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THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Bridging Cultures: The Migrant Philippine Woman in the Works of

Jessica Hagedorn, Fatima Lim-Wilson and Sophia Romero

by

Hope Sabanpan-Yu

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

CALGARY, ALBERTA

JANUARY, 2001

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the works of Philippine American women writers. I posit that that migration of Philippine women to the United States has created literature that reflects the need to recontextualize the feminine to cope with the cultural displacement of living in diaspora. The Philippine cultural construction of “woman” needs to be addressed and resisted in diaspora in order to deconstruct the binary of “Philippine” and “American” because it is through the dislocation of migration, with respect to their material living conditions, that women recast themselves.

In arguing that migration necessitates a recontextualization of women’s roles, I go beyond the binary oppositions to examine the cultural processes of change that account for the reconstitution of womanhood in the US. In doing so, I closely analyze the web of representations of “woman” in both the Philippine and American contexts, to know what constitute the politics of representations of a diaspora presented at the nexus of different discourses like nationalism, transnationalism, feminism and multiculturalism.

Chapter one traces the history of Philippine migration to the US and sketches the field of Philippine American literature and representations of the Philippine American contingent in the politics of US multiculturalism. Chapter two situates the ideal of womanhood in the Philippine cultural context as set forth through the Maria Clara ideology. Chapter three analyzes the poetry of Fatima Lim-Wilson and the novels by Jessica Hagedorn and Sophia Romero. These works emphasize the contradictions, redefinition and reinvention of the feminine by women straddling two very different cultures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank each of the professors for finding the time to make themselves available for the defence committee –Professor Fred Wah and Dr. Shu-ning Sciban – with special acknowledgements to my supervisor, Dr. Aruna Srivastava, whose unique insight and knowledge has been essential in bringing my thought processes to closure. Other professors with whom it has been a privilege for me to have been part of their classes are Dr. Susan Rudy, Dr. Susan Bennett and Dr. Jonathan Kertzer of the English Department. Thanks to Christine Schill, Saroj Tiwari and Lynne Churchill-Frail for their friendship and kindness; to the entire Inter-Library Loan staff for efficiently locating key academic resources for my thesis from different libraries across North America; to my fellow graduate students, Yaw Asante, Marie-Claude Legault, Karen Green, Julie Abbott, Lucy Clarke, Craig Lawson, Jonathon Wilcke, Stavros Stavrou, David Bateman, Aida Patient, Shaun Ramdin and Melissa Quigg without whom, I would be less sane and a great deal crankier.

I acknowledge a debt of gratitude to my family for encouraging me in my pursuit of knowledge and keeping me aware that there is a life outside of academics. Thank you, Frank, China, Adrian, Nuhma, Charity and Emile Rose. I wish to acknowledge Aunt Bel and Uncle John, for never doubting I could make it. I'd like to thank Jocelyn Yu-Hall whose support has contributed to my academic and creative efforts.

Of those not involved in the program, I'd like to thank my best friend, Gordon Morck, for giving me a second home, cheering me on and for being a good example of how to work and play. I wish to thank Wilbert and Sue Co, Anthony George Martin and

Donna Patricia Makeiff for sharing stories with me. In the Philippines, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Ceferina Ranario for urging me to follow my dream; John Patrick McSherry, SVD, for his guidance and sense of humour; Dr. Erlinda Alburo, Margarita Marfori-Cleto, Leilani Cuyos-Yu, Maria Russel Pielago, Dr. Dolores Buscato, Gilbert Lamayo and Raymunda Montano for their friendships.

Finally, I'd like to thank the women who have so bravely gone before me – Jessica Hagedorn, Fatima Lim-Wilson and Sophia Romero. Without their work, mine would not have been possible.

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Preface

It is amazing how times have changed. I remember not too long ago when research in the Philippine university where I did my undergraduate degree meant the erasure of the subjective. To employ the objective voice was the requisite of good scholarship. However, early work on this thesis had been returned with underscored notes on the pronouns “one” of which I had obviously too many. It took me quite some time to realize what the underscores meant. Today, not to declare one’s personal stake, my stake that is, in the subject of my research means risking what goes by the name of “political naivete.” As Stuart Hall states in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” “what we say is always ‘in context’, positioned . . . [I]t is worth remembering that all discourse is ‘placed’” (110).

I wish to begin this thesis then with the story of how I came to undertake this study, not so much to enter the politics of the personal but to give context to the discourse that ensues. After all, it is value orientation that determines subject interest and insofar as value orientations go, they do not strictly follow the consciously logical route but rather emerge from what I think are personal obsessions that need to be worked out. The story I am about to tell you comes in the form of snippets accumulated from several encounters. I reproduce them here not only to ease you into this unusual choice of a project but also to highlight a point about storytelling and how it is related to theorizing as a way of making sense and communicating. Looking back as I recount them drives home the fact how we never really tell our stories in the exact same way each time but that we weave them in

ways we feel would make more sense to our chosen audience at any given time. But, exactly for this reason, one story is no more truer than the other. If this happens with our own stories, then why not with our theories? I state this because this thesis is about reading and theorizing across cultural contexts. This is about making theory coming out of one context speak to the specific realities of cultural politics of another and vice-versa, allowing such theory to be informed by these realities.

Snippet 1: I am at the parking lot. It is my first day at the university. I see four Filipinos. My heart races. I almost shout "hello." They reply hello. I ask "Are you Filipinos?" They say yes. I say "I am Filipino, too. It's my first day here." Their faces look blank. One of them says "Bye" and they all walk away.

Snippet 2: I register for five courses. I am told I need only a total of three full courses. I can not understand why I cannot take five. I have all the time in the world to study. Then it is suggested I do one and a half courses for the year and the remaining one and a half the following year so things will be easier for me, with the adjustments and all.

Snippet 3: At the US consulate in Calgary, I meet a young Filipino production worker for a cable company seeking to renew an expired US visa. "In the two years you've been here, have you ever gone back home?" He replies no. I ask if he ever feels homesick or lonely. He says that once in a while he does but that he really likes life here. "You mean to say you have never thought of going home?" I ask disbelievingly. He smiles. "No, I like it here," he repeats. "Have you never encountered discrimination here?" "Yes," he answers, "there is lots of that here. One time at the mall with my friends, we spoke in Tagalog and this white woman snapped and said, 'Speak in English.' What right had she? She was not part of our conversation." He scratches his head and ends the topic with "Racism, there's lots of that here." "What did you do?" I ask. He shrugs his shoulders.

Snippet 4: I am photocopying an article. I see a woman stop by the cards section. She looks at me and continues to browse. I hear someone standing behind me. It is a girl holding a roll of film. I give her an envelope to fill out and the woman by the card section is now standing by the photocopier and with both hands on her hips addresses me rudely, "Do I have to wait?"

When I first encountered fellow Filipinos here in Canada, I expected the warmth that accompanies first meetings: greetings like "*Kabayan!*"¹ and "*Kamusta?*"² leading up to further questions such as "Which part of the Philippines do you come from?", "What are you doing here?" and "Where do you live?" These are the standard questions Filipinos engage in during first meetings whether in the Philippines or abroad. So you can imagine my discomfiture at the parking lot. Everywhere I had traveled, it has never failed but for here. This led me back to the stories I had heard and not heeded, that in America, Filipino immigrants try so hard to forget their Filipino-ness once they reach the "promised land." But this is not America, this is Canada.

I registered for five courses. Credit this enthusiasm to my desire to excel, and to my ignorance as well. Where I come from, all courses last only a semester, which translates to a half course here. We take as many as seven courses per semester. So I was confused. Just three full courses seemed a pretty light load to me. At any rate, because I was an international student, I was advised at this point to take only one and a half courses considering adjustments to culture and the like. I laboured over this predicament for days.

¹ Short for *kababayan* which means countryman.

² Abbreviated form of the greeting "*Kamusta ka?*" meaning "How are you?"

To me, this could only mean I was considered a less able student than my Canadian classmates who had signed up for three full courses the first year and never even heard this kind of suggestion. In the end, I opted for two and half courses the first year. This incident highlighted for me the requirement for a foreigner or an immigrant to adapt to Canadian circumstances rather than be accommodated.

The Filipino I met at the US consulate was one of many like-minded Filipino immigrants and illegal aliens I have encountered not only here in Canada but in the US as well as Europe who believe that life in the West despite second class citizenship, racism and exploitation is better than life in the Philippines. Obviously for economic reasons, they are willing to sacrifice self-respect, identity and community. It does not have to be this way. I have pondered on this issue of internalized oppression on every single encounter, arriving at the conclusion that had each of these Filipinos known of their complicity in their oppression, their situations would have improved. I could be instrumental in bringing about change.

One of the realities of not being white that was brought home to me is how I am perceived by a white person. It was a Sunday and I was photocopying an article at my friend's business establishment. Since there were only three people working that day, I automatically just helped out when I saw the customer with the roll of film. To my exasperation, the woman who had just finished browsing the cards assumed I was an employee and therefore did not accord me the courtesy I deserved. When I ignored her rudeness, she managed to complain to my friend who pointed out that I was not an

employee. The assumption that as a person of colour, I was to be in a subservient role, shows the dominant white mindset I and other Filipinos come up against.

Having lived in Canada for the past two years, my subject position as Filipina and "international student" has been complex and filled with many contradictions.

Borrowing Meena Alexander's line, "the shock of arrival" necessitated a recasting of all things familiar in a new land. I usually found myself negotiating notions of class, race, gender and nation. Working towards a master's degree in the university, I was amazed at the lack of representation of Philippine literature in the literary curriculum. Trying to find literary productions by Philippine Canadians yielded only Anita Chen's *From Sunbelt to Snowbelt: Filipinos in Canada*, therefore I turned to Philippine American literary productions. Though substantial compared to the Philippine Canadian category, Philippine American literature is fractional relative to the explosion of publications in Chinese American, Korean American or Japanese American literatures. Mainstream white-dominated publishers have privileged works by other Asian Americans as more marketable as "Asian American literature." Such examples though do not do justice to the diverse and multicultural population of the United States where Philippine Americans now represent the largest immigrant community. It was at this point that I found the impetus for my research. Filipino Americans, being the largest immigrant community in the US yet suffering invisibility and marginality, led me to examine the mechanisms that contributed to their disempowerment and continuing oppression. Ignorance, unawareness of one's complicity to one's oppression, coming closer to home, I found the Maria Clara ideology.

If there is an objective Filipino scholars worldwide have been pursuing, it is for collective self-recognition. Composed of 7,100 islands, the Philippines is peopled by approximately 120 ethnolinguistic communities. Colonized by Spain for more than 350 years and then the United States for almost 50 years, the Philippines seems to have struggled coming out of the trauma and psychological destruction such condition³ brings. James Fallows, in an article “A Damaged Culture: A New Philippines?” show how Filipinos in diaspora are perceived as suffering from various kinds of cultural malaise such as “regionalism,” “identity crisis” and “damaged culture” (49-58). They are subject to all sorts of institutional invisibility being “the New Empire’s forgetful and forgotten citizens” (Campomanes 178). Though these identity tags are not physically manifest, they are collectively and psychically experienced by diasporic Filipinos. A triply-marginalized ethnic community, diasporic Filipinos are first marginalized vis-à-vis the mainstream dominant white majority. Second, they are marginalized vis-à-vis the growing Asian community and, finally, they are marginalized vis-à-vis their own internalized oppression⁴ in the wake of the US colonization of the Philippines.

I have heard countless Filipinos back home dream of living abroad, particularly in the United States, as it is the so-called “land of opportunity.” I have witnessed Filipinos in

³The colonized condition as Pratt describes “under conquest social and cultural formations enter long-term, often permanent states of crisis that cannot be resolved by either conqueror or conquered” (26).

⁴Internalized oppression is the process of internalizing stereotypes and lies used to justify the Filipinos’ oppression. This process begins quite early in life. Lies and stereotypes are sanctioned in order to justify the imbalance of power and later these stereotypes become normalized within society until they have become accepted beliefs. Some of the outcomes of internalized oppression are hatred of fellow Filipinos, infighting, colonial mentality, and mistrusting one’s capabilities.

diaspora quickly transform themselves, get rid of native accents, deny their ethnic origins and act white. This internalized racist ideology has defined the Filipino condition for many centuries.

Coming to Canada, my first encounter with critical race theory was very difficult and painful emerging as it did at the point of my cultural awakening. Nevertheless it was exhilarating in that I was sensitized to the politics of theorizing and different aspects of knowledge production through the exposure to new critical frameworks. Terms such as “identity,” “nation,” and “ideology” which I never thought to interrogate before started to disturb me. Inevitably, I found myself examining minority issues and ethnic struggles particularly those of Filipinos in diaspora.

So what is it like for a Filipina to be a migrant in the United States? How does a woman, assigned the role of bearer and transmitter of culture, cope with the migration between two very different cultures? Will the sense of cultural displacement turn into cultural negotiation? How does she bridge "Philippine" and "American" identities and cultures?

This study is an attempt to answer the questions posed above by examining the works by Philippine American women writers. The migrant writers under consideration here, can help me to form a new understanding of how “nation” and “gender” translate for Filipino women. They can illuminate ways of rewriting the nation from outside its borders and, at the same time, from within the borders of other nations. I believe that women’s moving and writing between nations, cultures, and languages represent a process of

reterritorialization that record the ways in which nationalistic discourses construct gender differences and inscribe women into the narrative of the nation. But, I also believe that migration and dislocation now documents the ways in which nationalism fails to inscribe the women into the narratives of nation specifically through gender difference. Therefore, migrant women writers paradoxically transcend location through movement and re-call situatedness through memories of the homeland.

This study also aims to redefine the canon of American Literature to include Philippine American women's writing in particular, and to situate Philippine American women's literature at the interdisciplinary crossroads of American Studies, Asian American Studies, Philippine and American Literatures, Cultural Studies and Women's Studies. I believe that Philippine American literature should cut across defined categories that configure American Literature. For instance, American Literature configured along racial and gender lines ought to include Philippine American writing in its curriculum as opposed to classifying it as ethnic. This thesis is an effort to engender a politics that stresses inclusivity of ethnicity, race and colour, acknowledges differences, and tries to work with different contexts, groups and pedagogies.

This, I hope, gives a sense of the significance of this project for me. I am presently situated in the in-between space of the homeland and the diaspora where boundaries of discourses and identities meet and challenge each other. Both communities call themselves Filipino but between them are contentious ways and means of defining and performing Filipino-ness. This in-between space I have come to inhabit has offered me

many insights as well as fears that I will never completely understand enough of either community. And because I have experienced the privilege of viewing issues in new and meaningful ways not easily given to someone more deeply grounded in one community, I wish to contribute what I can with this study in order to build the bridge of understanding that does not reduce to the mundane whatever divides but instead challenges me to constantly rethink categories and not prematurely settle for a cementing of terms.

Chapter One

Introduction

In the anthology *Filipino Americans: Transformation and Identity*, the editor Maria P. P. Root notes that “[a]lthough the geographic location of home for most Filipino Americans may be in the United States or the Philippines (or both), the ancestral home . . . is nurtured by family stories and historical accounts that document the tragic, heroic, and ordinary ancestors who make our lives possible now. These pages could not have been produced without gratitude to and appreciation of those Filipinos who have come before us” (xii-xiii). The history of Philippine American literature can be traced back to the stories of the earliest Philippine immigrants in America. In the above statement, Root highlights two basic aspects of diaspora: one, that the cultural production of literature such as stories and poems is central to the cultural memory of diasporic communities, and two, that it is through such literature that diaspora creates a paradigm with which we can examine diasporic consciousness. Therefore, in calling forth the labourers from Ilocos to Hawaii, the migrants from the Philippines to the US, Root sets the ground for the mapping of contemporary Philippine-American literature in the US.

Before I can continue to discuss Philippine women’s work in the US, I need to look at the history of Philippine migration to the US. Unfortunately, most people (Filipinos included) are not aware of this history; to borrow from Toni Morrison’s concept of “re-memory,” a “re-memory” is in order. What follows is a brief overview of this migration in the context of the US.

THE FIRST WAVE OF IMMIGRATION TO THE US: 1906-1924⁵

There are two groups usually mistaken as the first Filipino immigrants: the “Manilamen” and the “pensionados.” In 1763, seamen commonly known as “Manilamen” and stowaways jumped ship off Louisiana and Mexico to escape the brutalities of the Spaniards, settled by the marshlands about 31 miles from New Orleans. These fugitives and adventurous men do not fit into the proper construct of the term “immigrant.” In 1903, the “pensionados,” a group of 100 college students selected from 20,000 applicants, entered the US. They were called “pensionados” because of the colonial government scholarships they received. The program was part of U.S. Governor General William Howard Taft’s “Filipinization” project to produce graduates in engineering, education and agriculture to return to the islands and occupy positions in government and business. The program ended in 1910.

During the first wave of Philippine immigration to the US, the Philippines was under American colonial rule.⁶ As such the immigrants were American “nationals”⁷ when

⁵ Epifanio San Juan catalogs 1906 as bringing the first influx of Filipinos to the US in *From Exile to Diaspora* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1998) as: “Filipinos appeared in US territory by grace of the racialized exclusion of the Chinese (the infamous 1882 Act) and the selective barring of the Japanese (1908 Gentlemen’s Agreement). With the acquisition of the Philippines and Puerto Rico, the planters in Hawaii and on the West Coast found a solution to their need for cheap and easily replenishable manpower. The first group of Filipinos in 1906 comprised of recruited peasants hired by the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association to work in the sugar plantations” (25).

⁶ Jonathan Okamura, *Imagining the Filipino American Diaspora: Transnational Relations, Identities, and Communities*. New York: Garland, 1998. “After the annexation of the Philippines by the US in 1898 as a result of the Spanish-American war” (37).

⁷ According to Bautista, “Filipinos were free to enter the US as ‘nationals’ although they lacked the full benefits and privileges of American citizenship” (110).

they migrated.

