were important migrants in Korea. When Peruvian migrants start to "reidentify and reorient" their pasts, presents, and futures, it is within a framework similar to what Susan Coutin calls "re/membering," where migrants negotiate their membership in both Korea and Peru through reflecting on their pasts in Peru as well as their migration and conversion journeys. In Coutin's work, young people re/member their lives in El Salvador and the United States through their sharing of *testimonios*, writing poetry, and sharing their experiences with her as an ethnographer. Coutin writes,

“Re/membering is temporally complex in that it entails revisiting the past with an eye toward achieving a more just future . . . the past haunts the present.”¹³ In my book, I explore cases of Peruvians both re/membering and reorienting their migration and conversion journeys through identifying and sharing the *respuestas* they have received, recreating themselves as cosmopolitan travelers rather than undocumented workers, and through sending home social and economic remittances that they hope will convert their family members and themselves into people who are on a higher rung of the global social hierarchy. However, rather than having a linear narrative, their interpretations of events keep changing over time as their context changes.

COSMOPOLITAN CONVERSION

Finally, by cosmopolitan conversion, I am referring to the various creative projects or plans that Peruvians developed in Korea in the effort to help them change their lives and those of their families. I see these projects as cosmopolitan because not only did migrants want to use them to gain the skills and abilities of cosmopolitanism—to “feel at home in the world” and achieve “infinite ways of being”—but they also hoped to be recognized as worthy and deserving of that status by others.¹⁴ Their efforts challenge the notion that cosmopolitanism is only the territory of rich “flexible citizens” because Peruvian migrants also hoped their migrations would lead to a personal transformation to their worldview and opportunities.¹⁵ Most migrants I spoke with arrived in Korea with a goal of saving money for opportunities for themselves and their families—by funding future migrations, educations, or businesses in Peru. However, I focus on how their cosmopolitan conversion projects emerged and took new directions given their situation of being undocumented and Peruvian in Korea at a time when the world economy was in flux and they were surrounded by many other migrants and groups who were also trying to lay out global plans.¹⁶

Looking at these three forms of conversion shows the relational impact various global and transnational networks have on one another. When viewed in isolation, a migrant’s choice to remain in a destination that is unprofitable and potentially dangerous might seem irrational. However, when those choices are placed in a larger perspective that includes global, transnational, and individual connections like global capitalism, Protestant and Catholic networks, and local and family histories, those choices start to make sense and clarify both individual migrant motivations and how globalization works. Exploring migration journeys and choices as conversions helps to show how people, things, places, and ideas change over time and in relation to one another. Further, the concept of conversion provides a way to study globalization even when the players in a particular “global encounter” are relatively invisible or have departed.¹⁷ The book not only discusses the peak of the migration flow into Korea but also the ways in which that migration continues to

play a role in the lived experiences of migrants after they have returned to Peru. Looking at conversion as a transnational journey reveals how globalization—and being active parts of global processes—continues to affect people's lives and ideas about their futures and pasts long after they have stopped moving, or once that particular global convergence has come to an end.

CONVERSION AS A JOURNEY AND NEGOTIATION

I draw on the following definitions of *conversion* to explore how these three types of conversion include developing a new cultural language or worldview through which to interpret or reinterpret experiences and the ways things and people change in form, character, or function as a result. As is reflected in the origin of the word *conversion* itself, which means "to turn around, send in a different direction," there is a sense of change through movement, *intentional* rather than passive change, and *multiple directionalities* rather than linearity built in to the word.¹⁸ There are also possibilities for *multiple positions* in conversion, of which I use three: (1) the process of being converted; (2) the act of converting others; and (3) causing things (like money, family, nations) to change in form, character, or function. A person can do all of these things simultaneously, and while they may do them with intention, such actions can have unintended consequences. I bring together these definitions with literature on transnational migration, religious conversion, money and value, and cosmopolitanism to explore the changes that happen to migrants and their home and destination communities through the process of their journey, and also how the journey (migratory, spiritual, and cosmopolitan) inspires migrants to see the world and their own lives in a new way, and how that affects the choices they make and their communities.

Scholars of religious conversion have long argued against what is known as the "Pauline paradigm," which depicts conversion as an unexpected, radical reversal of belief enacted on a passive convert.¹⁹ I agree with those who, rather than seeing conversion as a sudden and totalizing event, consider it a *process* that "takes place over time, interacts with institutional religious, network, and cultural contexts, and does not necessarily proceed in a linear or chronological fashion."²⁰ This makes religious conversion similar to transnational migration in that both have seemingly distinct beginning and ending points, yet the points are not bounded and the journey between them is not bipolar. Further, migrant conversions often have unexpected results, because while it may appear people are making direct journeys or negotiations between their point of origin and destination, one currency and another, or an old belief system and a new one, there are myriad other global, transnational, and local factors and forces influencing the choices and significance of the conversions. As a result, any attempt to understand the nature of the conversion and its effects must consider their context in place, in time, and to one another.

As I will show, however, part of converting is learning to see the world in a new way, and since people and their environments are also changing over time, they may not only interpret events in the past, present, and future differently over time, but they may try to influence the ways others interpret them as well. Like transnational migration, religious conversion is “a type of passage that negotiates a place in the world.”²¹ These conversions are types of power negotiations that could result in fracture, but they are also formations of new beliefs and a change to the way people understand the world and how it is connected.

There is a large potential for loss in these projects of conversion. In his discussion of conversion in “The Forms of Capital,” Pierre Bourdieu points out that when attempting to convert economic capital into social capital, there is always the risk of incommensurability and therefore the loss of value.²² For example, if a remitting migrant’s family is ungrateful for the gifts sent and they do not comply with the sender’s wishes, even the economic capital is lost. There is also the chance a migrant will be deported before she can complete her plan, and truly transformative institutionalized cultural capital—such as gaining a visa to a coveted destination, gaining covert embodied cultural capital that can be converted into economic capital, or being respected as a religious leader—takes a long time to accumulate.²³

However, with any conversion—to money, religion, or plans—there is always loss. The loss can come in the form of fees, physical and emotional distance from family, and perhaps most importantly, the inability to pursue other potentially beneficial migrations or plans. I show that through conversions, loss itself could become valuable.²⁴ In fact, separation, loss, and sacrifice were intertwined with a successful migration. The longer migrants stayed in Korea, and were separated from their families, the more time they had to complete their projects. Other times, they reframed loss into what Nancy Munn calls a “desirable outcome” in an exchange.²⁵ For example, migrants who shared their stories of loss received invitations to present at prestigious church meetings and converted loss into valuable social and cultural capital.

AT THE CONVERGENCE OF GLOBAL PLANS BY SOUTH KOREAN CHURCHES AND THE STATE

In the mid-1990s, Peru was experiencing an economic downturn and political instability that was increasing out-migration while South Korea was experiencing a booming economy that contributed to an increase in immigration. While I imagine many of those migrants, as well as people everywhere, were embarking on their own cosmopolitan conversions, the situation in South Korea infused the Peruvian migrants’ conversions with unique possibilities for changes to their mobility and status—as well as put them at great risk for loss and deportation. That is because Peruvian migrants arrived in Korea during a historical moment that

landed them in the midst of a convergence of other large- and small-scale cosmopolitan conversion projects headed by the Korean state, churches, and the Koreans and migrants with whom they interacted.

