MABUHAY: A DOCUMENTARY POETRY

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Introduction

This thesis, a collection of documentary poetry, examines the historical, cultural, and colonial implications of overseas migration in the Philippines, looking specifically at the plight of the overseas Filipino worker (OFW) as well as my own experiences as a balikbayan. The project employs a variety of forms and texts, including poetry, prose, letters, interviews, and photographs to address relevant issues in Filipino American studies, such as immigration, colonialism, national identity, and language. More importantly, this collection aims to present the stories and voices of Filipina women, who are often silenced, marginalized, and pushed into the realms of invisibility.

The idea for this project first began while I was a student in Adam Aitken’s documentary poetry workshop. I was struggling to come up with a final project for his class, until I overheard my mother and my grandmother arguing over the four unsent balikbayan boxes in our house. My grandmother insisted that the boxes be left alone because she will send them soon, but my mother pointed out that my grandma has been saying that for months now. The conversation was humorous, with the women exchanging “ukininams” and other Filipino expletives. What struck me during the conversation, however, was my mother telling my grandmother that the balikbayan boxes were taking up too much space in our living room. Of course, my mother meant “space” in a literal sense, but at that time I had just started to think about the ways in which poets construct spaces.¹ After overhearing this conversation, I thought, “Did my family just

¹ Jules Boykoff discusses this idea of poets constructing and writing about spaces in his essay, “Poets as Experimental Geographers: Mark Nowak, Kaia Sand and the Re-composition of Political-Historical Space.”
create space?” But more importantly, the exchange led to another thought: “Is the balikbayan box a Filipino space?”

When I started to research about the balikbayan box, I was surprised to see that there has been scholarship written about it. In fact, most of the essays I found have described it as a neo-colonial object, and the balikbayan as a neo-colonial agent.² For example, Vicente Rafael says that the box takes on “a new form of colonialism and hegemonic control over the Filipino people through the distribution of Western commodities of ‘better quality’” (Rafael qtd. in Fausto). The box usually contains canned goods and other non-perishable foods, clothing, electronics, toys, and toiletries, all of which have the distinction of being “imported.” It is interesting to note that many of the items inside can be easily found in the Philippines and for a much cheaper price, but the box is popular simply because Filipinos have an affinity for Western things. Rafael, however, does ultimately offer a compromise, suggesting that the box is a “hybrid” object that is both national and neo-colonial, an argument that essentially reflects Filipino identity.

I have never really thought about the box as a colonial object, although the ways in which we perceived the boxes certainly were. I saw them as a haven of foreign foods and imported toys. My parents, on the other hand, viewed the boxes as our ticket out of the Philippines, our ticket to a better life. As Rafael writes, “Such boxes are the material evidence of immigrant success as much as they are symbolic of the promise of

² For further reading, see “Ugly Balikbays and Heroic OCWs” by Vicente Rafael; “Inside the Balikbayan Box” by Johanna Fausto; “Migrant Heroes: Nationalism, Citizenship and the Politics of Filipino Migrant Labor” by Robyn Rodriguez; and “Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers and the International Division of Reproductive Labor” by Rhacel Salazar Parrenas.
immigration itself.” Even our neighbors shared our excitement for the boxes, often asking us if they could sample one can of SPAM. But first and foremost, these boxes were our connection to my maternal grandparents as well as my other relatives in Hawai‘i, and the objects inside allowed us to live comfortably and happily.

The chapbook I had turned in for Aitken’s class, then, explored the complex nature of the balikbayan box, and ultimately, my complex relationship with the Philippines as a balikbayan. My poems recalled growing up in the Philippines as a recipient of the boxes as well as my experiences eventually immigrating to the United States, and then finally returning to the Philippines for the first time in eleven years in 2007. Because the class was a documentary poetry workshop, I needed to include documents in addition to my poems. Thus, I decided that the form of the project itself would be a “document.” Instead of merely placing poems on the page, I recreated the actual space and presented the chapbook in a box form. Inside the box were poems placed in SPAM and vienna sausage cans and macadamia nut canisters; one poem was even written on a t-shirt. In addition, I included found poems from research materials, maps, and photographs to illustrate the cultural and colonial history of the balikbayan. I was pleased with the final product, but I knew that when I had turned in the chapbook I would return to it.

I decided to reopen the balikbayan box for my master’s project, and this time I felt it was important, to continue with the metaphor, to place more “objects” inside. I knew the term balikbayan is not only reserved for Filipino American immigrants; it is also used to describe the millions of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) who return
home.\textsuperscript{3} Although I was aware of the OFW phenomenon in the Philippines, I never really thought about its cultural and political implications. In the book, \textit{Nawala ang Ilaw ng Tahanan: Case Studies of Families Left Behind by OFW Mothers}, co-authors Lourdes Arellano-Carandang, Beatrix Aileen Sison, and Christopher Carandang note that labor migration has been going on for more than a century, beginning with the \textit{sakadas} who immigrated to Hawai‘i to work in the plantation fields (4). The 1970s saw an increase in male OFWs due to the petroleum boom in the Middle East, and the men worked in heavy production and construction (4). Women joined the overseas work force in the 1980s, taking on unskilled jobs such as domestic workers and entertainers (4). A survey conducted in 2009 by the Philippines National Statistics Office estimates that out of the 2 million OFWs employed all over the world, about 970,000 are women (“Close to Half of OFWs are Females”). I then became interested in what Carandang et al. call the “feminization of labor migration,” and so I began to write poems based on the female OFW experience.

As with any creative work, a discussion of form is essential in understanding its content. I have always been interested in playing with form because I feel that it gives another layer to the work. So, what then, is the form being employed here? Perhaps it would be best to first describe my thesis as a collection of documentary poetry, which Joseph Harrington defines in his essay “Docupoetry and archive desire” as poetry that “contains quotations from or reproductions of documents or statements not produced by the poet” and “relates historical narratives, whether macro or micro, human or natural.”

\textsuperscript{3} In addition to being referred to as \textit{balikbayan}s, OFWs are also known as heroes and heroines for their hard work and sacrifice, living in foreign lands just to support their families and their country.
Several of the poems\(^4\) in my thesis can be considered as reproductions. “Goodbye Philippines, Hello World” is an English translation of Susan V. Ople’s *Paalis ka na pala: Gabay Para Sa OFW*, a self-help/instructional manual for prospective OFWs. Another piece, “On What It Means To Be Filipino, by Imelda Marcos” is perhaps the most evident example of a documentary poem because it is a collage of her most famous quotes. My work also exemplifies Harrington’s second definition; as mentioned earlier in the introduction, this thesis aims to explore the cultural and colonial implications of the *balikbayan* through the voices of Filipina women. In addition, there are sections called “(IM)MIGRATION FACTS” interspersed throughout my thesis, most of which are the basis for a particular narrative.

In his essay, Harrington also discusses the criticism for documentary poetry. He quotes another poet, Nada Gordon, who writes that documentary poets only concern themselves with “grasping for mimesis and reportage at the expense of verbal imagination,” and she feels in documentary poetry “a kind of shoehorning of didactic social message into poetic forms that have no intrinsic connection to, or maybe add no value to, the often compelling and important narratives that are being conveyed” (Gordon qtd. by Harrington). Like Harrington, I am inclined to think that Gordon “was suffering from a viral infection of the upper respiratory tract” when writing her views about documentary poetry. It seems reductive to say that documentary poets value reportage more than imagination, when, in fact, documentary poets use their imagination to present reportage. I could have easily written a report if I simply wanted to spew out facts and

\(^4\) All the pieces in this collection will be referred to as poems, regardless of their form (e.g. prose, prose poetry, photographs, etc.) For me, poetry encompasses many different forms and kinds, but regardless of what it looks like, the important thing is that it arouses emotion for both the poet and the reader. That is what poetry means to me.
statistics, but instead I produced poems in different forms – translated documents, interviews, letters, and photographs – in order to present factual information in fictional ways. Just because I was using academic research to fuel my creativity, that did not mean I did not encounter the same problems as non-documentary writers. I, too, had to create memorable and compelling characters and voices. Every word, every line, and every line break had to pack a punch. For example, one of the main issues I had while writing this thesis is that the voices were simply “reporting” what was happening to them. To solve this problem, I had to place the characters in immediate situations, in the same way fiction writers think about action. For example, the poem “Hide and Seek” started out with the voice simply telling an implied addressee about being an undocumented immigrant and then telling the addressee, “Don’t tell anyone. It’s a secret.” The final version that appears in the thesis is much more immediate – Florence (and the “observer” notes that the name has been changed), an illegal immigrant working as a beautician, is having a conversation with one of her regulars, a sheriff’s wife. The “telling” does not seem as forced now that there is a situation; after all, “talking story” at the hair salon is very common among women. Moreover, putting the speaker in a situation she cannot escape (i.e. being detained) gives readers something to think about, not only about Florence, but about the other characters as well. Why doesn’t Mrs. Jennings stop her husband? What about the “observer” who witnesses the detaining? Why doesn’t she do anything? And more importantly, what will happen to Florence? Will she be deported? To say, then, that documentary poetry is not imaginative is an insult for those writers who try and come up with creative ways to reconstruct and re-imagine realities.
Harrington also says that perhaps Gordon made those comments about documentary poetry because she was influenced by a “widespread malady” that Derrida called the “archive fever.” Harrington then explains that documentary poets act as archivists who determine which information is included and excluded. I feel that here is another example where a poet’s imagination comes into play because the poet chooses which stories to tell and which ones to leave out. There are so many facets to the OFW phenomenon, but I cannot possibly include them all in my thesis, and part of it too is because some facets interest me more than others. For instance, I am not particularly interested in studying the effects of OFW remittances in the Philippine economy. While that information is worthy of study, I am more interested in the “human” aspect of OFWs, that is, looking at them not only as employees but also as mothers, daughters, and wives.

To complicate the discussion, however, I feel that my thesis can also be identified as an “illusion” of documentary poetry. The voices in this book (with the exception of the author, the author’s mother, and Imelda Marcos) are obviously fictional, but their stories are presented in ways that make them seem real. Moreover, it is important to note that although these voices are fictional, the circumstances and situations these women face are very much real. For example, the poems are written as documents: one poem is written as a mother’s letter to her daughter, a homework assignment reveals an OFW daughter’s story, and we learn about Corazon and Feminist Fe’s lives through their interview transcript. Each female voice is also introduced with her name, age, occupation, and hometown, as if each woman is a subject in a case study. Even Feminist Fe, who functions as the ethnographer/observer in her piece, is presented as a subject, as if
someone else is observing her in turn. Even the author is a subject in her own case study. I realize that the word “subject” has negative connotations, and so I negotiate that by allowing the voices to speak for themselves rather than integrating my “own” voice. Usually, in ethnography, the researcher would include his/her own observations and some quotes from the observed. Here, I let the “subjects” speak throughout.

However, there are two pieces in the collection that employ a third-person omniscient narrator, “Speak” and “Drug Mule.” The form works here because it preserves anonymity to the speakers, whoever they may be, and rightfully so, since the subjects discussed here, rape and capital punishment, are sensitive. At the same time, the fact that there is no name to the speaker suggests that it could be anyone, which further emphasizes the information presented in the graphic that appears before these two pieces, that many women end up as victims of abuse and violence because of their lowered status.

I also want to note that when I wrote these two pieces, I was channeling an unlikely influence, Ernest Hemingway. I had just finished reading *In Our Time*, and I particularly liked the immediacy and the economy of the “chapter” vignettes so I used that as a blueprint for writing the third-person omniscient narrator. What I also found interesting is that one of the essays I read on *In Our Time*, “Dramatizations of Manhood in Hemingway’s *In Our Time* and *The Sun Also Rises*” by Thomas Strychacz discusses the ways in which places such as the bullring, the garden, and the river, function as masculine spaces in *In Our Time*. Particularly, Strychacz suggests that male identity is “performed” in these spaces.5 I thought this argument was interesting when thinking

5 I cannot find an exact page number, but that is the gist of his argument.
about what is going on in my work and looking at the different spaces that men and women occupy. While the men in Hemingway’s work perform male identity in bullfighting arenas and fishing camps, the women in my collection lose their identity in violent workplaces and execution chambers.

Since the thesis can be argued as an “illusion” of documentary poetry, this basically means that the poems in the collection are not documentary poetry. This, then, re-begs the question: What is the form? But perhaps the more interesting question to ask is, does it matter what form it is? Maybe my thesis falls under what Harrington calls the non-genre genre of “creative nonpoetry,” a category for works that do not fall in the standard categories of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. He describes creative nonpoetry as a form that “borrows and burrows from the traditional conventions of the poetic; or mashes them up; or disclaims them altogether, by turns. It can contain verse, prose, dialogue, pictures.” I think that best sums up the content of my thesis. Harrington also further explains the value of creative nonpoetry:

Creative nonpoetry is creative because it does not limit itself to either the poetry or the “non” – the writer (the creative nonpoet) may believe it to be “based on a true story”; the writer may take a skeptical stance towards (some of) that material – or declare an unreasoning faith in it. It is nonpoetry in the sense that it decreases the distance between writing history and poetry, while experimenting with the received forms of both (at the same time and by the same token) (Harrington).

I feel that this quote expresses how I feel about my project. I do not claim authority to the OFW experience since I am not one. I wrote these narratives based on the research I have found. And to be honest, sometimes I am not sure if the research I am finding is accurate. For example, I have seen different numbers for female OFWs. The Philippine National Statistics Office says there are about 970,000 Filipina women overseas. Another figure states that 75% of OFWs are women (San Juan). Carandang et al. say that 7 out of 10
women are OFWs. Here, once again, I am acting as an archivist, trying to figure out which number is real. However, despite the discrepancies in the numbers, the important thing is that I am able to inform and educate my readers about the feminization of labor migration in the Philippines.

Now that my work has been “classified” as creative nonpoetry, the next question that may be asked is, why write the poems this way? To begin answering this question, I want to address the use of ethnography (or rather, the illusion of ethnography) in my project. Since I am interested in giving voice to Filipina women, it would make sense to use ethnography, a method used in the social sciences to study and describe a particular group or culture (Genzuk). Obviously, there are several groups “researched” in this project: female OFWs, female immigrants, immigrants and balikbayan in general, and ultimately, Filipinas.

What does poetry have to do with ethnography? There has been much discussion on the role of poets. In his essay on documentary poetry, Harrington describes the general view about poets from the Romantic era onwards – to “express the current thoughts and emotions of the individual, without documenting the past experience of collectivities.” But more and more poets have been interested in writing about a collective consciousness, and as Philip Metres points out in his essay “From Reznikoff to Public Enemy: The poet as journalist, historian, agitator,” this tradition has been going on for many centuries. The desire to write about the collective experience rather than the individual experience seems to have given poets new roles. As the subtitle of Metres’ article says, poets are journalists and historians. Jules Boykoff describes documentary poets Kaia Sand and Mark Nowak as experimental geographers, investigators, and
amateurs (Boykoff). This is no different from ethnographers, who collect data through documents, photographs, interviews, and observations. Writing in an ethnographic (documentary) form, then, is a way for poets to fulfill these different roles. Although the women in my work are fictional, I would like to think that in some ways I have done some investigating through my research and some reporting through my poetry.

