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**Title**

The awesome and mundane adventures of Flor de Manilay San Francisco

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1rb8x5h6>

**ISBN**

97898888139385

**Author**

Choy, CC

**Publication Date**

2014

Peer reviewed



PROJECT MUSE®

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## Drawing New Color Lines

Chiu, Monica

Published by Hong Kong University Press, HKU

Chiu, Monica.

*Drawing New Color Lines: Transnational Asian American Graphic Narratives.*

Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, HKU, 2014.

*Project MUSE*. Web. 7 Jul. 2015. <http://muse.jhu.edu/>.



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## 10

# The Awesome and Mundane Adventures of *Flor de Manila y San Francisco*

Catherine Ceniza Choy\*

It's easy to notice, then overlook, the Filipino immigrant nurse. Her ubiquity in US hospitals lends her identity to stereotyping: natural caregiver, docile worker, foreign labor competition. Take for instance District of Columbia council member Marion Barry's recent rant that pitted Filipino immigrant nurses against African Americans. When trying to explain how to get more African Americans employed in the district in April 2012, he proclaimed, "[I]f you go to the hospital now, you'll find a number of immigrants who are nurses, particularly from the Philippines. And no offense, but let's grow . . . *our own nurses*" (Craig). In the context of such divisive and misguided comments, artist Jenifer K Wofford's 2008 graphic novel and kiosk poster project *Flor de Manila y San Francisco* contribute to a much-needed conversation about international health worker migration and, specifically, the immigration of Filipino nurses to the United States. By providing a contemplative and multifaceted backstory about a Filipino immigrant nurse, Flor Villanueva, Wofford compels us to take a second, and more thoughtful, look.

Born in San Francisco and raised in Hong Kong, the United Arab Emirates, and Malaysia, Jenifer K Wofford is an artist and educator based in the San Francisco Bay Area. She earned a BFA from the San Francisco Art Institute, and an MFA from the University of California, Berkeley. Wofford is perhaps most well-known for her performance art. She is a member of the artist trio Mail Order Brides (M.O.B.), whose work has been performed and exhibited at the de Young Museum, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, the National Asian

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\* Parts of this essay originally appeared as "The New Face of Immigration: *Flor de Manila y San Francisco*" in "Art on Market Street 2008 Program," published by the San Francisco Arts Commission in 2009.

American Film Festival, and the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, among other venues (Wofford, “Wofford”).

In recent years, her paintings and multimedia art have received more exposure and critical acclaim. One of her paintings on Filipino nurses is featured on the cover of the poet Eileen Tabios’s book *The Awakening* (2013), and one of the panel images from *Flor de Manila y San Francisco* is the book cover illustration for the historian Shelley Sang-Hee Lee’s *A New History of Asian America* (2013). A self-identified mixed-race and Filipino American artist, Wofford writes that her artistic work on Filipino nurses is partly inspired by her Filipino mother who “is one of these nurses” (Wofford, “Nurse 2006–7”).

Wofford’s graphic novel was conceived and exhibited as public art, a kiosk poster project of the San Francisco Arts Commission’s “Art on Market Street” public art project in 2008. Since 1992, the Art on Market Street Program has commissioned new artwork by Bay Area artists, strategically infusing it into the daily life of San Francisco’s pedestrians through a bus kiosk poster series and other temporary projects on Market Street, one of the city’s main thoroughfares. A diverse group of passersby—residents, tourists, workers, commuters, and shoppers—encounters the kiosk posters, creating a broad public audience for the artwork.

At the time that Wofford applied for the Art on Market Street Program, the San Francisco Arts Commission was soliciting three artists or artist teams to create six artworks for the kiosk poster project based on an annual theme. The 2008 theme was “narratives.” One project, entitled *Dashiell Hammett’s San Francisco*, was inspired by the detective novel *The Maltese Falcon*. Another, entitled *Golden City Comics*, was a romantic comic book fantasy (“Art on Market Street 2008 Program”). Wofford’s project, *Flor de Manila y San Francisco*, imagined 6 years (1973–78) in the life of the fictional Flor Villanueva, a young woman who emigrates from Manila to San Francisco in 1973.<sup>1</sup> Six posters, one for every year between 1973 and 1978, were installed in kiosks along San Francisco’s Market Street. Pedestrians followed Flor’s life story as it intersected with political and cultural events, and witnessed the transformations in Flor’s own personal development as another year passed.