For example, the Korean state had various ongoing cosmopolitan conversion plans including *seggyewha*, an organized effort started in the 1990s to make South Korea globalized, partly through a promotion of English-language learning and welcoming and capitalizing on the skills of Koreans who had lived overseas.²⁶ The first decade of the 2000s also saw an increase in the interest around the idea of multiculturalism, with a push by the state and NGOs to manage the growing numbers of foreigners in Korea, including workers attracted to jobs and foreign brides brought in to marry bachelor farmers.²⁷ Finally, I interpret the implementation of the Employee Permit System and its promotion in other countries as part of a state strategy to show evidence of Korea's rising position on the global stage and to be recognized as a country with a clean and enviable migration record.

Since Peruvians were a small group of unusual foreigners in Korea, their refusal to leave despite being legally excluded made them both an insignificant and an urgent problem for the state agencies trying to regulate migration. Most people did not even know they were there, but their continued presence contradicted the story that Korea had a successful, and therefore enviable, migration policy. It made them "impossible subjects" or people "who cannot be and a problem that cannot be solved."²⁸ For example, when I met with Ms. Kim, a member of the Korean Ministry of Justice, and asked about the ministry's plans for increasing deportations, she pointed out that the state could only fully protect migrant workers who were documented, implying that undocumented workers were doing themselves harm by staying outside of the benevolent gaze of the state. When I asked if Peruvians were being targeted for deportation, she told me there were no Peruvians in Korea as far as she knew. I hesitated before correcting her, not wanting to give too many specifics, but not wanting to miss a chance to advocate on the community's behalf. Regardless, effects of these state-led cosmopolitan conversion plans—including the EPS, the amnesty that preceded it, and multicultural projects—resulted in an unstable environment for foreigners who, during the time of my fieldwork, were alternately welcomed, tolerated, targeted, mistreated, protected, given documentation, or told they were excluded indefinitely.

Peruvians' looming departures accelerated their membership in various social circles, including Korean churches, which were also undergoing their own cosmopolitan conversion plans. Various Korean Protestant churches, running out of potential converts at home, had turned to evangelizing to Korea's rising numbers of foreign residents as well as launching missions abroad. In her research on these foreign missions in Africa, Ju Hui Judy Han found that evangelization techniques included linking Korea's rising economic prowess to its high numbers of Protestants and promising the same for foreign nationals who converted.²⁹ For churches

with Peruvian members, having an unusual group of converts in their pews who wanted to work with churches to launch foreign missions added to the churches' own cosmopolitan cachet.

Because they were at the convergence of these other cosmopolitan plans, Peruvians were included because of exclusions, welcomed because of their foreignness, and eligible to become key members in a church or families because of their ineligibility to stay. For example, partly because the Peruvians' departure from Korea was regarded by most as being certain, they were fast-tracked in networks that gave them "pathways of incorporation" or access to symbolic capital such as prestige and personal connections, which they could spend to launch migrations to other destinations as educated pastors.³⁰ Since Peruvians were excluded from legal pathways, such as sending their children to public school, churches helped them find even more desirable alternatives, such as scholarships to American-run schools (chapter 4). Clergy intensified their leadership training and other benefits and gave them a platform for conducting a type of "politicalized spirituality"³¹ where they promoted issues in Peru and themselves as important leaders. At numerous events I saw Peruvian church members speak alongside ambassadors—and receive equal billing on the program—and when a Korean bishop who was also a *nuncio* (a papal ambassador) visited Korea from Rome, he made a special trip to perform sacraments for migrants at the Catholic Mass (chapter 3).

I explore how in pursuing their cosmopolitan conversion projects while legally excluded, Peruvians and their churches and communities created unexpected social practices because of their resulting experiences of liminality. Unlike migrants whose desired end point is legal and social inclusion, or asylum seekers who are in a "liminal legality" struggling to live with temporary but renewable visas that give partial rights in comparison to full citizenship, most of my interviewees were not straddling documented and undocumented statuses.³² Rather than waiting for legalization, they were in what Melanie B. E. Griffiths calls a "temporal liminality" where they were simultaneously waiting for an imminent deportation and had the support networks in place to "[reconceptualize] the present as a meaningful time in itself."³³ I am not looking at this story from the perspective of how "illegality" is used as a flexible governing tactic to keep a labor force vulnerable.³⁴ Instead, I am interested in how through their efforts to create a space for themselves in Korea despite their exclusion, and influence the world despite their lack of money, Peruvian migrants become what Victor Turner calls "liminars."³⁵ As liminars, they work to transform into people in transnational relationships, who "know how to work," as saviors of Peru, providers for their families at home, and cosmopolitan travelers with the ability to transport themselves to other social spheres and global locations. However, in attempting to defy their legal exclusion and become recognized contributors to Korea, as good workers and as important members of churches or transnational families, they also risk becoming entangled in the very social and

legal barriers they want to overcome—through being deported or legally “stuck” in bad marriages (chapter 4).

I look at how Peruvian migrants’ efforts to negotiate the meaning of their lives through multiple forms of conversion—monetary, religious, and cosmopolitan—while at the convergence of other individual and groups’ cosmopolitan conversions—helped to shift their value in Korea and at home. As David Graeber writes, value is the “way in which actions become meaningful to the actor by being incorporated in some larger, social totality—even if in many cases, the totality in question, exists primarily in the actor’s imagination.”³⁶ In order to get others to see them and their actions in a new way they need them to participate in their cosmopolitan conversion. I explore how initially many hoped to influence their family members through sending economic remittances; however, this became increasingly difficult during the global financial crisis when stable jobs decreased and the conversion rate of the dollar fluctuated wildly. Anthropologist Julie Chu looks at circulations of credit, desire, and migrants to discuss how mobility reveals the “differential value of various people and things entangled in webs of increasing transnational exchange.”³⁷ Here I explore how migrants found a way to continue engaging their family members in their cosmopolitan migration plans by converting their economic remittances into other forms of capital they hoped would be regarded as more valuable. For example, in chapter 2, I present cases of migrants who tried to convert their family members into people who were financially independent by evangelizing to them over the phone, or trying to get them to pursue educations in Peru. I found that the systems of value they had created in Korea and were trying to relay to family members in Peru were not always compatible, and so the results of these strategies ranged from tangible successes (in the form of converted family members, completed houses, and educational certificates), to successes “primarily in the actor’s imagination,” to family dissolutions through divorce and deception.

A SNAPSHOT OF GLOBALIZATION

I think of this story as a manageable snapshot of globalization, where focusing on the participants and tracing their origins, motivations, and imagined destinations reveal larger stories of the formation and reinterpretation of global hierarchies. A snapshot captures a particular configuration of the relationships of people, things, and places together at one moment in time. When families try to re-create iconic family photos, for example, with siblings in a favorite hangout or parents holding a new baby, it is never exactly the same. The original members are older or absent, the nature of their relationships has changed, and so has the meaning of the place. Yet, the snapshot is useful in that it informs the viewer about the meaning of the present. It infuses things and people with value by showing us what has changed and what has converted into a loss or gain.

