
Mobility in a Stationary Place: Labor and Ethical Conditions in the Philippine BPO Industry in Glenn Diaz's *The Quiet Ones*

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ABSTRACT

All over the world, Business Processing Outsource (BPO) companies have been set up to provide services that would enable utmost efficiency to business-related work operations. BPOs have been fertile ground for dreams of mobility and freedom for their employees. Illustrative is the 2017 Philippine novel in English, *The Quiet Ones* by Glenn Diaz, which frames the lives of call center agents who steal from the multimillion-dollar American-based BPO company and remain remorseless even after they have been caught for the crime. The novel narrates how the contemporary lives of Filipinos are drastically shaped by their experience of working as call center agents, highlighting their various unethical 'traversals' behind the stationary façade of the industry in order to escape from their sense of disempowerment. This paper would like to show how the novel's depiction of the BPO industry's shrinking physical and imagined spaces, protocols in customer service, and its bureaucracy are symptomatic of the call center agents' obsession, psyche, and modes of surviving the system. To do that, careful attention was given to the portrayal of the experience of the physical, representational, and mobile practices in the BPO industry. While the BPO industry plays an essential role in the economic progress of the Philippines, it has also affected the material and mobile conditions of Filipino call center agents, as they follow a business model of efficacy aligned with the larger scheme of global capitalism. Such efficacy is underpinned by a kind of 'modern' ethics specific to the BPO call centers concretizing the betrayal of globalization's promise of proper mobility and freedom as embodied by the infrastructure of the call center offices shaping the superstructural official practice and 'call center culture.'

Keywords: *BPO industry, mobility politics, mobility justice, call center culture, The Quiet Ones*

INTRODUCTION

"Imagine dealing with that kind of entitlement and that kind of pride and individualism on a nightly basis. I remember whenever someone would shout at me, I would almost cry. The way you process that, you'll think: am I weak? Is that my fault as a person? But then, whatever disempowering feelings that I had, there's a reason behind that; it's not just a weakness of character."

(Diaz, 2017)

The Philippine call center industry started in 1992 as providers of e-mail responses and service management (CCAP, 2018). Because of their location in high-rise office buildings in business districts and their association with technology and English, many Filipinos initially regarded call centers as a type of conventional office work or what one former employee described as a 'modern city-type job.' In 2007, the influx of college graduates applying for the job had some economists worry that there might be an

“insufficient quantity of suitable and willing talent to fuel growth” of the call center industry (Dahl, 2007). However, this predicament was contradicted several years later: “Unless something dramatic happens very soon, the Philippines will not be able to meet the demand for educated and talented people by next year” (Hamlin, 2011).

Despite the white-collar exterior, the kind of skills required of call center employees and the range of professional advancement available were often unclear. According to Jan Padios (2018) in his work, *A Nation on the Line Call Centers as Postcolonial Predicaments in the Philippines*, call center agents could be employed by a global powerhouse like Citibank but not in the recognizable positions of financial analyst, account manager, or even teller or they could work for a tech giant like IBM but not design or develop systems or hardware. The Philippines, especially those who had joined the BPO industry in its early years, had only a vague impression of the work, even when they applied for the job. Primarily attracted to the industry’s substantial compensation, these young college graduates often knew little about call center work beyond its fundamental descriptors like answering phones, speaking English, and working at night (Batalla, 2016). This seemingly basic set of skills contrasts with how the Philippine higher education was designed to be competitive in the workforce among the ASEAN – that college students must have personal, character-building, and organizational skills to be effective workers (Luz, 2014). However, the ambiguity about call center work stemmed partly from its novelty in the Philippines, where local customer service lacked many standards developed over the past fifty years in the United States. However, it was also significantly rooted in the call center’s uncertain connection to the corporate world (Padios, 2018).

The coverage of linkages in call center work in the Philippines is determined by tracing the global and local social relations on which the work is premised and in which it is embedded and the significance of these relations in terms of race, class, and gender (Dahl, 2007). Developing countries have been introduced to call center work due to global labor arbitrage, the process by which corporations take advantage of differences in national or subnational wage scales and what is benignly referred to in economic parlance as the cost of living (Lumba, 2013). However, if the last names the socially determined cost of maintaining

a life beyond mere subsistence, then paying wages consistent with (or even slightly elevated above) the lower costs of living in the developing world reproduces the uneven material relations between nations and the devaluation of life on which different costs of living are based in the first place — dynamics in themselves produced by histories of colonialism and neocolonialism. But, labor being cheap in the Philippines is not a natural fact but a social relation; without the disheartening quality of Filipino life, the entire call center outsourcing process to the Philippines would not be possible (Padios, 2018). Targeting call center jobs would also not be such a lucrative option for foreign corporations were it not for the overwhelming surplus labor among college-educated, English-speaking Filipino workers resulting from uneven economic and social relations that have their roots in neocolonial relations of control by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank (Nadene, 2021).

