

Cosmopolitan Conversion

After six years of attending an American-run Christian school in Dongducheon—the only school her mother could find that would accept undocumented children—Rosa spoke English better than Korean or even her native Spanish. I first met Rosa at a Mass in 2006, when she was just twelve and still a novice English speaker. As one of the few Peruvian children who had accompanied her parents to Korea, she was a favorite of the Spanish-speaking Catholic clergy, the evangelical Christian teachers at her school, and other factory workers who had left their own children behind in Peru. People from each of these groups helped care for Rosa while her mother Amanda worked long shifts at a factory, making it possible for mother and daughter to survive in Korea. Initially, both Amanda and her husband had worked in Dongducheon, but after losing their E-9 unskilled labor visas in 2004 and discovering that Amanda was pregnant with a second child, they decided it was best that her husband and infant son relocate to Peru while she and Rosa stay in Korea and try to evade deportation for as long as possible. They made these sacrifices to their family's unity and safety not just so that Amanda could earn money, but so that Rosa could finish her education in Korea, and her parents could afford to pay for it. While it was too costly for most undocumented Peruvians to raise an infant in Korea, if Rosa returned to Peru, an English-language education—like the one she received in Dongducheon for free—would be financially impossible.

“If Rosa speaks English well, she can study in America,” her mother told me when I met the family again in 2009. “She can get a scholarship,” she said, relaying the promises made by Rosa's American teachers. Anthropologists So Jin Park and Nancy Abelmann pointed out that for many people in South Korea working

to move up social classes and help their children be citizens of the world, English was a “saturated sign” that held many promises for a cosmopolitan future and transformation.¹ It was no surprise then that in Korea Rosa and her family came to see her fluency in English as representing possibilities: to transform her from an undocumented child migrant into an international student; to serve as concrete evidence of her educational achievement; and most importantly, to open up a path for her future documented migration to the United States. So, while Amanda and her husband had run into many obstacles after coming to Korea to work in a factory—that is, losing their visas, struggling to find a school that would accept their undocumented daughter, and then becoming separated—new and exciting possibilities for education and migration had opened up as a result of having no other legal options for themselves or educational options for their daughter.

Despite these opportunities, which were made possible by their exclusion, they had to find ways to normalize the danger in their lives. I saw this firsthand one hot and humid weekday afternoon in August 2006 when Azucena, a forty-year-old woman from Lima, invited me to her apartment for lunch. Azucena was out of work and had agreed to take care of Rosa while she was on summer break from school. I had just finished the long subway and bus ride from Seoul and had escaped into the relative coolness of Azucena’s apartment when her daughter-in-law, Maria, called and asked us to come over to her place for lunch. Azucena peered out of her window for a few long moments before she deemed it safe enough for us to go outside. Even though their neighborhood was nearly deserted on this weekday afternoon, nowhere in Dongducheon was out of sight of immigration officers, not even this sleepy residential street dotted with gardens bursting with cabbages, chili peppers, and flowers.

The thriving gardens were planted in empty lots between the area’s many villas, crumbling two- and three-story apartment buildings that had been popular housing models following the Korean War but had since fallen out of fashion. Small handwritten signs in English posted on the villa windows, advertising vacant rooms at prices higher than those found in Seoul, were obviously meant to attract non-Korean tenants—either migrant workers or soldiers. In recent years many Koreans had relocated to new high-rise apartment buildings that were popping up at an impressive rate along the highway coming from Seoul. Few Koreans would want to live in Azucena’s neighborhood anyway, given its high number of foreign residents, proximity to the street of nightclubs, and the dangerous reputation with which the entire city had been saddled since the 1950s when the US Army arrived, established bases, and the population of foreigners grew. Now, with the increase in the frequency and severity of immigration raids launched here, the foreigners were the ones who were scared.

In fact, Maria told me that just days before my visit, while out looking for work, she had been violently stopped and searched by immigration officers. Since her tourist visa had yet to expire and she was not caught while in a factory, the officers

reluctantly released her. The whole family, including Rosa, had been shaken up by this incident and now rarely left their apartments. They just waited at home and hoped a friend would call with information on where to find arbeits.

As I walked through Dongducheon with Azucena and Rosa, I saw that they felt the precariousness of their place as Peruvians in the ethnic and national divisions among foreigners in Korea. As we darted along the street to Azucena's daughter-in-law's house, Azucena kept pushing me ahead although I did not know the way. "You look American, you go in front," Azucena kept saying. In Korea, and in Peru, to look American often meant to look white. By telling me I looked American and pushing me in front, she meant to say that if immigration officers suddenly appeared, I was to either try to convince them we were all Americans and therefore documented, or provide a diversion with my whiteness while everyone else ran for cover. The Peruvians in Dongducheon know that the legal status of people in this area—and in all of Korea—is largely based on race and nationality. As a white woman in this neighborhood, I was most likely taken for an English teacher, an American soldier, or a Russian migrant. Thankfully we did not have to test the efficacy of this plan because we made it to Maria's apartment without seeing anyone.