When thinking of globalization I follow the lead of scholars who see it as being a series of unequal and uneven encounters, engagements, and connections.³⁸ To avoid the idea that globalization is inevitable, and making all corners of the world the same, Mei Zhan uses the term “worlding” to refer to the “emergent socialities entangled in dynamic imaginaries of pasts, futures, and presents” that combine to create the world(s) in which we live.³⁹ The story of Peruvian migration to South Korea, how it began, why it is coming to an end, and the enduring impact it has made on everyone involved, is a complex, but manageable, series of worlding socialities. It is of a relatively small scale and its peak lasted for about twenty years, but it involves countless individual, transnational, and global forces and imaginaries that are entangled in the past, present, and future.

Plans for globalization and cosmopolitan conversions cannot ever truly fail because they are ongoing projects that emerge in conversation with the plans of other people and groups. They constantly change direction depending on the particular barriers and opportunities that emerge as people make their way through the world. Also, the process of pursuing a cosmopolitan conversion has already made you cosmopolitan, even if the project does not go as planned.

By looking at the configuration of the overlapping cosmopolitan plans and projects of migrants, governments, and churches, I hope to depict a global moment in the making. By *configuration*, I mean the ways people imagine the world to be connected, the particular routes and destinations open and closed to them, and the ways migrants themselves participate in creating the routes they travel. These are the perceived beginning and end points, routes and barriers around which people imagine and orient their journeys. I think of it as the infrastructure for these conversions as well as the “hierarchically ordered global pathways” or routes of things, people, and ideas that migrants help create through their migrations and participation in transnational networks, including sending remittances.⁴⁰ Remittances are not only constitutive of globalization, but as Michele Ruth Gamburd argues, they also “simultaneously [map] and [obscure] a social reality of labor and exchange relations between people.”⁴¹ I am interested in exploring the configuration of the tangible and imagined world that migrants, their families, their churches, and the Korean state all played a part in creating at this particular moment through their overlapping attempts to influence the world around them.

SALSA DANCING IN SEOUL

My own thread in this story helps to illustrate the larger geopolitical and historical forces that both brought Peruvians to Korea and made their arrival seem like an accident. From the year 2000, when Peruvian migration to Korea reached its peak, to 2004, when Peruvians lost their visas through the EPS, I was also a migrant worker in Korea. However, my cultural capital as a college graduate with a US passport gave me access to a renewable visa and work protections as an English

teacher. Although we had traveled on very different routes, we were contributing to the same global moment.

When I decided to move to Seoul to teach English, I had just finished my undergraduate degree and knew that I wanted to travel, but I had no resources to do so on my own. After months of talking about going to China, but not having found a real way to get there, another recent college graduate said to me: "You should go teach English in Korea. Everyone I know is doing it." She told me the name of a school where she had done a phone interview, and that night, after looking at the school's website on the internet, I was amazed to learn how simple they would make my trip. Within a few months, I was on a plane to Seoul, a place that until July 2000 had never even entered my global itinerary.⁴²

While it may have felt like I went to Korea "on a whim," so had thousands of other people who found jobs in Korea's "highly gendered and racialized" English teacher market.⁴³ This was an important time in the economic and migration history of Korea. In 2000, the year I arrived, the nightmare of the 1997 Asian financial crisis and IMF bailout was fading, Korea was becoming one of the strongest economies in the world, and the country had accepted more migrant workers than it had in any other time in history. In 2000 the estimated 243,363 migrant workers in Korea included professionals with visas (such as teachers, chefs, and businesspeople), laborers holding "trainee" visas, and undocumented migrant workers.⁴⁴ In comparison, just thirteen years before, there had been only 6,409 migrant workers in Korea.⁴⁵

The booming economy starting in the late 1980s left a shortage of Koreans willing to do 3D factory jobs (dirty, dangerous, and difficult) and soon attracted foreign migrant workers not only from Asia but also from as far away as Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe.⁴⁶ Since until recently Korea had been a labor exporting country, it had visa waiver agreements set up with many other developing countries—including Peru—that allowed people to enter as tourists without having to secure a visa before arriving. In less than ten years, hundreds of thousands of people had entered Korea this way. Initially there was no system in place to regulate them, so as soon as their three-month tourist visas expired, they became undocumented. As a way of figuring out how many undocumented workers were in Korea, and where they all came from, the government offered undocumented workers amnesties on a limited basis. This was done in preparation for the Employee Permit System. Many Peruvians (and migrants from other countries) became temporarily documented during this amnesty.

Although the Latin American population in Korea is small in comparison to other groups of foreigners, Latin Americans had a very strong presence in various international spaces in Seoul. On weekends I went to areas like Itaewon (a former camp town next to Yongsan US Army base) and Hongdae (a college area) that had nightclubs and restaurants specifically catering to foreign customers and young Koreans. Two of the most popular places to go among my group of friends were salsa clubs: Fandango in Itaewon and Tropicale in Hongdae. The most exciting

thing about these clubs was that they attracted a wide variety of people with different socioeconomic backgrounds, legal statuses, and nationalities who were living and working in Korea. Every Saturday night, Koreans and foreigners would gather in these clubs to drink cheap mugs of Hite beer (only 2,500 won, or about \$2.50); dance to salsa, merengue, and reggaetón; and try to communicate in Spanish, English, and Korean. Saturday night regulars included Latin American embassy and consulate personnel; English, Spanish, and German teachers; Korean office workers; US soldiers from Puerto Rico, Colombia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic stationed in Korea; and factory workers from places like Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia.

By far, Peruvians were the most prominent group of Latin Americans in the clubs, and in Korea as a whole. By 2000 there were more Peruvians in Korea at one time than ever before. There were entire families of Peruvians living together, including parents, children, aunts, and uncles. Nearly everyone in the family—from fifteen-year-olds to sixty-year-olds—worked in small- and medium-sized factories, or on construction sites. My interviewees worked at a variety of jobs, including in factories making things like cabinets, cardboard boxes, metal parts, plastics, mannequins, chemicals, *makgeolli* (rice wine), mattresses, and jeans.⁴⁷ A few people I met worked at recycling plants, where a fringe benefit was free access to still-usable items Koreans had discarded, like rice cookers and TVs, before they were recycled.⁴⁸ Some of the least-desirable jobs involved working at industrial laundries washing fabric for the construction of jeans or other clothing items, because they required heavy lifting of wet fabric and frequently caused back injuries.⁴⁹ However, the worst jobs were those with abusive bosses, dangerous equipment, or where a person worked for a few months and never got paid, either because of a dishonest boss, a bankrupt factory, or even in a few cases where a factory exploded or burned down.⁵⁰

The Peruvian community continued to grow until 2004, when the Korean government implemented its own global plan to try to control undocumented migration with the Employee Permit System. Full-time factory jobs became difficult for undocumented workers to find after the EPS, and people started selling small jewelry items in the street and in the subway. They referred to this as selling *accessorios* (accessories) or *chaquira* (beaded jewelry). They also looked for *arbeits* (part-time jobs) at factories and restaurants, and for jobs cleaning Korean and foreign people's homes.⁵¹ Most *arbeits* lasted from a few days to a few weeks helping factories fill rush orders, but a few people used social connections from their churches and skills learned in previous careers in Peru or the United States to get long-term *arbeits* as chefs, house cleaners, Spanish or salsa teachers, or electricians. Like *arbeit*, there were other Korean terms Peruvians used frequently, even when speaking Spanish, including *sajangnim* (boss), which sounded something like *soyangni* in their Spanish-accented Korean. Terms like these linked Peruvians to Korea and united factory workers from different countries who could speak the

common language of the factory when they came together during church services or other social functions.

