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Intimate Invasions: Examinations of the Idea of Home in Filipino-American Drama

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
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INTIMATE INVASIONS:
EXAMINATIONS OF THE IDEA OF HOME IN FILIPINO-AMERICAN DRAMA

By

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To my two homes in Manila and Pennsylvania and to the memory of my father who truly was
my family's *haligi ng tahanan*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis' focus lies deep within the Filipino immigrant's "home" in the U.S. and offers an investigation of how different Filipino/Filipino-American homes in the texts examined challenge and confront the seeming viability and stability of U.S. boundaries that exclude them. Using postcolonial theory, critical scholarship on the "idea of home" and transnationalism, and guided by the metaphor of the local Philippine custom of the *bayanihan*, I argue that Filipino-American playwrights, rather than writing homes solely rooted either as a point of origin or relocation, *activate* the Filipino-American home by rendering the home as open, mobile, and unfixed and constantly enacting the process of home-making.

Chapter One focuses on Chris B. Millado's *Peregrinasyon*, a historical drama that provides an elaboration of how Filipino domestic space was invaded and managed during the earliest stages of U.S. occupation. By looking at how Millado's dramaturgy urges for an oscillating investigation of the two foregrounded homes in his play, I focus on how the domestic space gets activated in order to evince the relationship of the Philippines and the U.S. Chapter Two of my discussion looks at how the central Filipina maternal figure in Ralph Peña's *Flipzoids*, opens up the Filipino-American home as a provocative site where constitutive racial dimensions of "belonging" in the U.S. for Filipino immigrants may be interrogated. I argue for the rethinking of the Filipino-American home to foreground how home-making for Filipino immigrants involves a constant process of building and rebuilding. In Chapter Two, I then examine Han Ong's play *Middle Finger*, a differential assessment to *Flipzoids*. I examine how the play entraps the Filipino-American family and de-activates the home despite its attempts to highlight the systems of social control that negatively affects its young, male Filipino-American characters.

The plays discussed in my thesis re-present homes marked by their transit from the Philippines to the United States. These plays stage the challenges in rebuilding new homes caused by the immigrants' uprooting and their struggles encountered as minorities in the U.S. As I argue, not only do these plays paint a picture of home as one that is constantly harrowed by its colonial past, ultimately, they ask what lies ahead for the Filipino-American home.

INTRODUCTION

“The recesses of the domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting.”

—Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*

For my home *and* colonized countries such as the Philippines, Homi Bhabha’s rendering of an invaded domestic space is particularly apt. After more than three hundred years of colonial rule by the Spanish, the Philippines then came under U.S. occupation for more than 50 years, and now the country, already beset by the pressures of globalization, remains under attack by invasions of a different kind: that of imperialism and neo-colonization.¹ However, even beyond the breach of the Philippine nation-state’s borders, U.S. imperialism has also infiltrated the thresholds of homes, the private dwellings in which people reside. Anna Laura Stoler in her discussion of the U.S. empire argues that “the macrodynamics of colonial rule worked through interventions in the microenvironments of both subjugated and colonizing populations” (2). For Stoler, because the carrying out of colonial power highly depended on social hierarchies built on structures of difference, the U.S. entered the supposed privacy of domestic spaces and “mold[ed] new structures of feelings – new habits of heart and mind that enable those categories of difference and subject formation” (2). The intrusions to the physical home become paradigmatic of the incursion into the nation-state in addition to simply being a strategy of control. Because of the blurring of the line that detaches the inside from the outside, the home from the nation, “the private and public become part of each other” (Stoler 2). No longer separate from the public, these homes and their connotations of the domestic revealed the tensions that the nation found itself having to contend with.

This study’s focus lies deep within the Filipino immigrant’s “home” in the U.S. Here I invoke home in multiple dimensions: as physical residence and a sense of belonging. Already bearing the marks of a painful colonial past and its consequent invasions, the domestic space immigrants occupy does not go unchallenged, for while the immigrant attempts to ground his/her roots in the U.S., forces unique to living in another country permeate the boundaries of the new

¹ I use the term neo-colonization here to mean the continued military, economic, and cultural presence of the U.S. nation state in the Philippines “as manifested in U.S. military bases, lopsided economic agreements, and the ‘Americanization’ of Filipino culture and consciousness” (Abinales and Amoroso 186).

home and thus the immigrant's sense of place and belonging. The U.S. state through laws and policies constructs the world these immigrants live in; their status under the law as naturalized citizens, green card holders, and TNTs² sets up the conditions, challenges, and opportunities accorded to them outside of their physical confines. Hence, even though not physically located within the Philippines' borders, the immigrant's domestic space strikingly resembles that of the then and now invaded home country.

When an immigrant speaks of home, the question of *which* home—home in their country of native origin or home as their residence in the U.S.—always arises or worse, this invocation always seems to allude to the longing to return to one's point of origin, the homeland. In her essay "Homeland Insecurities: Transformations of Language and Space," Amy Kaplan describes the idea of the homeland as such: "Homeland . . . conveys a sense of native origins, of birthplace and birthright. It appeals to common bloodlines, ancient ancestry, and notions of racial and ethnic homogeneity" (60). In a similar vein, the idea of "home" is often regarded as the place of origin and belonging, yet since both terms connote the location of one's origins, home and homeland form a conjunction that problematically collapses home into homeland: home is, almost to a default, consistently misplaced and misconstrued as automatically located *only* in one's homeland and never in the U.S. However, for Filipino immigrants, home may be found in both one's place of residence in the U.S. or one's site of origin in the homeland, the Philippines. Kaplan takes issue with contemporary usage of the term "homeland" in U.S. rhetoric because its usage only serves to push aside and cordon off immigrants and other minorities within the U.S. since they cannot claim the nation as their place of origin. Although Kaplan wrote this article in light of the events of September 11, 2001, her arguments also hold significant bearing on how we view immigrant experiences in the U.S. Conflating the idea of home with homeland in U.S. popular rhetoric limits opportunities for the immigrant: if home equals homeland, the immigrant can never claim the U.S. as home because it is not their homeland nor ever will be. Hindered from establishing a home (physical, psychic, and often legal) in the United States, the Filipino immigrant suffers from an "enforced 'homelessness.'"³ I contend, therefore, that the plays in this study ultimately reflect the immigrant's desire and efforts to separate home from homeland in

² TNT stands for "*tago ng tago*," in Tagalog, a language spoken in the Philippines. Literally translated as "always hiding," TNTs are undocumented Filipino nationals in the United States.

³ This is a term used by Yen Le Espiritu in her book, *Homebound: Filipino-American Lives Across Cultures, Communities and Countries* (2003). Espiritu also uses transnationalism in her ethnographic study of Filipino immigrants in the U.S. specifically the San Diego area.

order to make a home in the U.S. despite transmigrations from their place of origin.

I start this project already with a heightened awareness of the presence of the United States in my family's domestic space back in the Philippines. Yet through the course of writing this thesis, our home and the Philippines will find their way to my apartment in the United States through countless emails sent to me by my dotting mother and certainly the subject of "home" will always come up in conversations. As much as my mother will remind me of home and update me with news from the Philippines, her questions regarding the recession and cold winters have much in connection to my own building of a home in the U.S. Therefore, this study concerns itself not with a critique of the invasions of the United States into the Philippines, resulting in its colonization. Instead, drawing from my own experiences and status as "temporary immigrant," I am particularly interested in examining how Filipino immigrants to the U.S. create homes albeit with indistinct coordinates. More importantly, this study aims to analyze how the different homes in the texts examined challenge and confront the viability and stability of U.S. boundaries by troubling the prevailing conceptions of the immigrant experience in the U.S. To make clear this idea, I offer that the plays examined herein invoke an *activation* of the homes they portray: activation describes homes that are rendered as mobile, open, unfixed and always involved in the act of home-making. In the tenets of this formation, Filipino immigrants in the plays I examine retain two senses of home and keep strong cultural ties to the Philippines; they do not neatly fold into a normative assimilation process. Instead these works demonstrate how Filipino immigrants' homes seem to secretly invade the U.S. through their subtle and intimate reworking of the notion of home and homeland.

In this study, I will examine the plays, *Peregrinasyon* (1998) by Chris Millado, *Flipzoids* (1996) by Ralph Peña, and *Middle Finger* (2000) by Han Ong. In these playwrights' foregrounding of the Filipino home in the U.S. and the domestic issues worked out within it, I argue that these dramatic texts work to first illumine the historical, political, and cultural underpinnings that have constructed and maintained the Filipino immigrant's home in the U.S. as a site of continuous contestation. Rather than fixating on the idea that dramatic representations of homes solely represents homes, which are rooted either as a point of origin or relocation, I will seek to examine the ways in which playwrights *activate* these homes. For one, the different homes represented in these texts trouble the notion that acculturation and assimilation basically sum up the main objectives of the immigrant's desires and, therefore, serve as the cause of

struggles Filipino immigrants face in the U.S. My close readings of these texts suggest that a more nuanced analysis of the relationship of the U.S. and the Philippines from the colonial period up to the present remains relevant and necessary. Broadly, this study may be used as an entry point for participation in the wider discourses about the shifting definitions of home at a time of globalization and transnational economies. The object of home now becomes even more contentious considering global speculations on the expansion of the U.S. empire and its consequent widening of borders. But, more than the political and economic implications, the United States' recent "War on Terror" and its seeming conflation of nationalism and military expansion put the repercussions of such expansions under serious question.

Sharing Spaces: the Philippines and Philippine-American Relations Then and Now

To those not familiar with why the Philippines and its relationship with the United States is fertile ground for interrogation, it is necessary to historically contextualize this relationship. The pre-colonial Philippines makes an interesting case in this study's rethinking of space and home. "The Philippines" as a nation-state did not exist before the Spaniards arrived in 1521 according to scholars. Spanish conquistadors grouped the islands together to make up one archipelago under the Spanish crown.⁴ The Philippines⁵, as it is known today, is comprised of 7,107 islands and major bodies of water, which surround 300,000 square kilometers of land mass, including the Pacific Ocean in the east, the South China Sea in the west, and the Celebes Sea in the south.

Two characteristics of the pre-colonial communities on these islands prove significant for this project. According to Abinales and Amoroso's work *State and Society in the Philippines*, the "cognatic kinship" that is fostered in the pre-colonial Filipino home was particular (20). As opposed to a "patrilineal descent" both sons *and* daughters receive rights to an inheritance; marriage does not and should not sever natal family ties. Moreover, fictive brothers, godmothers, and godfathers are not only formed through marriages but also through different types of alliances such as trade, which essentially bring people from different community settlements together. For this reason, Abinales and Amoroso find it unsurprising that relations between the communities that engaged in trade with Spanish conquistadors were very cordial. In fact, pre-

⁴ For a more detailed discussion, Vicente Rafael's introduction to his book, *White Love and Other Events in Philippine History* (2000) excellently traces how the Spanish colonizers consolidated the islands in the formation of the archipelago.

⁵ The first four Spanish expeditions used the name "Felipinas," after King Philip II.

colonial communities, which referred to the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan as “brother” at that time, were not considered unusual.⁶

The Portuguese sailors of the 16th century, whose allegiance belonged to the Spanish crown, went on an expedition to find a group of islands called the Mollucas (now named Maluku). Implicated in a competition with Portugal, another Catholic power, to find, capture, and monopolize the spice trade, Magellan landed on one of the islands in Visayas, the central region of the Philippines in 1521. What Magellan found were river settlements of different families that made up a strong system of networks built on trade and other forms of alliances prior to the Spanish fleet’s arrival. Yet although these networks grew and broadened, people remained loyal to their original communities. Oliver W. Wolters, in his study of early Southeast Asian communities, calls this “multicentrality” (17). According to him, “[e]very center was a center in its own right as far as its inhabitants were concerned, and it was surrounded by its own group of neighbors” (17). From Wolters, we are able to gather that although actions pointed to extending relations outside the community, people still were very much attached to the local, to home, here defined as land, site of origination, kin, and familiar community. Even without a single polity that governed and united all communities, the political contours of the region were mapped not through boundaries of the geographical or territorial kind but through the personal.

The Philippines experienced a reordering and restructuring of its internal political and social organizations concurrent with the spatial and geographic delimiting of the nation’s territory during Spanish colonization. In order to put the islands under the same religious and political rule, conversion to the Catholic faith also meant political submission under the Spanish crown. However, establishing control did not come easily for the Spanish missionaries who were sent to the disconnected islands.⁷ To consolidate control, the previously separate but linked settlements were forced into towns with the church at its center through the process called *reduccion* (reduction). The parish priest then suddenly rose in power over the *datu* (tribal chief or community leader) who was relegated to occupy a lower civil rank, and the effect of this shift in the political arena trickled down to impact the Filipinos’ other social realities as well.

⁶ Patricio N. Abinales and Donna J. Amoroso’s *State and Society in the Philippines* (2005) outlines these characteristics of pre-colonial settlements.

⁷ Although *reduccion* was successful in major towns, it is important to note that this forcing of boundaries did not go unchallenged. In fact, the Spanish did not succeed in reaching and converting Filipinos who live in the Cordillera region in the North. Also, Mindanao, the Philippines’ largest island remains predominantly Moslem. Both areas, until today, pride themselves for being areas not conquered by the Spanish.

Three hundred thirty years of Spanish rule only preceded the next significant shifts in the way the home was reconfigured in the Filipino social reality. The last years of Spanish colonial rule (1768-1894) were overwhelmed with economic, political, and religious strains. The peasantry and a group of wealthy discontent elite grew in number, and the threat of a revolution became more menacing as members of the elite and the peasantry planned movements in revolt. Although factions were formed, no single plan of attack was mobilized by either group. Instead, victory on one island was overshadowed by a defeat on another, but because the Spanish military was also trying to hold its ground in faraway Cuba, an opportunity opened up to establish a Philippine republic while communities continued the fight for independence.

While the colonial grip of the Spanish over the Philippines was weakening, the United States' efforts to widen its borders were also gaining ground. When Spain surrendered to the United States after the Spanish-American War of 1898, the new Philippine republic established by military general Emilio Aguinaldo in 1897 was soon challenged. As a result of war and acceptance of defeat, Spain ceded the Philippines to the United States in exchange for twenty million dollars after the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1898. The new republic established by Aguinaldo, however, went unrecognized by the United States. Instead, the U.S. soon exercised its sovereignty and power when President William McKinley ordered U.S. commanders, who were given rights to all public property, to “protect them [Filipinos] in their homes, in their employments, and in their personal and religious rights” (McKinley qtd. in Kramer 98). Historian Paul A. Kramer points out that at this point, “the Philippines found itself between two colliding declarations of sovereignty” because at the same time that the leaders of the new republic attempted to refigure the nation, the United States, by securing the Filipinos *in* their homes, also secured its position as an imperial world power (98).

The Philippines found itself caught in the web of ties that the United States sought to establish outside of its continental limits. Ideologically, the U.S. foray to the Pacific could be perceived as two-pronged. Under the tenets of U.S. national exceptionalism,⁸ the Pacific was a place of non-white savages in need of conversion religiously and politically, much like the continental West under the edicts of Manifest Destiny. Second, the United States sought to establish trade relations with the East as Western nations became more commercialized and

⁸ U.S. exceptionalism is rooted on Alexis Tocqueville's belief that the United States holds a distinct place amongst nations because of its unique origins, historical development, political and religious institutions.

industrialized. In fact, the rhetoric of President McKinley about U.S. occupation of the Philippines moved around these two loci. In his initial orders, McKinley made sure that violence and war were not seen to be the rationale of U.S. conquest. Rather, it took form as an act of benevolence which McKinley called “benevolent assimilation.” For McKinley, Filipinos who were “unfit for self-government” could use the help of the Americans, which echoed the concept of Rudyard Kipling’s “white man’s burden.” Also, McKinley justified American presence by calling it a commercial venture any other country would embark on. Through excellent political maneuvering and word play, consequent undertakings of power and control were easily masked by allusions of benevolence.

Today, many years after the Philippines formally gained its independence in 1946, political debates in the Philippines still center on issues concerning U.S. intervention on matters of the state. Though some nationalists celebrated the removal of U.S. military bases in 1991, the question of whether genuine freedom from the colonizer was truly attained resurfaced in the wake of Filipino President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo’s pronouncement of the alliance between the Philippines and the United States in the “War on Terror.” The arrival of the U.S. troops in 2001 to “help” combat the insurgencies in Moslem Mindanao rings a haunting echo.

Homes in Transit: Theoretical Frameworks for Reading Filipino-American Drama

Scholarship on Filipino culture often mentions the *bayanihan*, the Filipino custom of transporting huts from one farm to the other. The act of carrying your neighbor’s *nipa* hut on one’s shoulder, together with other neighbors sharing the weight, signifies the sense of community Filipinos are said to possess. Although this custom may be the perfect metaphor for community, the concept of the *bayanihan* is rarely explored in terms of what it says about home.⁹ The act of transporting does not find elaboration in scholarly discourse and whether the “home” changes in transit is neither questioned nor challenged: is it still the same home? To remember what the home was like and envision what it will be creates a divide between the past and future, the “here” and “there”—the contiguity of these two locations is never fully examined. Of course, what was carried over from the past bears significance on the future. Yet is it also possible that the very idea of the “there” already transformed the “here” even before the relocation has

⁹ Paul A. Rodell’s book, *Customs and Culture of the Philippines* (2000), describes the *bayanihan* as a “shared work ethic.” He also adds that the *bayanihan* is “demonstrated by the traditional practice of shared work to erect a house, but the ethic is much more pervasive and deeply rooted than this example of an occasional group activity” (197-198).

happened? With the *bayanihan* as a guiding metaphor, I argue that the plays discussed in my project re-present homes marked by their transit. At the same time that these plays stage the challenge to rebuild a home caused by immigrants' uprooting and their struggles encountered as minorities in the U.S., these plays also paint a picture of home as one that is constantly harrowed by its past and by what was left behind.

To direct my investigation and excursion to the inside of the Filipino immigrant's home, I will use postcolonial theory to support this study's methodological framework. My discussions of the plays will suggest that the relationship of the United States and the Philippines at present cannot be fully understood without reading it against the colonial history that intertwines the two nations. As with other colonized countries, the answer to whether decolonization may be fully realized remains elusive for the Philippines; indeed the impact of U.S. occupation and imperialism still manifests itself in the nation's present. Therefore, if a full separation from the imperial center seems improbable or unattainable, the more pertinent question becomes whether the porous lines which separate the two nation-states merely form an interspace entirely devoid of activity or constant negotiations that affect both countries.

Transnationalism serves as another theoretical post in the methodological framework that guides this study. Transnationalism, defined as "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" in Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc's landmark work, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (1994), buttresses the argument that these plays should be examined by simultaneously looking at the two diametric poles of place as opposed to looking at only the site of relocation. A majority of the characters in the plays I examine enact the "multiplicity of involvements that transmigrants sustain in both home and host societies" which Basch, Schiller, and Blanc sought to identify in their social scientific work. Since transmigrant characters often refer to their point of origin as home even though they have already resettled, "home" in these plays already connotes two separate but connected spaces simultaneously. Furthermore, transnationalism's troubling of the usual conflation of place and identity challenges U.S. American and Filipino scholars alike to rethink Filipino immigrant subjectivities and identities. By examining the characters in these plays, both groups will begin to discern that while in the process of resettlement in the U.S., the characters develop complex identities created from the very fibers of

the complicated entanglements that link both countries.

Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* points us to the “in between spaces” that “provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative signs of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (2). Because Bhabha reminds us that potentialities reside in these interstitial spaces, the plays for my project were chosen precisely because their actions inhabit off-centered locations. Recognizing that “collaborations” or “contestations” may be found in these texts, my study intends to map out the ways the characters move about or work their way within the interstitial space separating the two countries in order to locate the strategies of singular or communal selfhood that Bhabha suggests.

In his work, Bhabha uses a bridge as a metaphor to establish connection between the cultures of the colonizer and colonized. He describes it as such: “a bridge where ‘presencing’ begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness” (13). Here, the bridge not only points to the connectedness that these two locations share, but Bhabha also emphasizes that the bridge itself is its own site – one where the act of “presencing” manifests itself. Migrant fictions, such as the dramatic works this thesis seeks to investigate, engage in much more than a recapturing of the past, expounding on the present, or foretelling the future. I contend that these texts must be read as bridges where such acts of “presencing” can be found and therefore, examined and analyzed. Furthermore, for Bhabha, these works make present the estrangement and the unhomeliness that characterize the blurred space between “here” and “there.” Dismissing unfamiliar Philippine historical or cultural significations present in these plays as “strange” simply echoes the disavowal and “forgetting” of the colonial history between the United States and the Philippines. In my interrogation, I plan to look at the different ways that each play makes use of the “unhomely” home and the meanings that their acts of “presencing” suggest. Therefore, each chapter of my thesis will aim to historically or culturally situate the “strange” to unpack meanings and bring the suppressed and hidden to light.

