

EPILOGUE

By now, many of the Peruvians I met in Korea have either been deported or decided to leave. However, there are also a large number who have managed to stay, including those who married Korean citizens as well as many long-term undocumented migrants who have evaded detection largely by having strong social networks in their factories and churches, and by limiting their movements outside of their homes. Over the years I have kept in touch via instant messenger, Skype, and various social media platforms with people still in Korea and those who already left. Many of the Peruvians I spent the most time with in Korea, such as Karina and her father Victor from chapter 1, Rafael and Lily from chapter 2, Paty and Camila from chapter 3, and Eva and Oliver from chapter 4, left Korea between 2008 and 2015. Others, like Jheremy, the translator from Friendship Ministry who was preparing to study to be a pastor in Mexico, still seemed settled in Korea. He had been there for seventeen years and had weathered both the Asian financial crisis and the global financial crisis by working at the same small factory the whole time. However, one day in 2016, I went on social media and saw photos he had posted of himself and his family at the Lima airport.

A few months after Jheremy's departure, we chatted over Skype. One of the first things he told me was that he had been unable to find work in Peru and had decided to move to Santiago, Chile, where his sister was a resident.

"I have been in Santiago for two months," he told me. His voice sounded positive. "I'm doing construction and trying to get a Chilean ID card so I can find a better job," he said.

Soon after arriving in Peru he had realized how difficult it would be for him to find work there as a forty-one-year-old. "Thirty years old is considered too old [in Peru]. They want someone who is twenty-five or twenty-six because they don't

want to pay benefits. In Chile there is a lot of work. In a matter of weeks I found a job," he told me.

During our conversation it seemed that the lack of work was not the only thing that had made him leave Peru. He missed Korea, and living in Chile offered some consolation. "I felt unsettled in Peru," he said. "I felt comfortable in Korea. I miss Korea. I spent all of my youth there. I arrived when I was twenty-four. My original plan was to only be there two years, save money, and return to study. But I liked it. The life there is calm. Then I decided to stay one more year. And then I didn't want to return to Peru. I stay in touch with brothers from the church and my factory. I talk with my bosses from my factory all the time. When I talk to them they say, 'When are you coming back? You have to come back! We miss you at the factory.' If I could, I would."

"What do you miss about it?" I asked.

"The people who live there. I miss walking around Seoul. The church, Friendship Ministry. My friends from all over the world. In Peru I didn't find friends from other places, but in Chile, I can. Colombians, people from the Dominican Republic. Tons of different places. From what I can see, it's the same as Korea. We are foreigners. It is something that unites us," he said.

"Could you tell me how you left Korea?" I asked.

He told me was detained by immigration officers on his day off when he was resting in the container he shared with his documented co-workers. He sounded frustrated with them as he recounted the experience:

I worked with three people from Nepal. Monday to Friday. They always worked on Saturdays to make extra money. I always told them to bring their IDs with them to work, because if immigration officers came, they would bring them to our room and they would find me and deport me. They always went to work and didn't bring their IDs. One afternoon, as soon as they started working, immigration officers arrived. They asked for their IDs, but the Nepalis didn't have them. They tried to take out their cell phones to call me, but the officers saw and took away their phones. They said their IDs were in their room and the officers should wait for them in the factory. [From that] the officers knew someone undocumented was in there. They said, "It's better if we go together." They went to the room and I was there. They came in and saw me and asked me, "Are you Korean?" I said, "No." "Where are you from?" they asked. "Peru." They said, "Show me your passport." Then they said, "You are illegal. Come with me." They deported me. I was only allowed to bring my documents. They handcuffed me like I was a criminal.

He paused. "Why handcuffs?" he said rhetorically. "I wasn't making trouble."

"It seems excessive," I agreed.

His factory boss paid for the \$2,000 plane ticket as well as a 20 million won fine for employing an undocumented worker. However, he was detained for a week because there were very few countries that would allow a deported person

to transfer in their airports. The only route open to him was through Europe. He went from Seoul to Frankfurt, to São Paulo, and then finally to Lima.

“It took three days. It was exhausting,” he told me.

“Did you have to wear handcuffs the whole time?” I asked.

They took them off at the airport in Incheon when my flight was about to leave. They led me to the door of the plane and said to the flight attendant, “This person is being deported and you are now responsible for him.” I boarded first before any other passenger. When we got to Frankfurt, they told me to wait in the plane. A person came to get me. I was the last person to get off the plane. I waited in Frankfurt for seven hours. They told me not to move. Then in Brazil for five hours.

“Did they give you food? Or a hotel?” I asked.

“No. There was no hotel available. I just had to wait. The same thing happened in Brazil as I waited to go to Lima. When I arrived they called the immigration officers in Peru. It was in Peru that they gave me my passport,” he said.