Once we were safely inside, Rosa watched Korean TV and played with the family dog. I asked Azucena what would happen if Amanda were to be detained on her way home from work. I had heard horror stories about Peruvians being locked in Korean detention centers for months or years before they were able to scrape together enough money from sympathetic friends for their plane tickets home. Unlike the US government, the Korean government (like Japan's) requires its deportees to pay for their own transportation home. This can prove problematic, as Peruvians in general have few routes open to them to get to Peru, and deported Peruvians have even fewer. At this time, the price for a one-way ticket for a deported Peruvian (who could only transit through South Africa) cost roughly \$2,500—an incredible sum for people who make \$800 a month and a nearly impossible figure for those who have been locked in immigration prison for months or years and have to rely on friends to collect the money.

"What would Rosa do?" I asked.

"They keep their suitcases packed at all times," Azucena told me. Since 2004 when her husband left, Amanda had realized that either she or her daughter could be detained on the way to or from work or school, so they needed a realistic plan for if and when that happened. In addition to keeping their clothes and possessions packed in a suitcase, they had hidden an envelope in the apartment with enough cash for two one-way tickets to Lima. The escape plan was set up as a temporary precaution, and they hoped the heightened deportation risk would eventually decrease. However, when I met them again in 2009, they were still waiting for their inevitable deportation.

This was not unusual. Many people I met kept their most prized possessions—photographs of family in Peru and friends in Korea, and items like T-shirts, shoes,

and CDs purchased at Seoul's Dongdaemun Market—boxed up by the front doors of their small apartments. Securely taped, addressed to themselves at their parents' homes in Peru, the boxes sit for years, just waiting for friends to ship them off when and if their owner is detained. Undocumented migrants cannot be certain where their plans will take them, and the mere possibility of reaching someplace new keeps them going—or in the case of Rosa, staying. Nearly every Peruvian I met in Korea had laid out plans for future migrations where they hoped to become something more important than just factory workers.

Rosa and her family's plan to prolong their looming deportation so Rosa could complete her education is an example of what I term a cosmopolitan conversion, or the various projects or plans individuals or groups undertake in the effort to change their lives and help them be cosmopolitan. By being cosmopolitan I mean the pursuit of "infinite ways of being"² and "the desire to become 'citizen[s] capable of living at home in the world.'"³ Further, people or groups who attempt cosmopolitan conversions also exhibit a desire to be recognized by others as having valid cultural capital to rightfully belong in the category of a cosmopolitan.⁴ For example, they may pursue institutionalized cultural capital through things like visas, marriage licenses, or academic degrees, or embodied cultural capital in the form of being seen by others as a fluent English speaker worthy of a scholarship, a member of a successful transnational family, or even the receiver of *respuestas* from God. Since, as Pierre Bourdieu pointed out, it takes a lot of effort—in the expense of time and labor—for cultural capital to be recognized as valid by others, or to become covert and convertible to social or economic capital,⁵ the plans and projects in cosmopolitan conversions usually take a long time to reach fruition. For example, Rosa needed to prolong her deportation from Korea as a way to put in the necessary labor to acquire the cultural capital of an English education and the social capital that would get her a scholarship to a school in the United States.

Rosa was not the only person I met who had to prolong her imminent departure from Korea in order to fulfill a cosmopolitan conversion. When I met Frank, he told me he had spent his entire time in Korea preparing to move to Spain. He had applied for a resident visa to Spain years earlier through Peruvian family members who could prove their Spanish descent. He did not know how long the visa would take to be approved, or if it would be approved at all, but he was certain that being undocumented in Korea would hurt his chances of getting this visa to Spain. So, in order to keep his Korean tourist visa valid, he had traveled to China by boat every three months for two years. While in Korea, he worked in factories to fund his future move to Spain and his costly trimonthly trips to China. Ultimately, he had to abandon this plan during the economic crisis when Korean immigration increased scrutiny and he could no longer pass as a tourist.

Rosa's parents may have brought her to Korea in the hopes of finding a way for her to receive an education, but the particular way it was happening was a family project that was still taking form and had emerged during and as a result of their situation of being undocumented Peruvians in Korea. Therefore, I focus on cosmopolitanism as a "project" or "practice."⁶ This is different from an individual who recognizes his or her identity as a cosmopolitan person; rather, it is a sense of cosmopolitanism in which the form and content "is yet to come, something awaiting realization."⁷ Since the barriers and opportunities in cosmopolitan conversions are always emerging and the end is always yet to come, there can never be a definitively failed plan, just a chance to change direction and start a new plan. This is how the arrival of one child in Korea (Rosa) became a reason to prolong a family's stay in Korea, while another child's arrival (her brother) became a reason to leave. Further, even if Rosa was deported before she graduated or obtained her scholarship, she had still accumulated the cultural capital of attending an American school and being an English speaker, which had the potential to open up new possibilities for her even years in the future no matter where she lives.