Chapter Outline: Follow Me Home

Scholar Lisa Lowe notes that “Asian American culture is the site of more than a critical negation of the U.S. nation; it is a site that shifts and marks alternatives to the national terrain by occupying other spaces, imagining different narratives and critical historiographies, and enacting

practices that give rise to new forms of subjectivity and new ways of questioning the government of human life by the national state” (13). My study intends to carve out a space for the particularity of Filipino writers who, through their writing, seek to mark the alternative sites they currently reside within. I will carefully move away from an ethnically ambiguous Asian-American critique because immigrant histories and Asian immigrant experiences among them are not one and the same. As such, this study proposes an opening up and further articulation within the field of Asian American Studies to invite specific queries into the subject of home for Filipino and Filipino-Americans and shifts in location, meaning, and representations particular to these Asian ethnic identities.

Chapter One: Chris Millado’s *Peregrinasyon*: Activating Filipino Transhistorical Domesticity

If one views Chris B. Millado’s *Peregrinasyon* (1998) as a historical drama, the play’s well-grounded historical moments certainly give way to an elaboration of how Filipino domestic space was invaded and managed during the earliest stages of U.S. occupation. However, because the play also stages how certain economic, political, and social conditions and events led up to the early migration of Filipinos to the continental United States, I argue that the play activates domestic space in order to evince the transhistorical relationship of the Philippines and the U.S.

Set in 1930, Simeon, the son of a farmer who is fed up with the economic hardships in his province, decides to sail for the U.S. only to work and toil on land that he can never claim to be his. However, Millado’s play moves beyond a re-telling of these events. In this chapter, I will examine how Millado’s *Peregrinasyon* works towards creating a new framework for positioning Philippine-American relations by theatrically foregrounding the historical underpinnings of early U.S. colonization.¹⁰ For example, in Millado’s play, the presence of a U.S. American military family “micro-managing” the home of Simeon’s father in the Philippines mirrors the U.S. nation-state’s control over Simeon’s newly made family in the U.S. Simeon’s attempts to start his life in the U.S. are coupled with scenes from his family’s fight for a new life without colonial rule by means of a revolution in the Philippines in what seems to be two disparate ways of rebuilding: one through life/procreation (Simeon marries a white American woman and has a baby) and the other through destruction and death (Simeon’s father sees the revolution and its

¹⁰ I will mostly use Paul A. Kramer’s book entitled *Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States & the Philippines* (2006). Kramer’s transnational study on Philippine-American colonial history will be most helpful in my analysis of Millado’s play.

violent upsurge as the only solution). I contend that Millado presents the two spaces that denote the Philippines and the United States as linked by not only causal histories but histories that are contiguous in nature. Through underscoring the active sites of home on stage, the play's dramaturgy suggests to the audience that these parallel sites of home are intimately enmeshed. Furthermore, not only does it suggest – through spatial configuration – that the Philippines was changed decidedly by U.S. occupation, but also that the migration of Filipinos to the U.S. changes the “homeland's” cultural landscape as well.

Chapter Two: Transnational Maternity in Ralph Peña's *Flipzoids*

My second chapter will focus on Ralph Peña's *Flipzoids* (1996) that depicts the relationships among a Filipino immigrant family: Vangie, a middle-aged nurse, her mother Aying, and a young man whom Aying befriends: Redford, a second-generation Filipino immigrant. The hinge of this triad is the mother, Aying, who has just joined her daughter in America. Aying's yearning for home, Redford's feelings of alienation, and Vangie's guilt emerge through *Flipzoids*' dark humor. While Aying forms a bond with Redford, tensions brew between Aying and Vangie. The mother and daughter's already strained relationship takes a significant turn when Vangie humiliates and disowns her mother. In this particularly telling scene, Aying uses water from a fountain in a shopping mall to perform a Filipino cultural ritual. Upon seeing her, Vangie calls the police and asks them to take Aying away. After the incident, Aying refuses to speak and eventually dies from complications of a heart condition. At the end of the play, Redford is left alone on stage to attempt to reimagine the Philippine home he never knew but has been reintroduced to through his relationship with Aying.

Flipzoids makes comments not only on labor migration, for example, Vangie coming to America to work as a nurse, but also about family migration represented by Aying's migration to the U.S. to join her daughter. Peña successfully depicts how the trauma experienced by the Filipino family, broken up by one member migrating, may be nullified by what appears to be a benevolent provision of “family reunification” as stipulated in U.S. Immigration laws post-1965. *Flipzoids*' uncovering of the stresses that afflict Vangie and Aying's family group points us to what seems to be merely an empty promise of reunification.

Aying's central position in *Flipzoids* puts maternal subjectivity in the forefront and recalls recent events involving two important mothers also tasked with reunification: Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's (who declared support for the U.S.'s “War on Terror” in

2001) and Corazon Aquino (who was severely critiqued for maintaining alliances with the U.S. during her term “to build a new home for democracy”).¹¹ Aying, akin to these two women, transgressed national and gender lines. I argue that the important correlations between these three Filipinas makes Aying’s role in *Flipzoids* worthy of interrogation and elaboration. If colonizers succeeded in keeping mothers within the nation’s bounds, Aying’s border crossing to reach the U.S. turns potent because not only does it go against the notion that the mother’s place is only within the domestic sphere, but by taking on the responsibility of reunifying the family, she gives Filipina women tremendous agency. Rachel Salazar Parreñas, in her book *Children of Global Migration: Transnational Families and Gendered Woes*, links the difference in roles between mothers and fathers to Filipino metaphors: the mother serves as the *ilaw ng tahanan* (light of the home) and the father functions as the *haligi ng tahanan* (pillar of the home). For Parreñas, the “metaphorical reference” to the father as pillar of the home suggests that it is the father who “makes the home stand and must metaphorically build a home for his family”(57). To extrapolate then from Parreñas’ argument, Aying performs dual parental and gender roles in Peña’s play. Not only is she tasked with keeping the family together, Aying also needs to assume the responsibility of building the home.

Throughout the discussion of this chapter, I seek to ground the tense yet tenuous strings that connect the three characters in Peña’s *Flipzoids* in U.S. immigration laws, simultaneously connecting and separating the Philippines from the United States. Aside from the generational gap between mother and daughter, their contrasting views and responses to their new statuses as immigrants form part of the major conflict of the play. Furthermore, the mother’s storytelling and performance of rituals in the text conjure up the *babaylan*, the female ritual specialist of pre-colonial communities of the Philippines. While Aying’s actions partly contribute to the comedic intentions of the play, she could also be seen as fulfilling the role she shares with the *babaylan* as a binding force of the family/community. Whether she succeeds in doing so or not and why will also be part of my interrogation of the text. Therefore, the role of the mother will be analyzed even as the *babaylan* looms and makes her strong presence known.

As Peña exposes the cracks and fissures sustained by the Filipino home, he also portrays a home engaged in active struggle to simultaneously withstand traumas caused by immigration,

¹¹ This statement was taken from former president Aquino’s speech before the Joint session of the United States Congress on September 18, 1986 at the United States Capitol, Washington, D.C.

rebuilding the home, and reunifying the family. Hence, in this chapter, I intend to examine Aying's failed and problematic attempts in reunification, and then, her death that prompts the questions: Is reunification of the transnational family ever truly possible? Is the project of rebuilding in the throes of immigration a lost cause?

To conclude my examination, Chapter Two will also offer a brief examination of Han Ong's *Middle Finger* (2000) to serve as a contrasting idea of home in relation to Peña's *Flipzoids*. Based on Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening*, *Middle Finger* revolves around the lives of Catholic, teenage schoolboys, but as the play attempts to elucidate the relationship between two particular boys, Jakob and Lunga, both second generation Filipino-Americans, the text also lays bare the unconventional relationships or lack thereof which shapes them. After a teacher accuses Lunga of cheating on an essay, events then lead to the discovery of the boy's accidental poisoning of his stepfather. The guilt-ridden Lunga commits suicide after his expulsion from school. Upon Lunga's death, the rebellious Jakob decides to change his ways much to the surprise of his classmates and despite the absence of support from his father. The play closes with Jakob and the ghost of Lunga speaking of their plan for revenge. Unfortunately, it is only in the virtual land of a videogame that the two friends could ever be together again or have a rough sense of home.

Within their domestic space, the immigrant family in *Middle Finger* suffers from the pressure to uphold standards of the ideal Filipino family from the Philippines and, at the same time, to keep up with the middle-class U.S. American family and its lifestyle in the United States. In this chapter, I will argue that the fathers in the play embody these said pressures. Their inability to enact their role, first as a disciplinarian—Jakob's father decides not to discipline his son when they migrate to the U.S.—disrupts institutionalized notions of the stable Filipino home and the ideal Filipino family. According to the 1986 Philippine Constitution, “[t]he State recognizes the Filipino family as the foundation of the nation. Accordingly, it shall strengthen its solidarity and actively promote its total development.” Since the strength of the nation depends on the strength of the family, a “weak” father unable to fulfill his parental duties weakens the basic foundation of the nation accordingly.

Nevertheless, although the play successfully puts forward a clear critique of authority, the presence of “weak” fathers negates its potential to be cogent. Jakob's planned act of rebellion in recognition of Lunga's suicide never comes into fruition. Thus, I contend that the activation of

the home in Ong's case occurs in reverse – one of de-activation, and what we are left with are Filipino homes in stasis and at an impasse.

The Filipino-American homes I examine in these texts are sites of contestations wherein, already bearing the trauma of an imperial invasion from “back home” in the Philippines, need to rebuild their homes in the place of their relocations amidst the political, social, historical and cultural strains that keep them excluded from the U.S. nation-state. This introduction provided a brief purview into the history of the Philippines and its U.S. colonization that continues to shape both nation-states' relations. The homes in the three plays I interrogate, however, do not offer all points of view on the Filipino-American home, yet this study hopes to provide a comprehensive addition to the small but growing scholarship on Filipino-American drama. As I proceed to highlight the characters' acts of home-making and the complex negotiations they undertake to do so, I ultimately draw attention to the ways these homes become interrogative sites for past, present, and future entanglements between the Philippines and the United States. As the past always catches up with the present and the present forebodes a hopeful or dim future for migrants and minorities in the U.S., the dramatic re-presentations of Filipino-American homes, engaged in the constant activity of reconstitution, of building and re-building, invite only the most thorough investigation.

**CHRIS MILLADO'S *PEREGRINASYON*: ACTIVATING FILIPINO-AMERICAN
TRANSHISTORICAL DOMESTICITY**

*“You know, Teban, it’s funny but you learn to love your home when you’re away
from it. Now, I understand why Tatang has been risking his life to fight for the
landless peasants.”*
—Simeon in *Peregrinasyon*

In October 2007, Philippine Senator Manny Villar filed Philippines’ Senate Resolution No. 177 for the return to the Philippines of two church bells currently located at the F.E. Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming. These two large church bells were taken as war booty in 1899 by Company C of the U.S. Army’s 9th Infantry after the “Balangiga Massacre” on Samar, an island in the central region of the Philippines. In a surprise attack, Filipino dissidents ambushed the soldiers of Company C.¹² The “Balangiga Bells” were tolled to signal Filipino registers to organize their attack against U.S. soldiers, but dissidents ultimately failed to dispel the U.S. presence in the Philippines. Despite a number of pleas for their return (with Villar’s as the most recent), the “Balangiga Bells” to this day remain in the possession of the United States.¹³ In Cheyenne, these bells seemingly remain inert, now housed in a formal outdoor memorial, waiting for the still irresolvable question of who can lay claim and call themselves their “rightful” owner. Disrupting the vista of Wyoming’s flat plains, these symbolic bells simultaneously evoke the violent military attacks employed by the U.S. to pacify Filipino “natives” and the Filipinos’ acts of resistance, which far too often escape Western historical accounts of the U.S.’s occupation of this archipelago nation. The controversy that surrounds propriety of the “Balangiga Bells” confirms how they serve as synecdoches that connote the confluence of histories that are found in their mutual claims by both the United States and the Philippines. For the Philippines, the bells monumentalize a piece of the nation’s revolutionary history as a U.S. colony. For the U.S, they function to commemorate the lives lost in the nation-state’s military history in the Philippines.

¹² Delmendo, Sharon. *The Star-Entangled Banner: One Hundred Years of America in the Philippines*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2004. Print.

¹³ Every Philippine president since the bells possession by the U.S. has asked for their return to the Philippines. However, each petition has been denied. Dimasalang. "Balangiga Church Bells displayed at Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming." *FilipinoForum.Net*. phpBB Group, 2007. Web. 6 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.filipinoforum.net/>>.

The issues surrounding the Balangiga Bells recalls the dense historical imbrications that I suggest Filipino playwright Chris Millado aims to unearth and disentangle through his play, *Peregrinasyon* (1994). While Millado's play presents the history of these two countries' interactions within its story, the text does not valorize one nation nor denounce the other. Instead, within the theatrical space created by *Peregrinasyon*, Millado illustrates that long standing transnational events link the Philippine nation-state and its former colonial ruler, arguing that Philippine and U.S. histories should be viewed as "inexorably internal to each other" (Kramer 33).

It is in this context of inextricably linked sites between the Philippines and its former colonizer that I would like to read Millado's *Peregrinasyon* as a text that activates the "idea of home," which manifests as dwellings, nations, and a sense of place in the play. The foregrounding of this idea of home evinces the relationship between the two nation-states. Because Simeon, the young Filipino male protagonist, embarks on a journey that connects the two nation-states together, the text may be seen as offering an analysis about the underpinnings of the migrant's peregrination from the Philippines to the United States: what drives the Filipino migrant to leave the colonized home to go to the imperial center? Indeed the implicit suggestion throughout the play's story maintains that migrant histories need to be told and included in U.S. nationalist discourse and historiography in order to uncover a clearer depiction of immigrant history in the U.S., thereby destabilizing fixed notions of a U.S. nation/homeland, which feed anti-immigrant political agendas and as well as xenophobia. Also, not only does the play break apart latent Orientalist archetypes heaped upon Asian migrants to the U.S., the play also adds the "forgotten"—if not completely unknown—tenets of Philippine peoples' immigration experiences to the U.S., productively broadening the spectrum of Asian-American identities found in the United States.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze how Millado's play destabilizes notions about homes "left behind" by the migrant in his/her native country and the new homes they need to build in the land of their relocation. In this examination, I will argue that both homes—the migrant's point of origin and her destination—should be considered as crucial sites that contribute to the constant activity of home-making, a term and activity that connotes not only establishing physical dwellings but also cultivating a sense of place and belonging. In

Peregrinasyon, the home is neither permanently fixed nor perpetually mobile in Millado's renderings.

Peregrinasyon focuses simultaneously on the home of a U.S. military colonel in the Philippines and also on the home sites within in the U.S. of the play's protagonist, Simeon. I will look at how Millado uses the colonizer's home in the Philippines, with its forced and militarized settlement, in sharp contrast to Simeon and his Filipino family's home, which exists in a state of constant motion that I call *activation* because Filipinos have been both an occupied and migrant people. For example, Simeon's original home is invaded in two separate senses. First, invasion describes the presence of U.S. colonizers in the Philippines. Second, to complicate matters, Simeon's family lives in the same physical dwelling as a U.S. Colonel and his wife. Therefore, in the Philippines, Simeon's sense of home constantly needs to reground itself in opposition to the recently arrived colonizers. Moreover, after his migration, Simeon's constant travel from one U.S. state to another illustrates the continuous act of home-making he needs to enact as an immigrant. Because these attempts at home-making metaphorically transgress national boundaries through the historical, cultural, and interpersonal linkages that Millado draws out in his play, I will also direct attention to Millado's dramaturgical shifts between the two imbricated locales of the Philippines and the U.S. In this, I will examine how the play suggests that although the colonial project intended a clean separation between the Philippines and the U.S., they are not hermetically sealed from one another. The U.S. occupation of the Philippines has, in fact, created a devised space in which the colonizer and the colonized both experience and are affected by historical and social circumstances and knotted political strands that connect both homes and countries and the lives of the people therein.

I will first explicate theoretical figurations of home offered by Una Chaudhuri in her book *Staging Place: The Geographies of Modern Drama* and Sarah Ahmed (et al.) in her anthology *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration* that help to establish my own formulation of activated homes in *Peregrinasyon*. Then I will offer a close reading of *Peregrinasyon* that explores the fraternal relationship between its two primary characters, Simeon and Esteban, the implications of Philippine settlement by U.S. military officer Col. Gordon and his wife, and finally, the play's ending, which simultaneously stages a revolt in the Philippines led by Esteban and a riot led by Simeon in Watsonville, California. Investigation into these particular actions in the play will help me elucidate how Millado presents the two homes

that denote the Philippines and the United States as contiguous in nature. In this, *Peregrinasyon* illuminates how the Filipino home has been deeply affected by U.S. imperialism; concomitantly, the U.S. “homeland” has been changed decidedly by the migration of Filipinos to the U.S. in the twentieth century.

Set in the 1930s, *Peregrinasyon* tells the story of Simeon, a young man from the town of Sta. Lucia in the Philippines, who sets out for the United States with other young Filipino men to find employment. Even after Spain ceded control of the Philippines to the U.S. in 1898, lands were not returned to its native farmers in Sta Lucia. This possession has created an impoverished and rebellious native population. In California, Simeon falls in love with a white U.S. American woman named Patrice, further heightening one of the play’s central conflicts that addresses the Depression-era’s racial tensions, and ultimately, violence against Filipino farm workers in California by unemployed white male laborers. Meanwhile, Simeon’s family, who works for and lives with a U.S. military officer and his wife in their newly established Philippine home “base,” becomes involved with the Philippines’ growing underground resistance movement against the U.S. military presence in their town of Sta. Lucia. Left behind in the Philippines, Simeon’s younger brother Esteban rises to lead his country’s resistance efforts against the U.S. Utilizing scenes that dramatize continuing exchanges between the brothers through stage devices such as postcards, photographs, reenacted film sequences, and shared dreamscapes, Millado skillfully interweaves the narrative of Simeon’s U.S. migration and Esteban’s revolutionary efforts to drive out U.S. American presence in Sta. Lucia. Their exchanges across the Pacific Ocean come to inform and impact each other’s choices and actions illustrating the “intricate relationship of revolution and migration” (Millado 276). In the play’s pivotal scene, their actions and lives powerfully converge across the impossibility of physical space split by an ocean when the story depicts Simeon and other farm workers staging a violent uprising in Watsonville, CA while Esteban concurrently leads a peasant revolt in Sta. Lucia. As a result of the Philippine revolt, the brother’s father and eventually Esteban dies. Simeon and Patrice have a baby girl, but faced with the unrelenting waves of discrimination they receive as an interracial couple, they decide to move away from California in search of a better home. However, Simeon and Patrice chose to leave their mixed-race daughter in the care of a close Filipina friend to protect her from the bigotry they will continue to meet.

Chronicling the story of the two brothers and their separate locations splits the play's narrative and location of its setting. The intricacies of this complex plot and split narrative have confounded or eluded some of its reviewers and critics. For example, D.J.R. Bruckner of the *New York Times* praised Millado for his direction of the play in a 1998 New York City production by the esteemed Ma-Yi Theater company, yet Bruckner wrote that the play's "blurred plot and mystical dialogue" were reasons for the playwright's "failure" to "hold together two stories separated by the Pacific" (Bruckner, par.3). Bruckner's critique seems paradigmatic of how Western audiences normally view the possibilities concerning the dramatization of homes on stage. Insights from theatre scholar Una Chaudhuri's landmark work *Staging Place: The Geographies of Modern Drama* theorize the idea of theatrical domestic space and its significance:

The spatiality of modern drama involves a complex figuration of its favorite setting, the domestic interior. The idea of home . . . establishes a discourse that can be imagined as a semantic spectrum whose two poles are occupied by the tropes of belonging and exile . . . In whatever quests, revolts, contests and ambitions the heroes of this drama get involved, they invariably encounter and engage the issue of home, that is, of belonging and exile. (27)

Bruckner's confusion seems to stem from a propensity to favor plays that do not disrupt spatial and temporal linearities or, in other words, plays that consider the "semantic spectrum" between ideas of home that confound belonging or exile.

