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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ

**PORTRAITS OF DECOLONIZING PRAXIS:
HOW THE LIVES OF CRITICALLY ENGAGED PINAY SCHOLARS
INFORM THEIR WORK**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In

EDUCATION

by

Melissa-Ann Nielo Nievera-Lozano

June 2016

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2016

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Portraits of Decolonizing Praxis: How the Lives of Critically Engaged Pinay Scholars Inform Their Work

Melissa-Ann Nielo Nievera-Lozano

There is a dearth of knowledge about educationally disadvantaged groups particularly within the Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) population, as research does not adequately provide disaggregated data.¹ As such, this study particularly focuses on the intersecting sociocultural processes and educational experiences of Filipina American (Pinay) students-turned-professors to understand the transformative nature of their epistemologies and its manifestations in their work as scholar-activists.

Moving beyond questions of race/ethnicity, this study acknowledges the American classroom as both a fragile and powerful place of *becoming*; where “emerging identities are being invented within a contestation of dominant discourses of [not just] race, [but also] class, gender, and sexuality.”² It extends from the understanding that the exclusion of particular histories, cultures, texts, and ways of knowing in the traditional university has forced the construction of new alternative spaces, wherein the production of knowledge requires creative, critical, and collective thinking towards radical transformation.³ Thus, through the lens of women-of-color

¹ Chang, M., Fung, G., Nakanishi, D., Ogawa, R., Um, K., Takahashi, L., De La Cruz-Viesca, M., et al. (2009). *The state of Asian American, native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander education in California report*. Los Angeles: University of California Asian American and Pacific Islander Policy Multicampus Research Program (UC AAPI Policy MRP) Education Working Group. Retrieved from <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/3s89c1cm.pdf>

² Cruz, C. (2001). Toward an epistemology of a brown body. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 14(5), 657–669.

³ Collins, P. (1996). The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought. In A. Garry & M. Persall (Eds.), *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*. New York: Routledge.

theory, this work employs an intersectional framework, which sees these social categories created by colonialism⁴ as mutually constitutive across contexts.

Written in the tradition of Moraga and Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called My Back*, this study holds conversations with six Pinay scholar-activists. It pulls from memory, breaking long-held silences as it boldly sutures together glimpses of personal confrontations with coloniality (Lugones, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2007) across their lifetimes from childhood to womanhood, from within the American classroom and beyond. This critical looking inward of one's private (and often painful) formations of race, class, and gender reveals the unstable growth of a Pinay scholar-activist's personal/political identity. By drawing from an assembled, unorthodox framework of decolonized feminist thought and Buddhist philosophy, this study operationalizes the methodology of embodied portraiture to capture, interpret, and illustrate the ways in which transformative moments in these scholars lives shape their work. What surfaces is a shared story of how these women of color come to inhabit their paradoxical position within empire through the experiences and practices of silence, anger, and reconciliation; as well as the creation and participation of resistant socialities; helping to extend the work of Pinayist pedagogical praxis.

⁴ Lugones, M. (2007). Heterosexualism and the colonial/modern gender system. *Hypatia*, 22(1), 186–219.

DEDICATION

For Pinay.

Your immense and infinite light guides me.

I love you baby sister.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None of this work happens alone. Immense respect and credit to those who helped carry me to this point, beginning with family. Dear Mama, Tess Nielo, you are my shero. Made impossible things in life seem possible again. Your resilience taught me how to stay in the game no matter how hard the fall. I am full of love because of your example of love. Thank you for passing down that power to me. Dear Papa, Andre Nievera, as far back as I can remember you'd sit me down and together we'd flip and sniff the pages of books. Thank you for reading to me and asking me to interpret gobbledygook. You were the first scholar who invited my analysis and you remain my #1 philosopher. To my sisters, Rhea and Ging, your Nievera-ness coupled with Buddha-like qualities keeps our triad whole, humble, and happy—it's my medicine as we continue learning how to be without Pinay in the flesh. Our grieving together gave me incredible strength this past year. I am indebted to my beloved parents-in-law, Elena and Francisco Lozano, for jointly raising our little ones so that I could churn out the writing. I thank also Vivian Bejarin, their *ninang*, for your care during critical hours.

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Tremendous gratitude to faculty who saw me, heard me, and guided me along. To Mr. Felix Tuyay at Southwestern College whose Filipino American presence as an educator in my first ethnic studies class changed the course of my career; and to Kysa Nygreen, whose alternative methodologies class at UCSC birthed my feminist standpoint and cracked open my healing—thank you. To my committee armed with women of color, thank you for showing me how to keep pushing the envelope. Cindy Cruz, whose model scholarship and unyielding mentorship through rough patches, lit the way. Rosa-Linda Fregoso, whose critical teaching helped me ask the right questions. And last but not least, Ate Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales, whose authentic spirit as a mother-scholar shaped my aspirations in academia. Thank you for teaching me hope, sisterhood, and perseverance over the last decade. It sustains me always.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When the Gongs Echo, Our History Reverberates

“I have been a seeker and I still am. But I stopped asking the books and the stars. I started listening to the teaching of my soul.” – Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī

On special weekends, our mother would dress my younger sister and I in matching outfits. At only sixteen months apart, we were often treated like we were twins. Our parents would buckle us up in the back seat of our Subaru station wagon, roll the windows down, and drive 30 minutes north from our 2-story home in Paradise Hills, a predominantly Filipino neighbourhood in southeast San Diego, to Admiral Baker Park. There, the sun shone brighter over fields and fields of green grass. It was an open place to play and be joyful together, where about twenty other families, just like us, would wave us over to picnic tables full of food. Just like us, they were a mix of light and dark skin; parents speaking Ilokano, kids speaking English; fathers in the US Navy, mothers in nursing or clerical work; kids listening to hip hop or playing tag in one corner, while fathers played acoustic guitar, telling jokes in another corner; and mothers looking after us all. We needed each other. With our families recently immigrating from across the mountain provinces of the Philippines (often through the military), and now raising children in the United States, we depended on each other.

Some time midway through our gathering, the uncles (all our fathers) would disappear into the restroom, and reappear in their *bahags*. These loincloths covering

their otherwise naked bodies were woven by the hands of people in the homeland, with black and red patterns distinct to each of our families' tribes. They didn't care. Didn't care that other non-Filipinos or even non-indigenous Filipinos glared over from afar. Didn't care that their children had yet to fully understand the ceremony. They just played. Assembled in a circle on the grass, they held their gongs in the left hand, and their sticks in the right. One uncle would crouch forward assuming his position and begin the beat. Others would chime in because they knew. They knew how the rhythm went, where it came from, and how to play it. Rocking forward and back with every beat as they began to close in their circle, the aunties (all our mothers) would come to form their outer circle. I watched the two circles, inner and outer, bend forward and back, like a flower blooming. Our grandparents would smile and nudge us into the dancing circle to join and mimic our mothers' dance. That slight right-left hop, hands resting on hips till the beat changed, signalling us to lift our arms at each side parallel to the ground, shrug our shoulders and wave our hands in syncopated motion. This was joy. This circle of our families making music composed and played centuries before us—prior to three hundred years of Spanish colonization and then fifty years of American occupation. Before all of this. Before we found ourselves here in the U.S. trying to make meaning out of this new iteration of the Filipino family. We needed to know our joy.

Being an ethnic studies scholar today begins with hearing the echo of the gongs. It means seeing the pains of our psychic and cultural split as immigrant communities in America, and finding the joy again. It is digging up the lines of

thought and experience that have preceded us in the bodies of our mothers, our fathers, grandparents, and ancestors and using that wisdom as navigation wherever we are today. Through the re-discovery, the taking back of an infinite knowing of ourselves, we find that joy. And that joy is liberating.

The state of education today is such that we are held up by its tentativeness. There is a war on the university about whose knowledge is valid, as Ethnic Studies programs across campuses nationwide are being axed. The struggle to do the important work so that our communities not only survive but thrive with joy—is real. The gong echoes into the skies. Our histories reverberate deep in my veins. And I listen.

Background of the Study

Asian American and Pacific Islander (hereafter, AAPI) scholars constantly encourage the research and documentation of more in-depth stories and realities (Lee, 1996; Museus, 2011; Teranishi, 2010; Zhou & Sao Xiong, 2005) across and within subgroups. As a Filipina/o American scholar in the field of education, I am moved to fulfill this obligation by continuing to build knowledge specifically on Filipina/o or Pin@y¹ American faculty in higher education.

¹ Pin@y was a term first created to make the geopolitical distinction between Filipina/os in the U.S. and their counterparts in the Philippines, though now used to refer to Filipina/os throughout the diaspora. The @ symbol denotes gender neutrality. I use the terms Pin@y, Filipina/o American and Filipino American interchangeably. A recent movement during academic school year of 2015-2016 calls for a use of the x – as in, Pinxy, Filipinx or Pilipinx – to be inclusive of people who identify as transgender, genderqueer or non-binary.

First, the only work on this topic is yet to be published. A quantitative study entitled, “Exploring the Filipino American Faculty Pipeline: Implications for Higher Education and Filipino American College Students” (Maramba & Nadal, In Press) offers an initial survey conducted on Filipina/o American tenure track professors in the social sciences (e.g. psychology, education, English, ethnic studies, American studies, sociology, history social work, public health, urban planning, economics). It interrogates rank, gender, location, and the disciplines in which they work. Findings so far conclude that of the 114 faculty identified: most are assistant professors (52, as compared to 46 associate professors and 16 full professors); gender equity is somewhat balanced (61 women and 53 men); almost half are in California; and the majority largely represent Ethnic Studies, Asian American Studies and American Studies disciplines (with less representation in education, psychology, economics, social work and communication).

The two conclusions drawn by the study that concern my work are simply: there is a lack of data on Filipina/o American faculty, and that their study (like the one I hope to produce) has grave implications for the Filipina/o American faculty pipeline and for Filipinx American students. My work enhances the quantitative data they’ve collected with stories of their realities and life histories, which leads me to a second point.

Philippine-American history reveals an enduring colonial relationship repeatedly featured in schooling and familial experiences (Coloma, 2009; Espiritu, 2003; Root, 1997; Strobel, 2001). Building on my master’s research, interrogating

what I called the (American) “dream divide” felt by self-identified Pin@y artists, activists, academics in California, I’m interested in how this colonial relationship surfaces for those who not only attended U.S. schools as 2nd or 3rd generation youth, but are now also *employed* by U.S. institutions of higher education: as Pinay (pronounced, *Pee-nye*, or Filipina American) faculty and concurrent higher-level administrators.

This interest moves beyond questions of race/ethnicity (i.e., Filipino vs. American), to explore an intersectional framework that will consider race, class, gender, and sexuality—social categories and understandings created by colonialism. Specifically, this study will explore four research questions:

1. What are the life histories and/or experiences of critically engaged Pinay (Filipina American) faculty in academia?
2. How do transformative moments in their life histories shape their teaching practices?
3. How do they become transformative intellectuals? How do these teachers practice reflexive teaching and how does it work?
4. How does their work contribute to the larger political project of equitable, decolonizing education?

While the participants in this research are not representative of all Filipina Americans in higher education, they serve as an example of the possibilities of achieving academic success while remaining committed to the concerns of community; thereby carrying on the legacy of Asian American Studies: continuing links between their academic mission and community responsibilities (K. S. Chan, 2000). Ultimately, my projects shall stand on the shoulders of AAPI scholars whose work has participated in the act of “committing model minority suicide” (Prashad, 2001) by collectively “reclaim[ing] history... and correct[ing], re-create[ing], or express[ing]

our historical experiences” (Sucheng Chan, 2005, p. 7; emphasis mine) on our own terms.

This dissertation is presented in eleven chapters. Chapter two reviews literature on Filipina/o American educational experiences, situating them within the larger subject of Asian Americans in education, and paying particular attention to the model minority myth. Chapter three presents what I call *embodied* portraiture as a methodology set up to guide the study. It lays out my research design (data collection and analysis), and describes the risks and limitations of this research. Chapter four through nine are gifts from Rowena Tomaneng, Leny Strobel, Liza Erpelo, Dawn Mabalon, Robyn Rodriguez, and Sarita See—they are the very portraits from which we shall gain insight into what it means to be a Pinay scholar-activist who draws from life experience to inform her everyday work in the classroom and the wider community. Chapter ten is where I articulate connections found across all six portraits, the transformations found in each of their lives, as well as the transformation I experienced in my time with each of them. I discuss my unanticipated role as the weaver who stitches these portraits together, ultimately moving from the intentions of an *embodied* portraiture methodology to the resulting methodology of *sutured* portraiture. The chapter also draws up three analytical themes, which arise from our six extraordinary portraits: (a) the disenchantment of empire, (b) the creation of resistant socialities, and (c) Pinayist pedagogical praxis – to demonstrate the interconnectedness of these women’s multiple transformations. Lastly, chapter eleven concludes with some limitations of this work and points to a

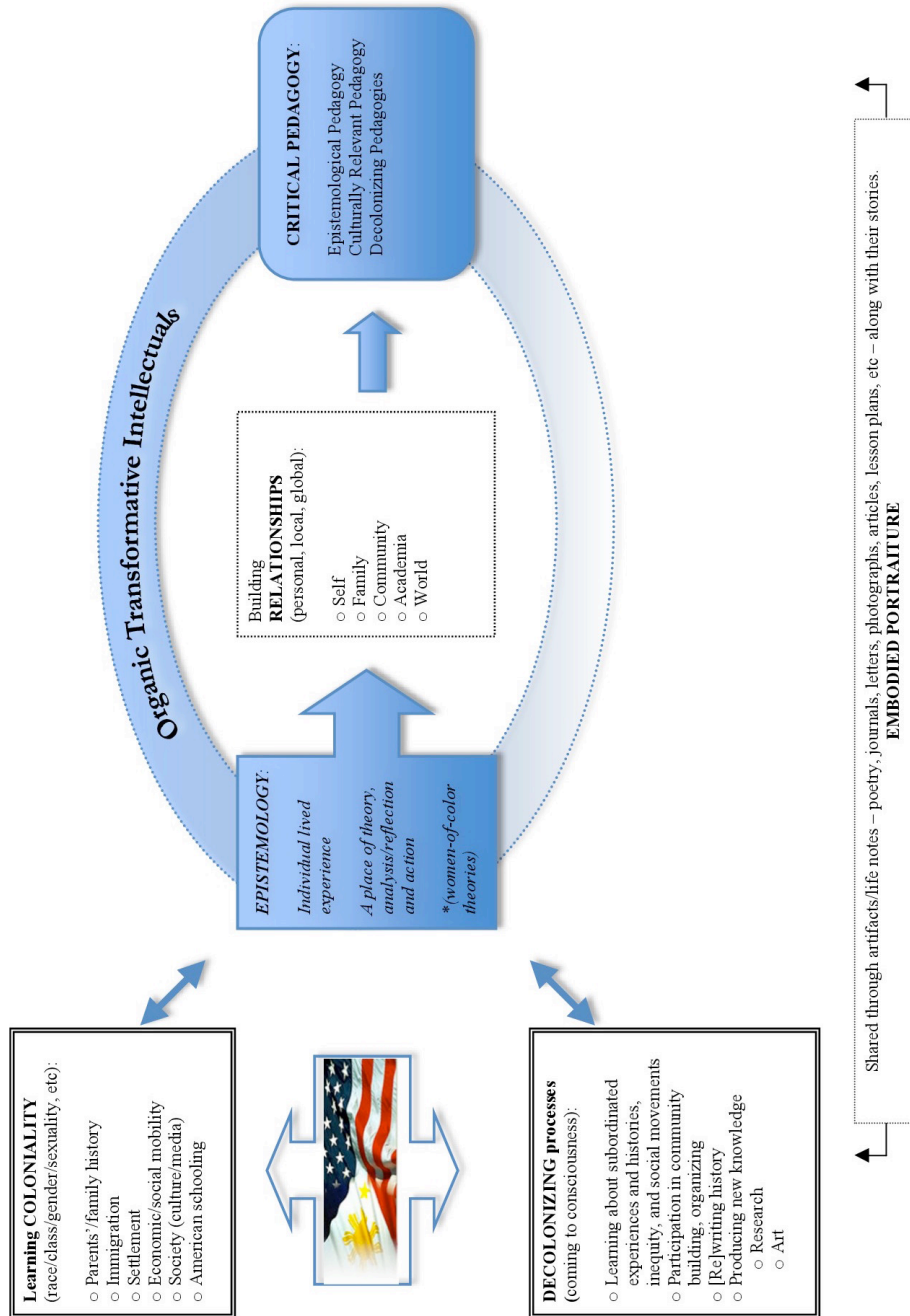
variety of ways the research can be taken up for projects that will further our wellbeing. I end with a consideration of ideas I could not flesh out and areas that need further review, so as to participate in the re-imagining of how we might see this research in a new light.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

A cognitive mapping of the ways in which several theories guide this study helps to show how I originally imagined capturing the portraits of Pinay faculty, to see how their life experiences inform their work (see Figure 1). I shall explain this map from left to right. First, this study draws from decolonial feminist frameworks, beginning with the concept of *coloniality of power* (Lugones, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Quijano, 2000; Schiwy, 2007)—that is, the process of being colonized even in a seemingly “post-colonial” world.² I propose that coloniality (a concept I will describe in slightly more detail in chapter two) occurs not only during the period of Spanish or U.S. colonization (experienced by their parents/families in the Philippines generations ago). Colonized views of race, class, gender, and sexuality seep into moments of immigration, settlement, labor, economic mobility, and schooling. It also occurs in the university classroom when for instance Pinays aim to speak on their own terms, but are debilitated by the constraints of the American classroom.

² I will not discuss coloniality at length. I use the concept as a jumping off point to understanding the complexity of Filipina lives and their connections to a history of colonialism.

**PORTRAITS OF DECOLONIZING PRACTICES:
How the Life Histories of Critically Engaged Pinay Faculty Inform Their Work**



Educational Attainment for California Population At the same time, decolonizing processes (or coming into consciousness) are part of the Pinay faculty experience as they learn about subordinated knowledges and histories, inequity and social movements connected to their own lives. They might participate in community building or grassroots organizing. Rewriting history by producing new knowledge through research and/or various art forms are also decolonizing processes. Together, recognizing one's (once colonized) understandings of race/class/gender/sexuality along with the one's processes of decolonizing (and ongoing pendulum throughout life) informs one's epistemology.

Epistemology, plainly speaking, is defined here as the process by which one's *lived experience* helps to produce new knowledge. This is a nuanced understanding of epistemology, different than the "standard" definition of epistemology, which is the study of "knowledge and justified belief... concerned with the following questions: What are the necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge? What are its sources? What is its structure, and what are its limits? What makes justified beliefs justified?" (Steup, 2014). In contrast, my research promotes the understanding of epistemology as "ways of knowing... alien to professional philosophers... and alien to a theory of knowledge in general," (Alcoff & Potter, 1993)— if there is such a thing as a *general* account of knowledge. Epistemology herein is a place of theory, analysis, reflection and action from these women. Their everyday experiences of coloniality and their developing epistemology are mutually constitutive. Together, they not only shape

relationships built at the personal, local, and global level—they also inform their pedagogies. In particular, I would like to witness the operation of critical pedagogies (Freire, 2000) such as culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) or other decolonizing pedagogies (Tejeda & Gutierrez, 2005) in this study. I assert that these fluid, dynamic pieces discussed co-constitutively help to construct these Pinay faculty into transformative intellectuals.

Transformative Intellectuals

Giroux and McLaren's definition of the transformative intellectual helps me see teachers as change agents or teachers who relate their work directly to social change. Examining the transformative intellectual is not about measuring their competency (how much one knows) in an insular way (only for the sake of one's self). Rather, it is about seeing how they outwardly perceive their job as revolutionary or necessarily radical in their respective fields and to *teach it*, as they define:

Transformative intellectual “refer[s] to one who exercises forms of intellectual and pedagogical practice which attempt to insert teaching and learning directly into the political sphere by arguing that schooling represents both a struggle for meaning and a struggle over power relations. We are also referring to one whose intellectual practices are necessarily grounded in forms of moral and ethical discourse exhibiting a preferential concern for the suffering and struggles of the disadvantaged and oppressed... Teachers who assume the role of transformative intellectuals treat students as critical agents, question how knowledge is produced and distributed, utilize dialogue, and make knowledge meaningful, critical, and ultimately emancipatory” (Giroux & McLaren, 1986, p. 215).

This study acknowledges the American classroom as both a fragile and powerful place of *becoming*; where “emerging identities are being invented within a

contestation of dominant discourses of race, class, gender, and sexuality” (Cruz, 2001). Thus, this work extends from the understanding that the exclusion of particular histories and texts in the traditional classroom has forced the construction of new alternative spaces, wherein the production of knowledge requires creative, critical, and collective thinking towards radical transformation (Collins, 1990). Ultimately gesturing towards the operationalization of love as “a political technology, [part of a] body of knowledges, arts, practices, and procedures for re-forming the self and the world” (Sandoval, 2000), this work participates in the collective academic conversation concerning multiple narratives within an interconnected web of thinkers, actors, and players on the tireless agenda of equitable education.

The Rhythm and Order of These Portraits

You will notice the shift in voice and language from one chapter to another, and also from one portrait to another. For the linear reader whom this might disorient, I offer a chance to exercise what it is to be in that unsettling position of the Pinay scholar-activist: the tightrope she walks between mind and body, between the academy and the community, for others and for herself. May this study allow you to experience the difficult conversations, the hard conversations (topics and feelings traditional schooling would not have us touch), and encourage a reading practice towards a radical literacy of our worlds.

These portraits do not aim to tell the *entire* life stories of these women. In their stories, you will come to the “clicks,” the turning points, the really poignant moments, soul-shifting events, and heartrending conversations that give meaning to

their scholarship. Flashing moments strung together in each story tell us something about each Pinay and the journey of life that brought her to this very important place—not just for her, but for all of us. Approaching these interviews was not just about collecting life his/herstories by asking about what happened “long ago.” Conversation with these six women over the course of a year or so also brought us the opportunity to be with the life journey we were on in that moment in time—a journey we’re still on.

Each portrait is written in a rhythm, a beat I felt through the storytelling of each person. For instance, Rowena Tomaneng’s portrait might feel linear, which is a reflection of the rhythm of our meetings—she is on a tight schedule, a moving calendar in which we find a moment to meet at her office conference table, chat, laugh, take a break, schedule the next one, and ride on. With Leny (whom I refer to as *Ate Leny*), there is a circularity in her storytelling that illuminate the ways in which memories orbit our present lives. As we stand at the center of these orbiting memories, we honor the practice of being with what is, whenever anything is, as it rises and falls at any given moment. So Ate Leny’s portrait is painted in this way. The movement from and across many places is a reflection of her written work and her pedagogy—to see memory while sitting in the moment, in communion with others. Notice the switch in cadence from one portrait to the next, as each life story told marches on its own beat. In her portrait, there is always a moment for pause, to take a breath, to take a look back, to imagine what lies ahead. In fact, with regards to the

ordering of the portraits, I position Ate Leny's portrait first among the rest, because she shows us what lies ahead in the portraits that follow.

First, the pace of Ate Leny's storytelling sets the pace at which way we should read the following portraits despite their varying rhythms. We don't rush through them. We read them with reverence. Like a walk through a field of wild flowers, it is meditative. We let our bare feet feel blades of grass, let our eyes take in a spectrum of colors, let our skin soak up rays of sun. We take sips of the experience.

Additionally, the themes that emerge from Ate Leny's portrait provide a narrative arch for both the portraits that follow, as well as the analysis. Her reflections on the split-psyche, the need to build with others, and teaching through *kapwa* (interconnectedness) give us foresight into the thematic analysis fleshed out in chapter ten, which will bear out the collective experiences and understandings of empire, resistance, and pedagogy.

All together, this study offers a space to capture conversations about their fluidity. It builds understandings that can bear out new relationships to the term "Pinay scholar-activist." Furthermore, their storytelling is part of a larger project to decolonize the academy. As the university systems within the U.S. have historically developed and profited off of slavery and the dispossession of indigenous lands, this work is critical to intervening in the reproduction of these epistemic and ethical violences that reproduce knowledge, based on the dehumanization of thousands of human lives. These stories are more than important – they are stories of survivance, resilience, and freedom.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Demographic Imperative

Today's Filipino American population continues to increase over time with upcoming native-born second, third, and fourth generations, as well as new immigrants. Between 2000 and 2004, the overall number of Asian Americans throughout the United States increased to sixteen percent (16%) (Filipino Community Center, 2004), suggesting that this minority group will continue to grow, with individual ethnic groups expected to grow and change respectively as well. The 2010 Census currently shows the Filipino population as the third largest Asian American group, as Asians all together continue to be the fastest-growing race group throughout the nation (Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Shahid, 2012). In fact, the number of Filipino immigrants to the United States increased between 1990 and 2000 from 912,674 to 1,369,070—representing an increase of fifty percent (50%). Almost half of the 1.4 million Filipino immigrants living in the United States, choose California as their new home (49%). Filipino immigrants and other ethnic groups are an integral part of American society whose stories provide a personal look at their concerns in a new home as they raise their American-born children.

Educational Experiences of Filipina/o Americans (Not Necessarily Your Model Minority)

To begin, this study must include the interrogation of their schooling experiences, specifically: *What did it feel like to be Filipino, or to be the child of Filipino immigrant parents, while attending school in the United States?*³ Asking this question implies two assumptions: (1) their American schooling experiences are connected to and embedded in the larger historical, colonial relationship between the Philippines and the United States; (2) their varying experiences as Filipino American students further debunks the myth of the model minority.

While a review of the literature will acquaint me with sociohistorical processes to consider before interviewing socially engaged Filipino American faculty—former students who themselves once traveled the U.S. educational system—the line of inquiry here is inspired by the larger political project of equitable, decolonizing education.

Stuck on the Model Minority Myth: 1960s – Present

In today's racial climate, it seems one can only begin talking about an AAPI subgroup's relationship to education only *after* accounting for this myth of the model minority—that is, the widely held belief that “Asian Americans have overcome all barriers of racial discrimination and are more successful even than whites” (B. H. Suzuki, 2002, p. 23). For the past fifty years, the myth was first assigned to Japanese

³ See Appendix I for Interview Questions.

and Chinese, later encompassing Korean, Indian, and sometimes Filipino and Vietnamese populations (Osajima, 1987).

Introduced in the 1960s in the midst of the civil rights era (Lee, 1996, p. 6) with media projections of Asians faring better than Whites, the myth grew with influential force in the public imagination. Asians were observed to be “*outwhiting* whites” (B. H. Suzuki, 2002, p. 21)—taking the place of Whites at the upper echelons of society.

In the 1970s, social scientists wanted to see how and why Asians seemed to be doing so well. They began researching Chinese and Japanese American “cultural values,” apparently attributed to their upward mobility in the U.S. Values stressing hard work, family cohesion, patience, and thrift were identified (Sue & Kitano, 1973). Fortunately, other researchers took issue with these simplified, essentialist cultural interpretations. Connor’s (Connor, 1975) study of Japanese Americans found that during the particular historical moment in which he was researching, “the denial of opportunities to participate in social and other extracurricular school activities in the pre-World War II period... set the stage for emphasizing educational achievements” (Sue & Okazaki, 2009). This finding supported emerging critical research showing, for instance, that while values such as “respect for education” were embraced by both Chinese and Japanese Americans, Asian Americans all together were pursuing education in increasing numbers as a way to overcome their designated low status as a minority group (Suzuki, 1977).

Through the 1980s, mainstream magazines played a big role in amplifying the

portrait of Asian Americans as “extraordinary achievers.” Sue and Okazaki (Sue & Okazaki, 2009) list them respectively:

U.S. News and World Report (Asian Americans: Are They Making the Grade?, 1984); *Newsweek* (A Formula for Success, 1984); *New York Times* (Why Asians Are Going Ahead of the Class, 1986); *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Asian students fear top colleges use quota systems, 1986); *Los Angeles Times Magazine* (When Being Best Isn’t Good Enough, 1987); *Time Magazine* (The New Whiz Kids, 1987); *National Education Association Today* (“Whiz Kid” Image Masks Problems of Asian Americans, 1988); and *Asian Week* (Probing into the success of Asian American students, 1990). These periodicals have pointed to the high levels of educational attainments shown by Asian Americans and supported by empirical evidence... [which must be tempered by evidence *also* showing] higher proportions of individuals with no education [or low education] compared with Whites (p. 46).

Such coverage inadvertently contributes to racial hostility on campuses and xenophobic fears of a “yellow invasion” (Leong, 2007).

By the 1990s, campuses with large Asian populations were often mocked: MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) was referred to as “Made in Taiwan,” and UCLA was ridiculed as the “University of Caucasians Living among Asians” (Kibria, 1999). This positioning of Asian students as “superachieving nerds” proves unhelpful and in fact, it only intensifies campus climate. Such a reputation further alienates AAPIs, typecasting them as perpetual foreigners (Leong, 2007).

With media blitzes and societal practices championing the model minority (myth) from the civil rights era and through the 1990s, scholars have made effort to critique the myth’s promotion of American meritocracy (Hurh & Kim, 1989; Lee, 1996; Osajima, 1987). Problematic are the ways in which the myth still suggests that (1) Asians are a monolithic group of people culturally predisposed to be good students and are successful through merit (Kibria, 1999); and (2) the established

political structures in the U.S. have dutifully instituted equitable pathways to economic and political growth, consequently “allow[ing]... for their achievement of the American dream” (Ngo & Lee, 2007, p. 415). In short, the main critique of the myth is that it “obscures the racism that characterizes the U.S. educational system, and simultaneously perpetuates white privilege and the underrepresentation and/or marginalization of students of color” (Buena Vista, 2007; Hune & Chan, 2000; Takagi, 1992). A closer look at the college-going rates of AAPIs further helps to dismantle the model minority myth.

Dismantling the Myth: AAPI College-Going Rates and the Complexity Within

After 1965, U.S. colleges saw AAPI student attendance triple particularly between 1976 (150,000) to 1986 (448,000) due to their ever-increasing population (Hsia & Hirano-Nakanishi, 1995). However, only recently have AAPIs been visible in the consideration at the state and national level, as well as in the improvement of campus services and programs (Teranishi, 2010). Current research on the number of AAPIs attending, completing or navigating higher education directly challenges the model minority myth. The stereotype that all AAPIs achieve “unparalleled and universal academic and occupational success” (Kiang, 1988) is disproven through statistical data gathered herein.