In 2006, former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo’s administration’s attempt to project the image of a technologically advanced Philippines ready to take on complex offshore work at home rather than sending citizens abroad affirmed and supported the BPO industry aspirations (Nadene, 2021). The Arroyo administration’s project for the Philippine Cyberservices Corridor (PCC) was an early depiction of this state-generated national imagination. This initiative was aimed at encouraging foreign and local investment in IT-enabled services in general and, in keeping with the Arroyo administration’s aspiration for greater inclusion in the knowledge economy, to move the Philippines beyond BPO work and toward knowledge process outsourcing and health information management (Nadene, 2021). This economic mobility in which the capital region of the Philippines can be linked to the world through technology to fulfill a desire for an unimpeded flow of capital is what Neferti Tadiar calls as ‘dreamwork’ of national development in the age of neoliberal globalization (Tadiar, 2004). Ironically, a decade later, during the Duterte administration, the public imagination is now gleaned away from the United States and towards China, an effort that paradoxically strengthened the Filipino workers’ courage to work at night, speaking in English for better salary (Teehankee, 2016). As Arlie Russel Hochschild (2016) puts it, this paradoxical working condition makes the Filipino call

center agents strangers to their homeland.

These socioeconomic complexities unravel the layers of rough treatment and opportunities occurring in the BPO industry — the national projection of the Philippine State to be a source of knowledge and economic capital and the precipitous entitlement it promises to the aspirations of the call center agents. Such manifestation of mind and labor conditioning in the BPO industry builds a particular physical, emotional, and mental tolerance among the employees. This conditioning has affected their mobility and ethical beliefs of good labor to upkeep with the demands of the industry known to use one's facility in the English language as its currency and working at nighttime in the global south. By looking at these critical points that call attention to a discourse on mobility politics, we see how globalization's promise of freedom, as embodied by the infrastructure of the call center offices affecting the superstructural official practice, and 'call center culture' are depicted in the novel, *The Quiet Ones*.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Mobility in the Stationary BPO Facade

Mobility is the movement from one place to another (Merriman & Pearce, 2017: 494). There is a notion that mobility studies are highly a social science realm, but scholars argue that such perception only limits the reach of the framework. Hence, the humanities discipline, where various forms of human mobility and their meanings are represented, has become a critical integration where mobility studies can prosper. Ian Davidson's *Mobilities of Form* (2017) expounds that mobility, as seen in literature, sustains a dual emphasis on how literary works provide representations of movement and mobility in their narratives and subject matter and how the form and genre of the work are influenced by mobility practices (Davidson, 2017: 584). Such interrelationship between the representations of mobility in literature develops an understanding of 'mobility of form.' Both in the social sciences and humanities perspectives, mobility is also understood as a significant source of social advantage as it enables people to access economic opportunities and goods, develop identities and social networks, and participate in civic life and pursue personal ambitions (Cook & Butz, 2019: 5). Peter Merriman (2014), in his article, *Rethinking Mobile Methods*, asserts the idea

of 'mobile methods' and to maintain a plural sense of what mobilities research is, has been, can be, and should be: expanding interdisciplinary practices across disciplinary boundaries; developing different theoretical and empirical avenues; drawing upon a plurality of methodological approaches; and above all adopting modest, open, non-representational epistemologies and ontologies as a means to experiment and move with (Merriman, 2014: 183). This belief is also supported by Mimi Sheller in her interview with Taehee Kim (2022) as she shared that the very nature of mobility studies being an emerging perspective in combining the social sciences and the humanities breaks the limitation of conducting interdisciplinary research. Inseop Shin and Jinhyoung Lee (2022) also took a similar position as they encouraged scholars in Asia to engage in mobility as a framework for conducting interdisciplinary studies.