Many of the Peruvians who came to the Fandango and Tropicale nightclubs left their factories right after work on Saturday night and stayed out until the subway opened around five in the morning. Most literally lived on their factory grounds—in shipping containers that had been converted into living quarters. Others rented apartments in the towns near their factories or churches. Like other groups of factory workers, the majority of Peruvians lived in cities located hours outside of Seoul, such as Dongducheon, Uijeongbu, Osan, Gunsan, and Suwon. In addition to having factories, many of these cities were also US military camp towns, or places that became boomtowns after the US military set up installations near small agricultural villages by the 38th Parallel (the present-day site of the Demilitarized Zone) during the Korean War.⁵²

Dongducheon, a city of about 82,000 people near the border with North Korea, was a hub of the Peruvian community. There you could find formal and informal Peruvian restaurants as well as migrant worker soccer tournaments on summer weekends complete with trophies, custom-made uniforms, and championship rings. In addition to the neighborhoods, apartment buildings, farms, and churches that looked similar to my other field sites in Korea, there was also a carnivalesque feel to the streets near the US military base, which were lined with clubs catering to foreigners. In her ethnography about Filipina entertainers who worked in Dongducheon clubs, Sealing Cheng points out that camp towns are “host to several groups of border-crossing people who have experienced different degrees and temporalities of dislocation,” including undocumented and documented migrant workers and the Koreans who work and live with them. On the way from the Catholic Church to the main Peruvian restaurant in the area, I passed Filipina club workers sitting outside of their clubs smoking cigarettes and chatting with their friends, and couples from different countries having dates along the streets of shops near the gate of Camp Casey army base.⁵³ Peruvian children who lived there went to American-run Christian schools, and a soccer tournament I attended there had players from Peru, Nigeria, Russia, Romania, and the United States. Dongducheon was often the backdrop to love affairs with foreigners—I heard stories of men going to the clubs to see their Filipina girlfriends and of Peruvian women who had left their husbands for their US soldier boyfriends (see chapter 4).

Dongducheon's thriving community of foreigners had also made it one of the most dangerous places for undocumented Peruvian migrants. Camp towns were targets of frequent and aggressive immigration raids, which sociologist Hae Yeon Choo describes as being part of a disciplinary mechanism, disproportionately targeting those who “stood out” for being “racial others” or for otherwise “violating the implicit rules of community conduct.”⁵⁴ Yet, despite the raids, Peruvians and other undocumented migrants continued to live and create communities there. For many Peruvians I knew, Dongducheon simultaneously represented something

foreign and familiar, exciting, and scandalous. It was a place where danger originated and a place with situations and people worth risking danger for.

The cosmopolitan landscape where Peruvians interacted with other foreigners from all over the world extended far beyond Dongducheon, however. On their factory floor as well as in their dormitories, Peruvians lived and worked with Koreans and with undocumented and documented foreign workers. There were numerous interethnic hierarchies based on language, gender, and nationality. In 2007, when factory jobs were scarce, I visited the factory of a Peruvian woman named Diana and received a cold welcome from the other migrants who thought I was Peruvian and there to work. Except for Diana and a Korean woman, all of the workers at this particular factory were men. They were from Peru, Bangladesh, Vietnam, and Myanmar, and some were documented with the EPS, but a few were not. Diana told me they were jealous because undocumented workers made more per month than documented workers.⁵⁵ When she introduced me to her boss and his wife and told them about my research they said they wished Diana could get a visa because she was the only foreigner at the factory who could speak Korean well enough for them to understand. Besides that, she was the only one who could understand the English words and Korean pronunciation of the other workers.⁵⁶ On my visit to her factory, she spent the day darting around the workshop, translating for workers and her bosses amid the din of loud machinery pounding out metal parts.

Other spaces that were both diverse and segregated in various ways were the churches Peruvians attended. During worship at Friendship Foreign Ministry, Korean church leaders organized parishioners by nationality: Filipinos in the front left pews, Mongolians at the back, and Peruvians on the right. One day I came in late and an usher I did not know asked my nationality and then sat me with Nigerians—who spoke English. The Peruvians in attendance saw me and waved me over to their side. Worshipers sat separately to get simultaneous translation of the sermons in their own language, but they mingled with other foreigners during meals, on retreats, and outside of the church. However, I heard more than one story of Korean church officials discouraging migrant workers from Peru from dating migrants from other countries. I do not know if this was based on their opinions about age differences, but it is one example of how they tried to control the migrants' personal lives. In addition to language, some of the divisions between groups in churches were based on class. For example, in Seoul there were other Catholic Masses given in Spanish, but a priest told me they were attended by diplomats and professionals who he said would never consider attending one of the Masses directed at migrant workers.

In exploring the ways migrants experienced and navigated localized, transnational, and global hierarchies in their daily lives, I show how their actions and perspectives created links and divisions between the transnational social fields of their churches, workplaces, and families in South Korea and Peru. This book is

about what happened when the global plans of migrants, their churches, and the Korean government converged and diverged.

Although I cannot say whether the migration flow has ended, it has definitely slowed. Between 2006 and 2011, when I did the bulk of the field research for this project, the number of Peruvians in Korea had reduced to an estimated 815 to 2,000 people. The reason for these varying figures was due to the difficulty in tracking down how many Peruvians were actually in the country. In 2006, the Peruvian embassy calculated 815 using official arrival and departure information from Gimpo and Incheon airports. That figure included people holding student visas, workers with temporary visas, and those who had entered as tourists and had not yet departed. The larger figure came from the Catholic Church, which kept a census of all the Peruvians they served and determined that there were closer to 2,000 Peruvians working in the country. By now many of the Peruvian migrants who appear in this book have left Korea. Some of them were able to find work in Peru, but others migrated again, primarily to Chile and Argentina. Others, though, have stayed, either because they are married to Koreans and became Korean citizens, or because they have been able to evade deportation and continue working. In 2016 I interviewed three former migrants on the phone, and all of them said they wished they could return to Korea but knew it would be difficult or impossible. However, even after migrants depart Korea, their time there continues to affect their lives and attitudes about the world. I try to capture these lingering global conversions through the stories in this ethnography.