This essay argues that the first significant contribution of Wofford’s *Flor de Manila y San Francisco* is its ability to humanize the Filipino immigrant nurse and by extension health worker migrants for a general public. Although the Filipino nurse and other health worker migrants are featured actors of globalization in public policy studies and scholarly books and articles, they are often

barely visible to the general public except as statistics, soundbites, and stereotypes. Wofford confronts and contests this invisibility by combining the genres of the poster and the graphic novel, which rely on visual traditions to convey a message and tell a story.

Second, the graphic novel reminds the viewer that the Filipino nurse immigrant is not a perpetual newcomer, but rather has a history over time and space. In the case of Flor Villanueva, the 1970s was a transformative decade for her story. Manila and San Francisco were the specific places that shaped her experiences of alienation, but they ultimately also created a transnational sense of belonging. A close reading of *Flor de Manila y San Francisco* that highlights the broader historical contexts as well as the individual personality of Flor reclaims a hidden history of contemporary migration, labor, and citizenship that is worthy of preservation.

Before delving into a close reading of *Flor de Manila y San Francisco*, it is worthwhile to contextualize Flor's life history in the broader historical and sociological context of international health worker migration. The 1970s was a transformative decade for tens of thousands of health worker migrants on the move who became part of the sociological phenomenon known as "brain drain." The international migration of highly-educated persons continues into the twenty-first century; it involves a range of professional occupations, but especially those in health care work.

## **The Global Dimensions of Health and Migration**

The phenomenon of the international migration of health workers is embedded in long histories of labor migrations. These histories reveal specific geographic patterns of sending and receiving countries, of which the immigration of Filipino nurses to the United States plays a significant role. It is striking that, in the United States, the issues of immigration on the one hand and health on the other are often conceptualized and discussed separately.

In recent years, debates about comprehensive immigration reform in the United States have been dominated by illegal versus legal immigration, an almost exclusive attention to Mexico as a sending nation of immigrants, and deep concern over the ability of the United States to protect its national borders. Concurrently, US health care reform—especially issues of affordability and accessibility—has been another major issue of debate. Sadly, the most attention given to the linkage between health and migration in these debates

came during a point in President Barack Obama's 2009 health care address to Congress denying that illegal immigrants would receive free health coverage when a Republican congressman brazenly interrupted him with, "You lie!" (Hulse).

What these debates obscure is the fact that health and migration are inextricably linked issues. The health of indigenous people, settlers, and the newly arrived migrants are intertwined because disease knows no national borders. Less understood, but equally important, is that they are also connected through the phenomenon of health worker migration. Migrants are not solely recipients of health care delivery in the receiving countries. Health worker migrants are integral to the operation of these countries' health care services. D.C. council member Marion Barry learned this point the hard way. Soon after his disparaging remarks about Filipino immigrant nurses, he thanked the "outstanding medical staff" in Las Vegas, including its "professional Filipino staff," after being treated for a blood clot at a local hospital ("Marion Barry Hospitalized").

While Wofford's graphic novel and my own research experience are rooted in the migration history of Filipino nurses to the United States, the multiple levels of diversity in health worker migration cannot be overemphasized. First, the definition of health worker is broad, encompassing many forms of paid and unpaid labor, a variety of professional occupations, and labor that takes place inside the home and outside it in various institutions. According to a 2006 World Health Report, "health workers are people whose job it is to protect and improve the health of their communities. Together these health workers, in all their diversity, make up the global health workforce" (*Working Together for Health* 1).

Health work is, on one level, a highly local household and community effort because it is a form of intimate labor, entailing "bodily or emotional closeness or personal familiarity" or "intimate observation and knowledge of personal information" (Boris and Parreñas 2). However, any understanding of health workers must take into account their tremendous geographic mobility. Since the 1970s, health workers have been key players in the phenomenon of international migration.

In 2006, a United Nations International Migration Report estimated that there were 191 million international migrants worldwide (*International Migration Report* 1). The Philippines and India were among the top sending nations of world migrants. Historically, they are also major sending nations of professional health workers, especially physicians and nurses. In the late

twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, however, the Caribbean, Egypt, sub-Saharan African states (especially South Africa and Nigeria), Cuba and the former Soviet Union have emerged as new source countries for physicians. China, Thailand, and sub-Saharan African states are exporting more nurses. Moreover, the Gulf States have joined the United Kingdom, United States, New Zealand, Canada, and Australia as major destinations for health worker migrants (Martineau, Decker, and Bundred 2–7).