I also chose to use ethnography for the simple reason that I like to play with form, and the reason why I like to play around with it is because I feel that unconventional forms add layers to the work. For example, in the poem “Home Work,” if I had just written Lyn Lyn’s story in a traditional poem (or perhaps even in a dramatic monologue), I do not think the narrative would be as powerful. I feel that presenting her story in a document, more specifically as a homework assignment, is effective because it allows me to reveal more about her character. For instance, the misspelled words and the grammatical mistakes, which probably would not be an issue in a traditional poem, are emphasized in this poem to show her age as well as her limited English abilities. The instructions in the beginning of the poem also work here. They prompt readers on what to expect about the piece, but there is some irony here because after reading Lyn Lyn’s essay readers will find out more about her than what the assignment asks. Her complete honesty about her family situation sounds completely natural in the essay form. I feel that if I had written this in a traditional poem the honesty might be a little forced to the point of sentimentality. Here, because she is writing an essay, the fact that she reveals a little too much (e.g. her father drinking, her father and brother hating their mother) is okay because that is what the assignment asks, but at the same time she cannot reveal too much because she is writing the essay for another person (her teacher in school). The unsaid
things, then, allows the reader to think and make assumptions – is Lyn Lyn’s father violent, is her mother ever going to come home, and more importantly, what are the consequences of a mother’s absence in a child’s life? The title, then, has a double meaning: it obviously refers to the assignment, but it also suggests that being at home is work for Lyn Lyn and appropriately (and depressingly) enough, Lyn Lyn’s solution to her problem at home is to work and become a doctor so she can cure her father.

As I reflect on my project more I think the statement “form fits content” certainly applies to my work, and more importantly, I think the form itself allows me to reflect on my own poetics (and in some ways, my politics). I have also been thinking about the criticisms against ethnography, and it is interesting to think about in relation to the critique of the balikbayan as a glorified tourist or as a neo-colonial agent as well as my own assumptions as a balikbayan poet. For example, there has been some question about the objectivity of an ethnographer, and critics have said that observers will always operate within their own values and assumptions, and therefore it will impossible for them to be neutral (Laragy). Another criticism is that “cultural knowledge is ‘constructed’ rather than ‘discovered’ by ethnography” (Laragy).

I think the photographs that appear in my project are important to note here. When I was looking through the pictures I took when I returned to the Philippines in 2007, I noticed that many of them were not the typical “touristy” pictures. Usually, tourists take photographs of beautiful landscapes, often ignoring the “ugliness” of a place. Granted, we did not visit any “tourist” destinations at all in Manila because we were mostly there for my sister’s wedding, but still, it is interesting to see how my perception of Manila, where I spent the first ten years of my life, is translated through the camera. It
seems as if I was at the end of the other extreme – rather than only focusing on the “good” like a tourist, I was deliberately taking photographs of the “bad,” like I was a tourist from an alternate universe. My photos included “Do not piss here” reminders painted on the walls, congested roads, rusted signs, and houses with faded paint and dilapidated roofs.

As I mentioned earlier, I think playing with form adds more layers to a creative work, and I think this is also true when thinking about what my photographs could mean. For me, there are two possible interpretations. The obvious one is probably that the pictures serve as a critique of the tourist. Many postcolonial critics, such as Guy Debord and Daniel Boorstin, have viewed tourists as mere spectators who “dehumanize and destroy the cultural integrity and richness of an area” (Grieve). And of course, one of the ways in which tourists do this is through photographs. As Tracy Benson points out in her essay “The Museum of the Personal – The Souvenir and Nostalgia,” tourist photographs typically consist of holiday happy snaps, family photographs, and postcards (72), because it is only the beautiful that the tourist wants to remember from his/her vacation. John Fiske, Bob Hodge, and Graeme Turner argue that for the tourist, the camera may be the “final agent of colonisation [sic] that constructs the rest of the world and its people as the picturesque to be captured and possessed by the photographer/tourist” (Fiske qtd. by Benson 72). As I stated earlier, however, my tourist photographs are the opposite. I do not ignore the harsh realities of my surroundings; I capture the congestion, pollution, and poverty that I saw, or in other words, I capture the ugliness of Manila.

However, another interpretation that may not be as obvious, but perhaps more appropriate in this context especially when considering the story behind my project, is
that these photographs both reflect and critique the negative notions about the 

*balikbayan*. In his essay “Ugly Balikbayans and Heroic OCWs,” Vicente Rafael cites the journalist Conrado DeQuiros, who complained about *balikbayan* and their arrogance:

> They bring us stories about how much life in America has proved what the *Reader's Digest* says it is. They also bring us homilies, delivered with the proselytizing zeal of Thomasites, which are forceful for their use of contrasts. It's too hot in the Philippines. It's nice to snuggle by the hearth in America. There's grime and smog in our streets. You can't drive without anti-pollutants in the States. Filipino drivers are maniacs. American drivers follow traffic rules... you defer too much to authority here. You can talk man-to-man even with the president of the United States (DeQuir os qtd. by Rafael).

Furthermore, DeQuiros suggests that *balikbayan* are *walang hiya*, or arrogant and shameless, because of their lack of empathy toward the “natives” or the Filipinos who remain in the Philippines. Furthermore, their elevated status as Americans and their association with Western commodities have transformed *balikbayan* into objects of envy and desire for the natives (Rafael). Rafael, further explaining (or even agreeing with, I am not quite sure) DeQuiros’ argument, suggests that the arrogance and shamelessness of the *balikbayan* is a result of their own shame as Filipinos, which is deeply rooted in “colonial hegemony.” When thinking about those arguments in relation to my photographs, then, perhaps I am the arrogant *balikbayan* who only sees the bad things about her former home. I must admit that at some part of my vacation, I was disgusted at some of the things I saw. Looking back now, I realize that really was arrogance on my part, and so I used these photographs as a way to critique my own perceptions.

> It is important to note that there are captions under the photographs, which only complicate the discussion even further. They were purposely included as a way to critique Rafael and DeQuiros’ arguments. As I mentioned earlier when talking about how my project began, I was quite offended by this whole notion of *balikbayan* as a neo-
colonial hegemonizer (yes, I just made up a word). The captions are textual representations of the photographs, and many of them sound arrogant and condescending because as DeQuiros points out, the “bad” is what the balikbayan sees, and therefore, that is what the balikbayan poet is supposed to visualize, textualize, and represent. The last picture in the series with the parol critiques that notion. The speaker says, “decolonize your eyes/not everything is colonized,” to point out the ways in which scholars tend to view objects and individuals as colonial agents. While there is validity in these arguments (and in fact, I make the same argument), sometimes, a tourist is just a tourist. Sometimes, a balikbayan is just a balikbayan. While we are certainly influenced by colonial practices, we will always be proud of being Filipino. If we weren’t, we would not be returning home!

Even though some of the captions are literal translations of what is in the picture, some are figurative, which a) seem to indicate how the speaker sees the picture, and b) seem to alert the viewer on how he or she should see the picture. If we return to our discussion on ethnography, clearly the balikbayan poet, as the observer, is operating within her own values and assumptions and/or what her own values and assumptions are supposed to be as a balikbayan, and she is then forcing those assumptions to her own readers. Of course, the viewer does not have to agree with the poet’s assumptions, but the captions do provide another meaning to the photographs.

I would like to discuss one particular poem in depth, “Star Marginalization,” as another way to address how the form fits the content of my work. The poem is presented in a question-and-answer/interview format. In the piece, a character named Feminist Fe is interviewing an OFW named Corazon, who works as an entertainer in Japan. What
ensues is a humorous yet poignant exchange about ideas on Filipina feminism, colonial subjugation, patriarchy, Filipino identity, and Star Margarine. It is only appropriate to begin with this piece because I feel that it sets the tone for the rest of the collection. I hope to engage my readers in a conversation about the plight of female OFWs and Filipina women in general. In fact, several of the pieces in this collection function as a dialogue. “Home Work” can be seen as a conversation between a student and her teacher, and “Letters to Lyn Lyn” is obviously a mother’s way of reaching out to her daughter. Some poems, on the other hand, also have an implied addressee. “Hide and Seek” and “Broos” are examples. Presenting the poems as conversations and/or dialogues is my way of inviting the reader to listen to the voices of these different women.

I also chose to begin with “Star Marginalization” as a way to introduce the different issues and questions that my project raises. For instance, Feminist Fe argues that female OFWs like Corazon do not have to be part of a neo-colonial and patriarchal system in which they are forced to work unskilled jobs in order to survive. Corazon, on the other hand, says that the system cannot be changed, and by accepting and making the best out of the situation, female OFWs like herself can exert control of their own lives. Although she plays ignorant at first, we find out that she is perfectly aware of what it means to be marginalized, or as she calls it, Star Margarine. The piece takes another ironic turn when Feminist Fe, with her visions of changing the world through postcolonial and feminist theory, realizes that she is just as helpless, if not more helpless, than the women she is trying to help. In the end, neither Corazon nor Feminist Fe seem to find the answers they are looking for, however, both women learn from each other and try to help one another. By acknowledging a common experience, both women have
empowered one another. I hope that the rest of the stories in this collection, albeit fictional, will empower my fellow Filipinas and women from other groups as well.

Another issue that is presented throughout in this collection, and one that Feminist Fe and Corazon also discuss, is the (never-ending) question of what it means to be Filipino/a. Feminist Fe’s background mirrors my own (which can only mean that I am Feminist Fe) – she immigrated to the United States when she was young, forgot how to speak Filipino but still understands, has not returned to the Philippines for a really long time. Corazon, however, insists that Feminist Fe is not Filipino because she does not speak the language and ultimately, because she has never experienced poverty and hardship the way real Filipinos have. This theme is explored throughout the collection, especially in the sections called “Immigrant Tips,” where the speaker ironically disassociates herself from anything Filipino to highlight her Filipino-ness.

The form of my thesis was also influenced by authors whom I have read. However, before I start naming all my influences for this project (of which there is only one), I would like to point out that I have not read much Filipino and/or Filipino American literature, and to be honest it is not something that I go out of my way to read. In fact, my adviser, Susan Schultz, brought up an interesting point when we were discussing what to write in this introduction. She asked me to think about why I was writing in forms that are not necessarily related to Filipino literature. My answer was, “Because I didn’t know there was such a thing.” My answer was so simple, but when I think about it, my ignorance obviously has deeper implications. I do not know anything about traditional Filipino literature because a) I have never studied about it, and b) I have never bothered to find out if such a thing existed. I probably did not bother because I was
completely satisfied learning about the Western canon, which I never considered to be my “tradition,” but it is one that I have constantly analyzed and imitated. Even my own literary preferences are colonial, and once again the never-ending discussion of “form fits content” is appropriate here. Perhaps the hybrid nature of this collection signifies not only the neo-colonial/national split of the Filipino identity, but it also represents my own colonial/national split as a Filipina writer. Of course, I like to think that despite all the neo-colonial influence in my work, that like the balikbayan box, there is something “Filipino” about my writing (although I do not want my readers to view me simply as a “Filipina” writer).

Thus, it is really exciting when I encounter a Filipino and/or Filipino American writer whom I like (and I must admit, there are only a few). R. Zamora Linmark is an example, and he is obviously a huge influence in my own writing. Although there are a number of Filipino and/or Filipino American writers, especially female writers (e.g. Eileen Tabios, Jessica Hagedorn, Barbara Jane Reyes), it is Linmark’s style that resonates most with me. I feel like it would make sense for me to relate more to Eileen Tabios because her work is eerily similar to mine in terms of content (for example, she writes about the pleasure of receiving balikbayan boxes in her book *The Light Sang As It Left Your Eyes*), but I just did not feel the same connection with her as I did with Linmark. I suppose it is because he plays with form and incorporates humor in his writing. Because I also employ these techniques in my own writing, I expect that anyone familiar with Linmark who encounters my work will draw comparisons. For example, his most recent novel, *Leche*, also explores the “complex colonial and cultural history of the Philippines” through his balikbayan character, Vince. While there are many similarities between
Leche and this thesis (in fact, I stole the “tips” idea from him), I feel that there are also major differences in form and content.

Leche has a linear narrative with a plot and a protagonist; the novel tells the story of Vince’s experiences in his return to Manila after thirteen years of living in the United States. Even though Leche is predominantly written in prose, it also employs another forms. For example, Linmark includes the postcards that Vince sends to his family and friends back in Hawai‘i. There are also sections called “Tourist Tips,” which, as the name implies, provides humorous yet helpful tips for visitors. Like Leche, my thesis is about the balikbayan. However, rather than focusing on one single character, I explore the balikbayan experience, or rather, the overseas migration experience, through multiple perspectives. While Linmark focuses on queer consciousness, I emphasize the female collective. There is Florence, the undocumented TNT or tago ng tago; Lyn, the domestic helper in Singapore and absent mother to Lyn Lyn, the ten-year-old student who dreams of becoming a doctor in order to “sick” father. There is also the unnamed speaker/woman abused by her employer, and although the poem deals with physical abuse, it can also be read metaphorically to represent the ways in which women are constantly abused and violated by colonial and patriarchal forces.

As I mentioned, I particularly enjoy Linmark’s use of humor, which he accomplishes through language and form. The use of humor seems unique to a Filipino American writer, and an Asian American writer in general; I find that most of the Asian American literature I have read is too serious. I am not saying that I hate “serious literature,” but it is refreshing to see a work like Linmark’s that is both humorous and serious. And so, as superficial as this sounds, I am all about getting people to read my
work, and I think one of the ways in which I can draw a wider audience is through 
humor.

Of course, there has to be a particular reason why I am using humor, other than 
the fact that I want to draw readership and make people laugh. While trying to come up 
with an answer this question, I was reminded by a paper I wrote about *The Rocky Horror 
Picture Show*. In my paper, I argued that comedy and horror “provide an appropriate 
vehicle to address subjects that are otherwise forbidden, inappropriate, or condemned” 
(Gajelonia). I cited another scholar, Dennis White, who says that the fears in horror films 
“often take exotic and barely recognizable forms so that they will not be unbearably 
threatening while being resolved,” and in the case of *Rocky Horror*, the horror is 
presented through comedy. Therefore, the humor disguises the horror. I think what I am 
trying to do in this collection is similar to what is happening in *Rocky Horror*. Of course, 
my thesis does not have singing and dancing creatures (although Feminist Fe points out 
that all Filipinos are born entertainers), but like *Rocky Horror* there is an underlying 
exploration of deeper issues, and in this case I am addressing the implications of the 
feminization of labor migration, which definitely has its share of horrors (e.g. poverty, 
oppression, domestic violence, abuse, death). This humor is especially seen in the first 
piece, “Star Marginalization.” Corazon absurdly relates the marginalization of women to 
Star Margarine, but she realizes that female OFWs like her are oppressed and treated 
unjustly. As a solution, she wants to put Tawas deodorant to get rid of her “stinky” life 
brought upon by the harsh living conditions in the Philippines as well as the sense of 
inferiority she feels as a Filipina. As I said earlier though, I cannot say I have provided 
solutions to the problems that are posed, but I think the first step is to recognize that there
is a problem. Even the more “serious” character, Feminist Fe, transforms into a “comical” character when she breaks down and rants about the sexism she experiences in a humorous way. Her rant also plays on the stereotype about the “crazy feminist,” but she does so in a subversive manner, as if she is pointing out, “Hey, I like you, but you are pissing me off because you refuse to accept that we are all equal, and you refuse to be part of the system that wants to change that.”