The first group consisted of fifteen Ilocanos recruited to work in Hawaii in 1906. After 1907, during which more than 150 labourers were sent to Hawaii, recruitment was stopped. In 1909, Chinese, Japanese and Koreans were barred from immigrating to Hawaii so the only available labour was Filipinos. By September 1909, 500 more Filipinos migrated to Hawaii. By 1910, 4,173 new Filipino workers were added to the population. The bulk of Filipino migrants consisted of young men under the age of 30. In his book *Sakada: Filipino Adaptation in Hawaii*, Ruben Alcantara writes that most of the workers were illiterate or had only grade school education. They could not read, write and speak in English. It was reported that recruiters preferred those who could not read and write because they were not likely to leave the plantation. By 1920, there were 5,603 Filipinos on the mainland who had very different experiences from their compatriots in Hawaii.⁸

Race – the physical characteristic such as eye shape, skin colour and ethnicity – and a different way of life made these immigrants the target of racial prejudice and racist stereotyping. Takaki notes that Filipinos were “thought to be black; staring at them whites asked, ‘Are they coloured?’ On the doors of hotels, Pinoys often read signs saying: ‘Positively No Filipinos Allowed’”(324). As Malays, Filipinos were not permitted to marry white women nor were they allowed to become US citizens. Filipinos protested

⁸ Ronald Takaki. *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*. New York: Penguin Books, 1989. The Filipinos in the islands did not face the presence of a racist white working class. “They were pitted against Japanese workers on the plantations but the managers carefully regulated this rivalry in order to prevent it from breaking into violence. On the mainland, Filipinos competed with white labourers and became the targets of violent white working class backlash” (315).

against this racial prejudice by criticizing the contradiction between America's ideals and reality:

We do not find that the United States government puts its theories into practice. In school in the Islands we learn from the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal. But when we get over here we find people treating us as if we were inferior. (326)

Worth mentioning here is the story of Severino Foronda who recounts how he was recruited to work in California's fruit and vegetable farms in 1928.⁹ This example of race relation points to the unquestioned hegemony of the white race and stands in contrast to the paradigm shift of today's multiculturalism that questions and endeavours to dismantle the dominance of any one race.

The history of Philippine male immigration makes me wonder about Philippine female immigration to the US. Takaki observes that "there were 300 men and only 2 women" (58) on the ship to America in 1929. In 1930, 16.6% of the 63,052 Filipinos in Hawaii and 6.5% of the 45,208 Filipinos in the mainland were women. Planters in Hawaii saw it was to their advantage to promote emigration of Filipino women since men with families were steadier workers. But Filipino culture placed restrictions on the possibilities

⁹ Reuben S. Seguritan, We Didn't Pass Through the Golden Door: The Filipino American Experience. Institute for Filipino American Research, 1997. In July 1929, Severino went to Chicago for better opportunities but did not have much luck so moved to New York in December of the same year where he applied for employment. Where Severino applied for work, he was met with the warning, "we only hire whites here" (13). Finally he found work in a restaurant and following that, at the food and coffee section of the Commodore Hotel for four years. He married Laverne, a woman born of Filipino immigrant parents in the US, who had her own tale of "bitter experiences of racism in school and her place of work, because she was colored" (13).

of travel for Filipino women, requiring them to be accompanied by either their husbands or fathers. Most Filipino migrants saw themselves as sojourners and America for them was not the place to bring families and settle. So the first wave of immigration from the Philippines does not include many women and it is not until the second wave in 1965 when women immigrants became less rare.

THE SECOND WAVE OF IMMIGRATION TO THE US: 1965-1999

The huge growth in the Filipino American population from 340,000 in 1970 to 780,000 in 1980 and 1.4 million in 1990 was a result of the 1965 Immigration Act, allowing for the reunification of families and the entry of skilled workers needed by the US economy. According to Yen Le Espiritu, because the 1965 act “gives a higher preference to professional-level workers, Asian immigrant women have had more opportunities to acquire jobs . . . among Filipino and Korean immigrants more females than males were admitted” (64). The Philippines was the largest supplier of health professionals to the US: “[D]ue to the shortage of nurses in the US, women have dominated the Filipino immigrant population since 1960,” (67) sending almost 25,000 nurses between 1966 and 1985 and another 10,000 nurses between 1989 and 1991.

The history of the two waves of migration from the Philippines is different mainly because of economic status, education and gender. The first wave was composed mainly of working class labour with very little education while the second is composed of the educated, middle class of both sexes. Issues of race and ethnicity figure differently, too.

As a social construct,¹⁰ race highlights the unequal power relations between a subordinate and dominant group. In the first wave of Philippine migration, racism was the product of the dominant group recruiting the subordinate group for its labour potential. This is almost a necessary part of capitalist society where the need for cheap labour engenders hierarchical divisions of the labour force based on physical characteristics. The same is true of the second wave of migration. As a product of immigration laws, only the professional class from the Philippines could enter the US. Again, it was the dominant group recruiting a specific type (professional) of the subordinate group. This kind of recruitment has led to racist stereotyping that has engendered the “model minority” myth in the US. Most Filipinos in the US are believed to be doctors, nurses, medical technologists and lawyers and this kind of stereotyping essentializes them as “academically gifted, overrepresented in higher education, having relatively high occupational and income status, and able to succeed through their own individual and family efforts and sacrifices” (Okamura 48).

In response to the racism directed toward Philippine cheap labour, which shadowed all immigrants as “brown monkeys,” the earlier migrants tried to be naturalized American citizens to no avail while a small portion of the second wave immigrants, in response to the growing racism perceived in the violence against plantation workers in

¹⁰ Theories by Stuart Hall set forth race and ethnicity as a social construct. In David Theo Goldberg, Anatomy of Racism. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1990. *Ethnicity* referred to pagans, those who were not Christian or Jewish, and only later became attached to political, national, linguistic and/or physical differences. To contemporary race theorists, this mobility demonstrates that race and ethnicity are social constructions linked to the specific discursive spheres within which they are used.

Hawaii and California or the Alaskan cannery workers, sought to attain minority status. In other words, the earlier immigrants endeavoured to change their situation of being materially exploited and ideologically controlled by hoping to get accepted as American citizens. Being classified as part of the dominant group could have exacerbated the stereotypical constructions of ethnicity and race, but only through assimilation. On the other hand, given the diversity and middle-class, professional status of the second wave of immigration, there is a debate about whether or not to have minority status. Professionals against minority status are afraid of losing the privilege of being middle class. Being re-classed as a minority would also mean an immediate rethinking of one's own identity and subject position. Unfortunately, many of those who are against minority status do not want to accept the fact that in the stratification of social relations in the US where the white male is on the top, they are already part of the minority, regardless of class and gender privileges they enjoy in their home culture.

In *From Exile to Diaspora*, Epifanio San Juan discusses the two waves of migration and observes as such:

Long before Filipinos – as immigrants, tourists, or visitors – set foot on the U.S. continent, they – in body and sensibility – have been prepared by the thoroughly Americanized culture of the homeland. This is true in particular for the second and third waves of immigrants . . . I disagree with those who claim that the majority of Filipino immigrants after 1965 carried with them traces of the growing nationalist sentiment in the Philippines. (58)

The second wave immigrants from the Philippines have a different idea of their homeland and their ethnic identity. Different from the first wave immigrants in many ways, these

new immigrants have met opportunities rather than constraints in the US. They are highly-educated, professional people, representative of the diverse regional cultures and different languages and dialects from all over the Philippines. They have the means to import and support many aspects of Philippine culture. Well-situated in the American economy, they find no need to deal with their cultural amnesia with respect to earlier Filipino immigrants and their descendants. By seeing themselves as superior, the second wave of immigrants enact the power of privilege and do injustice to the history of Philippine migration to the US. The second wave Filipino immigrants who lose sight of this historical memory seriously impedes their response to fellow Filipino immigrants who continue to face more insidious forms of racism. Often because they are blinded by their success as “model minority,” they fail to see racism towards themselves.

As a community, there is a need to caution against such behaviour. In the early 1990s about 60,000 Filipinos arrived each year, such that by 1994 they comprised, at one million, the second largest immigrant group in the US; it is very likely that at the current immigration levels, the Filipino American population will increase to 2.1 million by year 2000, when they will be the largest Asian American group. Data from the 1990 US census on different socioeconomic indices indicate that Filipino Americans, “while they have higher family income and educational attainment levels than for whites” (Okamura 44) have achieved minimal overall social mobility and remain a subordinate ethnic minority in American society. I hope the effects of class diversification and the consciousness of second generation Filipinos will call into question issues of essentialized notions of

authenticity and class privilege and therefore result in the appreciation of minority status.

The focus of my study is first-generation immigrant women from the Philippines who fall into the middle-class category. The migration is a lateral move in terms of class and profession. The women are active, productive members of society and contribute to the economy by working and living in the US. Their shared migrant sensibility and concern about being Filipino in the US is the common basis through which they form a community. As diasporic writers who write about the migrant condition, their works are not only products of the imagination but also of memory. Memory is the connection between the past and the present, a necessary aspect of diasporic experience. More importantly, memory is also the means of constructing a self or an experience; it underlies imagining and writing. Drawing parallels between memory and creative writing, Gayle Greene in “Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory” states that “[M]emory revises, reorders, refigures, resignifies; it includes or omits, embellishes or represses, decorates or drops, according to imperatives of its own. Far from being a trustworthy transcriber of ‘reality,’ it is a shaper and shape shifter that takes liberties with the past as artful and lying as any taken by the creative writer” (294). In writing through different genres about their migrant experiences, these women writers maintain and create memory by using the past to make sense of the present and map out a future.

But it is necessary to note that the centrality of the “imagination” is indicative of a new global culture and not just of literary culture. Arjun Appadurai theorizes about global cultural processes in his essay “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural

Economy,” observing that “the image, the imagined, the imaginary – these are all terms which direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: *the imagination as a social practice*” (5). In various ways, these writers articulate, interrogate and preserve memory in order to explore the worlds of the actual and the possible in their writings. Situated between cultures, they occupy ambivalent positions as subjects and objects, knowers and known. As such, they are able to portray tensions between oppositions of center and margin, public and private, assimilation and culturalism. In resisting attempts by cultural power centers (be it Philippine or American) to impose a homogeneous identity, they interrogate “Philippine-ness” or “Filipino-ness” and “American-ness” in order to represent multiple subjectivities and bring together different cultural selves.

The element of “Filipino-ness” is an important aspect in the works of these women writers. In discussing “Filipino-ness,” Cecilia Manguerra-Brainard, in *Philippine Woman in America*, points out that “[S]omeone unfamiliar with the Filipino setting would miss the underlying Filipino-ness of the manuscripts . . . I thought they’d get the cultural nuances that the Filipino reader would pick up without red-flagging” (10). Brainard sees her “Filipino-ness” as a reality that structures her position. In emphasizing their Filipino-ness in the US, these diasporic writers subscribe to the representative politics of multiculturalism that is operating with its different dividing and unifying factors in contemporary US, as opposed to the melting-pot theory in the figure of Ellis Island.

The politics of multiculturalism and women’s writing leads me to trace back the

emergence of ethnic women's writing that started in the 70's with the second wave of the women's movement. The crucial issue was to give voice to voiceless minorities and to deal with problems of history. Writers of African American descent like Toni Morrison and Maya Angelou had written *The Bluest Eye* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* respectively, to break the silence against female oppressions like rape, incest and exploitation of women. They wrote to testify against the cultural and sexual oppressions they faced in the United States. Maxine Hong Kingston in *The Woman Warrior* talked about the difficulties of life in the US and what it meant to be American. But this need to voice oppression has been appropriated commercially by publishers and has bred commodification in many ways. As such, authors have turned into celebrities and have been co-opted into the institution, dulling the sharp edge of their writing to effect social changes. The Filipina writer enters when the market has already been set and established and is therefore late in coming into this tradition of writing.

As middle-class, educated women from a previously colonized country, Philippine women enter America with a complex, multiple identity that is further complicated in the context of American race and ethnic relations. Being part of the middle-class, they implicitly support mainstream American values of upward mobility, capitalism, entrepreneurship and so on, but as ethnic women of colour they are marginalized by America. As middle-class, Philippine women, the ideological construction of "woman" that they bring with them contradicts what they encounter in the middle-class context of America. The "traditional" notion of Philippine "woman," with its emphasis on home,

family and community, contrasts sharply with the American ideology of freedom that construct “woman” as individualistic, public and aggressive. In the US context, family values serve as an ideological tool for conservative political gain while dysfunctional families and divorce are the social realities. Therefore, even if they are privileged in class, they are othered by race.

Given the complex situation of Philippine women in the US, these authors deal with identity issues, migrancy and displacement in order to explore the multiple implications of border crossings at the nexus of gender, class, ethnicity, language and sexuality. The experience of border crossing, both literal and metaphorical, highlights the existence of borders like never before. The recent explosion of Philippine American women writers in contrast to male authors is not an accident. It points to how, in the case of women, polemical constructs of “Philippine” and “American” function as border guards of identity, and such constructs bring to the fore the awareness that patriarchies in both nation and diaspora essentialize “woman” by building boundaries and dichotomies. The multiplicity and complexity of the Philippine female migrant has to be articulated away from polarizations that emphasize the “authentic;” diaspora demands an examination and interrogation of borders especially in relation to gender.

It is necessary to keep in mind that redefinitions – be it of woman, identity or nation – attempted by these women writers are not universal but particular, class-coded notions; even as they challenge and interrogate the notions of “Philippine” and “American,” it is always in a middle-class context. The writers I study are of middle class

backgrounds from the Philippines with access to Philippine elite education, and may be seen as being part of the bourgeois intelligentsia in the Philippines; as such they come from a recognizable social class and also belong to the professional, middle class in the US. They write works of poetry and fiction based on the material circumstances of their lives: the world-view of the class to which they belong and write for an English speaking bourgeois audience in the Philippines, and the diaspora.

These writers have money and a room of their own to write fiction and poetry, and this is a significant aspect of their writing; the frame of reference is without doubt a middle class one. Here, it is important to keep in mind that even though the class to which they belong in the Philippines and the US is the same, the context is different. That is, the middle class formations in the Philippines and the US are different from each other and require some translation. The bourgeois values that make up the middle class may be the same in both locations, but the material conditions of day-to-day life differ. For example, not having an air-conditioning unit or running hot water in middle class or upper class homes in the Philippines does not mean that they are not middle or upper class; similarly, everyone who has a car in the US does not belong to the middle-class. I employ these examples as a means to denote the kinds of translations the writers have to engage in within the middle-class contexts of different cultures in which they write.

Having established the history of the Philippine community in the US and having introduced these women writers, I wonder what sort of community they form and what term could be used to describe them. To start, given the diversity of the Philippines

(language, regional identity, religion), a Filipino in Luzon or Mindanao would identify herself as Cebuano, Tagalog or Waray and not Filipino or Visayan. Upon moving away, though, she becomes Filipino or, generally speaking, Southeast Asian. So calling oneself Filipino outside the Philippines is a strategy for creating solidarity and community. It can be active or reactive, often it is Janus-faced because it distinguishes between the two aspects of claiming Filipino-ness: the "being" Filipino and the "being seen" as Filipino. The gesture of being seen as Filipino by the dominant population is a contestation of what it means to be American. When the dominant group names the "other" as Filipino it is a denial of America in that it prescribes a national and ethnic identity in absolute terms of difference and constructs the US as devoid of ethnic and racial diversity. So trying to be Filipino and American may require a recourse to W.E.B. Dubois' notion of double-consciousness. Building on Dubois' concept, Paul Gilroy states that:

Striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness. By saying this I do not mean to suggest that taking on either or both of these unfinished identities necessarily exhausts the subjective resources of any particular individual. However, where racist, nationalist, or ethnically absolutist discourses orchestrate political relationships so that these identities appear to be mutually exclusive, occupying the space between them or trying to demonstrate their continuity has been viewed as a provocative and even oppositional act of political insubordination. (1)

Substituting "European" and "black" with "Filipino" and "American" in the above quote does not change the argument. The in-between space of identities is oppositional since it tries to hybridize and question notions of purity and therefore an established priority of races, nations and cultures. It also brings to the forefront issues of nation, nationality,

culture, identity, belonging and home. Even today in the US, there is a set notion of what it means to be “American” and this usually excludes the “brown” populations of US society, a colour that is between black and white and therefore cannot be neatly categorized into the polarities of black and white Americans.

Communities can exist on other bases besides that of geography. Benedict Anderson employs the idea of “imagined communities,” in the context of nation and nationalism. I propose that this concept is equally relevant to communities outside of a nation, because diaspora is the “other” to the nation. Put differently, the migrant condition is marked by diasporic consciousness; nation and imagination are an inseparable part of this consciousness of diasporic communities. I employ the term Philippine American to describe this community of women writers. I also use the terms “diaspora” and “diasporic” to describe these women and sometimes I use diaspora/diasporic interchangeably with “Philippine American.”

To start with, diaspora or “diasporic communities” is a metaphoric designation for immigrants, exiles, political refugees, expatriates and other categories of people who cross borders away from their homeland. “Diaspora” means the dispersal or scattering of a people. But “diaspora” as a term was largely employed in the context of Jews and Armenians and also in the context of religious oppression, indentured labour trade and slavery.¹¹

¹¹ In its Greek roots, diaspora literally meant “dispersal” or “to sow over.” However, most evocations of diaspora allude to the Jewish condition of exile and wandering as a result of a traumatic expulsion from a homeland to which they hope to return. While this “classic” definition gives a historical context for the continuing etymology of the term, it is important not to take the Jewish case as the defining prototype.

The term Philippine American is used to describe resident aliens and citizens of the US who live and work in the US: people who originate from the Philippines but look upon their ethnicity as an important factor in itself and as a negotiating factor with the supposed mainstream identity. Philippine American is a political signifier, a term that supports the politics of inclusion and the dismantling of the putative “American” identity. In hyphenating the term Philippine-American, I wish to emphasize the fact that the hyphen marks a dialogic and non-hierarchic conjuncture which gives equal emphasis to both the “Philippine” and the “American.” While “Philippine American” only refers to the Philippines and the US, the term “diaspora” points to Filipinos in other parts of the world (such as those in Europe, the Middle East, the rest of Asia, the Caribbean and others) besides the Philippines and the US. This highlights the global condition of diaspora and assumes a shared diasporic consciousness that emerges from a network of historical, cultural and religious connections that shows itself in different degrees in the literary production of our communities worldwide.