In addition to occupational and geographical diversity, an understanding of health worker migration must also take into account that there are histories of this form of global migration. In the US-Philippine example alone, this migration has changed dramatically over time (Choy, *Empire of Care*). In the early 1970s, the Philippine government adopted an export-oriented economy that featured the export of laborers. By the end of that decade, the Philippines became the world's leading exporter of nurses, sending nurses to European as well as North American countries. In the twenty-first century, Middle Eastern countries are major destinations for Filipino nurses working overseas.

Historically, however, the leading destination for Filipino nurse migrants has been the United States. The early-twentieth-century US colonization of the Philippines (1898–1946) created a unique and enduring relationship between the two countries. In an attempt to racially uplift Filipinos and distinguish US imperialism from that of European nations, the US colonial government established schools throughout the archipelago. This colonial agenda included the establishment of hospital training schools that encouraged young Filipinas to study an Americanized professional nursing curriculum, which included the study of the English language.

Mass migrations of Filipino nurses to the United States began in the second half of the twentieth century when US hospitals began to actively recruit Filipino nurses to alleviate critical nursing shortages, especially in public inner-city hospitals of major urban areas. In 1965, watershed US immigration legislation facilitated the permanent residence of Filipino nurses by favoring the immigration of professionals with needed skills. At least twenty-five thousand Filipino nurses immigrated to the United States between 1966 and 1985 (Ong and Azores 164–65). Like Flor Villanueva, many went to the state of California, a common destination of foreign-trained nurses. These broader forces of health work and international migration shape Wofford's graphic novel about how one health worker migrant changes, and is changed, by the social, economic, and political landscape of the Philippines and the United States.

## “FLOR 1973: Skylab”

In Asian American and immigration studies, transnationalism has become a generative thematic and methodology, but also a trendy and amorphous buzzword. In their introduction to a special journal issue on transnational Asian American history, guest editors Erika Lee and Naoko Shibusawa caution readers to think about the terminology more carefully, noting that terms such as “transnational,” “global,” “international,” and “diaspora” are best understood as describing distinct, though related, processes and phenomena. Citing the work of anthropologist Nina Glick-Schiller, Lee and Shibusawa explain that “transnational” refers to “political, economic, social, and cultural processes that extend beyond the borders of a particular state, include actors that are not states, but are shaped by the policies and institutional practices of states” (Lee and Shibusawa viii).

Wofford’s graphic novel visualizes how transnationalism is lived and experienced. In Flor’s life story, the settings in Manila and San Francisco are equally important and inextricably intertwined. The first poster, set in 1973, juxtaposes Flor’s arrival in San Francisco with the Philippine landscape, family, and friends she has left behind (Plate 11).

The largest panel image features newly-arrived immigrant Flor with suitcase in hand looking wistfully at a San Francisco, skyscraper-lined sky. She stands alongside a street with several moving vehicles. With the exception of a bystander in the background, Flor is depicted alone. While this scene of arrival in the big city is paradigmatic of the story of new immigrants, the five other panel images in the poster and all of the captions depict the emotional experience of transnationalism. Manila is on Flor’s mind and in her heart. “I hope San Francisco is as great as Manila,” she muses. Another panel image portrays the large extended family she reluctantly left behind with a caption noting her wishful thinking: “I hope calling home is cheap. And letters arrive quickly.”

Other 1973 panel images and captions present the multiple motivations for emigration, including the use of the nursing profession as a socioeconomic strategy to work abroad. Over the course of the twentieth century, the meaning of nursing in the Philippines changed over time. In the first half of the twentieth century, it predominantly signified a patriotic call to duty, a form of Philippine nation-building and preparation for self-government against the backdrop of US colonialism. An elite group of Filipino nurses furthered their nursing education in the United States as US colonial-government-sponsored students, but



the vast majority of them returned to the Philippines in order to replace white American nursing personnel in the archipelago and to perpetuate Americanized nursing there.