Bruckner might have expected to witness the characters' neat passages from their sites of departures to their new settlements yet found none. This assumption would bolster a dominant narrative of immigration to the U.S. whereby immigrants move in a steadfast way from their old homes to establish new ones in America without "backward looking" movement or capitulation. Chaudhuri's ideas invite us to think of the possibilities in between the "two poles of belonging and exile" (one either wants to leave one's home or belong to a new one) and towards the "semantic spectrum" that breaks apart the forces that hold this problematic immigration narrative together, which in turn coheres a dominant narrative of U.S. belonging and national identity sealed through citizenship. Instead, Chaudhuri's figuration desires not to efface the complexity of the experiences of migrants and those they "left behind," which eventually causes the bifurcation of the migrant's affective ties to their home. While the two home sites in

Peregrinasyon were distinct in Bruckner's eyes, the movement between the two brother's narratives, and thus a new creation of the idea of home in total, may have caused the critic's disorientation: "[T]he playwright's effort to hold together two stories separated by the Pacific fails" (Bruckner, par. 3). And although Bruckner appreciated the music, dance, and spectacle of the production, he seems to have missed the play's most important idea: the immigrant journey between the Philippines and the U.S. encompasses a multidimensional, counter-punctual journey that blurs any straightforward, sequential ordering of narrative, time, or space. Hence, my examination insists that Chris Millado's *Peregrinasyon* requires analysis that intentionally chooses *not*—as Bruckner advises in his review—to “ignore the tangled plot” (Bruckner, par. 5). This chapter will not only unpack the historical underpinnings of early Filipino peregrinations, but more importantly, my discussion will foreground the homes both left behind and created afar, triggered by migration, which constantly and simultaneously bear up the process of “uprooting” and “regrounding.” (Ahmed et. al 1)

Feminist scholars Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castaneda, Anne-Marie Fortier, and Mimi Sheller were the first to use the concept of “uprootings/regroundings” as a theoretical framework to describe the tenets of migration in their anthology of the same title. Arguing that “[b]eing grounded is not necessarily about being fixed; being mobile is not necessarily about being detached,” Ahmed, Castaneda, Fortier, and Sheller destabilize notions of the migrant home as merely ambulatory and the “grounded home” as stable, immutable, and unsusceptible to any future uprooting (1). This view proves most pertinent to my study as I look at the homes rendered within *Peregrinasyon*. The fluidity of these scholars' concept not only lends itself to reconsidering the activities of homes and the condition of their residents but also usefully deters any form of straightforward, unidirectional analysis of movement from an “old” home to a “new” home. This idea begins to explain how, although physically absent from Sta. Lucia after migrating to the U.S., Simeon continues to maintain an invaluable “presence” in his family's home—both the nation and the domicile. Moreover, Simeon's migration to the U.S. does not provide a “new home” so much as it creates two unstable ones: both in the Philippines and in the U.S. The concept of “uprootings/regroundings” makes room for the possibility of actual and imagined returns for the migrant, such as those composed in *Peregrinasyon's* dramaturgy.

The framework of “uprooting/regroundings” broadens the space for a rethinking of home and migration “in terms of a plurality of experiences, histories, and constituencies, and of the

workings of institutional structures” (Ahmed et al. 2). In the analysis that follows, homes of the characters in *Peregrinasyon* will be theorized while also interrogating the U.S.’s processes that engendered the Filipino characters’ uprooting. As I will argue, in Millado’s story, the migration of U.S. military officer Colonel Gordon and his wife to the Philippines and their attempts to make home forms a strategic counterpoint to Simeon’s migration to the U.S. Noting that colonizers also had to negotiate the experience of travel and resettlement, the colonizer’s “uprootings/regroundings” will be considered in relation to the Filipino migrant’s journey. In an effort to chronicle the challenges U.S. citizens faced in their resettlement in the Philippines, Millado refutes the often assumed easy transposition of the colonizers’ home to new and often hostile locations.

Finally, this chapter will move beyond unpacking the historical underpinnings of early Filipino peregrinations by directing attention to the two activated home spaces foregrounded in *Peregrinasyon*:—Simeon’s former familial home in the Philippines and the many home sites in the U.S. that he attempts to establish in his journeys as a seasonal laborer. Based on the notion that both locations of home continuously withstand “uprootings/regroundings,” neither of these homes are forever fixed nor axiomatically mobile. As each home establishes itself, it also simultaneously gesticulates within the borders of the nation-state and metaphorically transgresses national boundaries supposed to enclose them. Moreover, because the play dramaturgically bridges these two homes through historical, cultural, and interpersonal connections, I contend that the text evinces the transhistorical relationship of the Philippines and the U.S. In the same vein that the text rejects a simplistic depiction of the tropes of exile and belonging, the text saliently complicates the dialectics of colonization and migration and cogently argues for an oscillating investigation of the two homes to expose and offer for examination the complications caused by colonization and resistance. Thus in the play’s story, the interrogation of one home always leads to the other and then back again. Through deftly staged simultaneous scenes, Millado carves on stage a space where, like the situation of the Balangiga Bells, one home cannot be examined without the other, disputing any unilateral analyses of the relationship of the United States and the Philippines forged by colonialism.

Homes Unhinged

Despite the two homes that form the crux of the play, Millado begins *Peregrinasyon* in an entirely non-descript place that precludes appropriation of a singular locale. In fact, Millado

creates a highly abstracted space by placing an ominous hill of “suitcases of different makes and sizes” in stage center of the theatre’s “domestic interior” (297). The bags, though already highly recognizable symbols of travel, invoke pertinent questions: Where did they come from or where is their destination? More importantly, do the bags suggest a separation from or a return to home? Hence, in addition to these suitcases suggesting the large number of migrants and their variegated experiences, they also signify myriad locations of home as opposed to the binary of separated sites/homes. As these bags continue to occupy the stage throughout the play, they create an aura of continuous mobility and impermanence. Iain Chambers, in his book *Migrancy, Culture, and Identity* takes Edward Said’s notion of the migrant’s “discontinuous state of being” and argues that migration provides an exemplary way of examining home; migration is a form of “restless interrogation, undoing its very terms of reference as the point of departure is lost along the way”(2). By placing the suitcases, potent symbols of both home and migration, on stage and unhinged from fixed sites of origins or destinations, Millado invites the audience to think of the playing area as a space of interrogation.

In the very first scene of *Peregrinasyon*, Millado does more than situate Simeon in his point of origin, the Philippines. Rather, from the play’s start, Millado begins destabilizing the idea of home as either a shelter the migrant longs to return to or as a form of prison from which he/she seeks an escape. Thus, at the same time that the audience learns that Simeon plans to leave Sta. Lucia for economic reasons, Millado renders visible Simeon’s strong ties to his home. Riffing off the ritualistic atmosphere created during the play’s first moments, the playwright paints a religious tableau composed of Simeon’s mother, Nanang, and father, Tatang, as described in the stage directions: “*Nanang holds aloft the bleeding heart of the Mater Dolorosa [Sorrowful Mother]. Tatang’s head is crowned with thorns*” (278). By rendering Nanang in the image of the Virgin Mary and Tatang in the image of Jesus, Millado illustrates the sacral devotion Filipino children have for their crying, doleful mothers and their self-sacrificing, suffering fathers, which explains Simeon’s struggles to leave home. Feelings of guilt usually accompany a decision such as leaving home for the Filipino child for fear that he or she will be labeled with “*utang na loob*” (ingratitude) for all that one’s parents have done for them. Moreover, Millado further parses out the role of the father in his son’s life to reveal Tatang’s patriarchal complexity. Tatang is a father who gives out demanding orders: “I said walk this way” and also possesses helpful wisdom: “Carry this cross and you will be saved” (278);

someone who is willing to sacrifice himself, but also one who can turn to cruelty: “I should have left you [Simeon] to die when you were burning with fevers” (278). Simeon, depicted as one who acknowledges the sacrifice of his father, also sees his father’s more controlling side, further supporting his ambivalent feelings towards the “home.” Tied to his family by love and respect, Simeon also suffers from feelings of resentment and anger, which leads to his desire to escape from home. In the end, failing to convince his parents about the advantages of leaving Sta. Lucia, Simeon decides to “disobey” his father’s orders, and Tatang emerges as the angry but nevertheless self-sacrificing father. Simeon and Tatang’s fraught relationship forestalls quick assumptions that he will never return. Although Simeon decides to leave, he would later on explain to his brother, Esteban, who complains about their father’s strict parenting and concealed revolutionary activities: “He’s doing it for you. So you can have your own land to till in the future.” (293).

Millado fleshes out Simeon’s impending travel and its significance for the welfare of both him and his family by setting it against Tatang’s annual journey as a devotee of the local Lenten tradition, the *pasyon*, a reenactment of Christ’s passion to the cross on Biblical Calvary. Tatang, a secret leader of the underground revolutionary movement in Sta. Lucia, participates in the *pasyon* as a form of devotion and plea for the granting of a desire. Thus Simeon’s journey to the U.S. becomes imbued by the ideas of sacrifice, pain, and a sense of duty embodied in his father’s symbolic journey to Calvary and martyrdom: the *pasyon* ends when Simeon nails Tatang to a cross. While Simeon’s life has indeed been marked by his father’s struggles and journey: “I’ve trailed that cross as soon as I learned how to walk” (278), he also acknowledges that he must embark on a different path. As Simeon nails Tatang to the cross, the exchange between father and son provides crucial information concerning their differences:

SIMEON. [I] Stood and watched as blood burst from the mounds of your feet and
the valleys of your palms. (*Drives the nail deeper.*)

NANANG. Ayyyyy!

SIMEON. Sat on the hot stones as they raised your crucified body between
crosses of the two thieves. And when we walked back to our fields to sprinkle
the ricestalks with blood from your gaping wounds – you promised a
resurrection. Our *via crucis* did not end. It went on and on, year after year after
year. Through the drought. Through the typhoon. Through the earthquake.

(Drives the nail home. The pounding thunders through the house.) (278)

Here, not only do we learn that Simeon has always been witness to his father's suffering whereby he annually reenacts Jesus' crucifixion, but we also learn how Simeon helped Tatang in his mission to obtain "resurrection" or freedom from U.S. colonizers in Sta. Lucia. Yet aside from this visceral episode giving a historical and familial context to Simeon's impending migration to the U.S., Millado also renders visible the relation of the itinerant Filipino body to the ground on which it treads through carefully chosen metaphors that recall the natural landscape of Sta. Lucia. For example, as Simeon describes it, Tatang's body becomes a landscape of "mounds" and "valleys." Tatang's blood signifies pain, but it is also imbued with life-giving properties. Collected from his crucifixion and cast onto their rice crops, Tatang's blood sacrifice seeks to cultivate the regrowth of the land. Therefore, although it seems that Simeon believes his father's journey to exonerate the Philippines from colonial rule has been unrewarded and may be unattainable, he does not necessarily nor explicitly reject the journey's purpose or efficacy. One should recall their brief exchange a few moments earlier. Tatang tells Simeon: "Carry this cross and you will be saved" and his son replies: "I will be saved if I leave" (287). Tatang chooses to endure the harsh realities of their home in the Philippines. In contrast, Simeon decides that this solution is no longer the most viable action to make their lives better. While both men view the action of enduring a journey towards Philippine self-rule as a salient way of attaining salvation or liberation, Simeon makes a significant turn towards a voyage that will physically take him to a different place to achieve this end. Tatang firmly holds on to the belief that the journey should be continued in the Philippines, but Simeon disagrees, and thus decides to leave despite his parents' objections and the disrespect it will imprint on his parents.

Perhaps because the aforementioned verbal exchange does not suffice or for fear of its import being overlooked, Millado uses the body to reiterate his point, creating a visceral imprint on the minds of his readers/audience. As Simeon nails his father to the cross, he grows resolute in his decision to leave Sta. Lucia, and finally, when Simeon makes the firm decision to leave, Tatang's crucifixion is complete. Tatang's crucifixion and literal implanting onto the physical ground of Sta. Lucia concretizes the continuation of his mission to gain his town's freedom from the grip of U.S. colonizers. Furthermore, Millado uses another biblical metaphor to signify Simeon's new identity as a "wanderer." Instead of receiving a customary blessing for his journey, Tatang curses his son and names him Simeon after Samuel of Bellibeth, the "Jew

condemned to wander the earth for refusing to help Christ with the cross” (303). Then, the audience witnesses Simeon writhing on the ground, likening his journey out of his home, the “paradise” of Sta. Lucia, to that of Eden’s serpent (303). As the scene draws to a close, Millado has begun his activation of the home in Sta. Lucia: in Simeon’s departure, the home in Sta. Lucia experiences its figurative uprooting and simultaneously takes on the task of rebuilding in a new elsewhere. After Simeon’s departure, the play endeavors to vividly chronicle the divergent paths father and son will take in both Sta. Lucia and abroad.

The Home Falls Apart

Before the play’s action takes us to Simeon’s new locale of Watsonville, California, Millado opens up the home in the Philippines, foregrounding that both of Simeon’s homes—the first in Sta. Lucia and second in Watsonville—have incurred the invasion of colonizers and the concomitant exercise of colonial power. U.S. American soldiers have arrived and settled in the Filipino town and a distinct relationship of power comes into view as soon as the audience learns that Simeon’s family works for Colonel Gordon and his wife. Displaced from their home in the U.S., Millado features the colonizers as people who need to *make* their home in the Philippines. In order to “feel at home,” for example, Tatang, who works for the Colonel, brings onto the stage yet another suitcase: a steamer trunk filled with “a magnificent collection of stuffed animals, pressed butterflies, exotica displayed with the Colonel’s forty five caliber revolver” (288). These mementos evoke accrued memories of past colonial experiences when hung and displayed on the colonel’s “walls” and signify the Colonel and wife’s establishment of their new home. They also cleverly reflect the impermanence of the location of “home” for those serving the intent of colonial projects such as the Colonel and Mrs. Gordon.

More importantly, rather than portraying colonizers succeeding in the act of ordering landscapes, Millado enables the audience to become privy to the Colonel’s futile attempts to maintain *their* fixed home in Sta. Lucia and, in the end, depicts the home as one invaded by Simeon’s family. Hence, safeguarding their Philippine home by making sure that the “unknown” and the “Other” are kept under their watch appears to be the main preoccupation for the Colonel and his wife when they first are introduced. In the play’s second scene, when the newly arrived couple witnesses the unfamiliar *payson* Catholic Lenten ritual, the Colonel takes his brownie

camera¹⁴ to capture on film Lelang, an old woman, Esteban, and Nanang chanting. Tatang warns the colonel: “*Señor*, when you take a picture you steal their soul. They do not like for you to take picture. There are spirits, *Señor*. Spirits everywhere” (279). The women object ferociously, but the colonel takes their photograph anyway, mockingly saying: “it’s only a camera” (279). The colonel is confounded and compelled by what he views. His action of taking pictures attempts to fix, locate, and “capture” the Philippines and its peoples; his picture taking suggests a gesture of imperial power. Perhaps expecting the idealized or desired image of Filipinos as ever grateful for the presence of the U.S. military, the Colonel notes instead the people’s displeasure: “Have you seen a pleasant face among these people? Why do they have to frown and scowl all the time?” (279). In this, and despite the act of viewing *vis-à-vis* taking pictures, he fails to “see” the people he has been assigned to subordinate.

The ability to visualize and understand bears much significance for the Colonel who as a military officer must see and take visual control of the occupied land. Tatang’s position as the official census taker of the area likewise underlines the Colonel’s myopia—power shifts to Tatang, who as a secret revolutionary leader sees, knows, and is able to be in direct contact with the people of Sta. Lucia.¹⁵ The scenes between Tatang and Col. Gordon stress the Colonel’s anxiety and inability to be the principal purveyor of the land, especially given the audience’s knowledge of Tatang’s “true identity” as *Supremo*, the leader of a guerrilla group of dissidents in Sta. Lucia and the man Col. Gordon has received orders to find and kill. Also, with the guerillas secretly hiding within the mountains surrounding Sta. Lucia, the play underscores that the colonel—not the rebels—is the one under surveillance. Col. Gordon’s extreme frustration in not finding *Supremo* or at least gaining information on his whereabouts, finally gives way to a misguided conclusion:

COLONEL. Hate. Vengeance. That is what I see in the eyes of your people.

TATANG. Independencia, *señor*. That is what is written in their faces.

COLONEL. The time will come when you and your people will be ready for

¹⁴ The Brownie Camera was the first hand held camera cheap enough to make and market to children and the masses, which then helped to popularize amateur photography in the 1900s. Sold for a dollar, these cameras were accompanied by elf-like Brownie characters created by Palmer Cox featured in his 1904 book, *Brownies in the Philippines*. See Delmendo, Sharon. *The Star-Entangled Banner: One Hundred Years of America in the Philippines*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2004, 47-85. Print.

¹⁵ For a more detailed discussion on the census in the Philippines, see Vincent L. Rafael’s book *White Love: And Other Events in Filipino History. American encounters/global interactions*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.

independence. We are here to educate you and Christianize you. We are here as your brothers. You are my brother—my brown brother. Remember that.
(290)

In this scene, the colonel's inability to "see" escalates into a projection of his latent fears onto the faces of the inhabitants of Sta. Lucia. Aside from asserting that this brief exchange show the disparity between the Colonel and Tatang's individual perceptions of colonial actions, I draw attention to this scene because here Millado discloses the U.S.'s legitimizing efforts in Sta. Lucia, which run counter to the intimations of independence made by Tatang. In addition to imparting education and religion upon the Philippine peoples, the Colonel accredits legitimacy of rule by the U.S. through creating a manufactured and enforced kinship tie in the imperial relationship: Tatang is not his colonial subject, rather, he is likened to a family member—the colonel is his "brown brother." While Millado's strategic unraveling of the different strategies of the U.S. colonizers to invade and build homes in the Philippines makes them subject to further critique, they also serve as reminders that bonds have been forged between two homes and, therefore, must be acknowledged, remembered, and interrogated. In light of the Philippines' supposed decolonization, can the Philippines ever be free from its fictive brown brother? Or can the U.S. ever deny its "brother"?

Peregrinasyon clearly does not allow for a depiction of an uncomplicated domesticization of space by the U.S. colonizers who, in coming to the Philippines, thought of completely transplanting their homes to the Philippines (eventually manifested through the establishment of U.S. military bases in the country). Tatang, Nanang, and Esteban's forced "membership" and inclusion into the domestic space of the Gordon's home forcefully strikes at the foundation of the household. For example, Scene Ten of the play describes the subversive undertaking which occurs *inside* the Gordon's domestic space wherein Tatang drags Esteban and whips him in front of the Colonel and Mrs. Gordon for "stealing" the colonel's camera when in actuality Esteban asked for permission from Mrs. Gordon. Employing the same wooden pointer used by Mrs. Gordon to teach Esteban English, Tatang whips him in order to "educate" him of the consequences of stealing from his colonial masters. The curious interplay of submission and subversion becomes apparent during the confrontation between father and son that escapes the Colonel's camera lens. Much more than stealing from colonial masters, Tatang objects to the use of the camera's abilities, which can help lead the U.S. military to the location of Filipino

insurgents. Therefore, in what seems to be a mere display of compliance, the act of subjection ultimately serves the rebel cause by protecting the guerrillas from the view of the Colonel.

The undetected revolutionary activities of Simeon's parents (Tatang's leadership and Nanang's involvement in the recruitment of members) continually threaten the Colonel's "home" and impede the military officer's domesticization project in Sta. Lucia. In Scene Seven, while the colonel interrogates Tatang on the location and identity of *Supremo*, the initiation of members into the revolutionary group occurs simultaneously at the fringe of the Colonel's home. Soon, Millado actualizes this threat with the entrance of villagers/dancers performing a beautiful "dance-macabre" which slowly transforms to the display of the use of the *eskrima*, a stick used for wielding a martial arts form indigenous to the Philippines. In this scene, Tatang finally reveals himself as *Supremo*, filigreed with tattoos and the society's glowing emblems on his body (290). As *Supremo*, Tatang accepts what he must do to gain freedom from his U.S. colonizers: "There was a time when I refused to admit how little nourishment one can find on this soil. I pretended everything was beautiful. Admired the land passionately like a gentleman hopelessly entangled in a weird and dreary love affair. I willingly confused ugliness with nature. Now, what attracts me to this land is its hideousness. All that is beautiful has taken flight" (290). Tatang/*Supremo* leads the villagers one by one to symbolically impale the colonel, "the hideous," with their *eskrima* sticks, foreshadowing the intent of their revolution's ultimate goal. Chanting, elder Filipina women transform into black crows and descend on the Colonel before alighting in "flight," symbolizing both the Philippine people and *Supremo*'s predictions. After this ritual, the colonel remains unaware of his symbolic violence and is left "feverish" wondering about "weird presences" felt (290). In addition to this scene illustrating how the colonizer fails to protect his private home, the silent yet no less forceful acts of resistances by Tatang, Nanang, and Esteban within the colonial and domestic framework imposed on them, effectively weakens the Western home on Philippine soil.