First, one must note the heterogeneity *within* the umbrella “AAPI” category. The census identifies 57 groups: the majority being Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese; with smaller groups including Native Hawaiians, Laotians, Thais, Cambodians, Samoans, Guamanians, Tongans, Fijians, Tahitians, Sri

Lankans, Malaysians, Indonesians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis (U.S. Census Bureau, 1993). And with each group lie different challenges, histories, and complex relationships with the United States, which arguably shape schooling outcomes.

Second, ethnic groups within the AAPI category “occupy positions along the full range of the socioeconomic spectrum, from the poor and underprivileged to the affluent and highly skilled” (Teranishi, 2012). We are mistaken when we imagine the entire AAPI population as economically thriving. Let us take notice that while a first glance at poverty rates for Asian Americans as a whole are at 10 percent—lower than the state average of 13 percent—specific subgroups experience much higher poverty rates than others (Chang et al., 2009, p. 4). While Laotians, Vietnamese, Koreans and Native Hawaiians show poverty rates near the state average (M. Chang et al., 2009), poverty rates among the Hmong (37.8 percent), Cambodians (29.3 percent), Laotians (18.5 percent), and Vietnamese (16.6 percent), is much greater than what we find among Filipinos (6.3 percent), the Japanese (9.7 percent), and Asian Indians (9.8 percent) (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education (CARE), 2008). Aggregated statistics therefore demonstrate the falsity in viewing AAPIs as an altogether financially well-off group.

The idea that the AAPI population is teeming with academic achievers is informed by real numbers, which problematically support the model minority myth. They show Asians ranking highest in Bachelor’s and Graduate Degree attainment among all racial/ethnic groups.

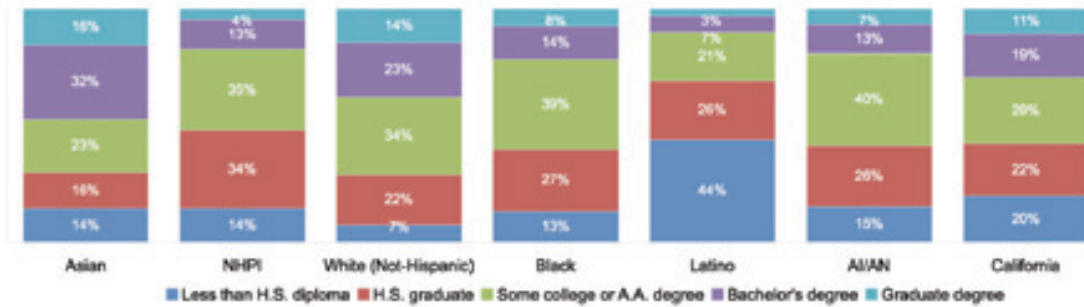


Chart 1. Educational Attainment for California Population 25 Years and Older by Race/Ethnicity, 2006-2008. Source: UC AAPI Policy MRP Education Working Group (M. Chang et al., 2009).

Here, we see Asians in the left column, among all racial/ethnic groups, hold the highest percentage of Bachelor's and Graduate Degrees: 48 percent own degrees (see top boxes in aqua and purple, Chart 1). However, we must look also at the column to the right, where Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders hold one of the lowest percentages of degree attainment (see bottom boxes in blue and red). More significant is the 34 percent graduating high school and 14 percent having less than a high school diploma.

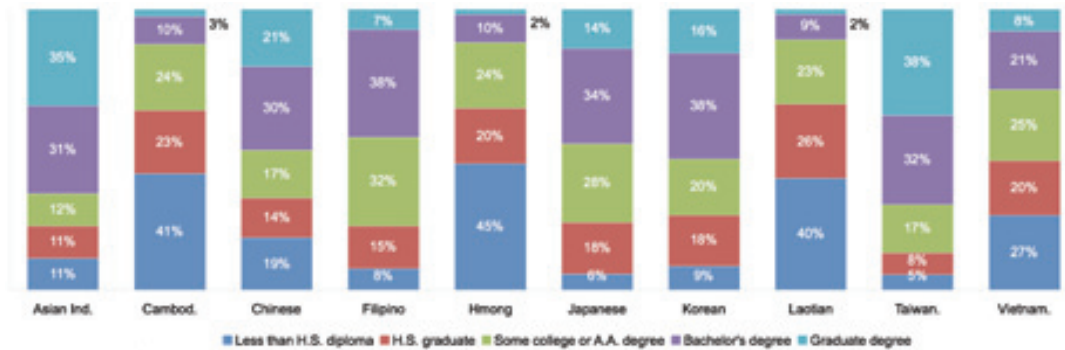


Chart 2. Educational Attainment for California Population 25 Years and Older by AA Subgroup, 2006-2008. Source: UC AAPI Policy MRP Education Working Group (M. Chang et al., 2009).

Looking closely at each AA subgroup, however, Chart 2 shows (with the top aqua and purple boxes) 66 to 70 percent of *Taiwanese* and *Asian Indians* own degrees while (the bottom blue boxes indicate) 40 to 45 percent Hmong, Cambodians, and Laotians hold less than a high school diploma (M. Chang et al., 2009). Focusing our attention on the educational attainment among AAPIs alone helps us see better the disparities *between* subgroups. To hone in on this perspective, let us take a second look from another source:

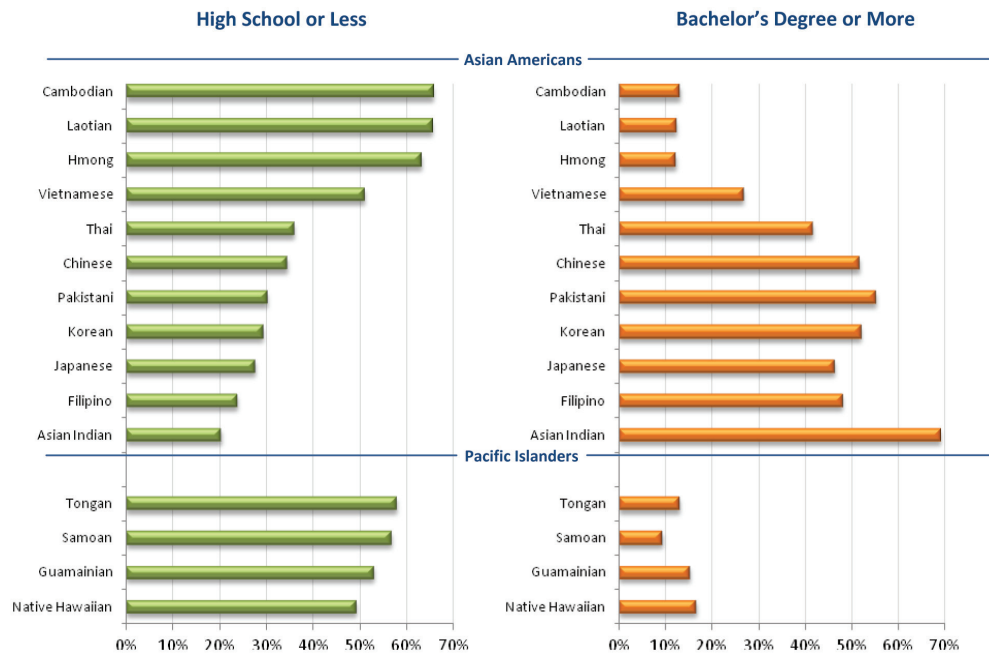


Chart 3. Educational Attainment among AAPIs (3-Year Average), 2006-2008.
 Source: ACS 3-Year PUMS, 2006-2008 (Teranishi, 2012).

The (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education (CARE, 2011) reports parallel the data provided in the previous chart by the UC AAPI Policy MRP Education Working Group (M. Chang et al., 2009).

CARE’s research shows that East Asians and South Asians “not only have a greater

likelihood of having an undergraduate degree—they are also more apt to earn an advanced degree”; while about half of Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander students attempt college and leave without finishing. In fact, 55 to 65 percent of Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander adults have not had the opportunity to enroll in any kind of postsecondary education; and 40 percent of Southeast Asians are simply pushed out⁴ of high school (Teranishi, 2012). In the 1980s, proportionately more Filipino and Japanese students had poor academic performances, and did not complete high school (Mau, 1995).

Community college, though positioned at the bottom of the higher education ladder, remains appealing to AAPIs. Teranishi (2012) finds that lower tuition, open admissions, and proximity to home are primary factors for AAPIs who eventually decide to attend a community college. Indeed in 2007, while AAPIs made up less than 5 percent of the national population, they represented nearly 7 percent of all community college students (Teranishi, 2012). In California alone, while AAPIs are different from other racial/ethnic groups in that they have higher numbers of enrollment in the University of California rather than the California State Universities, over two thirds of Filipinos and 62 percent of AAPIs are enrolled in California Community Colleges (Teranishi, 2012, p. 15). Like other racial/ethnic groups, most Filipino college degrees are Associate Degrees awarded by these colleges (Teranishi, 2012, p. 16). Such data demonstrates the falsity of Asian

⁴ I use the term “push out” rather than “drop out” to politically point to the ways in which U.S. schools obstruct the academic pathways of students of color.

Americans as the model minority and as inherently “possess[ing] the skills and knowledge needed to succeed at all levels” (Ling Yeh, 2002). The path to and through higher education is no easy road.

Dismantling the Myth:

Factors Negatively Affecting AAPI Academic Performance

The narrative of AAPI higher education is more complex than meets the eye. Statistics about debunking the model minority myth should be weighed considerably alongside the negative experiences of AAPI students, and particularly for this study, students of Filipino descent. This section surveys the literature illustrating the factors negatively affecting academic opportunity for Filipina/o students by looking at (1) gender; and (2) the colonial experience

Examining Gender Gives Insight to Academic Struggle

Rosalind Mau (1995) investigates the strong difference between home and school cultures with regards to gender roles (i.e., personal conduct considered “normal” for an American girl is seen as contemptuous in APA families such as negotiating with and/or challenging adults, etc). Interested in what barriers exist for “Asian/Pacific-American Females,” namely, Hawaiian, Samoan, and Filipino females in Hawaii, Mau finds that 45 girls in 10th, 11th and 12th grade who participated in her study in the spring of 1987, experienced obstacles which included teachers’ discouragement from enrolling into higher-level math and science courses. This directly challenged their pursuit of higher education (p. 240). If access to higher education is based on high school academic performance, and high school academic

performance is thwarted by the multiple pressures to fulfill conflicting perceptions of gender roles (intersected by race), then Mau's study reveals these young women are more "at-risk" than their male counterparts of not graduating high school or going to college all together (p. 236).

It would be interesting to see how such treatment of young Filipina, Hawaiian and Samoan women by school teachers in American schools relate to coloniality, or what Lugones (2007) terms the colonial/modern gender system. How different such research would be to show how their lived experiences are about looking deeply at the enmeshment and *co-constitutiveness* of race, gender, class and sexuality. At any rate, other studies on Filipina/os in education do speak directly to histories of colonialism between the Philippines and the United States. Let us explore that avenue.

Examining the Colonial Experience Gives Insight to Academic Struggle

The colonial histories of the U.S. and the Philippines (along with other former nation states such as Hawaii, Samoa, Guam, and Puerto Rico) shape the schooling experiences of their descendents in U.S. schools. From 1898 to 1946, Philippines was "not as a classic colony but a dependency... an internal colony... and to this day remains a neocolony, formally independent but politically a client state of Washington and the Pentagon" (San Juan Jr, 2010, p. 58). This relationship directly informs schooling for Filipino students. Roland Coloma's (2004) textual analysis of Americanized teaching and educational practices explores how Filipino students (in the Philippines and the U.S.) historically and contemporarily "negotiate between

Western education and indigenous culture” (R. Coloma, 2006, p. 6). Through the digging up of archives, he uncovers the ways in which the Philippine in the early 1900s set up their national education structure (i.e., administration and finance, supervision and curriculum) to mirror that of the United States. His historical research portrays American schooling as a site of contestation for Filipino students.⁵ E. San Juan, Jr.’s work compliments Coloma’s findings, as he asserts:

The durable recalcitrance of Filipino subjectivity saturated with nationalist memory-traces explains why, unlike the individuals in the relatively assimilated Japanese, Korean and Chinese middlemen strata, Filipinos—who have been disenfranchised and demonised for a long time—cannot function as the "buffer race" between the white majority and the castelike black underclass (San Juan Jr, 2010, p. 58).

In other words, E. San Juan, Jr. would say that this distinctive relationship between the U.S. and the Philippines keeps Filipinos from being “model minorities” who serve as a political wedge against other people of color (B. Chang & Au, 2007).⁶ The vestiges of colonial education impact the academic opportunities Filipina/o students in nuanced ways, which go undetected in environments embracing the model minority myth. The last two sections look at experiences at the high school level. The next section shall focus on higher education.

⁵ For more discussion on the colonial question as it pertains to Filipino Americans in *higher* education, see pg. 34.

⁶ See pg. 11 for Chang & Au’s reference to AAPI model minorities serving as a political wedge.

Dismantling the Myth: Filipino Americans in Higher Education

Dissertation work by Dina Maramba (2003) examines the “subordinate cultural experience” of Filipino American students. Her research highlights the ways in which college life fails to nurture the bicultural identity of Filipino Americans “due to the neglect of institutions of higher education, which do not provide the “necessary support systems that are conducive to promoting diversity, voice, engagement, and empowerment.” More recent work by Maramba (2008) on immigrant families and the college experience from the perspective of Filipina Americans, weaves in the gender perspective as it presents data from 82 Filipina students at a predominantly White large public research university in southern California showing how “family and the college experience are inextricably linked” (p. 346). Filipina students in Maramba’s study share the simultaneous obligations of home as do other AAPI students such as Vietnamese, who are “constantly reminded of their duty to respect elders, to take care of younger siblings, to work hard, and to make decisions only with the approval of their parents” (Zhou & Bankston, 1998, p. 151). Such research is not intended to “demonize Filipino parents” (Wolf, 1997, p. 474), but to explain how AAPI families struggle to survive in a world parents find very different from the one from which they came. Maramba found that the women she met with during the course of data collection appreciated on-campus conversations concerning family and school. Filipina students “looked to women staff members of color on campus who they felt understood their struggles... [and] mentioned the importance of having

Filipina American staff or faculty as a source of support in college” (Maramba, 2008, p. 340).

Adding to the research, Asian American Studies professor Tracy Buenavista (Buenavista, 2007) offers the stories of 1.5-generation Pilipino⁷ college students attending a California State University, who don’t experience a clean, easy path in academia. In fact, her study exposes their disadvantageous position on campus. Anti-affirmative action policies would not recognize their race in admissions and retention initiatives. Instead, socioeconomic status and education generational status became proxies for race—quite inadequately for Pilipino students seeking assistance. It marks them ineligible for different forms of support due to their parents’ level of educational attainment and apparent comfortable income, obscuring the situational complexity—their Philippine college-educated parents actually face underemployment in the U.S., and resist “low-income” status by working multiple jobs to support immediate and extended family. In light of these tough conditions, Pilipino students try to stay afloat in a “sociocultural context of contradictions,” as Buenavista uncovers the difficulty of:

[l]iving with the unrealized benefits of college degree attainment while maintaining eventual hope for the benefits of higher education, little and indirect college-educated parent involvement in the college choice process, and conflicting family and educational priorities (p. 134).

Embedded in these stories is the relationship of colonial histories in their families

⁷ Here, Pilipino spelled with a “P” (rather than “F” as in Filipino) is a linguistic, political, decolonizing gesture to honor the original native alphabet of the Philippines, which in fact has no “F”. The “F” is considered an Anglo invention introduced during centuries of colonization.

(parents as postcolonial subjects of the United States).

In my own master's research (Nievera, 2008), I found there was a particular tension among Filipino American college students in the way they defined the American Dream differently than their parents. I explored this conflict occurring between Filipino immigrant parents and their American-born children—artists, activists and academics—in the attainment of the American Dream. Student narratives demonstrate how such conflict, in the context of transnationalism⁸, is due to the simultaneous and contradictory processes of Americanization occurring at varying degrees for Filipino immigrant parents and their politically conscious children coming of age. In personal in-depth interviews with 25 – 35-year-old second-generation Filipino Americans throughout San Diego and the Bay Area, I examined the intergenerational dissonance within their families as it manifested itself through pivotal discussions of much different perceptions of immigrant hardship and the younger generations' ideals.

Moving forward, as Filipina/o Americans are the second largest population within the AAPI category, there is still very little research about their lives in the education system. I am interested in building the knowledge base by connecting the

⁸ Transnationalism is observed in this study as “acknowledging multiple locations of ‘home.’” Parents maintain direct relationships linked to the Philippines, while children remain linked via “emotions, ideologies and conflicting cultural codes situating them between different generational and locational points of reference” (Wolf, 1997, p. 459). Additionally, the younger generation recognizes larger global structures historically pushing families from the Philippines to the U.S. with economic and political interests beset with racism. Political consciousness raises in acknowledging systems that cause struggles of diaspora and transnationalism.

fields of Asian American Studies to Education by researching the life histories of Filipina American students-turned-professors, so as to shed light on the varying ways education from and across multiple social institutions affect our livelihood all together.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Towards Embodied Portraiture

My interest in examining the complexity of life experience through a sociological, historical, political, and even an affective approach requires a qualitative research methodology that can dive into the contradictions of human life and engage in “reflexive, messy text” (Marcus, 1998, p. 390). Documenting the many pieces of one’s story, and then attempting to identify salient themes across multiple people’s stories, is not a neat, linear process. It demands navigation tools, as “messy texts are many sited, intertextual, always open ended, and resistant to theoretical holism, but always committed to cultural criticism” (Marcus, 1998, p. 392). Thus, in describing my chosen methodology of portraiture (and later my new iteration of *embodied* portraiture), I urge readers to “‘speak back’ to [even this] text and engage in questioning that is different from the dialogue possible” (Pillow, 2003, p. 190). In other words, I invite healthy and helpful criticism throughout this dynamic process of building research and knowledge.

Portraiture helps to produce new knowledge by (1) driving creativity with (2) scientific precision, while (3) keeping the researcher inside – not outside – the work (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 21). These three tenets of portraiture align with epistemological research I previously conducted to launch this eventual dissertation project. In it, I conducted an auto/ethnography (Reed-Danahay, 1997). I investigated my *own life* as a “starting point for asking new, critical questions... about the

relationship between knowledge and politics” (Pillow, 2003, p. 197); that is—how I know what I know and from what position(s). It became what I call a Pin@y decolonialist standpoint. I carve new ways of understanding the meaning of knowledge production by (1) writing in semi-poetic form and storytelling, and yet (2) utilizing theoretical tools derived from research on decolonized feminist methodologies, (3) all the while exposing my histories and myself as the center of the study. Moving forward, portraiture allows me to depict and be in conversation with the standpoint of *others*.

In this section, I will discuss how portraiture methodology accounts for: (1) taking a perspective, (2) the importance of context, and (3) multiple forms of voice/power. A review of these three features will demonstrate a way of working with “reflexive, messy text... aware of my own narrative apparatuses, that are sensitive to how reality is socially constructed, and understanding that writing is a way of framing reality” (Marcus, 1998, p. 392).

Taking a Perspective

What perspective is taken in portraiture and how is it shaped? Taking a perspective is a feminist act of seeing the partiality of all truths; for there is no *one* truth, only partial truths. As Dorothy Smith (1987) points at androcentric, grand narratives: “The ‘one true story’ is nothing more than a partial perspective” (p. 121). Sandra Harding (1986) adds, “by giving up the ghost of telling ‘one true story,’ we embrace instead the permanent partiality of feminist inquiry” (p. 193). The story, one

might notice, is actually both partial and plural—a reflection of the many-worldedness of women of color.

To define my researcher lens, I operationalize this concept of ‘many-worldedness’ through the writing of a Pinay decolonialist standpoint (Nievera-Lozano, 2013). I elucidate pieces of me that might be understood as both partial and plural. Written in the tradition of Moraga and Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called My Back*, I pull from memory, breaking long-held silences and vulnerably suturing together glimpses of personal confrontations with coloniality (Lugones, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2007) across my lifetime from childhood to womanhood, from within the American classroom and beyond. This critical looking inward of private (and often painful) formations of race, class, gender and emerging sexuality reveals the unstable growth of a Pinay scholar-activist’s personal/political identity. My Pinay decolonialist standpoint, like portraiture, deals with the issue of partial truths by taking up the feminist project of exposing the reality of having to take a perspective from the onset.

Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot’s early work on *The Good High School* (1983) begins with a perspective – a standpoint if you will – where she introduces the origin of her invention of portraiture by sharing two poignant memories (one at age eight, the other during her mid-twenties) sitting as the model/subject for an art piece. As an educational researcher later in life, she recalls how these earlier experiences (of holding still/shifting position, imagining the final product, and finding only pieces of her illuminated) taught her “lessons about the power of the medium, about the

relationship between artist and subject, about the perspective of the person whose image and essence is being captured”(Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 4). Similar to a Pin@y decolonialist standpoint Lawrence-Lightfoot’s personal encounters became “starting points for asking new, critical questions... about the relationship between knowledge and politics” (Harding, 1993, p. 55) . Therefore, she must lay bare the knowledge and politics she already carries and “repeatedly consider what the [reader] will need to make sense of the portrayal” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 5).

Part of this is being clear about how the translation of another’s image/story is a “probing, layered, and interpretive” process, “shaped by the evolving relationship between the artist and subject” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 6). This perspective is visibly dynamic throughout her 1983 study of six urban, suburban and elite prep high schools across the U.S., and their “mix of ingredients” which make them good schools (p. 5). She pays great mind to the ways in which the narrative she is illustrating reflects the multi-dimensional processes between her and her subject, particularly through descriptive writing (or thick description)—employing the aesthetics of texture, detail, descriptors, and nuance. Lawrence-Lightfoot enters her research “as a participant in and student of artistic production, recognizing portraiture’s connections with making meaning through art” (p. 23), but also as a methodologist looking for ways portraiture’s structure can be replicated. With this artist-researcher perspective, how does one begin to illustrate the dynamism—the shifting power—between artist and subject?

The Importance of Context

Neither researcher nor subject exists in isolation. Portraiture gives researchers space to think critically about and thoroughly discuss the context of self, subjects, and sites of research. This can be a meticulous task for the portraitist. The interview, for instance, might begin with a list of basic questions, but shall include new and spontaneous questions particular to the stories being shared, and the connections being made, in each interviewing moment. My conversations in particular were also about making and recognizing connections between myself and my storetellers. It is a task conducted with great care. Lawrence-Lightfoot's discusses this consideration of context in her following work, *I've Known Rivers* (1994), which:

explores the life stories of six women and men using the intensive, probing method of "human archaeology" – a name I coined for this genre of portraiture as a way of trying to convey the depth and penetration of the inquiry, the richness of the layers of human experience, the search for ancestral and generational artifacts, and the painstaking, careful labor that the metaphorical dig requires. As I listen to the life stories of these individuals and participate in the "co-construction" of a narrative, I employ the themes, goals and techniques of portraiture. It is an eclectic, interdisciplinary approach, shaped by the lenses of history, anthropology, psychology, and sociology (p. 15).

M. Jacqui Alexander (2009) contends, this metaphorical dig is "an act of self and collective reflexivity. For how could we truly apprehend the archeology of the present, unaware of its lay contours?" This "richness of layers" portraiture attempts to draw out is an example of how research can unearth and reclaim that which lies beneath—that is, context:

The word context literally means to weave together, to twine, to connect. This *interrelatedness* creates the webs of meaning within which humans act. The individual is joined to the world through social groups, structural relations,

and identities. However, these are not inflexible categories to which individuals can be reduced. The more we consider context, the more we realize that while the general constructs of race, class, and gender are essential, they are not rigidly determinant. Context is not a script. Rather, it is a dynamic process through which the individual simultaneously shapes and is shaped by her environment (Personal Narratives Group & others, 1989).

Thus, historical, personal, and internal context is at play. Multiple contexts help portraitists towards “balancing the whole” (if something “whole” does exist).

Regardless, this metacognitive exercise in paying attention to and unveiling context is not just during interviews or data collection. It becomes an “ongoing quest reconciliation between what has been seen in the multidimensional context of observation and interview and the final portrayal in narrative” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 13). It is also about the writing. The portraitist, the final sculptor of the narrative, is also then politically aware of how power is represented through multiple forms of voice.

Multiple Forms of Voice & Power

Portraiture is not a method that brings the researcher out of the data. It participates in the discourse critiquing the “voice of truth/knowledge” (a voice which often comes from the outside). Thus, I am interested in the ways portraiture advises to honorably represent the many voices coming through—mine, my interviewees’, and the one we create together. This raises questions: what does it mean to have an “authentic representation of voices?” Lawrence-Lightfoot’s work, portraiture describes metaphorically that on the flipside, as participants, even if portraitists offer

their most bare and vulnerable selves, the portraits that enter academia are from *their* (the portraitist's) perspective (see earlier discussion regarding *partial truths*).

Portraiture gives the space to spin out the dilemma of juggling multiple voices contributing to and coming through the narrative. It admits the omnipresence of the researcher's voice and power, holding up a distinct standard of authenticity by identifying specifically six different forms of power held by the researcher. "Voice as witness" notes her observations. "Voice as preoccupation" meditates on assumptions and the lens through which she sees the data. "Voice as interpretation" makes sense of the world she is witnessing. "Voice as autobiography" exposes her personal history understood to be impacting and intermeshed in the study. "Voice as discerning other voices" listens for the vacillating expressions of participants' voices (i.e., it detects the feelings conveyed through the spoken word). The researcher and/or portraitist here is one who recognizes the plurality of women's lives. Lastly, "voice in dialogue" traces the growing relationship between researcher and participant.

These many voices touch on the co-construction of meaning between researcher and participant, as well as how the researcher becomes connected to the participant through their shared identities. Anzaldúa's (1990) border consciousness becomes key here. She posits that any field (I insert qualitative methodology as a field) can be and should be a place where we:

acquire voices without *becoming periquitas* (parrots [of the academy]) and to use theory [and/or methodology] to change people and the way they perceive the world... We need *teorias* that will enable us to interpret what happens in the world, that will explain how and why we relate to certain people in specific ways, that will reflect what goes on between inner, outer, and

peripheral 'I's within a person and between the personal 'I's and the collective 'we' of our ethnic communities (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxv).

This is about seeing clearly and becoming responsibly aware of *how* positionalities hold power, which has consequences, as positionalities affect how one researches, how one's research is taken, what strength one's voice has, and what the strongest position/space/identity is from which one can speak with utmost honesty. Portraiture is a solution to the limitations of positivist practices in research (where researcher may assume all power with her/his voice). It has an explicit "goal of speaking to broader audiences beyond the academy (thus linking inquiry to public discourse and social transformation)" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 13). Recorded first-hand accounts from my interviewees follows the goals of Ethnic Studies to allow the community to tell *their* story accordingly. This method "ensure[s] relevance for ethnic minorities and proper linkage... between the primary experience and the conceptualizations that follow from it" (Hirabayashi, 1974, p. 68). It values experiential knowledge. The community is engaged in a collaborative effort to produce knowledge, illustrating "an attempt to dislodge the hegemony of the 'white West and the study of it as a field site" (Swedenburg & Lavie, 1996, p. 20).

The three features of portraiture discussed – of taking a perspective, seeing the importance of context and accounting for different forms of voice and power – exemplify its "attempt to account for how selves interact and impact the research process" (Pillow, 2003, p. 182). I am interested in the things portraiture says it can and will capture: our contradictions, our beautiful/ugly experiences—our humanness.

A Critique of Portraiture

Strong critique of portraiture as a “valid” methodology has been pushed by Fenwick English. Three years after Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot collaboratively publishes *Art and Science of Portraiture* (1997) with Hoffman Davis, English submits a “critical appraisal” (2000), scrutinizing what he finds problematic:

If portraiture were about revealing the presence of simultaneous *multiple truths* it would possess the capability of being reflexive. But Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis insist... on the creation of a grand narrative with a stable and fundamental truth as its object encapsulated as an uncontested "essence" (p. 27)... Thus, through different paths, we arrive at an *objective truth*"... exactly the same agenda of traditional researchers (p. 23).

What do we do as methodologists with these seemingly huge contradictions? How do we represent them or even recognize them? Perhaps the plurality of many-worldedness can offer a clue to how we work with these contradictory moments. For now, allow me to flip back through the pages of this 1997 piece by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman, where they do assert, accordingly: “There is never a single story—many could be told” (p. 12). They are furthermore acutely attuned to how “the identity, character, and history of the researcher are obviously critical to the manner of listening, selecting, interpreting, and composing *the story*” (p. 12, emphasis mine); that is, *the story* they refer to is not *the grand narrative* English alleges they are trying to construct. They carefully elaborate how the story they arrive at shall be “captured by specifics, nuances, detailed descriptions, a gesture, a voice, an attitude”—something that cannot ever be replicated or generalized in the way traditional research would prefer.

So what they hope to “generalize” however are not hard and fast results found from within a highly controlled, isolated environment. Rather, they want to “document and illuminate the complexity... of a unique experience or place [local, not global], hoping that the audience will see themselves reflected in it, trusting that the readers will feel identified” (p. 14). In other words, they are portraitists “listening for a story” (p. 13) whereby the reader might ultimately “discover [*for themselves*] resonant universal themes” (p. 14). And these “universal themes” can be as broad as love, pain, struggle, or freedom. As feminist philosopher Lubna Nazir Chaudhry (2000) would say, “there is no easy story here to tell, nor for the reader to hear, but a whirling of voices, figures, and histories” (Chaudhry, 2000, p. 108).

I find that English’s critique of portraiture may have more to do with one’s inability to reconcile and accept the contradictions that lay therein. I argue that contradictions are unavoidable and inescapable and that the only way “out” (if any) is to at least begin by owning our contradictions. One of the ways I see Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis own (up to) the contradictions built in portraiture is in their account of how voice “encompasses orientations of the researcher to matters of *epistemology, ideology, and method,*” (p. 87). In portraiture, the researcher shall recognize the multiple voices contributing to and coming through the narrative: voice as witness; voice as interpretation; voice as preoccupation; voice as autobiography; voice as discerning other voices (listening for voice); and voice as in dialogue. If it is understood that language holds power (as previously discussed), then voice holds power. And if voice holds power, then Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis account for six

different forms of power inherent in the process of portraiture. Thus, the co-construction of the narrative is indubitably reflexive when the multiplicity of voices is heard.

However, if Fenwick's project is to show that portraiture does not live up to its claim of being a "marriage of science and art," I can understand. Unfortunately, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis do not develop this argument further and spend a great deal of time explicating the "artistic" aspects of portraiture. By seeing portraiture as a "science" in its own way, I am admittedly seeking permission from the academy to conduct this non-traditional form of research.