By the second half of the twentieth century, these ideals and the migrations that accompanied them would undergo a profound shift. Tens of thousands of Filipino nurses, many of them new graduates, left the Philippines for the United States for good. Their outmigration was the result of specific push and pull factors in the second half of the twentieth century: low wages, poor working conditions, and limited employment opportunities for nurses in the Philippines, and post-World War II critical nursing shortages and the implementation of more liberal immigration policies beginning in 1965 in the United States. US hospitals' active recruitment of Filipino nurses was also an inadvertent outcome of US colonialism and its establishment of Americanized nursing schools that trained Filipino nurses in an Americanized professional nursing curriculum as well as the English language.

Immigration did not translate into a clean break from the Philippines, however. For the Filipino immigrant nurse and her relatives in the early 1970s, the white nurse's cap symbolically and literally became a passport to a more prosperous life for the immigrant *and* the family that she left behind. In one of the 1973 poster captions, a relative of Flor puts it this way: "Get your nursing degree. . . . It is your ticket out of here." The image of Flor adjusting her pristine white nursing cap on top of her head, positioned directly next to the image of Flor newly-arrived in San Francisco, reinforces the linkage between nursing and migration.

Flor's story also illuminates the fact that the mass migrations of Filipino nurses in the 1970s were motivated by more painful events. Philippine political instability as well as American dreams of socio-economic mobility fueled the migrations of Filipino college-age students, new graduates, and their families. In the early 1970s, Filipino university students were at the forefront of protests against what they argued was an ineffectual Philippine government that was increasingly dependent upon and subservient to foreign powers. Dictator Ferdinand Marcos's declaration of martial law in the Philippines in 1972 and the disappearances of his regime's political opponents increasingly became a cause for alarm. The practice of salvaging (the torture and killing of dissidents) placed critics of Philippine martial law, like Flor's brother Totoy, at risk. As Flor explains, "Some people think martial law is a good thing. Tell that to my brother who's been missing for months. We know he's alive, but he's in hiding. For good

reason.” Thus, colonial educational legacies, despotism, human rights abuses, and shifting national economies intertwined with family dynamics in complex ways to shape Flor’s migration. “With Totoy gone, someone had to help the family. Turned out to be me.”

Finally, the first poster of Wofford’s graphic novel also establishes a global and diasporic context to Flor’s story. The title of the 1973 poster is “Skylab,” the name of the first US experimental space station that was launched into Earth’s orbit on May 14, 1973. The space station is illustrated in one of the panel images. Juxtaposed against an image of a Philippine Airlines plane, “Skylab” highlights the enabling role of new technologies that brought Americans to space as well as Filipino nurses to the United States and other parts of the globe.

### “FLOR 1974: Work/Life”

The major contribution of the graphic novel’s 1974 poster is the point that a newly-arrived Filipino migrant nurse is simultaneously a worker, colleague, migrant, family member, and consumer of popular culture. This point contrasts with the depiction of a Filipino nurse migrant in immigration and labor studies as a quantifiable human resource who is measured as a professional immigrant or temporary worker. Instead, the poster, entitled “Work/Life,” presents Flor as a laborer *and* as a multidimensional person who also has a life outside of work (Plate 12).

Several panel images address Flor’s culture shock. For example, in one panel image, Flor looks up at a steep hill in San Francisco’s Excelsior neighborhood. Although she lives with relatives (presumably extended family members who had migrated to San Francisco previously), the city’s topography and weather are unlike those of her Philippine upbringing. The caption reveals Flor’s inner thoughts, which weave Filipino expressions with English: “Ay naku. In Manila, no one walks, let alone walks uphill!” Similarly, in another panel image, Flor looks out of her kitchen window wistfully, thinking, “The fog here is so strange. I’m still not used to this cold, either.”

In a third panel image, Flor contemplates a major US news story of that year—the 1974 kidnapping of newspaper heiress Patty Hearst by the militant, fringe political group, the Symbionese Liberation Army—within her Philippine cultural frame of reference. While watching television, Flor is reminded of the Ayala family, one of the richest families and business conglomerates in the

Philippines: “This Hearst girl is always on the news lately. I think she’s like an Ayala or something.” Thus, readers of the graphic novel see San Francisco’s typical landscape and weather and the mainstream news de-familiarized through Flor’s eyes.