For some people, to use the term diaspora interchangeably with Philippine

Although not referred to as a diaspora until the 1950s and 60s, the dispersal of Africans through the slave trade was seen to parallel the Jewish diaspora as early as the nineteenth century (Cohen 31). The African diaspora is most associated with though not limited to the forced dispersal of Africans due to transatlantic slavery. Postcolonial and postmodern cultural studies theorists define diaspora against narratives of the nation – for Homi Bhabha, diaspora is the always-present nation’s other that fragments, hybridizes and makes ambivalent the national narrative (“DissemiNation” 300); for Stuart Hall, it is the hybrid historical position in opposition to cultural identities based on essence (“Cultural Identity” 119); for Paul Gilroy, it stands for an anti-anti-essentialist postmodern group identity and unit of analysis connected by circuits of travel and trade (*Black Atlantic* 308); and for Boyarin, diaspora functions as the renunciation of territorial sovereignty in conjunction with the maintenance of an ethnic identity and culture (“Diaspora” 711).

American may be viewed as a contradictory strategy. Radhakrishnan for instance, in his book *Diasporic Mediations: Between Home and Locations* explains the contradiction as follows:

Whereas the term “diaspora” indicates a desire to historicize the moment of departure as a moment of pure rupture both from “the natural home” and “the place of residence,” the ethnic mandate is to live “within the hyphen” and yet be able to speak. (175-176)

This explanation by Radhakrishnan may be seen as correct if diaspora is viewed as completely apolitical and existing in a vacuum without allegiances. But as this is never the case, I disagree with it. Diaspora does not mean total deterritorialization; diaspora often means multiple commitments and various reterritorializations.

Finally, I will briefly look at the growing field of Philippine American writers of the diaspora. This subject area is still being charted mainly in the form of anthologies such as *Fictions by Filipinos in America* (1993) and *Contemporary Fictions by Filipinos in America* (1997). In correspondence with my argument for inter-ethnic contextualizations of Philippine American writing, it is comforting to find anthologies, such as *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writing By and About Asian American Women* (1989), *Frontiers of Asian American Studies: Writing, Research, and Commentary* (1989), *Forbidden Stitch: An Asian American Women's Anthology* (1989) and *Growing Up Asian American* (1993), include Philippine American writers in their collections. There is need for more works that situate writers of the Philippine diaspora in the context of US immigrants and not just Asian American writers although mapping the collective Asian American is an

important communal and political act. A collection of critical essays, *From Exile to Diaspora* (1998), situates writers of the Philippine diaspora in the context of US immigrant writers. Critical works on single authors and genres are still to be written. *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and their Social Context* (1982), *Reading the Literature of Asian America* (1992) and *Reading Asian American Literature* (1993) study contemporary issues of history, economics, politics and literature in a comparative, global context.

Although research is being done on Filipinos in America, I hope that more authors, scholars, teachers and researchers will contribute to the growth of the field that needs much more representation not only in the US but worldwide. My study is an effort to fill such a need and I hope it influences future research in the area.

Chapter Two

Cultural Constructions of Maria Clara Ideology

This chapter is the *raison d'être* for my thesis which has gender as its main focus. Gender is the rationale behind my argument for redefining the Philippine feminine and the frame through which I examine Philippine-American women's writing. Here I will locate the ideals of womanhood as constructed in the traditional and cultural Philippine context. In tracing this genealogy, I aim toward the centrality of Maria Clara, the ideal of womanhood vis-à-vis marriage, and in doing so, highlight the malleability of this traditional idea from Hebrew Christian scriptures,¹² to be recast, in different ways at different times, in both the nationalistic project and the diasporic context. In defining "woman" vis-à-vis "man," Maria Clara in its patriarchal manifestation constructs unequal gender relations and perpetuates divisions in the areas of the home and the world and that of tradition and modernity – woman is determined as the submissive signifier of home and tradition. But such a representation of woman, vis-a-vis "traditional" Judeo-Christian texts erases differences between women and suppresses the Philippine multiplicity as historical processes such as colonialism, decolonization, nationalism, post-independent

¹² Carol Meyers and Amy Wordelman discuss how religion as one of the main socializing forces has influenced the consciousness of society regarding women. The main message of the Bible is liberation and the salvation of people but the popular interpretation of this contributes to the oppression of women. In Genesis 2: 21-23, the story of creation says woman was taken from the rib of Adam and the interpretations of this story has been responsible for the entrenchment of the notion that women are to play an inferior role. As man is the principal character, woman is simply derived, and since she was created only because man was lonely, she has no significance of her own except in a relationship of service to man. Also, the letters of St. Paul, which are culturally conditioned, are always cited to justify the subordinate role of women and her subservience to her husband ("Everyday Life" 245, 390).

women's movements and transnational flows have given rise to remarkable changes that have affected the construction of “woman.”

Despite such changes, in the making of the social imaginary of nation, the Maria Clara ideal has secured the system of representation that constitutes gender relations and exerts a strong hold on the cultural unconscious of the Philippines. Therefore, it is important to situate the feminine in the context of change, particularly the feminine in diaspora. As Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid state in their introduction, “[W]omanhood is often a part of an asserted or desired, not an actual cultural continuity” (*Recasting* 17). So in this chapter, I will examine the production of “woman” at the nexus of different histories, cultures and ideologies. I focus on the Philippine, female, migrant in the US and explore the reconstruction of womanhood vis-à-vis Maria Clara ideology in diaspora.

The definitions of Maria Clara are found in several texts such as Jose Rizal’s *Noli Me Tangere* and *Urbana at Felisa*. But while they may differ in some detail, they all emphasize her existence as virginal and subordinate to men. Edna Zapanta-Manlapaz and Ruth Cudala observe that “[I]n Filipino idiom, to be called Maria Clara is to be viewed as a virgin who, to protect that supreme virtue of her womanhood must observe the most minute rituals of maidenly modesty” (“Wrestling” 317). Though this notion was not discussed in the context of contemporary women, it is appropriate because this concept still runs deep in the Philippine cultural consciousness and is the foundation of the cultural construction of womanhood. The ideal Filipino woman is “expected to be a visible but

inaudible presence in society. Assumed to have no thoughts of her own (thinking was after all thought to be an occupation reserved for males), she was also assumed to have no opinion to offer” (317-318). Literally, the words “Maria” from the biblical “Mary” and “Clara” meaning “transparent” or “pure” may be translated to mean “pure as Mary.” This literal translation points to the inscription of woman into the larger cultural context that defines the ideal woman. The ideal of womanhood in the traditional Philippine cultural context corresponds “not to Mary as Mother of God but as Virgin. The choice of icon confirms the obsessive premium the Filipino traditionally places on a woman's virginity” (320). While a “good woman” is one who follows the prescribed role, what makes an “ideal woman” are the virtues of purity, patience, obedience and sacrifice that leads to self-effacement; this I refer to as “Maria Clara ideology.”

It is in late childhood that the conscious inculcation of the virtues of womanhood in girls commences. Nick Joaquin notes that “the convent schools . . . were very strict about their girls learning how to cook, keep house, keep accounts, sew, knit, embroider, draw or paint, sing, read music, play the harp and the piano, speak Spanish, make pickles and preserves, declaim poetry, make paper flowers . . . accomplishments, that were supposed to turn a girl into a useful cultured woman” (49). The ideal woman is personified by Maria Clara, the heroine of Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*. Although Maria Clara is popular, she is not the only paragon of womanhood. Stories of other heroines who were self-effacing in the name of female perfection and ideal womanhood abound in the culture. Women like Rosita (*La Rosa*), Malaya (*Malaya*), and Liwanag (*Tanikalang*

Ginto), all female leads in Philippine drama, religiously conform to the image of Maria

Clara:

pawang mapagmahal, mapagmalasakit, tapat at masunurin ngunit
palaasa, napatatangay sa agos ng mga pangyayari at walang
sariling pagpapasya

simply loving, sympathetic, faithful and obedient but hopeful,
willingly swept by the stream of events and without a decision of
her own¹³

Women are shaped through the lens of male artists – women who are the epitome of beauty and innocence, women both desired and victimized. These women exist as symbols instead of real characters. They may have had unique qualities, determination and strength but always they are depicted as passive – easily swept by their own emotions and those of others or by the current of events. They are women who do not have the means to introduce meaningful change to themselves and to society and are usually without the awareness that they are destroying noble intentions.

Interestingly, during pre-Hispanic times, women were upheld for the courage and character of their womanhood and not idealized as chaste virgins (where chastity is cherished as womanhood). The people then had no concept of virginity as a value. Agoncillo and Alfonso inform us that women then “enjoyed a unique position in society that their descendants during the Spanish occupation did not enjoy. Customary laws gave them the right to be the equal of men, for they could own and inherit property, engage in

¹³ Ruth Elynia S. Mabanglo, “Mula sa Altar nina Huli at Maria Clara: Imahen ng Babae sa Ilang Dramang Pilipino.” The English translation is mine.

trade and industry, and succeed to the chieftainship of a barangay in the absence of a male heir . . . [as] a sign of deep respect, then men, when accompanying women, walked behind them” (34). Researchers like Elizabeth Uy Eviota confirm women’s equal status with men in the political, social, economic and religious spheres of life. However, Spanish colonization in general, and religion in particular, gave rise to the subordination of women.¹⁴ Eviota observes, “[T]he content of religious ideology laid emphasis on the Virgin Mary as handmaid and mother, an emphasis which is said to have held her up as an ideal role model for women. This was reinforced by the special attention paid by the clergy to the Holy Family, particularly the Mother-Child bond, a bond which was to have implications far beyond sex roles” (39). Women were removed from the public sphere, thereby “laying the ideological foundations for a pattern of behaviour for Filipino women. Women’s removal from the public sphere came to be, in colonial society, synonymous with wealth and prestige. The cloistering of women came hand in hand with the Spanish notion of education for women: women were to learn only religion and homemaking skills . . . [reflecting] the Spaniard’s view of the role of women. This role centered on two basic institutions: the family and the Church” (42).

Towards the end of the Spanish colonial period the changes in production relations, coupled with developments in international trade, caused the reorganization of

¹⁴ When the Spaniards came in 1521, they were shocked by the freedom manifested by the Philippine women, which did not fit into their concept of how women should be and behave since the women in the Iberian peninsula at that time lived like cloistered nuns. They set out to remold the Filipina according to the image of the perfect woman of the Iberian society. Towards this end, they established Catholic schools for girls and women and introduced the cult of the Virgin Mary with a focus on the obedient Mary of the Annunciation.

social and economic life. Local economies were restructured away from self-provisioning to trade in particular products. These resulted in the destruction of some branches of production while encouraging others. Such radical social changes increased social differentiation, producing a class of people who, having no access to means of production, were forced to sell their labour and another class of people who, owning the means of production, profited from buying their labour.

With the agricultural export-crop economy rose a Filipino bourgeois who interacted with Spanish merchants and bureaucrats while exploiting the working class. Therefore, it is no longer appropriate to consider Filipino women as a homogeneous category. The women of this upper class subscribed to European norms and subsequently withdrew from the public sphere and productive labour. Within this class configuration emerged as well the need to legitimate paternity, necessitating stricter control of women's sexual behaviour, which previously had already been regulated by religion and colonial practice. Men's greater personal control over property was reproduced into an increase in power over their wives.

Maria Clara ideology as handed down from the Spanish period is inculcated in girls from a young age and as a result of past myths and stories, served the present and shaped the future. *Urbana at Felisa*, a book of etiquette, was published forty years before the Spanish rule ended. This book was directed mainly at the propertied Filipinos, particularly wives and mothers, tasked with the responsibility of nurturing the young. It prescribed a woman's way of life by laying down rules on every aspect of a woman's life, including

household duties and everyday rituals. Eviota describes *Urbana at Felisa* as “reveal[ing] a sexual practice which had taken on Hispanic and basically Western meanings. Daughters should be taught to fear God, to take care of their virginity and to be modest so as not to be taken advantage of by men . . . [a] married woman is subservient to the man who is the head of the household. She should serve her husband and look after his needs; she should be self-sacrificing and should bear with her husband’s faults” (60-61). As may be expected, the book emphasizes the role of women as the obedient wife and selfless mother.

Significantly, modernity reinscribes Maria Clara as “tradition” for the present¹⁵ at the nexus of different patriarchal discourses such as colonialism, nationalism, modernism and capitalism to render the “woman” as modern in one area (work) but traditional in another (home); dichotomies of tradition and modernity, home and the world permit for such continued prescription. Of course, there are exceptions to these prescribed notions and these exceptions do not proscribe resistance from women and women’s movements¹⁶ within the Philippines. Here then are some examples that show the prevalent notion of the

¹⁵ Maria Clara ideology is perpetuated by three socializing factors, namely education, religion and mass media. These institutions condition women’s consciousness about their person and their role and at the same time condition men’s consciousness and society’s expectation of women. In his book *Notes on Philippine Cinema*, Emmanuel Reyes analyzes women’s roles in contemporary Filipino movies as constructed at the nexus of the economic, political, sexual and traditional discourses. The focus of women in the story “gives them a heroic dimension in view of the problems that they must overcome. But beyond the tears and the suffering is a genre that tries to subvert female desire by establishing it as the root of all female suffering. In a patriarchal society, women are expected to be subservient to men. Her desire to challenge this restriction becomes the source of her dilemma” (44).

¹⁶ There were the Young Women of Malolos who led a protest movement on their own and stated that it was dishonorable for Filipinos to follow the guidance of priests. In addition, Eviota notes that Filipino women mobilized themselves for rights and roles traditionally denied them as a social group.

ideal woman in contemporary Philippine texts. From *Woman Enough and Other Essays*, Carmen Guerrero Nakpil writes about the relationship between men and women and how the assumptions of female inferiority continue to inform expectations of a woman's behaviour:

I was allowed a handicap of ten points in arithmetic because it was assumed that being a girl, I would be weak in the head. I lied, broke my word, flew into unexplained rages (comforts denied my brothers) because my father, a man of the world, expected that kind of behavior from a woman. (4)

A woman learns to bear cheerfully and without complaint all sorts of discomfort, injustice and misfortune. The popular image of the ideal woman on both film and television shows her to be protective, indulgent, self-sacrificing, docile, self-effacing, long-suffering martyr of a wife or mother. Another similar extract is from Sophia Romero's *Always Hiding*, in which she refers to the "Maria Clara ideal" as a woman who does not defy nor expect too much of men: "I'm afraid we won't be hearing or seeing the last of his women, so you better toughen yourself . . . Today it's one woman, tomorrow another. What matters is that he doesn't leave us. We can always put up with the rest" (33-34). However, there are contemporary women writers who dismantle the stereotype in their literature. Nakpil cites this as "the Filipino woman is the best man"¹⁷ in the Philippines . . . [s]he will rise to every challenge, time after time, tirelessly and magnificently. She will take the world on

The first of these movements was on the issue of suffrage: "After suffrage was won, women's groups moved toward legislation empowering women with certain rights especially with respect to property and work conditions" (96).

¹⁷ A Filipino idiom which means someone who excels at everything she or he does.

her shoulders, even when she does not have to. She works endlessly to improve herself and the status of her family. But she is a lady, and the truth remains her secret” (24).

Cecilia Manguerra Brainard gives her version in *Philippine Woman in America*:

My mother, I think, typifies the Filipina. She presents a pleasant demure look. A charming woman, she talks in a roundabout way . . . [she] goes out of her way to primp and behave in a feminine way. She once suggested that a way to avoid marital problems is "to tell your husband what he wants to hear, but to go ahead and do what you want. (41)

However, it seems the global scenario has had very little impact on the shaping of the Filipina. A study on Philippine women's values¹⁸ indicated respondents ranking high among the choices that “being submissive to men is a good womanly trait” (134) as much as “being a good wife and mother” (136). The orthodox view of the Filipina as being conventional – “‘too conventional,’ say the Americans – but as a result more moral, docile and religious than her contemporaries of Western nations” (*Woman* 14-15) is still the popularly accepted one.

Nakpil sketches the notion of the Filipina in opposition to the "Western" woman, and thus very effectively points to the imbrication of nation and woman. Paying attention to oppositions such as the East and West, tradition and modernity, is crucial to discussions of Philippine women's issues because both tradition and modernity are colonial constructions and carry patriarchal ideologies of nationalism and colonialism respectively.¹⁹ As a response to colonialism, nationalism locates itself in the spiritual

¹⁸ Milagros D. Ibe, “Values of Filipino Women,” (133-137).

¹⁹ The women's question in “tradition” was the Maria Clara model sanctioned by religious tradition.

domain of culture where it considered itself "superior to the West and hence undominated and sovereign" (Chatterjee 132). Thus, in emphasizing the national and the indigenous, nationalist discourse subscribed to an Orientalist (in Said's sense) construction about itself and, in doing so, equated woman with tradition and inscribed woman as a social marker of the nation. In discussing the trope of nation as woman, Parker et. al. observe that such trope "depends for its representational efficacy on a particular image of woman as chaste, dutiful, daughterly or maternal" (6). This observation is made in the general context of nationalisms however this statement is particularly relevant in the context of Philippine nationalism which further emphasized such a trope by taking its representational cue from *Inang Bayan*.²⁰

Greta Ai-Yu Niu theorizes that Imelda Marcos' symbolizing of female sexuality

American colonialist discourse identified this tradition as old-fashioned and backward as opposed to their model of liberation and modernity, and therefore needed to be criticized and reformed. Philippine nationalism, in charting a political position opposed to American colonial rule took the women's question as a problem of Philippine tradition. Nationalist discourse shows that the material/spiritual dichotomy (to which the terms "world" and "home" corresponded) condensed into an outer/inner distinction. The ideological framework within which Philippine nationalism answered the women's question in "modernity" was identification of social roles by gender applied to the meaning of the home/world dichotomy.

²⁰ *Inang Bayan*, a well-worn metaphor relating nation and woman, extends far beyond the traditional connection between the earth and women as "bearers of fruit." Women not only bear children but instill within the seeds of future generation the virtues and values they will cherish throughout their lives. The prevalence of the metaphor does not seem to have lost effectiveness; the equation of woman and nation remains strong today in nationalist rhetoric and literature, where the Philippine nation must be cherished like a good woman and also protected like a fragile woman. Within Philippine literature, there is a tradition of explicit comparison between the nation and the woman, one that has manifested itself differently through out the years but which continues to the present. Nationalists draw direct connections in one way or another between the nation and the women they portray—either linking their physical bodies with the nation, or drawing parallels between the roles that their bodies play, via romance or parenting, in the foundation of the nation.

was in line with the assertion of an essentialized “national identity” based on symbols such as the terno dress: “As First Lady, Marcos viewed the terno as a national symbol, insisting that women who were participating in a welcome for a 1981 Papal visit should wear white ternos. In 1969 she put her body on a world stage when she refused to wear the traditional black dress for a Vatican City ceremony investing a new Filipino cardinal. During this Papal audience she wore a yellow terno, and at each appearance in public she wore a different dress, just as she had worn a different terno for each public appearance” (91). This symbol mobilized women into the nationalistic struggle and the national agenda by evoking the image of the Philippine woman in her traditional dress as beautiful, noble, and sacrificing.