Raced Lives in Portraiture: Illustrated through Critical Race Theory, Poetry, and Jazz

Since Lawrence-Lightfoot's original application of portraiture, other educational scholars have applied this tool in educational research particularly during a post-9/11 era (published articles dated 2002-2007). A review of their works show this 25-year-old methodology as helpful for teachers, teacher educators, and professors in seeing how race/racism operates across schooling experiences. Racism is informed by schooling experiences while at the same time extending beyond them. In Lawrence-Lightfoot's *I've Known Rivers* (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1994) she explores how racism operates for educated folks of color through the portraits of six privileged African Americans in their middle years:

We strive to arrive at a secure place only to discover the quicksand of subtle exclusion. We work to amass the credentials and signs of status even as we recognize that our status will never assure a sense of belonging, or full

membership in the white world. We feel ourselves moving toward the center of power even as we feel inextricably tied to the periphery; our outsider status becomes clearer as we work to claim an insider's place. For privileged African-Americans, these contradictory experiences of insider/outsider, power/impotence, security/uncertainty are felt, I think, with particular force (p. 10).

In effect, racism becomes a unifying theme across many following works of portraiture. To begin, portraitists acknowledge the misrepresentation of communities of color in mainstream studies and seek tools that directly engage with questions, understandings, and histories of race. CRT (Critical Race Theory) is fitting for those “looking for both a critical space in which race [is] foregrounded and a race space where critical themes [are] central” (Crenshaw, 2002, p. 19).

Melanie Carter (2003) first identifies portraiture and CRT as “methodologically attractive.” These approaches together:

engender a methodological environment in which the researcher and the researched co-construct meanings instead of relying upon processes that dictate analysis and interpretation. These hybrid methods are not static modes of inquiry but instead create a methodologically responsive and dynamic terrain—one that simultaneously accommodates and interrogates multiple conceptions of truth (p. 32).

As researchers encounter and develop “truths” through various spheres in their lives, Thandeka Chapman (2007) explains that, “portraiture and CRT allow[s] the researcher to evoke the personal, the professional, and the political to illuminate issues of race... in education research” (p. 156). Chapman demonstrates this viable partnership in her 2005 article, “Expressions of ‘Voice’ in Portraiture,” about her study of a racially diverse urban classroom facilitated by a white teacher. The article applies the six aspects of “voice” originally defined by Lawrence-Lightfoot and

Hoffman-Davis (1997) to her study. Before discussing in full detail how Chapman breaks down each “voice,” I must point out that it is here in which Bakhtin’s (1973) understanding of polyphony can be invoked in the project of portraiture. When portraitists listen for, become conscious of, and operationalize the multiplicity of voices in research, they at the same time account for polyphony – the multiplicity of truths – as Bakhtin states (in his reading of Dostoevsky’s novels):

A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky’s novels. What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event (Bakhtin, 1973, p. 6).

I will speak more on this connection between voice and truth, but for now Chapman’s article offers a moment to hear for each voice. Looking at “voice as autobiography,” she tells her story as a young black woman having attended Illinois Math and Science Academy, Spellman, an all-black women college, and teaching at a transitional program helping “failing students of color and poor White students” (p. 36) improve academically. Through examining “voice as preoccupation,” Chapman explains precisely how her experiences in higher education and early research – on how, for instance, “emphasis on the individual in U.S. public schools privilege White middle-class students and disenfranchise students of color and poor students” (p. 38) – formed biases. This knowledge led her to seek a particular classroom, group of teachers, and group of students for her research, where there was room to confront this disenfranchisement. Critical Race Theory (CRT) gave Chapman a lens to

“understand the plethora of ways that racism is inherent in all structures of society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Williams, 1991) particularly the institution of schooling (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Tate, 1997) ...changing the way [she] view[ed] teachers’ and students’ experiences in public schools” (p.37). With “voice as dialogue” she lays out the ways in which conversations took place with teachers and students separated through both group and individual interviews. “Voice as witness” affords Chapman the chance to offer her observations as a non-participant, watching classroom dynamics from the edge, all at the same time closely examining layered perspectives of race throughout.

Roberta Newton’s (2005) article, “Learning to Teach in the Shadows of 9/11: A Portrait of Two Arab American Preservice Teachers” also sees race as a place of experience. However, instead of explicating any use of CRT, Newton makes use of poetry as a tool of inquiry. Specifically, poetry in her work captures the raced lives of her participants: three Black women educators. Focusing on two dimensions of portraiture—context and voice—Newton provides “poetic portraits” as sites of analysis. Abiding by the rule of portraiture, which insists the researcher must also be at the center of the study, Newton accentuates:

And this is what I know.
I’ll never know what it’s like to be an
Arab American Muslim...
The only thing I can and do know
Is about
Being
Black—
I’ve been that for
36 earth years
And

So I know some things
About Living
A
Raced life
in this Place
We now call
The USA...
We were never meant to
Survive (p. 93).

Newton pays respect to the “multidimensionality of [their] lived realities” (p. 81), while at the same time reflecting on how both her blackness and their brownness become narratives which merge in the historical moment of post-9/11 New York City. Whereas the aforementioned CRT operates as a lens through which researchers can utilize portraiture, poetry becomes a mode through which researchers can paint portraits of or about race. While I am not using poetry specifically in my own research, my writing will lean towards a poetic voice. It will honor the use of fragmented sentences to accentuate particular points or thoughts throughout one’s portrait about the meaning of, for instance, race. However, talk about race isn’t merely about the lives of people of color. Exploring race means simultaneously interrogating whiteness.

Heather Harding (2005) brings this perspective in her article, “‘City Girl’: A Portrait of a Successful White Urban Teacher.” Building on the work of Ladson-Billings (2000), McAllister & Irvine (2000), and Rothenberg (1997), Harding addresses “concerns about cultural mismatch in maintaining high-quality instruction for students of color” (p. 53), by extending a portrait of Jennifer Black, an experienced White public middle school teacher of inner-city students of color.

Jennifer's willingness to share her goals for teaching students of color, her definition of success, and how her pedagogy and practice is informed by her own upbringing in the city, all result in a story about how carrying an raced identity as a White teacher allows her to "move across racial and cultural boundaries to see 'truth'" (p. 61). Meanwhile, Harding's own social location as a black female from Harvard is confronted with this "challenge of researching race across racial lines... one that remains elusive, risky, and rewarding" (p. 54). Jennifer grew up in an "integrated city neighborhood" with parents who worked to "protect her from racism," and attended college with "suburban white" students who called her a "nigger lover." Later in life as a teacher, Jennifer found ways to engage her students through shared roots of "urban culture" (a term even she can't fully articulate) while also pushing them to dot their I's and cross their T's. This pedagogy successfully raised test scores and the quality of student work.

Fortunately for Harding, portraiture provides her both breathing space and methodological devices to reflect and reveal life story in order to see effectiveness—or what Lawrence-Lightfoot would term, *goodness*—in teaching practices for students of color. Goodness is a key aspect in portraiture. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman-Davis (1997) make clear: "Portraiture resists this tradition-laden effort to document failure. It is an intentionally generous and eclectic process that begins by searching for what is good and healthy and assumes that the expression of goodness will always be laced with imperfections" (p. 9). Harding hones in on this practice as she takes great pause to examine the strengths of her participant—Jennifer is a white

teacher in a classroom full of students of color. Harding must at the same time lay bare the “messy” parts of Jennifer’s experiences as they continue to unfold.

I should note that this understanding of *goodness* is something I do liken to the notion of effectiveness. As a researcher, what am I seeing in the work of these practitioners that is effective in higher education? What strategies are they using that work for them and the specific communities whom they tend to? It is akin to Gonzáles, Moll and Amanti’s (2005) *funds of knowledge*, which refers to “the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p. 133). They urge educators to see the *funds of knowledge* among their students. This way of seeing is a practice of culturally responsive teaching. By then using their students’ *funds of knowledge*, educators ultimately open up transformative spaces wherein organic learning can happen differently than it would in an otherwise test-driven system. *Funds of knowledge* counters the notion that knowledge is compartmentalized and instead argues that it is a model that sees knowledge as interconnected and revolving around and with students. Like *funds of knowledge*, *goodness* is also a way of seeing, a practice of culturally responsive *researching*. It is a way of giving credit to the power already there in the work. Both models see different *knowledges* or different expressions of *goodness* as fluid and dynamic, not locked in a vacuumed vessel. Both are tools of hope in teaching and educational research.

The search for *goodness*, is also an appealing feature for Adrienne Dixon (2005). In her article, “Extending the Metaphor: Notions of Jazz in Portraiture,”

Dixson offers jazz “as a heuristic for thinking about research that is informed by and a reflection of ‘racialized discourses’ and ‘ethnic epistemologies’ (p. 106). *Goodness* is one of a number of powerful aspects (such as voice and validity) which also address “some fundamental aspects of jazz as a methodology” she believes are essential (p. 114). Pulling from her 10-month study of the pedagogical philosophies and practices of two Black women elementary school teachers, Dixson portraitizes significant teaching moments they share. It is a narrative of goodness, organically produced through a collaborative effort between researcher and subject. Keeping her eyes and ears open to the various ways the subject expresses this goodness is similar to the project of the jazz musician, who sonically and/or compositionally jams (or harmoniously collaborates) with others through the expressive interchange of melodies (p. 116).

Improvisation in jazz methodology is related to portraiture’s attention to emergent themes. While there may be music sheets to follow for the jazz musician (or a list of interview questions for the researcher), the beauty is found in her performance of interpretation, as Dixson describes is:

demonstrated not only through changes in meter or harmony but also in the addition of improvised embellishments to the melody through the use of breaks and solo passages. These breaks and improvisations—emergent themes—manifest in the data. Through observational or interview data, themes come to the fore that either support and enhance the researcher’s initial hypotheses, hunches, and beliefs or contradict and refute them (p. 114).

Also, improvisation in jazz is akin to portraiture’s attention to context. Being acutely aware of the many sounds, songs, and instruments at play requires the jazz musician to have the facility to constantly improvise along with them. She may have the

pressure of a live audience, who counts on her to get and stay creative on each and everyday she performs, for every different audience. There is no linear, uniform path in her musical performance. Likewise for the portraitist, her context will never be exactly the same for everyday she goes into the field to collect data. Several factors will influence her research (i.e., her mood, her subject's mood; emotions and memories that arise out of the storytelling and subsequent questions that follow; the weather, the environment in which they meet, etc) and she must stay open to the impermanence of her setting and situation. "In qualitative research," Dixson says, "the context not only affects the data collection process but also adds to the understanding of the research question" (p. 112).

Dixson's analytical move demonstrating improvisation as related to portraiture entices me to improvise something new *with* portraiture, just as these women have before me. Studying race and portraiture through these varying lenses is an important first step. My interest however lies in the more explicit *intersections* of race, class, gender, and sexuality. I circle back to Chapman's (2005; 2007) work first discussed, which showed CRT and portraiture as a viable pair in education research through her studies of racially diverse classrooms. Although her use of portraiture is linked to the supposed "CRT call to explore the intersections of race, class, and *gender* as these constructions rely on and buttress one another" (p. 29, emphasis mine), her work primarily focuses on race, carrying out the notable objective to counter racial oppression. However, feminists of color have questioned CRT's ability to directly deal with issues of gender and sexuality (Caldwell, 1991; Wing, 2000,

2003). Building on CRT, they have fashioned a theory of Critical Race Feminism (CRF) drawing from and tying together multiple disciplines such as sociology, communication studies and literary studies to focus on “the multiple identities of women and how their experiences are a product of those identities,” ultimately providing a particular “legal framework” for examining such complexities (Pratt-Clarke, 2010).

I admire CRF’s expansive embrace of multi-disciplinarity and considered partnering portraiture with this theory for my own work. However, as the U.S.-born child of immigrant parents, descending from a former U.S. colony (the Philippines), I find more useful the partnering of portraiture and *coloniality*; or what Lugones (2007) terms the colonial/modern gender system. Her re-examination of Quijano’s (2000) “coloniality of power” emphasizes that no connection can be made between people of color (or women, or between people across classes or sexualities), without grappling with coloniality. Similarly, it is about looking deeply at – not just race – but also gender, class and sexuality, distinctively underlining the notion that all these categories and/or identities were fused together in a new arrangement co-constitutively and imposed onto the indigenous of the Americas and their colonies thereon. I want to recognize that “the final intention here is not to present race, ethnicity or gender as being essentialist, unchangeable, or immovable. Instead, these positionalities must be seen as shifting and dynamic sets of social relationships which embody a particular... epistemological basis” (Dillard, 2000, p. 670).

I link this to the influential passages in *This Bridge Called My Back* (Anzaldúa and Moraga, 1983), wherein Asian American, Latina, Native American and Black women theorize from their lived experiences (how they embody, feel and move through critical moments of learning and leadership). This new theoretical pairing of methodologies is something I refer to as *embodied portraiture*, which I will expand more at the conclusion of this paper. All together, this collection of efforts employing and enacting portraiture “challenge[s] the all too prevalent idea that there is a unitary way to know, do, and be in educational research” (Dillard, 2000, p. 672).

Portraiture’s Relationship to Case Study and Forms of Oral History

Portraiture is “framed by the traditions and values of the phenomenological paradigm” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 13), which rely upon methodical reflections on the development of consciousness. Portraiture is different than case study, which has its roots in studying a specific “unit” to seek out and define its “problem” (Adelman, Jenkins, & Kemmis, 1976) and comporting with social-scientific theoretical frameworks such as “behavioralism, rational choice, institutionalism, and interpretivism” (Gerring, 2004, p. 353). The linearity in these frameworks run counter to portraiture’s exploratory consideration of context. This linearity is perhaps a reflection of the dominant ideology of poking, prodding, and sorting things in one straight line, so that it “makes sense” to those exercising colonialist forms of power. Furthermore, portraiture extends a political “search for goodness,” smashing the kind of deficit-thinking which has far too long harmed the progress of marginalized students and teachers in our schools. Using case study to

see one unit with a “focus so tight” (Gerring, 2004, p. 347), in order to demonstrate causal mechanisms and arguments across other units (p. 348), it runs the risk of becoming another pathologizing practice in education (Bishop, Mazawi, & Shields, 2005). This is what primarily distinguishes portraiture from case study.

As a political act of storytelling, portraiture is closer to forms of oral history such *testimonio*⁹ birthed in Latin America and *kuwento*¹⁰ drawn from Philippine folk and oral traditions. I suggest that portraiture, *testimonio* and *kuwento* all counter the conqueror’s silencing narrative. As Latina Education scholar Delgado Bernal (2002) writes, “critical raced-gendered epistemologies allow this experiential knowledge to be viewed as a strength and acknowledge that the life experiences of [people] of color” (p. 6) are “uniquely individual while at the same time both collective and connected” (Dillard, 2000, p. 676). With human connection in mind, each mode of storytelling (and listening) “assumes that the speaker is already a fully conscious

⁹ *Testimonio* is the most frequently used term for oral history in Spanish in Latin America (Randall, 1985, p. 9). Through an academic lens, it can be seen as a form of documentation weaving together critical theory, literary theory and anthropology (Gugelberger & Kearney, 1991). Thus, *testimonio* and oral history serve as a social movement (Bertaux, 1990), where memoirs of guerilla fighters, of the poor, or of women, are brought to light, read and honored. A leading example of *testimonio* can be explored in “I... Rigoberta Menchú” (Menchú, 1984). George Yudice (1985) further defines *testimonio* as “authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to *narrate* by the urgency of a situation (e.g., war, oppression, revolution, etc)... portray[ing] his or her own experience as an agent (rather than a representative) of a *collective memory* and *identity*,” (p. 17).

¹⁰ *Kuwento* is the Filipino spelling and/or form of *cuento* in Spanish, meaning ‘story.’ Korina Jocson (2008) introduces *kuwento* to the Education field as “a communicative tool... and cultural and sociolinguistic practice among Filipina/o Americans” (p. 242). Often used in my own household with parents, grandparents, uncles and aunties detailing life in the Philippines, immigration experiences, or falling in love. Growing up, I was fond of listening to their “inner thoughts, feelings, beliefs, aspirations, values, goals, expectations, and creativity” and only now realize that each of their stories are “simply not the result of what the speaker has produced but also the result of a sort of co-authorship between the speaker and listener” (p. 243).

subject” (Gugelberger & Kearney, 1991, p. 113)... “with revolutionary potential... serving as a site of conscious-raising and social change” (p. 125).

Language and Power in Portraiture

“Embedded within the research process are relationships of power that all researchers must face” (Pillow, 2003, p. 182).

I look for ways to represent truthfully the voice of my interviewees, and see that portraiture is not a method that puts the researcher outside of the data. This raises questions for me about what ‘authentic representation of voices’ means, and if this is even possible. Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot’s work in portraiture describes metaphorically that, for participants, even if they offer their most bare and vulnerable selves, the portraits that enter academia are from the perspective of the observer (researcher)—me. And so, I am concerned with a particular kind of consciousness that allows for new understandings of self in and through the process of research/methodology. And I am in search of a methodology whose language can tend to these dynamics of power.

There is a radicalness and ideology in portraiture which forefronts and exposes relationships of power often not considered in traditional, positivist, scientific, colonizing research. As Anzaldúa (1990) writes: there is “a danger arises that we may look through the master’s gaze, speak through his tongue, use his methodology—in Audre Lorde’s words, use the ‘master’s tools.’” (xxiii). The danger is that researchers (1) neglect the use of power and (2) neglect the power of voice among people researched. So scholars must find a means to do and write research

that will turn the 'gaze' both critically inward and outward, and by nature source from unorthodox methods. In other words, "if it seems obvious that the history of migration is one of instability, fluctuation and discontinuity, it seems also clear for many Third World members of the diaspora" (Minh-Ha, 1994) and third world women writers that their sense of language and research will also appear as unstable, in fluctuation and discontinuity.

Here is the fight: becoming a portraitist means answering the womanist¹¹ call to see language as a site of struggle (Anzaldúa, 1990; Behar, 1996; Patai, 1994, 1994; Pillow, 2003; Sandoval, 2000; Walker, 2003); a struggle out of which I will not arrive, unscathed. Trinh T. Minh-ha (1990) eloquently claims:

[w]hen I visibly walk in the 'centre' with all spotlights on, I feel how utterly inappropriate(d)ly 'other' I remain - not so much by choice nor by lack of choice, as by a mixture of survival instinct and critical necessity. Here, the fact that one is always marginalized in one's own language and areas of strength is something that one has to learn to live with (p. 71).

In academe, women of color scholars are marginal; in research, portraiture is marginal. And so it works out: with portraiture I've found a way to survive, lest my voice be squelched. Asian American professor Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales (Tintiangco-Cubales & Sacramento, 2009) argues, "Our duty as Pinays, as Third World women is to write and be heard to gain power through our tongues. Writing is a way of nourishing our colonized souls" (p 11). How portraiture allows me to write my research – seeing language as a site of struggle, and a place to examine power –

¹¹ Whereby feminism also has a problematic history: demands primarily served white, upper-class women and neglected to see the concerns of women of color and men of color in their lives.

keeps me alive. My painting of participant portraits in my study, and my portrayal of their voices, are all acts of power of which I do not seek to absolve myself, but rather hope to make visible rather than ignore (Pillow, 2003, p. 194).

The celebrated work of Mikhail Bakhtin (Bakhtin, 1973; Hermans, 2001) and the work of recent radical women of color writers (Lorde, 2007; Lugones, 1987; Minh-Ha, 1994; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983; A. Smith, 2006) are connected by a strong link: one that points to the practice of locating self, *through, with and in* language. Bakhtin's notion of dialogism (Bakhtin, 2004) offers an optic to show how a dialogue always exists, and that everything (including ourselves and/or the written word) is always in relation to something else. Scholars should not be imagined as stand-alone researchers with full authority to tell others' stories. Their writing cannot be viewed as disembodied from whom they are and where they are in the world. This would be arrogant and colonizing as Latina anthropologist Villenas (1996) tells us, "we are like colonizers when we fail to question our own identities and privileged positions, and in the ways in which our writings perpetuate 'othering'" (p. 713). In basic terms: scholars must be mindful of the things they write, and the things they say. But the process is a complex one. For the many ways in which we grasp *language* is something we do in order to understand the way we grasp a sense of *self* (B. Olsen, ED 247 lecture, April 22, 2010). Understanding one's self through language helps one arrive at her own truths. Thus, I am interested in how different truths hold power; most especially when they are spoken, written, and realized in our research. Even more so, I am drawn by this opportunity portraiture in particular

offers to cultivate a sensitivity to ever-present power relationships in our everyday lives. All together, this is precisely the task of this chapter.

We must speak our truths, lest we remain invisible. As we use language to help us describe our worlds, Bakhtin offers the perspective of the “project of language and the project of selfhood as both *existing* in order to *mean*” (Holquist, 1990, p. 23). This perspective assists researchers like me who are “scared of writing, but [are] more scared of not writing,” (Anzaldúa, 1983, p. 169) because writing will allow us to connect (those in the margins of research, in the margins of society). In this way, there is no complete divide or wall between researcher/participant. For if there were truly a divide, there would be no bridge, no entryway, no link, no *reason*. But there *is* a reason: a responsibility to and for one another. When educational researcher/Black feminist scholar Dillard (2000) says, “language has historically served – and continues to serve – as a powerful tool in the mental, spiritual, and intellectual colonization of African Americans and other marginalized peoples” (p. 662), then scholars should hold dear the deeper meaning of their writing. Dillard pushes forth:

Language itself is epistemic... it provides a way for persons to understand their reality. Thus, in order to transform that reality, the very language we use to define and describe phenomena must possess instrumentality: It must be able to do something towards transforming particular ways of knowing and producing knowledge (p. 662).

So the take away here is seeing portraiture as part of a transformation in academia all together. I shall create portraits of Filipina American scholar-activists in higher education with high regard for the trails they blazed and followed in sustaining a pathway for other students of color advancing through the academic pipeline. Their

personal participation in truth-telling (that is, in lending their portraits, in speaking their truths) is a political move to keep that academic pipeline open wide because for far too long, students of color have historically been denied the same opportunities to attend and succeed in higher education than their white counterparts (Solorzano & Villalpando, 1998; Rogers, Terriquez, Valladares, & Oakes, 2006).

I must immediately clarify that in/for my work, *truth-telling is plural*. I return to Bakhtin's understanding of multiple truths. In portraiture, part of talking to scholar-activists is seeing how we make meaning together. This kind of knowledge production requires that I take risks – creative risks – in using a highly specific lens as an ex-Army, Filipina scholar engaged in community and cultural work. I've fashioned a Pin@y decolonialist standpoint as my lens, where the goal was to move from introspection to an understanding that this lens shall be used based on who I am and where I've been. Using this lens is risky in academia and I can be accused of being overly bias rather than diligently accurate. However, this is not to say I am not trying to represent my subjects accurately, but acknowledging different truths. The truth I will find in each moment will be co-constructed (as portraiture tends to the co-construction of the narrative). I shall have access to these truths, and will attempt to explicate them through the discourse and theoretical frames of academia while being cognizant of the truths I've heard and how I retell it. For it is not about crossing the border and staying there, but about coming back and being able to have a new perspective.

Portraiture, which I submit as a mode of truth-telling, may be regarded by the academy as too emotional, self-indulgent, and lying outside the “disciplinary régimes” that would otherwise “arrange facts in columns and tables” (Foucault, 1994) for testing standards and generalizability. From a Foucauldian point of view, this writing is invisible because it disrupts the norm. Enacting portraiture becomes tricky. It is a “precarious line we walk on... that allows us to challenge the West as authoritative subject... while also resisting the terms of a binarist discourse that would concede [our womanist work] to the West all over again” (Parmar & Minh-ha, 1990, p. 68).

I acknowledge this mode of writing as a political project to deliver truth from a different, alternative, marginal place that pulls from memory; breaking long-held silences and boldly suturing together glimpses of personal confrontations with trauma and violence among my participants. Portraiture employs a new kind of oppositional consciousness needed to tell their stories – one that is a “mobile, flexible, diasporic force that migrates between contending ideological systems” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 30). Portraiture does not fit in a box. It mixes and melds together art and science, story and theory. Goellnicht (1997) would note that portraiture is a genre which, “exist[s] as [a] point on a continuum, constantly merging, blending, shifting, like racial or gendered positions, never fixed or pure” (p. 349). In fact, portraiture disturbs academia in its “‘impurity’: the disrespectful mixing of theoretical, militant and poetical modes of writing” (Parmar & Minh-ha, 1990, p. 69).

This makes the political project of portraiture transgressive. When my participants share their diaries, photos, journals, poems, and personal artifacts, I am called to employ these “neglected, marginalized, and feminized genres... [and] these texts form an important part of the feminist challenge to the traditional, patriarchal hierarchies of genre” (Goellnicht, 1997, p. 349). As Minh-ha (1994) puts it more succinctly: “if the space of language is to resonate anew, if I am to speak differently, He [white theoretical policeman] must learn to be silent” (p. 24). Exploring portraiture as a site of struggle around language and power helps me to “reflect on the tools and the relations of production that define [me]... as [a] writer” (Minh-ha, 1990, p. 73). By meditating on the moral ethics and dilemmas of feminist/womanist approaches in educational research, I am able to move outside of the ‘master’s house’ and carry forward the lesson to “transform the terms of our consciousness.... [for] what it is about can never be separated from how it is made” (p. 73).

A New Embodied Portraiture: Coloniality + Women of Color Theories

Language can only live on and renew itself by hybridizing shamelessly and changing its own rules as it migrates in time and space.
(Minh-Ha, 1994, p. 14)

After demonstrating a firm understanding of social science portraiture, I take hold of the theoretical “freedom to carve and chisel my own face... making a new culture... with my own feminist architecture” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 21-22), by submitting a new iteration of this methodology, which I call *embodied portraiture*. As the U.S.-born daughter of immigrant parents descending from a former U.S. colony (the Philippines), I find the concept of *coloniality*, or what Lugones (2007) terms the

colonial/modern gender system, particularly useful. Embodied portraiture then is the partnering of: coloniality (Lugones, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Quijano, 2000) and black feminist/women-of-color theories (Alexander, 2006; Collins, 1996; Cruz, 2001; Dillard, 2000; Lorde, 2007; Minh-Ha, 1994; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983; Villenas, 1996).

Embodied portraiture requires personal and political interrogations of critical educators.¹² These deep interrogations tear at the pages of colonialism's history in our lives, the lives of our parents, grandparents, and ancestor. This I refer to as *coloniality*.¹³ Coloniality is *different* than colonialism—it is what *survives* colonialism. It is the longstanding power that exists as a result of colonialism's history. Coloniality defines labor, knowledge production way beyond the limits of colonialism (viewed as an encapsulated historical moment in time). Coloniality is not just the residue of colonialism, because to call it “residue” would lighten its weight. It is real. It is here. It is current. It is maintained. Leonardo (2010), furthers the examination of coloniality by seeing it:

not just in the negative sense (or as a burden in the Fanonian way) but as offering a more complex understanding that our experiences, our standpoint, our epistemologies are *fundamentally filtered through* these real histories of colonialism; and so let's talk about colonialism as a place to talk about survival.

¹² What Freya Shiwy (2007) might view as a “study of epistemic relations of power, [which] comprises research on epistemologies that were subalternized in the process of colonization and its aftermath,” (pg. 272).

¹³ See Maldonado Torres (2007) “On Coloniality of Being” for further reading.

Coloniality is something we experience through and feel in our bodies. Thus, we embody coloniality.¹⁴

As Pinays, we share this reality across the global south – where peoples of South America, Africa, Oceania, and so forth – have been subjected to this historical arrangement in which they are deemed inferior: where *their* race becomes gendered, their being becomes classed or inferiorized. From such history, Alexander urges scholars to hold “dogged attention of class hierarchy, class consciousness, and class struggle understood through the color of gender and the sexuality of race” (Alexander, 2009). Race/class/gender/sexuality cannot be dissected, fragmented or pulled apart. Embodied portraiture acknowledges this as truth; that these identities and/or categories cannot be considered without the other. Influenced by passages in *This Bridge Called My Back* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983) written by Asian American,

¹⁴ Lugones (2007) takes seriously the framework of coloniality of power in her article, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern System,” to show us how we can look deeply at how the social classifications of race and gender fused together this new arrangement onto the indigenous of the Americas and their colonies. There was this replacing of “relations of superiority and inferiority established through domination with naturalized understandings of inferiority and superiority” (p. 186). To understand the modern system in which we live, where these social classifications pervade our everyday lives, Lugones explains that colonialism “imposed a new gender system [which] we cannot understand... without understanding what Anibal Quijano calls “the coloniality of power” (p. 187). A striking historical moment where coloniality of power is dangerously at work is in the violent sixteenth-century illustration of European encounter with “New World” inhabitants. Anthropologist Jonathan Goldberg (1992) retells of the vicious act in 1513, when Spanish conquistador and explorer Vasco Nunez de Balboa arrives in Panama to find “Indian cross-dressers” whom he immediately accuses of sodomy. Disorienting European perceptions of normativity, these “cross-dressed” people were in fact indigenous priests and shaman of their village, practicing spirituality in their image with unique forms of knowing. Despite their distinctive connection to the spiritual world, conquistadors, explorers and those exercising *coloniality of power* nonetheless denied the very existence of their souls and their humanity. See Anibal Quijano (2000) for further reading on “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America.”

Latina, Native American and Black women theorizing from their lived experiences, embodied portraiture is about looking deeply at the enmeshment and *co-constitutiveness* of race, gender, class and sexuality.

This methodology of embodied portraiture is a political project to make visible these intersections of non-neutral race/class/gender/sexuality lines, and how this “modern/colonial gender system” has been imposed upon us. And I mean all of us. None of us is untouched by this system. Coloniality has marked our bodies in a way where we can distinguish “colonialism as the catalyst; coloniality as the embedded” (L. Villaraza, personal communication, November 1, 2010). Thus, coloniality becomes the crux of my work, the guiding theory behind embodied portraiture.

Critical Women-of-Color Theories

While coloniality offers a lens through which I can deconstruct a moment or a narrative (narratives along with artifacts are the data I will gather), critical women-of-color theories teach me how to keep critical as I think through, interpret, and share the stories I receive. Women of color theorists see standpoint (Harding, 1986) as the center of knowledge production. Women of color theorists remind us that only there—in the standpoint—can we learn what it means: to feel like an “outsider within” (Collins, 1996, p. S14); to participate in one’s own colonization (Villenas, 1996); to “keep one foot firmly in academia, the other grounded in community struggles and institutions” (Pulido, 2008, p. 342); and to “use flesh blood experiences to concretize a vision that can begin to heal” (Cameron, 1981, p. 23). My interest in

writing one's standpoint or "flesh blood experiences" is about seeing how people *embody* their histories, and how those histories *embody* knowledge. Embodied portraiture takes the writings of women of color theorists as lessons and mappings of how to proceed in telling the story.