Since the collection poses itself as an ethnographic account of the stories of Filipina women, it seems appropriate to use humor as a way to present their stories. In their essay, “Ethnic Humor: Subversion and Survival,” Joseph Boskin and Joseph Dorinson discuss the role of stand-up comics, particularly African American comics, as “cultural anthropologists” (95). Using Stephanie Koziski’s scholarship to frame their argument, Boskin and Dorinson write: “Comedians can jar audiences into awareness or deeply buried cultural underpinnings. Like a Margaret Mead, the stand-up comedian ‘gets down’ into primal roots. Comparable to the ancient storyteller in ‘primitive’ cultures, he or she may also communicate shared values as well as the common knowledge” (95). I feel that the humor in my collection functions in the same way that Boskin and Dorinson describe. I am the “comedienne” poking fun of Filipino idiosyncrasies – our fascination with whitening soap, our general obsession with Western objects and ideologies, and ultimately, our simultaneous feeling of shame and pride in being Filipino. But Boskin and Dorinson argue that ethnic humor, while originating as a “function of social class feelings of superiority and white racial antagonisms” (81), essentially became a tool for marginalized groups as a “means of revenge against their more powerful detractors” (81). The humor, then, serves a triple function: 1) as stated earlier comedy disguises the horror,
and in this case, the horror of Western colonization erasing and ingraining a sense of inferiority to an entire culture; 2) it critiques the inescapable colonial influences that permeate Filipino identities; and 3) certainly the most important, humor is used to gain (or maybe reclaim) a sense of national pride. As the “self” character points out in “Mother Packer” – “I am proud to be a cockroach.”

Speaking of cockroaches that never die, I would like to end this introduction by discussing the title I have chosen for this project, and let me do so by quoting one of my own characters, Feminist Fe. She writes, “Filipinos use the expression, *Mabuhay*, to welcome visitors in their home. But *mabuhay* also means to live, and the women in this book embody this word. A person needs to live in order to be heard. The women in this book are very much alive. And to live – that’s what Filipina feminism is all about.” Indeed, Feminist Fe. *Mabuhay ang mga Pilipina*, and this collection of documentary poetry and prose is my humble attempt in keeping our voices alive.
Works Cited


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Adios, Patria adorada, región del sol querida,
Perla del Mar de Oriente, nuestro perdido edén,
A darte voy alegre, la triste, mustia vida;
Ya fuera más brillante, más fresca más florida,
También por ti la diera, la diera por tu bien.

--- Jose Rizal
[IM]MIGRATION FACTS:

- 10 million Filipinos live outside of the Philippines.
- 3.9 million are overseas Filipino workers (OFWs).
- Overseas Filipinos and OFWs send balikbayan boxes and remittances to their families each year, comprising 10 percent of the country’s GDP. This is the reason why they are given special treatment when they return home.
you can leave your country three ways

immigration
labor migration
exile

but no matter how you left
you always return the same way –

home
MABUHAY:
A DOCUMENTARY POETRY
How do you write about a place that was once yours?

1. tell your story
2. tell her story
3. tell their story
4. tell our story
[IM] MIGRATION FACTS:

Overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) are persons of Filipino ancestry working abroad in order to support their families. Originally referred to as overseas contract workers (OCWs), the word “contract” was replaced with the word “Filipino” to emphasize national identity. The OFW phenomenon began in the 1970s, when the Marcos administration introduced Presidential Decree 442, a policy of labor that exported Filipino workers overseas (Rodriguez).

75 percent of OFWs are women, leaving their homes to become nurses, domestic workers, entertainers, and/or semi-skilled laborers.
Corazon Dimapilis

Name: Corazon Dimapilis
Age: 25
Occupation: Entertainer, Naitu Kurabu
Hometown: Iloilo, Philippines (currently living in Yamaguchi, Japan)

Joanna Fe “Feminist Fe” Dela Cruz, PhD

Name: Joanna Fe “Feminist Fe” Dela Cruz, PhD
Age: 35
Occupation: Assistant Professor of Women’s Studies, Author, and Feminist
Hometown: San Francisco, California

Star Marginalization

Corazon, who recently returned for vacation in the Philippines from Japan, has agreed to do an interview with Feminist Fe about her experiences as an OFW. Feminist Fe is an assistant professor of women’s studies at an American university. She is in the Philippines as a Fulbright scholar, doing research for her book about the role of Filipina OFWs in Filipina feminism.

Feminist Fe: Thank you for taking the time to do this interview, Corazon.

Corazon: It is my pleasure, Feminist Fe. By the way, I notice there are no cameras. Is this not going to be shown on The Filipino Channel?

Feminist Fe: Um, well… this is not going to be on t.v.

Corazon: Ay, ganun? Sayang, I told my family and friends pa naman that I was going to be on TFC.

Feminist Fe: Well, even though you’re not going to be on t.v., this interview will still reach a wide audience. My conversation with you is going to be included in the book I am co-editing with my colleague Farrah Feminist, entitled Wow Feminism: A Social, Political, and Cultural Study of the Filipina Woman Because All Other Asian American Groups Have One and I Don’t See Why We Shouldn’t Because We are Just as Powerful as They Are. We have a chapter on overseas Filipina workers such as yourself.

Corazon: A book? Filipinos don’t read books.

Feminist Fe: That’s not true…

Corazon: Yes, it is. We don’t read because we don’t know how to read. There are so many of us who did not even finish Grade 6.

Feminist Fe: I think you may be exaggerating the statistics.
Corazon: Fine, but I am telling you Feminist Fe, so many families cannot afford to send their children to school.

Feminist Fe: If you think about it, perhaps the reason why so many Filipinos are unable to go to school is because the Philippine government is so corrupt. That’s what we hope to point out in our book. Did you finish high school, Corazon?

Corazon: Yes, *anong akala mo sa akin? Tanga?* I attended college and I have a degree in hotel and restaurant management from Letran. HRM, that’s a good course, you know.

Feminist Fe: If you have a college degree, then why are you working abroad as an entertainer?

Corazon: Why not, coconut? Do you think *aasenso ang buhay ko sa Pilipinas?*

Feminist Fe: Exactly, Corazon! Do you ever wonder why Filipinos have to leave their own country in order to make their ends meet? Do you ever wonder why the government can’t even support its own citizens so they force women like yourself to find labor overseas?

Corazon: No… yes… sometimes… *wag na, masestress lang ako.*

Feminist Fe: Well, it’s something to think about. You know, according to a survey conducted by the Philippine government census there were two million OFWs in 2010.¹

Corazon: 2 million people were lucky enough to be able to leave the country, including me… thanks God. God is so good to me, you know!

Feminist Fe: Ok, let’s move on because I don’t want to take too much of your time. You’re on vacation and I’m sure the last thing you want to do is to talk with a professor…

Corazon: How much do you make professoring, Feminist Fe?

Feminist Fe: I’m sorry?

Corazon: You say you are a professor, correct? How much money do you make?

Feminist Fe: I make way less than a male professor, I will tell you that much.

Corazon: No, no, no, I do not care about male professors. I am asking about you.

¹ This information was taken from the 2010 Survey on Overseas Filipinos released by the Philippines National Statistics Office on Feb. 1, 2012.
Feminist Fe: Well, I used to make about $50,000 a year but there have been budget cuts in education so my salary decreased to about $45,000 a year. Wow, I sound ridiculous, don’t I? I’m complaining about a $5,000 pay decrease and here you are…

Corazon: It’s perfectly normal, Feminist Fe. Money is money. I understand your pain. We are Filipinos. We feel that way.

Feminist Fe: Well, enough about my problems. This isn’t about me. So, could you tell me a little bit about yourself? Tell me about your life as an OFW. Why did you decide to work abroad? What do you do?

Corazon: I didn’t think I would be an OFW. You see, I wanted to be an artista. I did a little acting and modeling in college. Plus, I won the Ms. Letran pageant. Do you know about Ms. Letran? It’s like the Ms. Universe of my college. I thought since I won that maybe I could try my luck in show business. I went to so many auditions, but every time they tell me the same thing – masyado daw akong maitim. Nakakainis nga eh, I use whitening soap everyday because I want to be whiter pero wala pa din. I am still too dark for showbiz…

Feminist Fe: Corazon, it seems that your desire to be white is a result of what anthropologists call “colonial mentality.” You feel that it is ideal to have whiter skin because the colonizers of the Philippines, the Spanish and the Americans, have white skin. It has been engrained in your mind that a fair complexion represents wealth and social class. But you have to realize that white isn’t always beautiful…

Corazon: Oh, but in this country, white is beautiful.

Feminist Fe: But we have to change that kind of thinking, don’t you agree? We have to decolonize ourselves.

Corazon: What is that decolonize chuva chu chu ek ek you’re saying, Feminist Fe? Everything you are telling me… easy to say, no can do. Anyway, I thought you wanted to learn about my job?

Feminist Fe: Of course, Corazon. Go on. Tell me more.

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2 The Chronicle of Higher Education has a comprehensive list of average salaries for assistant professors during the 2010-11 academic year (http://chronicle.com/stats/aaup/). On average, the salaries ranged from $50,000-$80,000. The list, however, does not take academic fields into account.

3 The sentence translates to, “I am too dark” or more appropriately, “I am too brown.” Itim, however, is the Filipino word for black.

4 Many Filipinos integrate swardspeak, or gay lingo, in their speech. Chuva chu chu ek ek has no direct translation, but perhaps it can be equated to the pidgin phrase, “da kine.”
Corazon: Anyway, so *ayun*, showbiz didn’t like me so I decided to try my luck abroad. I saw an ad on the workabroad.ph website looking for an entertainer in Japan. 22-28 years old, at least 5’2 in height, with a pleasing personality. *Sakto!* So I went to the agency, they asked me some questions, if I know how to sing and dance and all that *chuwariwariwap* and then I was hired on the spot! I processed my papers and ta-da! I’ve been working in Yamaguchi, Japan for three years now.

Feminist Fe: How do you like Japan?

Corazon: Oh, it is great! Here in the Philippines, they prefer that you have fair skin but in Japan they like my brown skin…

Feminist Fe: It’s interesting you say that, Corazon. Do you know that in America people want to be darker? They always compliment me for my tan skin and tell me things like, “Oh, Fe, I love your skin tone. I need to get a tan.” And yet here we are, trying to be just like them. You know, when I was growing up, I felt the same way as you did. I felt so strange because I was brown in a white man’s land. I even got into a fight with my parents. I told them I didn’t want to be Filipino. But as I grew older I realized that I can’t change my skin color, that I can’t erase my identity. I am proud to be a Filipina, aren’t you?

Corazon: Americans want to be brown?

Feminist Fe: Well, they like our skin color, but most of them don’t like our skin. But ah, we keep digressing. I am so sorry, please continue your story.

Corazon: Oh yes, as I was saying, I have plenty admirers, mostly salary men. Hiroyuki-san, Yamamoto-san, Kenji-san… they give me lots of gifts.

Feminist Fe: In exchange for what?

Corazon: Wait, do you think I am a prostitute? Just because I work in Japan you think I’m a *Japayuki*?5

Feminist Fe: No, I didn’t say that. I just thought…

Corazon: Thought what? They give me gifts because I have talent. They like the way I sing and dance. They like the way I perform. The showbiz industry in this godforsaken country cannot see that, but Japan can. The bottom line is, I work hard so I can make good money so I can help my family. You know I have two sisters that I am sending to school. One of them is a mass communication student at UP Diliman. Can you believe that, my own sister is attending the best school in the Philippines. I sing and dance everyday for them so they don’t have to end up like me.

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5 A derogatory term for female entertainers working in Japan, usually used for prostitutes.
Feminist Fe: What do you mean, end up like you? I thought you like your job.

Corazon: I do, but…

Feminist Fe: I understand. It feels demoralizing, doesn’t it?

Corazon: I don’t know, I guess. You use a lot of big words.

Feminist Fe: My parents also worked hard to give my siblings and me a good future. My father worked as a mailman, and my mother was a nursing assistant. Then they saved up enough money to open a Filipino restaurant in my neighborhood. My parents had college degrees, but when they came to America they had to sacrifice their intelligence to work menial jobs. Just like you, Corazon. They did it for us so we can get a good education.

Corazon: No, no, not the same, Feminist Fe. Your parents were in America. Everything is better there. It’s better to be homeless in America than in the Philippines. Maybe after I finish my contract in Japan I can find a job in America. Maybe I can work in a nice hotel. I don’t mind if I just clean clean clean. I hear they make good tips. Then I can petition my family to live there with me.

Feminist Fe: America has its own faults too, Corazon… influencing people like you to have this sense of inferiority.

Corazon: But I am inferior. Look at me… I am just an entertainer in Japan.

Feminist Fe: But you don’t have to be. You don’t have to be part of this colonial, neo-colonial trap.

Corazon: I know I don’t, but that doesn’t mean I can’t. It’s my choice.

Feminist Fe: All right, point taken. But can I ask you this? Because you feel inferior, do you feel that as a Filipina woman, more specifically, as a Filipina woman working overseas, do you think you are marginalized?

Corazon: Margina-what? Star Margarine? You like Star Margarine? I can go to the sari-sari store to get it for you. I can ask my maid. Yes, I know, my family can afford a maid now since I work abroad. Let me call her for you. Yaya, Yaya!

Feminist Fe: I remember Star Margarine! My mother used to make me eat it with rice growing up…

Corazon: So you want then? Yaya! Yaya!

Feminist Fe: No, no, Corazon. I don’t want Star Margarine. Marginalized, it means that we are powerless. Filipina women are perceived to be unimportant and powerless, especially in this patriarchal society we live in.
Corazon: *Hay naku teh, Tagalogin mo nga ako.*

Feminist Fe: I don’t actually speak Tagalog... well, I used to. I still understand it though.

Corazon: Wait, you mean to tell me that you are not even Filipino?

Feminist Fe: No, no, no, I am Filipino. My parents are from Cebu. I was born in the Philippines, but I came to California when I was 10. I am what they call a Generation 1.5 immigrant...

Corazon: A what?

Feminist Fe: It means I came to America when I was very young.

Corazon: No, you are still American to me. How often do you go back to the Philippines?

Feminist Fe: I received a fellowship to do research here for my book, and to be honest with you, this is my first time back in the Philippines since I moved to the U.S. 25 years ago...

Corazon: So they paid you to come here? When most of us pay to get out of here?

Feminist Fe: I guess you could say that. But it’s not like I’m on vacation or anything...

Corazon: No, no, of course not. Visiting the Philippines is never a vacation. Especially for a foreigner like you. Did someone try to steal your bag already? Your cell phone? Did you get into a car accident yet? *Najejeb* ka ba because you drank the water?

Feminist Fe: *Jebs*?

Corazon: *Tae,* crap, shit, diarrhea. See, you are not Filipino. You do not even know our language.

Feminist Fe: But I’m not a foreigner. I’m a Filipino too.

Corazon: *Hay naku teh,* you are not Filipino. You are an American. Embrace it. You may be brown like me, but you grew up living like an American. To us, you are considered white.

Feminist Fe: It’s so strange... I grew up in a country that perceived me as the “Other.” I thought being here in the Philippines would give me a sense of belonging, but my fellow Filipinos are Othering me too.

Corazon: *Ang drama mo, teh.* Maybe you should join showbiz and star in a *teleserye.* Joke *lang.* What I am trying to say though is, that’s life, Feminist Fe, and you have to
accept it. Look at me, I choose to be who I am because I have no choice. In this country, it doesn’t matter whether you are the president, vice president, senator, call center agent, OFW, nursing assistant, caregiver, domestic helper, singer, or Japayuki pokpok because we all have the same job – we are all basureras picking up this country’s garbage. And look at you, I don’t know why the hell you want to clean up our mess. Just go back to America and live.

Feminist Fe: But I want to help…

Corazon: Help? You cannot do anything. Better yet, you should not do anything. Everybody in this country knows the system is screwed up, and we all say we are going to change it, but deep down we don’t do anything because it works. Don’t change something that works. Look at Facebook. Hay naku, Feminist Fe. Do you have Facebook? Every time they keep changing the homepage. I get confused all the time! Now they get this Timeline, I don’t even know how to use that. Diyos ko.