While the unfamiliar can be exotic and exciting, Wofford’s illustrations also conjure feelings of isolation, boredom, and anxiety. The feeling of loneliness pervades this poster as Flor stares downward into a TV screen, out of a kitchen window, and up the Excelsior neighborhood hill. It also permeates her experiences at work. On the one hand, as Flor stands in the entrance of her new workplace, she is in awe of its size: “My hospital is so modern. Window after window.” Her fascination was not uncommon. In my research on the history of Filipino nurse migration to the United States, many of the Filipino nurses I interviewed recollected their admiration for the advanced technology and abundance of medical resources in US hospitals. As Filipino immigrant nurse Josephine Abalos explained, “The thing I love about American hospitals is that we have enough supplies and equipment. . . . It was no comparison. [In the Philippines,] it was limited all the time” (Choy, *Empire of Care* 86).

Although Flor claims that the actual care of patients is her favorite part of the job—“I really do love my patients”—these positive feelings are tempered by the drudgery that comes with hospital bureaucracy. For example, Flor describes work as “wonderful” in another caption, but then continues with the thought: “SO much paperwork though. Talaga!” Finally, the largest image in the 1974 poster depicts Flor walking down a hospital hallway holding a tray. She looks downward and slightly to the side as though in contemplation, but also as if fighting the boredom and the fatigue that accompanies care work.

### “FLOR 1975: Thrilla”

The poster title, “Thrilla,” refers to Ali and Frazier’s famous boxing match in Manila in 1975. As Flor notes in a caption accompanying the panel image of Ali boxing Frazier on a television screen, “Everyone has been talking about this big boxing match between Ali and Frazier in Cubao.” The popularity of the sport in the Philippines emerged during the US colonial period after US military soldiers introduced boxing to Filipinos as a form of discipline, a part of the Americans’ civilizing mission in the archipelago. Well before the rise of famed Filipino boxer Manny Pacquiao, American boxing recruiters scouted the Philippines for talent

and brought these young men to the United States. Some of them, like 1939 world middleweight boxing champion, Ceferino Garcia, went on to have successful boxing careers.<sup>2</sup>

However, the poster title also refers to the thrill of returning to the Philippines that Flor experiences after having lived and worked in the United States for the past two years. “I’ve missed everyone so, so much,” she proclaims alongside the panel image of her arrival at the Manila international airport where she excitedly reaches out to hug a younger relative. This return visit is a concrete example of transnationalism, as is the large brown box filled with American goods that Flor distributes to relatives and friends in another panel image: “Gifts and treats for everyone, of course.” This form of transnational gift giving would become a pattern among returning overseas Filipinos or *balikbayan* that transformed into a commercial enterprise in the 1980s. It led to the creation of what would be called *balikbayan* boxes manufactured by Filipino American entrepreneurs with the specific purpose of shipping American material gifts back to the Philippines for an affordable price. Philippine studies scholar Vicente Rafael illuminates the complex transnational symbolic meaning of the *balikbayan* box: “Such boxes are the material evidence of immigrant success as much as they are of the promise of immigration itself. Thus they do constitute the materialization of a desire realizable only outside the nation, yet recognizable only within its borders” (260).

Flor’s return, however, is bittersweet. She recognizes the emotional distance between herself and her younger relative (perhaps a younger sister or a niece), Leah. In one image, Flor looks as though she is pleading with the younger relative. She muses, “The kids are getting so big. And Leah has been so mad at me for leaving.” Flor realizes that her relationships have become somewhat commodified as well as strained. Another panel image features Flor’s hands holding a wallet accompanied by a caption, which reveal the ups and downs of a migrant’s return: “I’m able to send money back, but it’s just not the same as being home.”

### “FLOR 1976: Bicentennial”

The 1976 poster raises thoughtful questions about the meaning of independence on multiple levels (Plate 13). First, there is the issue of Flor’s own independence. Although her mother is an ocean away, the emotional as well as disciplinary connection between them is still strong. Flor reads a letter from her mother and expresses frustration: “I’m not going to church enough.