Additionally, the term *embodied* is to be viewed as a "methodology that sees the body, not as object, but as subject of study" (Csordas, 1990, p. 5). As I collect poetry, journal entries, articles, music, pictures of or made by my participants, I shall treat such artifacts as "specialized *bodies* of knowledge... *embodying* the meaning and reflections that consciously attend to a whole life as it is embedded in sociocultural contexts and communities of affinity" (Dillard, 2000, p. 664; emphasis mine).

Cynthia Dillard's (2000) description of "examining an endarkened feminist epistemology in educational research and leadership" sheds light on the wealth of these specialized knowledges, as she asserts how they are:

A place from which to theorize the leadership and [academic/community] realities of [Pin@y scholars] through situating such knowledge and action in the cultural spaces out of which they arose" (p. 670)... Are there patterns of epistemology that can help us to decipher the patterns of leadership lives, those situated political struggles and personal passions that lie at the nexus of scholarship and activism?" (p. 671).

Embodied portraiture is about going to these places that are fluid, ever changing and always moving yet can "encompass a coherent and dynamic epistemology" (Dillard, 2000, p. 670). There is no easy way to weave together multiple narratives and analyze the process of coming into consciousness for Filipino American scholar-activists in academe. However, I trust that the decolonizing feminist frames which guide my work will – if even in small ways – continue to engage readers in the political

struggle to cultivate a sensitivity to ever-present power relationships in our everyday lives. I join portraitists in this radical mode of writing research, so that such work with its goals to resist durable systems of domination might thrive through coalitional commitment.

Research Design and Methods

Sample Selection

I interviewed six Filipina American educators from institutions of higher education throughout California in varying positions—this includes four Associate Professors, one (full) Professors, and one Associate Vice President. The participants¹⁵ were not considered a vulnerable population (e.g., prisoners, children, pregnant women, cognitively impaired). I made phone calls and sent emails to each of them as they were referred through personal contacts. They were gathered as a nonprobability sampling via the snowball method.

To be included in the study, these six Filipina Americans confirmed they perform teaching practices (i.e. writing curriculum, working with students, or even organizing in the community, etc) by drawing from their life histories as a source of knowledge; personally transformative moments in their lives, which informed their understandings of race, class, gender, and/or sexual identity are recognized as starting places of wisdom. Additionally, they agreed that their pedagogy and overall work in

¹⁵ I use the terms participants, storytellers, and narrators interchangeably.

academia is directly in pursuit of equitable education for minoritized populations.

Below is a list of the participants of this study:

Name	Title	Institution	Department / Field
Rowena Tomaneng	Associate Vice President of Instruction	De Anza College	Educational Management
Leny Strobel	Professor	Sonoma State University	American Multicultural Studies
Liza Erpelo	Associate Professor	Skyline College	Language Arts
Dawn Mabalon	Associate Professor	San Francisco State University	History
Robyn Rodriguez	Associate Professor	University of California, Davis	Asian American Studies
Sarita See	Associate Professor	University of California, Riverside	Media and Cultural Studies

Chart 4. List of Research Participants.

The research was conducted through open interviews and the qualitative data served as anecdotal evidence to support the research theory. Interviews took place in a quiet area within close range in a home or office. Each interview lasted 1.5 to 3 hours and was scheduled at a time most convenient for them. To ensure accuracy in reporting participant statements, high quality digital media was used—sometimes several forms at once (i.e., laptop, smartphone, handheld recorder). This allowed me to directly store interviews onto a hard drive with no need for compression or transfer from media to media (i.e. tape to CD, etc.). These forms of information technology

also expedited the transcription process with digital audio easy to manipulate via computer.

Through the process of conducting interviews and transcribing, I also wrote analytic memos (Saldana, 2009). Analytic memos allowed me as researcher to keep a journal of sorts wherein I could personally relate to participant stories, draw connections to theories guiding my research, see emerging themes, and begin analysis (p. 40).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data I collected consisted of physical and abstract artifacts (see Appendix II – Data Collection and Analysis). Namely, these artifacts were: analytic memos of visits with Pinay faculty; interviews with Pinay faculty; documents associated with personal life histories: journals, poetry, photos, letters, fliers; documents associated with academic work: lesson plans, published works (journal articles or books), fliers, etc.; observations of at least one classroom experience; and observations of events which bridge their academic and community work (i.e., service-learning project, grassroots organizing meeting, book release, etc).

Data analysis occurred across different levels: (1) I identified epistemological relationships to race/class/gender/sexuality (coloniality) from personal life histories; (2) I identified their pedagogies/teaching practices; (3) I identified their participation in critical engagement with community/society; (4) I analyzed analytic memos and interviews to articulate how these relationships developed throughout their life histories inform their pedagogies; and (5) I developed a portrait for each narrator

based on these themes. I anticipated that these levels of analysis would weave and overlap during the time of my research.

I employed narrative coding (Saldaña, 2009) as a means of linking ideas to theories as found in transcribed interviews and analytic memos. It is an appropriate method in that it “explores intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions to understand the human condition through story, which is justified in and of itself as a legitimate way of knowing” (p. 109). Researchers particularly in the fields of identity development and critical/feminist studies use this form of analysis to capture “richly complex” narratives, especially as they explore “subject positioning and presentation of self” (Goffman, 1959).

From January 2013 to June 2014, I selected participants, gathered data, and analyzed the data (See Appendix III - Timeline of Work). I met with my dissertation advisor regularly to discuss emerging themes and issues, or any new literature that might further inform my research, and gather feedback accordingly.

Research Risks

While this study posed no serious ethical problems, there was a risk of loss of privacy as real names and identities are used in the research. There may have been possible psychological risks during the interview process. Interviewees may have felt slight discomfort in communicating their emotions of anxiety or stress when sharing personal life histories. To mitigate the risk of discomfort, I reassured participants that they did not have to answer questions they did not want to and could stop participating at any time.

Confidentiality

The study information was stored in a locked file throughout the entire duration of the study. Participants were assured in their informed consent forms that the data would be used for studies consistent with the original research purpose. They were given the chance to review and edit the electronic recordings and/or transcripts prior to submission of the dissertation. Audio tapes, notes, transcriptions and all related materials with identifying information are stored in personal research files.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations in this study. The stories and nuanced findings in this study are not intended to be generalizable. The participants in my research are not representative of all Filipino Americans in higher education. Due to personal time limitations, classroom observations only occurred once or twice with most faculty members. I was not able to visit the classroom of Robyn Rodriguez. Finally, I did not include Pinay faculty in fields *outside* of ethnic studies, Asian American Studies, American Studies and other social science disciplines. While they may carry stories of resiliency or the politics of ethnic studies professors, I narrow this group with an eye towards unearthing the nuances of their life histories and the academic disciplines they chose.

The How Means So Much More

In academia, I am often asked the subject of my research, rather than *how* I research. I believe our methodological approaches should bear more weight, especially as we come to know the insidiousness of coloniality— its ability to shape our lenses, limit our fields of vision, and drive us to reproduce the very hierarchies, which oppress us and the communities whom we claim to serve. The academic industrial complex maintains that my dreaming, imagination, intuition, emotion and love are unrestrained, irrational modes of inquiry, while these tools offer breathing space to build research anew. How and when am I to pause and deal with the ethical dilemmas of my work? Moreover, how can I honor (rather than neglect) the “richness of knowledge” already residing within, as well as among those who offer me their lives through biography?

This chapter explores the possibilities of social science portraiture as a means to do transgressive research, re-imagines this methodology towards an embodied portraiture, and then provides a mapping of my research design—all in preparation of examining the multifaceted life histories of critical consciousness among Filipina American scholar-activists, while telling my story. Rejecting cultural-deficit models of research, portraiture advocates a “search for goodness” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 2002), this work demands a heightened awareness of the ways in which researchers hear, read, interpret, convey, and position the many voices emerging in the data. To do this, portraiture joins science and art. That is, science, as the systematic process of participating in ongoing intellectual debates of educational

research; and art, as the expressive manner of presenting data through “portraits,” pieces of creative writing (illustrations through words) richly describing the personal/political stories of people hardly seen or heard by mainstream academy. Merging science and art in this way becomes a radical, un-disciplined act. It urges us to dive into the contradictions of human life and engage in “reflexive, messy text” (Marcus, 1998, p. 390), intentionally pushing back on the neat, the linear, positivist and colonizing approaches often celebrated in academia. This chapter illustrates how embodied portraiture—with all its utility and limitations—lends me “the freedom to fashion my own architecture... to stand and claim my space” (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 21-22). Ultimately, it shows how a methodology and research design allows me to dream again, to project a visions towards a communal well-being, as I ventured to capture creatively the embodiment of shared and/or varied epistemological relationships to race, class, gender and sexuality across each of my Pinay scholar-activist participants, while uncovering my own.

CHAPTER IV

PORTRAIT OF LENY STROBEL

It's about 8pm and the sky has grown dark this early autumn evening in Westminster Woods near Occidental, Sonoma County, Northern California. Climbing out of our trusty 1997 Toyota Corolla with me is one of our closest family friends Alexis David and her three-year-old son Emory, my husband Dennis, and our three-year-old Mateo. Dante is growing inside (at six months in utero). After a three-hour drive from San Jose, we stretch out, feel the brisk air and slip into our jackets. We toss our McDonald's drive-thru dinner waste, which we earlier half-jokingly, half-shamefully called our "decolonized dinner" on the road, and find the registration table for the 2013 International Babaylan Conference themed, "*Katutubong Binhi / Native Seeds: Myths & Stories That Feed our Indigenous Souls*," organized by Dr. Leny Strobel and the Center of Babaylan Studies (CFBS).

Who is Dr. Leny Strobel?

Elenita Fe (Leny) Luna Mendoza Strobel whom I reverently call "Ate (pronounced, *ah-the*) Leny" was born in Pampanga, Philippines, "On 9/11," she says delicately at our first conversation in her home, "I'll be 61 in September." She is a faculty member at Sonoma State University teaching while also serving as Chair of the American Multicultural Studies Department. Her range of teaching courses includes: The Multicultural Experience, Globalization and Race in the U.S., Religious Pluralism in the U.S., and the Asian American Experience.

Ate Leny's relationship to Sonoma State spans decades. It was 1991 when, with her Bachelor's in English and Psychology from the Philippines, she enrolled into the master's program in Interdisciplinary Studies as a re-entry student. "I was already older," she notes. Her teaching began early. She recounts:

I started as an adjunct in Ethnic Studies and Liberal Studies. When the tenure tracks positioned opened, I applied. So I lectured for a couple years and then went tenure track. I started lecturing right after my MA program, '93, because I had a mentor there and he started asking me to teach courses. The first course I think was [titled] Asian American Women. He gave me a break and said, "Well how would you like to do this?" [My MA] was in Interdisciplinary Studies... and when you do cross-cultural studies, you form your own committee, you create your own degree, you know, coursework. So I had to go to Berkeley and take PhD courses there. I had to go to SF State and take communication courses there, because Sonoma State did not have any at that level. So I actually took 2 PhD courses at Berkeley for my MA program. It was hard (laughing). It was interesting, it was an interesting time.

"So we're looking at the breadth of twenty years in academia," I remark. She sighs with a pleasant countenance, "Yeah, I guess. I forget to count... Before then I had another life." In two years, she finished her degree with emphases on Intercultural Communication, Cross-Cultural Counseling, and Asian American Studies and then moved on to complete her Ed.D. in International and Multicultural Education at the University of San Francisco School of Education by 1996. Her dissertation was eventually published in 2001. And it was this publication that changed my life.

How It Comes Full Circle

Ate Leny's published dissertation, *Coming Full Circle: The Process of Decolonization among Post-1965 Filipino Americans*, hugely impacted the direction of my scholarship during the time I was pursuing my own master's degree in Asian

American Studies at San Francisco State University in 2006. I came upon it during my research exploring intergenerational conflict over the “American dream” in Filipino families. I was thinking about Americanization. She gave me permission to use the word decolonization. Her “yellow book” (I fondly call, referring to the book cover) opened the door for me and my colleagues to uncover our collective historical trauma, buried but prevalent among us. For my particular study at the time, I was interviewing college graduates struggling through the decolonization process. They adopted American ideals of freedom of choice, individuality, the pursuit of happiness, and (social) justice in their career paths, however using those very ideals to challenge American institutional structures negatively and historically affecting their families.

As Leny Strobel describes in the yellow book:

They take home their cultural and historical knowledge, their understanding and empathy for their parents’ experiences as being shaped and constructed by a colonial past. To see their parents within a historical framework shifts from a sense of blame (Why didn’t you maintain the language? Why didn’t I know about this [historical event]?), to understanding (Now I understand why my parents are the way they are, why they think and believe the way they do) (Strobel, 2001, p. 106).

Dr. Strobel’s *Coming Full Circle* fed my hunger in those days. It validated our experiences before we even experienced them. It looked at the same broken history, critiqued it, embraced it, and reached out for more stories. It modeled the decolonization approach in research by allowing her respondents to simply tell their story. In doing so, her respondents “transform [their] consciousness through the reclamation of one’s cultural self” thereby participating in a collective “constant awareness of ‘Philippine-ness in America, awareness of systems of colonial

imperialism... awareness of the obstacles that [one's] family has had and continues to face." Her book provided responses to questions I had been asking since adolescence about my own relationship to the American Dream.

But There is Something Else

More than half a decade passes and I've entered a doctoral program with more questions about how we come to be who we are – not just as Filipino Americans, but also as women of color—beyond the family, the classroom, the degree, and the career path. What is knowledge production? How do we define it? Is it bound only in books and texts, expressed through rote memorization and measured by standards? Or is there something else? I knew there must be something else. And here she is again, Dr. Leny Strobel, offering some answers to consider in her “red book” (I fondly call) titled, *A Book of Her Own: Words and Images to Honor the Babaylan*, published 2005. She happened to sign my copy in 2010, “The Babaylan in me greets the Babaylan in you!” And in 2013, I'm attending her Babaylan Conference with a deep calling to understand and articulate this “something else.”

This conference is an opportunity for us to look at knowledge production beyond the books and the classroom, in a way that feeds our souls. This conference is an opportunity for us to relate to ourselves and one another at a transcendent level, spiritually and mentally. Note that the *Babaylan* is a significant centuries-old figure in the Philippines. This esteemed person is thought to be of both/neither/either gender who serves the village community as mediator, problem solver, healer, and shaman.

The Babaylan is a Filipino indigenous tradition is a person who is gifted to heal the spirit and the body; the one who serves the community through her role as a folk therapist, wisdom-keeper and philosopher; the one who provides stability to the community's social structure; the one who can access the spirit realms and other states of consciousness and traffic easily in and out of these worlds; the one who has vast knowledge of healing therapies.¹⁶

When I first heard about the concept of the Babaylan back in 2006 during my teaching internship in a Filipino American-based service-learning program, it dawned on me: my paternal grandmother carries a Babaylan spirit.

When I was sick as a child, she laid me down on the couch. Opened my shirt and placed her warm soft hands covered in coconut oil over my chest, stomach, and back. She closed her eyes, faced the heavens, and sang something. Muttered something. Called on something. She mixed it together with her Catholicism and quietly looked down at me, urging me to ask for help from Jesus, "Jesus help! Jesus help." Then she would blow the sign of the cross on my forehead, chest, and back. I would feel the oil cool on my skin. I would feel better, comforted, protected and sometimes out-of-body. What was my grandmother doing? Where did she learn this? What is this power? And how is it that both my girlfriend Lex and partner Dennis, standing at my side, provide me a similarly warm relationship in the figurative sense? Without applying coconut oil to the pain in my body, they hear me when I speak my wounds, can amass stories with lessons pertaining to my problems in that very

¹⁶ Magos, Alicia. 1993. *The enduring Ma-aram tradition: An Ethnography of a Kinaray-a village in Antique*. Manila, Philippines: Cellar Book Shop. As quoted by Leny Strobel in *Babaylan: Filipinos and the Call of the Indigenous*. Published by Ateneo de Davao University Research and Publication Office. Davao City, Mindanao. Philippines. 2010, pg. 1.

moment and then offer direction. It turns out this power is something shared, flowing through our many lineages across time and cultures. For Filipino families, *someone* somewhere down the line has this energy in their hands to heal, magic in their ears to listen, song in their voice to impart wisdom. CFBS celebrates this truth by assembling a summer conference with the vision to:

[f]ocus on sharing knowledge about our Filipino Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP), in order to deepen our experience and practice as culture-bearers in the diaspora... to learn how to access the power of our myths and stories even when colonization has erased most of these from our memory... [and to take] the fragments that we remember [which] can clue us in on how the stories are still embedded in our bodies and in our unconscious, and thus can be reclaimed and re-imagined (Center for Babaylan Studies, 2013).

Excited to see how this understanding of the Babaylan can bring us to meet others on the same soul search, we pick up our registration materials, find ourselves a cabin, and sleep well for the next day.

At breakfast in the community hall is when I finally and briefly get to greet Dr. Leny Strobel. The shuffle of artists, musicians, community organizers, writers, researchers and young families from California to Canada surround us. The 7 A.M. summer sun slices through the windows as people line up for some yummy *baconsilog* (bacon served with garlic fried rice and eggs). Folks are hungry, eager for the day, and happy to gather. Here we are in our layers of forest-friendly attire adorned with tribal textiles and jewelry. The event feels so hippy. So Bay Area. So Cali(fornia). So worldly. I attend the session she is chairing titled, “Dialogue with Culture Bearer Artists: Kidlat Tahimik, Kanakan Balintagos, Grace Nono, and Mamerto Tindongan.” We are situated out on wooden benches beneath sky-reaching

redwood trees. While toddlers Emory and Mateo play amidst sticks and small hills, I try to sit and take notes. I manage to jot down things that feel like they keep echoing inside me; such as this running theme of *kapwa* (“I am because you are”), which I connect to women-of-color theories of “bridging.”

I take note that the Babaylan is a *living* tradition, rather than a tradition of the past, involving humility, kindness, compassion, modesty, wisdom, diligence, energy, enthusiasm, and devotion to service. Keynote speaker Grace Nono challenges the notion of us being “cultural bearers” – that perhaps we’re really not. Instead, our culture is bearing us. Though we see culture seemingly falling away through generations, we must have/hold faith that someone among us (families/communities) will always carry traces of culture and wisdom. We are never completely void. She embodies this understanding by thanking everyone for their presence and the presences they bring with them. She expresses gratitude for the land and the spirits already here. She asks permission from her teachers to speak using their voices and asks for their blessings so that their voices are heard as well. She acknowledges, “When I speak, know that there are two voices coming through.”

World-renown filmmaker Kidlat Tahimik shares his term “Indio-*genius*”, to have us see the genius always residing within or among the indigenous, including our ancestors. It counters the widely held perception of the indigenous as backwards or unknowing. Dr. Strobel describes further that *indio-genius* is:

A word play on the indigenous. Filipino culture-bearers who may not be from land-based tribes, yet they live by the indigenous worldview. [S/he] is animated by her *sariling-duwende* or inner muse or trickster [playful spirit]... will be blessed and guided by her ancestral spirits which makes her wise and

thoughtful about how to live sustainably on the fragile earth. Not easily swayed by a colonial mind-set, she guards her *sariling duwende* by limiting her exposure to the superficial trappings of modern life (Strobel, 2010, p. 19).

The conference becomes a gathering of those who can identify with this description, either through their family lineages or within themselves.

Healing practitioner Mamerto Tindongan originally from Ifugao, Banaue (now residing in Ohio) leads the morning ritual. He chants in *Ilokano* (the language of my father's side), motioning up to the sky and down to the ground as he blesses a small bowl of water in his hand. Standing in a circle around him, we each dip our fingers and apply the blessed water to our foreheads, chests, and navels. I touch my belly, hoping to reach Dante growing inside. The way he chants in *Ilokano* is so familiar, so earthy and songful and to me—the way it is supposed to sound. I *am* thinking of my ancestors. My ancestors are speaking through him; I feel a deep connection in being here, pregnant as I am. I came to this conference thinking I was going to fill my brain with chunks of Babaylan history and philosophy, but the “filling up” is happening in my body. And so I am reminded: knowledge production takes place through experience and feelings in our bodies.

Ain't Feelin' the Academy

My first visit with Dr. Strobel at Sonoma State is surrounded with nerves—all my nerves. It's the first of all interviews in my (committee-approved) dissertation project. I want to be presentable. I want to sound smart. I want to be credible. Look how I have let the academy run me into the ground forgetting my worth. But the universe is listening and sends me to her 10 AM Ethics, Values, and Multiculturalism

class on the most beautiful day of the year yet, in 2013. It's April 10. Temperatures are expected to reach eighty-one degrees and I get to let my toes feel the sun in the countryside. Cows graze in the distance, and pull my heart away from the hustle of Silicon Valley (where I live). The greenery and spaciousness of the campus remind me it is a blessing to be here—to be alive, and to be able.

I'm here to observe her in action. And it isn't a coincidence what happens in that class period. She begins class with a calm presence, introducing her guest and colleague, Dr. Jurgen Werner Kremer. He is a shamanic practitioner and a psychotherapist. When they met some years ago, she learned he had written a lot on decolonizing European thinking and asked, "Have you ever considered writing a textbook for white folks, on decolonizing whiteness?" In response, he recently published the book, *Ethnoautobiography: Stories and Practices of Unlearning Whiteness, Decolonization, Uncovering Ethnicities*, for which she wrote the foreword. Today, he will lead us in some class exercises.

All twenty-five of her predominantly white students sit in their individual school desks circling along the perimeter of the room as Dr. Kremer sits unpresumptuously, front and center. With his long white hair in a bottom ponytail, he closes his eyes softly, takes a deep breath and gives instructions in a gentle voice. I am immediately impressed with how open the students are as they're advised to step out of the classroom, stand before a tree and speak to it, offer it something, and see what the tree says in return. I participate with whole-heartedness and yet mental uneasiness. I step out and see these eighteen to twenty-something-year-olds wander

off without further questioning. I center myself, find a tree of my own and ask, *What is the Meaning of Life?* And the tree says: “To be like me,” That is, “To just to live it. Go with the flow. Whatever happens, happens. Don’t force. Here go the leaves blowing, so go with it.” Suddenly all the nerves I came with begin to subside. I feel them and hush them. I tell the academic brain to take a back seat—because her very class and pedagogy is asking this of me. Stop the anticipation and mental grasp of what is to be documented here. Just be. I let this lesson inform the process of today’s session of research, the process of my *being* with her today.

Back in the classroom, students share: “Yes, I went to this tree for twenty minutes and offered a penny,” “I went to the smaller tree, at the farther end of the courtyard and offered a piece of my hair ‘cuz it had my energy, and I asked the tree a meaningful question about my life and this is what the tree told me.” I sit listening, amazed at their willingness to expose; amazed at their vulnerability, particularly within the confines of an institution that synonymizes vulnerability with weakness.

Dr. Kremer is now drumming away, humming away, ringing bells which hang on bracelets around his wrists for twenty minutes as students close their eyes or look down, mentally turning inward. We look up when the sounds are gone and they report: “I was in my vision, in my journey, I had gone to the bottom of the journey.” Later, students greet me and make it known, “Melissa, don’t be fooled. We had to build this. We couldn’t just – this totally was not on Day 1. It was awkward. We were totally resistant. But we can do this now. We’ve built this over the course of the semester and now we only have 1 month left of class.”

Class ends, students shuffle out and I find my way to Dr. Strobel. Her long a-line skirt, blue and green, matches her green sweater, matches her leather green mary janes. I greet her, “Wow you look so great and glowing!” I am not used to seeing her in green. I usually find her at community gatherings dressed in bright reds and yellows of traditional Filipino native wear. She replies, “Well it’s spring!” She is rooted in the freshness and calmness of spring. The vibrancy of spring is shining through her today. As we walk along together, I could hear myself strain to fill the silence with some intelligent conversation, but then apply today’s lesson: “No. Just be. It’s a warm day. Just enjoy this time with her.” She suggests we stop by her office where she can catch her breath, and then have lunch together at the University Club. At our table, I take a moment to observe—with the music playing over our heads and our plates and drinks in front of us, it would not be wise to pull out my recorder and list of interview questions and disrupt this cordial time together.

She speaks briefly about her academic career—what universities she attended and what degrees she earned along the way. She talks about feeling older, never feeling like she really had a cohort. She laughs when I ask her, “Are you going to any conferences this year?” It’s an interesting phenomenon to her because she noticed at conferences the tricks people have changing the titles of their talks or papers, however presenting the same material. She talks about recognizing the age gap, that there were no other older folks she could run alongside with from her Master’s to her PhD. She recognizes that she’s actually “done” with all that, that she doesn’t have to network, push for a job, relate her work to somebody else’s. Not that she doesn’t need

to build; she just has found other ways to build outside of academic conferences. “I have an Ed.D but have never actually been to AERA (American Educational Research Association) conference,” she chuckles. Conferences for the Association of Asian American Studies, U.C. Berkeley’s Pilipino American Studies, the California Association for Bilingual Education, and more recently the National Association for Ethnic Studies are some she’s attended, but feels the disconnect. The contexts are limiting to her. She explains in her 2013 publication *Back from the Crocodile’s Belly; Philippine Babaylan Studies and the Struggle for Indigenous Memory*:

Part of the work I do as a scholar of decolonization and indigenization is to articulate a criticism of empire and modern civilization... Lately, however, I’ve noticed that I have come to... [a] threshold. My growing dissatisfaction with the narrowness of the discourse on modernity made me want to seek alternative stories. The narrowness refers to the reduction of human history to only the last 500 years of modern civilization and self-definition as a progressive evolutionary process. In this linear progression, human beings are assumed to be incessantly improving... This was unsettling to me because in order to subscribe to this story, I had to deny other stories that I felt in my body and in my soul (Mendoza & Strobel, 2013, p. 11).

By 2009, with a collective of other Pinays, she spearheaded the creation of the Center for Babaylan Studies (CFBS), “a container for research, collaborative projects, and creative expressions involved in the dissemination of Filipino Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices,” (Strobel, 2013). It is meant to be a place of learning, knowing, and embracing the sacred outside of the confines of the ivory tower. She had done so much work in that ivory tower, swimming in theories: “postcolonial, postmodern, literary theory, cultural studies, multicultural studies, transformative learning and pedagogy, and feminist and womanist studies,” (Mendoza & Strobel, 2013, p. 12). Finally, she came to consciously acknowledge how much she was drawn

to creative writing, movement, sound, and rhythm while attending a *Kapwa* conference in the Philippines in 2008, where the gongs played, the participants danced, and where her body felt the tug to open up and give space for new wisdom.

Ate Leny says forthrightly:

People will note that I'm not a scholar. Even my books. Look at my books. None of them are published in University Press. My first book (*Coming Full Circle*) was published in the Philippines. The next one, *A Book of Her Own*, was also published by a small press in the Philippines. The other one, *Babaylan*, was published in Ateneo (Philippines) in 2010. So when I was [once] speaking with colleagues and mentors, they said to me, 'You know what—if no one wants to publish your work, go somewhere else. Speak what you need to speak and make it happen.'

She listened, took that advice, and ran with it. In hearing this story, even I am encouraged to think about the future publishing of my own writing, similar in style and subject. I am encouraged to remember that publishers don't reside only in one place (the States) looking for one thing (traditional, objective writing). I am emboldened to investigate or create alternative pathways as a writer, just as she had. This kind of work, she never did alone.

A Self-Built Platform in Communion With Others

Those encouraging words echo the energy behind the women-of-color collective who published *This Bridge Called My Back* with their own Kitchen Table Press. Where are they going to speak? Who is going to hear their voices? If they are told "No one," then they must create their own platform. For Ate Leny, she basically had to return home to the Philippines, in order to be heard.

Only after reading her yellow book and red book, did I happen to come upon an article she wrote even before those two publications. Her 1993 article, “A Personal Story: On Being a Split Filipino Subject,” appeared to me at a time when I really needed to read it. I was enrolled in a Feminist Epistemologies course. The reading was not assigned; it was my own finding. I was in the midst of drafting my own paper from a “Pin@y Decolonialist Standpoint” in which I too lay out the platform for my own voice to be heard. Naturally, I was wrestling with whether or not I had “the right” to speak about colonization and question the academy and institutions of power. The paper soon turned into a window into my past: small moments in which I learned about race/class/gender in traumatic ways. In her piece, Ate Leny quotes Homi Bhabha: “Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present,” (Bhabha, 1990). I was staring at my own dismemberment, this painful dismemberment; her article helped me put myself back together again as she takes the reader through her own earliest psychologically violent encounters with coloniality.

For instance, she documents the time it was found out her sister had been dating a “Yankee from Maine” who would soon visit their home. For this event, her father made plans to roast the family pig (meant to supplement their income) in celebration of this important white man’s visit. Ate Leny agonizes:

I was assigned to make sure the house was clean, especially the toilet and the toilet bowl. When no amount of muriatic acid would erase the yellow-stained bowl, my sister handed me a copper penny. Here, she said, use this to scrape the stain. I sweated for hours on my knees scraping the yellow. Yellow isn’t

good enough. Only white will do. I think this left a mark in my soul that I wouldn't understand for many many years. And so I made sure that I was liked by all the white missionaries and Peace Corps volunteers who came to visit us (Strobel, 1993, p. 120).

To tell this story, she luckily didn't have to go back to the Philippines. It so happened she befriended Filipino writer NVM Gonzales. She made sure to introduce herself to him, "Maybe at a conference," she tries to recollect. She emails him and says in so many words, "Hey, just take a look at this," and without her knowledge, Mr. Gonzales forwards her piece to Russell Leong of Amerasia Journal, who then publishes it. So while we must create our own platforms, we can never do this kind of work alone. It must be in alignment with the work of others.

Ate Leny breaks this train of thought and asks, "By the way, what was your Master's thesis on? Did you publish it?" I reply, "Oh no! How do you do that? I don't know how--" She suggests, "Oh you just get on a listserv. Like, for the Association of Asian American Studies, talk to folks and ask to be on their listservs, so then you'll see the call for papers and proposals and be ready to submit anything you have." I realize that while I'm interviewing her, she's actually mentoring me, continuing the cycle of support, and I honor the gesture.

What is Education?

During that first conversation at the wooden table in her backyard, she gives the run down of her academic career path and then sighs, "Eeeeh, well, I've slowly come to a realization that education by itself is really just not well integrated with the body and spirit practice, if you're just training your mind. So, I was drawn to the idea of integration or integral consciousness and I started to think beyond race and

ethnicity to spirituality to include embodied practices. What does it mean to embody knowledge? And of course that resonates very much with indigenous Filipino psychology. So my starting point in all of this is Filipino indigenous psychology.”