Feminist Fe: But it seems like you want to change the system, Corazon. You are obviously dejected that you’re just an OFW…

Corazon: Dejected? Like a cassette tape? Teh, marangal ang trabaho ko. My job is honorable.

Feminist Fe: I never said it wasn’t, but clearly you are disappointed that you have a college degree and you’re using that to perform at some club in Japan. Plus, I can tell that deep down you think it’s problematic that you have this sense of inferiority. I know deep down you want to change that.

Corazon: Ang buhay hindi yan damit, hindi mo mapapalitan. Do you understand what I am saying?

Feminist Fe: No, could you please translate?

Corazon: I am saying, life is not like clothes, you cannot change your life if it doesn’t fit you or if it gets dirty. Matalino ka nga, pero wala kang alam. You may be smart, but you don’t know anything.

Feminist Fe: If I can’t change it, at least I can point out the problem.

Corazon: I understand that there’s a problem, Feminist Fe. I just don’t understand why you care.

Feminist Fe: I don’t understand why you don’t.

Corazon: [pauses and thinks for a really, really, long time] Maybe you’re right, Feminist Fe. Maybe I do care. I think I am denying that I care because I care too much. But I just feel like it’s no use, you know. I get sad every time I hear about my fellow OFWs having
a hard time abroad. Some of them get hit and slapped by their employers. Some of them get raped. Some of them even get killed. But what can I do? What if that happens to me? What’s the government going to do? How are they going to help me? Who’s going to help my family?

Feminist Fe: Don’t you want to try and fix it?

Corazon: Oh believe me, Feminist Fe, I do. I said life is not like clothes but I want life to be like clothes. This life stinks like kili-kili and I want to put some Tawas on it.⁶ If I could run for president, I would. Did you know I was named after Corazon Aquino, the first female president of the Philippines?

Feminist Fe: That’s the spirit!

Corazon: Since you’re the feminist, what should I do?

Feminist Fe: Well, first of all, you have to free yourself from colonial mentality…

Corazon: How do I do that?

Feminist Fe: Well, for one thing, be proud of who you are. Be a proud Filipina. Be proud of the skin you’re in. Stop using that whitening soap.

Corazon: Ok, no more whitening soap. Then what?

Feminist Fe: Be active. Start a blog, protest, join organizations. And you know, the fact that you agreed to do this interview will bring awareness to your plight as an overseas Filipina worker. You’re already being a feminist in your own way. If you’re interested in being politically active… have you heard of GABRIELA Philippines?⁷ I know Filipinos can rise up against injustice. Look at the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution.

Corazon: Ok, say I start a revolution. I protest about how bad women have it in this country. I write a blog. But the government tells me, “No, sorry, Corazon, we cannot do anything.” No one reads. No one cares. Then what?

Feminist Fe: [pauses] Then we’re fucked, aren’t we?

Corazon: Wait, what?

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⁶ Tawas is a type of powder deodorant used in the Philippines.
⁷ GABRIELA (General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Leadership, and Action) is a network of grassroots organizations that advocates for women’s rights. The movement is named after Gabriela Silang, who is said to be the first Filipina woman to lead a revolt against colonial power.
Feminist Fe: Oh my God, Corazon. You’re absolutely right. What am I doing? Why am I even writing this book? Farrah Feminist is probably going to get most of the credit anyway because she’s a white feminist.

Corazon: But I thought…

Feminist Fe: Do you know what a male colleague told me? And this is an Asian American male colleague, mind you… he told me that feminism is a bullshit theory and that it’s sexist because it privileges the female experience. And I was like, “Are you hearing yourself? Marxist, deconstructionist, all those theories privilege your dick! And besides, feminism is not a fucking theory. It’s a way of life!”

Corazon: …

Feminist Fe: You see what I have to deal with, Corazon? Even in the university level! And you know what kills me? Most of them just assume that I’m a lesbian because I’m all about equality and equal rights and gender rights – and blah blah blah. I like penis too, but I’m not going to go down on you and suck your dick whenever you ask!

Corazon: Good for you, Feminist Fe…

Feminist Fe: [pauses] Oh my God, Corazon, that’s what I’ve been doing to you, isn’t it? I’ve been telling you how you should live your life. Oh my God, I am no different from the men. I assume that you don’t have control over your life when you do…

Corazon: No, no, no, Feminist Fe. You have been really nice and helpful to me. You made me realize that change is not going to happen if I do not care. And you are in control too. You have control of your brain. You are very smart, you know.

Feminist Fe: Go do your thing, Corazon. Sing and dance and get those damn gifts.

Corazon: I can teach you how to sing and dance, Feminist Fe. Maybe if you sing and dance your feminist theory ek ek, those men will stop and actually pay attention. It’s all about how you present yourself.

Feminist Fe: I’m a Filipina… I’m sure singing and dancing run in my blood.

Corazon: Maybe you should write everything you just told me in your book, Feminist Fe. Keep all the fucks. Maybe they will listen to you.

Feminist Fe: Maybe I’ll try my hand in creative writing. And when my story gets published, I will definitely thank you.

Corazon: Maybe you can turn it into a movie and then I’ll be the star!
Feminist Fe: [laughs] Well, thank you for taking the time to talk with me, Corazon. I really appreciate it. I learned so much from you.

Corazon: Of course, intercourse! You like that joke?

Feminist Fe: Yes, it’s very clever.

Corazon: By the way, can I make a request?

Feminist Fe: Sure, absolutely.

Corazon: Can you put a picture of me in my book? I know my family will read it if they see a picture of me.

Feminist Fe: Sure, of course.

Corazon: Ok, I am going to be colored, right? Not black and white? I look better in color.

Feminist Fe: Yes, we have the budget for color printing… only because our book will be printed in China…

Corazon: Ok, good. If I can’t use whitening soap, at least the color photo will make me look good!
The word *balikbayan* is used to describe Filipino immigrants and/or OFWs returning to visit the Philippines. The term was coined by Ferdinand Marcos in the 1970s, combining the Tagalog words *balik* (to return) and *bayan* (homeland or nation).
Immigrant Tip #1: Be Related to Someone Abroad

Every year, we would get at least two balikbayan boxes from Hawai‘i. Maybe four, when a relative comes home. My grandparents would bring boxes whenever they visited. I peered anxiously at their contents each time, although they were always the same each year. SPAM, vienna sausage, corned beef, macadamia nuts, chocolate covered macadamia nuts. Old clothes, old shoes. Toiletries, bath towels. Letters and pictures from Hawaiian relatives.

But the best thing about receiving balikbayan boxes was that there was always the anticipation on my part of what toy I would get that year. I remember one year I got the Hawaiian Barbie doll, with a matching hula girl costume and complimentary pineapple-flavored lip gloss, from one of my titas. I was so excited to finally receive my first “girly” toy. The lip gloss was gone within a day. But I didn’t know how to handle dolls, especially Barbie dolls, this being my first time to actually touch one. I remember brushing Barbie’s hair with such force that I ended up decapitating her. Maybe that was symbolic of what lied ahead in my future.

That was the first and only Barbie doll I owned. In fact, that was one of the few toys I owned. My parents never really bought me toys. We were too poor for such luxuries. Balikbayan boxes allowed me to experience what being a child was like.

A treasure chest filled with food and clothes and toys, that’s how I saw the balikbayan box growing up. What I didn’t know then that I know now was that the balikbayan box was more than just a “dumping ground for used items.”

Balikbayan boxes signified the American dream. That someday, you too, can pack your boxes and leave this godforsaken place and start a new life in America. I watched American shows to teach myself English, not knowing that English will become one day my first language. I read Sweet Valley and Babysitters Club books, not knowing that I, too, will experience what’s it like to be in the seventh grade. I decapitated my Barbie doll, not knowing that I would do the same thing to myself because I grew up receiving balikbayan boxes, not sending them.

I didn’t know that sixteen years later, I would sit and think about what the word “balikbayan” means to me. And all I can think about is that damn headless Barbie doll and the day I pulled her out of the box for the first time with tears in my eyes.
“No ideas but in [imported] things”

Libby’s Vienna Sausage SPAM Hormel Corned Beef 10 lbs of Jasmine Rice Nescafe Folgers Taster’s Choice Coffeemate Tang Nesquik Lipton Iced Tea Nestea Sapporo Ichiban Dole Pineapple Slices Hunts Tomato Sauce Del Monte Spaghetti Sauce Hawaiian Host Plain Macadamia Nuts Hawaiian Host Garlic and Onion Macadamia Nuts Hawaiian Host Honey Glazed Macadamia Nuts Hawaiian Host Chocolate Covered Macadamia Nuts assortment of Imported used items used bed sheets used pillow sheets used blankets used towels used shirts used pants used shorts used socks used shoes used slippers used toys used electronics Pik-Nik Shoestring Potatoes Pringles Original Pringles Sour Cream ‘N Onion Pringles Cheddar Cheese Chips Ahoy Oreos Toblerone Hershey’s Kisses Hershey’s Milk Chocolate Twix Three Musketeers Milky Way Crunch Butterfinger Kit-Kat Colgate Kleenex Zip-Loc Reynolds Wrap Foil Bakers & Chefs Plastic Forks and Spoons Nike rubber shoes Levis maong jeans Levis maong shorts Hanes t-shirts Fruit of the Loom briefs Pampers Always Maxi Pads Carefree pantyliners Avon Sweet Honesty Powder Avon Sweet Honesty Deodorant Dove Irish Spring Safeguard Pantene Gee, Your Hair Smells Terrific Oil of Olay Body Lotion Jergens Body Lotion Johnson’s Baby Lotion Old Spice Shaving Cream Wet Ones Q-Tips Marlboro Reds Maalox Centrum Energizer AA Batteries Sony Walkman Hawaiian Barbie doll with matching Ken complete with pineapple flavored lip gloss
hang your dirty laundry for all the world to see
there is no shame in poverty
Goodbye Philippines, Hello World: Tips For OFWs

“Written” by Remedios “Boots” Lopez

Every year, thousands of Filipinos leave the Philippines to start a new life in another country as an overseas Filipino worker. And every year, there is always at least one Filipino who cannot leave the country because of an expired passport, or even worse, a fake visa from a fake recruiter. Imagine how embarrassing it would be to throw a goodbye party only to find out you are not leaving!

I “wrote” this booklet because I, being the chief of staff of the Department of Foreign Affairs, have a responsibility to my fellow Filipinos. Please take the time to read this, my gift to you. This little booklet contains important tips about leaving the country for the first time. Here, you will find information about finding a recruiter, applying for a passport and visa, obtaining an employment contract, and other miscellaneous reminders so that you can avoid embarrassing moments such as deportation and imprisonment.

If you don’t believe me, check out the rave reviews from real OFWs and even an American scholar who have read my book!

“I do not like to read books but this book saved my life talaga, pramis!” – Corazon Dimapilis, entertainer extraordinaire in Japan

“**** Ms. Boots is the best! Because of her I am wiping poop in London and I am loving it!!!” – Marivic Dacuycuy, caregiver in England

---

1 The tips and scans are taken from Paalis ka na pala: Gabay Para Sa OFW by Susan “Toots” V. Ople. Many of the tips are actual direct translations from the book, although “Boots” has taken some liberties with her version.
“This little book is a great resource for aspiring OFWs who want to escape the harsh conditions of the Philippines to seek a better life.” – Joanna Fe “Feminist Fe” Dela Cruz, American professor (o, say mo, ang bongga, di ba!!)

Section 1: Finding a Recruiter

So you are leaving the country? Congratulations! But wait, are you leaving the country legally? Make sure you are working with a legitimate recruiter. Otherwise, you will rot in jail and you will never be able to send balikbayan boxes to your relatives.

But if you are anxious to send those boxes, keep these tips in mind:

• Don’t give your money to people with sweet tongues. Their source of income is your hopes and dreams.

• If you do not understand metaphors – for your own safety, go to the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) to find legal recruiters.

• It bears repeating: before you pay your recruiter for getting you out of the country, make sure that recruiter can legitimately collect money from you. Don’t pay until a) you are sure there is an employer waiting for you and b) you sign a contract.

• Seriously, is your recruiter legal? Did you visit his or her office? Does he or she work for an agency? Legitimate recruitment agencies have acquired licenses from POEA. They also have a staff, computers, phones, and fax machines. They have a permanent office and a clean record.

So remember, if you are in the sari-sari store buying vinegar and a person comes up to you and says, “Do you want to work abroad?” do not act like he is Jesus Christ and just start believing him. Chances are, Jesus is probably an illegal recruiter.
Section 2: Passport

A passport is a government document that provides identification for an individual who wishes to go abroad. This is an important document that you need to take care of, and you cannot have a fake passport the same way they have fake DVDs or VCDs in Quiapo. Many people say that it is difficult to obtain a passport – do not believe them because they are stupid. It is more dangerous to get a fake passport and assume another name. That is called “assumed identity” and that is not allowed in our country. If you are caught entering another country with a fake passport, you will go to jail, or if the odds are in your favor, you will be forced to return to the Philippines, but still you will be jailed or punished, so either way you lose.

If this is your first time applying for a passport, make sure you do all of the following:

• Obtain an authenticated birth certificate printed in security paper as proof that you are a real person and not an alien (although technically, you are an alien, as in immigrant, not the green space kind).

• Take a passport-size photo. It is okay to smile on your passport photo. It is better to look like a tourist than a terrorist.

• Wear decent clothes, but do not overdo it. Do not wear a gown or a barong tagalog. You are not going to a fiesta.

• If your real name is Miguel, your passport should not say that your name is Manolo.

• Just in case, bring other forms of identification – driver’s license, school ID, or work ID – as long as it has your name and signature.

If you are renewing an old passport, bring your old passport along with a passport-size photo. And if your name is Miguel, it should still stay that way. See the appendix for more detailed instructions.

Like milk, your passport has an expiration date. Check the date. You do not want to travel with a spoiled passport.
### Passport Application Form

**Republic of the Philippines**
**Department of Foreign Affairs**
**Manila**
**Passport Application**

**For DFA Use Only**
PPT. NO.

Fill-out all blanks, type or print legibly, please read requirements / instructions at the back.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Last Name</th>
<th>Middle Name</th>
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<tr>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
<th>Male</th>
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<th>Place of Birth</th>
<th>Age</th>
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</table>

Civil Status: ⡨Single ⡨Married ⡨Widow/er ⡨Separated  Name of Spouse

Complete Address in the Philippines

Present Occupation Office Address

Purpose of Travel: ⡨Tourist ⡨Business ⡨Immigrant ⡨Study ⡨Contract Worker

Seaman Others

Destination:

Name of Father Citizenship

Name of Mother Citizenship

Check if you are:

- Legitimate
- Illegitimate

Citizenship acquired by:

- Birth
- Election
- Naturalization
- Marriage

Have you ever been issued a Philippine Passport:

- Yes
- No

If Yes, Latest Passport No.: Date of Issue: Place of Issue:

For Minor Applicants:

Name of travelling companion:

Relationship:

Signature of Parent/Guardian
Section 3: Visa and Contract

It is important that you acquire a visa because it proves that you are able to enter the country of your destination. Many countries have been strict about giving visas because of terrorism. For example, the United States has a Department of Homeland Security, which is in charge of admitting people seeking entry and catching illegal immigrants.

You are probably thinking about approaching a person of higher status to endorse your visa applications. Sure, there may be politicians who are willing to sign a statement of good moral character for you, but such statements mean nothing unless you have proper documentation. Even if PNoy writes, “Manolo is a good citizen,” you will be in trouble if your documentation says that your name is really Miguel.