Or getting married soon enough. Ay.” In my oral interviews with Filipino nurses in the United States, they also discussed how migration created opportunities for both increased personal independence *and* parental surveillance and discipline. They acted on the transformative potential of work abroad by augmenting their socioeconomic status through the accumulation of material goods (such as kitchen appliances and cosmetics) and new forms of leisure (such as Broadway shows and travel within the United States) that were unavailable to all except the affluent elite in the Philippines. They lived in their own apartments and stayed out late at night. As Filipino immigrant nurse Ofelia Boado recalled, “You’re very independent. You have your own apartment. In the Philippines, you live in the dorm, where everything closes at 9 o’clock P.M.” (Choy, *Empire of Care* 70). Yet Filipino parents also used their nurse-daughters’ migration abroad as a means of disciplining them, for example, by literally separating them from boyfriends in the Philippines (70–72).

Second, the poster refers to both American and Philippine national independence. The year 1976 and the poster title “Bicentennial” immediately calls attention to the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the US declaration of independence. However, Flor’s romantic thoughts—“Americans take their independence seriously!”—that accompany a panel image of Flor with a red, white, and blue background are juxtaposed against her subtle critique of US neocolonialism in the Philippines. Although the Philippines achieved formal independence from the United States in 1946, Flor ponders, “I wonder when we’ll have it in the Philippines. (In a real way.)” Imprinting their American past onto the Philippines’ future, the US government granted Philippine independence on July 4, 1946. It was not until 1964 that the Philippine government claimed June 12 to be their Independence Day in commemoration of Filipinos’ declaration of independence from Spanish colonialism in 1898 and of their fight against US colonization. The US-Philippine neocolonial relationship goes beyond independence celebrations. By the mid-1970s, the continuing unequal relationship between the United States and the Philippines manifested itself through the presence of US military bases in the Philippines, and the outmigration of physicians, engineers, as well as nurses from the Philippines to the United States.

Yet, despite these inequalities, another theme expressed in this poster is hope: hope emerging from Jimmy Carter’s presidential victory, but also Flor’s hopeful attitude about her life in San Francisco. Although she continues to appreciate jeepneys (a popular mode of public transportation in the Philippines), she

now proclaims, “I love the buses in San Francisco! Not as colorful as jeepneys, of course, but so big. And clean!” Gleefully making a snowball, Flor marvels at the sight of snow in San Francisco.

Contributing to Flor’s optimism regarding her adjustment are the new immigration demographics that are changing San Francisco’s landscape as increasing numbers of Filipino immigrants, and specifically Filipino immigrant nurses, create new businesses and transform the hospital workplace. Standing in front of a small Filipino grocery store, Flor realizes, “There are more Filipinos here all the time. I just found a great pinoy market that I love.” And the drudgery of work explored in the 1974 poster on “Work/Life” is alleviated by newfound joy. One panel image depicts Flor laughing alongside two other Filipino nurses: “Shifts at the hospital are so much more fun when Krismin and Racheljoy are there, too.”

### “FLOR 1977: Redevelopment”

Flor’s transformation during her first six years in the United States is neither solely an attitude shift nor a simplistic linear arc of assimilation. It also includes her growing political consciousness about racism and discrimination in the United States. In the 1977 poster, panel images depict her increasing awareness about the plight of *manongs*, the generation of mostly Filipino elderly men who had migrated to the United States in the 1920s and 1930s with US-colonial-inspired dreams of furthering their education and socioeconomic status. Instead they found themselves relegated to doing the back-breaking work of picking asparagus and celery among other crops for US western agribusiness, while facing overt and often violent racism and discrimination. As the Filipino American author and poet Carlos Bulosan famously wrote in his 1946 ethnographic and semi-autobiographical novel *America Is in the Heart*, “It was a crime to be a Filipino in California” (121).

By the mid-1970s, however, Filipino immigrants were increasingly professional and highly educated like Flor. This demographic shift was shaped by the lack of professional opportunities and the move towards a labor export economy in the Philippines as well as critical nursing shortages and the liberalization of immigration policy in the United States. Many members of the newer, professional immigrant class were ignorant of and at times dismissive towards the travails and hardships of the *manong* generation, focusing instead on assimilating and securing a middle class identity in the United States (Mabalon 300–04).

However, others were inspired by the writings of Carlos Bulosan and made connections between social inequities and injustices in both countries (Choy, *Empire of Care* 154–61; Choy, “Towards Trans-Pacific Social Justice”).