When I asked him how he felt about that, he said, “The way I returned made me very embarrassed.”

I asked him to elaborate on what he was embarrassed about. I assumed he would say something about perhaps being made to feel like a criminal by his own country’s immigration officers, or I also wondered if he was returning with less money than he had hoped. Instead, he clarified that he had been referring to the sudden way he had left Korea in handcuffs.

“I was embarrassed because I could not say goodbye to my friends [in Korea]. I can’t return either. I didn’t leave in the right way,” he said. “Now I wish I could return to Korea to see some friends and say goodbye in the right way. I just want to see them again.”

We may have reached the end of this particular global moment of Peruvian migration to South Korea, but the end of this migration does not mean that the experience has ended.

My conversation with Jheremy highlights how even though many Peruvian migrants have left Korea, the experience continues to affect their daily lives through the various ways they have come to see the world and the choices available to them. A need for work and money certainly framed Jheremy’s choices to migrate to Korea and then Chile, but his perspective on these choices challenges the idea that money is an objective point we are all starting from. When describing his life in Chile, he sounded relieved to have a job but joyous about finding a community of international friends that he saw as similar to the community he had experienced in Korea. Only through migrating to Korea and returning to Peru did he realize that the type of community he found in Korea was something he was looking for, and that Peru lacked that type of community. Perhaps Chile promised even more potential for inclusion than Korea as he saw a chance to receive

recognition of belonging through getting a work visa and had the support of his sister who was documented.

Further, when he told me about his deportation experience, he did not focus on his loss of money but his loss of status and a misrecognition of his value. The embarrassment he felt at being deported was not about returning as a “failed” economic migrant, but about the way he was handcuffed and removed in front of his friends. He seemed to take this particular exit as an affront to the status he had gained during his time in Korea where in his church he was an official leader and in his factory he was regarded as a hard worker. Whereas in his church and workplace his actions and years in Korea had created his reputation as a good person, within the Korean legal system, his actions and years in Korea marked him as a “criminal.” Through his migration to Korea, Jheremy has embarked on, and continues to grapple with, multiple conversions to his understanding of his religious identity, goals, and place in the world.

In this book I have argued that conversions—concerning money, religious beliefs, and cosmopolitan plans—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 disappeared. Their situations are constantly changing because of their own transnational movements and connections between Peru and South Korea, their unstable legal statuses in Korea, relationships with others also in transit and at home, and their own changing worldviews and plans.

I have explored their emerging global plans through the lens of what I term cosmopolitan conversions, or the various projects or plans that individuals or groups undertake in the effort to change their situations by gaining the skills and abilities of cosmopolitanism—having “infinite ways of being”—and also by being recognized as worthy and deserving of that status by others. I showed how Peruvian migrants made plans to defy the status of disenfranchised undocumented factory workers to also be tourists, students, family leaders, members of transnational love affairs, or even saviors of Peru. However, they also worked to show others the validity of those identities, either by spending time and energy to gain institutionalized capital such as visas, marriage licenses, or educational certificates, or embodied capital such as identifying and relaying their *respuestas* from God, entering into relationships with foreigners, or even trying to pass as tourists during encounters with immigration officers and in public spaces.

While I would suggest that migrants (and nonmigrants) everywhere embark on their own types of cosmopolitan conversions, I have shown that South Korea is vital to the ways these particular experiences developed. That is because the plans of Peruvian migrants emerged at a historical moment that put them at the 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’s efforts to become globalized (*segheye*)

and manage arriving foreigners through multicultural policies first allowed Peruvians and other foreign workers entry and temporary documentation (through an amnesty) and then left them legally excluded (because of the EPS). Simultaneously, the efforts of various Korean Protestant churches to engage in Korea's global moment by having multicultural parishioners as charity cases and foreign mission partners made Peruvians highly desirable members. The Peruvian migrants' efforts to negotiate the meaning of their lives through these multiple forms of conversion—money, religious, and cosmopolitanism—helped to shift their value in Korea. The chance they could be deported accelerated their membership in various social circles, which gave them new opportunities. They became coveted church members because of their exclusion from the state and found new opportunities for education and marriage because of the barriers they faced to their legal belonging in Korea. 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.

With any conversion—money, religion, or plans—there is always loss. This makes it nearly impossible to reach an equivalent, or something better. Yet, through conversion, loss became valuable. Migrants built loss into their plans for cosmopolitan conversions. They came to see that they had to lose things—such as time with their families, their youth in Peru, and feelings of security—to allow for other parts of their plans to succeed. In fact, loss and sacrifice was the mark of a successful migration. At other times, such as when sharing the dark moments and periods of their migrations and at the same time interpreting them as *respuestas* during their testimonios, they converted loss into capital.