Eviota writes that women²¹ were active in the Revolution of 1896 but seldom “as combatants. Female leaders emerged but they were for the most parts relatives of male leaders. Women formed their own groups for the armed struggle . . . messengers, nurses, and supporters of what were essentially male-led and male-defined struggles for political independence” (*Political* 62). The first Philippine Republic was established though continuing to reproduce similar tools of dominance and control as that of colonizing Spain. The constitution privileged the political interests of men while denying women their political rights.

The American period²² inherited the Hispanic ideology of domesticity and

²¹ Women such as Gabriela Silang, Tandang Sora, Gregoria de Jesus, Maria Dizon, Melchora Aquino and others, played significant roles in the history of resistance against Spanish rule.

²² Philippines was under American rule from 1901 to 1942 and again in 1945 to 1946.

familialism which continued to be the framework within which Philippine sexuality was organized. There were changes in the form this ideology took but what characterized these years in terms of gender relations was “the entry of wealthy and middle-class women into the public sphere. American education and cultural practice had definite effects on the sexual and social behaviour of women . . . [c]oncern was expressed over the ‘loss of Filipino women’s inherent virtues’” (73). While Americanization had the effect of replacing “many, particularly Hispanic, forms of female subordination” (74), those forms of subordination which coincided with economic developments were reinforced. True womanhood and domesticity cults proliferated as ideological reflections of the rising wealth that allowed some women not to join the labour force. As Philippine economy developed along capitalist lines of production, the dichotomy between home and workplace became more pronounced, sharply delineating men and women’s proper roles. Motherhood became more idealized, an ideology that worked its way into the consciousness at all levels of Philippine life through mass-based education.²³

The stress on women’s natural relation to home and family heightened the persistence of sexual purity, endorsing monogamy, which was the Christian ideal of matrimony. Again, Maria Clara was employed as a discursive strategy through which a reformulated Philippines – one that soon began to be thought of in nationalist circles as

²³ The stereotyped roles are further confirmed in schools which teach sewing to the girls and carpentry to the boys. A grade school text portrays a picture of a happy family with mother and daughter cooking and preparing the table and the father reading the newspaper and the son playing with toy tanks and guns. Without any expressed statement, the message that gets to the student is that in a happy family, women work while men relax.

authentic – became grounds on which a national identity was to be forged. This reformulation also endorses an inherent Orientalism which sees Philippine society as essentially religious and traditional compared to the reason and modernity of the West. Under colonial rule, tradition is reconstituted and women and religion become interlocking grounds for this articulation. Women become symbols of Philippine tradition, which is reworked time and again through debates on the status and rights of Filipinas in society.²⁴ Despite the intimate connection between women and tradition, these debates are in some sense not primarily about women but about what constitutes liberation. The woman question is in this way redefined to fit into a nationalistic narrative and thus emerges the “La Filipina,” the woman constructed as a symbol of the nation.

Historically, the relationship between nation and woman or nationalism and feminism has had to be negotiated. Emerging from uprisings against the Americans, the ideology of nation overlaps with the category of woman to invariably invoke tradition/myth and further entrench the traditional idea of womanhood albeit in the name of modernity.²⁵ It has been a difficult relationship that needs constant rearticulation. For example, Filipinas were incorporated into anti-colonial struggle and so the woman question was spoken for in terms of the nation as opposed to getting politicized in its own right. So, women’s issues were sacrificed for national liberation. Nationalism in the

²⁴ The women’s movement was viewed as constitutive of the transformation of society and their male colleagues in the liberation movement tried to prevent women from organizing because this might distract the attention from the main contradiction of the elite against the oppressed.

²⁵ This argument is found in the recent research of Partha Chatterjee and Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid.

Philippines maintained the dichotomy of tradition against modernity through an ideological principle of “selection.” Chatterjee explains this “was not a dismissal of modernity but an attempt to make modernity consistent with the nationalist project” (121). This means the nationalist project reformed traditional culture by learning the ways of the West in the material aspects of life such as science, technology and economics, while maintaining the spiritual essence of the national culture. Such an appropriation of modernity into tradition invariably resulted in the material/spiritual, male/female, workplace/home, outer/inner polarities. Therefore, in dealing with the woman question in terms of tradition, nationalism continued to follow the colonial construction of women.²⁶ As a result of the nationalist project that emphasized tradition, and a result of the selective appropriation of Western modernity, the “new woman” of the Philippines came out feeling superior to other women (women of previous generations, lower class women and Western women) and took pride in her “superior national culture” (127). The new Filipina was still to follow the Maria Clara ideology and cherish both motherhood and wifedom but now she was able to get an education, be culturally sophisticated, have a job and participate in public life as long as she carried the conduct of the private sphere into the public sphere without posing a threat to established Manichean opposites. As Chatterjee states it very aptly: “The new patriarchy advocated by nationalism conferred upon women the honor of

²⁶ The colonial criticism of Filipino tradition formed the basis for the “civilizing mission” of the colonized and in taking up the women’s question in terms of tradition, the nationalists followed the colonial construct.

a new social responsibility, and by associating the task of female emancipation with the historical goal of sovereign nationhood, bound them to a new, and yet entirely legitimate, subordination” (130). In continuation with the “new” woman of nationalistic times, we have the new Filipina of the contemporary Philippines, who as Nakpil puts it, is: “a split personality,” in the sense of having evolved and arrived in response to the times. Part of the Filipina is seen to have remained “innocent, poetic, vulnerable homebody that she was at the close of the Spanish era; the other tries hard to catch up with the modern American woman who can drive a car, and bear children only when she wants to” (*Woman* 18).

At this point it is important to highlight the collusion of religion and class in the various constructions of nationalism. Studies in Philippine feminist historiography²⁷ point out that religion was used to develop the middle class, build the nation, set forth an ideal of womanhood and promote inegalitarian social structures. The construction and division of the private against the public domain as inscribed into women’s issues universalizes middle class ideology as national ideology. The national, patriarchal bourgeoisie therefore created ideologies of womanhood and defined itself and its relations to the women’s question through religion. In creating the “new” woman, the nationalist, middle-class patriarchy reconstructs the “traditional” by incorporating the “modern,” but Maria Clara ideology was still the basis of this reconstruction. Significantly, these issues of nation also carry over into diaspora.

²⁷ In particular the work done by Delia Aguilar, Mina Roces, Cristina Montiel and Elizabeth Eviota.

I theorize about womanhood vis-à-vis Maria Clara ideology in diaspora, specifically in the context of the United States. Given the history of nationalism and the woman question in the Philippines, it is evident that “home” was not only the site of women’s participation in the nationalist struggle, but it was also the site of the fight for what Chatterjee calls “new idea of womanhood” (133) in the nationalist period was fought. As discussed earlier, this “new idea of womanhood” was still based on the traditional Philippine ideal of Maria Clara despite the strategic manipulation and appropriation of “tradition” and “modern.”

In the crossing over from nation to diaspora, “woman” becomes the site on which the battle for “home” and “nation” are waged because of the complexities of cultural reproduction and the role of woman as bearer of children and transmitter of culture. In other words, migrancy renders culture as “conscious choice, justification and representation” as opposed to culture, within the nation, as “a tacit realm of reproducible practices and dispositions” (Appadurai 18) and the task of cultural representation and reproduction belongs to the woman. This complex relationship between woman and diaspora subsumes home in the form of Maria Clara ideology and memory. That is, in the crossing over from nation to diaspora, I posit that “woman” as constructed through Maria Clara ideology gets reconstituted as “home” because of the role of memory in the diasporic context. Memories of “home” take on a deep significance in diaspora as diasporic communities, being away from the homeland, strive to maintain a collective, national memory. Given the overlapping of nationalist ideology and Maria Clara ideology

(which subsumes cultural, mythic and gendered memories) the figure of the woman becomes the site of memory in diaspora. Such a transposition of the nationalist model to the diasporic context is problematic because it glorifies the Maria Clara “woman” of the past and demands that the woman of the present adhere to this image, an image that is activated by the collective, mythic and national memories in diaspora.

It is vital also to remember here the role played by the national bourgeoisie in the construction of Philippine nationalist ideology because the workings of the diasporic bourgeoisie²⁸ are similar to nationalist bourgeoisie. As such, given that middle class Philippine immigrants comprise the majority of the population in the United States, it is easy to find nationalistic parallels in diasporic middle classes.²⁹ The very essence of the Philippines wrested from the past and unchained by the hardships and struggles of the present lends perfection to the image of the model minority well. The “model minority” is the ideal that is constructed and reconstructed and at every moment preserved and celebrated.

Practices that idealize the nation must be critiqued because the figure of “woman” is woven tightly into it. We have to be on guard against such class-encoded notions of diaspora, nation, time and memory especially in relation to “woman” in diaspora. If not, while “home” in nationalist, bourgeois discourse was the cultural signifier for woman and

²⁸ Those that buy uncritically into bourgeois thought and culture.

²⁹ For instance, amnesia about earlier working class immigrants and the cooptation of gender issues and the need to homogenize Filipinos.

tradition (and therefore the spiritual domain of national culture), in the diasporic bourgeois context, it is the cultural signpost for the entire nation and not just a part of its culture as it was in nationalism; home in the diasporic context signifies nation, woman and tradition. Just as nationalism, in response to colonialism, constructed false essentialisms in the construction of woman, similarly, diaspora, as the other of nation, has the potential to entrench and continue the false essentialisms of nationalism because diaspora is the geographical absence of the nation.

Aspects of diasporic life invoke images of “home” and capitalize on the exilic condition. Examples are “long-distance ads” showing “a picture of a beaming elderly Filipino woman with a telephone in her hand: ‘Now *Inay* [mother] can call you . . . *Kahit sa public phone. Kahit sa tindahan sa kanto. Kahit sa kapitbahay. At kahit walang pera*” (Okamura 131).³⁰ Or, take ads in Filipino American newspapers such as *Philippine News* and magazines such as *Filipinas* for “delivery services and also for other transnational services to the Philippines, such as air travel . . . and for Philippine cultural products such as videotapes, compact discs” (Okamura 128). In discussing the cultural effects of Asian media markets in the United States, Alpana Sharma Knippling argues:

“home” is made increasingly tangible through commercialization, through the buying and selling commodities that both address and endlessly reproduce form of exile, guilt and nostalgia, “home” becomes increasingly abstracted, a receding idea. In this simultaneous play on “home” as both concrete and abstract, as

³⁰ Even if from a public phone. Even if from the corner store. Even if from the neighbour. And even if she has no money.

there and not there, ITV as the effect of complicating nationalism. It seems, in other words, to exchange nationalism for its subtitular variation: subnationalism. According to the logic of subnationalism, our relation to our “adopted” country must be regulated and mediated, however precariously, through our relation to our “home” country. (427)

I concur with Knippling’s argument and take this understanding of subnationalism away from media markets to fit into the context of diasporic women. Under the “logic of subnationalism” I suggest that “woman” is the subnational terrain upon which such regulations and mediations are undertaken. If Maria Clara ideology gets reconstituted as “home” then home becomes the locus of existence on many different levels, just as man is the centre of Maria Clara ideology in the national context. The traditional, nationalist, masculinist relationship between home and woman is reactivated in the migrant context, because of the signifying overlap of home/nation/woman. Cast as a necessary, essential paradigm, this imbrication of woman and nation is lodged deep enough that, just as woman is the ground on which the male discourse of nationalism gets written, woman is the surface on which diasporic constructions of “home” get inscribed vis-à-vis Maria Clara ideology in its subnationalistic manifestation, which also stresses the crucial oppositions of tradition and modernity: “Philippine” and “American.”

“Home” embodies powerful signification of the nation in the migrant context, but what complicates the woman’s position further is a transposition of nationalism into subnationalism. As such, everything in the new country has to be processed through “home.” In filtering the United States through the Philippines, Filipinas are constructed as social markers – transmitters of ethnic culture, reproducers of the nation and children,

symbols of “home” and in this process of transmission between nation and diaspora, there occurs fragmentation. Here I am reminded of Homi Bhabha’s theory: the “process of splitting” which is “the site of *writing the nation*” (Bhabha 297). In Bhabha’s theories, this splitting is the ambiguous space that permits for counter-narratives of the nation. According to him, these narratives “continually evoke and erase totalizing discourses – both actual and conceptual – disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which ‘imagined communities’ are given essentialist identities” (300). But the splitting that Bhabha discusses occurs in relation to people who are “also the ‘subjects’ of a process of signification” (297) and “woman,” when cast in the subnational predicament of being the allegorical ground on which diasporic transactions of nationalist history take place, is the mute transmitter, the silent translator. In this absence of subjecthood, representation is problematic; this lack of agency has perilous implications in the diasporic context with regard to social, cultural and political representation. The identification of “woman” with the overlapping layers of nation/home/ tradition and woman overlooks that “woman,” “home” and “nation” are not monolithic categories but rather are materialist and historicized entities, altering and contesting formations.

Further, since regulation of diaspora is through the “home” country, it lodges the woman’s position as defined by patriarchy as well as the Manichean divide of tradition/modernity, Philippine/American. “Home” is equated with the virtues of Maria Clara ideology: wifehood and motherhood. An important feature of this equation is for the wife and mother to carry on the tradition of suffering in silence in order to emphasize

her belief in the traditions that make a good woman – a good woman being one who is accepting, dutiful and enduring even if it leads to self-effacement. Self-effacement is highlighted in traditional ideas of wifehood and motherhood because the primary identification of a woman is with regard to her generativity, and grants her no other mode of expression. Caught in the act of signifying diaspora through images of “home” for the family, the woman is cast as a reified, ahistorical, fixed entity of reproduction who maintains the “essential” and “authentic” spirit of the nation. That is, in a carryover from the totalizing nationalistic discourse, the diasporic woman signifies home/nation/tradition/culture, and this imbrication of woman and nation imposes an identity that binds and burdens the woman with disempowerment.

Self-effacement is a dangerous tenet to follow in the diasporic context. A sense of self is necessary for a woman, any woman, but especially for the diasporic woman in the United States, who is displaced from her cultural set-up, faces the loss of societal support systems and meets an ideology that stresses female autonomy and self-assertion while in reality exploiting ethnic women. The element of diasporic memory in relation to other nationalistic constructs, therefore, gives rise to a definition of “woman” that is problematic. Women in diaspora who wish to reject these ideals have not been successful because they tend to combat it from a Western modernist position. Efforts to begin respecting traditions Filipinos value in order to develop an understanding of why the image of Maria Clara holds so much power over the Filipino heart and mind have to be made. When the tendency is to make fellow Filipinos feel they are backward because they

hold such values that ought to be rejected outright, the movement towards change is doomed to fail.

Deconstructing hierarchies and challenging oppression from within the system without recycling colonial oppositions of tradition and modernity is important especially in the diasporic context which not only underscores Philippine constructions of “woman,” but also the dominant “American” ideologies of gender. Contradictions and dichotomies of diaspora can be better understood by a double movement of acknowledgment of the past and awareness of the present. The past, in the form of culture and values, is essential for a sense of self to help direct actions in the present.

The subject position of a Philippine immigrant woman in the United States is a complex one. In contrast to her Philippine identity, which is shaped at the various intersections of class, religion, race and social status as ascribed by her culture, her identity in the United States is mainly seen in terms of migrancy, ethnicity and race or skin colour. It confounds the average female immigrant from the Philippines that ethnicity and race make up the skeleton of her identity. Her sense of Philippine womanhood is markedly different from that of the “American” woman, and therefore, there are two sets of relations concerning gender that she has to negotiate – the culture-specific gender roles and notions of womanhood as derived from Philippine culture and gender constructions as set forth by the dominant group in American society. In addition, Philippine women in the US have to likewise deal with the idea of a universal woman, the definition of which is based on the concept of a raceless, white woman. If “minority” women are acknowledged

it is only on the basis of their race. Such an understanding of “woman” is a reflection of women’s history in the United States.

It is necessary to remember that women’s history in the American context also idealized the Victorian middle-class female virtues of the “true woman” which, according to Nancy Hewitt, were “pious, pure, domestic and submissive” (2). The 19th century suffragist movement in the United States believed that the woman’s place was in the home. The suffragist movement, the rise of the two party system, the development of the “cult of true womanhood,” all contributed to the gendered division of the public and private spheres (Hewitt 2). This exclusion of women from the public sphere also created an all-female collective and, although the women’s movement critiqued and destabilized the division of the public and the private, the emphasis on the women’s sphere and women’s culture remained and gave the foundation for the celebration of the solidarity and strength of women’s communities. As we know, communities are welcoming and inclusive just as much as they are limiting and exclusionary. Working class women, lesbian women and women of colour were not a part of this community. Issues of this nature are being addressed by the second wave feminist movement³¹ in the United States today.

The exclusionary nature of first wave feminism in the United States has resulted in second wave feminism’s working towards diversity and inclusion, though much work is to

³¹ First wave and second wave feminisms are marked by large, distinct activist movements. A great deal of first wave feminism was concerned with women's suffrage, and second wave feminism with the radical reconstruction or elimination of sex roles and the struggle for equal rights.

be done in order to unlearn stereotypes about women of colour. In the US, the intersection of racism and sexism has to be acknowledged because race, colour and ethnicity are always present in the binary thinking of society. If, upon politicization in matters of race and ethnicity, the Filipina hopes to form coalitions with other women of colour, she faces problems there too. Barbara Cameron, a Native American critic, observes that “Racism among third world people is an area that needs to be discussed and dealt with honestly. We form alliances loosely based on the fact that we have a common oppressor, yet we do not have a commitment to talk about our own fears and misconceptions about each other” (in Moraga and Anzaldua 39). This quote highlights the double jeopardy of being a minority woman in the US, because gender relates to the binary of biological, sexual difference and racism relates to issues of belonging, community and collectivity. As women who are seeking to build coalitions, we need to get beyond the racial and ethnic categories that get set up in terms of irreducible difference. What Cameron cites also makes me wonder if part of the definition of being “American” is the internalization of oppression by people of all colours. All these discussions point to the complexities of the female migrant position in diaspora. Race comes out as a major factor of negotiation for the Filipina in diaspora and the fact that race does not exist as a category within nation makes it more difficult. The middle-class Philippine female migrant who is a woman of colour in the racial politics of the US has to redefine who she is. For a diasporic woman this means first and foremost a sense of self that strengthens and grows in an environment that promotes coalitional identity away from

oppositions and grand master narratives.