TRANSNATIONAL FIELDWORK

To understand the changing significance of money, religion, and migration for migrants and their families, I conducted twenty-four months of ethnographic fieldwork in both South Korea and Peru. Between 2006 and 2011, I took four trips to South Korea and three to Peru, where I spent from one to twelve months at a time. On my first two research trips I spent one and a half months (August–September 2006) and (June–July 2007) in South Korea. In August 2007, I spent one month in Peru with the family members of people I had met in Korea during my first two trips. In 2008, I spent three months in Peru (October–December 2008) reconnecting with families I had met on my first trip and former migrants I had initially met in Korea, but who had either decided to return to Peru, or more commonly, had been deported during the increased immigration stings in Korea at the end of 2008. After a brief visit to California, I then traveled to Seoul where I stayed twelve months (December 2008–December 2009). My final trips were a two-week visit to Seoul in July 2010 and then five months in Peru (December 2010–May 2011).

Making numerous trips between the United States, South Korea, and Peru starting in 2006 gave me a unique vantage point from which to see how the circulation

of people, money, and religious ideas shifted along with the rising tension of the global financial crisis and the resulting unstable value of the dollar. My first three trips were before the crisis, when a salary of one million won (which was average for my interviewees) was worth between \$1,000 and \$1,100 when converted into dollars. Some Peruvians still had valid E-9 visas, and the Peruvian embassy was still trying to negotiate for Peru to be included in the Employee Permit System. My field notes and interview transcripts from these initial trips showed that the key concerns my Peruvian interviewees shared with me were their chances for becoming documented and devising ways to bring their children, siblings, or spouses to Korea to join them.

Starting in 2008, however, nearly every conversation I had with Peruvians in Korea or their families in Peru touched on the day's *tipo de cambio* or conversion rate between the Korean won and the US dollar and speculation about what it would mean for the families in Peru who depended on remittances. When I arrived in Peru in October 2008, the value of the dollar was plummeting, and people dependent on remittances felt it sharply. Migrant families who received remittances now had empty refrigerators, and a number of my interviewees from my time in Korea were deported and arrived in Peru while I was there (see chapter 2). When I arrived in Korea right before New Year's Eve, 2009 conversion rates were not only terrible, but unstable, and the worth of one million won fluctuated between \$600 and \$850. In my final trip, the value of the dollar had stabilized, but never returned to the rates of 2006. The biggest shift before and after the global financial crisis was that people had stopped hoping to be documented, and had started planning for an end that had an unpredictable date, but was now seen as inevitable.

In the years that followed these field trips, I have continued to interact with my interviewees through social media and Skype calls. My long-term engagement with the community gave me the advantage of seeing the rise and decline of the migration pattern and with it how migrants, their families, and the situation of Peru and South Korea changed over time. Although former migrants tell me it would be financially risky for them to try to migrate to Korea now, since they would most likely be turned away by immigration officers at the airport, it still comes up in people's plans. They say they would like to find a way to return.

In addition to participant observation and many casual interviews, I conducted formal interviews with seventy-five people in individual and group settings (fifty-six people in Korea and nineteen in Peru). I worked with about twenty key people in Peru and Korea who welcomed me into their homes and lives and also allowed me to formally interview them between two and five times, sometimes over the span of a decade and in multiple countries. In Korea, I interviewed and conducted participant observation with Peruvian migrants, international and Korean Catholic and Protestant church leaders working with migrants, three consuls general from the Peruvian embassy, and a member of the Korean Ministry of Justice

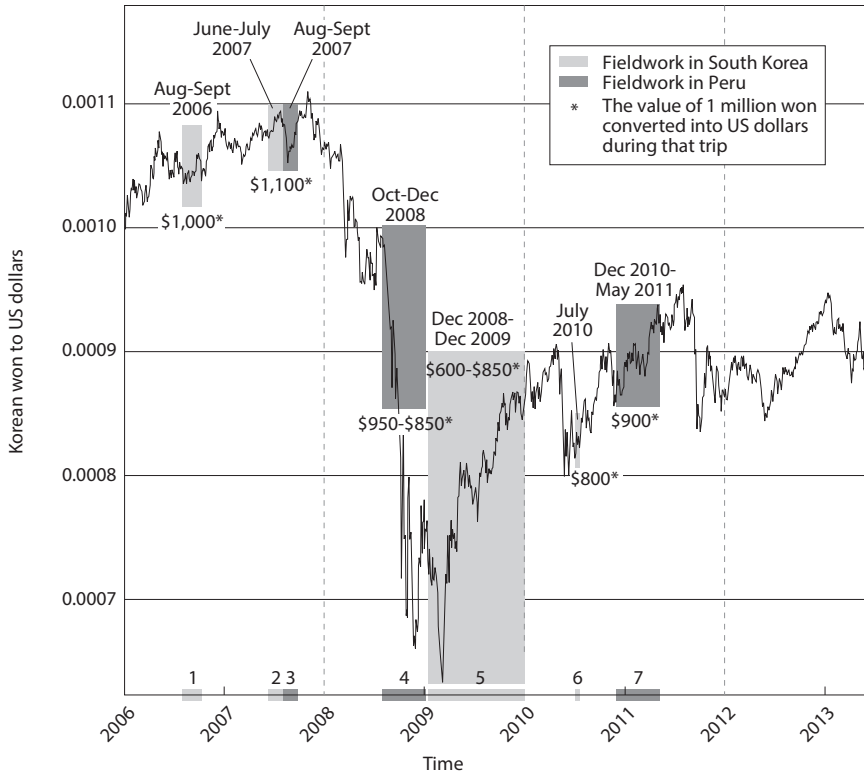


FIGURE 1. Methods and conversion rates: A timeline of my seven field trips (four to South Korea and three to Peru) superimposed on the conversion rate from Korean won to US dollars between 2006 and 2013. Note that my fourth and fifth trips coincided with some of the worst effects of the global financial crisis when the value of the dollar plunged and then fluctuated. Graph source: Fxtop.com.

working with the Employee Permit System. The majority of my fieldwork was in Seoul and four areas about 1–2 hours outside of Seoul by public transportation where Peruvian migrants lived and attended church.⁵⁷

While in Peru, I interviewed and did participant observation with the family members of migrants in Korea including their parents, spouses, and children as well as numerous former migrants, some of whom I had met in Korea during previous trips and others who I met through snowball sampling in Peru. I worked with nine extended families who had family members in Korea. Six of the families lived in central Lima or in surrounding *pueblos jóvenes*, and three of the families lived 200 kilometers north of Lima in an area known as Norte Chico.⁵⁸ During two stays in Norte Chico I lived with the mother of a migrant I had met at a Catholic Mass in Korea. She kindly welcomed me into her home and introduced me to more interviewees in Norte Chico. In Lima, I lived in apartments in the area of

San Miguel, which provided a somewhat central base to reach families in different pueblos jóvenes.

Due to my previous experience of teaching in Korea, from the beginning of my project I had multiple points of contact with the Peruvian community. While my knowledge of Korean was useful, especially to navigate the area and contextualize the topics people discussed in Spanish or English, without my fluency in Spanish and long-term connection to Korea as an English teacher, I doubt I could have gained such a quick entry to this community and project.⁵⁹ The vast majority of my interviews and fieldwork took place in Spanish, as this was the preferred language of most of the Peruvians I met in Korea, although some of them knew English and/or Korean fairly well. Most of the Korean clergy and government officials I interviewed had studied in the United States and dealt with their international congregants or constituents in English, and we conducted interviews in that language. Each time I arrived in Korea, I met with old friends and found new contacts through snowball sampling and by hanging out in places where Peruvian migrants went in their free time, including salsa clubs and Latin American restaurants.⁶⁰

The Catholic clergy working with Peruvian migrants, however, proved to be my most significant point of entry to the community. When I asked my Peruvian friends about who they went to for help, they all mentioned two names: Padre Ignacio, a French priest from the Migrant Help Center in Seoul, and Hermana Pilar, a nun from Spain.