Part of any successful cosmopolitan conversion is convincing others to participate in the project and accept the conversion as valid. Initially, many tried to do this with their families by sending money home. This became increasingly difficult because of the global financial crisis when even something as seemingly solid as the value of the dollar became unpredictable. From one moment to the next, the money migrants had earned lost and gained value depending on the day's conversion rate. However, I showed the creative ways migrants found to convert their economic remittances into other capital they hoped would be regarded as more valuable. Yet, they found that these systems of value were not always compatible. *Respuestas* may have earned *Cristianos* cultural capital in their churches in Korea, but they did not hold as much traction for their Catholic families in Peru, or even their Catholic friends in Korea. Further, as Bourdieu points out, a risk with trying to convert economic capital into social capital—by giving a gift in the hope of influencing others, for example—is that there will be an incommensurability.² If the people on the receiving end of the gift do not express the appropriate gratitude, some of the value is lost. This incommensurability happened with Rafael in chapter 2, whose family thwarted many of his attempts to give them the opportunity to gain cultural capital—through an education or becoming a store owner—by

squandering his economic capital. However, Lily, from the same chapter, successfully converted her remittances into a family with a house and careers that would support them after her migration had ended.

For migrants trying to relay their new religious worldviews to their families in Peru, they often found that the systems they were converting between were too different to reach a successful negotiation. For example, Camila's family in chapter 3 understood her desire to influence them to improve their lives through embracing a Protestant sobriety and business strategy, but they had little reason to participate in her plan—especially after she had returned home and lost her authority as an economic remitter. This highlights another risk of trying to convert capital, as cited by Bourdieu, which is that it takes a long time and a lot of labor for others to accept cultural capital as valid.³ Migrants needed to put forth a lot of time and effort to get others to accept their conversion from an undocumented migrant into a person who was a successful entrepreneur, or a family or religious leader worthy of respect. Yet, since they were in constant risk of being deported or not earning enough money to survive, they did not know how long they had left in Korea to realize these changes.

That said, even deportation could not fully end these cosmopolitan conversions. That is because they are ongoing projects that constantly change direction depending on the particular configuration of barriers and opportunities that emerge as people make their way through the world. Also, the process of pursuing a cosmopolitan conversion has already made a person cosmopolitan, even if the project does not go as planned.

This particular global configuration has most likely finished, and with it the large-scale migration of Peruvians to South Korea. However, as I have shown, the migration acts as a thread linking all of these global and transnational flows together, and its impact continues.

At the end of my conversation with Jheremy I asked him what had happened to his plan of becoming a pastor in Mexico. He told me that after leaving Korea, he realized his true calling was to be a missionary—in Chile. He had met many Koreans living in Chile through a pastor friend in Korea but did not attend their church because it was too far away. Instead, he had found a new church and decided to use his gift of talking with people to evangelize there.

Rosa, the student who hoped to stay long enough in Korea to learn English and get a scholarship to study in the United States, ended up returning to Peru. However, she recently graduated from a university in Peru.

Rafael returned to Peru at fifty years old to find that in his eight-year absence, all of his friends had moved to Spain and he no longer had anyone to recommend him for a job. When I talked with him in 2016, he described his shock at returning. “The companies were different. The opportunities were different. We bought a taxi, and that went badly. I tried construction, but found it was too difficult [at my age]. I had forgotten many things.”

He had been disappointed to be deported before saving enough money to complete a goal he had set for himself in Korea: to buy a farm in Peru. He said, “If you go to another country you have a goal (*una meta*). To make money and complete a project. I couldn’t complete my project.”

Then, after two years of what he described as “suffering,” a new opportunity emerged. His family owned a large piece of land in the countryside, which he had nearly lost a claim to while in Korea. However, he regained control over it and learned that an electrical company wanted to build a plant there. He said, “We negotiated with the plant that if we sold them the land, they had to do something for us. We knew they would need workers. They gave us [Rafael, his son, and his brother] jobs. We’ve been working there for five years. It’s stable there. We sold it all.”

Then, although he could not afford to buy the large farm he had dreamed of, he used his earnings from Korea to buy a small piece of land and build a little farm. His mother lived there during the week and took care of the place, including his guinea pigs and turkeys. Every other week, he took a trip to Lima to visit his girlfriend, whom he had met in Korea. They had constructed another floor on her house to rent out to tenants and planned to retire soon.

These are not simple conversions—they involve negotiating emerging forms of loss and gain with multiple actors in a constantly changing context of configurations. However, conversions cannot fail because any barriers are chances to find a new opportunity, and any losses are chances to attempt more creative conversions. Just as there is no direct route from Peru to Korea and back, or when converting won to soles, there is no direct route for completing cosmopolitan conversions, which are plans that are yet to be realized. Whether a conversion involves capital, religion, or worldview, changes in direction do not negate the experience but rather inform it.