In the context of Glenn Diaz's, *The Quiet Ones*, mobility is seen in the larger scheme of global capitalism—a kind of 'modern' ethics specific to the call centers of the BPO, objectifying the oppressiveness of the system that blurs what the call center agents truly dream about, their notion of happiness, the goodness of life, and freedom. The novel introduces four call center agents, Alvin, Eric, Philip, and Karen, who discovered they could steal from their clients' accounts without being caught by their Texan Operation Manager, Brock. The other characters are Scott, Alvin's American partner, and the Australian BPO Manager, Carolina, who are trying to find their sense of belongingness in the Philippines. Ironically, these foreigners are keen observers of the cultural and economic mobility that occurs in the country. Soon, the call center agents' crime was highlighted when Karen, who wants to get ahead from the rest, 'slept with the enemy' by having an affair with Brock and admitted their crime. They received a two-week suspension until they decided to resign from the company. Their fates were entangled by their past, their motives, and the present, as the Philippine National Police are targeting them for the scam that they committed against their clients in Utility Telco (UTelco). While escaping from the police once airport at a time, Alvin realizes the futility of the dream he had when the oppressive BPO industry subjugated him—his motive for stealing from the Americans will never be justified by his lower middle-class status, racial identity, his past, and his desire for a better life. The recurring

question, “What will you do if suddenly you are given a ton of money?” was never answered by anyone who participated in the heist—they just wanted to join Alvin, outwit the system that transformed their movement and speech into a machine, and “steal from the Americans.”

The Unevenness and Unequal Opportunities in the BPO Industry

In reading *The Quiet Ones*, Tim Cresswell’s work, *Towards a Politics of Mobility* (2010), is helpful to examine how the characters are constituted in this globalized, hypermobile industry. His work discusses the aspects of mobility where politics occur in various conditions. First is physical movement, which covers people’s means to get from one place to another. Next are the representations of mobility where the movement has been figured as an adventure, education, freedom, conformity, threat, or rebellion. This profound array of meanings is seen in literature, film, philosophy, and the arts. Lastly, mobility is a practice that determines how human mobility is produced, reproduced, and occasionally transformed (Cresswell, 2010: 20). With these aspects of mobility, Cresswell defines what politics imply in this area of study:

“By politics, I mean social relations involving power production and distribution. By politics of mobility, I mean how mobilities are both productive of such social relations and produced by them. Social relations are, of course, complicated and diverse. They include relations between classes, genders, ethnicities, nationalities, religious groups, and other forms of group identity. Like other geographical phenomena, mobility lies at the heart of all of these.”

(Cresswell, 2010: 21).

Tim Cresswell contextualizes the occurrence of politics in the three aspects of mobility he enumerated and raises fundamental questions to respond to when studying mobilities. For instance, in politics of material movement, the inquiry begins with who moves furthest, fastest, and most often; in politics of representation, the essential questions are: How is mobility discursively constituted? What narratives have been constructed about mobility, and how are

mobilities represented? Mobility politics asserts that some of the foundational narratives of modernity have been constructed around the brute fact of moving, making mobility as liberty or progress. In the politics of mobile practice, Cresswell frames his questions profoundly: How is mobility embodied? How comfortable is it? Is it forced or free? A man and a woman, a businessman and a domestic servant, a tourist and a refugee may experience a line linking A and B entirely differently on a map. The fact of movement, its represented meanings, and the experienced practice are all connected (Cresswell, 2010: 21). These questions delve into the power play in society and determine how uneven mobility constitutes social injustice. Mobility politics asserts that some of the foundational narratives of modernity have been constructed around the brute fact of moving, making mobility as liberty or progress.

The work in the BPO industry is projected in the Philippine context as ‘immaterial’ and ‘insignificant’. Still, it is a job many college graduates from various degrees apply for due to the higher compensation it offers than the expected income they would receive in their profession. In *The Quiet Ones*, Alvin recollects his first time applying for a call center after having been referred by a friend:

“Alvin’s destination then was a cylindrical building with emerald windows that alternated with gray concrete; stripes blurred into a burnished monolith in the distance. Around it crowded more skyscrapers, uneven, anonymous silhouettes, no-nonsense affairs of beige and gray and sheenless silver, fashioning the skyline that reliably accompanied the prime-time business news. In the elevator, he pressed 32. On the sixth floor across the gym was the Canadian embassy. On the fourteenth, the Australian. On the seventeenth, the American Chamber of Commerce. His knowledge of call centers was next to nothing. However, as the elevator traversed continents and companies, as coffee-totting white men and turbaned Indians stepped on and off the bar, he began to have a sense of it, the largeness of it, the arduous performance of it.”

(Diaz, 2017: 353).