I called Padre Ignacio, and by the next weekend I was traveling with him and Hermana Pilar on a bus on our way to the Spanish-language Mass in Dongducheon. Both spoke Korean and Spanish fluently (in addition to other languages) and between them had worked in Korea off and on since the 1970s.⁶¹ They had long participated in the church's defense of laborer's rights—originally focusing on Korean laborers and now primarily helping foreign migrant workers.⁶² In addition to running the Spanish-language desk of the Catholic Church's Migrant Help Center, they also offered spiritual services. Hermana Pilar was particularly beloved by migrants. As required by her order, every article of clothing that she wore was gray: her habit, her tennis shoes, and even her cell phone—a little flip phone that was always ringing at full volume. I could only imagine the kind of help people on the other end needed from her.⁶³ Over the years I saw that she and other Spanish-speaking Catholic clergy were the first point of contact not only for migrants but also for the Peruvian embassy and the Korean Immigration office dealing with Peruvian migrants. They connected migrants with lawyers, doctors, travel agents to get tickets home, jobs, and places to stay when they had nowhere to go. They helped families in Latin America track down incarcerated or detained migrants, and they knew inside information on immigration laws and policies. They also seemed to know nearly every person from Latin America living in Korea as well as any trouble those migrants experienced in Korea or had tried to leave behind in Peru—including bad marriages, debts, or drinking problems.

Throughout that summer and the following years, I accompanied them to the Masses they offered in areas with large Peruvian communities. Hermana Pilar asked me to write an article about my research for the monthly newsletter she published and circulated to migrants during Mass. The newsletter usually included a couple of pages of religious teachings (about things like marriage or Lent) and articles written by the clergy about the arrival or departure of Spanish-speaking clergy and religious or recreational retreats the community had taken to places like Seoul Grand Park. Each issue also had numerous articles written by migrants sharing their reactions to the retreats or their experiences of preparing for sacraments, like First Communion, in Korea. The back cover of the newsletter listed contact information for the clergy and the schedule of Masses and catechism classes in various communities for the upcoming month. From my March 2007 newsletter article, which asked those who were interested to contact me via email, as well as by attending weekly Masses and other church events, I met hundreds of migrants from Latin America—primarily from Peru, but also Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela.

During the first Mass I attended with Hermana Pilar and Padre Ignacio in July 2006, we arrived to find about twenty people waiting to enter the church. There were numerous families at this Mass, including three families with school-aged children. In one family, the children worked in a factory with their parents, and in the other families, the children attended an American-run Christian school. As we walked in, I received a few smiles and looks of curiosity, but no one had time to ask who I was. It had taken us about two hours to get there via subway and bus from Seoul and we had arrived just in time to begin the Mass. As Padre Ignacio disappeared into a room by the altar to prepare, Hermana Pilar hugged a few of the members and paused to talk to a girl about her upcoming confirmation.

Hermana Pilar asked us to take a seat and reminded everyone to come forward when it was time to take communion. "You don't go to a party without food!" she joked, referring to the wafer and wine. Years later, Padre Diego, a priest from Colombia, told me that at the daily Masses he led for Korean people, nearly everyone took communion, but at the Spanish-language Masses for migrant workers, almost no one did. He thought it was because they felt guilty about not having confessed, about living with people who they were not married to, or for not having gone through their confirmation in Peru.

"Where is everyone?" Hermana Pilar asked once we were settled in the pews. There were hundreds of Peruvians who lived near Dongducheon, she had told me on the bus, but it was difficult to get them to show up to Mass. "Tell the others that Sundays are safe," she said. "Korean immigration has promised us they won't patrol on Sundays," she said.

This was the first and only time I heard her relay a promise of a "safe" Sunday. There seemed to be an implied respect for people going to church in this message from the immigration office. However, the reprieve must have been short-lived,

because even that same summer, Peruvians I knew were detained and deported on Sundays while working or walking in their factory towns.

The fear of being detained by immigration officers—even as surveillance became more intense over the years of my fieldwork—did not stop people from living their lives. After Hermana Pilar asked again where everyone was, one man finally cleared his throat and said, “There is a big soccer tournament today.” Hermana Pilar looked annoyed but did not comment. Later, I accompanied friends to some of the nonchurch events held in Dongducheon, including all-day soccer tournaments that started over beer and food at one of the area’s migrant-owned Peruvian restaurants and finished at one of its Latin nightclubs.

Hermana Pilar then introduced me to the group. I stood up and smiled nervously as everyone stared at me. She told them that I was an anthropologist from the United States who was doing research about the Peruvian community in Korea. “She is not here to turn you in to immigration,” she said straightforwardly. Then she said, “She is going to Peru next year too. If you want to share your stories, or give her your contact information, please say hello after Mass.” Detecting basically no reaction from the crowd, I sat down awkwardly. I hoped I could at least meet one or two people before we returned to Seoul.

After Mass nearly everyone stayed to talk with me. The families and couples at the Mass had gathered on some benches near the church to wait for me as I left with the clergy. It was dark, and the muggy summer night was thick with mosquitos and the screams of cicadas in the trees around us. The parishioners had saved me a seat in the middle of the bench, and when I sat down they began asking me questions. They were curious about why I was there, and why I cared about Peruvian migration in particular. When I told them about my project and explained that I had also worked in Korea as a teacher, they embraced me as a fellow foreigner in a strange land. Almost like a ritual, at this and other first meetings I had after Masses, immediately everyone wanted to exchange stories of the trials and tribulations of living in Korea. “Have you been here during the winter?” they asked. Then they would tell me their arrival stories and describe arriving at Gimpo Airport in January when it was minus 9 degrees Celsius; they told me they were dressed in the lightweight clothes they had previously considered to be “winter” clothes in Lima (where a typical low winter temperature was 17 degrees Celsius). “What do you think of Korean food?” they would ask. When I said that I liked it, most shook their heads in disbelief and said they thought it was inedible. “*Demasiado ají!* [too spicy!],” they said. Then one person would say they liked some kinds of kimchi, or *gamjatang* (a spicy pork and potato soup), or appreciated that Koreans ate a lot of vegetables, and others would agree.

“I was so surprised when you read the prayer in Spanish!” one of the older men told me, referring to the prayer Hermana Pilar had asked me to read during the Mass.⁶⁴ Few non-Latin American foreigners they met in Korea spoke Spanish. “The Filipinos speak a little Spanish!” one woman told me. A few Filipinas who

had Spanish-speaking boyfriends from the nearby US military base attended their Masses. They were happy that I spoke Spanish, albeit with an accent. "It's not an American accent, though," they said reassuringly. Then they tried to figure out what kind of accent it was. "French? Italian?" I told them that my family was not from Latin America, but that I had learned Spanish in college and spoke it at home with Omar, who was soon to be my husband.