In this chapter, I present examples of different cosmopolitan conversions undertaken by Peruvian migrants while in Korea and explore how their efforts to develop and achieve their cosmopolitan plans helped to create a new global configuration that shifted the value of their actions, status, and the results of their plans. This is because their plans emerged within the context, and at the convergence, of other large- and small-scale cosmopolitan conversion projects by the Korean state, churches, and the Koreans and migrants with whom they interacted. For example, the Korean state's efforts to be globalized and enact multicultural policies had left Peruvians legally excluded, while the efforts of various Korean and American Protestant churches to have multicultural parishioners and global missions while promoting themselves as world changers had made them highly desirable members.

I consider how even though their cosmopolitan conversions interacted with those of multiple individuals and groups, as undocumented migrants, Peruvians faced risks and potential losses others did not, including deportation, lost time with their families in Peru, or lost chances to pursue other projects. However, I argue that they built loss into their plans, thereby changing the value and meaning of these risks and losses. For example, their status as undocumented workers simultaneously put them in constant danger of being deported and accelerated their inclusion in groups and relationships that gave them new chances to develop cultural capital. They also creatively revalued loss as a "desirable outcome"⁸ through incorporating it in the narratives of their cosmopolitan plans that they presented to each other and at their churches. However, sometimes in their attempts to make themselves at home in the world, they also created new potential losses for themselves, including becoming entangled in the very legal and social barriers they wanted to overcome.

“WE HAVE EVERYTHING HERE!”

Lucia, a woman from a *pueblo joven* who had been undocumented in Korea for two years, asked me to come stay at her factory with her for the night and then take her sightseeing in Seoul the next day. “I want to be a tourist!” she said.

I had met Lucia and her husband Jorge at a Mass the year before. Soon after I returned to Korea the following summer Lucia told me over instant messaging that she had been in a minor accident while riding on the back of a moped through the roads near her factory, so she was off work for a few days. We were friendly, but I guessed that the main reason she had asked me to accompany her to the city was similar to why Azucena and the women in Dongducheon had pushed me to the front of the group. She wanted to use my “American” face to help her pass as a tourist in Seoul and avoid the gaze of immigration officers. She was also excited about this outing because Jorge—who was jealous because she had been on a moped with another Peruvian man at the time of the accident—would be at his job in a nearby recycling plant and had agreed to let her go with me. This was one of the first times that she would venture beyond her factory town.

It was a hot and muggy Thursday afternoon in early July 2007 when I arrived at her town outside of Seoul. Jorge picked me up near the train station on his moped and drove me to where Lucia worked. The factory was surrounded by a tall wooden fence that hid it from the view of the road. We passed through the gate and drove in front of a row of metal shipping containers that were lined up end to end against the factory wall. He stopped in front of one and told me that this was where he and Lucia lived.

This was long before the tiny-house phenomenon made converted shipping containers popular housing options in the United States, but many Peruvians I knew lived in them inside their factory walls. The containers were very small but offered privacy, and the couples and a few lucky individuals who had an entire container to themselves had positive things to say about them. However, factories often housed numerous single male migrants together in one container. Earlier that week I visited another Peruvian woman’s factory and had seen the shipping container shared by all of the factory’s seven documented workers—men from Southeast Asia. That factory owner had actually stacked two shipping containers on top of each other and installed a shower in the top one. The living space below had sparse furnishings and the floor was made up of a patchwork of plywood and linoleum scraps. The whole place was caked with mud the men had tracked in from the monsoon rains outside. In addition to being crowded and uncomfortable, it was hot and stuffy from the lack of good air circulation.

I was surprised then when Jorge opened the door to his container to reveal what looked like a cozy bedroom. Lucia had decorated their container with curtains on the windows and a small traditional Korean table on the floor next to the bed. A queen-size bed with mosquito netting hung around it gave the room a princess



FIGURE 6. Converted shipping containers: Home for seven documented workers. Photo by author.

look. Their bookshelves and desk displayed photos of their three school-aged children in Peru. They had installed a wall-mounted air conditioning unit that kept the temperature cool and the humidity at bay. It was cramped in there, especially with all three of us, but pleasant. Jorge explained that although he lived there, after dinner he would return to his recycling plant to sleep. He wanted to give us space.

Lucia gave me a hug and invited me to sit down on the floor by the table where she had arranged three heaping plates of the *arroz chaufa* (Peruvian-style Chinese fried rice) she had cooked for us. Joyfully, she pointed out a green mesh bag filled with five avocados that Jorge had bought on the black market for our breakfast the next day. These were part of a typical breakfast in Peru, but this was the first time I had seen them in Korea. Later I would see avocados in those same bags for sale at a Costco that had recently opened in Seoul and guessed an enterprising Peruvian married to a Korean had started selling them to migrant workers who lacked the proper documentation to get a Costco membership card.⁹

During dinner Lucia and Jorge told me about their difficult migration experience. Their broker had scammed them out of \$9,000 and abandoned them at a hotel in Seoul.¹⁰ After spending three months working at jobs that never paid them, Lucia found work here and Jorge found work at the recycling plant. They

had only recently paid off their debt from their migration journey and started remitting. Although they wanted to stay as long as possible to accumulate money, it was also clear that Lucia suffered emotionally from being separated from her three children. She cried every time she talked about them to me. She told me she felt terrible leaving her children, but her parents had agreed to take care of them as long as necessary.