The representation of mobility in the novel was initially depicted as a material movement determining

who among the industry moves fastest, furthest, and most often. The politics of mobility in the BPO industry is also represented by the intersection of genders, nationalities, and classes, as observed by Alvin when he first entered a call center building. Such depiction of the BPO buildings as stationary holds the industry as an agent that constantly moves across the globe by following the time zone in Naperville, Illinois, to serve their clientele abroad. Not only is the coverage of the industry massive, but what is appalling is also the ignorance of Filipino applicants of the complexities of working for a mega industry like the BPO, which most undergraduates desire to get into, and the vague understanding that speaking English using the American accent and acing tongue twisters would get them through the stringent interview process. As Alvin describes, “learning English was like lifting a veil impossible to fully restore” (Diaz, 2017: 352). That was why when it was his turn to be interviewed, his comfort in the language gave him a vague sense of power when it separated him from the rest of the applicants. However, the application stage is only the beginning of the rigorous training call center agents undergo. As Padios (2018: 64) asserts,

“Indeed, with its stringent requirements for English language skills and a full or partial college education, the call center industry was, in fact, more exclusive than many initially imagined it to be. Thus, call center agents understand that they were cheap labor structurally, but they often did not perceive themselves as such.”

Apart from perfecting an American accent, social relations at the global and national scales come to bear on the meaning and experience of call center work for Filipinos in everyday life in ways contingent on their class positions. James Ryan Jonas (2012) explained that call center work has consistently drawn from the Philippines’ top four socioeconomic classes—nebulous categories referred to as classes A, B, AB, and C, with class A representing the most affluent and elite group. However, for members of classes A and AB especially, and to some extent class B as well, call center work’s ambiguous relation to conventional educational fields and markers of professional status, not to mention its instability, raises questions about such work’s ability to reproduce their social positions and class identities (Jonas, 2012). Such anxieties are

expressed in references to call center work as a “dead end” and “last resort”; indeed, business processing work is a far cry from their first choice of careers in the field like nursing, accountancy, or engineering but the only meaningful choice available to them in the Philippines’ narrow and constrained labor market. Jan Padios argues that instability also contributes significantly to doubts about the value of call center work. To wit,

“While call center wages are comparatively high, the jobs themselves are contingent on corporate actors whose decisions to pursue or cancel a contract with a BPO firm can change with little to no warning... along with its affective and service-oriented purpose, call center work’s precarity, lack of apparent opportunities for professional advancement, and routine nature bear all the markings of feminized, low-status work, at the same time as it pays relatively high wages. In this way, the anxiety call center agents experience in everyday life points to how gendered and racialized global processes shape perceptions of skill and value and, thus, how class identities are socially constructed locally and transnationally.”

(Padios, 2018: 68-69)

Call center trainees were compelled to study American culture and norms so they could use for small talks with their clients when necessary. Outsourcing has been a ‘controversial’ topic, so they are bound to encounter customers not pleased that their calls are being rerouted to Delhi, Mexico, and Makati, Philippines (Padios, 2018). Hence, with upward mobility as the desired direction of the call center agents comes the divide, they had to endure to be the Other. Deducing from this social relation, mobility is narrated as forced, and the notion of liberty is limited.

From the physical aspect of mobility, it is observed that the characters have limited mobility based on their designated roles. In the novel, the call center agents, Alvin, Eric, Karen, and Philip, have a limited scope of mobility since the company’s protocols, transactions, and customer service are dictated by a company manual:

UTelco Manual

P3: *Disclosure of call recording* – “This call is

being monitored or recorded but only for quality assurance purposes.”

P5: *Empathy* – “I understand.”

P6: *Probing* – “If you tell me what’s wrong, maybe we can do something.”

P9 *Apology* – “I understand how you feel. Once again, I’m sorry for any inconvenience this may have caused you.”

P10: *Assurance* – “I will be taking note of everything so it won’t happen again.”

P27: *Initiating Small Talk* – “By the way, sir, while I’m processing your request....”

P18: *Disclosure of location* – UTelco offices are located in Naperville, Illinois

(Diaz, 2017: 270)

Such bureaucracy in the industry leaves the call center agents stuck inside the building beyond office hours but cannot complain since their performance is constantly evaluated. On the other hand, their Texan Operations Manager, Brock, can easily plan and require a “Stress Management Workshop” to be attended by the agents. Meanwhile, representational mobility is depicted as conformity for the call center agents relying on the company’s manual to mimic a machine-like script for the following instances: disclosure of call recording, showing empathy, probing, apologizing, giving assurance, initiating small talk, and disclosing the location. Since the call center agents are being trained to respond to customers like machines, they learned a structure of ostentatious anger at subpar customer service when dealing with outside conflicts (Diaz, 2017: 252).