In the 1977 “Redevelopment” poster, Flor takes the latter path by developing solidarity with the *manongs* who comprised the majority of tenants at the International Hotel or I-Hotel on Kearny Street and who were served eviction notices in 1968. Tenants and their supporters protested the evictions for almost a decade. One panel image depicts Flor volunteering in the I-Hotel, serving the *manongs* food. These tenants refused to leave the I-Hotel, which was, for them, after surviving decades of discriminatory housing segregation practices, their only home. In one caption, Flor muses: “This city can be so cruel. They are tearing down the I-Hotel. All my lolos, the old *manongs*, with nowhere to go.” These historical and present-day injustices awaken her political activism. Although she is self-conscious and anxious about her status as an immigrant—“At first, I was shy at the protests. I didn’t want to have visa troubles”—Flor joins the protests to stop the evictions of these elderly men. These protests would culminate in the forcible eviction of these tenants in the middle of the night on August 4, 1977.<sup>3</sup>

Contesting the binary of Philippine versus American social justice issues, the large panel image features Flor holding a protest sign, demanding police and other redevelopment forces to “stop the evictions,” with a caption that connects her activism in the United States with the anti-martial law activism of her brother in the Philippines: “But Totoy’s activism in Manila runs in the family, I guess.” Thus, the theme of redevelopment refers to San Francisco’s changing landscape vis-à-vis gentrification as well as the formation of Flor’s transnational political consciousness.

### “FLOR 1978: Return”

By 1978, Flor has started the process of petitioning for her family to immigrate to the United States under the auspices of family reunification policies, and her family is expected to arrive soon. Her actions reflect a broader demographic shift in Filipino immigration flows by the late 1970s in which family reunification visas became the dominant mode of immigration to the United States as backlogs for occupational visas increased (Espiritu 33). As with the previous posters, various captions refer to the year’s major social and political events. In 1978, these events, such as the shooting and deaths of San Francisco Mayor George Moscone and City Supervisor Harvey Milk, stir fear and despair. The

migration of Filipinos out of San Francisco and into the nearby Daly City reflect new housing challenges for Filipinos in San Francisco as well as the diaspora of Filipinos across the Bay Area (Vergara).

In this final poster of the graphic novel, Flor claims to feel like “a real San Franciscan.” Yet, her Filipino identity is not displaced. “I’m still 100% Manila,” Flor insists. The juxtaposition of two seemingly distinct identities—“a real San Franciscan” who is “still 100% Manila”—is not a contradiction. Rather, throughout *Flor de Manila y San Francisco*, Wofford brings to the fore that an immigrant’s departure, arrival, settlement, and return are transnational matters.

Wofford’s graphic novel offers a unique lens to view the broader forces that shape international health worker migration, the migrants’ experiences of socio-economic mobility, and the social costs of overseas migration. Its most distinctive contribution, however, is its use of visuality to convey Flor’s humanity. Wofford skillfully illustrates a myriad of facial expressions that suggest Flor’s ambivalence about her arrival in San Francisco and about work in the United States. Flor’s look of awe and intimidation at the San Francisco high rises is also accompanied by a longing to fly back to the Philippines. Her downcast eyes as she carries a tray of food and medicine belie the drudgery of her labor even though she is excited to work in a modern American hospital.

*Flor de Manila y San Francisco* places a human face on the Filipina immigrant nurse and constructs an alternative narrative to the immigration studies that too often represent them as commodified units of labor. Instead, viewers are able to see Flor as a daughter and sibling, professional caregiver and colleague, emigrant and immigrant. Wofford’s drawings and captions imbue the Filipina migrant nurse experience with complexity and dignity, making Flor’s story of loneliness and adaptation across two cities, nations, and continents wonderfully unique and universal at the same time.

## Notes

1. In addition to being featured in the “Art on Market Street 2008 Program,” images from the *Flor de Manila y San Francisco* kiosk poster project are available in Jenifer K Wofford, “FLOR, 1973–1978,” *Wofflehouse Projects*.
2. See Linda España-Maram’s *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles’s Little Manila*, especially Chapter 3, “From the ‘Living Doll’ to the ‘Bolo Puncher’: Prizefighting, Masculinity, and the Sporting Life.”
3. For a fuller discussion of this movement, see Estella Habal’s study *San Francisco’s International Hotel* and the film *The Fall of the I-Hotel*.



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