When I asked the couple if they liked living in Korea better than Peru, Jorge looked shocked by my question. “Of course!” he said, looking around the container. “We have everything here! A rice cooker, a TV, a computer!”

He explained with pride that his boss had let him pick all of their furnishings and appliances—like their bed and air conditioner—out of the many things Korean people had discarded at the recycling plant where he worked.

Their place was definitely nice for a container, but it was still a container. The items inside it seemed to work well but showed scuffs and dents from their use and time in the recycling plant. I imagined that their family house in Peru must be very humble in comparison for him to say that.

That night after Jorge left, Lucia worked hard to hide me from the rest of the factory. She told me she was not afraid of the Korean bosses seeing me, but she was worried the other Peruvians would see me and start rumors about why I was there. She only reluctantly let me out of the container so I could brush my teeth in the communal bathroom nearby. She tried to rush me past a small group of men who were chatting and smoking in the light coming from the building’s open door.

“Who’s that?” someone asked her in Spanish. She ignored them, but then they asked more questions.

“Is she going to work here?”

“She is my friend from America,” Lucia told them with exasperation as we disappeared into the building. “Peruvians are gossips,” she said.

They were not the only people who mistook me for a factory worker in this area. The following morning after everyone else had gone to work, Lucia and I slipped through the large factory gates. We walked down a narrow road flanked by bright green fields of crops for about ten minutes before the first vehicle, a white work truck, came along. Lucia flagged it down, and the young Korean man who was driving stopped alongside us. His passenger-side window was already rolled down, probably to let in the breeze.

“Train station?” Lucia asked in Korean. He reached over and opened the passenger door for us. I had never hitchhiked in my life, but before I could ask Lucia if this was really OK, or protest, she had jumped in. I got in behind her and shut the door. Probably sensing my reluctance, she reassured me that this was how the factory workers always got to town. The driver heard us speaking Spanish and asked us where we were from. When Lucia said *Peru*, his eyes got wide. When I said *Miguk*, “the United States,” he turned to look at us. After a moment he said that he hadn’t seen any factory workers from the United States around there before. We

both laughed, but neither of us corrected him. We just smiled as we bounced down the rough road toward the train station.

Once we got to Seoul, I led Lucia on a minitour of the city hall area where I had worked as an English teacher years earlier. We visited Cheonggyecheon stream, Deoksugung Palace, took photos of each other standing in front of the fountains near city hall, bought key chains at Namdaemun market, and ate a late lunch at a Peruvian restaurant. Around 5:00 p.m., I took her back home. That night I emailed her the photos we had taken, and she sent them to her children in Peru. She said they were very happy to see her “*paseando como turista*.” From our conversation I took this to mean both “sightseeing” and literally “walking around like a tourist,” as opposed to hiding in the factory.

When I flew to Peru the next month, Lucia had asked her parents and children to pick me up in their family taxi and take me on a similar tour in Lima. They took me to the Plaza de Armas, and to see a church, and then I treated them to a meal of *pollo a la brasa* (Peruvian rotisserie chicken) in central Lima. When we got back to the family house, we emailed Lucia the photos we had taken of her children feeding pigeons in the Plaza de Armas. We talked to her over a crackling internet connection from a dial-up modem set up in a bedroom. Although she seemed very happy this outing had taken place, I remember feeling sad that she could not see her children, but I could.

Sitting in the bedroom talking to Lucia, I also recalled Jorge’s pride in his container and was surprised by how nice the family home seemed in comparison to what I thought it would look like. It was spacious and in an established part of a pueblo joven that had paved roads. Unlike other migrant homes that were still under construction, this one had a lived-in look with two finished floors and a roof-top garden with a chicken coop and plants. It appeared these things predated their migration and did not come from their remittances. However, it was also not clear to me if this was the family home collectively owned by everyone, or if it just belonged to Lucia’s parents and the couple was saving to build their own home.

No matter the full situation, Jorge’s position toward this house—and his life in Korea—made more sense to me the next time I saw the couple. It was in Peru in 2008. After three years of living in Korea, he and Lucia had been deported a few months before.

Omar and I invited them out to lunch and they suggested we meet at Larcomar, an upscale mall overlooking the Pacific Ocean in Miraflores. They brought their children who wanted to eat Happy Meals at the McDonald’s inside. We sat at a table near the counter and they talked about how much they missed living in Korea.