In 1993, Virgilio Enriquez (also known as the Father of Filipino Psychology) was a visiting professor at UC Berkeley, lecturing and teaching tagalog among other courses. “And I just followed him around,” she chuckles. “Well I attended his lectures, I got to know him. He became a mentor. And also [Filipino author] NVM Gonzales was at [California State University] Hayward at that time. When I was doing my M.A., I would just organize regular *kapihans* (conversations over coffee) every quarter. I would call NVM Gonazales, Jim Sobredo [then a PhD student, now a professor of Ethnic Studies at California State University, Sacramento]. They would all come here whenever there was a visiting scholar from the Philippines, which there were many at that time.” These *kapihans* were sites of critical reflection in which Dr. Enriquez would:

[u]ndermine the students’ excessive awe and unquestioning of Western norms of scholarship by critiquing the whole citational tradition in Western social science where a self-perpetuating logical system tended to be built around the practice of name-dropping of published authorities as sole warrant for knowledge claims.”¹⁷

Pin@y scholars were encouraged to stop relying on the West as a bottomless well of answers. Instead, they were to look inward, trust the wealth of knowledge already in our families, communities, and histories, and share one another’s work for further

¹⁷ Mendoza, S.L. (2005/2006). Tears in the archive: Creating memory to survive and contest empire. In R. Lustig & J. Koester (Eds.). *Among US: Essays on identity, belonging, and intercultural competence* (Rev. ed., pp. 233-245). Boston: Pearson. As quoted in *Babaylan*, pp. 5.

insight. Such dialogues were happening in the 90s, an era of revived Filipino American consciousness and identity formation. Activism and a cultural renaissance of sorts was brewing. Ate Leny's work examines this phenomenon and the "Filipino American community's attempt to find an alternative framework for understanding our location and position in the United States that is not assimilationist," (Strobel, 2010, p. 39).

Ethnic histories in the U.S have always been rooted in the Civil Rights movement of the 60s that saw an emergence of Filipino American ethnic studies courses taught by community activists; construction of Asian American panethnic identity; emergence of panethnic Asian American institutions... Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS) and Asian American Studies (AAS) conferences, online listservs (flips pgabablikloob, Babaylan) became fertile grounds for contesting assimilationist paradigms as well as cultural nationalist paradigms. Henceforth, postcolonial, postmodern, feminist, diasporic, and transnational discourses would provide the underlying ideological framework for the community's efforts at staking a territory on its own terms for talking back to the Empire. Additionally, cyberspace provided the space for the interlinking of resources and dialogues at the local, national, transnation, and diasporic levels.¹⁸

Ate Leny's article, "Born-Again Filipinos" gives us a context within which Filipino Americans were redefining their worlds and shows how this "cultural divide [between immigrant and U.S.-born Filipinos] in the 90s [was] being bridged through political and cultural education on both sides" (37). As an example, she exhibits:

The desire to learn and maintain the Filipino language(s) and other cultural forms becomes the means by which students explore the Filipino part of their identity, creating new narratives that decenter notions of cultural inferiority based on master narratives that portray Filipinos as either having a "damaged culture" or none at all. In the process, they also create a new discourse which

¹⁸ Ibid.

implicates U.S. imperialism and colonialism in the Philippines (Strobel, 1996, p. 40).

Ate Leny's personal involvement since 1992 with the Sarnahan sa Sikolohiyang Pilipino (American Association for Filipino Psychology) founded by Dr. Enriquez gave her a window to see this phenomenon unfold, that of the "born-again Filipino" experience. As Filipino Americans coming-of-age were redefining their worlds, the association was in concert redefining education for themselves.

The association is composed of Filipino American academics, researchers, and cultural workers who are interested in studying indigenous culture and psychology and its implications for cultural identity. What I have come to label as the process of cultural identity formation among Filipino American college students and some community and cultural workers is the attempt to comprehend the interrelatedness of 1) the need for Philippine historical and cultural knowledge, 2) the function of personal memory, and 3) the consequences of language loss. These variables are needed to understand how Filipino / Filipino American (colonial) identities were constructed from the outside. To re-invent or re-imagine our cultural identity as "indigenization from within" is to create alternative narratives and in so doing advance the understanding of the immigrant experience beyond the classical assimilation model. As a result of this project, I have observed that re-invented cultural forms, practices and new narratives are emerging from several locations within our community and that this process of identity formation is an important aspect of our decolonization work (Strobel, 1996, p. 33).

Dr. Enriquez organized the Indigenous Filipino psychology conferences. She thinks back, "We had conferences in Yale, SF State, USF, Hayward, City College, I think. I forgot that a lot of young scholars don't know [this]." Young scholars like myself were in middle and high school at the time in different corners of the country, dealing with bullying, school dances, talent shows, gang fights, keeping friendships, falling in love—completely oblivious to scholar-activism or activist scholarship among

Pin@ys. For Ate Leny, she was entrenched in studying and unravelling the process of decolonization through *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*, as she writes:

This articulation of Filipino psychology is empowering and liberating. What was before known only intuitively is now validated by discourse. What has seemed impossible, due to the lahar of colonizations, as the ethnic identity project, has become possible by reclaiming the indigeneity of our own tongues. The narrative of the colonizers which has dominated our colonial history and educational system is being displaced by a decolonized discourse (Strobel, 1993, p. 126).

Into the mid-90s during her Ed.D program, Ate Leny reaches for unassigned literature to further explore theories of postcoloniality and indigenous knowledges, seemingly alongside her peers. But some colleagues intellectually challenged her, “Even [other Filipino American scholars, my contemporaries] will tell me—Leny, your stuff sits on the fence. Is it academic? Or are you just an organic intellectual?” They’ve earned their PhDs across different fields from various universities, from the U.S. to the Philippines and despite their connectedness will re-evaluate her work with arguably yet another colonizing gaze, another form of dismembering. It is one thing to be questioned by others (i.e, non-Filipinos, non-academics, etc) about your work. But when it is your peer, it might hit home a bit differently. It dislocates you differently. She writes: “In the collective consciousness of Filipinos, dislocation is a natural site,” (p. 124).

When It Hits Home

Many moments of coloniality remain vivid in Ate Leny’s memory. As a young girl growing up in rural San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippines, she bore witness to the whiteness that enveloped the town with the nearby Clark Air Base, “the

largest U.S. military base in Asia, and fifty miles north of Manila,” (p. 117). That whiteness entered her home, as mentioned through her “clean the toilet bowl for the white man is visiting” story. She was raised in a small Methodist church in a largely Catholic country. Her family listened to American songs, read American newspapers, and recited American tales amidst the noise of Filipino superstitions, neighborhood cockfights, and daily soap operas. Ate Leny, having been a Christian and ultimately (mis)educated to adore America as the standard, had one too many encounters with white folks who dehumanized her, from her hometown in the Philippines to her new home in the U.S. when she arrived in 1983, “Are you married to a G.I.? Where did you learn to speak English so well? I’m looking for a domestic helper, do you know one? Do you really eat dogs? Wouldn’t decolonization lead to anti-American feelings? Why talk about the past now? What good does it do?” (Strobel, 2005, p. 18). A harrowing time, the thought of her grandmother came to her in those days, as she retells:

Perhaps she was watching over me and wanted to remind me that I was loved. I thought of her and saw her in my mind as she stringed fragrant buds of *sampaguita*. Always gather the buds at dusk when their fragrance is not wasted in the heat of the sun, she said. And while I helped her string the fragrance, she would reach into her pouch and assemble her *maman*—betel nut, lye, a green leaf as wrapper. She chopped the betel nut, spread a thin layer of the lye on the leaf, wrapped it and put it in her mouth. And then she told stories (p. 121).

In her backyard, warm and lush with the garden she cultivates together with her loving partner Cal, we sit beneath the trellis and she points:

Look at that vine, that’s my grandmother’s vine. I call it that, because my grandmother started appearing in my dreams. And my grandmother used to have *sampaguita*. Have you seen *sampaguita*? And so we would string

sampaguita every afternoon. So when I started remembering her I started thinking, I would like to plant a sampaguita to honor her, and I said well what is the closest here? Well honeysuckle smells like sampaguita and that's why we planted the honeysuckle. So that honeysuckle vine's maybe 20 or 25 years old. That's my grandmother's you know.

Cal tends to the hens a-clucking as I sip this wondrous tea she's made with fresh yerba buena leaves some feet away. Sampaguita is the national flower of the Philippines, a dainty fragrant white flower. In this moment, the vine embodies her *lola*. It is home. Her *lola* is that piece of home; a part of the earth, yet worlds away from the harsh realities of facing the America that is not so kind. When America is always penetrating and poking, unforgiving and misunderstanding, we may find ourselves caught up in the quicksand.

When the World Goes Dark, Stars are There

In 1996, Ate Leny finished her doctorate to find, just months after, a tenure track position open up at Sonoma State in the Ethnic Studies Department. Having already taught some courses in that department, she applied, "Went through all the process of this and that." She pokes her index finger down on the surface of her wooden table here in her backyard, signalling the multi-step process, as well as perhaps the ways in which one is prodded or shoved under the microscope during the course of a job application and interview. Making it to the final round, she was abruptly stopped in her tracks when another applicant filed a lawsuit concerning the hiring procedures for this position. Here is Ate Leny, a finalist among those who've applied, and the job call is cancelled. It was mentally and emotionally taxing, "All very stressful," she chuckles. "So coming home, then, I got into an accident. It was,

you know, I guess it was the stress.” It moments like these where death is close by, the world goes dark. She emerged from the wreck with broken bones in different places, including her ankle. Her doctor suggested exploratory surgery, “to see if my organs were okay. So they opened me up.” She wasn’t just opened up surgically, however, but also spiritually, as she recounts:

What that did to me was [long pause] it was like the zen moment of, you know, do I really wanna die being just... being ambitious because I was so stressed out already? That was [taking a moment to find her words]— I just gave up my ambition of ever getting on a tenure track. I said, “I don’t care about academics anymore. If I don’t teach anymore, that’s fine. If I just teach one class, that’s fine. I’m not going to join the rat race. You know? [looking me in the eye] It’s not worth it.

The near-death experience put life in a different perspective indeed. Ate Leny, now the survivor of a car accident set in motion a gentler pace from day to day. Forget the rat race. Forget that chase up some imagined academic ladder. Let’s just be. After all, it turns out that someone or something else is really in control of the wheel; there is another guidance and another way to *be* guided. All of the external pressures from the academy were no longer worth sacrificing her well-being. From across the table, I could feel her inhale the wisdom from that memory. I received the message as, “Just follow from within.”

Soon enough, after recovery and some years passed still teaching as adjunct faculty, the same position opened up again; this time, under more amicable circumstances, “It was a tenure track position specifically to hire adjunct faculty,” she describes, tapping on the table to drive her point, “to allow some of the long-term adjunct faculty to get tenure. Sooo then,” she says with a great sigh. With all those

years of adjunct faculty work carrying through in that one breath, she says, “I was hired.” And just last year, she was promoted to full professor. Holding that title, for her, isn’t about the over-glorified climb up through the academic ranks. She reveals, “I just did what I did without consciously thinking that I am being in competition or that I am trying to get tenure or I wasn’t comparing myself to other scholars.” This way of reaching full professor is a far cry from the way we in academia are taught to “move up.” Success relies on competition and comparison. It’s a dog-eat-dog world. I’ve read once that comparing yourself to one another leads to suffering. But what happens when you see another, and then see yourself?

A decade after Ate Leny’s car accident, she finds herself at her father’s bed side, shortly before he passed away in 2007. This is another moment where the world seems to grow dark, but as we’ve learned, there are stars. In this moment, seeing her father in his frail condition was a window into her own self. As he looked back at her, she was suddenly reminded of the things she did not want to be, as she writes:

My father is the epitome of a split psyche visited upon him by the violence of colonialism. He fell deeply into the pond of Methodism and it shaped his life (and thus, mine) forever. As a man of faith (he is a pastor), he is sought by others to preach, to officiate at baptisms, funerals, and everything in between.. As a husband and father, he is emotionally distant... So that morning... as he recited bible verses to me, I cried because I sense this primal wounding (that was also mine). Perhaps I’ve been reading too much about patriarchy, capitalist control, gender oppression, colonialism, etc. Perhaps it was my recent immersion in indigenous literature and indigenous spirituality that made me see this split more clearly... Yet in that moment, as I watched my father, I knew what I didn’t want to become. I want to be whole and spend the rest of my life feeling whole (Strobel, 2010, p. 24).

Feeling whole means: acknowledging every piece of you that’s been torn, challenged, or gone unheard. Feeling whole means: shifting your focus away from the grind and

gears of capitalism, of academia; shedding that cloak and presenting your authentic self, walking your truth. Perhaps her father needed to walk that life path of a split-psyche, so that she could bear witness to its collapse and find her way home. This is where you move from the dark and towards the stars that were there all along. This is how you begin to give precious attention to all the levels of knowing that reside within. Including your dreams.

Dreaming as Knowledge Production

Dreaming is an alternate plane of awareness. If the mind goes there, there must be something to be gained. It is another place of story and learning. As Ate Leny shares some dreams, I am a bit uncomfortable as I am ill equipped to speak on the power of dreams, and I have yet to learn about or experience this power myself. I just know I wake up some mornings with a nightmare that throws me out of bed, a pleasant dream that starts my day nicely, or a strange dream that I eventually ignore. Today, her dreams are stories about which I'm excited to hear. I want to listen. I want to hear about the connections she's made. And I want to learn. Fortunately, she recorded them in a journal. Reading them is like meditating or holding a prayer for next steps in her life.

Often her dreams carried instances of fear. In one dream, she was giving a talk at a conference, but standing behind a lectern so as to hide her pregnant belly. She woke up asking herself what she was hiding in real life. And that question became her guide, "Why are you hiding? What are you hiding? Maybe that was during a time when maybe I didn't really want to put my work out there. I really didn't want to put

myself out there because I didn't think that other people were interested in my experience." Other times, she had dreams in which everyone was walking in one direction as she walks alone in the opposite direction; or dreams where she's in a stage play, forgetting her lines, or wearing the wrong costume. She also had a lot of dreams of being under water, "You know the water is like your subconscious," she glides her hands, palms open, fingers spread, this wooden table surface as if it is water itself, stirring and stirring till one particular recurring dream comes to mind.

For ten years, from age forty-five to fifty-five, she kept dreaming about her favorite boy in high school. As research would require her to go home to the Philippines, she would gather with high school friends from Pampanga and run into him on occasion. The story is they "were always paired up since the second grade," she says. I laugh. It's too cute. "We were together in elementary and high school," she smiles. There is a history between them, an undeniable gravitation towards one another. This was evident in her dreams, which were the same for this period of ten years. The dream was always her as a teenager asking, "Why won't you love me? Why won't you love me?"

And one day, she had the chance to reveal this to him over dinner, "Okay, now that we're alone, can I ask you a question?" I am giggling in my seat, excited for the story, anticipating the heartbreak, or some turning point. I can feel it in my chest. I love this love story already. She continues, "I said, you know I had this dream— [we are laughing together] – for ten years, Why won't you love me?" There was some shock, and then some relief as she remembers he confirmed, "Well, I have always

loved you. It's the one secret in my life that I never told anyone." Now I'm just a giddy mess. Ate Leny's eyes soften and widen, "But that was like a psychic breakthrough for me. A very powerful experience." I've lost her. There is a larger take away from the sappy romance by which I'm intrigued. What is the wisdom here? For Ate Leny, the dream wasn't about him. It was about what he represented in her life. She took note:

Okay, this guy is someone who has never left home. He decided he was going to stay and serve his country, which he did. He's in public service, very high up. He's very kind, [has] integrity, just really a very nice human being. And I said he represents the part of me who wishes to have never left home. I said, "I love you because you represent that part of me who wishes not to have left home. And I had to leave in order to come home." Why won't you love me? It had to do with my connection to the homeland, my feeling for needing to be connected to the land, to a home.

Dreams guide us home. Home is where the heart is. And the heart is this miraculous, complex thing beating inside us, which pumps our blood, regulates our breath, and stores our authentic voices. So we must follow that tracing back to ourselves.

Personal Voice as Meditation

At a Siklohiyong Pilipino conference at Yale, anthropologist Harold Conklin (known for his research on the indigenous Mangyan culture in the Philippines) was in attendance. "*Pero puti* (but white)?" I ask. She confirms, "*Oo* (yes), he's a very big name." At once I notice the way our conversation dances. I recognize that I tend to match the vocal melody of the person with whom I am conversing, the way in which one matches the rhythm of their partner on the dance floor. You have to find your balance in that groove or the dance is over. With Ate Leny, I speak in a sing-songy tone. It's the Filipino way. It's singing for my elder. Singing with my elder.

“So I was presenting on the issues of power within interracial marriages,” she continues, explaining how she had pulled from her lived experience as a Pinay married to a white American. Harold Conklin approaches her, standing at roughly six-foot and three-inches, and suggests, “You know, maybe you don’t need to decolonize yourself. You just need to de-professize yourself.” I squint my eyes slightly seething in anger, imagining how I would have shot him this very look on my face. And then he adds, “And try not to theorize, but just think of the stories that you would like to tell.” Ate Leny walked away feeling slighted, shamed, and belittled—as if he were telling her she wasn’t good enough to theorize; as if he were saying, “Enough with your theorizing. Just stick to stories,” she cracks up. I am not laughing. I’m bothered by his patriarchy at work. But again, in this second of darkness, there is light.

She came home from the conference and stepped out into this backyard under the trellis where we now sit. She thought about that exchange, meditating on the question, “Who are you? If you could just tell your story, who are you?” With pen in hand, she settled in, and just started writing. Whatever flowed from her veins through her wrist and onto the page, she wrote. “And it started to flow out of me—these *tagalog* words. Oh, this is who I am.”

Finding this personal voice is a journey of patience. That is, questions upon questions and long periods of silence in the service of one’s soul-search, sometimes accompanied by another human being who might offer guidance. Yes, a therapist. Ate Leny was growing exhausted of constantly entering white spaces as an immigrant Pinay and feeling brokenness. Someone, come make sense of this madness.

She first sought a therapist nearby who was a second-generation Pinay, “Dito, dito [here, here]. Daughter of Manongs [Filipino American agricultural workers],” she emphasizes. This woman’s geographic and ethnic location were like “welcome” signs for Ate Leny. This therapist is someone who will surely understand. But on their very first session, this Pinay suggested she practice some visualization. I laugh as Ate Leny makes an awkward face, mimicking:

“Okay, visualize yourseelllf [sighing] as a princess in a tower in a castle.”
Blah blah blah. And I said, “You knooow, I cannot get there.” I said, “I just keep seeing this little girl in a nipa hut in a field of green *palay* [rice fields].”
And she said, “Oh, you’re right! I’m so sorry.” I never went back to her.

What a waste of money it is to have to educate someone before they can help you.
What a waste of time to sit with someone whose psyche doesn’t align, who perpetrates yet again this one-way relationship too often experienced already in individualistic America. “And then I don’t feel comfortable you knowing me, and I’m not knowing you—there’s no reciprocity. Even though they’re being paid to listen, right? Because there still is no *kapwa* (interconnectedness), you’re not really developing your *kapwa* relationship.” I resonate with this expectation.

It took me some time to find my own therapist the first year of my doctoral program. I too needed another woman of color to help me put myself back together after my spirit had been crushed in an abusive romantic relationship, while on this harrowing journey in grad school. For Ate Leny, she eventually settled with a Jungian therapist in Berkeley named Ruth Hill, a Filipina *mestiza* (of mixed heritage). She would sit in sessions with her before going to class at Cal. And Ruth Hill listened to

her dreams, to her anger and pain. She listened to her voice, as Ate Leny writes in her 1993 article, “A Personal Story: Becoming a Split Filipina Subject”:

Yes, I know. There is anger and defiance in my voice. How can I help it? I have not spoken for centuries. I didn't know I had a voice. I didn't know I could speak. Must I now beg forgiveness for such outrageous rantings and ravings? Let me for a moment listen to my own voice and hear the timbre and resonance of my own truth that has been denied for so long. Perhaps soon the anger will be spent and I will be able to move on (Strobel p. 123).

Sometimes it is tremendous help to be in the company of another who has the skill to radically listen to our raw truths. In these sessions, Ate Leny can speak to and eventually address forthrightly the academy and other institutions of power, which render her silent. The teaching we come away with from this encounter with Conklin is that when our voice is questioned, we go back and check in with ourselves, check in with our bodies; only to realize that sometimes in order to stay the course, we must build our own platform. As Chicana feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa would say, “If going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space...my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture” (Anzaldúa, 21-22). Ate Leny is building away.

Teaching Today Through *Kapwa* (interconnectedness)

We recall the unorthodox way in which Professor Strobel (Ate Leny) holds class, encouraging her students to tap into their consciousness through the sounds of drums and walking meditations of sorts. In the beginning, her students would understandably retort, “This is weird.” She agreed, “Yes it is.” “This is uncomfortable,” they would say, and she'd warn: “It's going to get uncomfortable.” Even by the end of the semester, she wasn't completely out of the woods. Ate Leny

once posted on Facebook at the end of a Fall term how one white student of hers didn't take too well the notion of "healing the white mind." She wanted to work with the argument that white folks just need to be "exposed to different perspectives." Ate Leny shares her response:

I told her and the class that the white mind has been exposed to many different perspectives, that we have amassed a wealth of knowledge and information and perspectives but always from the position of colonizing and appropriation, of supremacy and that this is what needs healing. But it's difficult to heal when we don't want to own our history and we remain disconnected to it so that we cannot face the question of what our intellectual, political, and moral obligations are to the peoples who have suffered under these supremacist notions.

In a gentle way, Ate Leny first expressed how she understood the student's apprehension. Nonetheless, she urged her to "face the hard question" after having had a full semester exploring the ethnoautobiographical process (a practice of introspection) in class. The student took this guidance and wrote in her paper:

It is very rare in our western culture to be challenged and forced to question and relearn everything you've ever known to be true. It wasn't until this reflection that I realized that this class was trying to get me to do that. I rejected it and pushed it away because it was unfamiliar and it intimidated me. By healing our minds, we rid ourselves of supremacy, gender inequality, racial inequality, religious inequality, etc. and we begin to separate ourselves from the toxic myths we are exposed to.¹⁹

As women of color in the classroom, it seems we're expected to provide a certain quality of care, a kind of emotional labor perhaps not expected so much by white male professors. Through *kapwa*, we do the best we can by offering care, while saving space for ourselves to recover from these tensions in the teaching and learning

¹⁹ Facebook post, Dec. 3, 2013.

process. This concept of *kapwa*, of seeing one's self in others (especially in other students), isn't something you can package into a binder and pass onto the next teacher to use for professional development, as Ate Leny acknowledges:

That's why it's so hard for me to answer when people ask me: well, how did you come from point A to point B? There was no plan. There was no road map. There was no 1, 2, 3: this is how you should do it. But in indigenous Filipino psychology there is this term, you can call it *magka-papa* [to flutter close by] or *magbabaybay*, you know, you're coasting along but while you're coasting along you're observing; it's phenomenology, really. It's just focus and concentration on how things are connected and just being sensitive. It's a very fine-tuned skill that's developed from within... the deeper you know your *loob* (inner self).

We return to meditation as this place from which we find our voice. Dreaming as knowledge production. Understanding moments of darkness as opportunities to find the light. Time with Ate Leny has been a retreat in and of itself. Visiting her over the course of six months in her Californian bungalow home, its nooks adorned with colorful tapestries and art pieces; making lunch in her kitchen with her, breaking bread with her and her husband at the table, staying for hours at a time to just connect and *be* – not so much a researcher, but a human being – all of this has been a chance for me to listen to her stories as a window to my own story. With her, I developed my inner knowing, a sharpened sense of *loob*.

Gratitude to Ate Leny

Allow us to travel back to the moment I am sitting beneath the sky-reaching trees in Westminster Woods at the Babaylan Conference on a sunny day. Three-year-olds Mateo and Emory play along the hill as I jot dot down notes. In this “Dialogue with Culture Bearer Artists: Kidlat Tahimik, Kanakan Balintagos, Grace Nono, and

Mamerto Tindongan,” I listen to Ate Leny speak on the notion of written language as erasure of oral traditions. We just don’t tell stories anymore. My grandfather told me stories. My grandmother told me stories. Somewhere along the line, my parents thought storytelling was no longer important because they decidedly (or subconsciously) never told me any, really. But here I am interested in carrying on that tradition in my work, as Ate Leny calls out, “We are now finding ways to use the written word to reflect orality—our orality.”²⁰ We know colonization is about loss and severe disconnect. Decolonization is thus about connecting and connection, which we find powerful in the storytelling. She argues:

For now we need to tell our stories. Dig up memories. Sing old songs in an old tongue. Write poetry in praise of Bathala. Heal in the name of our Babaylans. Dance to the rhythm of kulintang gongs. Nostalgic perhaps. Romantic perhaps. Commodification and misappropriation perhaps. But let us be. The gods must be happy that we are making our way home, at last. In a place far removed from the homeland perhaps. But it is as close as we can get to Home (Strobel, 2001, p. 19).

This portrait is our glimpse of her journeying home. Following along in the tracing of her journey is an act of reverence. She calls it, “research as ceremony.” It is a journey rooted in love, “Ultimately,” Ate Leny claims, “it is the love that has been kindled in us that gives form to the work that we do... It is in hindsight that now I see more clearly what I have fallen in love with—the beauty of being an indigenizing and decolonizing Filipina,” (Mendoza & Strobel, 2013, p. 13). This opportunity to walk together on a path back to our own selves, back to our own

²⁰ Babaylan Conference 2013.

homes, brings me to a place of abundance. We have so much inside us. And so much more, when we share.

CHAPTER V

PORTRAIT OF DAWN MABALON

It's a sunny, but windy and cool Saturday afternoon in the SOMA district, San Francisco. Dennis and I have scored a parking space! We break open our doors, feel that freezing wind, pick up toddler Mateo in the backseat and fumble around at the brand new credit card-charging parking meter. We cross the busy street to reach 6th and Market, site of the Bayanihan House which holds much history, representing the influx and livelihood of newly arrived Filipino immigrants in the area since the early 1900s. It now provides affordable housing to Filipino WWII Veterans and other displaced senior citizens; and on its ground floor is the Bayanihan Community Center, providing programs engaging multiple sectors of the community. Today, the center is holding a celebration for the book release of, *Little Manila Is in the Heart: The Making of the Filipina/o American Community in Stockton, California*, written by Dawn Bohulano Mabalon, Ph.D. She's who we're here to support and see.

We rush in and find seats with friends towards the back. Another Pinay scholar, Evelyn Rodriguez, is closing her talk about her recent publication of *Celebrating Debutantes and Quinceaneras: Coming of Age in American Ethnic Communities*, and lucky for us we've arrived just in time for Dawn's talk. She introduces her book by first reading a passage from it, giving us a taste of the work that is now out there on shelves and in libraries. So commanding and inviting is Dawn's voice. She's taking us back to Stockton in the 1930s through oral history. I want to be in the time she is talking about. I want to see what her informants saw.

She reveals the stories she unearthed concerning female relations and jealousy— things about which Pinays would customarily keep quiet. But here, *walang hiya ditto* (no shame). Dawn responds to audience questions about the truths throughout the stories shared with her. It's bold and liberating, while at the same time presented in a way that offers us to think beyond what's written on the page. This is her gift, after all.

Who is Dawn Mabalon?

I first met Dawn in the summer of 2006. I was in the Excelsior District's Filipino Community Center, attending a *Tibak*²¹ training. This one was specifically designed for SFSU students recruited into the Pin@y Educational Partnerships [PEP] program to become Filipino American Studies teaching interns throughout SFUSD. Dawn was the guest speaker. I was one of twenty-seven budding educators in the room. With our many desks encircling her in a u-shape formation, she stood in the middle, presentation pointer in hand and asked us, "What is history?" These words were lit up, bold and yellow on the black screen behind her. We thought deeply. Maybe too deeply. She clicked her pointer to the next slide and read one word on the center of the screen: Interpretation. "History is an interpretation," she began and the day's lesson opened up new ways to think about the history we've been taught, and the kind of histories (and herstories) we would be teaching *differently*. It was her first challenge to me, as a mentor of sorts, and she didn't even know it.

²¹ *Tibak* is short for *aktibista* (activist). Arnelson Concordia and Sergio Robledo-Maderazo created *Tibak* training in the early 2000s with the hope to effectively prepare teacher-activists.

Dawn is a Pinay scholar-activist in my book. But she wouldn't outright call herself that. Instead, she'd simply say, "I hustle," as she did one afternoon in her office at SFSU when I asked her to describe what she did for a living. It's a funny question to ask a person who holds this tricky role. "What do I do for a living? I hustle. I hustle stories." Dawn breaks into laughter, and I believe her completely. The hustle she lives became evident the moment I walked into her office. She's a "no nonsense" woman. With a warm smile and stories to tell, her fast pace orating gets us down to business—I've begun recording 3 minutes after saying hello. Our first conversation together would only last 24 minutes, but hold so much to unpack. Dawn sighs and continues, "Okay um, I am an associate professor of history, so my day job, the job that I get paid for is to teach U.S. History here at [SF] State, to do research, and to publish in my specialty which is Filipina/Filipino American History, and that takes up the majority of my time." Indeed, I've seen her shine in this role. In fact, just a week prior I caught her presentation at the Association of Asian American Studies conference in Seattle. With esteemed colleagues at her side, she was smartly dressed complete with freshly manicured red gel nails and hair, shiny with full bounce.

Today, she sports a relaxed style wearing all black from head to toe: hoodie, v-neck, leggings that reach her calves, and Toms slip ons, as she goes on to share her work in the community as a historian: preserving the last remaining buildings of Historic Little Manila site in her hometown of Stockton with the Little Manila Foundation; and preserving and disseminating Filipino American history as a national scholar on the Board of the Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS).

When Dawn talks about hustling, however, it's about how she "hustle[s] stories everywhere as a professional historian, as a community historian, as a public historian. Trying to preserve and tell our community's stories in all of these different ways. I think that's what I do for a living. Don't get paid enough to do it, but get paid okay." The corner of her mouth curves upwards to a smile and she breaks into chuckle, "At least I get paid! I guess, that's the way to think about it, but it could be more," Dawn adds, her eyes blink gently.