The text forcefully challenges the seeming impenetrability and stability of the colonial home. Despite the desire to control what lies outside the home and guard its inside spaces from exterior forces, Millado depicts the colonizer's home as unable to do either. In this, the Colonel's frustrated and incomplete domestication of space in Sta. Lucia and of Simeon's family's home troubles the notion of a smooth transfer of the many senses of "home" to the U.S. colony. In fact, in the same way that Simeon encounters many challenges to building a new home in the U.S.,

Millado renders Colonel and Mrs. Gordon's acts of making and re-making homes as a troubled and contested process. Although colonial power believed that visually and physically controlling landscapes and domesticating space would accomplish inhabitants' compliance, the imposition of the U.S. American home on Philippine soil did not guarantee power. Therefore, what the text ultimately does is emblemize the highly problematic thinking of the fixity of homes *and* provides the necessary sharp contrast between the homes, led by Simeon and Esteban, who are both constantly in the process of making and re-making their ideas of home.

Regrounding: Theatrical Strategies of Home

If we follow the trope of exile or escape from the home, once the migrant arrives in the U.S., the Philippines merely becomes a point of origin. However, Millado's text takes measured steps in order *not* to reinscribe the notion that homes left behind by migrants remain inert and immobile because they are geographically situated in a faraway place. In Scene Three, Simeon and other young Filipino men share stage space with their relatives in Sta. Lucia. The migrants move about different areas of the stage to suggest the various stopovers during their travel to the U.S. Repudiating the sole ascendancy of the imperialist's mapping of its territorial space, Simeon and other migrants take on a cartographic function in the play as they, with their cameras, stop and pose for pictures of their journey in an effort to familiarize the unfamiliar. Yet in comparison with the Colonel's use of the camera, Simeon and these migrants figuratively capture space in the making of their homes; they will send these images to their families in the Philippines to help family members imagine their continuing presence in their lives. Meanwhile, their relatives from Sta. Lucia physically rush in and are staged to "meet them" as postcards and letters are handed around and narrated by Simeon. The news and well-wishes from the U.S. fill the aural gap of the scene. Additionally, the scene gets dramatic punctuation through the use of repeating flashes of light from a camera's flashbulb accompanied by the sound of exploding glass. In this first simultaneous scene of the play, where locations are split but action is done in a parallel fashion, Millado succeeds in demonstrating that Simeon's peregrination implicates the old home with his creation of the new home. It becomes palpable that he does not wish to sever with Sta. Lucia (and simply migrate to the U.S.) as he maintains continuous and detailed correspondence with his family in the Philippines throughout the play. For example, through the simultaneous reading of a letter of Simeon and written to his brother Esteban, Simeon figuratively invites his family to participate in his trans-Pacific life:

ESTEBAN. (*Reads from a letter [from Simeon]*) “No hard time yet. Will send money to you so you can watch cinema . . .

SIMEON. (*Continues*) “. . . My friends and I rent Model T and ride car just like in the movies. We go out to picnic and roast pig just like in Sta. Lucia. I hope you are well. Until we meet again, Simeon Capistrano. P.S. . . .

ESTEBAN AND SIMEON. (*Read together*) Give my regards to the old carabao [Tatang]. (281)

From this interaction, used throughout the play, the audience sees how vibrantly Simeon’s family exists in his mind despite the distance as he is depicted to be still informing them of his day to day activities. Even though he references the Model T and Hollywood, Simeon also ensures that he tells them that he maintains relations with other Filipinos through gatherings.

Millado also uses the creation of a “film” in the play as another theatrical device constructed to emphasize the presence of Simeon’s family in U.S. home-making activities. Here, Simeon draws parallels between his life in the U.S. to the “exotic” narratives of Hollywood Valentino movies. It is apparent from his description that both he and his family are quite familiar with Valentino’s significations of heroism and adventure and have shared the experience of watching his films when they were together in the Philippines. Simeon invites and welcomes his family to view the film *The Sheik* wherein Simeon “acts out” the Valentino-esque character (“a Sheik”) with Patrice, the white woman he meets and eventually marries in the play, as his romantic conquest. With his new relationship in full view of his relatives and portrayed through the reenactment of the story of “the Sheik,” (acted out as a film on stage), Simeon describes and exposes to his family the contentious issue of a Filipino migrant such as himself courting and marrying a white woman to which his own brother, Esteban comments in amazement: “She’s *puraw* – She’s white” (285).

The very first line that Simeon and Esteban share (“Give my regards to the old carabao”) is telling of the succeeding scenes wherein Esteban’s function in the text becomes underscored. With Simeon “physically” gone from their house, Millado uses Esteban to activate the home in Sta. Lucia. With the Philippines’ impending revolutionary activities already providing a strong undercurrent, it is through Esteban that the text shatters notions of homes which sit quietly, thus only maintaining oppressive configurations of power that control and order them. Thus, as the first simultaneous scenes between Esteban and Simeon remind the audience, while the migrants

begin the act of creating homes in the U.S., allowing Philippine homes to metaphorically travel with them to the U.S., homes in Sta. Lucia have also been set into motion.

Remembering the previous scenes between Simeon and Esteban, once again the text exposes and interrogates the predominant idea that the migrant leaves home only to start a completely different and removed life at the site of his relocation. Take the case of an exchange between Simeon and Esteban across the ocean in Scene Eleven where we learn that Simeon's U.S. work life remains closely knit with his familial life in Sta. Lucia:

SIMEON. Tatang needs you. He is growing old.

ESTEBAN. Why don't you come back and do that then.

SIMEON. I will – as soon as I earn enough money. You know, Teban [Esteban's nickname], it's funny but you learn to love your home when you're away from it. Now, I understand why Tatang has been risking his life to fight for the landless peasants. (294)

This scene between Simeon and Esteban cogently encapsulates the complex entanglement created by the U.S. occupation of the Philippines and the concomitant, if not almost always, necessitated migration of Filipino workers to the U.S. Through Millado's conscious foregrounding of this continuous interconnection between the two brothers, he creates the expanded space where the audience finally views how the two homes collide and intertwine.

Yet Esteban's "journey" to reground his family's home in Sta. Lucia does not begin as expected. Jealous of his brother's departure, Esteban first expresses his own desire to go to the U.S.: "*Agat-Amerika* [from Amerika]. Dis letter smells like Amerika. We go to America, 'Tang?'" (281). Despite the elaborate scene revealing the material hardships of Simeon and other migrants, in the movie sequence that follows, Esteban exhibits how much he "knows" about America which he learned from his brother: "Your letters, manong! You said once a Pinoy [Filipino] learn to dress up like American they look a *quartermillion* times better than American" (284). However, in the same scene, Esteban also shows signs of the influence of coming in contact with the bigotry of U.S. military soldiers. Acting as the Sheik character narrating the movie of his U.S. life to Esteban, Simeon tells his brother that "Anything can happen in Hollywood" and chides him to "stop bothering me so I can finish my monkey business" (284), namely pursuing Patrice/his love interest. Esteban misunderstands his brother's directive and replies back: "Go climb a tree you brown monkey googoo!" (284). Simeon is appalled:

SHEIK/SIMEON. (*Horried*) Where you learn that? Huh?

ESTEBAN. The American soldiers tell that to me when they want coconut from coconut tree. 'Hey, go climb coconut, brown monkey googoo!'

SHEIK/SIMEON. You stay away from them, you understand? And don't breathe a word until the movie is over.

(*Simeon goes back to the business of seducing the Lady.*)

Esteban has confused the colloquialism “monkey business” (romantic pursuit) with the pejorative use of “monkey” in reference to the Filipino people and the demeaning taunts wielded by soldiers.

Esteban’s statements depict the inevitability of transference that occurs because of the transnational exchange between the homes of Simeon and himself. With his camera, Simeon serves as the cartographer of U.S. space for his family in Sta. Lucia and thus constructs America for Esteban. From carefully framed “pictures”—staged tableau moments within the play, and select information conveyed through “staged” letters and postcards, Esteban comes away with, at best, a fractured view of the U.S. However, tucked in the middle of Millado’s play lies a scene where Simeon and Esteban meet in dreamscape. While Simeon realizes the advantage of having Esteban remain home in the Philippines, Esteban expresses his desire to follow his brother to the U.S.: “Easy for you to say while you’re drinking rum in the bars and playing billiard in the pool halls. It’s easy to imagine revolution while you’re driving around in your Model T’s in the open roads of America” (294). Simeon’s prodding that “it isn’t easier here” does not work to discourage his brother’s ambitions, and Esteban remains firm in his wish to go to the U.S. because “nothing can be more difficult than this goddamn town” (294). From this point forward, although Esteban is physically removed from the U.S., his relationship with the Colonel and Mrs. Gordon *and* his correspondence with his older brother develop in him a desire for the unfamiliar, consequently changing his idea of home. Although the initial movement of the home that Esteban first enacts is one of dislocation (moving to the U.S.), Esteban will eventually decide to take up his father’s revolutionary mission to free their home in the Philippines. After the quelled insurgent attack that also leads to the death of Tatang, Esteban decides to stay: “I want to stay with my Tatang” (296) and will join with the guerrillas.

Meanwhile, Millado deploys the interracial relationship of Simeon and Patrice as one that elucidates the challenges of creating a home in Watsonville, California. The audience learns

more about Patrice and Simeon's relationship through a rendering of their close and deep connection with their respective father/lands. Starting the discussion with the difference between natural forces such as the Philippine *bagio* (typhoon) and the U.S. tornado—"Big wind. Howling wind. They destroy the farms, the houses . . . change people's lives . . ." (286), Simeon and Patrice establish that these life-changing natural calamities befall both their countries and wreak the same forms of havoc despite the distance between and differences in their cultures. As Patrice and Simeon discover this connection between them, discussion of these natural forces triggers recollections of their individual homes, specifically painful memories of their fathers. Patrice recounts when her father made her dance for money in front of his friends:

PATRICE. There I watched my father become a gambler. My father taught me a trick. When the gamblers came over to our house, I would stand by the table and watch them. Then my father would say, 'Patty, show the men something cute!' I would catch the hem of my dress, give a wide grin, and pull it up my chest. And the men would howl and stomp on the floor, throwing coins into the fold of my dress. My father made sure that all of this happened when my mother was away . . . (286)

For his part, Simeon recalls the blend of consternation and concern that hampers his relationship with his father as when they must collect their crops to save them from an impending typhoon, worth noting in his full recall:

SIMEON. But we hear the typhoon coming. So, we try to save the corn and place as many on the cart. And the poor animal, he was scared . . . He wouldn't move . . . get stuck in the mud . . . It was our year's harvest, you see. My father shout and scream at the carabao . . . I don't know what got into me, I picked up the largest stick I found and started beating the animal. I kept on hitting him and hitting him and HITTING HIM. I didn't know I was crying, I thought it was the rain on my face. I didn't stop until my father pulled me away. I've never seen my father so angry. He threw me to the ground. And I wanted to hit him back . . . *(The memory overcomes Simeon, he struggles to continue the story.)* . . . I wanted to hit back . . . so badly . . . but I . . . I run away . . . I didn't go home that night. Slept out in the fields. When, I returned home, my father wouldn't speak to me. And never spoke to me for a long time . . . (286)

Because both fathers may be perceived to stand synechdocically for the Philippines and the U.S., painful memories involving their fathers not only bonds Simeon and Patrice but, more importantly, presages their departures from their individual childhood homes. Nevertheless, the similarities Simeon and Patrice share do not elide the racial differences that pull them apart even as they encourage the growing love between them that, as Patrice recognizes, will bring new kinds of storms:

PATRICE. I feel another tornado approaching.

SIMEON. I'll go up to your brother and ask for your hand in marriage.

PATRICE. We can go to jail for that. (286)

More than elucidating the hard labor conditions such as long working hours, limited food, and low wages that Filipino farm migrant workers had to cope with, *Peregrinasyon* lays bare how in the same vein that Filipinos become racialized and discriminated against in the Philippines, these same issues would affect the Filipino immigrants' U.S. home-making as well. The Filipino migrant workers' relationship with land in the U.S. forms the basis of their discrimination by U.S. white workers. Claude, Patrice's brother, has a virulent reaction to his sister's relationship with Simeon, whom Claude regards as a member of the "jungle folk." Poor, white, and also a migrant farm worker, Claude ascertains Filipinos based on what he *sees*—in a fashion similar to Colonel Gordon's assessments:

CLAUDE. . . . During the night they dress up like Solomons strutting 'round like peacocks. They even have Roosevelt's cufflinks on their sleeves . . . That started me thinkin' – here we are poor and hungry and wondering why those men could have all those cufflinks when we couldn't have enough to eat. Them Filipinos are killing white labor . . . (287)

In 1930s California, taxi dance halls were "a key site of sociality amongst and between immigrants" where Filipino men purchased a dance ticket, chose a girl among a group of taxi dancers, and danced with her to the music of the band that night (Burns 23). Filipino-American scholar, Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns in her article "*Splendid dancing*": *Filipino "Exceptionalism" in Taxi Dancehalls* notes that the Filipino men's "exceptional" dancing abilities and display of hypersexuality in these halls led to "exceptionalism" and violent racist attacks from white male workers. *Peregrinasyon* draws upon the tensions of the taxi dance hall in many of its scene settings and, in this, we see that Claude's opposition to Filipinos is actually

a compounded one: much more than a reaction to the Filipino male's "take over" of the land as farmers or competing laborers, Patrice's brother objects to the Filipinos' "overbearing" presence in the taxi dance hall where Filipino males bodily and figuratively "ruled" the space of the taxi dancehall.¹⁶ For Claude, the early Filipino migrant workers are simply out of place in the U.S. landscape and must remain where they belong. In a final and succinct observation laced with nationalistic and xenophobic reactions, Claude virulently asserts: "...They do not keep their place" (287).

Simultaneity

When we look closely at both homes that Millado at first delineates, we begin to make out parallels between the two locations. While the migrant sought to build a new home in the U.S., Esteban aimed to rebuild the native home through means of a revolution—taking over his late father's lifelong mission. Through the interweaving of Simeon's protest riot in Watsonville with Esteban's revolutionary attack in Sta. Lucia, their two spheres/homes collide then interpenetrate, ultimately animating a fused, shared space. The stage directions, quoted at length here, demonstrate how the melding of these two incidents carve out a space wherein characters from both Sta. Lucia and Watsonville are implicated in one "*tumultuous event happening*" (301). On stage, performer becomes spectator, spectator becomes witness in each and all's movement to create meaning, emphasizing one's being and significance for the other:

Simeon walks holding a wood plank. He stares at the weapon for a long time before beginning the ritual. He hesitates. He forgets. He searches for the voices of the ancestors deep within his bones.

Esteban walks in with eskrima¹⁷ [Philippine Martial Arts] stick and knife.

Esteban takes out his anting-anting [amulet] and prepares for battle.

Manang [female Filipina elder] enters and gives her blessings.

¹⁶ Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns examines the geopolitics in the taxi dancehalls and the racial workings that characterized it. See Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns. "'Splendid Dancing': Filipino 'Exceptionalism' in Taxi Dancehalls." *Dance Research Journal* 40.2 (2008): 23-40. Print.

¹⁷ *Eskrima* dates back to 1521 when Spanish colonizers came to the Philippine Islands. The Spanish had a hard time imposing their rule against the Filipinos' bolos, daggers, and sticks and had to come back with reinforcements of firearms. The practice of *eskrima* was banned by the Spanish and was then practiced in secret. To go unnoticed, *eskrima* was set to native music and was performed without the weapons. The movements resembled dance and seemed harmless to the Spanish and even became popular that demonstrations were given in public at fiesta time.

Nanang/Heneral [General] *does the same to the group of kali* [refers to the same Philippine Martial-Arts as *eskrima*]¹⁸ *stickwielding men and women.*

The Manongs [male Filipino farm workers] *in Watsonville, led by Simeon, walk out with their sticks.*

Esteban in Sta. Lucia, gives the signal to the Villages to take their positions for the attack. (301)

In this scene, for example, Simeon who has momentarily forgotten the Philippine way of fighting of the *eskrima* soon gets reminded of his roots and ancestors by Esteban's powerful entrance on to the stage, as he holds an *eskrima* and *anting-anting* (amulet) both symbols of local ancestral power. Millado's dramaturgical shift from words to gestures to indicate the two locales' imbrication echoes the text's argument for examination of both sites simultaneously, especially with regards to onlooking spectators. Because it is impossible to watch each site at the same time to create meaning, Millado forces the spectator from one gesture to another and back again; the actions are non-sequential but simultaneous. In the cleared space of the stage, the bodies, which are dispersed at different locations in the playing area, require a very active spectatorship: the eye may choose to focus on one particular action or maintain multiple foci. The simultaneous performance of the riot in the U.S. *and* the revolution in the Philippines proves that, although the colonial project intended a clean separation, Sta. Lucia and Watsonville are not hermetically sealed from one another. The U.S. occupation of the Philippines has in fact created a devised space in which both the colonizer and colonized are affected by and experience the historical and social strands that continuously connect the homes, countries, and lives of the peoples therein.

After establishing the presence and the confluence of similar activities and conflicts that connect both sites of home, Millado goes further than blurring the demarcations between them and interrogates whether a true sense of belonging in the place where one currently dwells is possible. If we follow the logic of Ahmed (et al.) that "each home is neither fixed nor axiomatically mobile" or that homes are in a continuous activity of uprooting and regrounding, is it even possible to ever feel "at home" again—especially for colonized or formerly colonized

¹⁸ When Filipinos emigrated to the USA, they brought *eskrima* to Hawaii and California. It is believed that *eskrima* surfaced onto the US American martial arts scene because of the majority that settled in Stockton, California. The term *Kali* is believed to have been coined in the 1960s by U.S. practitioners who popularized the term to distinguish their teachings from *eskrimadors*. The term is now widely used in the United States and Europe.

migrants? As demonstrated in the play's concluding scenes, Millado does not forget his intention of forging a colonialist critique.

Tatang's death at the hands of the U.S. military affects both Simeon and his brother. For his part, Esteban ascends to the leadership of the rebel organization after its revolution and riot, but quickly vanishes to an unknown location. When his brother disappears, Simeon longs to return to the Philippines. Yet Manang, an older female migrant worker and fervent subscriber to the possibility of creating a new home, urges him to stay in the U.S.:

MANANG. Maybe if you just try listen, maybe you hear what I'm saying? Look at this pot of soup. We cook whatever is sent to us by the manongs [male migrant laborers]. We receive crates of food and vegetables from manongs who have stayed in this camp. When I get salmon, I say 'Ah, this must be from Fredo in Alaska.' When asparagus arrive, I remember Carding – he said he was going to Fresno to pick asparagus. And spinach! I am sure in my heart that these are from the manongs in Salinas. And beets – this must be from the rowdy group of Cebuano's from Lodi. You see, Simeon? We're not only making soup. We're cooking up a new home. (298-299)

Manang's advice to Simeon interestingly conjures up the idea of the multicultural melting pot, but with an important difference: it is one comprised of ingredients from the harvests of Filipinos scattered among different U.S. states. Hence, according to Manang, Filipinos from different areas of their wanderings in the U.S. and the multiple home sites they have made are able to create a single new, decidedly Filipino configuration of home. Although Simeon finds this idea alluring at first (Manang successfully coaxes him to dance with her), Simeon chooses to flee, leaving Manang at the end of the scene "left standing alone with her pot of soup pondering her loneliness" (299). When the lights signal a scene shift, the *manongs* enter, pick up their suitcases, move to different corners of the stage, and open to display for the audience's view memorabilia, mirrors, and photographs they have brought from their homes in the Philippines. Lit strings of lights also emerge from the suitcases. These lights form the space of the Filipino taxi dance hall and offer an evocation of Filipino culture amid the surround of a U.S. setting. In the next scene following a raucous dance sequence in the taxi dance hall, Manang arrives to the dance after she has been assaulted by white farm workers: "They surrounded me with their shotguns. They shoot on the ground. Dance! Show us your dance! They wanted me to lift my

skirt. They want to see my tail. No tail . . . no tail . . . I have no tail” (300). Manang’s attack spurs another series of riots between the Filipino and white workers and leaves unanswered questions about the possibility of Filipino immigrants ever truly belonging in the U.S.

As the play moves towards its closing moments, Esteban dies in the revolution’s ongoing skirmishes with U.S. forces. Again, Simeon desires to return for his brother’s funeral but is unable to pay for his steerage. However, even death does not keep the brothers apart: Esteban’s ghost visits upon his brother in California to call him to account for his promise to return to Sta. Lucia:

SIMEON. I wanted to . . . but how can I . . . I don't have enough money. . .