“Let’s put it this way. This is one of the nicest places in Peru,” he said indicating the dark stone structure of Larcomar, “but this wouldn’t even be a subway station in Korea.”

This was an exaggeration, especially since Larcomar has an ocean view and luxury stores. But, I understood what he meant. There were some fancy subway stations in Seoul with impressive architecture and walls covered in a similar dark stone that somewhat resembled this shopping center. But more importantly, what I took from this comparison was that being in Korea had changed his understanding of quality. No matter what happened here, after experiencing life in Korea, Peru was never going to be the same. The couple told me returning to Korea would be nearly impossible since they had been deported. They were also sad about the prospect of leaving their children again, but they were already devising plans to migrate to Chile. This was a family project, I realized, as Lucia's children happily discussed the newer cell phone models she would be able to bring them from abroad. The ones they had from Korea were getting old.

Lucia and Jorge experienced many changes to their worldviews during their time in Korea. In their migration, they experienced a shift in the way they and their family valued things and actions. David Graeber posits that value is what we see as "beautiful, or worthwhile or important."¹¹ The value of things, people, or actions is determined by where they "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."¹² As a result of the couple's attempts to overcome the multiple barriers to feeling at home in the world they encountered during their time in Korea, as well as taking advantage of opportunities to partially surmount those barriers, they now viewed their migration as a success despite being abused and misled at the beginning. Their attitude toward their container and its furnishings picked from the recycling plant transformed what an outsider might view as an inhospitable living situation into an enviable paradise. That happened in the Korean factory life where their privacy and access to the recycling plant's contents made them privileged in comparison to their peers. Living in their container in Korea had also made them see their home in Peru as unacceptable. Within their family's projects for cosmopolitan conversions through a future migration to Chile, the parents and children had also collectively changed the way they saw another lengthy family separation. While in Korea, Lucia had discussed the loss of time with her children as an almost unendurable sacrifice, yet while together with her children in Peru, talked happily about the chance to be apart. Their family project of a cosmopolitan conversion to change their fortunes and provide them with remittances shifted the way they talked about separation—from being about loss to being about opportunity.

Since they had not achieved financial independence and were still intending to migrate, Lucia and Jorge had perhaps not experienced the permanent type of conversion to their status that they had hoped for when planning their travels to Korea. However, during my day of sightseeing with Lucia, I saw that her desire to be a tourist for a day was indicative of her larger cosmopolitan project for travel and to experience the world. She "passed" as a tourist, both in the city space of Seoul's

tourist area and also when her children viewed photos of her standing in front of a palace. Her transformation did not seem so radical to me though, because she had always seemed to view her journey as an exciting experience that was not dissimilar from traveling for pleasure. However, that ability to transform—or even maintain a cosmopolitan appreciation of exploring the world through her experiences as a migrant worker in Korea—was insufficient to protect her and Jorge from eventually being detained and deported. I too experienced a conversion to my status while in the factory area when I was categorized as a factory worker, yet, as both Lucia and I were aware, my passport and cultural capital made that a temporary—yet not insignificant—conversion. Perhaps this couple’s most significant cosmopolitan conversion was that even after they had returned to Peru without any hope of returning to Korea, they continued to experience the effects of their migration and see the world in a new way—full of new projects and barriers.

“MARRY AN ARMY”

One afternoon in 2009, Eva, a twenty-three-year-old single mother from Norte Chico, and I had been shopping in Namdaemun market when she told me about her sister’s plans to find her a Korean husband so that she could become documented and stay in Korea.

“Do you have to pay the guy to marry you?” I asked.

“Of course!” Eva had said. “\$2,000 to marry a Korean and \$5,000 to marry an *army*,” “Army” being the term local Peruvians used to refer to US military personnel. She implied that this was a fairly regular process.

“How do you set that up?” I asked.

“They do that kind of thing in Dongducheon. My brother-in-law keeps telling me he could introduce me to one of his friends,” she said.

The particular marriage Eva spoke of, and the citizenship it implied, had a set market price, and it varied by the desirability of the citizenship received. US citizenship is more expensive than Korean, partly because US citizenship will get you further—access to more countries and it is more prestigious—and partly because the paperwork is more difficult to file. I later heard from other Peruvian women that US soldiers receive a higher rate of pay when they are married and so continue to benefit financially from marriages of convenience.

When I asked Hilda, a forty-year-old woman who lived in a small factory town, if marriages between Peruvian women and US military personnel were common, she said, rhetorically, “Wow, how many *Peruanas* have left their husbands and run off with a soldier?” Then she laughed and said, “¿*Quien sabe? ¡Una cantidad!*” [Who knows? A huge number!].” There was no way to count.