The poems and novels I read show that an important aspect of life in diaspora for the female migrant is to resist the replacement of patriarchy³² as it operates in the Philippine national context with patriarchy as it operates in the diasporic context. Resistance is necessary because it takes away the focus from patriarchy and emphasizes that women are not passive receivers of whatever is handed to them. This leads to the realization that women are active agents in their struggles – against ideologies that oppress – as well as their own subordinations to it. The importance of race and ethnicity in the diasporic context requires this crucial understanding of patriarchies with respect to gendered and racialized social relations. Most of the texts I examine point to the dominant definition of “America.” Given the hegemony of the dominant, national collectivity, which is identified as white and male, the female Philippine immigrant has to find ways of being part of the melting pot without melting. With names such as “alien” and “naturalized,” as in a resident alien or a naturalized citizen, the Filipina is constantly reminded of a naturalness that is constructed or an alienness that will never be removed. As such, she has to create a space that becomes a source for power and allows for both individual and collective representation of “woman” and “Philippine” into the “we the people of the United States of America” with the vision of a truly equal, multicultural

³² Feminist theory has usually employed the concept of patriarchy as an analytical and descriptive instrument with the premise of the universal existence of male domination over women to analyze social relations of power between women and men. In this study, I employ patriarchy not as a monolith but with an emphasis on its diversity and with the realization that patriarchies are constantly made and remade reinscribing power structures along different constructions of identity and difference.

United States, one that does not erase contexts and histories. In therefore trying to establish her relationship to the US, the Philippine immigrant needs to be aware that “home” (the domestic sphere, the nation and the migrant condition) is an ideological construct in both the native and adopted country.

In order to fight this slippage that occurs between woman and nation or to prevent woman from being the subnational terrain of mediation, the idea of “home” needs to be interrogated and deconstructed away from essential notions of “home.” This does not mean doing away with “home” itself but calling into question what home means in its many forms. Is home a social locus, a cultural construct, an emotional need, a state of mind, a place to live in or a creative energy? I believe that “home” means all of these things at different times. Given this tremendous significance of “home,” it is necessary to explore the implications of displacement from “home” and take into account the difficulties and ambiguities that emerge in balancing the past with the present. Usually, it is the experience of leaving home that leads to questions about home and the understanding that, along with literally leaving the frames of the house, migration also loosens fixed notions of belonging, identity, community and nation. Such metaphoric homelessness makes us ask “What does ‘home’ mean?” and progress into the interrogation of “home” which is essential for a revisionary project like this.

The preceding questions and issues frame the works I study. “Home” as an image and concept has a power and appeal that operates literally and metaphorically in these migrant women’s works. The chapters that follow give voice to migrant experiences

where traditional definitions of womanhood are under pressure. In articulating their migrant experiences, these women affirm my sense that there is a literary place where womanhood is interrogated and recast as a move away from rigid cultural and gendered essences. Such diasporic authors are creating a growing and vibrant literary culture of Filipinos in the US. Their works emphasize connections with “home” on all levels: the geographical, literal, political, emotional and the metaphorical. In “Homesick,”

Hagedorn writes:

Home is now New York, but home in my heart will also always be Manila, and the rage of a marvelous culture stilled, confused and diverted. (186)

In speaking of women’s issues, there is some sense of caution here against idealizing home because patriarchy and tradition as it typically operates in most cultures dictate that the woman’s place is in the home and as such home, where a woman is cast physically, culturally and psychologically, can become a constraining and suffocating place. In some of the works I study, home is familiar and secure but it also excludes and “others.” “Home” can lay down the “us and them” rule of exclusion, therefore allowing no attempts for representation in the adopted country. This means that the emphasis on seeing oneself as Filipino or American disguises the dangerous effects of only “being seen as Filipino or American” with its implications of essentialized identity, exclusion and lack of agency and representation.

In the works I study, redefining the feminine and interrogating home/nation – away from the binding forces of male, nationalist discourse, of Maria Clara ideology – and that

of diaspora/America – away from mainstream definitions and ideologies of gender and freedom – permits the horrors and surprises of endless boundary confusions, but also points to the usually difficult multiple negotiations involved in remapping boundaries. Leaving “home” or interrogating “home” does not have to culminate in a feeling of homelessness or the desire for another place like “home.” Instead, as Martin and Mohanty suggest, it should be “challenged by the realization that ‘unity’ – interpersonal as well as political – is itself necessarily fragmentary, itself that which is struggled for, chosen, and hence unstable by definition; it is not based on ‘sameness,’ and there is no perfect fit. But there is agency as opposed to passivity” (208-209).

Chapter Three

Between the Philippines and America

In this chapter I focus on the works by Philippine-American women writers: Jessica Hagedorn, Sophia Romero and Fatima Lim-Wilson. In exploring the dominant themes and strategies, I look for the following: Do these texts rework social structures and redefine the feminine? Do the writers' textual strategies succeed in dismantling monolithic notions of woman, "Philippine" and "American?" Given the diasporic context, how do the "Philippine" and the "American" manifest themselves in these texts? Do traditional and nationalist constructions of gender continue in diaspora or is there change and if so, about what and how?

The writers I discuss explore the poetics of displacement that delineate a historicized psychology, which is usually situated in the fragmentary and momentary workings of the memory and its double vision of the past and the present. In setting forth a poetics of displacement that charts the migrant condition and grasps the complexity of migration in relation to gender, these writers highlight the ideologies of gender at work in both nation and diaspora. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Mikhail Bakhtin theorizes about the novel form's capacity for "heteroglossia" and "openendedness" (7). This capacity sets forth a similarity to the synthesis of different cultures usually produced in migrant contexts. The double-voiced discourse characterized by heteroglossia goes beyond linguistics to encompass the socio-ideological aspects of language. According to Michael Holquist, Bakhtin's concept of language embodies

“an almost Manichean sense of opposition and struggle at the heart of existence, a ceaseless battle between centrifugal forces that seek to keep things apart, and centripetal forces that strive to make things cohere” (xviii). Such a struggle is dramatized where female protagonists are caught in the effort of trying to reconcile Manichean opposites such as tradition and modernity, individualism and community, created by patriarchal ideologies of the Philippines and America. The multi-linguaged consciousness of the works encompass narrative structures, themes, ideologies, cultures, languages, characterizations, and memories, all of which help to deconstruct oppositions and highlight the feminine as multifaceted and agential. For example, Rocky in Hagedorn’s *The Gangster of Love* understands her transnational, diasporic condition as a space to transcend the oppositions of Philippine and American cultures. In Romero’s *Always Hiding*, Viola confronts American, orientalist assumptions of Philippine women and her own socialization by Maria Clara ideology. These writers address both the Philippine cultural construction of women and the American construction of women in significant ways and emphasize the contradictions of Philippine female migrants caught between ideological constructions of womanhood. Most works culminate in an open-endedness that characterizes the protagonist’s lives as they shake loose from the hold of rigid social structures without severing ties with community or culture.

These Philippine women authors write in different styles. Reviewers of

Hagedorn's novel see it as postmodernist work.³³ In comparison, Romero's book is more in line with the realistic tradition. The tension between community and individual is in sharp focus in these works because the individuals in contradiction with society are Filipinas whose understanding of the public and the private is influenced by Philippine traditions, Spanish and American colonialism and contemporary Philippine reality. Moreover, in America, Philippine women face the ideology of freedom and individualism which demands that women be "superwomen" – outgoing, public, aggressive – further dramatizing the contradictions between the private and public. In depicting the complexities and contradictions of such female protagonists in the US, the writers incorporate aspects of Philippine culture in the content and form of their writing thus emphasizing the heteroglossia of the work. In writing about the Philippine American middle classes, their lives and relationships in America, Hagedorn, Romero and Lim-Wilson write critically and question the values and attitudes of the Philippine and American communities, especially in relation to women. Though privileged by class, the writers are marginalized due to their gender, ethnicity, and migrant condition. Thus, in their writing, the reader is made aware of the reasons why these works came to be, to portray the predicament of the newly emergent migrant Philippine female protagonist in the United States.

³³ See Epifanio San Juan's article "Transforming Identity in Post-Colonial Narrative" where he highlights the elements of Hagedorn's postmodernist style; and Erica Duncan in "Jessica Hagedorn: Creating a Powerful Collage," talks about the novel's construction being more a collage than the traditional linear progression of events.

SOPHIA ROMERO'S *ALWAYS HIDING*

Sophia Romero's *Always Hiding* redefines the feminine through the developments of Lourdes and Viola Dacanay, the mother and daughter protagonists who journey from Manila to the US. Romero employs the discourses of class, religion and nationality to show Lourdes' transformation from an upper class Catholic Filipina to a transnational³⁴ diasporic woman – sexual politics is at the core of this transformation. In showing the development of Lourdes, Romero uses humor not only to write about the self-definition of Lourdes' upper class Catholic, Filipino identity but also to highlight the culture clashes and cultural translations as both women travel through America and understand its cultural context.

Sexual politics as implicit in nationality and the construction of “woman” is the point of departure for Romero’s novel. In framing the novel in terms of nationality, class, and sexuality, Romero points to the complexities of being an upper class Catholic Filipino woman under the martial law reign of President Ferdinand Marcos. Set in the transitional period before Marcos was ousted from power, Romero’s novel highlights the traditional patriarchal structures and the censorship of female sexuality. As prominent and well-to-do citizens of Manila, the Dacanays are well-connected and socialize with the elite of Manila society. The story begins with Viola narrating the circumstances of her birth. Being

³⁴ Arjun Appadurai’s employs the term “transnational” to denote the permeability of national borders in the transmission of media, capital, labour, technology and so on. In “Beyond the Nation in Eastern Europe,” Katherine Verdery notes this term as describing “movements of peoples, commodities, ideas, production processes, capital, images, as well as possible political alignments across the boundaries between sovereign states.”

firstborn, it would have been an auspicious occasion but Viola explains "I was a girl, and in the Philippines, that made all the difference" (3). Romero points to the Philippine reality of how males are valued above females even from birth: "[L]ike all other daughters before me and all other daughters after me, I was cursed" (3). This preference for males is further illustrated when Lourdes, Viola's mother, explains how inheriting the bookstore *Libreria de San Lazaro* from her father defaulted to Viola's father. There was nothing she could do because "she was now a wife and a mother" (5).

When Viola discovers her father is a womanizer, her mother tries to mediate the issue: "Don't hate your father. He loves you very much. This thing is between your father and me. But I'm afraid that we won't be seeing the last of his women, so you better toughen yourself" (33). Through Viola's father, Diosdado Dacanay, Romero underlines the patriarchal power that seeks to control women by having mistresses here and there. Romero points to the gender ideology that sees female sexuality as cheap and so can be exploited. She also directs our attention to how this form of male supremacy is sanctioned by society. Lourdes stated how "[h]e was no different from every Filipino male, rich or poor, who had at least one mistress, sometimes two at a time. Nobody ever protested. Not even the Church, which was more concerned about preaching against birth control and the evils of divorce" (45). Here, I see Lourdes' gesture as a powerful, double message to Viola about being a woman in a world controlled by men. In reassuring Viola of her father's love, Lourdes provides her daughter with the paternal affection she needs, yet in doing her duty as a mother and teaching Viola that women's roles prescribe

obedience to the father and husband, she highlights the social construction of gender.

To escape scandal, Lourdes intends to go to the US and invites Viola to accompany her: "We'll have so much fun. Let's leave this rotten place. Your father can have Manila all to himself" (53). The author's framing of the Lourdes' journey in her own liberal terms emphasize freedom, entertainment and a space of one's own which illustrates the opposition of the "third" world with the "first" world. Being of the Filipino elite, Lourdes sees herself as part of a progressive "westernized" community and not wanting to be the laughing stock and gossip item of Manila, she is convinced that escape to the US is the answer to her dilemma. Thus, against the protests of Viola who asks "Why does it have to be America?" (52), she leaves, convinced of the virtues of opportunity, modernity and freedom.

Lourdes sets out for the US to stay with her best friend Divina Magtanggol, otherwise known as Dede, whom she has not seen for a long time. Dede is the embodiment of the TNT or better known as "the Filipino code for an illegal alien. *Tago ng tago*. Always hiding" (89) who believes in life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness made attractive by American opportunity and free market economy. In Dede, Romero creates a character who displays a lack in her identity that manifests in, among other things, her obsession with American ways and in the rhetoric of skin "colour." For example, when Dede writes to Lourdes about the latter's upcoming trip, she advises her friend on the few things she needed "to know in order to make [her] trip a success" (49). Lourdes is advised to "avoid blacks" because "they're jealous of Asians. Whites are safer"

(50). Being of Philippine stock, a population known to be light-skinned in comparison to blacks, this emphasis on skin colour is important for Lourdes' and Viola's developments and their politicization of being in America. As the narrative progresses, Viola realizes and insists that she is brown; this results in her awareness of the plight of her own and other non-white cultures in the US. However, besides pointing out that skin colour is relative in comparison to the dominant society, Romero also highlights this issue of colour to illustrate Dede's character.

Dede is set forth as the kind of immigrant who internalizes the dominant society's biases about her culture and those of others and allows the gaze of the dominant majority to shape her attitudes and behaviour. So, her advice to Lourdes about avoiding blacks is a reflection of her own attitudes as opposed to genuine advice to her friend. Lourdes does not question this either: "I was told to open up my luggage, which I found odd, since I had nothing to declare. But the next thing I knew, this man, this complete stranger, was digging into my belongings. My God, he was black no less! Viola, he touched my panties and bras!" (58). Both women's "superiority complex" may be viewed in what Frantz Fanon terms as "the double process" (11). In his *Black Skin, White Masks*, speaking of the black psyche in the white world, Fanon describes the "inferiority complex" of the black man as "primarily economic" and "subsequently, the internalization – or, better, the epidermalization – of this inferiority" (11). The women's inferiority complex is thus a product of their "third world" origins and their skin colour. In the Philippines, Lourdes and Dede are privileged because they come from upper class families with connections and

belong to a wealthy community. In the US, however, Lourdes and Dede feel marginalized by their non-white, “third world” status in white America and therefore see the need to assimilate. Interestingly, these women do not see this as a complex but as Americanization. They buy into the dominant stereotype of the third world as inferior and continue to make themselves “American” at the expense of other minority groups. Lourdes’ remark about the immigration officer asking if she had any fresh mangoes illustrate a stereotype: “Apparently, Filipinos sneak them in all the time.” But she debunks this by adding, “[A]s if I would put them in my Louis Vuittons. He probably doesn’t know a fake from the genuine thing” (58).

Romero’s portrayal of Dede and Lourdes is also a commentary on the immigrant ideology in America. Romero exposes this ideology – as evident in the melting pot theory – to be homogenizing; one which dictates that being American means othering oneself and discriminating against everything that is not mainstream or non-white. This reminds me of Toni Morrison’s analysis of assimilation and race relations in the US. Morrison notes that it hardly matters anymore “what shade the newcomer’s skin is. A hostile posture toward the resident blacks must be struck at the Americanizing door before it will open” (Mahler 231). Morrison’s words are important because they highlight the implicit dichotomy of American race relations. In describing assimilation in terms of estrangement, specifically racial estrangement, Morrison uncovers the essence of American immigrant ideology. Unsuspecting, Lourdes buys into this ideology. Her obsession with modern conveniences, her equation of blue-collar work with a classless society make up her assimilation process.

So what? In America nobody cares what you do for a living.
A lot of *pinoys* do it, including ex-engineers and teachers in
Manila. Even Ph.D.s work as taxi drivers. (150)

The author portrays Viola as an intelligent, sensitive character who is able to make connections about people and issues. When she arrives in the US for the first time and goes through immigration she feels sorry for the Asian gentleman. An irritated immigration officer asked him, “Once-again-how-long-are-you-staying-in-the-United-States?” When it becomes evident that the man did not speak English, the officer “asked in exasperation if anyone in the room spoke ‘Chinese or wherever this person is from?’” (138). It is not Viola’s idea of a welcome into the US. As she looks around, she realizes that a piece of the world has descended upon JFK Airport, each individual a tiny patch that belongs to a larger canvas. She wonders if the immigration officers see them as purely sensory data (shapes, colours and sounds). Her mother had advised she does not look overly confident when going through immigration. Interestingly, when Viola faces “the Asian Oppressor,” she realizes “something snapped inside of me. *I was not my mother!* Her fears didn’t have to be mine” (139). Sympathetically, Viola wonders how her mother had been taught American ways: “She was not the mother I remembered. That one seemed more dependent, given to melodrama, self-indulgent. That one was burdened by an unwanted marriage. A martyr. This one, on the other hand, was self-assured, independent . . . taking charge of her life instead of merely reacting to it” (157).

Economics is not the only area in which Lourdes feels inadequate in the US; she is also racialized by her white female employer, Mrs. Elfrida Steinberg: “You took my

Chanel to Lucky's! . . . Are you retarded? I told you to take this one to the Imperial."

Lourdes tries to reason with Mrs. Steinberg, "That's not what you said. All you said was, 'This goes to the cleaners' so I took it to your usual place" (204). Viola however observes this confrontation as capitulation on her mother's part, since Lourdes "addresses [Mrs. Steinberg] as if she were Queen Elizabeth." What Viola sees as deference is further aggravated when Lourdes dismisses the incident as "She was probably just having a bad day" (204). This specific incident in the novel brought home to me the reality of how many Filipino immigrant women have to cope with similar humiliating experiences. Instead of calling attention to the verbal abuse and confronting the racist behavior of her employer, Lourdes tolerates it. This is one of the effects of internalized oppression that Filipinos have accepted without question.

It is interesting to note that Romero's characterization of Lourdes as a TNT sets the stage for Viola's life in the US; Viola encounters America in her mother. Beginning with the revelation that her mother was a TNT, which immediately casts her as the "other," Viola is shown the estranging, individualistic aspect of American culture: "She cooked all our meals, bought the groceries, took care of the laundry, and balanced her checkbook all by herself" (157). She is lectured on the merits of American capitalism and consumerism.