Embassies charge a fee for visa applications. If you have an appointment with any embassy, arrive on time and bring all the required documents. Wear appropriate clothes so your interviewer does not feel uncomfortable around you. Hide your tattoos. And just because you are going to be an entertainer in Japan that does not mean you are going to show up wearing your costume at the embassy. Do not panic. Do not be nervous. The person you will be talking with is also a person. If you are polite and honest, you have nothing to fear.
You should not bother going to the embassy if you are not certain that you have an employment contract. All overseas Filipino workers should have an employment contract; if you do not have one that means you are illegal. The employment contract includes your job, your employer, your address, your recruiter, your salary, and your rights and responsibilities. Do not lose your employment contract because this is your proof in the unfortunately somewhat likely event that your employer mistreats you.

Some employment contracts are not written in English, especially if your employers are Arab, Chinese, or Korean. Do not sign the contract until you have read an authentic English translation. When in doubt, ask POEA. If you have a lawyer friend, show the contract and ask for advice. If you do not have a lawyer friend, take a trip to your mayor or vice-mayor or congressman’s office and ask for help. You can even visit me in my office and ask me any questions. I love having visitors. Just say, “Hello Boots, I read your book and I think it is wonderful. I have some questions about…” and I will be happy to help you.

So remember, get a real visa and employment contract. Your life is at stake here!

Section 4: Miscellaneous Common Sense Reminders

You are not quite ready to leave yet. I know that you are excited to leave, but sometimes excitement can cause us to lose our common sense. This is why I am here, to bring your common sense back. Here are some reminders to keep you in track before the big departure:

• Once again, remember to check the expiration date of your passport. It would be embarrassing to throw a despedida party only to find out you cannot leave because your passport is expired. And you know your next-door neighbor will say something about it. Because that’s what neighbors do.

• Learn about the country where you are going. How is the weather there? Do you need to bring coats or jackets? What language do they speak? More importantly, do they have The Filipino Channel?

• You do not need to pack your whole house in your suitcase. Just make sure you bring enough clothes.

• Weigh your suitcase before going to the airport because certain airlines have baggage limits. If your suitcase is fat, you will pay extra.

• Seriously, there is no need to pack your entire house in your suitcase.

• Put a nametag on your suitcase with your name, address, and telephone number. Maybe you can even tie a yellow ribbon on your luggage so it will be easy to identify in the baggage carousel.
• Write down important phone numbers in a piece of paper: Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), the Philippine Embassy or Consulate in the country where you are going, and the Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO). Also write down the telephone numbers of your recruiter and your foreign employer.

• Complain to the Philippine Embassy if you come across any problems. If they are actually helping you, write them a letter of gratitude.

• Make sure you bring all your documents – passport, airplane ticket, overseas employment certificate, and other important papers.

• Do not pack pointy objects in your hand carry. That means no scissors, razors, or the heirloom sword your father bestowed upon you. They might mistake you for a terrorist or a hijacker or Osama Bin Laden’s long-lost cousin.

• You do not have to wear Christmas attire on your plane ride. Dress comfortably because the flight is uncomfortable.

• Do not bring the entire baranggay to the airport to say goodbye to you. Politely tell the baranggay band to serenade you a goodbye song at home.

• If a friend of a friend asks you to bring a suitcase with “toys” and “clothes,” don’t say yes. When they say toys and clothes, they really mean drugs. Scratching your head and saying, “I didn’t know! I thought it was toys!” to the customs officer is not going to save your butt from going to jail.

So this is it! This is really, really, really it! You are about to embark on a new journey and begin a new chapter in your life. You may have second thoughts, especially about leaving your family behind, but remember that you are doing this for them.

When you arrive in your country of destination, remember to follow their laws and set a good example. Remember that you are representing the Philippines too. You are one of the many heroes and heroines of our country, so make sure you act like one.

More importantly, save up enough money so you can come home once in a while. Never forget where you came from. And like I said, you can visit me in my office. Just look for Boots, and I will be tooting and booting!

So what are you waiting for? Goodbye, Philippines and hello, world! Good luck and bon voyage!
PROSES SA PAG-AAPPLY PARA SA MGA AGENCY HIRED WORKERS

APLIKANTE

PUMUNTA SA

AGENCY ACCREDITED BY POEA NA MAY JOB ORDER

I-submit ang mga sumusunod:
- Bio-data
- Passport
- NBI Clearance
- School credentials/diploma
- Certificate of previous employment

AGENCY MAG-BIGBAGY NG PRE-APPLICATION BRIEFING

PIPLI ANG EMPLOYER/AGENCY SA MGA APLIKANTE, ISA KA SA SA MGA NAPILI

TINITANAGAP MO BA ANG ALOK NG EMPLOYER?

AGENCY IPAPALINUHAN SA APLIKANTE ANG DETALLE NG OFER NG EMPLOYER

HINDI MAGHANAP NG IBANG ACCREDITED AGENCY

AGENCY HIRED WORKERS

HAPPY TRIP!

SA AIRPORT, DADAAN MUNA MAG-CHECK-IN NG BAGAHE PARA MATAKAN ANG DEC O E-RECEIPT

HINDI KAHITANAN NG WORKER IBIBIGAY NG AGENCY

E-RECEIPT/EXIT CLEARANCE NG WORKER IBIBIGAY NG AGENCY

AGENCY MAG-A-APPLY SA OMNA-MEDICARE NG ELECTRONIC CARD (E-CARD) PARA SA WORKER

AGENCY PRE-REQUEST SA POEA NA UPROCESS ANG PIRMADONG EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT, LALAKARIN DIN ANG VISA NG OFW

APLIKANTE PAPUPUNTAHIN NG AGENCY SA

POEA ACCREDITED MEDICAL CLINIC
A TRAVE TEST CENTER BAGO PIRMADANG CONTRACT

PRIMAHA NG EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT NA APRUBADO NG POEA AT MAGBAYAD NG PLACEMENT FEE

DUMALO NG PRE-DEPARTURE ORIENTATION SEMINAR (PODS) NA IBIBIGAY NG ACCREDITED PODS PROVIDER

PRIMAHA NG EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT, LALAKARIN DIN ANG VISA NG OFW
Those *balikbayan* from America, who force us each year to make an apologia for the indolence of the Filipinos…

They're the ones who sally forth to bedazzle the natives. They queue up in East or West Coast airports with tons and tons of baggage, many of them containing groceries for relatives who can't wait to have a taste of America...

They bring us stories about how much life in America has proved what the *Reader's Digest* says it is. They also bring us homilies, delivered with the proselytizing zeal of Thomasites, which are forceful for their use of contrasts. It's too hot in the Philippines. It's nice to snuggle by the hearth in America. There's grime and smog in our streets. You can't drive without anti-pollutants in the States. Filipino drivers are maniacs. American drivers follow traffic rules... you defer too much to authority here. You can talk man-to-man even with the president of the United States.

--- Conrado DeQuiros, quoted by Vicente Rafael
who the fuck am i
to make these assumptions
about my once home?

caption: third world suburbia
### Cost of Leaving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Cost</strong></th>
<th><strong>Amount</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>76 signatures to obtain passport, including Community Tax Certificate (CTC), Baranggay Certificate, Birth and Baptismal Certificate, NBI &amp; Police Clearance etc.</td>
<td>P 7,600 (each document ranges from P50.00-100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passport (minimum)</td>
<td>P 1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) Fee (new hire, equivalent to 1-month salary)</td>
<td>P 7,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas Workers Welfare Administration Fee ($25)</td>
<td>P 1,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicare</td>
<td>P 900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pag-Ibig Fund</td>
<td>P 600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other application costs</td>
<td>P 1,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>P 20,000 (average)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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\[
P 20,000 \times 3,400 \text{ OFWs} = P 68,000,000 \text{ daily revenues} \times 365 \text{ days} = P 24.82 \text{ billion per year}
\]

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1. The figures were taken from the GMA news article “Gov’t ‘bankrupts’ aspiring OFWs” by Angie De Lara and the Migrante International website.
2. Under the Republic Act No. 9679, OFWs are required to register with the Home Development Mutual Fund’s Pag-Ibig program, which, according to its website, offers “savings, short-term loans, and access to housing programs.”
you are welcome
to leave live
Immigrant Tip #2: Leave

I never told anybody at school that I had relatives abroad. I didn’t think it was that important. I just assumed everybody else did. But when the school principal came to my fourth-grade classroom one afternoon and announced, “Gizelle E. Gajelonia’s mother is here to pick her up from school because they need to go to the U.S. Embassy,” with a mixture of authority, awe, and envy, I realized then that having relatives abroad is kind of a big deal.

The next day in class, my classmates crowded around me like a newborn panda bear, like I was cute and cuddly and a glimmer of hope for an endangered species.

“Saan?” Where.
“Kailan?” When.
“Ang swerte mo naman!” Lucky.

One girl, whom I had a strange obsession with because all the boys thought she was gorgeous because she was mestiza, walked up to me with a contemptuous look in her eyes. I figured it must be from yesterday’s revelation.

“I didn’t know you had relatives abroad,” she told me.
“Yeah, I do,” I replied.
“Saan?”
“Hawai’i.”

“You don’t look like the type of person who has relatives in the U.S.”
“How are they supposed to look like?”

I don’t really know why I asked that question, considering that I knew the answer. They were supposed to look like my mestiza classmate – white and fair-skinned. In the Philippines, the whiter you are the prettier you are. Clearly, that same law should apply in America. After all, America was the white man’s land. And after all, it was the Americans who imposed this law on us.

My classmate didn’t answer my question, which was a good thing. I hadn’t learned how to build walls protecting me from insults and putdowns yet. I learned that when I came to Hawai’i.

Instead she said, “I can’t believe you’re going to the U.S. before me. I have family in California too, you know. Di lang ikaw ang magkamag-anak sa abroad.” Not like that was better.

“I’m only going there for vacation,” I said.
She laughed. “No, you’re never coming back.”
I asked her if she was a fortuneteller. “Manghuhula ka ba?”
“Basta, you’re never coming back.”
Her words haunted me like martial law. He never came back either, you know.
Well, he did. But he came back dead.
[IM]MIGRATION FACTS:

Sociologists use the term “Generation 1.5” to describe immigrants who came to the U.S. as children and adolescents. According to the “immigrant scale,” the “truest 1.5s” are “those who arrived between ages 6 and 12” (Rojas). 1.5s are neither here nor there, American in many ways, but not entirely.
I arrived in Hawai‘i on April 22, 1996.
I was 10 years old.
I came here as a Filipina.
I stayed here as a Filipina American.
do not piss here

but while you are here,
don’t forget to buy
your pawn ticket
Name: Marivic Dacuycuy  
Age: 38  
Occupation: Caregiver  
Hometown: Lingayen, Pangasinan, Philippines (currently living in London, England)  

Shit This Caregiver Says

Shit, shit, shit.  
All they do is shit.  
Oh, the glamorous life of wiping shit!

I am a good caregiver  
because I can speak English:  
Feces, poop, poo, doodoo, shit!

“I care about my job, sir.  
I care about you.”  
Sharon Cuneta, you are full of shit!  

I am a good caregiver  
because I am friendly and kind:  
“Let me wipe your shit… SIR!”

Family members always yelling at me  
because I can’t do anything right.  
Hey, you try wiping your mother’s shit!

I wipe your mother’s shit because  
you don’t give a shit about her.  
And at the end of the day, I feel like shit.

I am a good caregiver  
because I can easily adapt  
in a new environment:  

I left the shithole called Philippines  
so I can live in another shithole,  
but at least this shithole pays dollars!

---

1 Sharon Cuneta is a famous Filipino actress who starred in the 2008 blockbuster hit, *Caregiver*, where she uttered the famous line that Marivic quotes in her shit rant.

2 Marivic is fully aware that the monetary unit in England is pounds, but like many Filipinos she equates anything foreign with America, and that includes money.
Name: Katrina Medina
Age: 29
Occupation: Nurse/Caregiver
Hometown: San Pablo, Laguna, Philippines (currently living in Denver, Colorado)

Hurricane

Mr. Chesterfield does not remember my name. Katrina, I tell him. Like the hurricane? he says. Yes, Mr. Chesterfield, like the hurricane. I ask him how he is. He asks about his wife and children, if he had a wife and children. I say yes. His wife’s name is Maria. He has three children: Carolina, Katrina, and Dennis. Yes, sir, I have the same name as your daughter. They don’t visit because they live in another state, but they send their regards. The other nurses don’t know I sprinkle lies in Mr. Chesterfield’s chicken noodle soup. But they are not completely lies. I once had a father too.

Nobody visits Mr. Chesterfield. Except me. 10 a.m. every weekday. I feed him, bathe him, change his clothes, wipe his ass. I tell him stories about my life back home in the Philippines. Most of them made up, because I want to forget too. But sometimes I tell Mr. Chesterfield the truth. My father is sick. We cannot pay for his medical bills. That’s why I left home. I tell Mr. Chesterfield I miss my mother. He asks if my mother is as pretty as I am. Yes, Mr. Chesterfield, I say, she will rock you like a hurricane. Mr. Chesterfield laughs, asks if my father loved my mother as much as he loved his wife. Yes, but then he forgot how.

Mr. Chesterfield cries sometimes, says he can’t remember anything. If his wife really loved him, why did she leave him here? What about his children? Where are they? Sometimes, we have to leave the ones we love, I say. I cry sometimes. I remember too much. I can still hear my father screaming --- sino kayo, hindi ko kayo kilala, umalis kayo!

Today, Mr. Chesterfield does not remember my name. He starts yelling and throwing things. Go away! Who are you! I don’t know you! I hold back my tears. It’s me, sir, it’s Katrina. Like the hurricane, remember? He does not remember. Sir, it’s Katrina. I am here to feed you. He knocks the tray of food out of my hand. Go away! He calls out names. Dennis, Maria, Carolina, Katrina.

Mr. Chesterfield remembers my memories. I once had a home. I once had a father too.
how is the view from your sony cybershot?
is it as distorted as the view from your cornea?
Immigrant Tip #3: Don’t Come Back (for a really long time)

They were crying and screaming and I felt left out I wanted to join them when my mother told me that my sisters were going back to the Philippines and that I was staying here for the rest of my life and go to school here I had a reason to cry and scream I didn’t want to stay here I thought we were only here for vacation I told all my friends in the Philippines I was only here for vacation that I would buy them pasalubong when I got back but they knew they knew this was going to be permanent that girl knew I was never coming back put me in a balikbayan box I want to go home
[IM]MIGRATION FACTS:

7 out of 10 Filipino OFWs are women.

10 million Filipino children grow up without a mother.

Overseas migration breaks families.
Home Work

*English Assignment #1: Write a short autobiography. An autobiography is a story about yourself. Include the following in your autobiography: your name, your nickname (if you have one), your age, your birthday, and the members of your family. Make sure to also answer the following questions:*

1. What are your hobbies or what do you like to do for fun when you are not in school?
2. What is your favorite subject (or subjects) in school and why?
3. How is your family like at home? Which family member (or members) are you closest with? What do your parents do for a living?
4. Who is your role model and why?
5. What do you want to be when you grow up and why?

My name is Jerilyn B. Escalante. My nickname is Lyn Lyn. I am 9 years old my birthday is September 7. I live with my papa Jerry and my kuya Jericho and my youngest brother Jerry but we call him Junior becoz my Papas name is Jerry. My tita Precy also lives in our house too take care of us. She is Papas younger sister. My Mama Lyn is not living with us. She is in Singapore. Papa said she is a ofw. I ask Papa whats ofw but he said it means *alila*. I dont know what is *alila* in English.