ESTEBAN. Not enough money . . . how much does your Macintosh suit cost?

Enough to pay for steerage back home. Enough to see your younger brother get a decent burial.

SIMEON. You know it's not that simple.

ESTEBAN. You have forgotten your promise, Manong.

SIMEON. Don't say that, Teban.

ESTEBAN. Are you still coming back to Sta. Lucia?

SIMEON. Yes, I am . . . How can I not go back to Sta. Lucia. Sta. Lucia is my home. Everything here reminds me that I am nowhere near home . . . And you ask me about going home? I want to go back home to Sta. Lucia. (302)

But Esteban, witness to the many changes in Sta. Lucia, warns his brother that their home has changed in his brother’s absence: “Tatang, Nanang, the whole brood. The house that creaks in the wind. The tree that you used to climb. The muddy river -they're not there anymore. They've all left” (302). The vanishing of the Sta. Lucia Simeon remembers troubles the migrant’s relationship with both of his homes:

ESTEBAN. (*Points to Simeon’s chest*) Here. Everytime [sic] you remember a tree, a house, a cousin – that tree, that house, that cousin disappears from Sta. Lucia. And when you heave a sigh it carves its new home – here.

SIMEON. Wait, Teban, don’t go yet. (*Takes out a piece of paper*) . . . Take this with you . . . a few lines...a poem I was writing for you . . . I keep it in my shirt pocket and hope it finish[es] writing itself . . . the last line should read “We are

America.” But as you can see the bullet ripped through the word America and now that piece is lodged in the heart. (302)

In this symbolic gesture, Millado suggests that as much as Simeon still wants to return to Sta. Lucia, he has also created a place for himself and his new family in the U.S. The bullet here, which signifies the struggles Simeon engaged in to fight for the rights of Filipino farm workers in Watsonville, causes “America” to be lodged in his heart. And, although he and Patrice leave Watsonville for an undisclosed location to escape the threats of violence that surround their interracial union—moving inland, towards the “heart” of America, their decision to leave their newborn baby with Manang reminds the audience that Simeon’s relationship with the landscape of Watsonville is slowly rooting him to a U.S. sense of home.

Homes unsettled

The two homes in Millado’s *Peregrinasyon*—that of Colonel Gordon’s Philippine location (in which Esteban, Nanang, and Tatang also live) and Simeon’s U.S. inhabitation—have both been imbued by Millado’s efforts to interrupt and change their location’s landscapes, archetypes, and imaginings. Yet, more importantly, in *Peregrinasyon*’s historicized dramatization, Millado emphasizes that the acts of home-making and domestication of space, in both the Philippines and the U.S., occurred in highly contested terrains resulting in homes that are not impenetrable and impregnable to forces that function to tear down their boundaries. Both efforts at home-making, therefore, are engaged in recurrent and continuous negotiation and (re)definition of the idea of home. What links these two similar yet geographically separate sites is Simeon’s peregrination, and through his physical journey to the U.S. and his imagined return trips to the Philippines, Millado underscores the ambivalence inherent in the notion of home for the Filipino migrant.

The issues surrounding the ownership and location of the Balangiga Bells also describes this ambivalence. The matter of their return to the Philippines or continued possession by the U.S. does not preclude the fact that even in their inert and immobile static condition, they nevertheless inscribe a new figuration of space and, thus, belonging. As historical relics and monuments, one can only imagine that they “stick out” against the otherwise Western setting of Cheyenne, Wyoming in the same way that Filipino-American homes disrupt the landscape of the U.S. nation. Yet it must not be ignored that on this site, the two bells beg to be observed in relation to the interwoven histories of the United States *and* the Philippines: inasmuch as they

recall lives lost in battle for the U.S. nation, their significations also bear witness to the traumas caused by the U.S. occupation of the Philippines.

**TRANSNATIONAL MATERNITY IN RALPH PEÑA'S *FLIPZOIDS*, FEATURING A
MEDITATION ON HANG ONG'S *MIDDLE FINGER***

*This water, here, this is the same water on the shore of Pagudpud. That is where
I come from. When I feel the water... when I touch it...it is like I am also
touching my home.*

—Aying in Ralph Peña's *Flipzoids*

We came to this country so you could be part of it.

—Mr. Rodriguez in Hang Ong's *Middle Finger*

Immediately before I began work on this chapter about Filipino-American playwright Ralph Peña's play, *Flipzoids* (1996), two important news stories from the Philippines transgressed nation-state boundaries, crossed the Pacific, and made their way to the United States' media circuits. After many posts on social networking sites and emails from family in the Philippines, I learned about former Philippine President Corazon Aquino's death and current Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's lavish spending of the "nation's money" here in the U.S. Allegedly, President Macapagal-Arroyo had spent an exorbitant amount on a single dinner in one of New York's finest restaurants during her presidential visit to the U.S. Although close examination of these two incidents is not part of my chapter's scope, my attention was drawn to the reception of these events by friends and family members *both* in the Philippines and the United States. Both groups were joined concomitantly in the mourning of Aquino's death and the critical conversation regarding Macapagal-Arroyo's spending activity. Regardless of the geographic location of these two women's "spectators," Macapagal-Arroyo and Aquino served as loci where Filipino nationals and members of our diasporic community converged, collectively mourned and debated about the state of the archipelago nation, and thus, formed one "imagined community" of Filipinos local and abroad.

Ardent supporters of these two firebrand Philippine, female presidents would argue that they are quite dissimilar and yet, in some ways, the same. Both women's presidencies have been marked by accomplishment and controversy. For example, while the nation recently heralded and remembered late former President Aquino as their savior and saint for restoring democracy to the Philippines in the 1980s after many years of previous leader Ferdinand Marcos' dictatorial turn as "president," others clamored to remember how they had pressed Pres. Arroyo to step down after she admitted cheating in the presidential elections. Yet the polarization of the two

women's public images does not abate their similar political histories. In addition to the daunting task of rebuilding the Philippines after two separate traumatic regimes of male presidents, as the nation's next leaders, both women had to perform what could be called a form of national "housekeeping" that included the difficult task of "taking care" of the abused nation's relations with the United States.¹⁹ In this, the women's acts of "housekeeping" extended outside the limits of Philippine domestic space. Their many attempts and strategies for maintaining and improving relations between the Philippines and the United States—in their separate terms—have been the subject of harsh critiques and difficult controversy. For example, Aquino's decision to keep U.S. military bases in the Philippines during her term haunts her legacy, and Macapagal-Arroyo's decision to join in the "War of Terror" is still a subject of much contention in Philippine politics. In both cases, their presidential work to establish continued relations with its former and neo-colonizer are considered acts of betrayal to the nation especially to those who have long fought for a "complete separation" from the U.S. since Philippine independence. Hence, both women become caught in a double bind – they must choose to be either for the Philippines or for the United States.

Corazon Aquino and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's "motherly" actions as Philippine presidents serve as synecdoches that frame out the terms of Filipina maternity, belonging, and transnational location. And, their lives speak to this chapter's exploration that interrogates the house and home keeping done by Filipina women and the violence they endure to accomplish this function as foregrounded in Ralph Peña's *Flipzoids*. This chapter will examine the character of Aying, the play's central Filipina maternal figure, and her border crossing maneuvers within the social, political, and economic space forged by the U.S. colonization of the Philippines and, through her story, the consequences of migration for Filipinos to their supposed imperial center. This examination will consider the ways in which Aying's relationships with Vangie, her "Americanized" adult daughter and a nurse, and Redford, a young Filipino man whose family

¹⁹ Beginning from former President Corazon Aquino's term after Ferdinand Marcos' 12-year dictatorship, the Philippine nation-state had to grapple with its "excessive centralization" and has since "debated the merits of different institutions of representative government" with "questions of executive versus legislative power, bicameral versus unicameral legislature, and presidential versus parliamentary government" (Abinales and Amoroso 290). Many years of colonization from Spain, the U.S. and Japan had indeed impacted the very structure of governance of the Philippines and, thus, make institutional reform a daunting and long, arduous process. At the same time that political systems are subject to incessant critique, extreme pressure is continuously placed on the president deemed to in charge of strengthening the state while instigating the necessary reforms. Currently, Macapagal-Arroyo is under scrutiny not only because of fear of acts of corruption, but many still wait for the fulfillment of her promise of reforms after she took over former President Erap Estrada's presidency and now as she nears the end of her term.

migrated to the U.S. when he was a child, open up the idea of home for Filipinos as a provocative site where we may interrogate the constitutive racial dimensions of “belonging” in the U.S. for Filipino citizens who have long inhabited U.S. “domestic space” due to their U.S. colonial legacy. Through his characters’ discussions, actions, and decisions of what defines “belonging,” Peña illuminates Filipino-Americans’ agency as well as their ability to contest, trouble, or reconfigure the boundaries and concepts that define “home” and “belonging” in the U.S. nation. In its of discussion of women’s centrality to the concepts of home and belonging, this chapter responds to the call for the generation of nuanced scholarship that considers more urgently the intersections of gender and migration for Filipinas. It hopes to contribute to these efforts by extending critical space for thinking on past, present, and future Filipinas in the U.S. who—although legally and economically part of U.S. America—must continue to fight for their more thorough inclusion.

Through an analysis of how the Filipino-American home troubles static notions of “home” and “belonging” implicit to their exclusions in the U.S. milieu, I examine how Peña’s text makes a case for a different analytical frame for Filipino-American writing, especially Filipino-American drama. After a brief discussion of the exclusions Peña’s characters experience, I proceed to look at how Peña uses the elder, female, mother figure of Aying to illuminate a type of re-making of home particular to Filipino-Americans wherein the “home” in the Philippines is always reconstituted as they make and re-make their homes in the U.S. through the characters’ acts of memory. I read Peña’s unapologetic insertion of references or invocations of Filipino culture as part of the project to assert nuanced analyses of Filipino-American homes whereby cultural particularities will be ever present. I end my discussion of *Flipzoids* by highlighting Peña’s activation of the “home” as a “site of emergence,” a home always in the making.

I will conclude my analysis with a brief discussion of Filipino-American playwright Han Ong’s play, *Middle Finger* (1997), a text highly reminiscent of Frank Wedekind’s *Spring Awakening*. Here, I will offer thoughts on how Ong activates the home in reverse and in direct contrast to Peña’s *Flipzoids*, which I believe provides a differential assessment of the challenges faced by Filipino immigrants in the U.S. and articulations composed by Filipino-American playwrights. *Middle Finger*’s story attempts to interrogate systems of social control and how these systems’ faults negatively affect his young, male Filipino-American characters. Most

importantly, I will focus on how Ong's work stages the rigidity and strictures of a Western immigration narrative that eventually entraps the Filipino-American family and creates homes that are not active but instead at an impasse.

Set in the mid-1990s and on the Western facing beaches of Orange County, California, Peña's *Flipzoids* tells the tale of three Filipino-Americans struggling with their un-belongingness in the Californian home they presently inhabit while seeking to keep, discard, or discover ties they have with the Philippine home they have departed. Peña begins the play with his three characters occupying isolated locations on stage, which symbolizes their distinct attitudes towards a state of belonging in the U.S. The play animates their attitudes and positions by elucidating each of their experiences as Filipino immigrants. Vangie, dressed in the crisp whiteness of a nursing uniform, is determined to expand her English vocabulary and diction and thoroughly "melt" away into the "pot" of her new country. She clashes continuously with her elderly mother, Aying, who longs to return to the Philippines before she dies. In her every action and utterance, Aying reminds Vangie of their long departed home, which frustrates her daughter's attempts to forget and belong to the U.S. At the edge of the Pacific, Aying meets Redford and creates a bond with the young, disconcerted, and idiosyncratic Fil-Am man.²⁰ Throughout the play, the platinum blonde, semi "Gen-X" clad Redford searches for his identity, and through his relationship with the elder Aying, starts to re-connect with the Philippine "home" he cannot remember. To explore the relationships between and among this divergent trio of Filipino-American experiences, the play's scenes shift fluidly to many locales nearby Anaheim with the beach serving as a "base" of interactions and a metaphor for the Philippines. This non-realistic staging enables Peña to compose a meditative tone for the play as it offers images and thoughts about the hard realities of living in an alien U.S. American culture. As the play unfolds, monologues by and discussions between characters reveal both humor regarding their cultural encounters and uneasy revelations about the vicissitudes of Philippine dislocation.

In *Flipzoids*, Peña complicates and challenges the concept of a strict bifurcation of belonging that Filipino-Americans face in establishing new homes in the U.S.: one must *choose* between the two nation-states, between assimilation "here" or a lifetime of exclusion "from there." To this binary configuration, Aying serves as an important challenge. Aying, rendered by Peña as female repository of Filipino culture, attempts to reunite Vangie to their culture,

²⁰ A colloquial term and often used to denote Filipino-Americans.

which her daughter has chosen to reject in her migration. Redford's many encounters with Aying on the beach similarly enact an attempt to re-unite the Filipino-American man geographically, culturally, and even psychically removed from the land of his ethnic origin. Hence, we can say that contra the "family reunification" that U.S. law has "benevolently" and perhaps paternalistically provided for U.S. immigrants and naturalized citizens, Aying embarks on her own mission of "reunification."²¹ However, in Aying's manifestation, she works to acknowledge that the Filipino/American home is both Filipino *and* U.S. American—not bifurcated. While this idea presents an enticing disruption to the "here" or "there" binary composed by immigration for Filipino émigrés, Aying's death at the end of the play and the very tenuous strings that connect Aying to both Vangie and Redford confounds the act of home-making she set upon activating.

I began my discussion with the image of the Philippines' two women presidents to draw important correlations with their circumstances to the challenges and conflicts faced by the character of Aying. Aying's death at the play's conclusion and what could be read as a failure to restore or cause the return of Vangie and Redford to the Philippines may provide reasons for critique of Peña's central character's project. Yet focusing on Aying's (dys)function elides the parallel dilemma the two former presidents faced as Filipina women: socially and culturally, women should and will always be tied to their home of origin in the Philippines for they can only serve as symbols of the nation/homeland. In all three cases, the Philippine woman is always already assumed to function as the signifier of "home" and "belonging" in both a national and cultural sense, however, she is seldom recognized as one who, in fact, *both* inhabits and challenges "home" and "belonging" in the site of any relocation.

In her essay "Taking (a) Place: Female Embodiment and the Re-grounding of Community," Irene Gedalof challenges the "problematic, and sometimes disastrous, ways in which women are positioned as the useful embodied ground for models of ethnic community belonging" (99). Gedalof stresses the importance of "revisit[ing] the reproductive female body, and women's reproductive work, to find the points of dissonance that contest the constraining

²¹ Since the 1965 Immigration Act, 50 to 70 percent of the annual allotment for the provision of U.S. immigrant visas was given to close family members of U.S. citizen and legal permanent residents. Although there are ceilings to limit the number of visas awarded based on the country of origin or the qualifying relationship category, spouses, minor children, and parents of U.S. citizens are granted their visas regardless of the quotas and are allowed to immigrate within a year of the filing of the petition filed on behalf of the family member.

effects of the dominant identity models in which they are unmeshed” (100). Gedalof argues for the necessity to un-tie women as carriers of a pure and stable culture and allow them the “right to travel” wherein, through their work of making and re-making home, they also insist “the ‘right’ to belong in more than one way” (103). After women have been dislodged from this problematic positioning, Gedalof describes the possibility of a different type of “home” and “belonging:”

Community belonging and survival might be premised, then, not on the timeless permanence and stasis of repetition, but on the endless daily decisions about what to hold on to and what to let go. Home might be reconfigured, not as a fixed ground of identity from which to act, but as itself a continuous act of production and reproduction that is never fully complete. (106)

With Gedalof’s idea, I cannot help but think of the local practice of *bayanihan* in the Philippines. In this tradition, huts (homes) are transported from one location to the other: the “home” becomes configured while in transit and motion, with a different sense of community and belonging simultaneously created. The practice emblemizes Gedalof’s concept of continuous production and usefully illustrates the idea of not simply “having” a singular home, but also, of producing that community and belonging on its way to the next home. Therefore, drawing from Gedalof’s thesis and the cultural practice of the *bayanihan*, I will examine what I position as the *activated* home in Peña’s *Flipzoids*: a Filipino-American idea of home imbued with a transformative potential.

Un-belongings

Because the U.S. occupation of the Philippines not only invaded the national “home” but also caused its shattering, Filipino communities have now scattered around the globe wherein each confronts the challenge of building new homes. These reformations remain haunted by a traumatic separation and dislocation from their once occupied nation. Historical, political, and cultural forces compound this feeling of disconnection. Building a home highly depends upon the Filipino immigrant’s access and participation in the host society. Theorists of citizenship have argued that citizenship categories, established by the state to describe and contain its subjects, usually impinge on and limit the immigrant’s public expressions that do not conform to the hegemony of a nation-state’s desires. Hence, the legal granting of admission into a new country does not automatically guarantee inclusion to its social-political make up in a meaningful way and, instead, often foments exclusion of the newly arrived by those residents

already located inside immigrants new “home” nation. Scholar Yen Le Espiritu calls this transaction “differential inclusion” wherein “a group of people is deemed integral to the nation’s economy, culture, identity and power – but integral only or precisely because of their designated subordinated standing” (47). This condition is one that I would describe further as an emotional and physical state of unbelonging.

The notion of unbelonging permeates the setting of *Flipzoids* to emphasize the characters’ disjuncture and dislocation. Peña situates his play directly on the U.S. coastline of Southern California—at a beach near Anaheim, immediately signifying the most common port of entry for Filipino migrants. Although the natural elements associated with this location such as sand and water may contribute to the Filipino’s island-oriented sense of being “at home,” these elements find themselves contained and abstracted in their staged “U.S.” representations. As the text notes, the beach, ocean, and coastline locale are represented by: “*A rectangular sandbox [which] dominates the stage. Half buried in the sand, down center, is a large earthen bowl of water [used as the ocean]*” (252). These stark and minimalist choices makes access to the elements of the play’s setting both familiar and unsettling for its Filipino characters. Behind the setting’s “beach,” three walls enclose the playing area and present a sharp contrast to the gesture of the coast’s “natural” elements. On the tall walls of either black or white backgrounds are written the names of Filipino-American migrants, which evokes the administrative maelstrom and black and white reductiveness of an immigrant’s legal status on paper; the ever present names writ large in this fashion compel one to consider themselves as either a U.S. citizen or not, belonging or not. Aying enters “dressed in *fin de siècle* clothing” (252) and the script suggests that she be lit in a fashion that evokes a figure on a daguerreotype. The “sound of crashing waves” accompanies Aying’s entrance (252), which further emphasizes her migration journey. Aying’s first stage action foreshadows her function in the play in relation to unbelonging: “*As she kneels down to touch the gleaming liquid, we hear the sound of a large metal bolt unfastening*” (252). Although the significance of water for the character of Aying is not revealed to the audience immediately, the distinct sound of unfastening a locked opening suggests the “opening up” of the enclosed space that Aying’s presence will soon facilitate.

The character of Redford also wrestles with the tenets of unbelonging at the play’s start. The first character the audience meets is Redford, the young, gay Filipino-American with “platinum bleached hair” (252). As Aying continues to dwell at the ocean’s edge after her

entrance, she meets Redford whose exclusion is concretized for us by Peña as he sits in the close confines of a toilet stall at the beach's rest area bathroom facilities. As we learn, he prefers to inhabit this self-selected seclusion due to its comfort of anonymity: "Wouldn't it be great if we all walked around in our own little cubicles?" (252). But, in his own way, he also desires to make connections.

Redford strikes up a conversation with a man using the next stall over by complimenting the only thing he sees in this situation—the man's shoes. Yet rather than describe this anonymous man, represented only through Redford's monologue, the shoes and their symbolic significance expose important facets of the "renegade Gen X-er's" (252) unbelonging: "Nice shoes. I had a pair just like that. (*Pause*) Well, no, not really. Okay, the truth. I wouldn't be caught dead in them. No, no, no. But they look like great sensible shoes. I REALLY mean that" (252). The language of these first discombobulated and hesitant thoughts emblemizes Redford's overwhelming ambivalence towards his life in general as a Filipino-American. For example, although the shoes do not appeal to him aesthetically, "he wouldn't be caught in them" (252), Redford insists on seeing their "sensible" value. Here Redford negotiates what he might innately believe about the shoes with the Western values of practicality and sensibility. Yet because this introduction does not illicit a response from the man in the next stall over, the Filipino-American Redford then proceeds in "proving" his knowledge of Western literary classics to the man, whom he hears avidly ignoring him as the sound of newspaper pages rustling is the only reply from the stranger. However other than citing a fondness for the Irish novelist James Joyce, and Redford's propensity for him: "I just, well. . . am so drawn to. . . drunken Irishmen. They're so. . . manly," (252) which begins to reveal Redford's homosexuality, his thoughts more tellingly expose the escape these books give to him: "Oh yes. I like to read, as you do. Especially the classics. They sweep me off to someplace more sanguine. I often think I was born in the wrong century. Don't you? I imagine myself, living. . . say. . . in 18th century England. Oh. . . all that lace. (*Pause*) Hello? Hello? Are you breathing?" (252) Ultimately, indulging in Western literature fails to provide the familiarity of belonging Redford seeks.