Lourdes' deficiencies and insecurities exemplify her as the case of the Americanization of a Filipino, although Romero stops short of making her a full-fledged American citizen. The ideologies of class, race, community and nation keep Lourdes from

assimilating in the most basic and important way. Interestingly, Lourdes' understanding of the American economic system features a person who works to maintain a free and competitive economy regardless of class/educational background. She chooses to work as a housekeeper because in America "nobody cares what you do for a living," (150) thereby perpetuating the capitalist notion of worker. That is, she resists the traditional Philippine ideology of labour (the maid is menial labour) but substitutes it with capitalist ideology. However, Lourdes separation of the "public/work" and the "private/home" may also be seen as an example of her Americanization in the racial polarization of the US.

Lourdes wishes Viola to live in the US and eventually assimilate into mainstream society. Notions of opportunity, freedom and empowerment are part of Lourdes' attraction for the US. She tells Viola: "For the first time I could be anything I wanted and when I wanted. I could take my life anywhere. My life became a series of inventions, each one better than the last" (90). Lourdes decides to start all over – "I got tired of apologizing for things I had never done, for thoughts I had never thought" (90).

It is significant that Lourdes is inspired by the American dream – "What was before me was mine. All of it" (90) because this points out that her main attraction to America is liberation from religion and patriarchy. Lourdes is attracted by the possibility of a life without the strictures of religion and patriarchy but framed in a class context with individualistic echoes. Her decision to stay in the US does indicate a fall into constructions of the "American woman." However, framing her choice in a class context, Romero foreshadows the continuing presence of class structures in Lourdes' life, a factor

that resists assimilation into America: “I think about my life in Manila and my life here, and how much of it has changed. I think the biggest change for me was coming to terms with the fact that I am no longer a socialite. A woman who used to have servants, a driver, social status, wealth, a family. I guess it shouldn’t bother me that much” (117). Viola however views the issue differently. She echoes the early depiction of strong class consciousness in her friend Cecilia, who had then returned from a three-week tour of Los Angeles. Because Cecilia and her mother did not speak English with an American accent, they had been demeaned and racialized by a white salesgirl at a Giorgio Armani boutique. Cecilia recounted the incident to Viola:

When I asked her if I could try it on, she snapped that it was two hundred fifty dollars. The nerve of the bitch! Did we look poor? My mom was carrying her Hermès bag. She held the shirt up to the woman’s face and said ‘That’s all? I want ten of them in different colours. And make sure they’re extra small, because Filipinos are not as big-boned as you are.’ (69)

In the same vein, Viola’s questions such as “You’re a maid?” and “You came to America to work as a maid?” (150) show fear about her mother’s digression from culturally-sanctioned behaviour.

It is at this point in the novel that the imbrication of nation, community, class and race is brought into focus, and Romero shows Viola’s development at the nexus of these influences. Away from her father’s patriarchal representations of the Philippines, away from her community of friends, Viola stays with her mother and enrolls in a couple of business courses at NYU. Exposed to a different culture, she states “I kept reminding myself, as I looked around at my classmates with their pierced navels and ripped jeans,

their heads filled with ideas that were alien to me, that I wasn't going to be here for a long time" (163). The cultural differences between Viola and her American classmates appear immense. Their modes of dress, fashion as well as thinking are foreign to her. Here the author highlights the American ideology of culture and cultural values which Viola rejects. Visiting her mother at work, Viola dressed up: "I don't know why, but it mattered to me to be well dressed" (202). Here Romero underlines the class connotations implicit in dress modes. Lower class women are expected to slack on dress codes so it is extremely important for the upper class Filipino woman not to do so. Furthermore, Romero contrasts Viola's "eye" for taste with Mrs. Steinberg's "lack of taste." While Viola goes through the Steinberg apartment, readers are made aware of the questions she asks. "I wonder what Elfrida would say about our house in the Philippines, about my mother's collection of Steubens that far exceeds hers. About my mother's beloved garden. I wonder if Elfrida even knows exactly where my mother came from" (203).

In making Viola interrogate Mrs. Steinberg's possible notions about Lourdes, Romero allows Viola to make connections between America's relationship with its "citizens." Comparing Mrs. Steinberg to America, Viola gets a glimpse of the hardships and humiliations encountered by being a non-professional Filipino woman in the US. As readers realize, Lourdes has not achieved her American dream; the irony is that Lourdes' passage from the Philippines to America is a journey of minoritization – she is classified as lower class in the US in contrast to her upper class Filipino identity. The implicit critique here is not only of American immigrant ideology and race relations, but also of most upper

and middle class Filipino immigrants who assume homogeneity of class and profession.

The bitterness of an unfulfilled American Dream,³⁵ the myth versus the reality of life in the US, flows through the story. Often missed, the irony of the American Dream is that the spiritual is subsumed by the economic ideologies of the US. In this light, Lourdes represents the failure of an unfulfilled American Dream vis-à-vis race, colour and ethnicity. She expresses this as: “That’s what happens when one country is rich and another is poor. Did the Native Americans turn away the Pilgrims when they first arrived? Did the natives say ‘Sorry, no vacancy’? Why was it okay to come in then and it isn’t now?” (158).

So while Lourdes embodies the failure of the economic dream, Viola’s economically comfortable sentiments highlight her upper class imagination that envisions a better life for herself and her mother by rectifying her mother’s illegal status. However, these sentiments changes when she witnesses how Mrs. Steinberg talks her mother down. The fantasy notion of America is shattered. Viola is horrified: “You didn’t even stand up for yourself. I can’t believe that you let her dump on you. You took it as if you deserved it!” (205).

Viola’s last stage of development occurs with meeting Caloy in America. They previously met in Manila at a *despedida de soltera*, a formal banquet given in honor of Sylvia, the older sister of Viola’s friend. With the advent of Caloy, Viola’s notions of

³⁵ Coined from the time of the Great Depression, the American dream is an ideal that is characteristic of the US and subscribes to the view that progress indeed happens and that the best is yet to come. Seen as an aspect of American exceptionalism, the American Dream is said to be made up of two components: the economic and the spiritual. The economic is viewed as the financial security, the chance for upward mobility and material comfort, whereas the spiritual consists of notions of freedom, justice, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

marriage and family are brought to a crisis until she realizes the complexities of her situation as opposed to simple dichotomies. Carlos Austria came from one of Manila's elite families and is currently an MBA student at Harvard. He has gone home to the Philippines for a brief vacation. Because so many people are vying for his company, it is impossible to find time for them to be alone in the next couple of days before Caloy leaves for the US. Viola feels reckless and "almost kissed him on the lips" (101). Significantly, Romero's brief descriptions of Viola's first serious love affair is characterized by an element of otherness that is at the heart of the relationship. Even though the author portrays Viola's youthful explorations of love with a sensitivity that points to the universality of a young woman's feelings, she highlights the element of exoticism between Viola and Caloy which by definition distances and "others." For example, when Caloy and Viola drive back to Manhattan he confesses he knew Viola's mother was a TNT. Viola then exhibits a certain reticence that is the result of their "different" cultures. Caloy is surprised she does not "trust" him enough.

The trip to the US is a learning experience for both Viola and Lourdes because it makes them question their Filipino beliefs and shed light on class and racial notions they had taken for granted. Their decision to leave the US does not signify the triumph of the community over the individual, but connotes a negotiation that is in keeping with the critique of nationalism as set forth by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*. These women create spaces for themselves that is neither nationalist nor assimilationist, but ones that resists cultural domination by critiquing the ruling institutions.

Romero positions the character of Diosdado Dacanay as representative of Philippine patriarchy. Romero's critique of political power figures also translates into a critique of patriarchy where the submissiveness of women is extolled and perpetuated to victimize countless Filipinas like Lourdes. Romero reveals the patriarchal and colonial collusion in worsening women's condition and her most lucid criticism appears in the novel in the critique of the Marcos regime where the nationalist movements controlled by men, gender symbolically represented power divisions of class and ideology.

Romero's characters migrate to escape from the tyranny of marriage, enjoy better economic opportunities or educational advancements. Such wandering away by distancing from family and familiar territory perpetuates a homelessness and transformation into what Said observes as "permanent outcast, someone who never felt at home, and was always at odds with the environment, inconsolable about the past, bitter about the present and the future" (47). This is the exile Said further describes as a "pre-modern banishment" (56). But the resulting pain coming from such a dislocation is tangible for modern immigrants as well, most of whom are self-exiles in the quest for economic and political well-being.

Although Said believes it a misconception to assume that being exiled "is to be totally cut off" (48), this is usually the case. Secure employment and fear of economic instability are some of the circumstances that might prevent a return. But the immigrant, like the exile, is always reminded of the home she left behind and the customs and traditions that are no longer as real as they once were. The constant reminder of home is

what makes immigrants live "neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another" (49).

Stuart Hall distinguishes two ways of thinking about "cultural identity." The first defines cultural identity in terms of "one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self,' hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves' which people with a shared history, and ancestry hold in common" (393). This oneness describes the shared cultural codes of Englishness or Caribbeanness or Filipinoness, for example. It is a unified identity as such that had impelled colonized people to rise up against colonization through the concepts of nationalism. National identity continues to be a very powerful and creative force in emergent forms of representation among hitherto marginalized peoples. For immigrants, the identity formation is more valid in a position which recognizes that "as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'" (394). In this sense, cultural identity is a matter of becoming as well as being. Because of her multiple dislocations, Romero cannot claim the cultural modes of one national identity.

FATIMA LIM-WILSON'S CROSSING THE SNOW BRIDGE

Like Sophia Romero, Fatima Lim-Wilson examines the Philippine female migrant identity within a hegemonic, capitalist society. Where Romero maps out a landscape that highlights binary identity constructions between whites and people of colour in the US,

Lim-Wilson's *Crossing the Snow Bridge* takes as its basis the Philippine paradigm which subsumes the Maria Clara ideology and its centrality in a Filipina's life, in order to explore this particular identity in diaspora. In speaking about the subject of her writing, the poet characterizes the Filipina as redefining her place within the numerous male and white-dominated situations that underlie a migrant's life.

In his article entitled "Filipinos in the United States and Their Literature of Exile," Oscar Campomanes discusses "the spectre of 'invisibility' for Filipinos" as a "necessary historiographical phenomenon" (53). This invisibility is what Fatima Lim-Wilson addresses in the poem "Inventing the Filipino." The poem explores the issues of "self and peoplehood" ("Filipinos" 50). Faced with the shadowy history of Filipino people's experiences with racial discrimination in the US, it comes as no surprise to encounter Lim-Wilson who deals with this issue of history, re-writing it to show what has been omitted. She presents her reality, including her critical vision of what others cannot see, as both an ironic commentary on the "discoveries" the Americans in the poem are claiming and as an acknowledgment of her own position within the cultural system:

Let's celebrate the yo-yo makers.
 Before you named it "Walking the Dog"
 And "Cat's Cradle," our folks
 Climbed trees, those agile monkeys,
 Knocking down the day's meal
 With the world's first yo-yo
 Created from twine, a skull-
 Sized stone and the spittle
 Of gods. What about that jeep
 That bounced on the moon? We
 Thought of that, too. From
 The war's heap you left behind.

Of particular interest in this very simple poem is how Lim-Wilson manages to describe the American claims while maintaining her own subject position inside the Filipino community. The beginning line, which invites the reader to “celebrate the yo-yo makers,” is one that has been made repeatedly by Filipino activists such as Kidlat Tahimik, who remind us of Filipinos actively committed to the struggle against racial oppression. Just as the title suggests, Lim-Wilson’s opening gesture reminds us that she is both participant and observer in the unfolding drama. This “in-between” positionality gives Lim-Wilson a perspective into the politics of reality that is unavailable to others. The folks who “[c]limbed trees,” presumably for survival, invented the moon buggy. This irony is lost to the Americans, just as the “Miss Philippines” who goes through a Miss Universe beauty pageant contest, also goes unnoticed:

Our Miss Philippines pinned on,
Demurely, Miss Universe’s crown.
She now rides horses, up and down,
Her makeup artist strategically
Throwing buckets of water
Between her breasts. We have more
Elvises than we can count. And, of
Course, our very own Marie Antoinette,
Who has only you to thank
For the swan-shape of her ankles. (10)

“Miss Philippines” may have passed all “brains and beauty” tests in her ability to secure the Miss Universe crown, but is not beautiful enough to make her anything more than a dehumanized figure who “rides horses, up and down.”

Recalling Filipino women’s “objectification” at this juncture is a particularly barbed commentary on the women’s position of subordination within both the Philippine

patriarchal and the white male-dominated cultures. Just as the term “discoveries” arrives fully laden with irony as a result of Lim-Wilson’s ability to see the complexity of the Filipino’s position, free from race oppression, victimized by sex oppression, yet also participants in their own internalized oppression, the term “Miss Universe” here is equally ironic. “Miss Philippines” or “Miss Universe” to a sexist environment, Philippine women seem to take it as a matter of course that they have to pass “beauty standards” set by males and white people. Lim-Wilson however, cuts through the layers of institutionalized sexism and racism to offer the angle of vision from which analyses of these oppressions can be made: the significance and power of naming and defining oneself and one’s history is invoked as one of the most significant step in the quest for gaining empowerment. The power of self-definition carries with it the promise of protection against those who would define minority as “other.”

Lim-Wilson delivers a similar, but even more pointed critique of the blindness of her own people and that of the colonizers in her later poem, “Positively No Filipinos Allowed:”

It was the blind man who carved our front door.
It groaned, heavy with the tumble of fruit
And bleeding fountains. In between the serpent’s
Spiral of branches, father and mother
Floated, eyes heavily lidded
And heavenward, their hands petal-folded,
Pious as plump saints. We, nine children,
Knelt below them, openmouthed
With that fixed look of dumb wonder. (12)

Gone is the swinging gait of the earlier poem “Inventing the Filipino.” In the

introspective, lyrical tone of the opening, Lim-Wilson begins with the particular experience of the legacy of Spanish colonialism: religion and economic exploitation, and how these persist in society. The power of the images that follow serve as reminders that hers is not a metaphoric existence, “father and mother . . . eyes heavily lidded and heavenward” are carved onto the front door, the “face” that outsiders first see. They look “pious as plump saints” and the children are carved in inferior, reverent positions. In Filipino culture, parents are figures of absolute authority. Having been conquered by the cross, they educate their children into religious dogma. The narrator however, sees beyond this act of carving.

The second section picks up Lim-Wilson’s awareness of being reconfigured into someone else. She attempts to extricate herself from the “tepid, trembling fingers” that seems to “steal the very shape of [her] face.” Her identity, though, is not being stolen, instead, it is being recast into whoever the carver envisions her to become. To avoid this fate, she stays away until the darkness conceals her “features with the death mask of shadows.”

In the third section, Lim-Wilson returns to confront the biases that keep the culture from recognizing and accepting her:

Sugared water for the beggars,
 Snail-shaped chocolates for the visiting
 Archbishop: all were welcome but I
 Who wanted to knock down the door
 With my own bloodied knuckles.
 Father soon spoke of his eight offspring.
 Mother’s tears and her spent candle wax
 Rubbed me out of my hardened heritage. (12)

The people who buy into the “ideal” picture are welcomed with sugared water and chocolates. She, who resists being cast into the “ideal” image, is banned and disinherited. She can knock all she wants but the doors remain closed. The colonial mentality this alludes to, is what severs her from familial ties and heritage. Because she is conscious and resistant to being moulded by religion, she becomes an outcast.

And now it is America that chisels
Itself into my memory, but I will not
Blink at the glistening monuments,
Nor step back at the approach of oversized
Cars. My hands grow coats of armor
From their bouts with the cold, thorned
Fruit, the repetitive rubbing of my last
Coins. (13)

That America attempts to fashion itself into her consciousness in this section, reveals her location as now being in the US. It is now America that attempts to reconfigure her, but she continues to resist the efforts to change her by “grow[ing] coats of armor.” She shields herself from the hostile environment and economic hardship. Lim-Wilson, here, recalls the flagrant discrimination and prejudice experienced by Filipinos in the 30s when “signs in hotel doors and on entrances to restaurants, swimming pools, etc. that said, ‘Absolutely No Admittance to Filipinos,’” (Bautista 130) and implies that the times have not changed significantly.

Finally, the last section examines her position as a Filipina in the midst of the history of marginalization:

I keep warm with the crisscross
Of my own arms. Memories grow

Stale as bread, but the open air
 Does me good. I welcome the rain
 With its woman's fingers. My face,
 Which in broad daylight is a frightening mask,
 Vanishes. Undisturbed, I dream
 Of harvesting another barnful
 Of fruit, choosing the most
 Overripe to throw, like
 Grenades, at all closed doors. (13)

The list of her different colonized identities, coming as it does at the end of the poem, clarifies how, by breaking the silence, she manages to empower herself. Speaking out is one of the greatest risks and responsibilities of being a revolutionary. She might find herself in the alienating position of struggling alone, of keeping herself warm with her own arms, without support from other Filipinos who may not see themselves a part of the same struggle. But Lim-Wilson stresses the necessity to risk speaking, “choosing the most overripe [of her experiences] to throw like [g]renades, at all closed doors.” The subtle but still politically and emotionally charged impression of “grenades,” relates to exploding the silence imposed on her. However, we also sense the danger that, having spoken and written, she might continue to be ignored. We are left with a sense of doubt: the burden of speaking in the knowledge that one will not be heard occurs whenever and wherever power dictates a minority whose voices do not have to count.

In perhaps one of the most moving of all her poetic works, “Luzviminda, or Filipinas Make Such Good Maids,” Lim-Wilson sets out to explain through the voice of a domestic helper, the specific pain and humiliation that reside in the lives of migrant women who offer themselves as sacrifice, so that they can feed and clothe their families back in

the Philippines. This diasporic reality is a consequence of global capitalism gone crazy, whose negative effects are experienced by women from economically underprivileged countries, seeking their fortunes overseas and finding themselves usually victimized by cruel and racist employers or illegal recruiters who subject them to abuse and unjust working conditions. Lim-Wilson begins the poem with a monologue in which the maid explains her experience:

They call me Lucy who call me
 From the steamy kitchen to show
 Their guests how I can, harmonica-
 Like, whistle “Blue Moon” through
 A folded leaf. The husband touches
 My breasts with his eyes. My womb
 Teem islands disappearing at high
 Tide. Between my legs lie virgin
 Forests where snakes still roam
 Upright. His wife shows me how
 To turn carrot curls into flowered
 Appetizers. I teach her how to grow
 Trees indoors. She makes dried-up
 Balls out of the scented flowers
 No bigger than her bitten nails. (49)

The maid’s monologue discusses how she is being exotically shown off to the guests. Then, she proceeds to speak of the husband’s gaze on her breasts to reveal the gendered representations of Filipinas as inseparable from its racial/colonial dimensions. The poem reduces racial and gender differences to the essence of the “conquered”: the phrase “his eyes” comes to stand for the colonial gaze and “breasts,” “womb” and “legs” for the parts of the colonized body. These all figure as irreducible markers that synecdochically define Filipinas as one part of the body that comes to stand in for the whole. Americanization

imposes domestication on the female migrant's body by rendering it as a terrain of conquest and nationalization. Although this domestication was also part of everyday life in the Philippines, the US promised emancipation from these constraints.³⁶ Instead, the US simply introduced new gender constraints and new domestications of the feminine.