My hobbies are playing games with my brother Junior. He is 6 years old. My favorite game to play is doctor, I am the doctor and Junior is my patient. Sometimes we play teacher too, I am the teacher and Junior is my student. I teach to Junior what I read in the encyclopedias. Mama buys encyclopedia for us but I am the only one that read encyclopedia. I like to look at the pikchurs. I memorize all capitals of all countries of the world. The capital of Philippines is Manila, the capital of United States is Washington dc, the capital of Singapore is Singapore. I also like to play nintendo ds. Mama gave Kuya Jericho me and Junior nintendo ds for Christmas. But kuya Jericho put his nintendo ds in the garbej. I also like going to the mall with Junior and tita Precy. I like when we go to the mall. I do not like being in the house all the time.

My favorite subject in school is, science. I like learning about animals plants and the human body. I feel very happy when I am studying science, I feel very happy when I am in school. My second favorite subject is English. Tita Precy said, if I know how to speak English I can leave the Philippines and find a good job abroad like Mama. Tita Precy likes to go abroad too but she has too take care of us.

In my family I am very close to Junior and tita Precy. My kuya Jericho likes stay in his room and dont talk to us. He hits me and Junior sometimes and tell us to be quite. My
family is only happy sometimes. Papa is not working right now, he stays home and watches tv all day. The people in my family is very sad because Mama is not here. She is an ofw, she is a maid. Papa says she's just a katulong who cleans house and takes care of other people's children. He is very mad. He said Mama doesn't care about us. Tita Precy says to Papa at least Mama has a job, Papa hits Tita Precy when she says that. Tita Precy does not want to live in our house anymore but she said she has to take care of us. Tita Precy is very nice, she is like my second Mama. I do not see my own Mama very much. She goes back to our home once every year but she sends us balikbayan boxes with Laurent Bernard chocolate and nintendo ds game so I know she cares for us. She also writes letters, in her letters Mama says someday we will all live in Singapore together. I miss Mama. When I was young she would cook my favorite food spagetti and take care of me when I am sick and we play games. Kuya Jericho does not like Mama, he says Mama is the reason that Papa is lazy and drinking all the time. She is supposed to be here and take care of us. Kuya Jericho says Mama cannot take care of us if she is somewhere else. But I know Mama is trying her best to take care of us. That is why my Mama is my role model. I wish Papa and Kuya Jericho will love her again.

When I grow up I want to be a doctor so I can help sick people like Papa. Papa always tells us he is sick. Tita Precy said he is not sick and he is just drinking beer a lot. Sometimes I see Kuya Jericho go inside his room with Papa's bottles. I do not want him to get sick to. I want to be a doctor so I can take care of my family.
Letters to Lyn Lyn

Dear Lyn Lyn,

How are you, anak? How is Junior? Are you taking care of your baby brother? How is your kuya? Is he still mad at me? How is your Papa? Is he drinking again? Do you tell him to stop like I ask you to do?

Your Tita Precy told me you are Top 1 in your class this quarter. I am so proud of you, anak. Since you study very hard, Mama will buy you gifts. What do you like? Do you like the Nintendo DS I bought for you? The children I take care were playing that so I asked my amo, Mr. Chen, where he bought it. I tell him, “Sir, I save up enough money to buy my children nice gifts.” And my boss was so nice, anak. He took me to the Forum Mall and he was the one who bought the DS for you three. I said, “No, sir, I can buy them myself. I save up enough money.” But Mr. Chen was very mapilit, anak. Maybe because he is so rich. He said, “Lyn, save your money so you can visit your family. You have been a good nanny to my children. I want to return the favor to your children so I will buy them gifts.” I want you to meet Mr. Chen, anak. He is very good to me. Mrs. Chen also, his wife. Did you see the dress for you inside the balikbayan box? Mrs. Chen made that for you, anak. Mrs. Chen makes me clothes too. I put a photo of myself inside the letter so you can see how I look like now. The dress I am wearing is made by Mrs. Chen. She likes to make clothes for me because she said I am very thin. Can you believe that, anak? Mama is thin 😊 Do I look thin in the photo?

The kids I take care are really nice too. They pick the DS games for you. Do you like them? Mario yun, di ba? I remember when I use to play Super Mario with Jericho on the family computer. You were very young then and Junior was not born yet. Jericho was very good. I remember he stay up all night trying to beat the game. He had to save the princess daw. Please tell your kuya I miss him very very much.

Sometimes I get very sad because the kids I take care remind me of all of you. The oldest one is the same age as your kuya Jericho but he is very nice and smart. He plays football like the Azkals and studies very hard. I wish your brother was like that. He was smart before but he changed, anak. I know it is my fault. The middle one is makulit and matalino just like you. She likes science also. The bunso is a little older than Junior and he likes to call me “Mama Lyn.” But no matter what, you three are my children. I will always be your Mama. One day, when I save up enough money I will bring you kids to Singapore and we can all live here. Mr. Chen is a lawyer and he said he will try help me with the immigration. I will bring you kids and Tita Precy and your Papa to Singapore. Maybe your Papa will stop drinking if he lives here. Maybe Mr. Chen will give him job
cleaning office. Me and Tita Precy will start a business and we will all be rich like Mr. Chen 😊

Mr. Chen bought his children something called Wee, I forget the name. Is that how you spell it? Do you like a Wee? Every Saturday Mr. and Mrs. Chen play Wee Sport with the kids. They play bowling. It looks fun. Sometimes they invite me to play but *nakakahiya* so I just watch. But they tell me, “Don’t be shy, Lyn, you are part of our family now.” When I go home I will bring a Wee for you and Junior and your *kuya*. Before I forget to tell you *anak*, I have good news! Mr. Chen said I can take vacation soon. I will try and go back in March when it is summer so we can all be together everyday. Maybe we can play the Wee with your Kuya Jericho and Papa and Tita Precy too. We will be like a family again.

I miss you so much, *anak*. I am sorry I am not there to take care of you but always remember that I love you very very very much.

Love,
Mama
Immigrant Tip #4: Learn to Love America (and start hating yourself)

My first day in American school was the first official day of my Americanization. The first step in being American was to learn the words to the Pledge of Allegiance. The bell rang for flag ceremony, or as they call it in America, morning assemblies. In the Philippines, we would sing the national anthem, “Lupang Hinirang,” and then recite “Panatang Makabayan.” But this was America, and during flag ceremonies they recited something called the Pledge of Allegiance.

I placed my right hand on my chest just like everyone else, but everyone else was American and I was not, so they recited the words while I stood there in silence.

I took my social studies book home that day, hoping that the words to the Pledge of Allegiance would be printed somewhere in the appendix (and it was, because the publishers must’ve known that someday there would be a ten-year-old immigrant who desperately needed to know the words). I locked myself up in the room I shared with my parents, stood in front of the mirror with my right hand on my chest, and began to memorize.

“I pledge allegiance to the flag and the United States of America…”

No, no, no. I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America. Try again.

“I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the…”

To the republic. So after you say “the United States of America,” think of the Philippines because the Philippines is a republic.

“I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands…”

No, you cannot think about the Philippines because you are in America now. You’re just going to have to associate the word republic with the United States. Besides, the Philippines is so corrupt it is not standing in a republic.

“I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands. One nation, under God…”

I had been memorizing for almost half an hour now, and I still had trouble remembering what came after “under God.” I checked the book. Oh right, indivisible. I didn’t even know what it meant. That was a hard word to say, especially for a Filipino, because we tend to get b and v confused.

“I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands. One nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

One more time.

“I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands. One nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

The next day, I recited the Pledge of Allegiance with such confidence that even the girl who stood next to me, Elisa Ford, was surprised at my newfound patriotism. She giggled though, and I assumed it was because she heard me say the word “indivisible.” One step at a time, Elisa. Learning to talk like you will come later.
I grabbed a dictionary later on that day and finally looked up what indivisible meant. Indivisible, adjective, unable to be separated or divided.

No wonder I didn’t know.
How do you expect them to love you if you don’t love them back?
with more than 70 percent of Filipinos working abroad belonging to the female gender, it has become obvious that overseas migration has taken on a woman's face.

Female overseas workers are exposed to the "3D jobs" (dirty, dangerous and demeaning) such as domestic work, jobs that are shunned by nationals of receiving countries.

Because of the nature of their work and lowered status, they usually end up victims to the more serious problems of migration: physical and sexual abuse, drug dependence, prostitution, mysterious or violent deaths, and trafficking in women.
Speak

Her employer grabbed her by the neck and tried to seduce her. She said *please don’t* in her mother tongue. He didn’t hear. He didn’t listen. He didn’t understand. Her employer slammed her against the wall and tried to remove her clothes. She screamed *help* in her mother tongue. No one heard. No one listened. No one understood. Her employer slapped her face and told her to *cooperate* in his mother tongue. She kicked him in his other tongue, which was armed and ready to speak in a universal language everyone can understand. The employer called his bitch a *bitch* in a language that she has learned to understand. While he writhed in pain she ran toward the kitchen. She took a knife from one of the drawers. She pointed it at her employer. Still in pain, he only laughed. He said she wouldn’t dare, but she dared. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight until there was enough red to last her a lifetime of prosperity and good luck. On her knees she watched as her employer’s blood formed a trail on the floor, formed a map to guide her back home.
[IM] MIGRATION FACTS:

In 2010, three Filipinos were executed in China for drug trafficking. One of the convicted was 33-year-old Sally Villanueva, mother of two. Her last request was for her children to receive a proper education.
Drug Mule

She sat in the execution chamber, waiting. Her last meal included *chicharon* and *kornik* that her mother had brought for her hours before. She could still taste the salt in her mouth. Someone opened the door. She could not make out the face of her executioner, but she could make out the shadow of the needle he carried. *Do you have any last words?* the executioner asked her. She shook her head. The executioner injected her arm. Fragments of memories flashed before her as the fatal liquid entered her body: a mother’s hands waving goodbye, a mother’s arms embracing her daughter for one last time. She was neither the mother nor the daughter. *Do you have any last words?* the executioner asked again. She could still taste the salt in her mouth.
ma-buhay
[IM]MIGRATION FACTS:

Many Filipinas seek foreigner husbands, particularly those of Caucasian American and European extractions. This phenomenon can be attributed for various reasons, including economic motives and the desire for foreign citizenship. The desire for foreigner husbands also stems from the colonial mentality that “imported” is better. Women who marry foreigners are given honorary balikbayan status.

“In this process (marriage), the Filipina is not seeking to erase the existing self, but to remake herself. Consequently, going abroad is not about escaping the Philippines as it is about expanding the space, both geographic and social, in which one has to manoeuvre (sic) in the world” (Bulloch and Fabinyi 140).
HINDI PORKE'T MAY ASAWA AKONG FOREIGNER, MAYAMAN NA! MUKHA BA AKONG ATM??!

This is a message from a good friend of mine. (foreigner) kachat ko kasi xa last night. Its sad he was married with a filipina and they have 5 kids!!! i asked him why he still want a filipina... :( and then he replied ...

Why a filipina? well, firstly as a general rule, people in the Phils hold family values high and are loyal and loving partners. Second we share Christian values for the most part, and thirdly we share English as a language, even tho perhaps not always polished in the Phils. Everyone has a type they are attracted to I guess, and I find pretty slim and fine featured ladies attractive, and the Philippines is full of those. As for my past experiences, well, I cant speak for why my ex wife decided to break her vows, or to abandon her marriage. It was a shock to me, and I think that it wasnt a real reflection of pinay, or even of my ex wife. She suffered a lot after killing her baby, and I think it really made her mind go strange.

I do know that before that happened we were very happy and everything I had ever thought about Pinay was true. I am not trying to replace her, I just seek happiness like everyone else.

I appreciate your comments about giving everything to your wife, spoiling them if you like, but what else can you do? When you love someone, you do anything for them and to make them happy.

Im very tired this week, and sometimes I feel that there is no future for me, but still I will come there and God willing, find someone who can tolerate me ..
Name: Maria Concepcion “Connie” Smith (nee Gatpandan)
Age: 30
Occupation: Housewife of David Smith, 53
Hometown: Lipa, Batangas, Philippines (currently living in Sydney, Australia)

Broos

Maaaaaaaaaaareeeeeeeeee!
Kamusta? I mean,
how are you?
David says I should practice
my English so I correct myself
and say “How are you.”
I am very good.
Thank you for asking.

Oh yes, this is my husband David.
David, say hi to my Mare.
David is Australian from Australia.
He is a pilot for Qantas Airlines.
That’s why we are here,
because he can fly.

What happened to my arm?
Ay mare, this is nothing.
I just hit my arm in the table,
este on the table.
My pasa will heal in time.
Honey, how do you say pasa in English?
Ay, broos pala.
My broos will heal in time.
David healed the broos in my heart.
Naks, may ganun?

It is so nice to meet you
here at the mall, Mare,
because you can see my husband!
Isn’t David the most handsome man?
Even more handsome than Piolo Pascual!¹
We are actually looking for shirts for him,
because look, his stomach is showing.
I hope they have size XXL for him!
I am so happy David take me back home.

¹ Piolo Pascual is a famous Filipino actor, singer, and heartthrob.
He goes Philippines plenty times because of his job but he does not want to take me. He say, “Next time Connie, I’m too busy with work.” I am surprise he let me go with him this time! Oh, I’m sorry, surpriseD pala. Don’t need to yell, David. I am still learning English!

Oh, you are hungry? You are going to Jollibee? Okay, I wait for you here. I will be talking to my Mare.

I told you, Mare, I hit my arm in, on the table. Ok lang ako. Anyway, do you wanna know how I meet David? We meet in Yahoo Chat, he tell me he is a pilot. Then he show me a picture of himself. He looked so young and handsome! Blonde hair and blue eyes, puti pa!

One night, we chat online then David tell me he is going to Manila for work so we meet in SM. But I was so surpriseD when I saw him because he was so old! I ask him, “Sir, are you a pilot?” Then he tell me he is retired. He said the picture he showed me, that was his son! He say sorry, he didn’t mean to pool me... ay, fool pala, but he wanted to meet a nice Filipina girl because he heard we are very nice!

Of course, I was so sad. I wanted to cry so mats, mare. But I think to myself, David is rich and he is Australian, And maybe if I marry him,
I can go to Australia too!
So ayun, I tell him it is okay,
I do not care if he is old,
my tatay is 10 years older than my nanay
and they love each other very mats!

We spent many time
together for two weeks.
He tell me about his life,
he tell me divorce his wife.
Then he go back to Australia for one month.
He come back again and then he say,
“Connie, you are the most
beautiful Filipina I have ever met.
I want you to take care of me
for the rest of my life.
Will you marry me?”
Of course I say yes!

Look at my ring,
ang bongga, di ba?
He tell me it is 24 karat.
He tell me he buy it in Australia,
he said he couldn’t wait for me,
he had to buy a ring without me.
I don’t mind, this ring is so nice.
I wear it in my middle finger
because it is too big for my ring finger.

No, Mare, how can you say that?
He bought this ring for me!
He does not hit me!
I tell you how I got this broos!
David loves me!
I think you are just jealous
because your husband is
a tricycle driver and
I am married to a forenjer pilot.
Shut up, shut up!
Damn you! Shut up!
HINDI NIYA AKO SINASAKTAN!

Oh good, David,
you are finally back.
I thought you buy food.
Oh, I am very sorry!
I did not know I was suppose
to meet you in Jollibee.
I tell you I am talking to Mare.

Ay Mare, pasensya ka na,
Next time na lang tayo mag-usap.

Please don’t yell, David.
I am so sorry.
Please, David, masakit---
I am sorry I speak Tagalog.
It hurts.
It hurts.
You are broosing me.
Please forgive me, David.
I will never disobey you again.
Immigrant Tip #5: Love an American Boy (and start hating yourself, as if you didn’t already)

Being the Other in a love triangle is a shitty feeling. I can’t describe it any other way. It sucks.