Yearning to live in a different era and at different place such as the romantic lures of Budapest and Paris, Redford dreams of a place where he can blend in and adopt a different persona and name: "What do you think of . . . Michel Signoret or Daniel Piaf?" (252) His dream career of becoming a tour guide in Europe exposes Redford's inclinations for static objects and

“dead derelicts” (252). He has learned a French phrase that he would use in this imagined occupation of docent for the many “dead” figures held inside Parisian museums: “*J’suis. J’reste (Trans. Here I am, here I remain)*” (252). These thoughts counter his earlier longings for movement and travel: “I want to live in Budapest. Or Paris. Maybe join the Black Panthers. Someplace where I can blend in” (252) and, once again, shows his wavering and contradictory state of mind. In total, through these many contradictions and loose ends that comprise Redford’s complex character, we are hindered from forming any simplistic or “boxed in” characterization of his identity.

Part of this complex identity is Redford’s homosexuality, which complicates and extends the “idea of home” the text offers. In addition to calling into question the limited conception of Filipino-American gendered identities in the U.S. as primarily male and female, Redford simultaneously troubles the closed construction of a nuclear family and invokes the potentialities to negotiate, interrogate, contest, and stake claim to spaces wherein Filipino-Americans are excluded. I emphasize Redford’s sexuality because while attention should be drawn to the tremendous power located in the home and its activation, as this thesis argues, there should be caution against a valorization of the Filipino home that ends up constructing a similarly stable *exclusionary* home for gay identities. Instead, through the character of Redford, Peña opens up space and makes way for a different definition, configuration, and construction of “home.”

In Martin F. Manalansan IV’s excellent ethnographic study on Filipino gay men in New York City, he asserts that because for Filipino gay men “home, privacy, and domesticity are vexed locations,” they occupy the space outside familial homes and also suffer from exclusions from the “Home” of mainstream, Western culture as queers of color. Thus, relegated to spaces in the peripheries such as gay bars or, as in Peña’s play, toilet cubicles, they develop a keen awareness of their displaced locations, which challenges them from claiming them as their own but also provides the opportunities to lay claim to these spaces (88). In the early moments of the play, Peña suggests this social reality by recalibrating the tenets of unrooted-ness for Redford’s sexual and national senses of inhabiting two homes of the Filipino-American. With Redford’s simultaneous desire to know more about Aying’s home in the Philippines and negotiate mainstream U.S. American gay culture through participatory acts such as dressing up in punk, Gen X, modern garb, Peña may be read as suggesting that a return to the homeland or complete assimilation are *not* the only recourse for the Filipino-American. Without preconceived,

idealized and absolute definitions of home then, Redford is portrayed as more receptive to the possibility of the home acquiring new meaning through the process of creating “home” with his new friend, Aying. His significantly more amicable encounters with Aying in contrast with Vangie’s will be further elucidated and expanded upon later in the discussion.

Although without material or concrete boundaries around her, Aying’s adult daughter, Vangie constantly works on something that she believes will insure her belonging in the U.S. Dressed in her white nurse’s uniform to remind us of her successful economic migration, Vangie habitually recites English vocabulary words and definitions: “I’m putting Webster’s to memory” (252). Although her opening monologue may be perceived as her display of acquiring the means to facilitate her unfettered participation in U.S. society, instead, her dialogue tellingly writes out her difficult journey to the U.S.

Vangie’s monologue of dictionary lists helps to trace her journey to the U.S. She chooses to start with the words “Dainty. Dandelion. Dandruff. Decapitate” (252), which also connotatively describes other Filipina migrant workers: from dainty flowers to dandruff that cause irritation in the head. Vangie ends her list with “decapitate,” which eerily recalls the use of Filipina bodies for labor and not for their minds. The next string of words following her opening list further describes facets about the journey of Filipino immigrants to the U.S.: “Today’s road to the promised land is brought to you by the letter D. Debonair. Desecrate. Donut. Doo-be. . . doo-be . . . do bee-doo” (252). Broken apart, the list sketches the arrival of a dashing Western man (“Debonair”) to the occurrence of the plunder of the Philippine homeland (“Desecrate”) to the introduction of Western objects such as the “Donut,” and concludes with punctuating an advertising jingle (“Doo-be. . .doo-be. . .do bee-do”). In its crude fragments, this list traces out a rough history between the U.S. and the Philippines that connotes what capitalist driven U.S. imperialism has wrought upon the Philippines.

Yet it is through Vangie that the play begins to introduce dilemmas and also highlight activities that Filipino-Americans do in order to struggle with the unbelonging that comes along with living in the U.S. When she reaches the letter D, Vangie also traces out the traditional roles Filipinas play: “Domestic. Domicile. Dominatrix. D. Noun. A woman who physically and psychologically dominates. Dominatrix. Hmmm” (252). This terse but important account not only informs the audience about the gamut of professions available to the Filipina migrant (nurse, domestic worker and prostitute), Vangie also unknowingly and inadvertently subverts

this summation. At the same time that she identifies the stereotypes, Vangie's semantic tracing back of domestic, domicile and dominatrix to the latin, *domus* or home may be perceived as the tying back of the Filipina to her home which at this moment has been indirectly described as "physically and psychologically possessing power" (253). Peña then dramaturgically makes this ambivalence known as shown through Vangie's next speech. She reveals her desire to assimilate but her monologue also belies the anger that she holds:

VANGIE. You see that? I'm putting Webster to memory. So far, I know every word from A to G. That's something, right? Not every nurse can say that.
(Pause) I can. Now I'm taking Art classes. Imagine that. Me. The nurses at the hospital say, 'Vangie Dacuycuy, art classes?' What do they know? Van Gogh. Van Eyck. Van-Gie. Ha! . . . Eulogy, Eunuch. Eupeptic. E. Noun. Cheerful. Optimistic. Eupeptic. (252)

Vangie thinks that her knowledge of Art puts her above her nursing peers, and in this opening monologue, she also manages to iterate a reclamation of power through her words. Put side by side, the two white male artists, Van Gogh and Van Eyck, may be matched to the ideas of "Eulogy" and "Eunuch," two words that connote forms of death (physical and in a certain sense sexual in terms of emasculation) concerning these renowned painters. However, when Vangie links her ambitions and potential to these great Western artists by reconfiguring herself as "Van-Gie," she equates her ability to their legacies, causing herself to become "eupeptic" or happy. In creating Vangie's dictionary lists laden with innuendo and connotation, Peña employs a clever and revealing dramaturgical tool for this character. His strategy is noteworthy because it does not negate the fact that workers like Vangie need a good, solid base in the English language (her mix of words ranging from silly to the pretentious), but its use also questions the validity of these requirements to the worker. Simultaneously, Peña's figuration of Vangie emphasizes the ability of a Filipina to economically participate in the U.S. and also underlines the anger that accrues within them, which can be harnessed for resistance.

Troubled Homes

Both Redford and Vangie's intimate monologues at the beginning of *Flipzoids* undermine the "forgetting" experienced by Filipino immigrants and Filipino-Americans in the U.S. and invoke Filipinos' struggles for legitimization. Thus between them, in the heightened world of the play, Redford and Vangie come to stand for the 18% of the U.S. American

population comprised of Asian/Pacific Islanders. Redford's desire to be associated with such groups as the African-American Black Panther Movement at the beginning of the play speaks to this struggle for national visibility and glosses his desires with a revolutionary patina. Scholars from the field of Filipino-American cultural studies who search for factors contributing to this invisibility point to economic and political exclusions in the U.S. and to the hegemonic cultural forces that Filipino immigrants and Filipino-Americans subsume unto themselves. As Eric Gamalinda argues: "Many Filipino-Americans still regard their own culture as inferior (that is, compared to America's)...Filipino-Americans feel they are neither here nor there, perambulating between a culture that alienates them and a culture they know nothing about or ashamed of" (Gamalinda qtd in Jesus 20). Hence, not only are Filipino-Americans forced back into their U.S. homes due to exclusions instigated by the pressures of minority status in the U.S., but also, due to the legacy of imperialism, Filipino-Americans feel that their homes, as bearers of this culture, are somewhat flawed as well; whether Filipino culture thrives (or not) in their homes, there will also always be feelings of severe dis-location, inferiority, and inadequacy. With this, the Filipino home in the U.S. is always already a site of conflict.

Peña uses the contentious mother-daughter relationship of Aying and Vangie to imaginatively portray the Filipino-American home as contested territory. Because Vangie and Aying have been separated for years, Vangie arrived first and then facilitated her mother's immigration, they both attempt to reestablish connections that have been broken or lost because of Vangie's earlier arrival to the U.S. Aying expresses her intentions of finding Vangie in metaphoric language by likening her daughter to crabs she spies on the beach. She asks the audience: "Do you like crabs? Ha? Plenty here. Sometimes you see them. Then they go away. Hiding. When you see one you tell me. I will try to catch" (253). What follows is a portrayal of Vangie as a Filipina immigrant who has already started to adapt and work her way within or around the forced upon matrices of racial, class, and gender strictures that stifle her.

It is not easy for Vangie to have Aying with her in the U.S. as she struggles to "belong." While it was Vangie's decision to bring her mother to the U.S., Aying reminds Vangie of her "home" in the Philippines and the culture she must reject if she wants to be included in U.S. society. Upon discovering that her mother was about to regale the audience with one of her "folk" stories, Vangie exclaims: "...Your stories give people the impression that we're barbarians" (253). The humorous retort of Aying ("What is wrong with cutting hair?") quickly

dissipates when Vangie elaborates: “Barbarian. Adjective. Without culture. Without refinement. Without Art Classes. Why do you insist on sticking out? Why can’t you just blend in?” (253) Vangie estranges herself from Filipino culture while showing signs of espousing an assimilationist view. She now wants to “melt” and become “part of the soup” (253)

To further complicate the relationship between mother and daughter, I would argue that Vangie succumbs to what Filipino scholar Oscar Campomanes has termed, “United States’ imperial nationality” wherein Filipino-Americans are caught within a web of “powerful acts of forgetting and impressions of formlessness” (Campomanes qtd in De Jesus 3). For Vangie, Aying reminds her of a history she desires to forget; she believes that employment in the U.S. is “[e]verything [they have] worked for” (253):

AYING. Evangelina? Do not be angry, ha? But you are becoming crazy already. I tell you something. You listen to me. Do not forget. Always remember. You are the first one in our family to wear a white uniform. Me, I only finished grade four. My grandfather, he sell dried fish. His son, your *Lolo*, he carry sacks of rice all day from the market to Don Mariano’s warehouse. Your *Lola*, she wash the mayor’s clothes. Me, I learned how to use a Singer Sewing machine. (Pause) Now you wear a white uniform. Do not forget why you are better. (253)

Here, Peña not only uses Aying to historicize the journey of Filipina immigrants but also refuses the “formlessness” that is often ascribed to Filipino-American homes/culture. Through tracing a genealogy—with each family member affecting the lives of another—Peña dramaturgically gives form to a loving and supportive home that enabled Vangie to travel and put on a white uniform. Moreover, Aying’s message (“Do not forget why you are better.”) emphasizes the work and survival of their family despite difficult conditions from servitude. Peña even subtly hints at the colonial history of the Philippines from “serving Don Mariano” in the feudal land system instigated during the Spanish colonial period to the entry of market forces signified through her reference to the sewing machine, brought by U.S. colonizers. Nevertheless, with Aying, Peña elucidates the family’s pride in their history and their ability to survive. Vangie’s retort articulates a new attitude concerning the dimensions of these accomplishments: “The white uniform means nothing if you act like you come from a cave. White means nothing if you can’t say emphatically, ‘I have never eaten a pet.’ If you can’t say that, if you haven’t melted, Aying,

the uniform means nothing” (253). For Vangie, the white uniform does not signify a family’s survival but rather the pain of an unrealized desire to belong to the U.S. nation.

Redford’s home, on the other hand, is void and emptied out of Filipino culture. When Redford sees the figure of Aying along the beach while she sings and performs a ritual, he is intrigued with the unfamiliarity, which drives him to introduce himself to Aying. Redford fumbles and is at a loss for words when he approaches Aying to respond: “It was very fascinating and seemed fraught with symbols. *(Pause)* It’s uh... very... you know... very... earthy. *(Pause)* Delightful stuff...” (255). His inability to fully articulate what he thought he saw before meeting Aying anticipates a different type of estrangement with the home. A second-generation Filipino-American and a “Flip,”²² Redford shares with Aying that after arriving in the U.S. from the Philippines, his parents raised him as a “Macintosh apple” and not a “tropical banana.” Redford says of his mother: “Anyway, my mother bought a copy of the Official Preppy Handbook. ‘This,’ she said, ‘this will be our blue print to happiness.’ It became the spiritual center of our family life, more revered than the Holy Bible” (257). Raised in an environment where he is supposed to be a Western someone else, it is not surprising then that Redford experiences an estrangement from his own home and seeks refuge in places like the Red Cove at the shore. Due to his encounter with Aying, he shows that his home is incomplete and longs for the home that he once knew but can’t remember.

By underscoring the reasons why we may perceive Vangie’s and Redford’s homes in the U.S. as troubled, we also begin to see the work that Aying does for both characters. Although geographic and physical separation from the Philippines has become a reality for Vangie, “home” has not become out of reach for Aying whose connection to water evokes an emotional proximity to her home in the Philippines. As she dips one foot in the basin of water, she says: “It brings me closer. . .” and “... it is almost like touching my home” (253). Similarly, Aying shows Redford that his temporal dislocation can be solved through reaching towards home. She tells him: “This water, here, this is the same water on the shore of Pagudpud [Aying’s town in the Philippines]. That is where I come from... Give me your hand. I will show you Pagudpud...” (255-256). Home is not so far removed that one cannot experience it, despite the physical distance from it. Nevertheless, as Peña would further reveal and subtly hint at through the sound of the crashing of waves that accompanied her arrival, Aying simultaneously embodies the home

²² A colloquial, slang term used by young Filipinos to denote Filipinos or Filipino-Americans.

that refuses to be left behind *and* the homes to be created upon her arrival. As Gedalof reminds us earlier in my discussion: “home is in continuous acts of production and reproduction,” thus, the idea of home in the Philippines which Vangie tries to reject and Redford attempts to reconnect with make themselves present and will be reconstituted in the production of their homes in the U.S.

(Re)Making homes

In *Flipzoids*, Peña makes clear that Aying does not merely function to bring Filipino culture to the U.S. and argue for the return of Vangie and Redford to their homelands. Ascribing only these purposes to her function in the play would only implicate Aying in a form of cultural nationalism, hence, reinscribing the culture binaries that Filipino/Filipino-Americans are forced to choose from. Also, her death at the end of the play would affirm the failure of her actions and evoke the loss of Filipino culture/home in the lives of Filipino-Americans. Peña avoids this hasty prescription by instead attending to the ways in which Aying challenges and destabilizes the idea that home-making for the immigrant must entail a rejection of the “home” in his/her land of origin. Aying’s memory work—her consistent recall of her life in the Philippines—does not necessarily compel a return, nullify the desire for it, or replace the lived experience of “being at home” in the new resettlement. Instead it involves a remembrance of the Filipino home which is and will always be imbricated in their acts of home-making in the U.S. Aying says to Redford: “This water, here, this is the same water on the shore of Pagudpud. That is where I come from. When I feel the water, when I touch it ... it is like I am also touching my home (255).

Peña exposes that, in the same vein that U.S. imperialism engendered Filipino migration to the U.S., potential Filipino migrants already envision their home in the U.S. because of the arrival of *balikbayan* (return home) boxes from the U.S. These boxes, filled with food items, clothes, and other mementos come from Filipinos already residing in the U.S. and are sent to their families in the Philippines. While these boxes are ways for the Filipino immigrant to “take care” of the home they left in the Philippines, they also affect the experience of home for family members who eventually follow to the U.S. The divergent effects of these boxes are articulated by mother and daughter:

VANGIE. What do you smell? Hmm? Tell me. Do you remember when we used to receive package from the States [a *balikbayan* box]. The first time you opened the box, there was this... smell. It was nothing like anything we had

back home. The only way to describe it is . . . better. And every time I smelled it, it gave me goose bumps, and I wanted to hold it in forever. And I did, until I started turning blue. Now, we don't have to wait for any boxes Aying. Now, we smell like boxes from America.

AYING. I tell you something. When I first arrived here. I smelled it also. Like leather shoes. Before you step outside. Like that. It made me feel peaceful. Then it changed.

. . .

AYING. You like me not to remember. But I am old already. That is all I have.
(254)

From this exchange we learn that part of the tension between Vangie and Aying lies in the differing reactions to the new “home” in the U.S. influenced by the expectations caused by the *balikbayan* (returnee or homecomer)²³ boxes they received while in the Philippines. While Vangie refuses to let go of the romantic view she has of the U.S., Aying admits to a changed experience of living in the U.S. Hence, the home of Vangie and Aying becomes this site of conflict and continuous negotiation of the conflicting perceptions of whether their new home in the U.S. matches the imagined one. Also, their joint efforts in recreating this memory suggest that constructions of the new home in the U.S. have not only been influenced by the past but also have acquired a different meaning caused by the lived and present realities of life in the U.S. Ultimately, in the shifts this scene describes, Peña repudiates the myth that immigrant homes in the U.S. are impermeable ones that take over the land through invasion. By underscoring the U.S. presence in Aying and Vangie’s home both in the Philippines and in the U.S., Peña argues for a rethinking of “invasion” notions that make the immigrant home more susceptible to exclusion and, at worst, xenophobic attacks.

Indeed Peña paints this act of reconstruction as an uneasy one. Both women’s desires to stay together as family are complicated by Aying’s longing for home and Vangie’s mission to

²³ Yen Le Espiritu writes, “In 1973, the Marcos government turned home – the term most used by Filipino migrants to refer to the Philippines – into state policy to encourage Filipinos living abroad, especially in the United States, to come “home” for a maximum of four months around the Christmas holidays . . . Officially named *balikbayan*, the returnees were offered a combination of reduced airfares, extended visas, tax breaks, and priority immigration and customs service upon arrival at the international airport in Manila” (80-81). See Espiritu, Yen Le. *Home Bound: Filipino Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. Print.

achieve financial security for their family. In the next scene, Peña highlights a shared memory that amplifies the emotional and familial resonances included in the act of home-making for Filipino immigrants. They recount a poignant memory of a young Vangie being put to sleep by her mother in Pagudpud:

VANGIE. I was nine. At night, every night, before we slept . . .

AYING. I remember.

VANGIE. I used to say... someday... Aying... I will give you better than this.

AYING. You wanted to live in a cement house. [. . .]

VANGIE. I was forcing myself to dream about it. And I didn't just want it for myself. I wanted you there with me, in the big cement house, walking up and down the wide staircase, you and me Aying... all the way up... and then down again...up...and down... and we would never get tired because outside, the neighbors were watching us through the screened windows, their eyes are bulging with envy [. . .]

AYING. Now we live in Anaheim. (260-261)

Here, Vangie reveals that her strong desire to stay and build a home in the U.S. is for her mother and what she thought matters to Aying—making the neighbors envious of their success.

Frustrated that her mother still intimates feeling dislocated (“I do not belong in your home”), Vangie finally bursts and says: “You’ve never once made me feel like I’ve done good. Instead, every time I look at you, I’m reminded of my own failure” (261). Peña continuously portrays that home-making involves constant negotiation between family members whose emotional tug of wars echo the struggles they encounter while making sense of their two homes. Set in between the presumed promise of success in the U.S. or the economic struggles in the U.S., both Vangie and Aying vacillate between the yearning to keep the family intact or separate between the two nations.

Indeed Peña strategically employs the mother-daughter relationship as a site for this continuous negotiation and contention. In fact, he heightens it by making Vangie and Aying embody and perform such acts of struggle. In back to back scenes, the first scene one portrays a hopeful note to their home-making. Aying, sensing Vangie’s frustration, takes her daughter’s hands and says: “We have the same. Same fingers. You see. You have my hands from many years ago. Strong hands. *(Pause)* Someday they will be ugly and crooked like mine” (261).