Immediately, I think about the grim financial future ahead, asking out loud, "Oh gosh, what's it gonna be like for me?" We sit with the reality that the university is changing. It's a different time than when she first entered in the early 2000s, and she reminds me, "It has nothing to do with how good you are. A lot of really smart people aren't getting hired simply because the public university system is in a shambles." So despite her everyday hustle, Dawn feels quite fortunate for the positions she holds.

Dawn started at San Francisco State University in 2000, as a lecturer teaching courses on Asian American Women and Asian American History, a class a semester here and there as she was finishing her dissertation at Stanford. SF State wasn't the only place she was teaching part-time. At one point, she was at SF State, Berkeley, *and* Stanford, trying to make ends meet, "I couldn't keep everything all—it was crazy! I didn't show up for the first day of class at Berkeley 'cuz I got all confused with my dates!" she shares, completely amused with herself and all the wild memories that year brings up. It was 2004. By early winter, she had completed her

dissertation at Stanford. By spring, she was lecturing at the most prominent campuses throughout the Bay while applying for jobs. She lands the position of Assistant Professor of History at SF State, starting fall. With no gigs lined up in between, however, she faced her “summer of extreme poverty, which is kind of what happens in the timing of the academic world!” Dawn remarks. She rechannels the experience:

So I remember I got an eviction notice. I mean it was crazy! I had this summer where I didn't have any paychecks and then I told my landlord like "Look, okay I got this job at State. I'm gonna actually have *real pay*,"—for the first time in my life since maybe my job in high school or college, a *regular* paycheck. You know when you're in grad school, it's like grant check to grant check. Loan check to loan check. Like, oh here's my one check for the one class I taught here and there. So I explained to my landlord, “Okay I swear I'm gonna get paid in September.” She's like, “Okay I'm gonna have to still give you an eviction notice because that's still technically what I'm supposed to, but I'm not gonna evict you. I'll wait for your paycheck in September [laughter].”

We learn how to survive in those ways. Coming from a working class background and you know you just, we learn how to hustle, right? And how to survive and get by. I look back at those lean years and I wonder, wow. It's amazing how we all get through. We do. Somehow.

Dawn's hustling skills were in full throttle that year. She was on a seemingly linear trajectory towards this role: attending prestigious universities, finishing strong, and taking up solid lecturing gigs. Turns out, being a professor of history was not at all Dawn's dream to begin with. She originally wanted to hustle stories another way.

This Was Not My Dream at First

“It's funny because I think um,” Dawn pauses, leaning forward from her chair, “I never thought that I would be doing this.” She wanted to be a writer. Any kind of a writer. Her whole life growing up, this is what she knew she was meant to be. It began with her love of reading. She was a voracious reader. She loved fiction and

found history much more interesting in high school, despite being a rather mediocre student, “just not very motivated at all. Just very pissed off and angry about the ghetto educational system we were in, in our south side ghetto high school,” Dawn says matter-of-factly, shaking off the irritation in her body. She was “like #256 of the of the class of 300.” She cut class all the time. Class was boring. Some teachers were good, while others were simply terrible, “It was like one of those, Lean on Me schools [laughing] you know! Stand and Deliver! It was like a typical kind of 80s working class, one white person in the whole school or maybe three,” she half-jokes. Upon graduating, she knew she had to clean herself up, go to community college, and redeem herself in the eyes of her family who were wondering what she was going to do with her life. She transfers to UCLA and now everybody is seeing her in the light of, “hometown girl turned good,” Dawn chuckles, “‘cuz I was bad in high school.” There were suddenly all these new expectations of her—even the hope that she would be Valedictorian. “Of course I wasn’t,” Dawn quips.

Nonetheless, her insatiable hunger for critical readings of history and her constant involvement in journalism planted the seeds of some early consciousness-raising. She was editor of the school newspaper from junior high, to high school, to community college. “I mean, my whole path [was to be] a journalist, basically,” explains Dawn. She didn’t see herself as a hard news reporter, but a feature writer.

Doors opened up for her along this path. Upon her sophomore year at San Joaquin Delta Community College in Stockton, Dawn entered an annual contest for Sassy magazine, a “really really cool magazine aimed at teenage girls that was anti-

vogue, anti-seventeen; it was feminist, it was hip hop, it was punk rock, it was this really cutting edge magazine that talked about birth control and race and daring [topics for teens] for the late 80s, early 90s.” From a pool of entries across the nation, Dawn was selected and flown to New York to be their editor for a special reader produced issue.

With her heart set on writing political reporting features as a profession, Dawn transferred to “one of the big journalism schools,” UCLA. Unable to get into the impacted Political Science major of her choice, she was offered a list of other majors that might appeal to her, and half-blindly settled on History casually thinking, “I guess I like it.” While taking up courses, she worked as a journalist for UCLA’s Daily Bruin, “a newspaper bigger than most small towns’ in California,” Dawn chuckles. As journalism students use their summers to go do internships at major daily newspapers such as the Chicago Tribune or the LA Times, Dawn spent hers interning at USA Today right before the start of her senior year. The experience turned the tables for her, as she recalls:

I came back really kind of disillusioned about journalism. It was already at that moment becoming more and more dumbed down, more and more mainstream, more and more corporate, you know. The long stories I wanted to write were being cut down to you know half. I thought, okay I still wanna be a writer. I still wanna be a journalist, but maybe for some kind of political magazine... not mainstream news.

By the end of her senior year, Dawn had a job waiting for her at the Dallas Morning News. “Dallas, Texas?” I ask incredulously, thinking of the red state, this far away place both in geography, demographics and politics. “Dallas, Texas!” she confirms. We lock eyes and break into laughter. She was supposed to leave immediately after

graduation. She even listed the job as a form of income upon her purchase of a new car out in Moreno Valley while her family was visiting the week following her graduation. It was an exciting time, Dawn shares, beaming:

I got all this graduation money [giggles] and I bought a car. This all happened in 3 days: I went to Toyota. My aunt left me, she's like, "Oh go look at cars." This [was] more money than I had ever had in my life, like \$4000 in my pocket. And I was like, "I want that." It was a Tercel, and they [asked], "Do you have a job?" And I [answered], "Yeah, at the Dallas Morning News," I put that on there! A couple days later, I had the car and [my family asked], "Aren't you gonna pack? Aren't you gonna get ready? Where are you gonna live?" I still hadn't made a plan about where I was gonna live, and then I decided, "You know what, I'm not gonna go." It was this weird 3 weeks of my life because it was the first time I had never had a plan for what I was gonna do. I didn't know what was gonna happen next!

I lift my chin upward, slowly taking that story in. Had I been in her position, I would have lost it. The fear of the unknown is my greatest fear. For Dawn however, something else was stirring. Her dream of becoming a non-mainstream journalist writing feature stories had been quickly dissolving when her senior year brought her intimately closer to the topic she would love to write about most: Filipino American history.

How I Came to My Truth

As a history major at UCLA, Dawn was taking Ethnic Studies, Asian American Studies, African American History, Native American History, and Chicano History. It wasn't until her senior year when she found herself sitting in a Filipino American Experience course with the late Uncle Roy (Royal) Morales. To thousands of Pin@y students who had the privilege of meeting him in the courses he lectured, or the tours he gave through P-Town (Historic Pilipino Town, Los Angeles), Uncle Roy

gave history a new meaning. It wasn't just any history, but *our* history he was teaching. It was *our* (youth) generation he was really concerned about. As a trained social worker, community leader and scholar, he spent his life doing just that. Tears form in Dawn's eyes as she remembers Uncle Roy, "this really pivotal, pivotal mentor in so many of our lives. Three generations of us were raised by him...He would be the last person to say that he was a professional historian even though he knew more than anybody."

Dawn had the opportunity to work with him as a teaching assistant (TA) in his class—something that appealed to her not only because she enjoyed his class and performed academically well in it, but because she learned she could get paid while helping out in this fun learning environment he set up, as Dawn reiterates, "I was hustling! [During the time I was] working at the Daily Bruin Newspaper, I was TAing for Uncle Roy. I was an undergrad and I was grading! And he was letting me do it. I was getting \$600 a month to do it, I mean that was my groceries!" But her experience in this space brought her to fall in love with the history major she had chosen.

By spring of Dawn's senior year, she becomes more deeply involved with UCLA's student organization, Samahang Pilipino, as well as in the larger Filipino community in the area. It's the third week in June when the job in Dallas is set and waiting for her, while at the same time, the Samahan Pilipino Education Retention Project (SPER) was in search of a new director. Dawn stopped in her tracks. That path leading to journalism had to be questioned. Dawn embraced other options: to apply for the position at SPER, work there for a year alongside the very Filipino

community she now longed to be in, and then apply for UCLA's Asian American Studies master's program.

And this was the moment in which she gave it to the wind: purchased her first car in Moreno Valley, declined her new job at Dallas Morning News, applied to work at SPER, and applied for the master's program. She didn't know what was going to happen next. She anticipated getting hired, and if that fell through, she didn't have a Plan B. It was the first time she recalls ever having taken life by the reins. Much to her delight, the universe answered her call: she landed both the job and entry into a new chapter in her academic career. It was an entirely new road she was traveling, and she wasn't going alone. Key people along the way noticed her, pulled her aside, and pushed her to use her talents in the academy.

“Someone Believed in Me”: How Mentors and Loved Ones Light the Way

Dawn's talents as a scholar historian are taking her places. She is on fire right now. As she shifts position in her office chair, her keys dangle from the lanyard around her neck, and I'm thinking about all the movement not only of and around her body, but also in her mind and spirit. We're enjoying this conversation this morning, but by tonight, she'll be catching a red-eye flight to DC. Recognizing she's older now, she won't sleep easily on those plane rides, but she has to be there. She'll spend the first day perusing the Smithsonian where she helped with an exhibit on Asian American History. The next day, as part of a celebration for Asian Pacific American History Month, she'll be speaking. And did I mention before we even sat down together, that she had just come from a meeting with another Asian Americanist

working through a possible book on Koreans in San Francisco, similar Dawn's, *Filipinos in Stockton*? I'm grateful for this time she's allotted to share with me despite all the things on her table—a practice of giving and selflessness perhaps modelled to her during her own time as a graduate student.

During the spring semester of senior year at UCLA as a History major, Dawn continued riding the wind as a future journalist. That is, until the teaching assistant of her Philippine History course sat her down. Her name? Cathy Ceniza Choy, now professor and chair of UC Berkeley's Ethnic Studies Department and recognized author of, *Empire of Care* and *Global Families*. During her office hours one day, Choy asked undergraduate student Dawn the question that sparked everything: "have you ever thought about graduate school?" Dawn was struck, as she replays the memory:

I was like, "No? [laughing nervously] I wanna be a journalist after this. I'm gonna go and get my job at the LA Times or Chicago Tribune," or whatever. And she's like, "You should really think about graduate school. I think you're a really, really good writer and I think you should think about going on and getting a master's and maybe more than that." And I was like, huh? And it was the first time anybody had ever said that to me. And I always tell her that—she kind of laughs it off, haha—but I think that's really important. Because for one, I had never seen a Pinay professor [or] teacher at that level. But it was somebody in that position that told me: hey you're good enough to think about doing this.

Only in that moment had Dawn even considered going forward for a master's. But even then, she imagined being a journalist after because for her, all she wanted to do was write. "That's what I wanna do! Whether it's stories or non-fiction or whatever it was, I was like why would I need a PhD to do any of that?" PhD was not anywhere in her vision of the future. At the time, graduate school meant a master's, particularly

Asian American Studies. And she was fine with that. But Choy wasn't the only one giving her the nudge.

History professors Henry Yu and Valerie Matsamoto further encouraged Dawn to think about the PhD. Even her roommate —then PhD student in Education (now tenured professor and chair of San Francisco State's Asian American Studies Department), Allyson Tintiango-Cubales—wouldn't let her off the hook. And for Allyson, it wasn't merely a suggestion; it was a challenge, "What are you, scared?" Dawn mimics her voice, "Like, come on, why don't you do this?" When Dawn considered taking a year off first and then continuing on, Allyson pushed again, "Nah, why don't you just do it now?" Dawn shakes her head in amusement, recalling that moment in the Laundromat. Two single graduate student Pinays, arranging their clothes and thinking about Dawn's next steps. She finally decided: "Gosh, stop nagging me! Okay fine."

In that same year, 1995, she met Terry Valen (now executive director of San Francisco's Filipino Community Center) who was pursuing his PhD in Public Health. Being that it was the mid-90s, a special point in time in which Pin@ys were pursuing advanced degrees in considerable numbers, there was a growing influence to build with another on campus and in the academic world; a "golden period" their generation holds in high regard.

However, UCLA's campus alone didn't set her drive into motion. Even further back, when Dawn was at San Joaquin Delta Community College, a professor encouraged her, "You're a good writer. You really know how to tell stories. You

should keep going.” She thanks him in the acknowledgments of her recently published book, though mentioning one’s community college professors is uncustomary. “I do,” Dawn asserts, “because I think that’s important for me, in terms of getting me motivated about wanting to do well in school and wanting to transfer.” We recall the days in her under-resourced high school weren’t necessarily bright and shiny, so being at the community college was good enough. Professorship was not the plan. Nonetheless, figures on campus from the junior college to the 4-year university took the time to speak with Dawn, to let her know, “I believe in you,” and “Imagine the places you’ll can go.” So too did folks in the community and even within her family.

The process of writing her thesis on Filipino immigrants in Stockton in WWII set the groundwork for Dawn. During her research, her grandmother called her friends and shared, “Oh Dawn’s writing her thesis on this, can we come?” And her grandmother would accompany her to these visits as Dawn collected stories. Dawn also had a maternal aunt who had just moved back to Stockton from Riverside and had a video camera. No one else in Dawn’s world had one available for use at the time, and so Dawn’s aunt videotaped some of the earlier oral histories for her work. Dawn’s dad, a figure in the community his whole life as a leader in the fraternal order of Legionario Del Trabajo, he also would go with her to interview people. No one suspected her of coming into their spaces as an outsider. Instead, there was a feeling of, “She’s one of our own. She’s gonna write about us.” This kind of moral support

from within the family and outward into the community shone more light onto the path lying ahead. That network didn't only exist within Stockton.

While Dawn was at UCLA, she got involved with the Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS) chapter in Los Angeles. Founder of the nationwide organization, the late Fred Cordova (fondly referred to by many as Uncle Fred), happens to be her paternal great uncle, "his father is my grandfather's cousin," Dawn notes, "And in America, that's [huge]... In case of emergency contact, in his father's wallet was [the contact information of] my grandfather. They're distant cousins in the province, but then you come over here to America and there's 10 of you guys. You become brothers." Dawn grew up knowing him as Uncle Fred as he was born in Stockton, though he lived in Seattle. She was ten years old when he returned to Stockton to celebrate the launching of his widely circulated, paradigm-shifting 1983 book, *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans*. She remembers flipping through the publication in awe, chuckling as she affirms, "But you're 10 years old, you know? You're not like, I'm gonna write a dissertation about this!"

It was during her undergraduate career when Dawn grew closer to Uncle Fred and his wife Auntie Dorothy. Their niece Joan May Cordova, Dawn's cousin, was completing her PhD in Education at Harvard at the time, inadvertently modeling the pursuit of the graduate degree for Dawn just starting junior high. The family was so proud to see Joan May's doctoral graduation announcement in Stockton's small town newspaper. It was instrumental for Dawn to witness. Her cousin, now Dr. Cordova, went on to write and contribute to projects embracing Filipino American oral history.

Soon enough, Uncle Fred and Auntie Dorothy invited the community to search: who among our youth will step up next? Who will take this up and do the work of continuing to preserve our history? Dawn felt the draw, as her dreams began to change. She recounts:

I felt like I was one of those that kind of answered the call and said, “Okay yes, I wanna do this work.” So it was like, “Okay good! Here's the phonebook. Here's the work. Go do it.” So very blessed in that way; that I didn't have to explain who I was to people [whom I would interview]. And it's interesting because I would interview some of the *manangs* and *manongs* [elders] and they'd be like [in an Ilokano accent]: “Yes! Der's sambahdee here pibe years ago, I don't eben know der name. I don't eben know dem! Por der tesis. I neber saw it! I don't know!” but then not seeing me as that. Seeing me as their kumadre's [close friend's] granddaughter who's gonna interview them, so I was very blessed in that way... in terms of what sustained me for fifteen years, having that community, having FANHS, all those elders who were really committed to this history and again, me being one of the few younger ones.

At this time, the elders were well into their 70s and 80s, seeking the “next generation emerging.” When Dawn followed suit, it caught the community's eye. She was identified as someone who shall take the baton and move the work forward. It's a heavy calling. And it forced Dawn to figuratively hold a mirror and confront the sensitive question: am I worthy?

Imposter Syndrome: Being Pinay in the Institution of the Academy

The imposter syndrome is not an issue openly discussed both in Filipino households or communities, as well as in academia. It's an interesting beast—this topic we don't touch. Because we are not supposed to feel this. There's something wrong with us if we feel this: inadequacy, fear of being seen as a fraud, fear of being called out one of these days for not quite meeting expectations in our positions of

power and privilege. And yet we feel it all, deep inside, beneath all the work we do. Amidst the rushing and the hustling; the teaching, publishing, and service; the organizing, advocating, and community leading, somehow we're supposed to appear unstoppable, perhaps even threatening, and then grateful.

I would argue it's a mix of internalized oppression with roots in Filipino colonial mentality/catholic guilt. With internalized colonization comes the value of the individual, the swelling of the ego, the centrality of one's accolades; governed by these scripts, we join the rat race to the imagined top. Catholic guilt, a mentally manipulative and unhealthy practice arguably imparted upon Filipino peoples during both Spanish and American colonization teaches us "*tiisin mo lang*": to grin and bear it. Engrained messages of, "I should be grateful for all the doors that have opened for me and stop complaining about the harsh work. Because I am not worthy of all of this anyway, and if I ask for too much or say too much, I might lose everything I've worked for. Oh look how far I've come. Not many others are this high up. Look at me. See how much better I am than the rest," further reinforce a crab-in-the-bowl mentality. Such crab mentality feeds right into capitalist values of competition and (the myth of) meritocracy. Self-hatred is part of the mix. Self-doubt is part of the mix. It can take a toll on the psyche and spirit, "and we haven't even talked about structure yet," Dawn reminds me. What she's talking about is what it feels like to be a Pinay—to exist in this brown, constantly foreignized, female body—in the institution of the academy. She gets down to the truth, gently placing her right hand over her chest with eyes cast down briefly:

It's about one's own realization of self worth and self esteem. And we haven't even talked about racism and sexism and class and all these other things that made me think that: PhD? Why would I wanna do that? Why would I—you know what I'm saying?! Filipino? Professor? Why would I want to do that? I mean, who does that? That's a whole other part of [even considering]: is this my dream? Which is why, that moment in which Cathy intervened, was really important because I saw someone that looked like me, doing something that I could have never imagined myself doing for different number of reasons. I don't know if it was that I didn't think I was smart enough, or that it was even a possibility. You mean... I could, do this? And not even so much, *me*—I mean it is about me, a Filipina, working class girl, daughter of farmworkers, but also just—this is a profession that we could do? That we like to do this? Do you see what I'm saying? So it's a little bit of both! Because of class, it's not something that we think about... that's why I was kinda like, wow, a Filipina who's getting a PhD, okay, I can do that. And she thinks I'm good enough to do that, too. So that's important!

We can't talk about imposture syndrome without talking about the rat race—the practice of chasing particular career milestones while the clock is ticking, while people are watching, while we are constantly being judged. The individualistic quest for institutional recognition naturally becomes quite a lonesome journey, as Dawn describes:

You can get really isolated and it's just you and that book, and the burden of that book, and everything that book represents right? How the book's reception is gonna be makes or breaks your academic career in many ways. And then, having to finish the book so that I could get tenure, so that I could stay—you know, all of those things that are really invisible to almost everybody else. Pretty much everybody else. Even my own partner, even also for my family and for our families who see us go through all of this, go through the maze, [be this] hamster on the wheel where we're just like, “Ugh! I gotta get through this!” All they see really in many ways are our victories. They're like, “You got to Stanford; of course all of this stuff was gonna happen for you.” They don't [know].

Neither our loved ones or our colleagues see us reading emails from the copy editor citing corrections on every page of our manuscript. They don't see the midnight lesson planning before the 8am class or the string of department committee meetings

or community-based meetings happening in the same afternoon. They don't see the long and winding road we're walking on, most often alone. Feelings of stress intertwined with the imposter syndrome are heightened as one nears each milestone—in this instance, the publication of Dawn's book. When Dawn was finally at the point of sending drafts to her publisher, her initial thoughts were, "Oh good, thank God I'm done. I just need to get tenure. Give me the contract, so I can keep jumping through the hoops." Because she's *been* jumping through hoops. The all mighty rat race, set solely on the obtainment of degrees, awards, and titles, demands us to keep eyes ahead; never back, in reflection; never here, in the present—only forward. We have to stay relevant and viable in the competition. We keep our feet moving on the everyday hamster wheel of academic work. There is no rest.

The vicious cycle of institutional pressure and imposter syndrome begins on day one. Dawn chronicles all the way back from her days in grad school, "[A master's] thesis takes two years, right? A dissertation takes anywhere from two to five years to do research, another three years to write. I felt like I was rushing to finish [so I] can get the job [with] the hope that [I'll] have the time then to go back and revise it." [Instead, I'm] teaching a huge eighty-person class: Intro to U.S." It was a topic Dawn hadn't explored herself since community college an entire decade ago. Her History major requirements at UCLA were such that one could complete the degree by taking all ethnic studies courses (as Mexican American Studies, Asian American Studies, Black Studies and Native American Studies were housed in the History Department).

In one moment, she's writing her dissertation—studying her “belly button, studying the bottom of [her] foot,”—knowing everything about her specialized topic; in the next moment, she's told, “In two weeks, you're gonna have to teach the History of the United States.” Dawn's eyes grow wide, inviting me to join her in laughter. The incredulity. In that quick jump from dissertation to teaching, she was thinking, “Fuck I don't know even know what caused the Civil War. I gotta teach this shit? Omigod.” And the Pinay in academia has to find a way to do the double work. For her, she has to know all the rules in order to break them. She has to know her U.S. History, in order to teach an alternative Ethnic Studies. She has to prove herself as an authority of dominant histories while she hones her craft in the writing and teaching of marginalized histories. The rat race goes on. The clock ticks on. The pressure only intensifies, as Dawn felt when a colleague and mentor in her department told her as soon as she stepped into her new role:

“Look, you have 4 years. 4 years to finish the book and get tenured,” because you go up your 6th year. And the timing of it has to be where you have either the book in process or in hand by the time you write your tenure file the beginning of your 6th year. So count backwards. So, see that kind of pressure? Right?

Right. I'm feeling the anxiety. Already, here in this chair sitting across from Dawn, as she looks back. I'm looking forward. This is what I'll have to saddle up for. I'm trying to listen to her tell me more, but for a second my hearing is muffled. I am beside myself. Why does the system demand so much from us, and in these ways? Dawn's voice dials me back in, “All of a sudden, summer comes, I'm exhausted, I can't even get off the couch, and now I have to finish writing a book? I was also doing

the Little Manila activism.” She reminds me that trying to publish as a tenure-track faculty member at the CSU is markedly different than at, for instance, top-notch research universities. There, faculty must teach one class a semester. At the CSU, they’re expected to teach three. And magically turn out books. How is this possible? Somehow, it is.

Dawn begins to detail the hoop-jumping journey towards publication: first, she starts her academic job, tries going back to revise it, heads out to do more research, sends it off to the press, waits six months for them to send it to their reviewers, “And then their reviewers tell you—wait, has anyone ever talked to you about this?” she pauses, peering into me. I shake my head. “So lemme tell you about the book, just so this is mentorship to tell you how this is done. I mean really, it’s like nobody kinda tells you. So this is why I’m telling you now, right?!” Dawn snickers. But again, she’s also serious. I’m serious. I want to hear how this all goes down. I have to hear it.

She lets me in on how folks will send a chapter and their introduction to editors at University presses such as: UC Press, University Minnesota Press, Rutgers University, or Duke. And every press has a reputation for certain kinds of books, and certain kinds of topics. She gives me the rundown: “Temple has done a lot of Asian American Studies stuff. Duke does a lot of cultural studies, humanities, and is really building its Philippine and Filipino American. First, Vince Rafael kind of busted open the door, and then they published Cathy’s book.” Dawn was hoping for either UC Press, Duke, or Temple University Press, commonly sought after by colleagues in her

field particularly in the late 90s and early 2000s when she was finishing her dissertation. She wasn't really sure how to go about it back then, and as we know, the ever so insidious imposter syndrome cuts in to this entire process, as Dawn half-whispers, "I was going to AAAS [Association for Asian American Studies annual meeting], and I was saying, 'Oh, I'm having a meeting with the editor of University Press,' and then I'd get all nervous and stressed like: Fuck! What. Was I supposed to send something?!" But was Dawn really meeting with editors? Was she calling them? Truth: "No!" she exclaims and then reveals:

Cuz I was also really, totally um, I can't find the words for it. I wasn't sure if my book was any good. Either. I wasn't sure if it was important outside of the 20 *manangs* and *manongs* that cared about it in Stockton. I was insecure, is the word. As most of us are about our dissertations right? We're like, well it's important to me, but is it good? I was like, I don't know if I wanna send my—I don't even have anything that I feel like I'm proud enough to send to Temple or to UC Press or whatever. And then we also go through graduate school doing book reviews where you're told to tear apart your colleague's books and then you sit there... as a young academic, you're kinda like, shit. Omigod, if I can see all these things wrong with all these other books that are great, my book sucks! Or my dissertation sucks! Oh god, yo, I gotta do all these things [to make it perfect]!

My soul commiserates. Perfection is a killer. It kills the spirit because perfection is a fallacy, a delusion. The spirit cannot thrive in delusion. It has must be fed, nurtured, and tended to in space and time where one can show up as they are without any rush, judgment, or pretense. But this is the academy, where perfection is indeed thought to be attainable. Where your intellect is on the chopping block and your spirit takes a back seat. Not only can this be done, it *should* be done, especially if we want to be taken seriously as women of color in the institution.

Duke University Press shows interest in Dawn's book project saying, "Sounds like a fantastic book. One of the best books we've done in the last few years is Cathy Choy's book and if it's anything like that one, we wanna do it." Dawn nods to Cathy Choy again for somehow gracefully intervening again. But now Dawn has to measure up. And how is "best" measured? Well, reviews translate into it being used in classes, which translate into sales, which translates into awards. Now the pressure is nauseating.

So already in Dawn's first three years along her tenure-track, clock ticking, she had to go do some more oral history interviews, fix that terrible chapter one, massage the book into a workable manuscript, and get those interviews transcribed. In fact, I transcribed a couple of them during my second year as a master's student at State. As a temporary assistant to the project, I couldn't see, just as she mentioned; I was completely unaware of all the hoop-jumping at play. Completely oblivious to the hamster wheel beneath her feet:

I was getting some little grants [to complete the project]. I was trying to use my summers. Trying to use my Thanksgiving and Christmas breaks to try to do some additional oral histories, sort of knew where I was going but then I was also stressed out about whether or not I was gonna get tenure and then in my first year, my dad died.

We pause. Take a breath. Dawn is only human. There comes a point in time along the rat race when we're reminded: our bodies are not meant to do this. We need to take a break.

Sacrificing the Body on the Hamster Wheel

Dawn's father is whom she credits for opening all the doors for her in the community. Those doors led to all the oral histories, which make up her research and life's work, "In many ways, it was *his* book. You know, I went to the cemetery yesterday," Dawn starts as tears well up in her eyes, "And I was like, I didn't wanna leave the book for my dad 'cuz I'm cheap like that," she giggles and then sniffs, "He'll read it over my shoulder. Just left a postcard there... That laid me off for... literally it was like two years, I couldn't even look at this stuff. Here I was just kind of depressed with my dad's death. I was like seriously depressed."

Fortunately in the same year, Dawn had just entered into a relationship with her now-spouse Jesse. He would be her rock, a support system to help her ride these waves of stress and strain. And by her fourth year, she was awarded the Ford Foundation postdoctoral fellowship, allowing her a year to step away from her teaching load and write. Just write. No doubt, Dawn eventually finishes.

Fast forward to today, however. I'm sitting back in her office on a November afternoon after having sat in her "Filipinos in the U.S." class. It's a cool 62-degree day in San Francisco and her autumn attire is charming: black dress top, black a-line skirt, black wedge heels, beige cardigan and a dark green scarf swept around her neck. She looks well. I say this, because she hasn't been. After years of relentless hammering away at every task, duty, and expectation in the institution, Dawn's body literally had to stop.

All of this labor—intense labor—to birth this book, and Dawn was suddenly confronted with a life-threatening medical situation. Without inflicting any psychological wounds from her hospital experience, I ask how she’s been. Here eyelids flutter to recollect the mayhem of sorts:

It was this extreme high of the book release and the book launch parties. At the same time, I was having these health problems that I was ignoring. Like, I knew I had fibroids. I had these periods that were really long, really painful, and I kept putting it off and I kept saying, “Well I gotta take care of this stuff first;” “I gotta deal with the book first.” And I feel like for the last ten to fifteen years, it's kinda been about that. I've kind of ignored my health. And with many bad consequences. I have diabetes. I have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, all of which developed in my first few years of graduate school—just incredible stress. And then [in] grad school, you live this student life style [of] eating late, eating bad. Rewarding ourselves with bad food after, you know, “Oh, I just wrote this 30-page paper, I'm gonna go eat Mitchell's ice cream and lay down.” And then on top of that, the genetics that I have from my family: both sides, heart disease; both sides, high blood pressure; both sides, diabetes. And not being in shape and really prioritizing my work. At the expense of other things. At the expense of my health.

So roughly three months ago, at the end of August, it was the first week of school.

Dawn felt this intense pain on her left side. She was waking up in the middle of the night covered in sweat. She was thinking, “Omigod, this is menopause,” she giggles.

She continued popping Advil and telling herself, "Okay, the pain is gonna go away.

It's the first week of school. I have to teach. What else am I gonna do?" On the second day of school, she was getting ready and noticed the pain again. The only comfortable position she could find was laying down here in her office. She was so tired, having had no rest, lying awake in bed drenched in sweat. She didn’t realize she had a fever, and the roller coaster began, as Dawn details:

It turned out it was because I had a high fever. 103-degree fever. I was hiding it from Jesse too, I was like, I'm okay. I just had a little fever. It'll just go

away. I was really scared it was a big thing, and it was. I went to the ER the next day. All these tests, tests, tests. It was an e-coli infection of my ovary and my fallopian tube on the left side. Then they found fibroids all through, which I knew they would find. So they had to do a six-hour surgery.