In another aspect, mobility is also represented in the novel as the characters describe the busy Metro Manila as “Kilometer Zero”—it is the people who make the city, not the infrastructures or speed of movements on the streets (Diaz, 2017: 99). On the linguistic aspect, English is also seen as a language with a putative function to be an individualized commodity representing mobility as progress. Rey Chow (2014) would call this condition of transforming languages into labeled items like jewelry and parcels of actual state as the “neoliberal attitude toward multilingualism”. With the changing times and the fast-paced transactions of the industry, the practice of mobility by the call center agents—following the time zone in Naperville, Illinois, speaking English fluently and in an American accent, and believing that they can

steal from American accounts without their clients knowing, have become ways of surviving the capitalist system that separates people and fragments ethical ideologies.

The ‘Unquiet’ Ones: Secrets, Global Dreams, Futile Escape

Throughout the novel, the motifs of secrets, global dreams, and futile efforts to escape from the BPO industry’s capitalist system that corrupt the characters’ perception of what happiness and freedom are persistent. However, the industry’s protocol and bureaucracy reveal Filipino call center agents’ obsession with high-paying salaries, a psyche that clients can be pleased with for so long as their American English accents can fake their true identities and learn survival modes. A closer look at this mechanism depicts a colonial discourse as the call center agents’ mimicry of the American’s servile attitude is tantamount to American power and knowledge strategies. As Homi Bhabha (1994: 86) argues,

“mimicry is the sign of a double articulation, a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which “appropriates” the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate; however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres to the dominant strategic function of colonial power intensifies surveillance and poses an imminent threat to both “normalized” pieces of knowledge and disciplinary powers.”

The American English accent and the automated scripts from the BPO manual—their responses, coupled with the fact that they only mimic the American industry in the global south determines a colonial mimicry, a reformed, recognizable Other that is, “almost the same but not quite” (Bhabha, 1994: 86). In addition, the issue of mimicry—almost the same but not quite—becomes problematic when caught inappropriately. In one instance, Alvin deals with an irritated American customer whose frustration over an unpaid bill was suddenly directed to Alvin:

Customer: “Is this UTelco?”

Alvin: “Yes, it is.”

Customer: “Where am I calling? Is this India?”

Alvin: “No, Sir.”

Customer: "What?"

Alvin: "This is not India, Sir."

Customer: "Where is this?"

Alvin: "UTelco offices are located in Naperville, Illinois." [Page 18 under Disclosure of Location]

Customer: "Naperville, eh?" the customer said, taunting. "How's the weather there?"

(Diaz, 2017: 275-276)

This industry assures its clients of customer service that is reliable and convenient. However, the customers calling from America are also aware that since the BPO industry is a stationary façade located anywhere in the world, the call center agents could be from the global south who are only parroting an automated response from a manual enough to be covered by one's essential fluency in American English. When the customer asked Alvin from where he made the call, the customer was not after the company's location but the agent's racial identity, thereby determining his proficiency in English. The visibility of mimicry in, "almost the same but not *white*" becomes a discourse uttered that, though known, must be concealed because it would be a conflict of authority. Alvin's credibility as a customer service provider is questioned in this case because he is not white. Furthermore, this BPO's system of hiding one's identity by mimicking the service mechanism and time zone in America determines a mobile practice among the Filipino call center agents that is limited, contrary to the notion of the Filipinos that the BPO industry equates to money and freedom.

The main characters in the novel, who are all call center agents, come from the lower middle and middle classes. Unlike the notion that employees would likely steal from their company due to a dire need for financial aid, the characters clamor that they joined the heist to "steal from the Americans," and "to experience the feeling of a payday, only permanent." This observation is also accurate, especially when Alvin would ask his colleagues what they were to do when they were suddenly given a ton of money. They would be quiet, unable to utter what they truly want with the money. The secrets of the characters for stealing are only trivial: Eric's past as a lover of a communist rebel and Philip's intention to give money to the family of the deceased Phillip Manabat were unraveled; Karen's relationship with the Texan operation's manager, Brock, her dream to work

abroad, and her betrayal against her colleagues who "steal from the Americans" (Diaz, 2017: 22) was shed to light; and Alvin who plans to migrate abroad with the money that he stole constantly escapes the Philippine National Police in airports but was finally caught.