Aying attempts to establish the connection the two women share, and Peña raises the possibility of a more harmonious relationship between them and that of their home. However, the play then complicates this in the following scene:

VANGIE. Why do you say these things?

AYING. Here you put your hands here. (*Aying puts Vangie's hands around her neck.*)

VANGIE. What are you doing?

AYING. Here. Now you press hard. Squeeze it. (*Vangie recoils in horror. She looks at Aying with contempt and runs out.*) (261-262)

Although Aying claims soon after that she was only joking, the scene recalls the trauma that their family has suffered because of Vangie's migration, and the sacrifice Aying is willing to make to secure her daughters success and happiness. In her sadness about the changes she has seen in Vangie, Aying could be reenacting what she now thinks Vangie feels for her. In the end, Aying, with a mother's love, chooses to view her daughter with understanding despite Vangie's continuous disdain: "My daughter, she is good. You do not always see that. This place, it does not let her show that all the time. But I know she is good. In her (*She touches her chest.*) I know... because she is mine" (262).

Redford first meets Aying when she is performing a ritual based on the story of *Milagrosa*, which tells the tale of a fisherman unable to catch fish. The man receives help from an apparition of a woman who instructs him to go to the shore every year, wash his spirit with water to ensure his bountiful catch, and recite the words: "Begin again. *Empezar Ya*" (254). The story confounds Redford who knows almost nothing about Philippine culture, but Aying offers it to him as a metaphor that will inspire his reclamation of the Philippines as home.

The differences between Vangie and Redford's senses of exclusion hinge on figurations of exteriority and interiority. Vangie's external dislocation stems from refusing to acknowledge her split home sites. On the other hand, Redford seems unaware of what truly constitutes his home in the U.S. and expresses this through a corporeal estrangement not only from his U.S. milieu but also his internal sense of self:

REDFORD. Just peel the skin, and reveal the truth. Now isn't that an aphorism to live by? You know it's the largest organ of the body, right up there with the liver. They say you can stretch your skin for miles. Is that right? That may be a

little overstated. Enough to cover a room anyway. Or upholster a couch. It could happen. Just peel the skin, and reveal the truth.” (262)

To elucidate Redford’s sentiments, I turn to Sarah Ahmed and her book, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. Ahmed argues that “[t]he experiences of migration – of not being in a place one lived as home – are felt at the level of embodiment, the lived experience of inhabiting a particular space, a space that is neither within nor outside bodily space” (92). For Ahmed, pain and trauma from not being at home is expressed through his “skin narrations.” Redford migrated to the U.S. as a child and cannot remember the “lived experience” of the Philippines. Moreover, he cannot fully inhabit the U.S. as he has been made to “put on” a skin that is not his but that of a “Macintosh apple.” Thus to access any memories of home (both in the United States and the Philippines), Redford cuts into the skin of his palm using the edge of a rock saying: “Something is under there. Something more. We have to believe that. There, you see. (*He holds up his bleeding palm*)” (262). As opposed to Vangie’s exterior enactments, Redford’s actions display a quest for a hidden, essential idea of his Philippine origin contained within his body.

Peña offers important juxtapositions between Aying and Redford. Redford is set in contradistinction with Aying who has a corporeal connection to her home in Pagudpud. Not only does she reconnect with the home by touch, she embodies home as revealed in an earlier scene:

AYING. I tell you this. Before I ride the airplane. I walk around our house three times. Very slowly three times. I stop at the acacia tree and stand under her branches, very long time also so I can count her leaves. I stop by the fence, and I listen to the neighbor’s pig. I stop in the middle of my kitchen I touch the black bottom of my favorite *kalder* [cooking pot]. I stand there, very long time also and I smell my mother’s cooking. I will take this, I say. I will take that. Stop here, for a while. Stop there a little longer. This is important. Because I know, someday, you will come to me and say, ‘I do not remember. I do not smell. I do not feel.’ And I will give you my heart. ‘There’ I will say, ‘you look in there. I keep it all for you.’ (260)

In this narration, we see Aying’s preservation of the memory not through the lens of a camera or objects but through varying experiences of the home in a spatial, physical, and emotional dimension gained through her senses of vision, touch, and feeling—all kept vibrant in her heart.

Later in the play, Aying relates the folk story of Esmeralda, a woman who asked her suitor to cut up the heart of his mother as a test of his love. Aying ends the story by saying that despite the son's cruel follow through of his potential lover's horrific demand, the mother forgives her son and willingly sacrifices her heart for his happiness. Aying's intention is to relate the lengths to which Filipina mothers will go in order to attain their children's happiness. Ironically, a few scenes later, Aying dies from heart trouble.

Millado takes into account that Aying cannot pass such bodily, lived experience to Redford and it is here, I argue, Millado begins to complicate Aying's significations in *Flipzoids*. Through her relationship with Redford, who stands in for the many second generation Filipino-Americans raised from a very young age, if not born, in the U.S., Aying begins to demonstrate how home-making occurs not only in the domestic space shared by a Filipino family but amongst a community of Filipino-Americans. Because Redford's body or skin does not allow him access to share in the lived experience of Aying's home, the transference of memory functions as the only option for Redford. Redford reveals that his parents have chosen to adopt the US American teleology of progress and development which for the Filipino-American entails a "forgetting" of the past of American imperialism: "My family shares information on a 'need-to-know' basis only . . . It was always what he was going to be in the future. . . And there was never any (more) residue, you know . . . My father just kept on moving forward. . ." (262).

His family's erasure of the past in his family home and feelings of dislocation impelled by life in U.S. society causes Redford to be drawn to Aying who activates home, reconstructs it in the U.S. for him thus allowing Aying and Redford to re-inhabit a new site together, which is neither wholly Filipino nor American. During the first moments of their initial encounter, Redford asks Aying where her home is, and Aying reaches out for his hand and makes him touch the water:

AYING. Feel that? There is a small town close to the water. Pagudpud. We call it that. . . In the streets, you hear the carabao pulling big carts of rice to the market. That is next to the bus station. Do you see? Where I live, there is a big acacia tree. . . All around, my mother, Nang Senciang, she put Sampaguita flowers . . . At the back of the house, there is a mango tree . . . We also have small river . . . When it rains, the water comes out of the river and covers the

ground . You can see the fish swimming all around the house. Can you see? It begins now. The rains have started. See? (256).

In this scene, Aying conjures a spatial memory of her home and shares it with Redford. Importantly, she draws upon bodily experience to convey to Redford the home he has forgotten. She urges him to know with his senses, to “hear,” “see,” “smell,” and “touch” his unfamiliar home in order to transfer her memories of the Philippines to him. Through communal gestures such as Aying taking Redford’s hands to touch the ocean or home or of the two characters playing Filipino children’s games like the *pitik bulag*²⁴ or the *taguan* (hide and seek), Aying and Redford rework the terms of spatial alienation they have come to inhabit separately. Moreover, through their newly forged friendship, a community is formed through their collective remembering. Ahmed astutely describes it as such: “The gap between memory and place in the very dislocation of migration allows communities to be formed: that gap becomes reworked as a site of bodily transformation, the potential to remake one’s relation to that which appears unfamiliar, to reinhabit space and places” (93). As the scene described above illustrates, Aying becomes the catalyst for community and home building in the U.S.

Aying hints at the dialectical movement of the home in the previous scene, which sheds light on Redford’s dual homes. Like the Filipino custom of the *bayanihan*, transporting huts, Aying and Redford’s home “travels” as it resituates itself in the U.S. through Aying’s memory work. And, like the movement of relocated huts, Peña challenges the notion of the need for a perfect reconstruction or the impossibility of an “imagined return” of a Filipino-American. In his rest room facility at Red Cove, Redford attempts to rehearse Aying’s memory strategy to an unsuspecting stranger:

REDFORD. Do this for me, will you? Bob? Close your eyes a minute and imagine a huge...big...oak tree. *(Pause)* You with me? Just to the right, a singing brook . . . with water like...I don’t know...Evian...and gold fish... In the...spring...when it rains the water spills all around the home and you can see the darn things swimming around. And ... well... that’s all I have to say about that. (262)

²⁴ *Pitik Bulag* (Flick the Blind) is a game played by two players. One person covers his eyes with a hand while the other flicks a finger on the hand that covers the eyes of his/her partner. The other person indicates a number through his hand at the same time the other person does. If their numbers match, they switch roles.

Although this speech attests to a disappointed attempt in recreating Aying's home in the Philippines, the importance lies in Redford's attempt to fashion a home that is both "here" and "there," a crucial step in solving the crisis of his dislocation. His home is recreated with an oak tree, Evian water, rain during spring time, and goldfish, all references that mark his U.S. American identity. Redford is slowly reconstituting his idea of home now informed by his and Aying's shared memory of the home in Pagudpud and also his own experiences while living in the U.S.

For her part, Aying does not insist on the return to a Philippine located home for her daughter and her new friend, Redford. In fact, she assures him that he has a home. While Redford nurses an insatiable and unidentifiable longing: "And you know what keeps repeating in my head? Over and over. 'I want to go home.' I want to go home. Over and over. I want to go home," Aying replies with matter of fact observation: "This is your home" (263). Because Redford's uneasy entrapment between two homes seems to gesture towards the irresolvable duality of homes he must inhabit as an immigrant, this dilemma, brought upon by his encounters with Aying, helps to undermine the notion that the Filipino-American must choose between the "homes."

Using again the metaphor of the *balikbayan* (return home) boxes to illustrate a sense of active, mobile homes and home-making, Aying and Vangie elucidate how homes in the U.S. were imagined by Filipino families even before other members arrived to their American destination. New homes that are created in the U.S. will always bear traces of the old homes left in the Philippines. Concurrently, through Aying's conversations with Redford, Peña argues for the significance of a sense of history to ground the identities of Filipino-Americans. Therefore acts of narration such as Aying's oral histories and folk stories or the rejection of their import for Filipino-Americans such as Vangie become important didactic tools in *Flipzoids*. Because his parents refused to tell their son about his other home, Redford poignantly illustrates that without these memories, the ahistorical, postmodern subject will remain alienated, disorientated, lonely, and without a home. The lack of or the rejection of history and cultural memory negates these activities import in conjuring new ideas of home in the U.S., inciting their activation, and creating the duality of home. As the character of Redford illustrates in *Flipzoids*, without these important tools that refigure the terms of home-making into a more expansive endeavor,

Filipino-Americans are left to fence with compounded feelings of dislocation already hampered by political and social exclusions in living in the U.S.

Peña leaves the space he opened as a site of contestation through his play's unexpected unhappy ending. The already strained relationship between mother and daughter finally unravels in a shopping mall where Aying performs the ritual of the *Milagrosa* upon seeing the mall's water fountain. Vangie, embarrassed, calls the police to take Aying away. The audience comes to learn that Aying has stopped speaking and then dies after three months after the incident at the mall. Millado raises doubt whether Vangie will choose to acknowledge "home" in the Philippines even though she expresses guilt over the incident with her mother: "She can't go back. There's nothing to go back to. I know you probably think, listening to her stories, that where she comes from is a magical place, well it's not. She says to me all the time, 'Evangelina, do not forget.' That's exactly what I've done" (268). The ambiguity in this confession belies any assumption that Vangie will automatically turn her back on "melting" into Whiteness because of Aying's death. Aying's silence at the end of the play, accompanied now with a knot-tying habit she has picked up from Redford, especially set in contrast with her beginning monologue further complicates an "ideal ending" for Vangie's narrative. Aying's death casts an ambiguous pall over the play's idea of home-making and belonging causing us to wonder, despite her intentions, does Aying's self-made project ultimately fail?

By the end of the play, Redford comes to a realization that he does not have a corporeal attachment to home in the Philippines: "I thought I was somehow tied to...like an umbilical connection. That I was somehow entitled to say, I belong to this ... I am part of this. But it's not. It rings hollow in me" (269). But Millado also suggests that Redford has an embodied memory of the home his family left behind upon migration deep within himself. When he gives his final goodbye to Aying, he "*kneels and takes Aying's hand. He touches the back of her palm to his forehead*" (269). This gesture in Filipino culture is one that a child learns early on as a sign of respect to their elders. Yet Redford admits: "I don't know why I did that" (269). Redford's gesture seems to espouse an essentialized Filipino-ness that lurks somewhere in the Fil-Am man. However, Millado throws focus towards Redford's final imaginings in the play, through which the playwright argues for the continuous work of making homes to redress the demise of the "Filipino home" in the U.S. Millado allows Redford to trace his own history through his recall of a dream, which suggests his own form of self-transformation. In a poetic and comical vision,

Redford gives birth to a baby who morphs into a “black and white spotted calf.” The retelling of the dream sequence is worth noting at length:

REDFORD. I am pregnant [. . .] I contract. Dilate. Whoosh! It’s a fuckin’ pink baby. We’re sitting in a pasture. . . I AM CONTENT. Until is cries, and cries so implacably, I. . . *(He covers its mouth with his hand.)* SHUT UP. Pink baby turns to Red baby. Red to blue baby. . . Blue to purple. OH BABY *(he takes his hand off in horror)* Good god. . . what am I. . . ? You hungry? That all? Here. *(He offers his breast.)* Holy shit. I have nothing. . . The cow? The cow. . . Yes. There, chewing cud under the apple tree. Baby, Bessie. Bessie, baby. SUCK GODDAMIT! [. . .]

Purple progeny turns, first blue, now red, now pink again [. . .]

But it didn’t stop there.

Pink to yellow. Come in Yellow.

But paler, and paler and paler still.

Yellow invited White. Come in White [. . .]

Now black spots form on its tiny hands and feet.

MY POOR BABY IS BECOMING A BARN ANIMAL. Help. *(He tries to pull the baby away fro the cow.)* Let go. Let go. But it would not, and I could not. And my child, which has now fully metamorphosed into a black and white spotted calf, turned to me. . . and I knew it wanted to say: [. . .]

Don’t be sad, Initial Life Giver.

But I CHOOSE to be part of what sustains me.

Only none of these tender words come out.

Instead. Instead of a blessing.

Instead of Daddy.

A long and disgusting MOOOOO.

I woke up with a spoiled taste in my mouth. (271)

In the vivid imagery of this dream, Redford acknowledges that he has created—through himself—part of what has “sustained” him and also offers an implicit critique about the subservience required of him. His dream traces out his own journey of vexed racial identifications and the depths of his confusion, dejection, frustration, and, ultimately, the loss of

his ability to “speak.” Nevertheless, because of his relationship with Aying, Redford does become able to remember a partial memory about his last experience of home in the Philippines before his family departed for the United States:

REDFORD. The only thing I remember... from the other side... maybe I was six...maybe seven... the only thing that survives...is a fuzzy picture. A small blue window over a bed. Maybe over my bed. Lying down, I recall catching a slice of the sky outside . . . When it rains, it sounds like...it makes the same sound as when you drop pennies into a tin can . . . you're swallowed by a wave of music. There is comfort. There. (272)

In this recuperative gesture, Redford can face his feelings of dislocation and unbelongingness with a renewed sense memory about his past. In contrast with Vangie, his act of speaking his past and his home in the present bring to mind the Filipino-Americans' ways of existing, inhabiting, and sustaining two homes simultaneously.

Homes in the Making

If we following the logic that Aying's function in the play only serves to bring Vangie and Redford back to the Philippines, her death at the play's end, with Vangie and Redford remaining in the U.S., may be perceived as a failing on the part of both Aying and Peña. Yet to read the play through this lens overlooks the agency that Peña strenuously gives Aying. Therefore, I argue that it would prove more instructive to focus on the ways Aying offers a rethinking of the notions of “home” and “belonging” wherein the traumatic past and the dislocated present are able to cohere in the “continuous act of production and reproduction,” which ultimately undercuts acts of exclusions based on fixed notions of home, culture, and nation. In her essay, Gedalof views the value of women's function through the “reworking of always-messy origin stories told to and by ever-changing selves, which allows for the persistence of a sense of community without recourse to a story that says ‘this is how it has always been, you must do things this way so that we know who we are’” (106). Drawing from this argument, I read Aying's performative speech acts, her many folk stories, as acts of resistance and of reclaiming women's ability to negotiate the complexities of living in the interstitial space between the U.S. and the Philippines. Throughout *Flipzoids*, Peña makes a point that homes in the Philippines imbricate themselves in the making of new homes of the Filipino immigrant. Vangie's home will always be inflected with her past home, and Redford's new home will

continuously be composed by the memory of a “home” in the Philippines. Aying’s final gesture before her death—tying and untying knots on a shoe string, which she learned from Redford earlier in the play—signifies the effect of her presence in the U.S. to her relationship with her daughter, Vangie and new friend, Redford. Not only does this act evoke the entwined bond she has made with Redford or in the case of Vangie, their still tangled relationship, but it also suggests the necessary unraveling of entanglements in order to re-create – the Filipino American home is continuously built and then rebuilt.

The Problem of Filipino Homes in Han Ong’s *Middle Finger*

My decision to visit Filipino-American homes for the explorations of this thesis is in direct response to the complex, sometimes strained, relationships I have with homes. Part of the reason behind interrogating the Filipino-American home was not only to seek the complex factors that help construct or de-construct it, but also to raise possibilities of its future reconstructions—What will happen next? Where is my new home going to be? Hence, as I make one final stop to visit Han Ong’s *Middle Finger*, I ask: if this is how Filipino-American homes *have been* dramatized on stage and, in light of Peña’s inconclusive end to *Flipzoids*, what lies ahead for the Filipino-American home? What will they be? What will we *make* them be? And How?

What propels my questions is the most recent play out of the three texts I explore. Filipino-American playwright Han Ong, commissioned by New York’s Public Theatre, wrote *Middle Finger* in 1997 as part of the theatre’s artistic project that year. Tasked to “connect classics to modern theatre,” Ong chose German playwright, Frank Wedekind’s work, *Spring Awakening* as basis for his contemporary adaptation. Paradigmatically, circumstances surrounding Ong’s writing of the play evoke the dilemma Asian American artists need to contend with. Patrice Chu in her book *Assimilating Asians: Gendered Strategies of Authorship in Asian America* asserts: “To belong in the city of words, Asian American writers must call for themselves ‘the difficult names of who we are,’ must make a place in the [U.S] American national literature where their stories belong” (3). Asian American playwrights share a heavy burden imposed on them to negotiate between narratives of assimilation and those that propound Asian-American cultural distinctions for their inclusion to the “national literature” amongst other playwrights unmarked by race or ethnic origin. Ong faced this exact challenge in taking on the

task of adapting *Spring Awakening* into a Filipino cultural context to participate in the prestigious arena of The Public Theatre.

Ong sets his play in a contemporary U.S. American context, not marked by a distinct city or location. *Middle Finger* centers on two Filipino-American middle school aged boys, Jakob and Lunga, and their friends of different racial identities who all attend a strict Catholic school. In the school they fight against the adults and each other. In scenes of terse and intimate contact, the play dramatizes how the boys attempt to define themselves through the caring concern of their parents, the rigidity of Catholic school systems, and the troubles between them as teenagers. In the end, one commits suicide after being accused of cheating and accidentally murdering his stepfather. As a result of the boy's death, another central character decides to change his "delinquent" ways and suppress his defiant demeanor in order to please his parents and teachers.

Deeply embedded in Wedekind's and Ong's work is "the development of the individual from youthful innocence to civilized maturity" that prominent Asian American scholar, Lisa Lowe astutely identifies as one of the main tenets of the Western narrative structure, the *bildungsroman*. According to Lowe, the *bildungsroman* functions as "'official' narratives of integration" wherein, through its following of the telos of "reconciliation of the individual to the social order," (98) it allows readers to identify with the "national" and, thus, simultaneously constructs and excludes the "Other." Hence, scholarly projects such as Lowe's have celebrated Asian American writing which "produce effects of dissonance, fragmentation, and irresolution" by challenging the Western linear narratives that impinge on marginalized identities such as the Asian American subject. The two Filipino-American leads in Ong's play already suggest an attempt to tell a different story than Wedekind's, yet I argue that *Middle Finger* strives to create the effects of "dissonance, fragmentation, and irresolution" for different ends. In Ong's departure from *Spring Awakening*, I turn my exploration's attention to the ambivalences that complicate his project to write a Filipino-American "coming of age story." Indeed while the genesis of *Middle Finger* impels us to be suspicious of its *bildungsroman*'s strategies, *Middle Finger* remains a productive site wherein we can examine its representation of the Filipino-American home vis-à-vis Peña's *Flipzoids*. If *Flipzoids* argues for homes-in-the-making, does *Middle Finger* only render a home, though seemingly stable and impenetrable against U.S. forces, that still does not stand against the "U.S. home"? Is it possible then to only reinscribe and revert back to the concept of home as fixed and stable, a process I call deactivation, and thus only

reinforcing or perhaps even constructing a different binary between “that” home and “this” home?