Fibroids are non-cancerous tumors that women commonly find in the uterus. They can be dangerous. All the symptoms a woman should look out for, Dawn had: lengthy and painful menstrual cycles, and fibroid growth. One of hers was growing within a kidney. She still undergoes tests and ultrasounds to see if the surgery reduced her fibroids enough to keep her kidneys safe from any complications. The experience weighs heavy on her, as she shares:

It was a big wake up call. I felt like I just kind of surrendered myself to whatever was gonna happen at that point, and just hoping that I was gonna live. Everybody was like, "You're really really sick. Good thing you came in." My heart was going 160 beats per minute. My fever was 103...They had no explanation how the e. coli shut my digestive tract to cause that infection. Then the medication [I had been on] wasn't controlling my blood pressure well, so they took me off of it. It went back up again, so then I had a blood clot. The fibroid was pressing down on a vein [in my uterus], so that caused a clot. So now I'm on medication for that.

When told by her doctor that her surgery would put her out four to six weeks, the first thing she thought was, "Omigod, it's the beginning of the semester. How could I miss the beginning of the semester?" Missing the beginning of school is seemingly the worst thing for professors. Luckily, Dawn's teaching assistants pitched in for her. Her department chair helped find people to sub her classes during her recovery. The wake up call in the hospital continued ringing in her ears, as she recounts:

I had to just kinda tell myself that this is my career for hopefully the next thirty to forty years. I'm not gonna care that I missed six weeks in the Fall of 2013. It's a matter of life and death. And it really was a moment of—I just had to slow down. Like, I'm not running this race anymore. I don't need to. I have tenure. Here's the book. But I feel like, a lot of my life has only been about go,

go, go, go. And through the go, go, go, go, a lot of health problems. You know when people say, "Oh! You're ssssuper this! You can do all these things!" No, not really. Yeah, but at what cost? ... I still feel my stitches.

Prior to this, Dawn had never had surgery her whole life. She spent a total of eleven days in the hospital. She was fortunate to have her partner Jesse stay with her both at the hospital and at home during her recovery for three weeks. My only surgery was my c-section with my first-born Mateo. She asks me about my recovery and I describe how I felt like my body was in every room in the house, and not really put back together again for months after, perhaps even up to a year. We commiserate around the trauma of knowing our insides had been taken out and shifted around. You're just not the same after a major operation like that. While physically, she's feeling much better, emotionally, she's still healing, as she reveals:

They don't know if I can have a baby, so we'll see. Yeah, I finished the book. I did all those things, but I didn't have a kid. Maybe if I wanted to have a kid, I woulda had a kid earlier, I dunno. But it's the nature of our work sometimes. And I think that's something that's just terrible. Because it's relentless, "Oh I have to get this done. I have to get that done. The baby can wait." So we'll see. Maybe we'll adopt. Keeping all options open. And it really has been about leaving it up to God, up to the universe. I mean, that's something that I learned eleven days in the hospital. You can't control what the cat scan is gonna say. I feel like the kinds of careers that we're in. [We're] very controlling people [and] that's the only way that we can get to where we're at.

With the book finally done, and her health back in order (slowly but surely), Dawn published an article in *Eating Asian America: A Food Studies Reader* and then made this decision that she would not take part in any other major projects for a year. To heal, she was just going to chill, enjoy her book being out, perhaps do a couple book

talks, maybe travel and try to get healthy. Her body told her to stop running itself into exhaustion:

I don't wanna be on the hamster wheel! There's no need. It's unnecessary. If anything, I already squandered my health my first forty years in my life trying to run this rat race to get the book done. Why do I—I , I'm done. I'm out of the race.

But last month was Filipino American History Month. Dawn is the first Pinay scholar I think of whenever October rolls around. In my mind, she's the leading Pinay scholar-activist historian in the United States. That's her niche. So many of us younger Pinays in university have been influenced by her ability to thread together archival work, oral histories, community organizing, writing, and teaching. So every week in October, something is going down. Filipinos cram all their events into this one month. And sure enough, Dawn found herself treading lightly on that hamster wheel, participating in a couple things each week: a Filipino food movement program at the Asian Art Museum, a book reading in Stockton, a speaking engagement at Sonoma State University, the Filipino American Book Festival, a townhall meeting with Assemblymember Rob Bonta, a reading at UC Berkeley, Larry Itliong Day in Stockton, and finally, "the Filipina Women's Network 100 Most Influential Filipinas in the Worrld!" she cracks up with sarcasm. Dawn was named "one of the top 100," and is appreciative, but also so grounded, she doesn't let it blow up her ego. Awards and recognition are nice. What Dawn values most however are the human connections created by and through her work.

Reflecting on the Path and the Impact

I arrive at her office for our last conversation, hoping she didn't come all the way to campus just for our meeting. Turns out it's perfect timing; she needed to pick up some books her publisher had sent. She sifts through her mail while telling me the story of a *manong* (Filipino for, older brother, but in this context, a term of endearment for those who served as agricultural workers in the United States, particularly around mid-century). This *manong* emailed her about a check he sent to purchase her book, but had not yet received his copy. Eager to resolve this, she sifts and finally spots an envelope with his name on it, tears it open and reads his note. She pauses. Her face softens, "He wanted the book personalized," she says near tears, "and here's the check." Awww, I say. But she's in a place far beyond just, "Awww". It's way deeper. She chuckles a bit, in disbelief. He's the *manong* who founded the Filipino Center in Stockton. It is this place deeply meaningful to her family history and life's work, saving Stockton's Little Manila.

She was actually there in Stockton for a book reading over the weekend, and tells me about a special person who attended. It was an older Mexican man who had waited in line for up to an hour and a half for his book to be signed. Upon reaching her table, he handed her a little post-it note indicating who he would like her to address her message to. Incredibly touched, she discloses what was written on his post-it:

“To Elias Gomez,” that was his name. “En recordando de Antonio Guijaldo,” I’m totally messing up the Spanish, but basically it was in memory of this man, Anotonio Guijaldo. So I said, who is this man? And he said, “He’s the Filipino who hired me when I came here as a *bracero*²² in 1960, and he gave me my life in America [tears in her eyes] see I’m gonna cry [laughing]. And for him? For him, he was like, “The Filipino community and this Filipino man gave me my life and I want to pay tribute to him by buying [her voice breaks] this book and knowing this history.

She breaks into laughter, catching her emotions, but noting the deep impact on both ends. He was impacted by this history. She was impacted by his presence, also living proof of this history.

Once her book was in her hands, only then was she able to reflect: turning the pages, feeling and seeing the weight and wonder of her hard work. And the words that fall from her lips are: “Omigod, did I really do this? Did I really write this? Did this really all come together?” The more she reflected, in came those questions of, “God, how did I? Why did it take this long? How was it that I did it?” As academics, this kind of work takes years upon years, as she opens up:

From an idea, an undergraduate paper I wrote, an oral history that I did of my grandmother, then a paper I did as an undergrad on my grandfather’s restaurant. You know all of those found their way into my book.

Here on the other side of it all, she can actually look at it and think about how it will affect people who read it. It goes into its second printing this week, and she’s feeling mighty blessed. “You know what’s interesting is you were the first one to order it!” she points out. But even before all the orders were coming, the harrowing publishing

²² Mexican worker temporarily contracted as a result of U.S. policy for inexpensive labor. Further reading can be found at <http://braceroarchive.org/teaching>.

process, she likens a bit to the dissertation process, “You know when you're in it, all you see are the [flaws]. I'm just now getting it, now [that it's] in published form. I have to reckon with it.” Her book is not only the result of decades of data collection from primary and secondary sources to tell an important story, it is also an expression of why she's here at the university in the first place.

Why I'm Here

Why are you here? It's not the easiest question to answer for someone who sees herself straddling academia and community, navigating all the contradictions and tensions wrapped up in this tricky position. But now that the dust has settled after reaching this big milestone, now that she is having to reckon with the 464-paged book she's produced, it's a good question to revisit. A question that I ask myself at each mini-milestone up to this point. She begins by locating herself in her field, US

History:

One of the reasons why we're not so worried about the fate of US History at [SF] State as much as say Ethnic Studies or maybe other departments is because there is this wide spread consensus in the nation that everybody needs to learn their history. Everybody needs to learn US History. I feel my really important role at the university is to teach US history from my perspective. To impart that onto generations of students who probably expect something different when they're gonna take a US history class, but end up leaving with a more critical view of their world and their place in it and the context of their lives. And hoping that critical view or critical perspective somehow makes them feel like they can contribute something to the world and to this nation and to their communities in the form of some kind of positive change, whether it's even just a shift in perspective that they give to their children and their families; or if it's other kinds of activism or community work.

There is a ripple effect from the work each of us does in the world. For Dawn and her scholarship at SF State, it's about how her work is digested and metabolized by

students who enroll in her courses and people who read her work. That it isn't enough to walk out with a grade, or close her book, and move onto the next. What makes it all worthwhile is when a student or reader can take this knowledge she's gathered and hold it with critical engagement. Hold it in their hearts. And carry it forward.

Gratitude to Dawn

Allow us to time travel back to that cool Saturday afternoon in the SOMA district, San Francisco. Dennis, toddler Mateo, and I sit in the back rows of the the Bayanihan Community Center, where Dawn's book launch is taking place. We listen in on audience member comments, questions, and dialogue Dawn is happy to oblige. *Little Manila Is in the Heart: The Making of the Filipina/o American Community in Stockton* is a book her family, mentors, colleagues, and students are so proud to see. She concludes by pointing to the table of baked goods she made herself! *Ube* (purple yam) cupcakes and *bibingka* (rice cake with a cream cheese filling topped with butter and sugar), served with trays of fried *lumpia* (egg rolls) for added measure. We all rise from our seats. Some form a line to grab some goodies. Others form a line to approach Dawn for a congratulatory hug. The room is filled with smiling faces, reunions, chatter, and laughter. We've found my way up through the line with my copy of her book in hand. I'm suddenly remembering that I had the opportunity to contribute to this book, having spent hours in my Daly City apartment roughly five years ago, transcribing video interviews of various Stockton community members whose testimonies are in here. In many ways, her book is not just for or about the community—it *is* the community.

Dennis positions us for a picture. Dawn and I remain standing together with Mateo sitting at the edge of her table, holding her book at one side, as she holds the other. We smile. He doesn't. He's a cranky two-year-old ready to see the sun. Nonetheless, these are seeds I'm glad to plant for him. He will always get to look back at this memory through this picture, and also through Dawn's very signature on the first page of her book. It reads: "For Melissa & Mateo, In memory of the Manangs & Manongs! Thank you for all your help with this book & your friendship! –Dawn." I rest on this idea of friendship. Indeed, it takes the building of relationships to make change possible. These new stories she's "hustled" to add to library book shelves—this is change. The chance for my son to be in the presence of so many Filipino scholars in the same room—this is a marker of change. Deep bows of gratitude for Dawn's ability to bring us all together this afternoon, celebrating community research like this, propelling us forward to continue making change.

CHAPTER VI

PORTRAIT OF ROBYN RODRIGUEZ

I am alone (without help, that is) braving the world with two and half month old infant Dante sitting in the back of our new Mazda 3 as we head up to San Francisco on this Saturday afternoon. I feel the anxiety in my bones—I'm late. But I have this new baby and I've got to stay safe on this road. He cries on and off through the ride up and right into our parking space at the San Francisco Library in the Civic Center area of downtown San Francisco. I look outside at the gloom, watch the peninsula mist fly over my windshield, and take a breath. Bust the door open, affix the ridiculously long Moby wrap around my waist, chest, and shoulders; pick up the baby, position him up against my torso, tighten the wrap, grab the diaper bag and find my way to the library's front door, thinking, "I'm late. Late. Late." An entire hour late.

Dante's whimpers slice through my thoughts. I kiss his forehead to ease his discomfort, realizing he may be feeling my angst. He falls quietly back to sleep and it turns out: I'm on time. Thank goodness for Filipino time! The first hour was programmed for appetizers and socializing. Robyn is now on stage, after having been introduced by a fellow colleague, a local official, and students with spoken word pieces dedicated to her work. I take a secluded seat in the back, keeping Dante warm and happy while I witness this moment in Robyn's life. I note her parents and extended family are seated in the front rows. *Kasamas* (fellow cultural and community workers) including members of San Francisco State's League of Filipino

Students are present throughout the auditorium. Robyn is scheduled to give book talks throughout California. This one, in San Francisco's Main Public Library, is just one of them.

Robyn takes a seat in the middle of the stage. Behind her hangs a large screen illuminating the light blue front cover of her new book, *Asian America: Sociological and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, co-written with Pawan Dhingra. In a bold black and white geometrically patterned dress that falls just below her knees, she crosses her legs, leans forward and sighs. Robyn points to her son Amado in the audience, to whom the book is dedicated, and tears fall. Amado is her everything. She notes this book was conceptualized, written, and published during the "most difficult time in her life." She discusses how writing the book was a labor of love as she thanks her son, family and community for their labor of love in helping her see through that difficult time in her life. Robyn cries openly on stage. Many of her loved ones sitting nearby share in that pain. I don't know what the pain is particularly about, but I hold the moment dear. She has been on quite a journey.

She gathers herself to tell us about the origin story of this book, which harkens back to her experience growing up in Union City and bearing witness to the on-going violence and racial profiling of Filipino youth from middle school through high school. "Why was there no knowledge of our community when we were completely populating the city?" she begged. With her mom's encouragement, Robyn wrote a letter to local officials demanding multicultural studies and history classes. Unfortunately, she can't locate it now, but the memory of seeing her own words in

her own ink glide across that page to fight for something—that was the birth of her political consciousness, her organizing, her scholarship, her writing—her being a Pinay activist-scholar.

Who is Robyn Rodriguez?

Robyn Rodriguez is an associate professor of Asian American Studies at UC Davis, with a PhD in Sociology from UC Santa Barbara. I met her in passing many times at community events throughout the Bay Area in the past couple of years. We formally met and conversed for the first time one fall evening in 2009 when I was invited by my friend (her roommate at the time) Ryan, to attend a live pay-per-view showing of a Pacquiao fight at their home. World champion Filipino professional boxer Manny Pacquiao was fighting Puerto Rican boxer Miguel Cotto. Robyn was making caprese salad in the kitchen to add to the growing spread on a serving table along the bay window. My partner Dennis waved to her and they exchanged a hug, as it so happened they participated in San Jose organizing in the early 2000s. He introduced us to one another and we had the chance to chat about scholarship (as Pinays in academia), and then turned our attention back to the screen with the rest of the party. Pacquiao ended up defeating Cotto by total knock out in the 12th round, thus becoming the first fighter in boxing history to win world titles in seven different weight divisions. Here we are surrounded by the victory of this fight, with friends and acquaintances who are in one way or another tied to San Francisco's Filipino Community Center (fondly called the FCC), while thinking about the important work that needs to be done among Filipin@s in higher education.

Four years later, she accepts my invitation to join this research project. I begin by asking, “How would you describe what you do?” and Robyn takes the time to articulate. “I guess the question is,” Robyn clarifies:

How do I understand my work in a broad sense? And the answer to that is that I see myself as an activist-scholar. I am in but not of the university (I'm taking that from someone who commented on a FB post recently), that is, given the state of the university (it being increasingly neoliberal and often serving the interests of the elite), I do not identify with it, but I do see it as a crucial source of resources that ought to be liberated for the broader public. Another way of thinking about it is that I see myself both working for and against the university. That is, the university, in an idealized sense can represent a site for democratic knowledge exchange, it can offer tools to address and advance social justice, but in this society, it falls short of that.

The university's inability to more directly confront social justice today is wounding for marginalized communities. This is where Robyn comes in, addressing the wound by serving from within the university not only to teach about the world, but ultimately to change it by looking at power. As Prudence Carter (2005) emphasizes:

Schools are more than institutions where teachers impart skills and lessons; they are places where teachers transmit cultural knowledge... [it] is as much about being inculcated with the ways of the “culture of power” as much as it is about learning to read, count, and think critically (p. 47).

Robyn has been tending to this wound since age 15 when she sat down to pen a letter to the mayor and superintendent of schools in her hometown of Union City. To help shape the purpose and function of the university, this essential institution in our society, Robyn has taken a position as a woman of color (as a Pinay). To hold her stance takes strategy, fortitude, and commitment, qualities she began harnessing as early as the late 1980s as a high schooler seeking justice through education.

Union City in the Late 80s: My Youthhood, My Politics

I've touched briefly on this moment in Robyn's life, but the backstory is special; it is where she marks the beginning of her politicization, if she could name one. It was the first time she felt compelled to change the conditions in which her neighborhood was growing; conditions she knew were affecting her, her family, and beyond. "I was my son's age, 15," she begins to tell me, "a high school sophomore at Logan High School in Union City where I grew up." We sit on soft cushioned couches across from one another in the living room of her home upon a hill in Oakland, roughly twenty miles north of the place she is describing. The sun spills through the window behind her on this pleasantly warm 4th of July Saturday morning in the Bay Area. Robyn is a morning person, so we have begun promptly at 9am. She rests her index finger to the corner of her mouth, thinking. She remembers that eventful time in her youth, when she had been sitting with some disillusionment for a while. She had expressed these torn feelings to her mother, who then gave her the suggestion to write a letter. Her memory is a bit hazy, but as we sit together, she takes the time to disentangle the details:

I remember there was an issue of gang violence in Union City, and there were a lot of guys that I grew up with in middle school that were getting in trouble. This was like 1989, '88. I finished 8th grade 1987. So I'm already seeing guys I knew from my middle school going into gangs. The issue was also, I remember hearing about, that a lot of young people were being pulled over being suspected for being in gangs. At the time, we didn't have a language for racial profiling. But [I was] seeing something wrong. I remember people in the community being appalled by it. So I wrote a letter to the School Superintendent and the Chief of Police and basically I said, "No, I think the reason why you're doing this to our community, and that this is happening in our community is that there is no multicultural education. We have no role models in our educational system around which we can identify as young

Filipino Americans. So that's why gang culture is an appeal[ing scapegoat], like this [Filipino immigrant] culture doesn't apply to you [mainstream America]. And then the reason why you [in authority] profile us is because you don't know our people." So... they felt moved enough to invite me to a meeting.

Robyn finds herself in a room with the Chief of Police, the Mayor, the School Superintendent, and a Filipino American gangs violence consultant from Los Angeles brought into the district to assist. And she finds that in writing her letter, she is beginning to get their attention. The meeting results in a personal invitation to Robyn to join their youth commission. It was good timing. She happened to already be involved in youth programming with a local organization called Filipinos for Affirmative Action (now called Filipino Advocates for Justice). In fact, she was part of their first cohort of young people recruited from nearby high schools to get involved with community change. Here, Robyn becomes an educational advocate with an interest in not only diversifying curriculum but also the teaching force, "find more teachers who look like me," she specifies, "I was really invested in politics because I thought it was also about political representation. So I started at 15 and that letter really put me into these positions. I went to school board meetings; they actually talked to me." Robyn was being heard. How world changing that can be for a young person to be heard—not just anywhere—but at the table, where decision-making happens. "So it was this moment really," Robyn's eyes scan the ceiling of her living room as memories return. She wants to dig up how all of this even concerned her, how she even came to care about it all, especially when the norm that we (Filipino immigrant families) choose to fly under the radar, or we don't make

waves, or we remain grateful servants. We call this *hiya*, in which we hold high regard for the dangerous potential to shame one's self or one's family. "But there was a broader political discourse circulating in the 80s," Robyn recalls. And then gasps as the pieces come to her:

Yes yes yes. I'm remembering now, in the 8th grade, I think my middle school won an award. [A woman] representing the District made a speech. She must have talked about diversity. Must have impressed me then. But I was basically picked to represent the school to receive the award. I think I had to write an essay [to have been chosen to receive the award on behalf of the school]. Ohhh! Dude! I think I remember the time frame now. I think the same year, there was an educational rally. Proposition 98. What was proposition 98 about? I don't know, but there was a rally that Delaine Eastin [Assemblymember at the time] was totally supporting and I was asked to speak at that rally.

The layers unravel. Robyn fumbles through her smart phone Googling Prop 98, "There it is! 1988, I was a freshman in high school when it passed, requir[ing] a minimum of the state budget [to fund schools]. If you can imagine, it means that in 1987 people are talking about it." And in 1987, Robyn was in the 8th grade, amidst the political and educational discourse of multicultural America from which she was able to fashion a new lens to view the world around her as multiculturalism seemed to be an answer at the time. She pinpoints a disjuncture between "this discourse that was out there, and actual practice in the classroom." The lack of literature and knowledge about our community bothered her, as she exhales:

What books are out there about Filipinos? This is the 80s. So of course, I didn't know that actually just twenty to thirty minutes freakin' north in Berkeley there was an Asian American Studies program, an ethnic studies program that was churning out research by that time. My teachers didn't know about it; certainly people in the community didn't know. They didn't have an answer to that.

There was a disconnect between the university and public schools. Robyn was set to find an answer on her own. It's the road she's been on ever since: seeing the conditions, in which marginalized people cannot thrive, naming the injustice, finding answers, and making change. It sounds like a lot of work. It is. And it can be heartbreaking. Robyn's shoulders slide down a bit, "Somewhere along the way with traditional politics, I got somewhat disillusioned by quickly." In this crossing into political work, Robyn got involved in Democratic Party activities to the point at which there was some expectation for her to finish college, return to Union City and run for the School Board, and then eventually run for California Assembly. She was perhaps the token Pinay who would go and live out the American Dream through party politics, "I mean people had a plan for me. They thought I would go that route. I was really young," Robyn chuckles. Some shadiness she can't quite recall left her "incredibly disillusioned with party politics," which she found to be undemocratic, actually. "There was a lot of party machinery involved and I didn't want any part of that. I didn't feel like that was real democracy. So I ended up getting more involved with grassroots activism [later on]."

But those crucial years of the late 80s got her thinking about resources and schools: where resources should go, how the movement of and discourse around resources and communities eventually affects all of us on the streets, particularly if we don't become part of the conversation. I'm visualizing Robyn in the predominantly Filipino community of Union City, in 1987. I was a second grader, age seven, in my own predominantly Filipino 'hood of Southeast San Diego; also noticing

difference and wondering about my positionality. In different physical spaces, but the same timespan, we were actually dwelling in sort of parallel intellectual, emotional spaces. More explicitly, we were both trying to understand this thing called race.

Watching Race and Racism Unfold

Of course no one told us it was about race or racism when we witnessed things that didn't sit right with us, especially when it involved our parents. We hear our parents express a certain kind of stress at the work place, or we see how their non-Filipino peers treat them differently, and we wonder what's really going on. We understand that our family is not quite American, and yet we're striving to *be* American because our schools, our society, and even our parents say so. So we obey, and it's a confusing practice: being Filipino in a hyper-American context. It's what James Baldwin (2008)²³ refers to as “schizophrenic” when thinking about the condition of the Negro. We can see how schizophrenia might describe Robyn's father, or the experience of any person of color who is:

[i]n the shadow of the stars and stripes... is assured it represents a nation [which] guarantees “liberty and justice for all.” ...But on the other hand, is also assured that [they²⁴ have] never contributed anything to civilization—that [their] past is nothing more than a record of humiliations gladly endured. It is assumed by the republic that... the value [they have] as a [person of color] is proven by one thing only—[their] devotion to white people.

Robyn reveals poking at this schizophrenia a bit, while at the same time trying to remedy it: “I remember teasing our dad about his English, but I also remember having

²³ Originally published in 1963 in *The Saturday Review*. Copyright renewed.

²⁴ Rather than “she/he” or “s/he,” I use “they” to refer to the singular so as to be inclusive of transgender, non-binary or gender nonconforming.

to do the work; I remember I used to type his letters for him because he didn't trust his English." And that wasn't all. Because her mother (whose English accent was smoother) was working around the clock as a nurse, Robyn's father was expected to attend school functions; but he couldn't. Robyn rests her mind on this point. For the first time ever, she is touched by a clarity about why her father could not go:

He was really just embarrassed. I really think—that's *saaad*, omigod, I'm gonna cry because I think that now I—it just occurred to me now, because I've been so hard on him, like, it wasn't that he didn't come because he wasn't supporting us. I think he didn't come because he was embarrassed. And I don't know why, just literally *now*, omigod! It's this ah-ha moment! How stupid. Tsk.

Tears stream down her cheeks. Back then, all she knew was that she was the one that had to go and stand in for her parents, while still a kid herself. This morning, she cries for that time in her life, "It's probably why. So I would always go to those Back-to-School nights and--" She drops her head and I sit with her, in this moment of self-awakening; in this moment of grief for her father fearing judgment for not being American enough. She stops there.

Robyn sniffs, collecting herself and her new insights about the way her experience produced knowledge about what race meant. And then there were books. Thank goodness for books. Robyn identified as a bookworm as early as nine years old. In lieu of toys, her father afforded her books through the Scholastic Reading Club catalogue distributed at school. He invested generously to her practice of literacy. She exclaims, "I could get whatehhever I wanted. 'Hey, I could check as many?!' So I'd check hecka. I was so proud of myself when my big pile of books would come, delivered at the school." Robyn purses her lips into a dignified and knowing smile.

Harriet Tubman and Martin Luther King were some of the first biographies she held in her hands. Such literacy practices were foundational in her early education around social justice.

Direct and indirect childhood experiences with racism sit in our bodies for some time, holding a wisdom for us to grasp later. For Robyn, there are two poignant moments in her childhood, which she can identify now as explicitly racist. The first was in kindergarten. It involved her really close friend, Monica Cortez, who was the daughter of Chicano rights activists. Monica would talk about how her mom went to UC Berkeley; she was very proud of it and rightly so. Attending this top tier university was not only a symbol of attaining the American Dream, a marker of one's belonging here; it was additionally a critical site of the Third World Liberation Movement in which students fought for Ethnic Studies. On a walk home from school one day, "Monica shares this story," Robyn retells with animation:

"You know whaaat?" I said, What. "This old white guy showed me his ring (right)? It had an American flag on it. And he said, This is OUR country. This is MY flag. YOU don't belong here." And I was shocked. And I think she said something about how her parents got verry angry. I just remember that.

It was perhaps the first message she received about her perceived otherness. And the message was that she better be clear about this difference, that she had no right in her occupying space on American soil. However, we also note that even at a very young age, her kindergarten friend knew to tell her parents about this creepy white dude.

This becomes a learning experience for Robyn—an understanding that your parents are on your side, and they will fight for you. So aside from this lesson of otherness,

the instance is also a lesson about the power to say what is right and what is wrong.

This is kindergarten.

The next striking memory comes from a moment in middle school when Robyn was playing on a soccer team that was quite diverse, “Very Union City,” she describes, “Bunch of Filipinos, Japanese, no white people. And when we played, we were good.” It was a game in Castro Valley that became what Robyn would call her very first direct experience with racism, as she recounts:

Here we are, a multicultural team. We played against this white team. They weren't just white, they were like rich. Because you compare them, back in the day you know, it used to be expensive to bring all those lawn chairs. You know? Nobody brought lawn chairs to soccer games. You just sat on blankets. They had lawn chairs and they had long umbrellas. They were up on top and we were on the ground--- I mean, it's all symbolic. Hella blonde [white girls]. And I remember seeing a girl. It's all very, very colorful in my head. She was wearing a very bright orange hoodie that said Princeton on it. And I was like, Wow, Princeton. They basically were mocking our team. They were mocking our coach for his Spanish accent. We were coached by a Latino man and his white working class wife. It felt like the field was totally like lopsided, so they had to get [referee assistance to literally even out the playing field]; it was just all very symbolic for me. There was a Navajo girl [on our team whose] name was on her jersey: Nanako. They made fun of it. By halftime, I broke down into tears because I was like, I can't believe this. And I think the rest of the team knew this too. We didn't know the words for racism.

They didn't have the language to explain this experience. I can feel the separation of body and mind in this memory, where the team had been playing soccer, engrossed in the game itself and not any of this nonsense. The team was upset. The coach was upset, “Of course we lost the game,” concludes Robyn. In a fit of tears after the game, Robyn tried explaining to her mom this mind-boggling painful experience, to which her mother advised, “Don't let them get the best of you. Don't cry. Don't stoop down to their level by being angry. To acknowledge it is to give them power.” Robyn was

not satisfied with this answer. She refused non-action. She refused to be silent. She was mad and wanted to be mad. She knew what the other team did was wrong, and she wanted her mom to say that. Just say it. But it would be Robyn's story to ride out, not her mother's. In fact, it is this story that Robyn used as the topic of her freshmen year essay, and that essay lifted her into the role of class president.

While she didn't have the language to name racism as it were in those very critical exchanges in her youthhood, again, there was a dialogue already circulating. Robyn blinks, picturing the dots connect:

Let's talk about Nelson Mandela. I mean we knew about apartheid. He had just been released. He was in the process of getting released by the time I graduated high school... See, wow—this convergence. How weird they all totally make sense. So you know this was historical.

Her stories growing up remind us that each of us does not live in a vacuum. Indeed, the tensions we carry in our lives are not only or merely self-induced. Rather, the tensions we carry are at the same time a direct result to prevailing systems of oppression, as Robyn's life shows us thus far. And school gave her some language about such oppression. This was only the beginning of her consciousness-raising. It wasn't until she really left Union City that race became pretty close and personal.

The first college she attended was Boston College, a private Jesuit, Catholic university in Massachusetts, where she was left with a strong impression, "Wow, *this* is America." Never had she seen so many white people and so few people of color in one setting. Robyn takes a breath, "Having this moment at 40, really, getting why my dad never showed up to stuff... It wasn't because he was being a bad dad. It was because he just—he couldn't." She circles back to this cultural dissonance with her

father, taking another breath. There is something deeper there for her to tend to, a need to reassess what she thought of her father. Bringing her attention to her breath becomes this intimate experience, in which she is transforming before my eyes. Baby steps. We embrace the wisdom presented at least on the surface level. That is, his personal experience as a Filipino immigrant father in the United States presented itself to Robyn as this gaping hole, both a symbol and signal for her to unearth the hidden layers of history that informs her own being.

Higher Learning in the 90s: How a Book and a Mentor Change the Game

In this unraveling of political consciousness and personal identity, Robyn finds herself back in the Bay Area, enrolling into community college in Napa Valley. The Bay Area is home. Boston was not the place she needed to stay for too long. It was a good move, one where her politicization as a woman of color awakens. The critically acclaimed book, *This Bridge Called My Back*, lands in her hands, “I can't even tell you how I got a hold of that book. All I know is that it changed my life,” Robyn beams. This anthology of poetry and prose by women of color born out of a UC Berkeley's Empowering Women of Color Conference validates her life experience like no other book before it. Here is an example of what it feels like to have your truths documented and disseminated through libraries. Here is the opportunity to recognize also “the power of writing, right?” Robyn emphasizes. Blown away, Robyn calls together a group of women she had met to share in the reading. It was her second year of college and she was amped. The book moved her in

such a way that it shaped her politics of not just being a person of color, but being a woman of color.