Eva’s sister Carla had just recently married a Korean man herself. Ten years Carla’s junior, he had proposed after her Peruvian husband, with whom she had migrated to Korea, had left her for another Peruvian woman. Heartbroken, she

had accepted the proposal. They had thrown a large Korean-style wedding in a wedding hall for which some of the Peruvian guests, including Eva, had shown up at 1:00 p.m. instead of the official start time of 12:00 p.m. This type of perpetual lateness was known as *la hora Peruana*, or Peruvian time, and it turned out to be one hour too late for the ceremony, which had started at 12:00 p.m. Korea time—12:00 p.m. on the dot. Wedding halls in Korea are typically booked in one-hour slots all day long, and when one ceremony ends, the next wedding party is already coming in through the back doors.

Months later Carla was still furious with Eva for missing the ceremony, but she said she would forgive her if she finally agreed to marry one of her husband's Korean friends. In total, Carla had spent four years and roughly \$12,500 USD to put together the right connections so that Eva could come to Korea. Before successfully entering Korea by posing as a business traveler, Eva had flown to Seoul from Lima on two separate occasions only to be refused entry by immigration officials at Incheon Airport and immediately sent back to Peru. Carla had not only paid for her sister's three round-trip tickets to Korea (more than \$7,500 in total), but also provided the \$5,000 fee to the real Peruvian businesswoman who had agreed to pose as Eva's employer and help her get the business visa that had finally convinced the Korean officials to let her in the country. Now, Carla wanted Eva to marry a Korean man so she could become documented and stay with her in Korea permanently.

People discussed these marriage plans as strategies for how to earn institutionalized cultural capital, through visas and passports, as well as the embodied cultural capital of being a person with freedom of mobility. Through entering into a relationship with an American or Korean man, migrant women could gain the freedom to travel, or stay put, as they wished. The possibility for entering into these relationships also arose as a direct result of being in a place like Dongducheon where there were a large number of foreigners and Koreans who were engaging in their own cosmopolitan conversions, or plans to migrate or change their status. By marrying an *army*, a Peruvian woman helped an American man increase his cultural and economic capital. Not only did the marriage reduce the time it took for someone to acquire cultural capital, but within this space, the marriage was accelerated. There were offices both on and off the base that helped to facilitate the paperwork for international marriages. Sometimes people rushed into marriages because there was always a risk someone could be deported. Carla wanted Eva to marry a Korean for somewhat selfish reasons. By marrying a Korean man, Eva would help her sister achieve a cosmopolitan project of feeling at home in her new world of Korea, where she felt freedom of movement, without feeling totally isolated from her family in Peru.

These relationships and the changes they promised emerged at the intersection of multiple cosmopolitan conversions that diverged and converged in new ways as people interacted in this space.

DANGEROUS RELATIONSHIPS

By April 2009, the effects of the global financial crisis had started to recede, but it was still dangerous for undocumented Peruvian migrants to walk around outside in their factory towns. I found that while some people dealt with this increased danger by rarely leaving their homes, others continued to venture out to socialize in public spaces. For example, one Sunday afternoon I was supposed to attend the Dongducheon Mass with Eva, but she called me early in the morning to cancel, saying Carla had heard immigration officers were patrolling in the area and she did not want to risk being detected. As soon as I hung up, Oliver, a member of Friendship Church, called to see if I wanted to meet him at a factory worker soccer tournament held in Dongducheon. I had heard about these games for years and wanted to attend one, but I told him we had better stay home because immigration officers were patrolling the streets. He told me he understood if I could not go, but he had promised friends he would be there and could not cancel. Convinced by his blasé reaction to the warnings, I decided to go as well.

When we arrived, there were already dozens of other factory workers there too, playing soccer or hanging out around the edges of the field. From the beginning of the game and throughout the day people received calls from friends located nearby who were reporting sightings of immigration officers. However, the reports placed the immigration officers relatively far from the field itself, so no one stopped playing.

The tournament was held at an abandoned schoolyard next to a school that has since been torn down. The building was in bad condition—most of the windows and some of the walls had been knocked out or torn down, and there was graffiti in Spanish and Korean on the remaining walls. However gutted, the school's bones still obscured the field and players from the main road. The games lasted until after dark and attracted players and spectators from Peru, the United States, Bolivia, Nigeria, and countries in the former Soviet Union. Men and women watched the game from threadbare couches and chairs people had pulled out of the trash and dragged up to the sidelines. Everyone passed around big bottles of beer to share and mostly ignored two Peruvian women who were standing by a table trying to sell containers of Peruvian food they had made. People told me they thought it was too expensive at 7,000 won (about \$7) a plate.

I spent most of the afternoon standing on the sidelines talking to a woman from Lima named Veronica who introduced herself to me. I told her about my project and she started telling me about the players and who they were dating. I cringed as she pointed out that two of the worst players on the field—a sweaty goalie who had just let three goals through in succession and a very tall guy who had gotten injured almost immediately at the start of the game—were Americans (“like you!” she told me). They were US soldiers stationed at the nearby base who were dating two Peruvian women sitting on the sidelines.