Complicity

Although the play begins with the display of the oppressive force of the school in Jakob and Lunga’s lives, critical focus is immediately displaced and the narrative of Jakob’s resistance, the more rebellious of the two boys, becomes riddled with a depiction of his troubled home. After a teacher punishes the boys in the first scene, the conversation prompted by Jakob’s plan for cutting class suddenly turns into a discussion about Jakob and Lunga’s fathers:

LUNGA. What do your parents say?

JAKOB. Nothing.

LUNGA. They don’t hit you?

JAKOB. They wouldn’t dare. Do yours?

LUNGA. They caught me slacking once. My father almost killed me.

JAKOB. I wish my father was like that. I can’t wait to die. (8)

From here, the text swiftly sets the Filipino-American home in contradistinction with the Catholic school but only to its detriment. Far from being safe havens or recuperative spaces to which Jakob and Lunga can go to after experiencing extreme alienation in school, Jakob’s and Lunga’s homes are rendered as sites of abuse or neglect.

In an exemplary “family dinner” scene, Jakob’s detachment from his family becomes almost understandable. Upset that he arrived late for dinner, his parents start questioning Jakob about school and they inaugurate the assimilationist narrative that underscores the entire play. The audience learns that although Jakob’s father, Mr. Rodriguez admits the unjust situation at his work place: “Work was the way it always was. Awful. Every day I have to sit there and withheld all my true feelings. Diplomacy. The world is divided into two. The expert and the inept” (12). Jakob’s father has already bought into the American dream of attaining economic and social mobility. Not only does Mr. Rodriguez make himself complicit in his own exclusion through settling in the middle of the “expert” and the “inept,” he enacts this same act of exclusion on others. Since assimilation in the U.S. connotes the erasure of other cultural specificities, Jakob’s father figuratively casts out traces of Filipino-ness in his house by ordering his son to stop being friends with Lunga and start “associating” with Americans. His father tells him: “We came to this country so you can be part of it” (13). Here, parallels can be drawn between Jakob and

Redford; while Redford's parents ask him to put on his Americanness to cover up his Filipino identity, Jakobs' parents propose to sanitize their home of any evidence of Filipino-ness.

I would argue that part of the text attempts to draw attention to the seeming absence of patriarchy in the Filipino home to set it in sharp relief to the oppressive school system that the boys live under and must abide to secure their future success. Nevertheless, as the events in this scene show, what the text does is render the Filipino home as inherently flawed. This weakening becomes embodied in how Jakob's father, Mr. Rodríguez, is portrayed in the scene. The text subtly hints at Jakob's father's benevolence in his choice to not carry out corporeal punishment on his son, even at the urging of his wife who believes in the practice for the sake of her son's "character":

MRS. RODRÍGUEZ. (*To Mr. Rodríguez*) Is that the best you can do?

MR. RODRÍGUEZ. I thought we agreed.

MRS. RODRÍGUEZ. On what?

MR. RODRÍGUEZ. No more punishments . . . (13)

However, this exchange informs the audience that Mr. Rodriguez does "nothing" to help develop much less discipline his son, even according to Jakob ("Why don't you ever hit me anymore?") (14), and despite the strong insistence (or nagging) of his mother. In effect, the scene negates what the text seems set out to do: prove that the Filipino-American home does not inflict the same physical and emotional violence the school system does on Jakob. Instead, the father/home gets portrayed as incapable of implementing any form of responsible parenting to help form a capable Filipino-American subject, which only adds to racist rhetoric that insists immigrants need to be controlled and disciplined before they can be integrated into the nation-state. Scholar Tayyab Mahmud writes that immigration is presented as "a problem to be solved, a flaw to be corrected, a war to be fought and a flow to be stopped" (633). Thus, the placement of this depiction of the Filipino home at the start of the play works to undermine later scenes that depict the school system's injustices and control: the school is justified and not at fault because the immigrant home, a problem and flaw, failed in fulfilling its responsibility.

Moreover, while the text may be read as a critique of patriarchy in the Philippines or in the U.S., the text turns to portraying Filipinas in a bad light to achieve such a goal. Jakob's mother may at first be perceived as functioning as Aying in "bringing" Filipino cultural values to the U.S., but in *Middle Finger*, it is also through Mrs. Rodríguez that the Filipino-American is

made incapable of adapting and reconfiguring the home to suit the living conditions in the U.S. After Jakob's father refuses to punish his son because of the ill effects severe punishment had on Jakob's older sister, now a "slut" according to Mrs. Rodriguez because she sleeps "only with one guy," Jakob's sister will make an appearance later on in the play, but preceding her arrival, the text already recounts the parents' estranged relationship with their daughter, most likely caused by his mother's high expectations and her father's iron hand. Indeed by no means should punitive or unjust "old" and "traditional" Filipino cultural values be valorized, but the text also begs questioning whether they should also be rendered obsolete and inflexible in stories such as Ong's. Moreover, the mother/daughter relationship in *Middle Finger* invokes a different yet vaguely similar type of "patriarchy" inflicted on Filipina daughters by mothers who want to keep their daughters chaste, pure, and inside the home, which promotes problematic notions of gendered behavior implemented on girls. If Ong wanted to recuperate the female's role in the home, this scene with the daughter only perpetuates and reaffirms the failure of the father while demonizing the Filipina mother. In fact, it seems to feed into Orientalist stereotypes that render Asian men incapable or passive and Asian women as heartless "dragon ladies."

Imbibing Jakob's home with agency is particularly significant for Jakob as he is the character Ong attempts to imbue with a narrative of resistance. Yet as we have seen, his home is rendered incapable of empowering him. Chu asserts that Asian American writers take advantage of "the separation of [public and private] spheres and the possibility of coding political conflict in private, domestic or sentimental terms" because their works will be able to reach those who are not aware of their countries histories (16). However, the potential to critique the narrative of assimilation and a depoliticized rhetoric of socio-political and economic mobility gets completely subsumed by the inaction characterizing the Rodriguez home. As the play describes, during the last moments of this scene:

Mr. Rodriguez takes off his belt without ceremony. A routine. Puts it on the table.

It has a big, square, gold buckle. [. . .]

JAKOB. Why don't you ever hit me anymore?

MR. RODRIGUEZ: You sound like you miss it.

JAKOB. I asked you a question.

MR. RODRIGUEZ. Would you like us to hit you?

JAKOB. Wouldn't you like to hit me? (14)

The ceremonious removal of the belt, which for many Filipino children symbolize his/her father's role as the "*haligi ng tahanan*" (pillar of the home) signifies not only the loss of power of the Father and his giving up of his responsibility but also of the collapse of the home's relations between its parents and children. From an immigrant standpoint, it signifies its deficiency to exhibit the fortitude it had to develop in order to survive the U.S. invasion of the Philippines and its forced migration. While some may interpret the family's silence at the end of the scene, because it closes without a reply from Mr. Rodriguez to Jakob's question, as a depiction of the trauma it has suffered because of migration, Ong does not give enough dramatic action to substantiate such a reading. Rather, the unanswered questions only serve to echo a son's longing for his parents' attention and the wavering influence of parental authority in Jakob's U.S. life.

Absentee Home

While Aying in *Flipzoids* makes the home present in the space of Vangie and Redford's U.S. realities, Benjamin Lunga's mother dis-embodies the home. In a scene set inside their house, Lunga confronts his mother about her "idealizing" of his stepfather. The portrayal of Lunga's mother as such creates a problematic conceptualization of the immigrant Filipina mother in the U.S. Melinda L. De Jesus in her edited anthology for Pinay²⁵ feminist writing argues that despite the "ubiquitous presence" of the Filipina-American in the diaspora: "Filipinas remain contingently visible: as nameless, faceless overseas contract workers, sex workers, and mail-order brides" and only seen as "objects of a sexist, imperial ideology" but "invisible as subjects and agents" (3). Ong's text, therefore, leaves intact and unquestioned the invisibility and violence inflicted on Lunga's mother by also making her complicit in her own domestic abuse: Mrs. Lunga chooses not to leave yet another abusive relationship, similar to the one she had with Lunga's birth father. When she claims: "I am nothing," (20) Lunga's mother renders herself invisible in her own home. Moreover, the text does not offer a complex understanding of the Filipina immigrant. She alludes to being "something," yet admits to her "underdevelopment:"

MRS. LUNGA. He doesn't know [Lunga's stepfather] – or maybe he does, but he doesn't want to remember – that nothing can sometimes turn into something.

But it takes a long time. It's slow. So slow that not many people want to stick

²⁵ Filipina or Filipina-American

around to see it happen. And besides, when it happens it's usually not spectacular. Just something small. Maybe not even worth waiting for. (20)

If one attempts to read this reflection for the well-intentioned critique by Ong of the male figure in her thought's first line, the lines that follow belie this critique. What it does essentially is perpetrate notions about Filipina invisibility and unworthiness—held in check even in the confines of her own domestic space.

Compared to Jakob's domestic situation, Ong seems at first to have painted a semblance of closer family unit in Lunga's home through the appearance of a stronger son/mother relationship. Despite his strained relationship with his stepfather, Lunga's talks with his mother reveal his concern for his mother's well-being, and Mrs. Lunga's doting on her son is evident and poignant. Yet inasmuch as Ong attempts to highlight the closer relationship between Lunga and his mother, this scene elucidates the internalized abjection that will play a role in Lunga's suicide later in the play. Before Lunga leaves home for school, he asks his mother:

LUNGA. Who am I today?

MRS. LUNGA. You're a good boy, Benjamin.

LUNGA. Don't say that. I'm not.

MRS. LUNGA. Yes, you are.

LUNGA. I'm disgusting.

MRS. LUNGA. Who told you that?

Lunga ups and leaves. (20)

Lunga displays an ambivalence and confusion towards his identity by asking questions such as "Who am I today?" He asks this question because a few moments before, his mother explained that her feelings of "nothingness" stemmed from Lunga's grandmother, who also decided to stay in an abusive domestic relationship. In essence, tracing this abjection genealogically weakens the two homes of his upbringing—in the U.S. and in the Philippines—that Lunga can claim as familiar. As we have learned previously in the play, Lunga has already internalized a form of abjection akin to his mother's. Therefore knowledge of his grandmother and mother's cycle of domestic abuse affirmed in this scene proves that his domestic space cannot provide a palliative to Lunga's feelings of dislocation and alienation as part of his experiences in school because of the self-imposed abjection already haunting his homes. Ultimately, this scene depicts the Filipino

home as unable to inaugurate a the second generation Filipino-American subject such as Lunga, whose name, paradoxically, evokes the home (*lungga* in Filipino means home).

Ong's *Middle Finger* makes a powerful case against the punitive U.S. American educational system that impinges both Jakob and Lunga in scenes that clearly demonstrate many examples of its faults. Yet on the other hand, because the text has in effect effaced the presence and value of the home in each of the two boys' narratives at the beginning of the play, the events that follow continue to unfold without the home. After a teacher accuses Lunga of cheating on an essay assignment, Lunga, goes to Jakob, his best friend, for help. But Jakob, preoccupied with "porno cards" at that time (further inscribing his Asian identity with hyper-sexuality), dismisses Lunga's plea for aid and fails to hear Lunga's talk of enacting "revenge" against others that the two boys had discussed in earlier scenes. The next time the friends meet, Jakob learns that Lunga has already taken matters in his own hand. In his juvenile fantasy and confines of his home, Lunga "imagines" his revenge against the teacher who accused him of cheating: he "playfully" prepares a Drano-laced drink for the teacher. Lunga admits to accidentally killing his stepfather by watching him imbibe the poisoned drink which he left unattended in the house. In the telling of Lunga's act and his own confession, the text not only fails to depict the home as a safe refuge for the desperate Lunga, but Lunga literally ends up killing part of his home with the murder of his stepfather, while his revengeful act towards the school is merely imagined.

The scenes following Lunga's suicide, the homes of the two boys are depicted only to eventually remove them from their lives altogether. For example, Lunga's mother decides to return to the Philippines, believing there is no reason for her to stay in the U.S.: "In our house no one will be living anymore. Except for me. I will go inside myself now so that I can't see my own existence. From now on there will only be quiet" (50). For Jakob, on the other hand, the text does not allow him to grieve the death of his friend nor find refuge in his home. Instead his home repeatedly insists that he needs to change, completely undercutting Jakob's narrative of resistance; he supposedly begins enacting "revenge" upon those whom he deems responsible for his best friend's death. After Lunga's burial, Jakob's mother neglects to sense the sadness and remorse of her son and instead places an unnecessary burden on him: "You are our hope. You know that don't you?" (53). Moreover, in a later scene, Mr. Rodríguez suppresses his grief altogether, observing that:

MR. RODRIGUEZ. Being sad in this country is a waste. In the Philippines you can be sad all you want. In fact everyone is. So if you're going to be sad that's where you should be. But here. You can't be afford to be slow. The lesson I want you to learn, Jakob. That lesson is progress.

JAKOB. Am I your hope?

MR. RODRIGUEZ. Screw hope. Hope is. What is that? Daydreaming. I want action. (53)

The divergent portrayal of Jakob's parents in these two scenes functions to illustrate the collusion of two unique paradigms that trap practically every second generation Filipino-American within progressive Western ideologies. This entrapment pushes against Jakob until the end of the play where he capitulates to the assimilationist logic that his parents have conditioned him to succumb to.

The play, however, insists that Jakob's attempts to change are in fact part of his plan to avenge his best friend's death. Jakob seems at first resolute and confident of his plan: "On the outside, you should be – Calm. . . . You should suggest edification. . . . But inside is this secret is you laughing like a revenge. Inside you should be sordid" (63). In the play's last scene where Jakob meets with Lunga's ghost, he confides in his best friend:

JAKOB. . . .I'll make sure you're remembered.

LUNGA. How. . . . Revenge?

JAKOB. I gotta keep working hard. I gotta change into what they want me to be.

LUNGA. It is revenge?

JAKOB. It all takes time Lunga. (68-69)

The emphasis on change (or assimilating) as a prerequisite for resistance depicted in this scene reveals the narrational inability of the "home" to support the two characters' plan to take action against the oppressive forces that have succeeded in excluding them. By portraying their parents as weakened due in part to their self-imposed abjection and desires to "melt" into Whiteness like the character Vangie in *Flipzoids*, the text displaces Jakob's and Lunga's potential subversive acts on to the narrative that, in turn, renders them and the home as problems that need to be solved first. Because their plans did not work out and knowing that Jakob's next plan would take time to produce its desired effects, Jakob and Lunga's ghost get lured in the meantime into a "fantasized" agency and power to control their future through the world of the videogame, "Car

Crash 2000.” As stage directions note, the play’s final image depicts the boys’ evacuation from their subordinated lives and blissful immersion into the videogame’s irreality: “*The boys negotiate the wheel [of Car Crash 2000] expertly. Every curve the game throws them they react to with a reflex like a sudden flickering of heat and energy. They have not once crashed. The road keeps winding. The engine keeps humming, whirring. The boys are rapt, ecstatic, happy*” (68). This final image, set against the backdrop of the boys’ shared virtual world *vis-à-vis* the videogame not only foretells the illusory nature of Jakob’s plans of revenge but also confirms the boys’ efforts to escape from “home.” Once the text sets into motion the virtual world that Jakob and Lunga come to inhabit, this also signals the complete de-activation of the Filipino home in *Middle Finger*.

CONCLUSION: HOME RETURNS

It was during breaks from school and the writing of these essays that I was reminded most of how my project's exploration of "home" attempts to speak to the everyday realities of the Filipino immigrant and the Filipino-American. For example, this past December, I once again shared countless conversations with my *ate*, my older sister, and fellow graduate students here in the U.S. Although topics of our conversations ran the gamut from the mundane to the significant, I would hear my sister conjure our Filipino home in her kitchen in Pennsylvania. Beyond simply recalling what has been already forgotten in her personal migration and trying to keep abreast of the latest developments in the Philippines, I have seen my sister almost having to "re-learn" the economic, political, cultural, and social fabrics that make up the city where we grew up, and it was my job to confirm and/or augment what she retained. As the months add up in my stay here in the U.S., our casual discussions have made me acutely aware of my own slowly developing unreliability about the intricacy of affairs in the Philippines. Yet together my sister and I reconstruct the Manila we knew in our effort to imagine the city we still—to this day—both call "home." After an hour or two of dinner preparations and shared recollections, the very composition of the meal we made? speaks to our experience here in the U.S. Our *adobo* (served upon my request and, by now, a dish that my brother-in-law swears should be made part of the Pennsylvania Dutch tradition) is paired with the very American sides dishes of mashed potatoes and vegetables—instead of the traditional accompaniment of rice. According to my mother who still resides in the Philippines, with this simple amendment, this meal is now far too American in its manifestation.

Yet it is the disparity between what goes on inside and outside the Filipino-American home that has ultimately propelled my questions for this project. Although the melding of the Filipino and the U.S. American inside my sister's home, for example, remains uncontested and seems without complication, once outside, my sister's and many others' encounters provide sharp relief. Therefore, scholar Yen Le Espiritu's theory of "differential inclusion," first used to describe the lived reality of Filipino friends and family, became an important point of departure for me to examine Filipino immigrants and naturalized U.S. citizens who experience varying degrees of exclusion in some form or another in the U.S. Le Espiritu's work would also come to

inflect highly my own thoughts about what I term the “idea of home” in the three dramatic works explored in this thesis.

While the prevalent focus on the “home” in plays may not come as a surprise, especially with excellent studies by eminent scholars such as Una Chaudhuri, I was nonetheless drawn to the homes in the works of Filipino-American playwrights Chris Millado, Ralph Peña, and Han Ong and saw their works as lenses and sites wherein one can, not only delve deeper into the contours of Filipino-American identity formations but also reflect upon Philippine – U.S. relations forged by the westward expansion of the United States. As I have argued, the plays I have examined suggest that Filipino immigrants’ homes in the U.S. carry the imprint of the imperialistic invasion of the Philippines, bear the mark of their forced dislocation, and contain the effects of the immigrants’ exclusion and marginalization. Because these homes in the U.S. maintain transnational links with the ones they “left behind,” these homes, although physically dislocated from their country of origin, the Philippines nevertheless makes itself present in the very peripheries where the new homes are currently situated. Through the dramaturgical foregrounding of the homes’ transgression of boundaries and constant enactment of “home-making,” the playwrights’ of these works’ “activated” homes become cogent sites wherein borders of exclusion are interrogated and contested.

Because this thesis seeks to argue for future investigations that employ an oscillating theoretical approach that takes into serious account the contiguous histories of the Philippine and U.S. nation-states, it therefore first and foremost intends to serve as a necessary impetus *and* provide a good solid base for future investigations of Filipino-American drama. By no means should the three works I discuss here be seen as encompassing the very complex figurations of Filipino immigrant/ Filipino-American experience. Instead I would like to emphasize the numerous and variegated narratives that are yet to be heard and acknowledged. In addition to the challenge of finding published works of drama, scholarship on these works is practically non-existent. Thus, although there are quite a few production reviews of some plays, the need for further critical analyses remains palpable and urgent.

As the possibility of my actual return to the Philippines looms, I am reminded that I left the country, already with a sense of the idea of home here in the U.S. Like Esteban of Millado’s *Peregrinasyon* and Vangie of Peña’s *Flipzoids*, I visualized trucks in expansive fields and smelled the U.S. when I opened *balikbayan* boxes. I also suddenly recall the white U.S.

American husband of one of the only two *Pinays* I have come to know during my stay in Tallahassee, who commented: “The Filipino is *the* American Asian.” Indeed Filipino-Americans’ figurations of home can only be fully defined with an understanding of what home is before his or her migration. Moreover, this can then be extended far back into interrogating what the U.S. thought of the Philippines before its’ travels to the Southeast Asian archipelago: how did these conceptions influence imperial strategies and inflect our past, present, and future visions for the Philippines as “home”? It is interesting to think that this initial journey and its many ramifications leads me to think of turning back, with hopes to ignite long overdue interrogations of Filipino plays, mostly written in Tagalog and English, which may complicate, broaden, and extend the concept of home as soon as Filipino plays, Filipino American plays, and US American ones are positioned to be in conversation with one another.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Vanessa L. Banta was born and raised in Manila, Philippines and received her bachelor's degree in Theatre Arts from the University of the Philippines in 2007. She wishes to continue exploring theatrical representations of Asian-American identities in Western drama and plans to continue writing on Filipino/Filipino-American theatrical texts and performances in the Philippine diaspora.