Gayle Rubin discusses the sex/gender systems which locate women's oppression within systems of kinship that define them as objects of exchange among men. Such descriptions of this "traffic in women" underlying the social fabric parallels Irigaray's definition of the "specularization" of the feminine body – how this body is transformed into a value-laden object whose meaning exceeds its national properties.³⁷ Both theories posit that gender differentiation depends on the control of female sexuality. This understanding of the ideological encoding of sexuality is relevant to the history of Filipino women and their subsequent cultural representations.

Most of the conditions under which Filipinas were granted permission to immigrate were as mail-order brides, domestic helpers and nannies, reflecting the centrality of sexual and racial constructions. Having experienced the loss of identity, the Filipina attempts to

³⁶ Advertising itself as freedom from patriarchal constraints, Americanization suggested to migrant women a certain freedom from the forms of patriarchal domination they encountered from their fathers and husbands. However, these migrant women find themselves in a double bind: the US does not provide them with a safe space apart from their Philippine oppressors but keep them physically and psychologically tied to their cultural origins – that the oppression is not just by their father or husband but by the generations that made their father and husband which weighs them down.

³⁷ See Gayle Rubin, "Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex." Toward an Anthropology of Women, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), and Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which is Not One, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

recover it through stories of women who “fly from waist up above church steeples” (49). She challenges those who “call [her] Lucy” with the question “What again is my real name?” (50). But, without waiting for an answer or bothering to answer the question herself, escapes, crossing “the snow bridge of burning / Coals, walking on bare feet home” (50). The flight implies resistance and subversion, despite the horror of her existence. Escape alludes to redemption, resolve and hope.

In the “Ringmaster’s Wife,” Lim-Wilson comments on the Filipino woman’s role:

You jerk me,
A circus animal in chains.
And my mind suspends tightropes.
I perform on automatic pilot
Doing cartwheels, doing house
Chores, twirling balanced meals
On broom handles, pulling laundry
Pressed and ironed, out of my sleeves
With the bravura of the hard-
Muscled ballerina. Under the hot
Glare of your wordless commands,
My senses reel, blindly tracking down
The sweetness of the invisible carrot. (18)

Filipino women have come to represent the “Maria Clara” ideal, the trained feminine. This representation is overlain with expectations of the domestic passivity ironized in the poem. Drawing an analogy between femininity as a construction and the spectacle of performance, the poem functions as a caricature of Filipino domesticity. The phrase “I perform on automatic pilot” parallels the prescription for femininity that the speaker must confront as a Filipina. The poem parodies the constructedness of femininity: so much effort goes into showing efficiency, “you jerk . . . / I perform.” This submissive

expectation reflects an aspect of the Filipino woman's gender inscription: "Your friends approve." The same expectation makes plausible the performance premise of "The Resident Alien as Acrobat" which juxtaposes calm facial/bodily expressions with those of violent inner emotions. The poem demonstrates that point at which racial and cultural denial become recognized as a form of survival.

The images of pretense associated with normality, fitting in and assimilation begin the poem in order to contrast them with the speaker's true self-image. She attempts to distance herself from racist taunts that attend Philippine American experience but the poem returns to the body in recognition that her difference cannot help but implicate her within the cultural interpretations of that body. To "survive" means excising "accents" from the tongue, performing "like a well-trained chimp" in spite of the knowledge she looks comic doing so, forming "frothy lace" at the corners of her mouth (51).

Seen upside down, my smile's a frown.
How polite I am even as my heart pounds
A wolfpaced beat. When I turn around,
I unclench my fist, releasing arrows
Of curses, silently. I walk in a crouch
Disguising kings in my blood and the wings
Fluttering beneath my thin coat. (51)

"Resident Alien as Acrobat" protests the hegemony's marginalization and dehumanization of Philippine Americans, but also shows the deep ambivalence of the internally colonized. Struggling to counter oppression and affirm Philippine American culture, Lim-Wilson's identity politics appear doubly focused on the female immigrant torn between acculturation to the customs of the host country and the maintenance of

cultural authenticity. Focusing on what I see as the figure of the double,³⁸ she illustrates aspects of the self one has repressed. This double is central to the relation between the national American self and its racial others within.

Bhabha depicts the dominant society's construction of racial others as doubles and, Lim-Wilson, speaking from the perspective of Bhabha's double, shows how as the marginalized, she can also view the dominant culture as familiar, yet foreign and alienating. In addition, her resident alien's internal colonization, her double consciousness of hegemonic perception of her "own" culture, makes Filipino American culture unfamiliar to her as well as to the dominant culture. However, by revealing the mechanism by which America represents itself as superior against Philippine culture, Lim-Wilson denounces US nationalism built at the expense of the racial other:

I have learnt to say "love"
Without wincing, hearing myself
Tossing cheap syllables
Clanging against fancied objects.
No longer will I stop to save
Each snowflake, a miracle
Melting into tears in my cupped hand.
When my throat rages dry,
I recall the dozen ways to say "rain." (51)

Although similar in message to the preceding poem, "Broken English" explores the English language by revealing the depths to which it contributes to the Filipino's oppression. No matter what a wonderful instrument English is, its historical

³⁸ Bhabha describes the double as both the reemergence of a repressed history and the repetitious "scraps, patches, and rags of daily life [which] must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a national culture" ("DissemiNation" 297).

underpinnings are linked to colonialism:

The asuwang has a long, black tongue.
 She pokes it through holes in the roof
 Rooting for newborn babies. Maria Clara
 Totters between the convent spires
 Singing in Spanish the lullaby her father,
 The friar, taught her. The village
 Idiot running naked in the rain chants
 The first, middle, and last names
 Of all the American presidents backwards.
 They are all my mothers. At night,
 When the cold burrows in my bones,
 They come with bowls of porridge
 And unpolished pearls to lay
 Upon my burning tongue. Who is my father,
 They croon. I murmur in polysyllables:
 “*Magellan, Hirohito, Macarthur, Ferdinand.*” (45)

The *asuwang*³⁹ starts off the parade of figures that transform and re-transform the Filipino through her colonial education. Because the *asuwang* is a supernatural figure in Filipino literature, Lim-Wilson cues the reader that there is no link to a Filipino culture through English. The witch uses her tongue “through holes in the roof rooting for newborn babies.” The physical act of the *asuwang* that the reader is asked to comprehend is a metaphorical link to the manipulation of English by the Filipinos to free themselves by formulating/creating a language out of one’s experiences and memories. Lim-Wilson represents these experiences differently: through figures from history and folktale. Such representation stresses the point that some people do not have access to Philippine experience or literature and here lies the possibility for constructing meanings a non-

³⁹ The *asuwang* is a frightening, indigenous witch in Philippine literature, associated with stalking pregnant mothers and waiting for a chance to snatch the baby away.

Filipino reader may not be accustomed to. When the speaker's myths and values are absent from the English language, then the speaker must insert her own reality to make meaning. The speaker defines the words according to her own reality. Whatever meaning is attached to the word is what gives it value and it goes to show how relative and arbitrary meaning in language can be.

"Magellan, Hirohito, Macarthur, Ferdinand," were all her fathers. This short list names the various influences – Spanish, Japanese, American – and finally the Filipino emerges, after centuries of colonization. Is it any wonder then that she speaks broken English?

Dedicating the poem to Manuel Frangente, who was dismissed from his government post because of his "heavy Filipino accent," means interrogating standard English and directing our attention to the fact that the social correctness of English has been historically constructed in order to suppress the cultural codes and languages of the colonized. Variations⁴⁰ on English have been labeled as substandard to restrict rebellion against those people who maintain the status quo by refusing to openly acknowledge that other forms of communication are important to the survival of non-European and non-American cultures.⁴¹

⁴⁰ The picture of purity and contamination underlying a Eurocentric understanding of English is presented by Ali Mazrui in The Political Sociology of the English Language (75). In Edward Brathwaite's History of the Voice is a discussion of how "pidgin English" implied that the English language had become degraded in its Kenyan context (7).

⁴¹ Monolingual America's paranoia about immigrants and their mother-tongues is evident in the countless efforts to stop bilingual English-Spanish education and make English the official language of the US.

Lim-Wilson finds a way through the fragmentation that informs the life of the Filipino subject under colonialism. The fragmentation is a problem to be overcome and also a reality to be taken as a condition of possibility. It is precisely in the working of the broken pieces, the “broken English,” that Lim-Wilson as a poet is able to reclaim what has been repressed in colonialism and challenge the English language to weaken the authority of given discourse.

Lim-Wilson’s work is not so much driven by the desire to reclaim the unhistoricized Philippine body prior to the impact of colonialism as by the need to rewrite the Philippine self within the representations that have already been established. She recreates Philippine histories and myths, as well as integrates painful experiences. By sustaining the tensions between the Philippine and colonial encounters instead of choosing one above the other, Lim-Wilson evokes an ambiguous identity. This resulting unstable identity indicates the sources of displacement in a contingent historical condition that cannot be erased. The logical outcome is an alienated, diasporic identity – one that is isolated from its Philippine roots and at the same time isolated from the colonial American culture – an identity that can reinvent herself out of the different confluences that have socially determined her existence.

JESSICA HAGEDORN’S *THE GANGSTER OF LOVE*

Jessica Hagedorn’s *The Gangster of Love* is a novel that strings dreams, music, memory and immigrant life into a tale of love and survival. In this novel, which is set in

vibrant multilayered frames, the conflict is one between hybridity⁴² and racial stratification in the protagonist's life as Rocky Rivera. Through the protagonist, the author reworks the Maria Clara ideology, which sets forth woman as defined by Philippine patriarchal culture, and changes the feminine into an empowered individual. In creating a woman-centered novel and one that embodies the element of choice, Hagedorn emphasizes power. Portraying Rocky's journey to the US and her subsequent difficulties in going through the American landscape, Hagedorn creates a serious story that characterizes the lives of Filipinos and their encounters with others in the host country.

Feminists analyzing the "woman question" in studies on the image of women in literature or in media have often pointed out the centrality of ideology in the oppression of women. That a scholar would be aware of the operation of such ideology is usually assumed or perceived as a self-evident truth that requires no explanation. According to Leonora Angeles, the sexuality of the Filipina is "defined by how well she gets and keeps her man. She must come in a well-wrapped package – smooth, flawless skin, shiny hair, shapely body, well-perfumed or deodorized, nails manicured – 'every inch a woman'! Knowing how to prepare breakfast in bed, cook a delicious meal, budget or buy the biggest bargain is an added asset that could assure the woman her man's love and fidelity" (38). Femininity must be maintained to please men and, in contrast, make them look more

⁴² To become hybrid means to cross boundaries and to translate national affiliations into a global context. Hybridity is also a state of multiplicity created by a blending of cultural features and derived from the historical and cultural conjunction of different parts of identity that disrupt unitary national belonging and stable nation boundaries.

masculine. Therefore, the Maria Clara ideology has a great influence on the Filipino psyche. Angeles sees the Maria Clara ideology as a continuing vital aspect of a woman's identity and its persistence to this day helps us comprehend better why many Filipinas, in spite of their economic independence, opt to suffer humiliation than leave an oppressive spouse.

Hagedorn's use of Maria Clara ideology in the novel encompasses the elements of class, race and gender. Conditioned by her ya-ya's view – the word “ya-ya” means nanny – Rocky constructs an idea of romance from the radio broadcast of love songs, the most popular of which is “Dahil Sa Iyo”: “*Nais kong mabuhay / dahil sa iyo / hanggang mamatay.*” (Because of you / I want to live / because of you / until I die)” (36). From the kundiman⁴³, Rocky is raised to believe that love is forever and that marriage is for life. But just as she starts to learn about love, she leaves the Philippines with her mother and brother for San Francisco. “How can she take you away like this? What does your mother think she's doing?” (36) asks Jose Mari and, although Rocky is not really interested in Jose Mari, her exploration and understanding of gender relations culminate in a redefinition of Maria Clara ideology.

In tracing Rocky's development with regard to gender relations, Hagedorn

⁴³ According to Elizabeth Pisares, “kundiman is the signature Philippine love song. It is slow, in triple time, and in either binary or tertiary structure; it begins in the minor key and in the last section modulates into the parallel major. Emotional and melancholic, the theme of kundiman is romantic love, unfulfilled and unrequited. With precedents in indigenous Tagalog love poetry and in kumintang [war song] and awit [song] and having absorbed the meter and form of European art songs, kundiman emerged early in the 19th century. During the late 19th century struggles against Spanish colonization, revolutionaries adopted kundiman as a patriotic song” (73).

debunks the myth of cultural authenticity and its attendant implications of native informancy and essentialist identities. For example, when her mother, Milagros, invites Rick Foss for lunch, Rocky provides the following insight:

Rick offended her by constantly referring to it as her “egg roll business.” “Excuse me, Rick Foss. Egg rolls are Chinese. Lumpias as Filipino. There’s a difference,” she corrected. (19)

In America, the only thing that would protect Milagros’ difference was to state her difference. Any term of identity bears with it a specific history, but it is also possible to be artificial in this era of shifting national boundaries. For Lourdes to say that lumpia is Filipino, is a choice of nationalist identity that carries on what amounts to a revolutionist struggle.

In Rocky’s life, difference comes in the form of her lover, Elvis Chang, an Oakland-born Chinese American rock guitarist. According to Milagros, “*We have plenty Chinese in the Philippines*” (24), businessmen who have acted as agents of Western colonial exploitation. In Elvis, a Chinese American, Rocky faces the issue of ambivalence of identity,⁴⁴ a Filipina in diaspora, and her consequent awareness of her neocolonial difference from others makes her perceive Elvis to be “more American than we could ever be” (25). Both visible and invisible are the effects of American imperialism on Filipino contemporary life catalogued in the novel: working as “housekeeper at the Hilton Hotel”

⁴⁴ When the Spaniards colonized the Philippines, they encouraged diasporic Chinese to trade, so for generations the Chinese lived in the Philippines but were not of the Philippines.

(7), having a “two-bedroom tract home in Daly City” (8) which has the highest Filipino population, and after many years in America would still be “say[ing] ‘Open the light . . . close the light’ when she orders someone to turn a light switch on or off” (9).

Knowing the difference is Rocky’s way of dealing with cultural difference, her way of coping with the displacement of migration that puts her in the position of “native.” However, this knowledge does not prevent her from thrusting herself headlong into American hip culture. Graduating from Ralph Waldo Emerson High School “with no close friends and technically still a virgin” (16), she finds her “virgin crotch” tingling with love and anticipation in Elvis’ presence. She waits a week before having sex and moving in with him. This act, Rocky knows, would have horrified Sister Immaculada, her catechism teacher in Manila. Rocky notes, however, that despite Elvis’ skill and confidence as a lover, she did not enjoy sex and attributes this to her Catholic upbringing:

I guess the vigilant Sister Immaculadas of the world had done their job well. I dreamed about sex, wrote about it, sang about it; I got down and dirty when I talked about it. But actual sex for me was . . . well, too *penetrating*. I was always a mess afterward. Call it what you will. An intrusion, an invasion, a mortal sin – sex was simply too much trouble.” (28)

Rocky’s behaviour has been moulded by the nuns with their emphasis on chastity and deference to men and this makes up her understanding of what it means to be a Filipino woman:

I had chosen a man as remote and as complicated as my father, whose proof of love when you demanded it consisted of staring at you in mock astonishment and

saying, "I'm here, ain't I?" From a noisy and
 tumultuous household, I, Rocky Rivera, daughter of La
 Reyna Milagros, Queen of the Not-So-Mellow-Drama,
 had to learn how to read between the jagged lines when
 Elvis did speak. (31)

Hagedorn's focus on the dilemma that Rocky faces, highlights the dilemmas Filipina migrants face in reacting to a different place and language. Recognizing that gender is often pitted against ethnicity in their daily struggles of living in a new world, many Filipina migrants may want to choose liberation from misogynistic cultural practices, and therefore, may feel forced to give up traditional Filipino customs and behaviour if these suggest limitations to female self-development. As an alternative to the sexism of a Filipino custom or world view, the Filipina chooses the American form of femininity which initially appears to be more liberating. Yet, this very attempt at female liberation usually brings with it intense cultural alienation. Hagedorn's Rocky struggles to establish instead a space where constant interaction between her identities as Filipino and woman can happen specifically because her culture of origin is as patriarchal as her culture of settlement. Paradoxically, it is only within the space of relocation that Rocky can displace the power of traditional constructions of femininity.

Then Rocky meets the racially ambiguous visual artist, Keiko Van Heller, who confounds categories and resists essentialisms. In Keiko, Hagedorn complicates the idea of authenticity and critiques the simplifications of identity politics that is based on origins and associations instead of a politics grounded in ideas of resistance and solidarity. Keiko, as "Fantasia Laveaux," a fire-eating "funkified beauty" hustles for money in downtown

San Francisco. Rocky stares at “this flamboyant, beautiful creature with the silly, made-up name” with a “mixture of irritation, envy and desire” (38). Asking Rocky for her name, Keiko mistakenly identifies her as Chicana.⁴⁵

Hagedorn also depicts the phenomenon of interracial identification in Puerto Rican characters like Eduardo Zuniga, a cabdriver who recognizes Rocky as an exile from a country colonized in the same year his country was, or Graciela Delgado, a midwife who “thought [Rocky] might be Puerto Rican” (164). Often taken as any non-white nationality but Filipino, a Filipina has the option of asserting her identity or, like Rocky, recognizing herself in the racial figure of the Puerto Rican she is often mistaken for. Across racial boundaries within the people of colour hierarchy, identifying with the Puerto Rican indicates Rocky’s orientation towards others marginalized by race and colonial status.