Veronica's eighteen-year-old daughter Gaby, who had recently arrived in Korea and now worked in a factory dyeing fabrics, arrived late to the games. She came up to her mother and asked her to hold a backpack that contained her volleyball clothes. Gaby and other women were planning to play volleyball next to the soccer field, but for some reason their game never happened. Veronica took the bag and then jokingly asked Gaby where she had been the night before. Gaby looked embarrassed and started to walk away. "She came home the other night with a mark on her neck [a hickey], and I honestly thought she had gotten a stain from the dye at her factory!" she told me laughing, as her daughter walked off to find her boyfriend, another Peruvian factory worker, whom she had met in Korea. Veronica herself was separated from her husband in Peru and had recently dated and then broken up with one of the players on the field. She said that he kept trying to get her back, but she refused because he was jealous and accused her of dating other men. She lowered her voice as she told me that one man on the field had slept with many of the women in town, recorded the encounters, and then uploaded the videos to the internet. We ran into someone she had flown over with on the plane from Peru and had not seen since as well as people I had met during fieldwork at various churches and nightclubs.

The games and conversation continued as the light of day faded. I caught the last subway train home, but Oliver and others stayed at the abandoned school late into the night. Then he and other players went to a Peruvian restaurant and Latin-themed nightclub where they danced until 2:00 a.m. with the Filipina women who worked there. Immigration officers never came. There was another tournament the following weekend.

That afternoon was simultaneously routine, dangerous, and something that promised excitement beyond anything possible in Peru. I got the feeling the attendees were not in denial about the danger of being deported, but that the possibility for loss through deportation was always in the background of their lives. Not only were they willing to risk the danger of detection if it allowed them to socialize with people they would otherwise not be able to meet at these events or have experiences they could probably not find in Peru, but the danger accelerated their inclusion in this community of international people. There was always a chance they could be deported, or would be deployed, so they entered into relationships quickly.

Their plans—and their lives—emerged and transformed along with the plans of the other people they met along the way. Even though they had come to Korea for work, people most wanted to discuss in their conversations with me, and seemed to value most about their time there, the relationships they formed with other migrants. They were willing to take great risks, in terms of being detected by immigration officers and with their families at home in Peru, to meet and interact with others. The relationships they formed and ended in Korea were complicated and overlapping and had beginnings and ends in both Peru and Korea.

STUCK IN LOVE

Oliver had entered into a relationship with someone who turned out to be both risky and transformative for him long after his relationship and migration ended. It had all started a few years after arriving in Korea in 1997 when he met and fell in love with Katya, a migrant worker from Russia. When Katya became pregnant, they decided to get married and raise their child together. Katya stayed home to take care of their daughter while Oliver worked fourteen-hour shifts at a glass factory. A few years later he was hit in the eye with broken glass while working in his factory and was partially blinded. After a period of hospitalization, he was released to discover Katya had emptied his bank account of the money he had earned while in Korea, stolen his passport, and taken their young daughter to Russia.

After the accident, Oliver was left blind in one eye, penniless, and with only sporadic phone and internet contact with his wife and daughter. Of this time, he said:

What could she have been thinking? I don't know. I can't imagine. The thing was that she made that decision. Maybe she thought that I would be [injured] for a while. That I wouldn't be able to work. Maybe she thought she would have to work. . . . All the money that I had, she took. I was left with . . . what's the saying? Without even a dollar. And she took my daughter.

He soon learned that Katya had never registered their marriage in Russia and had quickly remarried there. She later returned to Korea under a false name, but without Oliver's daughter. She dated other Peruvian men before being detained by immigration officers and taken to a detention facility to await deportation. Oliver's pastor pressured him into paying for Katya's return ticket to Russia to spare her from having to wait for months or even a year in the detention center. The pastor argued that despite Katya's bad behavior, she was still his wife. Oliver reluctantly paid for her plane ticket back to Russia. However, since Katya's second departure, all of Oliver's efforts to reconnect with his daughter have failed. When I asked Oliver if his church could help him legally demand parental rights in Russia, he said that when they tried to do just that, Katya had changed their daughter's last name and moved. If he were to travel to Russia to find his daughter, he would not know where to start looking. If he found her, he would not be able to reenter Korea and would not have enough money to get back to Peru.

Over the years as I heard more details of this story from Oliver, I came to see that while he had been in love with Katya, it was also apparent that he was proud of her nationality as a Russian woman. When speaking of Katya, he frequently mention her nationality first before proceeding with the story. To understand the significance of this approach, it is important to note that among the Peruvian men I spoke to in Peru and Korea, Russian women were thought of as being extremely beautiful, and entering into a relationship with a Russian woman was considered

to be prestigious and (particularly in Peru where there were not many Russian women) highly unlikely.