In the sixth grade, I had a crush on an American boy named David Powers. He had blonde hair and blue eyes. His father was in the military. My American best friend, Jessica Potts, also had a crush on David Powers. She also had blonde hair and blue eyes. And her father was also in the military.

Me? I had black hair and brown eyes. My father cleaned rooms for the military. It only made American sense that David asked Jessica out. Jessica never knew I liked David too. It’s not like she was going to stop dating him to spare my feelings. That’s not how it worked.

Besides, why would David ever like me? He said I looked like a monkey with a weird accent. And here I was, thinking I’ve completely fooled everyone with my Americanized English. But no, not David. I was still an outsider to him.

I was too nice back then to tell David, “Fuck you, you stupid haole!” Calling him a stupid haole wasn’t any better, but the way this world works, one racist comment calls for another racist comment. That was part of my Americanization. I know better now. I learned from history. Put other people down before they can put me down. Attack before others can attack me. I cannot let history repeat itself again.
it is not the journey, 
but the destination---
He will guide you home

and if you don’t see Him, 
check your mirrors---
idols are closer than they appear
[IM]MIGRATION FACTS:

11.5 million undocumented immigrants live in the United States.

230,000 are Filipinos.
Hide and Seek

Mrs. Jennings! It is so nice to see you here again today. Why are you here? Haircut? Hair color? Highlight? Come take a seat over there, Mrs. Jennings. I will wash your hair. Oh, you are going to a party with your husband? Your husband is a sheriff, oh my, how exciting. Come, sit, sit, would you like some tea? I make you some tea. Is that your husband with you? Hello, sir, it is very nice to meet you. My name is Florence. Yes, it is my real name, sir. Why do you ask? Oh no, it is okay, Mrs. Jennings. I am used to being questioned all the time because of my color. I completely support Mr. Jennings. I think we need to deport illegal immigrants. Arizona has plenty of them. Especially those Mexicans. Oh boy, they are no good. Look at me, I wait ten years for my papers to be legally processed and then they just jump the fence and show up here! What the heck?

Take a seat over there, Mrs. Jennings, please. I will get the shampoo ready. How are you today? Oh, you don’t want to go to the party? Why not? You don’t like the other sheriffs’ wives? Yes, I agree, Mrs. Jennings. Women can be very, what’s the word… oh yes, bitch. Especially Filipino women, ay sus, they are so madaldal. That means talkative. They gossip too much. Back home in the Philippines I used to get into fights because ay sus, they cannot mind their own business. I cannot help that I am a very secretive person, Mrs. Jennings. Patago. Oops, I did not mean to speak Tagalog in front of you. I hope your husband did not hear me, ha ha. But yes, I agree, women, they are so bitch. Especially the celebrities I met when I used to work at Salon De Manila, they always greet me with “Do you know what so-and-so celebrity did last night, Clara?” Ay shet, you did not hear that. Clara is my nickname. My full name is Clara Florence, but I think Florence sounds more American, doesn’t it? So I introduced myself as Florence when I came to the U.S. Ay, I am going to shut up now. I am talking too much! I am talking so much I forgot the hair dryer! Now where did I put it? Hold on, let me go find it.

Sorry about that. I am so out of my mind lately, Mrs. Jennings. I am so sorry. You want to learn Tagalog? I will teach you, Mrs. Jennings. You should go to the Philippines. I think you will really like it. I wish I can go home, but… well… I don’t have money. Yes, I don’t have money. That’s it. That’s why. Oh no no no, Mrs. Jennings. There is no need to lend me money. You are too nice. The truth is, I have nothing to go back home to anyway… ay, I am saying too much again. Pasensya ka na, I mean, I am so sorry, ma’am. It is just that… you are very easy to talk to. I feel like I don’t have to hide when I am talking to you. Ay, I am so senti! Oh, that’s short for sentimental. That is how we say it back home.
Layers for your hair, Mrs. Jennings? Then I give you highlights. Is that okay? You will be the belle of the ball. Is that the correct expression? I have been living in the US for so long and I still have a hard time remembering American sayings. In the Philippines we call it *reyna elena* because we have this pageant called *Santacruzan* and... *ay*, I don’t remember anymore, so long time ago. I have been here too long. How many years have I been living in the US? I cannot count the years anymore, Mrs. Jennings. I came here on a tourist visa to visit my cousin in Tucson and never left since. Oh, umm... I have a green card now, of course. Otherwise, I cannot be working here in the beauty salon, right? Well, umm... can you keep a secret, Mrs. Jennings? The truth is... well, it’s nothing. I just really miss my family. I do have something to go back to, but life is better here. I can help my family if I am in the U.S. Life is harder for me here because... well, it is just hard. Mrs. Jennings, your husband is looking over here. I think he wants to talk to you. Do you want to go there right now? No problem, I will wait here.

No, you don’t have to be sorry, Mrs. Jennings. You are the customer. Why are you crying? You like me a lot? I like you a lot too, Mrs. Jennings. You are a very nice lady. You’re sorry? Why are you sorry? Why is your husband carrying handcuffs? Oh, do you know... detained, sir? There is no need for handcuffs, sir. I will not hide from you this time. No, no, please don’t apologize, Mrs. Jennings. I guess you knew my secret the whole time. Please don’t cry. You should really go to the Philippines some day, Mrs. Jennings. Maybe I will see you there soon. I can cut your hair. I think the layers would look really good on you.
Immigrant Tip #6: Lose the Accent

As a new student, I had to introduce myself in front of the class. Some boys snickered while I spoke, but I decided that it didn’t matter because my teacher gave me a “Very good.” During recess, I was sitting alone when one of my classmates, a Filipino girl, walked up to me and asked me if I was Filipino. I said yes. She then asked me if I was born in the Philippines. Once again, I said yes. To prove to her that I was not lying, I said a couple of sentences in Filipino.

Then she told me, “Don’t let the boys hear you speak Filipino. They will make fun of you.”

I was surprised to hear this from her, considering that she, herself, was Filipino. However, she was right. The boys in the class laughed every time I spoke. Whenever I mispronounced a word, the Filipino girl, who eventually became my friend, would tell everyone: “She’s Filipino, that’s why she says words all wrong.”

Since then, I became obsessed with losing my Filipino accent. I started with my name. Everyone at home called me “Jee-sel” even though my name was spelled with a “z.” Sometimes, they would say “Gee-sel” with a hard “g” sound. When my fifth grade teacher called attendance, she would pronounce my name with the “j” sound and the “z” sound. She made my name sound beautiful. I practiced saying my name the way she said it. Juh-zelle. Ji-zelle.

I eventually expanded my vocabulary. At-ti-tude, not at-ti-chood. As-su-ning, not a-shoo-ning. Ad-ver-tise-ment, not ad-ver-tees-ment. In-di-vi-si-ble, not in-dee-vee-see-bol. Don’t say persons, say people. Don’t say Lola, say Grandma. Don’t say Lolo, say Grandpa. Uncle, auntie. Not tito, not tita. There’s no English word for ate either; just call them “Sister” like they’re nuns.

I started to speak English all the time, even at home. I even learned pidgin words – bumbai da kine, I get choke homework brah, no thank you I no like beef you. My parents would ask, “Bakit hindi ka na nagta-Tagalog?” I ignored them, pretending I didn’t understand what they were saying. When they spoke in Filipino, I would answer in English. I started to keep a diary. I wrote only in English, and only about American boys with blonde hair and blue eyes.

When I reached sixth grade, I had completely lost my accent. Nobody made fun of the way I talked anymore; it was as if everyone forgot that I was an immigrant.

Except me.
[IM]MIGRATION FACTS:

The first Filipinos in Hawai‘i arrived in 1906 to work in the sugar plantations. By the 1930s, Filipino laborers became the largest ethnic group in the plantations, surpassing the Japanese. Sugar plantation owners preferred hiring Filipinos for various reasons: 1) Filipino labor was cheaper; 2) Filipinos were uneducated, and therefore, less likely to strike; and 3) it was more practical since the Philippines was a U.S. colony.

Today, Filipinos are the second largest racial group in Hawai‘i, behind Caucasians.
Name: Josefina “Fina” Andres
Age: 42
Occupation: Crew Member at McDonalds, Janitress at Waikīkī Beach Hotel, Unaware Asian Settler
Hometown: Banna, Ilocos Norte and Kalihi, Hawaiʻi

Ukininam

Hay, ukininam!
Where is the bus?
That’s why I’m late
to work every time
because of the bus.
What? You’re doing
a project on balikbayan?
I never go back PI long time,
I like but I no more money.

Hay, ukininam!
Where is that fucking bus?
Anyway, what you like know?
I work two jobs –
crew member at McDonalds
and a janitor at Waikīkī
Beach Hotel on the weekends.
And for what?
My kids are shitheads,
my husband good-for-nothing,

Ukininam!

What else you like know?
I came to Hawaiʻi
when I was 15,
I’m 42 now.
How many years is that?
I’m no good in math.
I never spoke one word
of English when I came here.
Shet, I don’t even know if
what I’m speaking right
now is English.
I grad from Farrington,
I went LCC for little bit,
but then I got pregnant
so I never finish school.
If I wasn’t taking care
of four kids and yes,
that includes my good
for nothing husband,
I’d go back, take night classes,
then I can be a nurse.

And maybe I can save up
enough money to go PI,
Maybe I can finally show face,
I not gonna be embarrassed.
I like go back, you know.

Hay, *ukininam*!
Where is that damn bus?
I gonna be late for work!
On what it means to be Filipino, by former First Lady Imelda Marcos

I.

i have never been a material girl
my father always told me never to love anything that cannot love you back

it is so easy to choose the wrong word

i am neither steel nor butterfly

i am a sweet potato a sweet potato will never mother a tomato because it takes two to tango

i am kind of a symbol

i am just a drop of water

if that drop is dropped in an ocean that drop of water is no longer a drop but an ocean
II.

i did not have three thousand pairs of shoes

because you never dress down for the poor
that’s not what they want to see

my little people want to see a star
people want someone they can love
someone to set an example

it’s no fair to say
someone is a tyrant
there are no tyrants
where there are
no slaves

i am my little people’s star and slave

i am your mother

i hope that you look
at me as a symbol

like your mother
if she’s ugly
so are you

i had one thousand three hundred sixty
III.

“we don’t have money
but we have bananas”

i am in the process
of building
a banana house
to show people
we are not that poor

filipinos are ingenious
about such things
IV.

my innocence is undeniable

you went into my closets looking for skeletons
all they found were shoes beautiful shoes

people say i’m a dreamer

i dream
not only at night
when there is
the moon
and the stars

but i dream
more so during
the daytime
without the moon
and the stars

but i don’t just dream
i do it

life is so beautiful
life is so good
as long as there’s
music
flowers
a nice person
a smile
a good deed

i have no problems with my conscience

i have loved
therefore i will
go to heaven

there is no need for sleep
V.

for four hundred years
we were a subject people

when marcos became president
we had been independent
for only twenty years

we were a mixture of races
we had to identify who we were

we helped our people to understand
what it meant to be filipino

we are very good
at destroying ourselves

but we are beautiful
Filipina hyphen American

Filipina space American

Filipina slash American

Filipina

American

USA! USA!
the poet says:
  your very own star-spangled banner
  your light in the darkness
  it will guide you home

but the Filipino says:
  it’s fucking christmas
  a parol is just a parol

the Filipino tells the poet:
  decolonize your eyes
  not everything is colonized
Hello Again, Philippines: Tips for the Balikbayan

Tip #1: Dress down so the poor will ignore you.

That way, when you’re waiting for a cab or for the MRT to show up, you wouldn’t have to worry about thieves trying to steal from you. I suggest wearing plain t-shirts and jeans. You’ll blend in with everyone else. However, if you want to highlight the fact that you’ve been living in another country for a while now, there is a way to look poor but still flaunt your status as a balikbayan. For example, if you live in Hawai‘i like yours truly, you can solve this problem by rocking out local-brand slippers (e.g. Locals, Surfah, Scotts). Filipinos wouldn’t know that you’re wearing $3 slippers from Longs Drugs, but they would know that you’re wearing a non-Filipino brand (although if you’re wearing t-shirt and jeans, they probably wouldn’t even bother looking at your feet).

On a related note, make sure you also own poor-people items. For example, you’re going to need a cell phone during your stay. Your imported phone isn’t going to work in the Philippines unless you buy a special SIM card. Now you can buy the SIM card, but if you have an iPhone, you’re just asking for danger. If you really must Instagram those delicious street foods you just ate, you’re better off using your three-year-old digital camera. Yes, your photo will not look vintage, but that’s better than losing your phone because you wanted to be a hipster. If you need a phone, get one of those prepaid old-school Nokia phones. If you get bored waiting for a cab or the MRT, don’t bust out your iPhone so you can play Temple Run or Bejeweled Blitz. Play Snake or create your own ring tones on your vintage Nokia phone. See, if you can’t afford a decent cell phone, the hoodlums have no business robbing you.

Now, this is good advice if you don’t want to lose your things. Unfortunately, this is not good advice if you want to get things. If you look plain, chances are, you will not get the best service at a store or a restaurant.

Unless you start speaking in English.

Tip #2: Speak English.

Which situation would you prefer?

You: Miss, size 5 nga. Salamat.
Miss: *either a) ignores you, or b) gets you the size 5, but doesn’t acknowledge your existence*

or---

You: Excuse me, do you have this in size 5?
Miss: Yes, of course, ma’am. Let me get it for you. Please wait here.

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1 “Excuse me” is completely optional.
Yes, that’s what I thought. That’s why you need to speak in English. It doesn’t matter that you have an accent, that you still confuse your p’s and f’s. Sure, the sales lady will make fun of you, but you still have the edge over her. You returned home, she never left. Now you’re probably thinking that anyone can do this as long as they can speak English. No, it doesn’t work that way. Filipinos have a “balikbayan radar.” They know who’s for real and who’s faking. For example, if you speak English but call the sales lady “Miss,” you basically just revealed that you are not imported. Americans don’t address sales ladies as “Miss.” Remember, if you are going to pose as a foreigner, be rude.

But I digress… these are tips for you, the balikbayan! You already know how to be rude!

**Tip #3: Don’t speak English.**

You’re probably thinking, “Huh? What? But you just told me to speak English!”

Yes, speak English when you’re at a restaurant or at a mall or some other fancy place. But when you’re in the streets, you better speak the language of the streets. You see, the “bayans” apparently like to take advantage of the balikbayans. That’s why you have to pretend you’re one of them. And what’s the best way to do that? Don’t speak.

I learned this lesson from my sisters. During our vacation, we had to take a cab to the mall. The first thing they told me while we waited was, “Don’t talk when we get in the cab.”

“What not?” I asked.

“Because you have an American accent,” Ate Gladyz said.

“The cab driver will charge us more,” Ate Gretchen said, using the word *mandurugas* to describe the unknown cab driver.

A cab driver stopped in front of our hotel. We all sat in the back seat, with me sandwiched in between my sisters.

“*Saan*?” he asked.

“Trinoma ho,” Ate Gladyz said, naming the mall as our destination.

Filipinos are very nosy people. This cab driver was no exception. “*Taga-saan kayo?*” Where are we from?

“Valenzuela ho,” Ate Gladyz said. She was appointed our spokeswoman during the cab ride. Although Ate Gretchen also knew how to speak Tagalog, she had been living in

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2 Another option for *balikbayan* is to hire a driver.
New York for six years now so she was technically a *balikbayan* as well. On the other hand, my *Ate* Gladyz spent the last few years in Japan, which was also a foreign country, but at least it was in Asia. Out of all of us, she was still the most familiar with Filipino customs, and therefore, she became the Speaker of the Sisters.