Mobility in the BPO industry is criticized for its tendency to blur the line between what is ethically right and wrong. The limited mobility of the call center agents caused by the bureaucracy within the BPO company leads to their apathy toward their victims and denial of the immorality of their crime. In Eric's words,

"I'm trying this thing called Conscious Unknowing. It's very popular in the US. It's a reaction to the regime of information that the modern world is inflicting on us. With Conscious Unknowing, you respect the universe's decision on the kind and level of information you are entitled to receive. Don't seek, don't probe. Bask in innocence. Celebrate it. Choose not to know."

(Diaz, 2017: 319)

Eric's ideology about their work as call center agents is a reflection of the extent to which the bureaucracy, protocols, and capitalist system in the BPO industry have affected the super structural condition of mobility—that is, the contradiction of apathy and rebellion of the call center agents towards the system that promised them to achieve their 'global dreams' shaping a better life with choice, pleasure, and desire (Hoang, 2015). Such is the ideation of a global scene with urban decay and poverty amidst the colorful prism of a twenty-first-century city (Benedicto, 2014). As such, Eric is bound to create a counterintuitive space where he, as a queer call center agent, can sustain the very hierarchy and economic class that mistreat him. Since pro-globalization corporations do not pay offshore workers the same wages as workers onshore in the United States or other advanced industrial nations, wages for offshore work are still higher than those that can be found in other non-globalized sectors of the economy—that something is better than nothing and that people in developing countries are just contented to have a job (Lumba, 2013). Nevertheless, the fact that call center wages are considerably higher than what other workers could demand elsewhere in the Philippines, and thus the standard of living may be rising among

call center workers, does not change the structural relations in any fundamental way; it only makes the asymmetry challenging to see. Hence, the call center agents in the novel avenge themselves against the industry that has controlled them like machines as they steal their clients' money without feeling remorse. This act represents mobility used to revolt against the system that corrupted their bodies and morals.

CONCLUSION

The Quiet Ones blurs the line between what is ethically right and wrong in the BPO industry. The three main points of view used in the novel (those of call center agents, the foreigners, and a third-person omniscient) show the characters' dispositions regarding their place in the BPO industry. Glenn Diaz utilizes the call center agent's point of view to depict each character's moral ambivalence and their justification for looking and finding their 'desire.' Similarly, the foreigners Scott and Carolina were also given voices to express their observations of the country's obsession, location, the psyche. Scott and Carolina romanticize the simple living they have encountered as they enculturate themselves in the Philippines, yet can directly trace the country's contradictions. Scott comments that Modern Manila has no 'real center' as it has a fluid population, striking contrasts, great inequality, and shrinking spaces. Carolina describes the Philippines as a "catalog of all things deplorable: the infrastructure, the indecisive weather, the poverty, the unceasing stares, the special treatment that nobody bloody asked for" (Diaz, 2017: 182).

The Quiet Ones shows the woes and the depressing 'humor' in the BPO industry, where capitalism separates people and fragments consciousness. Global capitalism is assumed to be about acquiring profit based on the employees' efficacy, efficiency, and competence, sometimes to a fault. However, to gain profit, call center agents tend to experience exploitation brought about by the capitalist nature of the industry, resulting in false mobility and freedom. The three features of 'mobility' where politics in the bureaucracy in the BPO industry are depicted in the novel are the following: (1) material movement, in which call center agents are constrained in their movement inside the office and have limited chances of promotion as they are being treated like objects

and machines, (2) politics of mobility in the BPO industry which paradoxically involves both progress and oppression—advantageous for the operation managers, yet oppressive for the call center agents; convenient for the foreign managers, but restrictive to the local employees, (3) mobility as amounting to a form of conformity or rebellion to the industry when the characters choose to steal from the industry as a way to outwit the system that subjugates their time and bodies.

Finally, the novel's representation of mobility in the BPO industry has also revealed the 'ethical norms' which are hypocritically practiced because they are geared only towards giving superficially satisfactory customer service, turning out to be half-hearted gestures of politeness and servitude, prescribed by a company manual. This situation builds apathy among the employees, thus subverting the company's bureaucracy. Globalization's promise of freedom in exchange for their labor ends up oppressive rather than liberating, as embodied by the infrastructure of the call center offices, shaping the superstructural ideology that is the 'call center culture.' As noted about the BPO industry, "happiness is a form of strength, a subversion, and modus of survival even if at times it is superficial and misplaced" (Diaz, 2017: 204).

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