They wanted their stories to be told and were happy that I was interested in hearing them. Their legal instability added to the urgency with which they wanted to talk to me. More than anything, they were frustrated with being regarded as unimportant. They saw themselves as contributing to the Korean economy and as examples of successful migrants, yet their presence was both ignored and actively challenged in Korea and Peru.

From this meeting and others like it I received invitations from migrants to visit their homes, spend the night at their factories, and attend their church- and non-church-related events, including soccer games, parties, and shopping trips. Catholic migrants later introduced me to the Protestant community, and people from both groups asked me to visit their families in Peru.

In Peru, I spent much of my time hanging out with families in one of the most visible examples of Korea I found: family homes or businesses built with remittances. We also spent many hours preparing Mexican and Peruvian meals together, shopping, communicating with their family members in Korea with online messaging and over the phone, and attending special events, such as birthday parties and block parties.

In Korea, I visited numerous churches with Peruvian members, but eventually I focused on three: the Spanish-speaking Catholic community, Friendship Foreign Ministry (a small community mission outside of Seoul), and Nazarene (Ximena's megachurch in Seoul). I concentrated on these groups because while the members from these churches knew one another and sometimes interacted, they all had different attitudes toward the significance of their migrations, their religious participation or conversions in Korea, and their responsibilities toward Peru and toward their families, especially after the global financial crisis hit.

Although both Friendship and Nazarene shared many similarities, they also had important differences. First, even though Friendship was a nondenominational mission church, it was affiliated with some of the most powerful (and rich) mainstream evangelical Protestant churches in South Korea. So, while the members were migrant workers, they had regular contact with Korean church members who would visit with food and clothing donations and would also help migrants access scholarships from more economically powerful churches located around the world. In contrast, Nazarene was a megachurch, and Peruvians attended the main service with Koreans (seated in a specially designated foreigner section listening to simultaneous translation delivered via headsets) and then retreated to a smaller hall where they held a separate service entirely in Spanish. Nazarene was

Presbyterian, but the founder was a charismatic Korean pastor whose views and teachings were admired by the Nazarene Peruvians and seen as extreme by some of the other churches I worked with.⁶⁵

To learn more about these three churches, their infrastructures, and their current and future plans for serving or working with their congregations of Peruvian migrants, I interviewed Peruvian members and their leaders, read documents and pamphlets produced for and by Peruvian migrants, and regularly attended services, Bible studies, and special events. Each church was based in Korea but had differing levels of transnational ties. All the churches had launched missions to the Peru-based hometowns of their respective congregants.⁶⁶ This included the Catholic Church. The day I arrived in Korea in 2008, I called Hermana Pilar to see if we could meet. She told me she was actually on her way to the airport to leave for Norte Chico, where her order had decided she should relocate and set up a new chapter. In Lima, I joined a few families as they attended their churches, including one of the mission churches started by Friendship members who were former migrant workers trained to be pastors. This helped me to compare churchgoing in Korea with churchgoing in Peru in order to see how the transnational churches adapted to a Peruvian framework.

MY RECEPTION AND POSITIONALITY IN THE FIELD(S)

Since I moved among so many different sites, families, and churches in Korea and Peru, there was a lot of variation in how others saw me and how I tried to position myself over time. My reception as a researcher and an American was different in Peru than it was in Korea. Whereas in Korea, Peruvians treated me as a fellow foreigner or potential member of a church, in Peru I was mostly welcomed as the friend of their family member in Korea, but I was also distanced because of my foreignness and class status. When I told families that I was staying in the middle-class area of San Miguel they were shocked I could afford something so expensive. In contrast, when I told other researchers in Lima where I was staying, they seemed shocked I would venture out of the tourist-friendly area of Miraflores. Many of the families I met in Lima owned taxis and offered to give me rides to and from their houses, or to my next interviews. However, I frequently found myself trying to figure out if I should pay for these rides or treat them as a favor. Some families happily accepted (and expected) a flat daily fee; others refused (and looked offended) when I asked if I could give them some gas money. In the end I tried to take *colectivo* buses or combis instead of taxis to avoid this dance, during which I always felt I had taken some kind of misstep.

I married Omar, who is from Mexico City, in the United States in between my trips to Korea and Peru in 2007, and he accompanied me on most of my subsequent field trips to Peru and Korea. I mention that because I noticed that being married to

Omar changed the ways people treated me. Before getting married, people seemed curious about my motivations for traveling alone and conducting research—I was asked more than once about whether I would consider marrying someone to help them get a green card. However, after Omar came with me to the field, it seemed to make my personal life less a topic of interest and my presence less suspicious. He was popular among my Peruvian interviewees; they told us they loved Mexico, having felt a familiarity with it from *telenovelas*, and some migrants had been there on their way to Korea or other destinations. Whenever he accompanied me to an interview, the opening conversation was invariably about Mexican food, and if he did not come, the opening conversation was asking when he was coming to visit.

My foreign accent in Spanish also carried a different meaning in Peru than it did in Korea. In Peru, on a few occasions after calling the numbers my contacts in Korea had given me for their family homes, the person on the other end hung up on me after hearing my voice, thinking I was trying to scam them. Not only were migration-related phone scams common, but also a few people had already been scammed out of thousands of dollars while arranging their trips to Korea. After emailing my contacts in Korea to confirm that their family members wanted to speak with me, someone from the family would call me back, welcome me to their homes for meals and stories, and often treat me like a friend or daughter.

Being treated like a daughter had its benefits and drawbacks, however. Although I was welcomed into Peruvian homes and included in family events, people were worried about my safety to the point that they did not want me to walk outside alone. In fact, while staying in Norte Chico, my hostess would only let me go outside "alone" if I was in the company of one of her granddaughters—girls who were nine and twelve years old at the time. My nine-year-old chaperone provided an excellent narrated tour of the places I wanted to go—especially places she frequently went, like the local bakery to pick up rolls for our dinner—but limited my ability to explore new leads in fieldwork. My freedom of movement increased dramatically on my second and third trips when Omar came with me to Peru. I either brought him with me when I went out, or told people that I had so they did not worry about me. However, the families in the pueblos jóvenes were also worried about his safety there as a foreign man. Petty thefts were common. They would give us specific instructions regarding which streets to walk down and which to avoid. Nothing ever happened to us, but we witnessed a few robberies in Lima. In one instance we were in a taxi, stuck in traffic, when a group of men began walking among the idling cars and combis. They tried to get on a combi, but the driver locked the door in time. Then they turned to the taxi directly in front of us, reached through the open passenger window and grabbed the purse of the woman who was sitting inside. They ran off with the bag, and I was reminded of the warnings about this very crime that I had heard from my Peruvian friends in Korea. This—and more serious violent crimes they told me had escalated in Peru after the global financial crisis—is what they meant when they said they preferred Korea's

safety and calmness, even though they were constantly in danger of being detained by immigration officers and deported.