It seemed like the cab driver wanted to stump us, wanted an excuse to charge us more money. “*Bakit naka-hotel kayo?*”

But he didn’t know that you could not stump the Gajelonia sisters. Ate Gladyz quickly responded, “*May kamag-anak ho kami na dumating galling Amerika.*” We had relatives who came from America.

“*Ah, ganun,***” the cab driver said. He didn’t say a word after that, and we only paid 50 pesos for the ride.

So my fellow balikbayans, if you want to save money, pretend that you’re one of them. You will already lose at least $20 at the airport because the porters will “insist” on helping you with your balikbayan boxes, but you can get that $20 back by faking your foreigner status in the streets.

**Tip #4: Learn how to speak other forms of Tagalog.**

As a Filipino, you probably pride yourself in being able to speak multiple languages – Tagalog (and if you are from a province, you speak that particular province’s dialect), English, and maybe even Chinese, Japanese, or Hebrew, depending where you live. But speaking three, four, five languages isn’t enough when you’re in the Philippines. You also need to learn how to speak Jejemon and swardspeak (a.k.a. gay lingo).³

I don’t even know how to describe Jejemon. In fact, not everyone understands it. Many Filipinos even refuse to acknowledge its existence because only *jologs*⁴ people speak it. Hell, even the *jologs* people will tell you they will not stoop so low as to be a Jejemon. But it’s important that you are aware of this cultural phenomenon. Chances are, you will hear some creature say something like, “3ow ph0w, mUsZtAh nA.” Don’t worry, he’s not trying to take your wallet. He’s actually just saying, “Hi. How are you?” Then you can respond with, “*F1N3 H0W U?”* Since Jejemon is a very complex language, it will probably take you decades to master. I know what you’re thinking. It took you 5 billion years to learn English, and now you have to learn a butchered version of it? But don’t fret, an easy way to fake your Jejemon fluency is to replace your A’s with 4’s, your E’s with 3’s, and your letter O’s with 0’s.

³ Jejemon and swardspeak are not the same language, although there may be some overlaps. It is possible that a swardspeak term has been Jejemonized. ⁴ *Jologs* is a term used to describe gaudy and tacky Filipinos, usually belonging to the lower class.
Swardspeak, on the other hand, is much easier to learn. According to Wikipedia, the language uses elements from other languages – Tagalog, English, Visayan, Chinese, and sometimes Japanese. It also gives new meanings to celebrity names and trademark brands. It is very popular in gay communities because it allows them to “resist the dominant culture of their area and create a space of their own,” but that doesn’t mean the language is not limited to the baklushes. Everyone in the Philippines employs swardspeak in their speech, even politicians and celebrities. You may not know it, but I’m sure you already know some swardspeak words. Haven’t you called someone a Bitter Ocampo lately? That Gelli De Belen bitch trying to steal your American jowa, right? What a Pocahontas.⁶

Tip #5: Toughen up your stomach.

And no, I don’t mean doing 50 sit-ups a day so you can have chiseled abs. I mean, toughen up your stomach so it can handle third-world food.

In the summer before third grade, I was hospitalized because I had contracted Hepatitis A from eating pagkaing kalye, or street foods. You remember street foods, right? Pig and chicken intestines grilled to perfection, fish balls deep-fried into a golden brown and then dipped in a sweet brown sauce. Do you remember kwek-kwek, deep-fried quail eggs wrapped in orange batter, then dipped in peppered vinegar? What about green mango and bagoong in a stick? And how can you forget sorbetes, or as we affectionately call it, “dirty ice cream.” Mmm, so dirty, but so delicious.

Since you’ve probably been living in America (or another foreign country) for quite some time now, your Filipino stomach has probably evolved into an American stomach. Unfortunately, American stomachs probably can’t handle the dirtiness of street foods because they are so used to eating fine gourmet like SPAM and vienna sausage. Hmm, maybe that’s why I got sick. As a child, I was fortunate enough to receive balikbayan boxes from my American relatives, filled with imported foods like SPAM, vienna sausage, and corned beef.

But no, I cannot let that happen again. And neither should you. But alas, you’re probably thinking, “I’m too good for street foods.” You think you are, but you’re not. Admit it, street foods are one of the few things you miss about home, and you should not let your foreigner stomach ruin your vacation. If you want to experience the dirty but still remain clean, University of the Philippines – Diliman is probably the best place to satisfy your street-food craving. Do not, I repeat, do not, eat the kwek-kweks at the mall. You will get sick. I learned that the hard way. But then again, I don’t regret puking and shitting on the eleven-hour plane ride back to Hawai‘i. That kwek-kwek was delicious.

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⁵ At least that’s what Wikipedia says.
⁶ Bitter Ocampo = bitter or jealous, derived from Diether Ocampo, a popular actor; Gelli De Belen = jealous, derived from Gelli De Belen, an actress; jowa = partner or spouse; Pocahontas = whore, slut; derived from the Disney character and the word “pokpok,” a derogatory term for a promiscuous woman
Tip #6: Bring toilet paper at all times.

After eating all those street foods, chances are, you probably need to use a public restroom (and by the way, don’t call them restrooms, they’re CRs, or comfort rooms). Unfortunately, CRs don’t have toilet paper. Now you’re probably thinking, “What is this third-world bullshit? What kind of a bathroom doesn’t have toilet paper?” You can complain to the mall manager all you want (if there is even such a person who exists), but the mall manager would probably tell you that you should’ve known that it’s your responsibility to have the proper equipment to wipe your ass.

The reason why there’s no toilet paper in the bathrooms is because like most basic necessities in the Philippines, there is a shortage of toilet paper in the country, and therefore people are inclined to steal them. So where do you find toilet paper? Steal some napkins from Jollibee or some other fast food restaurant. You can go to a drug store and buy packets of tissues. If those suggestions escape your mind when you enter the bathroom, there are also vending machines inside the bathroom that sell tissues. Just make sure that you have a ton of change.

Bringing your own toilet paper also applies when you’re visiting a relative or friend’s house. Chances are, they won’t have TP in their bathrooms either. Instead, you will see a tabo,7 but you already know how to use that, right? I mean, don’t tell me you don’t even have a tabo in your house abroad. What kind of a Filipino are you?

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7 A small bowl or bucket used for showering and washing.
Name: Tessy Barbara Gajelonia  
Age: 57  
Occupation: Field Supervisor, 7-11 Hawaii; daughter, mother, choir member at Our Lady of Sorrows Church  
Hometown: Pinili, Ilocos Norte, Philippines (currently living in Wahiawā, Hawai‘i)

Mother Packer

“Nana, go throw away those boxes! How come you never send them? Long time they’ve been there! Get ipis inside already! They’re taking up so much space in the house! Dad, go carry the boxes outside and open them. Release the roaches!”

Note to self:  
Filipinos are like cockroaches. We are everywhere and we never die. It’s okay, I can say this because I am a cockroach.

***

“Put all the clothes you don’t like in the balikbayan boxes on the right. That’s your grandma’s. Don’t put any clothes in your dad’s boxes. Every time they always get something from him. He is drowning in debt because he keeps borrowing from the credit card. He thinks I don’t know. I read the letter of his sister. Pa-happy birthday happy birthday pa and then they ask for money, shet. You know your cousin Mia? Punyeta, she asking your dad for money because she like go to school abroad. He should help you pay for your student loans. But what? Is your cousin abroad? No, she break her bones biking that’s why she asking for money. Why should we help them? Did they help us when we lived in the Philippines? Before I asked if they could spare us some rice. Did they give? No, they were selfish with the rice. And now, when they need something they suck up to your dad. Do they think life is easy here? Just because you are in America that means you are rich? Life is hard here too, you know. Just put everything in your grandma’s box. Don’t say anything.”

Note to self:  
Don’t say anything (but write about it).

***

“Gizelle, go help me organize the balikbayan boxes for our trip. I’m putting rice because the rice in the Philippines is not the same as the rice here. The rice there is hard. You will not like it, and I know you are very picky. Go put the clothes you don’t like over here so we can give them to the relatives. Why are we bringing boxes? Hello, we are balikbayan, we gotta have boxes. Your auntie has six! Come on, help me put the stuff inside.”

Note to self:  
We need to bring boxes because we are balikbayan.
“Why do you need a box for? Oh, for school? There, go take that box. What you mean, smaller box? They do not make small balikbayan boxes. Use the big box. Ok fine, we go turn the USPS box to a balikbayan box. What? You need a can of SPAM and vienna sausage? You gonna put poems inside? Oh, that’s a great idea. You like put one shirt too? I get you one that says ‘Hawai‘i.’ What do you mean, no need? White shirt? You don’t give out plain white shirts to relatives! That’s not how it works!”

Note to self:
The fake balikbayan box must be authentic.

“Gizelle, go take a picture of the balikbayan box for your project. Oh wait, write down the name. Dad, go write the name in the box. Nana, that’s Gizelle’s project. Should we be in the picture too, Gizelle?”

Note to self:
No, Mom. You can’t be in the picture.

“How is the box? Does your professor like it? Is she learning about the balikbayan box? Remember when we used to get balikbayan boxes from your grandma and grandpa?”

Note to self:
Sixteen years later, I finally want to remember. I am proud of being a damn cockroach.
A Response to Conrado De Quiros’ “Bracing for Balikbayans” as quoted in Vicente Rafael’s “Ugly Balikbayans and Heroic OCWs”

I am a balikbayan.
I am a foreigner in my motherland.
I am more superior to the natives.
I am the envy of all the natives.
I am unable to respond to their envy.
I am ugly.
I am an object of desire.
I am a purveyor of the miseducation of the Filipinos.
I am a safe driver.
I am an American colonizer.
I am a neo-colonizer.
I am a priest.
I am a proponent of breathing clean air.
I am a tourist.
I am Ferdinand Marcos’ favorite even in death.
I am a container filled with American groceries for relatives.
I am associated with Western consumer products.
I am a consumer.
I am the consumed.
I am a commodity.
I am a commodifier.
I am Reader’s Digest American Dream issue.
I am equal to the president of the United States.
I am America’s domestic helper.
I am an American state of mind.
I am the promise of immigration.
I am a tragic figure caught up in colonial delusions.
I am a participant in colonial hegemony.
I am the demise of an entire nation.
I am cultural degradation.
I am different.
I am alienated.
I am shameless and arrogant.
I am ashamed of who I am.
I am walang hiya.
I am balikbayan.
Name: Gizelle Gajelonia  
Age: 26  
Occupation: Graduate Student, Poet, Aware Asian Settler  
Hometown: Valenzuela City, Philippines and Wahiawā, Hawaiʻi (but mostly Wahiawā, Hawaiʻi)

**Immigrant Tip #10, Balikbayan Tip #7: Have no heart**

While waiting for my brother-in-law to pick me and my sisters up at Glorietta Mall, I noticed an old woman going up to people and making palimos. I don’t remember what she looked like or what she was wearing. But for some odd reason, my memory tells me she was wearing a black shawl and she was kuba, a hunchback. She caught me staring at her. *Shit*, I thought. *Please don’t come here. Please don’t come here.*

But she did. She walked right in front of me, cupped her hands, and said “Palimos po.” I was surprised to hear her say po; it’s a term used to show respect, usually to an elder. Did she sense that I wasn’t from here?

I shook my head. Not because I didn’t want help her. I shook my head to indicate that I didn’t understand. Although I perfectly understood what she wanted. My older sister answered for me. “Sorry ho, wala kaming pera.” Yep, sorry, old lady. We gave all our money to retail. Capitalism, for the win.

With disappointment, she turned around and continued her quest to find some loose change. It’s not like I didn’t want to help her, but I didn’t trust her. I didn’t trust anyone here. Manila is definitely one of the shadiest places I’ve ever been to. I was afraid that if I take my wallet out to give her some change, she’d take my wallet and go. Yes, she was old, but what if she had a younger accomplice waiting nearby whom she could toss the wallet to?

I watched as every person she asked refused to help her out. Some said flat-out no, others were more apologetic, while some just completely ignored her. One man went on a tirade; he told her to find a job because she wasn’t too old to stop working. “Maghanap ka kaya ng trabaho. Di ka naman ganun katanda. Pwede ka pang magtrabaho para mapakain mo sarili mo. Kung may pera ako, sa akin yun at sa pamilya ko. Di ko ipapamigay sa mga inutil na katulad mo!”

I thought about the old woman on our drive back to the hotel. Why didn’t anybody give her some spare change? Are Filipinos that selfish? Surely, somebody had money in their pocket.

I thought about what the man said about the old woman finding a job so she could feed herself. What if this was her job? Hanging around at malls, walking up to people, and begging for alms? What if the little change she makes each day goes to feeding her family?

Three years later, and I still wonder about the old woman. I wonder where she is now. Is she still begging for alms? Did she take that man’s advice and find a job? Or did she just give up? Maybe that would be best, to just end the suffering.

I know I should’ve helped her, but what did you expect? I’m a balikbayan. I have no heart.

When I began working on this book, I approached the project through a theoretical lens, that is, I viewed the Filipina woman from postcolonial and feminist theoretical perspectives. After all, the theories perfectly explained her position and place. She was marginalized, she was dictated by the forces of patriarchy, she was trapped in this neocolonial way of thinking, she was outside of the hegemonic power structure – in other words, she was powerless, and she needed to reclaim her power. However, when I actually started writing the book, I realized that I was doing it all wrong. While theorizing the Filipina experience is valuable (and inevitable), sometimes it takes away from the real voices that need to be heard.¹ In other words, I should not let the academic language speak for these women, but rather, I should let the different “languages” of the women speak for them. Tagalog, English, Taglish, Ilocano, pidgin English, swardspeak, Jejemon, “mother tongue” – these are only just some of the languages that the women use to tell their stories. Corazon, the entertainer in Japan, may have difficulty pronouncing the “academicanese” word *marginalized*, but she knows damn well what it means. She will even give you Star Margarine to prove it.

Catherine Ceniza Choy points out that the “future of Asian American history demands our imagination and creativity.”² However, Filipina diaspora extends beyond America, and therefore, I want to take Choy’s argument a step further, and suggest that the future of Filipina women, *saan man sa mundo*, demands our imagination and creativity. This book is my humble attempt to creatively and imaginatively tell and shape Filipina history, or as my fellow feminists would say, *her*story.

The imagination and creativity of this book comes from the voices of the different women. The voices may seem disjointed and fragmented from one another, and yet there is a connection between them. These voices, much like the objects inside a *balikbayan* box, are diverse and eclectic. They are foreign and imported, but when packed together the voices create a sound that is distinctly Filipina. Like the *balikbayan* box, these women are neo-colonial, but very much national.

Filipinos use the expression, *Mabuhay*, to welcome visitors in their home. But *mabuhay* also means to live, and the women in this book embody this word. A person needs to live in order to be heard. The women in this book are very much alive. And to live – that’s what Filipina feminism is all about.

I hope you enjoy this book, and more importantly, I hope that you learn something from the stories of these women because I certainly did. If not, well, that is your loss. Now if you excuse me, I am on vacation. Corazon just invited me to sing karaoke at her house, and I cannot wait to test out my feminist version of “Lady Marmalade”: Where’s all my Pinay sisters, lemme hear your flow, Pinay sisters!

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¹ Now I’m not saying we should theorize, I’m saying we should also explain the problems in ways people can understand.

Works Cited


Images:

Philippines map scanned from James Hamilton Patterson’s America’s Boy: A Century of Colonialism in the Philippines.


Screenshot from “Hindi Porke’t May Asawa Akong Foreigner, Mayaman Na! Mukha Ba Akong ATM??!” Facebook page.

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