Through her interactions with Keiko, Rocky explores another aspect of racial identity in the US. Aware of her beauty and racial ambiguity, Keiko does not hesitate to alter stories of her origin or image according to opportunities that serve her advantage best. Her exploitive nature is gradually revealed as she asks Rocky to pose as a prom queen with a handgun. Rocky’s lurid images make both her mother and brother believe that Keiko does not really like her. Then Keiko also initiates her into doing drugs, the

⁴⁵ Juliana Chang in *Word and Flesh* notes that “social processes of racial (mis)identification and racial commodification inscribe the racialized body as a site of simultaneous hypervisibility and invisibility. Hagedorn posits the Filipina/o body as the site of consistent misidentification, a practice exacerbating one’s subjective sense of displacement: “in new york / they ask if i’m puerto rican / and do i live in queens??? i . . . chant to iemaja / convinced i’m really brazilian / and you a riverboat gambler . . . in macao.” “Tha’s a funky name, man. You Chicano?” “Are you Indian or something? Mexican? Italian, somewhat?” (38)

“pure Owsley LSD,” and takes more pictures of her “spewing up her guts” (50).

Keiko, “touted by the critics as a ‘rising feminist artist of colour’” (94) becomes an overnight celebrity. Her unfocused blown-up photographs are hailed and labeled “hybrid manipulations” (107). In making her characters speak out for the issue of multiple positions and identities, Hagedorn sets forth the idea of coalition-building among people of colour. However, the difficult part of forging coalitional identities is to guard against perpetuating hierarchies or ranking discriminations; identifying with being a “woman of colour” should emphasize the politics behind it. Keiko does not take up colour issues nor does she fight for women’s causes. She takes pictures of women she met or saw on the street. Keiko’s photographs, therefore, of women she calls “friends and curiosities” (106) placed on the visual art scene become parts of a political agenda emptied of meaning. Pisares notes that “under the art appraiser’s eye,” these objects simply become “exotic capital goods” (89).

Hagedorn also looks at jokes to display multiple existence, difference and association with diasporic Filipinos:

An old Filipino man goes before the judge for his citizenship papers. The *manong*’s really nervous. He’s been in America since 1930, waiting for this Big moment all his life.

The judge isn’t too friendly. He says, “Excuse me, Mr. Manong, but before you can get your citizenship papers, I must order you to compose a correct sentence in English, using the following words: *deduct*, *defense*, *defeat* and *detail*.”

The *manong* jumps up and down with excitement. “Ay! Very easy, judge! Very easy. See? De duck jump over de Fence. First de feet, den de tail!” (68)

The humor of such jokes which come from regional accents or bilingual puns is a means for the Filipino diasporic to celebrate and ease her anxieties about being simultaneously Filipino and Americanized:

The same judge decides to test the *manong* even further.

“Mr. Manong, I’d like you to use the English word *persuading* correctly in a sentence.”

The *manong* is once again eager to please. “No problem, judge! Last month I went to my sister’s first wading anniversary party.”

The judge is appalled, but gives the old man another chance. “Mr. Manong, do you know the word *devastation*?”

The *manong* smiles. “Of course, judge! I know that word! De-bas-tay-shon. That’s where I go to wait for the bus.” (69)

In writing about the manongs, an early group of Filipino immigrants to the US, the author puts forth urban jokes as a way of celebrating diasporic identity, one that not only includes knowledge about the Philippines but also an understanding of American life. As I have discussed earlier in Lim-Wilson’s section, the socially correct usage of English has been employed to suppress the cultural codes and languages of the colonized. In making homonymic puns, the Filipino ridicules English and asserts the form of communication necessary to her cultural survival.

Specific to the experience of migration, these jokes direct our attention to the immigrant experiences that make up the Filipino identity in the US:

Why did the Filipino cross the road?

Because he thought America was on the other side.

The Filipino immigrant in the US is perceived as privileged compared to those Filipinos back home who dream of coming to America. To the immigrant however, that dream

seems as naive as the chicken joke. Crossing the road is a simple act but bridging the gap between colonizer and colonized is not.

Amador Reyes, a.k.a. the Carabao Kid is one of these Filipino Americans, a former welterweight boxer and agricultural migrant labourer who became the “unofficial spiritual leader of a fast-growing, chaotic and exuberant Pinoy arts movement in San Francisco” (202). Born in Watsonville, California, Carabao Kid is a typical US-born Filipino.

Because he has never been to the Philippines, he obsesses over it as an idealized paradise before colonization: “He’d describe the fiery sunsets, swaying coconut trees, and white sand beaches, sounding like some romantic tourist brochure” (199). He and his daughter Ligaya have worked in the Alaskan canneries, Californian orchards and Louisiana shrimp farms, the same places early Filipino migrant workers were labourers.

Due to desperate economic conditions and experiences of racism, Carabao Kid is forced to move beyond his fetishistic ideas of the Philippines to be socially active and develop relationships within the Filipino community. In Kearny St., a shop called “Manong Joey’s Kayumanggi Barbershop” (199) becomes the centre of manongs and young college-aged Filipinos the Carabao kid calls his “zany disciples.” They bring “food, beer and rum” and transform the place into “a major cultural hangout” (203).

Carabao Kid is etched in Rocky’s memory as the man who taught her and Voltaire “*How to be a F(P)ilipino*” (199). American-born, Carabao Kid claims his Filipino-ness by recapturing and restoring Filipino ideals that have been lost in the deficient imperfections of present-day life in the US. These ideals can be retained through collective action,

whether this be a Pinoy arts movement or describing landscapes he has probably only seen in pictures. Cultural memory in a living culture is never fixed. It needs a constant reinterpretation of the present in terms of the past: “America was here: vast, inhospitable, and harsh. The Philippines was there: distant, lush, soulful and sexy” (199).

Since the definition of cultural memory depends on a continuous exchange between memory objects of a given culture and their interpretation by its members, it is difficult to reveal the product as suspect. The definition of identity emerging from this memory construction, therefore, is very imaginary.⁴⁶ Pisares states that Carabao Kid’s emergence would allow Rocky “to identify with him and other Pinoys” which would “fulfill the conventions of US immigrant narratives, beginning with arrival, working through adjustment and ending with assimilation into the host nation” (95). But Rocky rejects Carabao Kid’s romanticization of the Philippines because his idealized visions do not take into account the pain of exile.

In the novel, we see the exilic condition played out in the characters of Milagros and Voltaire. Milagros’ strategy for coping with exile is through her lumpia business. An undeniably Filipino food, the lumpia functions as a fetish, her own image of the homeland. However, this is not enough to hold her together. Voltaire on the other hand, in drug-induced dazes, “wandered the streets, not sleeping or eating” (63) and finally reappears barefoot at his mother’s door after two weeks. He goes through a series of different

⁴⁶ Benedict Anderson has argued convincingly that “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact are imagined” (7).

hospitals but after some time he gets well enough to fly home to the Philippines.

Strategies of coping such as Milagros' lumpia fetish, karaoke and nostalgic reminiscences work, however, these also reinforce the sense of alienation the characters feel. In order for them to maintain structures that allow recognition usually denied by an indifferent host country, social practices that involve reciprocity with others is necessary. In the case of Rocky, her search for a viable community finds expression in the rock band which San Juan considers a "temporary surrogate and compensatory device" ("Transforming" 11).

Corresponding with the condition of exile is Rocky's description of what she felt for Elvis when she fell in love with him: "He fulfilled my notions of love, which meant no one could ever get what they wanted" (32). Rocky is inhibited at the beginning of the novel and loosens up as she gets to America. She becomes a woman empowered by herself and not by a man, as she becomes more open-minded, experienced, less inhibited and willing to express desire and seek pleasure. In Detroit, she allows Keiko to make love to her while at the same time she is conscious that Keiko is moving in on Elvis.

Rocky is transformed by her disillusionment. Moving into her own apartment in Manhattan, she has an affair with Jake Montano and has his baby. Deciding against marrying Jake, she concentrates on herself and the baby. Rocky's mother "reflects how much her daughter has changed" (192). With a failed love affair with Elvis, a useless infatuation with Keiko behind her, Rocky feels at peace nursing her child at this juncture in her life. She comes to realize that happiness has no set definition: "Right before I gave up music, I was full of myself. The happiest I'd ever been. So much pain, I had to sing"

(243). Rocky finds fulfillment away from the traditional definitions of Philippine womanhood as defined by the Maria Clara ideology. She does not need a man to be complete.

At the end of the novel that suggests new beginnings and new ways of thinking, Rocky dismantles her band and waves the illusions of the 60s goodbye. Her mother passes away and she returns to the Philippines after twenty two years to see her dying father. Rocky is no longer just an isolated individual, but a collection of “the dispersed and fragmented lives of generations of Filipinos whose chief claim to distinction is (to paraphrase the Carabao Kid) their unrelenting pursuit of happiness and their equally inexhaustible capacity to suffer” (San Juan 26). This trope therefore marks an important part of the novel since the transformed Rocky not only goes home but does so without her child. This infuriates Luz, her sister, who asks “Who’s taking care of her?” (291). When Rocky replies that Venus is with her father, Luz opines, “Ayyy, Raquel. How could you be so irresponsible?” (292). In the traditional role of a Filipino mother, a woman is expected to remain with her child under all circumstances. Rocky’s willingness to leave Venus with her father shows her further abandonment of the Maria Clara ideology.

Hagedorn frames this part of the ending in a Filipino diasporic context filled with images that return Rocky to the Philippine landscape: “malnourished children” pressing “their faces and wares against” the car window, “rice cakes wrapped in banana leaves,” white squares of carabao cheese” (293), and a “bunch of woven palm fans in the brilliant hues of purple, red, yellow and lime green” (296). In also concluding the novel with a

scene where father and daughter meet, Hagedorn allows Rocky a split second of symbolic return. Francisco Rivera thinks it is Milagros who has come home. But Rocky's homecoming is meant to demonstrate how she is Filipino by blood and matures into an American in the US, blending two identities into one irresolute synthesis. In bringing together these elements, Rocky becomes a model for many Filipinos in America who find themselves negotiating their identities and don't find it easy to strike a balance between both worlds.

CONCLUSION

According to San Juan, there is a "specific reason why the Filipino contingent in the United States . . . needs to confront its own singular destiny as a 'transported' (in more ways than one), displaced, and disintegrated people" (*From Exile* 6). While he continues to point to the reality of US colonial subjugation and its lasting effects which "most people cannot even begin to fathom, let alone acknowledge the existence of," (7) many readers, including myself, feel addressed by this statement. In an attempt to show both the specific alienation of migrants but also the potential explanatory power of migrancy in present literary discourse, I seek to address the Filipinos who according to him, in a manner of speaking, belong to the world:

Formerly redundant liabilities, they become assets, "human capital," when they transplant themselves. This crisis of deracination and unsettlement (permanent or temporary) afflicting a whole society becomes more pronounced in the phenomenon of the "brain drain," a factor that explains the continuing underdevelopment of the South or "Third

World.” It is not a joke to say that the Philippines, an economic basket during the last decade of Marcos’ despotism, produces every year thousands of doctors, nurses, scientists, and engineers for the world market. As exchangeable commodities, many of them immediately head for the United States – note that there are several million “warm body exports” now inhabiting the Middle East and Europe – whereas in the Philippines, where 80 percent of the people are poor and 30 percent of the children malnourished, most towns and villages lack decent medical and health care (not to mention other vital social services) to sustain a tolerable quality of life for their citizens. (7)

My study of migrant Philippine women writers is an attempt to comprehend the “tremendous spiritual and physical ordeals that people of color are forced to undergo” (7), specifically Filipino women. My analysis shows that gender positions affect Filipina migrants and this study has investigated the mutually constitutive politics of nationalism and gender. These women’s narratives show that they can easily be co-opted by nationalist agendas, even as their presence destabilize national literatures. On the other hand, their narratives can contribute to the rearticulation of theories when existing critical frameworks⁴⁷ are not sufficient to address the complexity of the migrant construction of Filipino nationality and gender.

According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “women must tell each other’s stories, because they must call into question the model of criticism as neutral . . . [there is a point

⁴⁷ The critical frameworks are those that rely on the stability of cultural identity and in the linear narrative of progress. The major operating assumption about women migrants is that migration necessarily improves the women’s control over their lives. Therefore, to move from the Philippines to the US is commonly represented as a move from pre-modernity to modernity. This representation does not take into consideration that the US, depending on race and class structures that create poverty, can also be termed pre-modern.

to] the awkward, elaborate yet marginal autobiography besides the straight reading” (*In Other Worlds* 15). The telling of personal stories is important even if it results in “awkward” storytelling, precisely because individual stories call into question what Spivak terms “straight readings” and certain models of criticism which locate migrant stories in nationalist frameworks. My examinations of Hagedorn and Romero’s works show that their writings critique the nation for its exclusion of women as political subjects and its cultural constructions of them as wives and mothers. Connecting gender systems to nation formations, Eve Sokofsky Sedgwick shows that both the discursive and geographic spaces in the nations reproduce citizens through education and gender-socialization (239). Societies raise their children to take on national roles that is in keeping with the gender roles, with which they are at the same time, learning to identify. Therefore, relations of domination and subordination between men and women and among women, emerging from these historical and cultural contexts, organize Filipina migrant women’s lives differently.

In the beginning of this thesis, there were questions I set out to answer. I have discovered that each of the writers I discussed mediates her allegiance to the Philippines, while simultaneously critiquing gender oppression, the concept of nationality-as-nationalism, and the arrogance of US society. These writers’ acts of mediation have become important because of the unique demand the nation imposes on its women migrants: the use of the female body as a metaphor for nationhood and the replication of national ideologies through generativity. In these representations, the Philippine female

bodies represent sites of conflict between ethnic loyalty and assimilation into the US national scheme. These bodies also represent the border between inclusion and exclusion, between home and dislocation.

Hagedorn, Lim-Wilson and Romero's narratives of migration and readjustment show more than simply a glimpse into the particular experience of migration. Their narratives call into question not only Philippine identity but identity as such. Migration causes change because no woman migrates with herself, with her history intact. The move toward new national identities creates stories that imply a theoretical importance that does not begin nor conclude with migration or settlement itself.

Epilogue

Writing this thesis has been a process of self-discovery for me. Writing about Philippine women writers in the US has brought together the academic and personal in intense ways. Having made the journey from the Philippines to Canada, I found myself responding on many different levels to the different works as a woman, a reader, a critic. I express these responses here to articulate my politics of location and remind the reader why and how I came to this project.

Living and studying in Canada has been a defining feature of my life and processing this event of displacement with its impacts and changes in terms of self and community has been an important aspect of this study. I focus on women writers because I believe that women experience the migrant condition differently from men. As the study shows, the complexities of a gendered identity plays a vital role in the politics of women in diaspora.

In an online news article “Filipino Poet Actualize’s the ‘American Dream’” by Francesca Mustacchia, Lim-Wilson speaks of how most Filipinas come to America: “Many of us who grew up knowing that this was the land of opportunity” have “experienced the prejudice and particular sense of isolation that flavors minorities’ piece of the great American apple pie.” Such a notion of migrancy points to the complex relationship between gender, culture, nation and memory in the diasporic context.

The works depict the female protagonists as redefining themselves in the context of America. Significantly, such a reformulation happens at the nexus of Philippine and

American cultures. The treatment of their protagonists also discloses the author's location in diaspora. Hagedorn establishes a radical, anti-bourgeois feminist politics in a novel that advocates community and coalition building with ethnicities. In contrast, Romero's novel does not articulate any diasporic community-grounded politics. Oppositions are deconstructed and the feminine vis-à-vis Maria Clara ideology in *Always Hiding* but Viola and Lourdes do not engage with America outside the workplace situation. Romero does not try to articulate her politics of location in the US.

Lim-Wilson's poems exemplify situations in which the persona gives up communal structures and networks of friends and relatives as she enters into the American capitalist context. Through her poems, Lim-Wilson expresses her commitment to a feminist politics that exposes the predicament of women at the intersection of patriarchy vis-à-vis culture, gender and ideology.

Working on these texts reminded me so much of my arrival in Canada. I was not a typical immigrant and the ideology of liberal democracy was not important to me. Without friends or community to interact with, my arrival was confining and alienating. Ironically, this set-up actually entrenched essential notions of Filipino womanhood. The cultural expectations of being the Filipina, adjusting and uncomplaining, weighed me down.

After a couple of years of living and studying at the university, I realized my experiences, my education, my culture and my history all contributed to who I was and who I am, which is constantly changing. This realization helped me cope with my cultural

displacement which for a large portion was and still is marked by a horrible sense of alienation. Hanging onto this realization is a daily battle, though, because most people I have met believe in fixed and essential identities. Filipino immigrants arrive everywhere, Canada, the US, Japan, and elsewhere with the high hopes of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” but usually personal dreams are co-opted and subsumed under the rhetoric and ideology of freedom.

Reading Hagedorn’s character Rocky in *The Gangster of Love* who always gets mistaken for someone she is not, I remembered my first experience with racialized Canada. My friend had a conversation with a co-worker who heard I was arriving. Without even having met me or knowing why I had come, this co-worker referred to me as a “mail-order bride” (as I was coming from the Philippines where there were plenty of women getting into this thing.) I did not know how to react because my entire Philippine existence had exposed me to nothing but privilege. This interpellation disturbed me and it took me an entire week to understand and process the racial implications of this naming. I realized I would probably not have hesitated to use this particular term for some disadvantaged woman back home. Now I believe the only way to change dominant ideologies is by making one’s presence felt through ethical, conscientious representations that challenges hierarchies. For a Filipina, this means primarily a sense of self that strengthens and nurtures, and this is only possible with debunking of oppositions in an environment that promotes coalitional identity and is not dominated by grand master narratives.

I find myself thinking of Hagedorn's character, Keiko, whose identity politics need to be grounded in social and political awareness. Being a woman of colour has to mean more than just taking photographs of "friends and curiosities." As a Filipina, I see myself as a "woman of colour" because being so is a way of unlearning privilege, the next important step after recognizing and acknowledging privilege. I may not be the Filipino immigrant but without realizing I am a "woman of colour," I can still contribute to the reinscription of discrimination and continue to internalize oppression. However, in forging a coalitional identity with other people of colour, particularly women, I am able to see how I oppress and am oppressed by others.

As I stated in the beginning, this study is an effort to direct attention to the Philippine contingent within the politics of US multiculturalism. By writing about these Philippine American women writers who grapple with migrancy in America, I explode assimilation theories and insist that America be redefined to include hyphe(nations).

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