When I asked Cristina, a twenty-two-year-old Peruvian woman working in a factory town, whether she thought Peruvian men in Korea liked Russian women in particular, she said, “Of course. Because they are tall and blond. For their bodies. But they have a bad reputation.” When I asked her if Russian women were popular in Peru as well, she said, “Yes, but I think here [in Korea] it is easier [to meet them]. And listen, Peruvian men who are working abroad, are not faithful [to their wives in Peru]. That is 100 percent certain.” Perhaps for this reputation cited by Cristina, other Peruvian men envied and respected Oliver for his relationship with Katya. It appeared that having a relationship with her helped him gain a level of cultural capital in the form of prestige for being part of this enviable transnational family.

Oliver’s marriage to Katya gave him a way to engage in a cosmopolitan conversion by becoming a member of an enviable transnational family, but it simultaneously left him entangled in new ways. Not only did Oliver’s failed marriage leave him emotionally devastated, but it also caused him to become legally stuck—at least temporarily—in Korea. In 2009 he tried to file for divorce, but said that representatives from the Peruvian embassy told him that he could not do so without having his wife present. To request an exception to this rule, they told him, he would need to collect documents from Peru—either in person or with the help of an expensive lawyer. When I asked him about this situation, he said, “I told the embassy everything. But they said that basically I could not do it in Korea. That those things are done in Peru. That I had to send a person [a lawyer or agent] who had power of attorney, and do many other things.” After months of attempting to maneuver the bureaucratic red tape, Oliver gave up and decided to remain married to a woman he had not seen in years.

As undocumented migrants, neither Oliver nor Katya had many legal options or ways of solidifying their presence in Korea besides formally registering their marriage, which made their union valid and recognized by the state and in their church. However, in this case, rather than opening up new possibilities for future migrations or making his relationship last, Oliver’s cosmopolitan plan actually restricted his freedom of movement. Although Oliver’s is an unusual case, being made both forever linked and removable by official documentation such as birth certificates and visas is common for transmigrants in the globalizing world.¹³ Instead of supporting or validating their marriage and enabling the family to stay together, their legally documented marriage inhibited him from moving on.

When I talked to him in 2015, Oliver told me that he was only able to get a divorce after he was deported to Peru. When I asked him if it had been easier to obtain the divorce than it had been in Korea, his voice became sad. He said, “Well, now that I am here [in Peru], I could do it myself. Anyway, they [the Peruvian Ministry of the Interior] told me that with everything Katya had done to me, my

marriage was not valid.” So, by officially divorcing, Oliver learned that his marriage to Katya had never existed.

Katya apparently had her own plans to change her life and status that no longer involved Oliver. Their cosmopolitan conversions had intersected in important ways, but they were ultimately not compatible.

Although this experience had caused Oliver loss—his vision, his money, and his family—through his interactions with his church, he was able to change the value of that loss into cultural capital. He told me that a few years before he was deported, he gave his *testimonio* (testimony) or personal story of salvation at Friendship Church. His *testimonio* included his migration experience, conversion from Catholicism, and everything that had happened with Katya. He said that his experiences were so exciting to the Koreans in attendance that they invited him to speak at Yeouido Full Gospel Church, which has 763,000 members and claims to be the largest in the world.¹⁴ Allowing foreigners to present their testimonies, especially shocking ones that mix the trials of undocumented migration, injury, and betrayal with miraculous conversion and redemption, is an effective way to raise money for mission churches. By performing his story of loss in front of this audience, waiting to hear about big setbacks before the rise of redemption, he helped to revalue the meaning of his loss. By converting his loss into a *testimonio*, he influenced others and gained cultural capital as a special migrant, social capital through an invitation to participate in a prestigious group, and most likely helped raise economic capital for the church through donations.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have discussed various examples of cosmopolitan conversions, or projects or plans that individuals or groups undertake in the effort to change their lives or future opportunities and help them become cosmopolitan. The seeds for these plans may sometimes originate in Peru, but they really emerge and transform within the context of Korea when migrants interact with so many other people and groups who are embarking on cosmopolitan conversions of their own. The plans converge and diverge in unexpected ways and can help people overcome barriers that typically prevent undocumented migrants from achieving the freedom of mobility and the recognition of belonging that they seek, but can also leave them stuck or excluded in new ways.

In attempting to be recognized as belonging in Korea, by pursuing institutional capital like marriage licenses or visas, undocumented people can make themselves visible and deportable. They can also become vulnerable to potential forms of loss when pursuing embodied cultural capital such as entering into a love affair, passing as a tourist, or even attempting to access desirable remittances for their children. However, in interacting with others who are also embarking on emerging plans for cosmopolitan conversions, they have the chance to create the world

that they are participating in. Along with that, they help to construct the value or meaning of their actions, experiences, and themselves. Through sharing the stories of their plans, they help to revalue things like loss or risk into enviable outcomes, the markers of success, or even economic capital.

In essence, the globalized world is made up of countless cosmopolitan conversions: plans that are emerging in conjunction with other plans; plans that are constantly being realized and still taking form. As the projects meet barriers and opportunities, they convert along with the people, places, and connections that they touch and reveal the configuration of the global worlds created through transnational migration.