In Korea, I also found difficulties in focusing on three different churches simultaneously. First, logistically, it was somewhat difficult to balance attending three different main church services, all of which primarily met on Sunday and were dispersed around Gyeonggi Province. However, with planning I could attend two in one day: one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Second, I was treated either as an honorary member or potential member at each of these churches, and so I sometimes felt like I was betraying one group over the other.

Although I told everyone the purpose of my research, seeing me participating in so many different groups sometimes raised suspicions about what I was doing. For example, after Mass one Sunday, a few members of the congregation, as well as two priests and three nuns from Latin America, gathered in a room at the back of the church to share the meal of *aji de gallina* [a spicy Peruvian chicken stew served with white rice]. I was helping her serve the food on paper plates when one of the nuns looked around and asked where Antonio, one of the men who had been at the Mass, had gone. A few people laughed and said they had seen him get on his moped and drive off to “the other church” [the Protestant Friendship Ministry] right after service.

“People really go there?” one of the nuns asked in disbelief. “Why?”

A parishioner commented that she had heard they served a large Korean meal after services and hinted that they had cute Vietnamese members who Miguel might want to meet. Then she paused and said, “Well, we should ask Erica. She goes there.”

The whole room turned to me with surprised looks on their faces as if to say, *You do?*

After a moment, I said, “Yes. I am a spy,” and they all laughed and continued chatting.

I had been joking, but as an anthropologist, I could not help but feel a little like a spy. I kept notes on what everyone did and said and what they thought of each other. Not only did I have notes on what they thought at the time, but I could compare them with notes I kept on what they had said years prior. I knew what their parents thought of their conversions or migrations. I visited their children when they could not. Further, in interviews I conducted with different Peruvian consuls general over the years, I nearly always personally knew the “anonymous” cases they described to me with regard to things their constituents had done, including being arrested for drug use, and the man who had sought asylum in the Peruvian embassy on the basis of being gay. I learned that his request was denied, but the consul general had felt bad about not being able to help him. Each story I heard or took part in was a moment for me to enhance my research and a moment where I faced a moral choice: Do I admit I already know a little of this story, or pretend that I do not? Do I wait to see if the story unfolds on its own, or do I ask for more

information? Selectively withholding information was crucial to protecting people who trusted me with their stories.

Further, as an academic from the United States, I felt conflicted about the numerous forms of mobility I had that my interlocutors lacked. Not only could I move around Korea without fear of being detained and deported, but as long as I received grants and was able to put remaining expenses on credit cards, I could also move between the destinations they wanted to go—Korea, Peru, and the United States—without becoming stuck because of a lack of visas or money. Additionally, as I moved among groups, I found myself shifting my class association, religious orientation, and loyalties, by choosing to speak up or stay silent on different issues, including my own politics and (lack of) religious beliefs. George Marcus notes that ethnographers doing multisited fieldwork become “circumstantial activists” who must navigate situations where “the politics and ethics of working in any one reflects on work in the others.” This, as he points out, “generates a definite sense of doing more than just ethnography.”⁶⁷ The various mobilities that I experienced were crucial to conducting my research but also troubling.

Despite my own misgivings about feeling like a spy, I was still surprised when Ximena confessed to me that there were rumors circulating at Nazarene that I was an *actual* spy in the employ of a smaller church. When she canceled a couple of lunch meetings with me, I had not thought anything of it because last-minute *arbeits* often came up. However, one afternoon when I ran into her in the subway station near her house, she held back tears as she told me that her Peruvian pastor at Nazarene had forbidden the congregation from seeing me. Apparently, the pastor had left this smaller church without saying where he had gone and thought I had been sent to collect intel on the new church, and perhaps even turn in the congregation to immigration. Eventually this rumor was cleared up when Imelda, a woman I had met while living in Norte Chico the year before, migrated to Korea and joined Nazarene. After she vouched for me, I was included in more church events, but never became a favorite of the pastor.

Finally, although I tried to be forthcoming with everyone about not being religious, I had to creatively and delicately respond to ongoing questions of how my faith was developing. After all, I had been attending church with them for years. With Catholics and members of Friendship, my religious beliefs were rarely the focus of any discussion. I participated in church services, and occasionally they would ask me to interpret a piece of scripture, but no one ever sat me down and asked me to explain my religious beliefs. They also did not evangelize to me. Only after years of knowing them did the Peruvian leaders at Friendship say that I had been attending church long enough that it was about time I started to convert or at least share my experiences of conversion. However, with the members of Nazarene, my religious beliefs, and my knowledge of theirs, was a central topic of conversation. When I told them about the purpose of my research, they told me that I was wasting my time trying to study them when I should really be studying the

gospel. When I explained my fieldwork, they explained *their* fieldwork, literally their *trabajo de campo*, where they went to places like Dongducheon and evangelized to other Spanish speakers. I would ask to conduct interviews, and people would invite me to their houses or a café and pull out a piece of paper or even a whiteboard with markers and explain the gospel to me for an hour. They were surprised when I listened and even took notes and asked questions for clarification. “Americans are arrogant,” I heard more than once. “But you are not as arrogant as most of them.” I tried to take that as a compliment. At one extreme, some members of Nazarene saw me as a *respuesta*, literally an answer to the prayers they had been making in church for months for a Spanish to English translator, whereas others, primarily their Peruvian pastor, saw me as a problematic interloper, at best wanting to study them, at worst trying to get them deported.⁶⁸ After a few months, some of the women I spent a lot of time with—hanging out at their homes, cooking together, participating in prayer circles—were happy to tell other church members about the signs that I was successfully converting, because as Susan Harding points out, “If you are seriously willing to listen to the gospel, you have begun to convert.”⁶⁹ The more I listened, the more I found that their own experiences of conversion, and their interests in converting others, were intertwined with every aspect of their lives, both as migrants in Korea and with their families in Peru, and that was part of the transnational story I had been looking for.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter 1 investigates why Peruvians wanted to come to Korea, and what was happening in Korea to both welcome and exclude them. I include ethnographic data of migrant arrival stories in Korea as well as provide historical context about migration and churches in Peru and South Korea.

Chapter 2 discusses money conversion and remittances and how, during the global financial crisis, migrants had less money to send than ever before. I also show migrants’ efforts to temper their economic and social remittances in the hope of transforming their family members into people who could thrive with fewer remittances and become more self-supporting.

Chapter 3 explores religious conversion and discusses the significance of South Korea to undocumented Peruvians with respect to accelerating these conversions and infusing them with the potential to change one’s status. In particular, I focus on how migrants attempted to convert themselves and others as well as to recast their migration as being less about the pursuit of money and more about actions predestined by God and identified through *respuestas*.

Chapter 4 focuses on cosmopolitan conversion, and on how looming departures inspired people to make new plans and connections with others that helped them to defy their statuses and create unique transnational worlds. I discuss how

developing these projects in Korea placed them at the convergence of cosmopolitan conversion projects led by the state, churches, and other people in transit, which resulted in migrants both transcending and becoming entangled in barriers and new identities.

In the epilogue, I summarize and bridge my key points and present stories of what migrants do after they leave Korea to discuss how cosmopolitan conversions and plans cannot fail because they are continually emerging.