Indeed, it is a woman of color who becomes her most prominent scholar-activist mentor in her eventual transfer to UC Santa Barbara as a sociology major. Diane Fujino is her name; a professor of Asian American Studies who changed the game of academia for Robyn forever, as she relives that time:

When that woman walked in the room, I was like, whoaaaawheee who is this? She's young, she's beautiful, she is stylish, and she is like you know, ON. POINT. This class is like amazing and I was like, I want to be her. I wanna be just. like. her! And it wasn't even about her scholarship yet. This was just because she was teaching the material. I didn't really know about anything else [regarding her work], apart from the fact that she was a college professor. The material is fantastic and she was a scholar activist. We ended up forming a women's organization together on campus. Asian American Women's organization called Asian Sister's Ideas for Action Now. She really taught me in a way to think about knowledge production and the university as this place where you could link ideas in action. So meeting her was a real crucial moment of my life.

It's one thing to see someone do their thing, be inspired, and then hope to follow their footsteps. It's an entirely different experience to actually sit down with someone you admire, in this case, your Asian American woman professor, and organize alongside her. Diane Fujino helped support Robyn as she coordinated educational workshops outside throughout campus. ASIAN held forums, inviting people to speak, "It basically felt like God, how could this knowledge be confined to the 60 people who happened to be taking Asian American Feminism right now? And it only gets offered occasionally," Robyn stresses. There was a need, a gap Robyn needed to fill in raising consciousness about the role of U.S. imperialism and global inequalities. "Don't we want to share it with people on our campus who don't happen to be taking that class?"

We need to take this knowledge outside of our immediate classes,” she proposed. Dr. Fujino was by her side supporting the work: providing her syllabus, which shaped the content and activities ASIAN put out for the broader campus community; and providing her feedback, such as ideas for films to show or guest speakers to bring to campus. And the mentorship stepped off campus, as Robyn walks through the memory:

And then she would take us to demonstrations in L.A. We rallied you know. It was around immigrant labor so the time of big campaigns in the 90s because there was such an assault on immigrants; we were paying attention to immigrant issues. So at the time she linked us with a group called Korean Immigrant Women Advocates, KIWA, and they had this big campaign around sweatshop workers in L.A. and the majority of the workers in sweatshops in Los Angeles were Asian immigrant workers, and meanwhile they were working for these high end fashion designers who were making a killing on their labor. So then we're making these connections because meanwhile I was learning about Asian workers in Asia, Mexican workers in Mexico, and then you're seeing these workers in L.A. doing the same exact things. Meanwhile these protests are happening while the Chiapas people are talking about how NAFTA creates more maquiladoras, creates more low wage Mexican women working for the—all these connections happening.

Robyn assesses this memory. It's as if it was put away in storage for some time, and she returned to do some dusting. I see a glimmer in her eyes, nostalgia, and then a reawakening. I can almost imagine this blue translucent globe spinning around her; her at center, looking up, and taking stock of the way life brought her this knowledge through mentorship, and an example of praxis. Through Diane Fujino. Robyn shakes her head back to this moment:

So she just was this role model, somebody who was in the college classroom, changing our lives, and the content of the books that we were reading was changing our lives, and always making these connections to putting that knowledge outside of the classroom but also taking the knowledge and doing something about it. Supporting movements that were fighting these injustices,

right? So she was a living embodiment of what could be possible. Yeah, I mean she embodied the person I wanted to be. Because not only was she teaching in the classroom. She actually was an activist. There were other avenues for me.

This beautiful connection of mentorship indeed helped define the avenue Robyn would take. She ate up everything she was learning. With many of her professors working on third world issues, her training in Sociology helped her fix her eyes on issues here and abroad.

What a moment in time, the 90s. There was the Zapatista movement, an indigenous uprising against the North American Free Trade Agreement in Mexico in which native peoples were saying “No, you cannot re-colonize us with these trade agreements,” Robyn puffs her chest. The Chicana movement becomes quite powerful on Santa Barbara’s campus while there exists a political assault on immigrants. The 1990s was when the governor of California was passing anti-immigrant legislation with Proposition 187, followed by Proposition 209. Robyn takes pause:

Like, this is a moment and talking to you I feel like I have to listen to this interview. Because I've been telling folks from that time that it's probably important for us to write about the 90s because so many people are so obsessed with the 60s and 70s, but I actually think the 90s was a really important moment when young people, I mean a lot of people in my generation were yet again making global connections between like you know what was happening in our country, in the U.S. What was happening throughout the globe. There was a real crucial conjuncture of things. I came of age and became conscientized in the 90s.

So in the midst of Nelson Mandela, Korean sweatshop workers, the Zapatistas, Prop 187 and 209, young Robyn asks, “What is happening in the Philippines? How are they exploiting our people?” She wasn't seeing much about the Philippines in her classes, but she knew there was a history there—an avenue for her to travel herself.

It's 1995, and graduation is approaching. Breaking news hits: Filipina overseas domestic worker Flor Contemplacion is sentenced to death by the Singaporean government for the murder of a child she was taking care of, as well as the child's mother, another Filipina. Contemplacion is executed. The Filipino people are beside themselves. There is still much suspicion behind the case, so many questions left hanging, something seemingly shady still. Perhaps these are false charges. Could it be the employer who is actually responsible for these murders? Filipinos are in the streets in outrage, suspicion, grief, and action. The case becomes a major topic of conversation as the 1990s opens up more dialogue concerning global diaspora. This was not just a conversation in the Philippines. Or Singapore. But around the world. In addition, it's a conversation about being Pinay, a woman of color descending from the 300-year-colonized and currently imperialized nation of the Philippines. And there is something to investigate further here.

Filipinas were migrating out of the Philippines in droves seeking work to earn income for their families back home. "There's no jobs in the Philippines," is something we've been hearing far too often since time immemorial. Prior to this, the complicated relationship between the Philippines and the United States would force men, more typically, to leave. They were often recruited as agricultural workers from the early 1900s, to soldiers and navy men in the mid-1900s. Filipinas in the 1990s, for the first time, outnumbered Filipino men for export labor. Robyn was keeping pulse:

I was already conscious of Filipinas being stereotyped as domestic workers, being stereotyped as prostitutes, and it was already an issue [we were addressing in] ASIAN. So that started in '93, '94 so by '95 when the issue of Flor hit, that was so much a part of my consciousness right? Already thinking

of myself as a woman of color, very much as a Filipina and the way that Filipinos are sexualized. Flor hits and it's really shifting my world. I'm just seeing the mass mobilization of it. It was also a proud moment for me to see it like, wow Filipino people, globally, so mobilized.

Though Flor's execution was not stopped, Robyn is left with a bigger takeaway, "the Philippine government crisis said something to me." Diane introduces Robyn to people involved in the National Democratic Movement (sometimes called the ND movement). Up until this last year as an undergraduate, Robyn had only been aware of the political strife during the Marcos regime from 1971 – 1982. Like most Pin@ys in the United States and throughout the world, she was unaware that there was still an ongoing struggle for freedom from oppression in the homeland. Diane, this fly Japanese American professor, then introduces Robyn to people on the ground; specifically those linked to Migrante, a Philippine-based international labor rights organization. They eventually would change her life and bring Robyn into the movement. Meanwhile, Robyn is thinking seriously about continuing onto graduate school.

First seeing Diane in the position she was in, doing the things she was doing, wanting to follow her trajectory, and then personally connecting with more Pin@y activists—it all made sense to continue riding that path. What great fortune for Robyn then to be accepted into some prestigious universities: two of them being Cornell and UC Berkeley. With the timing of it all—her growing awareness of the Filipino diaspora, the convergence personal, local, and global events—all signs pointed to Berkeley. Its top tier doctoral program in Sociology offered a move up the academic

ladder, and its geographic location offered a hotbed of ND movement activists with whom she would get the chance to interact, connect, and flourish.

Robyn repositions herself on her cushion. Her mind travels back to now. She thinks of those activists who are now her colleagues and friends. She thinks of the interconnectedness of their conscientization, “It’s all fitting into my biographical frame, you know, world-historical time,” Robyn realizes. On that cushion, Robyn begins to understand why all the people who started the Filipino Community Center in San Francisco are her contemporaries, and why they think about the world the way they do. “You know, we make connections to the Philippines and the U.S. and the Philippine global diaspora all at the same time. We can’t see it as separate. It’s all convergence. Because we came up in a time when it was. It’s hard to convince us [otherwise], right? ...It’s crazy. The memories are very vivid.”

Robyn’s bewilderment reveals the long run she’s been on in the game of academia. So long and so fast was this run that there had been virtually no time to verbalize these critically transformative moments in her life. Not for herself, not for anyone. And we haven’t even touched the subject of tenure.

Academic Tenure: Survival as a Woman of Color

I write this thinking about all the women of color who have systematically been denied tenure over the last decade or so. As a doctoral student, I’ve read the stories, signed the petitions, admired friends and colleagues organizing for and alongside their mentors on the chopping block. Daunting at times, this view of what may lie ahead for me. Nonetheless, we proceed to the inquiry of her tenure track

position at Rutgers University in New Jersey—another story to add to the greater knowledge base of disproportionate epistemic violence among women of color; another one for us to heed.

The predominantly white Sociology Department at Rutgers brought in Robyn and another Asian American woman to ultimately replace a black woman professor who was denied tenure. A couple things had happened just in the initial interview process that made Robyn consider, “These people are fucking racist.” First, she recalls a colleague asking her if she was Latina, “Fucking know anything? Sorry--“ she excuses herself. Together, we laugh. Her eyes grow big, “The real Robyn comes out.” But the memory, annoying and bitter, wears her down. It appears they thought they would be able to “check two boxes” by hiring a Latina (assumed to be Robyn) and the other Asian American woman, essentially pitting women of color against one another. “When academic searches happen, they're highly political,” Robyn discloses. She got the sense that the hiring of two women of color was an attempt to cover up of their tenure denial of the previous black professor. There was also the politics of how the other Asian American woman was hired to represent mainstream sociology, “and I wasn't mainstream,” Robyn points out.

Then there were things that would fall out of the mouths of her colleagues that just blew her away. “Like what?” I ask softly, preparing for the blow. She tells me about the way they spoke about foreign students “having ‘language issues,’ right?” Robyn mimics, then sarcastically quips, “No, they're really just *English* issues, asshole. They’re attempting to write in academic English. You can't write in

academic Chinese. Fuck you! You know what I mean?" she laughs. I get it. I'm reminded of my days as an Army Reservist at weekend drills an hour away from home, hearing white soldiers ask me what I did for a living Monday through Friday. And when I'd share I was just a student pursuing studies in Sociology with an interest in Ethnic Studies, they'd glare at me incredulously, partly offended and then say, "They should have classes on white history, or the white experience." And oh, how I've wanted to shout back, "Are you fucking kidding? That's all we've *been* learning." Luckily, I had a couple of soldiers of color to hang with.

It turns out Rutgers had its own pretty sizeable population of students of color. In fact, it's what Robyn really loved about the campus. But the ignorant comments kept coming from colleagues, such as the time someone mentioned in her first year teaching there, "You're lucky you're doing a popular topic." Robyn was being published, invited to major speaking engagements in the U.S. and overseas, "And he was like, 'It's because I was doing you know, something popular,'" scoffs Robyn. She squints her eyes, "So what is he trying to say?" As if her work in and of itself was not worthy of attention; or that if her work covered more traditional research, it would be going nowhere. I can feel her want to raise her middle finger to the sky. We take these instances and put it right next to the fact that Robyn was not often assigned graduate students to mentor or graduate courses to teach:

Because what, they didn't trust me to train graduate students? I just felt like...they didn't see me as a real intellectual. They saw me as good enough, but I felt like—I remember joking to people like I'm the domestic worker of the department. I teach all the undergrads. They want me to mentor all the undergrads, especially first year students. They want me to babysit. They don't want me to do the hard and real work of intellectual development.

Fortunately, Robyn finds a sense of community: another woman of color, black and Puerto Rican. They connected and became friends instantly, “We commiserated, commiserated, and commiserated,” Robyn sighs, “Just to be able to feel like we're not crazy.” Together, they apply for funding to support a space for themselves. Rutgers at the time was notorious for either not tenuring people of color or women of color, or not promoting them, or not retaining them as they were getting recruited elsewhere. They jump on it, “So we were like, dude, we need this for ourselves because we are not gonna survive this if we don't connect with other people,” Robyn pressed. But the two knew it was a tricky move, as they deliberated:

On one hand, the generation of women before us knew very well what it was to be [women of color in academia], and also chose to engage in strategies that would help them survive if it meant distancing themselves from [their true identities] in education... they choose to either continue to embrace it or they take measures to survive. So we even realized that it would be risky, because it would mean that we were communicating to the world that that's our identity. But I think we didn't feel like survival for us could be any other way. I decided it was my formation; it's what got me there. It was an identity that it was sometimes painful to identify with because it opened up with it that you were already on the outside, and you're gonna stay on the outside [scoffs] right?! But trying to figure out a way to negotiate that and for me it was about building community, you know. I couldn't be alone. Because when you choose for instance to do a topic related to your background, when you choose to do methods that are already considered marginal in your field, when you choose to continue to do—I mean there were so many things that I chose that were always butting against the system [clapping her hands with each word.] How was I gonna survive myself? I had to build community with like-minded people.

We must create space to think and write to survive. This was an imperative for Robyn who had one too many instances of feeling the pressure to act in ways that were unnatural and outright painful in order to survive academia. As early as graduate

school at Berkeley, Robyn began feeling really anxious about what she could bring to the table, seeming kind of unsophisticated. Now at Rutgers, it had come to the point where she was subscribing to the New Yorker and taking it with her to the bathroom. She laughs a hearty laugh, “Gawd, yeah!” Her subscription to the magazine was a solution to an anxiety that had been building up inside her from the countless encounters with colleagues who conversed about things about which she had no clue (or interest).

Once was at a faculty dinner hosted in a Victorian home. Everyone had something to say about the architectural details or pieces of artwork displayed, using terms Robyn didn't have at her own disposal. They exchanged opinions about local politicians. Robyn was not familiar with any one of them in office. And then there were independent film references. “Just a whole realm of understanding!” Robyn exclaims, opening her fingers and hands and waving it in the air above her head. This distinction of being upper and lower class sliced through her body. To even just make small talk was this very excruciating thing. So yes, she subscribed to the New Yorker, and read it to have in her arsenal *something* to talk about when the moment would arise. She chuckles, remembering the words of a working class white colleague, “We can't make up for over thirty years of this class education. We can't. No amount of reading is gonna get us to where our colleagues are.” It made sense finally, to just come back to her authentic self.

All of this extra emotional and psychological labor, aside from the research and writing and teaching, and yet “oftentimes tenure is about how much they just like

you,” shrugs Robyn. “Like, straight up?” I raise my brows as my ears twitch.

“Straight up! You know, how much you fit. And you know, ‘fitness’ is racialized, is gendered, is sexualized right? So you're more fit if you're straight. You're more fit if you're married, if you're settled. Less fit if you're queer, you know. More fit if you're white. I mean they were painful. I hate them. I still hate them.”

The sounds of birds chirping outside her window interject. It's still a sunny morning in Oakland, moving quickly into noon. The smart phone I'm using as a backup recording device is losing battery power. And our stomachs are growling. We break for a moment to marinate on her string of revelations while she goes to the kitchen to cut up some fruit. “How old is your son now?” Robyn calls out, referring to my firstborn Mateo. “Two years and two months,” I reply. “Oh that's fun,” she comments. I giggle, rubbing my belly. Dante is moving at four months in utero. Soon, I'll be a mother of two. Her roommate (a mutual friend) Tina offers us some quinoa salad she's whipped up for today's FCC picnic at Golden Gate Park. I join them in the kitchen and together we feast on bowls of her wonderful cooking. The sharing of both stories and food humbles me. Feeling recharged, we head back to our soft cushioned sofas to dive into some deeper places of reflection and healing.

Arriving in the Body: The Imposture Syndrome, Reflection and Healing

Robyn is jolted back to those days as a grad student at Berkeley. Same deal. Tier one university boasting a “very, very, very reputable program. It's always been. In the top 3 for years! And for years it was terrifying for me to have to go to these damn things.” She's talking about the annual Student Sociological Association, where

both current students and alumni of the program would meet. As a grad student, she'd see: "All these alums coming back from doing exceptionally well, and when they'd talk to me I felt like I wasn't gonna get to where they were. Because you know, there's a whole pecking order." And now Robyn sees her arrival at Rutgers, part of the "research one club," which is however:

[i]ncredibly rigged. Not everybody gets placed. Now I can walk into that space and feel less marginalized. I actually have some kind of connection to this. Yeah, it matters. I have to go to the American Association of Sociological Meeting the next week actually. I was just invited to present. And for years I always had to submit a paper that proved that I'm a sociologist.

Once Robyn landed her position in Asian American Studies at UC Davis, she stopped going. The money, time, and space were no longer worth the pain of walking through that world. So it will be quite the challenge, navigating the upcoming conference because she has intentionally distanced herself from white scholarly spaces for a very long time. Part of it is that she's still not accustomed to the fact that she is actually receiving special invites to these academic functions, although they've been showing up in her inbox for quite some time. It's not real for her, yet. She names it:

That imposter syndrome. It's still less than when it used to be. I'm kind of nervous about going. It's always a source of anxiety for me. Wow, it's so weird to remember this stuff. I mean I'm very reluctant to talk about myself and my biography in any way-- this is very emotional for me cuz it's like [she takes a pause, shaking her head]. It was such a struggle! [Sucking her teeth] I dunno, like I think on one hand 'cuz it was so hard—you still can't quite believe [crying] you're that person that you wanted to be. It was so hard getting here.

Robyn sobs freely. Tears stream down her face, like much needed rain after a drought. She is arriving in her body. By "arriving," I mean that she is coming home to

where she is inside her body, opening up the space of availability, and release the tensions that have created knots in her stomach for so long. To think she's actually "that person now" is disorienting. For most of her career, she picked up the message that her life didn't have much to offer, especially to the ivory tower. She sniffs, gathering herself. I listen intently, with all of me. It's a complicated thing, this imposter syndrome, because she also feels "it's sort of arrogant of me to think that I have something to offer," her voice trails. But she does have something to offer. She did when she was a high-schooler writing a letter to city officials. She does now, as a scholar. Students are telling her so.

Just yesterday, she was sitting with six students when a graduate student whom she formally mentored walked by. The grad student stopped in her tracks to tell Robyn, "Omigod, I was just talking about you to a young person who was your student." Robyn asked who this person was, to which the grad student replied, "Well, she's not really your student. She follows you on iTunes. She wants to meet you." As Robyn recounts this story with me today, she takes a breath and recognizes how hungry the youth continue to be for knowledge of self and their communities. And that she can feed that hunger, despite all the ways imposter syndrome has set in her body over the years: "You know, what do I have to give you? I don't have anything. I'm not that special. It's so hard to internalize that you're there. Because the imposter syndrome doesn't go away." I ask if this is the case even after tenure, to which she jerks back, "No!" And this question pulls her into the traumatic memory of the academic roller coaster. It was no easy ride, as she details:

When I got the job [crying] now I'm getting really emotional. When I got the job at Davis, it was like my dream come true because I wanted to be like Diane [who] got to teach in an Asian American Studies program, out of these activist movements where you will not be penalized for being political. I mean for six years at Rutgers, I had to hide my politics. I had to live like this schizophrenic life where I kept my politics on the D (down-low) and work vigorously to earn my right to belong—A tenured faculty member! Sorry, it's so traumatizing!

She cries deeply. I rush to the restroom down the hall and return with tissue for her. She wipes her tears, and chuckles a bit about a recent conversation she had with other women of color faculty regarding this feeling of having PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). Her Puerto Rican friend who just got tenured shared that she “didn’t know what to do with herself,” to which Robyn replied, “Just rest. You're still in recovery.” In many ways, I feel Robyn recovering. We sit and it’s a moment of meditation for her. Meditation, in the sense that after all the ripping and running around from being grad student to tenured faculty, she can rest her mind on one point. Mediation, as seeing what these energies running through her are all about, how they came to be, and how they can help her trust the wisdom within to transform this pain. Robyn stresses, “You know, I mean ALL of graduate school, ALL of tenure was trauma. And you get it from all sides.” She mentions how you get it from your doctoral program, when you’re one of two who attended public schools and started at the community college, she relives:

I mean, I was in a room with Harvards and Stanfords. I know they don't think I'm the smart one. Everybody knows who the star is. I was not a star and then I get pregnant my 2nd year, and I'm definitely not a star.

I can hear the woundedness in her voice as it fades. She finds it again to describe how you “get it on the activist side” where community folks reduce you to being “just an

academic,” if even in jest. Your politics are questioned. You feel like people are turning their back on you because your book isn’t enough to prove you “did something.” It isn’t “activist” enough. And then of course your critical engagement with your academic work, still isn’t academic enough:

Just having to finish. I mean, every step of the way [sniffing] you know that, because you chose to do the Philippines, they're gonna think it was easier. They're gonna think it's this “autoethnography.” They're gonna think you didn't have to struggle. They can study white people and be white, and it can be easier for them, and nobody will ever question the scientific merit of their work. They can all be liberal and sign petitions and do whatever and they will never be considered un-scientific. They can do the same. And you are [the] “biased” [one].

So having reached this place in life—with tenure, in an Asian American Studies position at UC Davis, here in Northern California where her family and community resides—shows her how the impossible became possible. This is life affirming. This is life transforming. And it is a life that she did not build alone nor would she like to carry on alone. It is ultimately about the sharing.

What’s Mine is Yours: Sharing Wealth as a Scholar-Activist

Academia is more often than not a competitive sport. You win. You lose. You move up the ladder, or you’re behind. You aim for positions up the rank while already being marked (constantly measured for the quality and worth of your work). It can kill the spirit. Amidst the rat race however, Robyn embraces what brought her to academia and what makes her stay: a commitment to social justice. So what she gains in her moving up the ranks is not hers and hers alone, as she notes:

I was very committed to doing the research and the writing of Filipino diaspora and also conversely taking the tools and skill sets and resources at

the university and pumping them back into the community. That's always how I see my work and continue to see my work.

For Robyn, sharing the knowledge is one piece; sharing the skillset on how to do research is another piece, "It's so crucial," she presses. For people to be able to understand their collective experiences through their own research is where the power lies.

It's translational work. That is, language from the "culture of power" mentioned earlier that is picked apart and put into a words people on the ground can actually understand, enough to make sense of their lives. From scholarship (theory), to research (studies conducted), to even funding (legalese), learning this language helps to facilitate connections between the university and the broader communities. This is how Robyn pops that bubble of the university, by bringing it into the community, as she points, "I think there's such a wealth of resources at all universities that can be tapped into creatively." This has been true for the work she's been doing for example at the FCC (Filipino Community Center).

Robyn participated in the organizing efforts for the establishment of the FCC back in 2004 and being able collaborate on a project there upon her return from the east coast many years was meaningful to her, as she embraces:

It was like being able to come home in a real sense. Come home to an organization that I helped plant the seeds for; come home to the Bay, which is where I grew up; come home to really actualize these things that I believed about thought the research process.

FCC had been working with caregivers and was trying to do research about their poor working conditions set up by employers in homes and institutions throughout the Bay

Area. Researchers had come from the Labor Center at UC Berkeley, stayed for a couple of days and managed to gather some initial data. Robyn looked at the data around wage theft, the exploitation of undocumented people, gender discrimination, and racism. It was fine as a product—this report that one could look at and read. However, FCC’s aim was to allow the caregivers to use such data in a way that would effectively gather support towards improving their working conditions. The philosophy here is not to just to advocate for people, but to be a place where those very people can gain the confidence and skills necessary to advocate for themselves, articulate for themselves on their own terms what their issues are.

This is where Robyn helped launch the CARE (short for, Caregiver Research) project in 2011 in which a cohort of workers committed to a 6-session training period learned how to collect research. It concluded with a graduation in April 2012. The summer afterwards, they launched *kwentuhans* (storytelling), a process of gathering community stories which brought caregivers to see their shared experiences in the work place. The project then provided different models of organizing. With Robyn’s previous work with *Migrante*, a global alliance of Filipino workers connected to the National Democratic Movement in the Philippines, she illustrated for them how their labor and patters of immigration were rooted in problems in the Philippines. As a result, FCC now has its own chapter of *Migrante* in Northern California. Robyn is delighted by the direction this project:

It can really be an agent for transformation and liberation! I mean in that kind of way. When you think about how the CARE project came on the heels of a traditional research project, it’s a very different thing. The vision was different. I think we came in not concerned about the question but concerned

about social justice and trying to really work towards transformation. I'm really proud of that. And I think it's a testament to again what academic resources can do for people who are marginalized.

Research for Robyn then is not just directed towards the ends of research, but towards aims of social justice and the transformative process all together. Knowledge is not meant to be kept in one place, or in one institution, but to be shared to improve the quality of life for as many people as possible.

Gratitude to Robyn

Allow us to time travel back to San Francisco's Library auditorium where Robyn is holding her book launch. I hold Dante in a wrap. He is warm and quiet, sleeping against my chest. It has been a long road carrying him in my womb, and now holding him as a human being outside of me is astounding. Like her work. This thing that's been inside her, burning and bubbling and writhing and growing inside her, and it manifests here at this celebration of a second publication she's co-authored, *Asian America: Sociological and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. It is seen in the strong presence of students and *kasamas* on the floor hugging her congratulations as she walks down from the stage, putting down the microphone. It is in the eyes of her son beaming back at her, her only child to whom the book is dedicated.

I walk to the table in the back of the auditorium to purchase a copy of the book. I hand it to her, exchanging a smile before she puts pen to the paper. We hug briefly, and give a mutual thanks, "Thanks Robyn," I greet. "Thank you for coming, Melissa. Tell Dennis I said hello!" she reminds me. I touch base with some familiar folks in attendance, hop back in the car, and drive the hour home to San Jose. Only

then do I stop to open my copy of the book to see her signature. She signed: “Sistah scholar-activist! Know that we’re in this together. Always. <3, Robyn.”

Honored, I post on Instagram an photograph of her message: “When someone you admire autographs your copy of her new book like this, you know (1) you got your work cut out for you! But most importantly (2) you’re not alone. Thank you for leading, writing, sharing, and believing [in me] Robyn. *Isulong* (onward).” *Isulong*, indeed.

CHAPTER VII

PORTRAIT OF ROWENA TOMANENG

The spring sun is out in San Francisco's Chinatown and I'm walking through the brisk air to reach the Hilton in this dark blue blazer, trying to strut like I'm a young professional. It's the 2012 Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education (APAHE) conference and this year's theme is: "Our Lives, Our Stories, Our Future." After a morning of workshops, I spot Rowena who invites me to sit next to her amidst the hectic crowds teeming in to get their hands on the lunch buffet. My ears are muffled by the tinkering of coffee cups, saucers, and silverware. Voices and laughter, handshakes and greetings. Attendees with their nametags dangling from their necks, and here is Rowena—kindly offering a seat at her table. I am humbled.

Who is Rowena Tomaneng?

Rowena Magdalena Tomaneng is Associate Vice President for the Office of Instruction at De Anza College, a community college. At 44 years old, she oversees at least 12 instructional divisions, but primarily 2: Academic Services, and also the Learning Resources Division. She's been at De Anza since 1996, when she was hired as a tenured track faculty member for the English Department. Having worked for 16 years at this institution, she's established a name for herself.

The room is packed. I would have not found a seat otherwise. She greets me with her wide-open arms, plants a kiss on my right cheek, and says, "I'm so sorry I won't be able to attend your workshop this afternoon. But hey, I want you to meet Josephine, a student leader at De Anza College." My introduction to Josephine is

Rowena's *pinayism* at work: building a pipeline, cross-pollinating relationships, facilitating the opening of new opportunities for and with Pinays.

At the outset, Rowena is a big name in the community college administrative world in the Bay Area, holding a high-ranking educational leadership position among Pin@ys in the region. She is a busy woman: drafting proposals, facilitating meetings, calling points of contact, pulling strings, and leading the way. How did she arrive here, name badge reading: "V.P. of the Office Instruction, De Anza College"? Rowena would be less concerned with how, and more interested in talking about *why*—"We gotta always think about [these things]," she advised.

The Meaning Behind the Badge

A year prior, I was in her office for one of my first visits. I had the opportunity to meet with her at De Anza over the course of six visits across two years. It's early June 2011 and I'm finding my way to the Administration Building. The Cupertino heat is rising. I can feel it shine from above and bounce back up from the concrete as I carry my heavy body across, pushing a hand-me-down stroller with my newborn, first born son in it. Mateo is 7 weeks old and I'm praying he remains asleep as I try my hand at conducting fieldwork after giving birth. I am escorted through her door to find her ironing out travel details with her administrative assistant. She just arrived from a conference in Denver and is again preparing for another conference in Washington D.C. happening in the next 2 weeks.

I park the baby beside me as we take a seat across from each other at an oblong conference table in front of her desk. Neatly packaged Korean pastries sit in a

bowl between us. She offers and I happily tear one open to enjoy before Mateo awakens for the next nursing.

She begins to share, “I was at a student celebration this year.” Silver hoop earrings with fringes at the bottom dangle from her ears and shine beneath her straight, sleek, long-layered hair. Black at the roots, brown at the tips. No product. Au naturale. “I was with another Dean who is Latino. It was an African American Student Welcome event.” When Rowena attends student events like this, she clips on her name badge with deep intention. It reads: “Associate Vice President” and she makes sure to make her rounds and introduce herself to students of color. At this particular event, her accompanying Dean didn’t have his nametag and she asked why. “Well first of all, I don’t have it yet,” said the Dean who then joked, “I don’t need no stinking badge!” Rowena recalls, “Then right after he said that a couple of students who knew me [as a previous instructor] from Language Arts came over and were like, ‘Hi Miss Rowena.’” Upon seeing her nametag, they exclaimed, “Miss Rowena, you’re an Associate Vice President now? That’s so exciting!” Rowena smiles at the memory, “They were so excited about it and they were Asian American women, so then I said bye to them and then told him, ‘This [she pauses] is why I wear my nametag, because if they see that I could do-- that it could be something they could strive for if they were interested.’” She looks back directly at me to drive her point, “It’s combined with people like you and me and other educators who really want to develop a pipeline... that’s where the impact will be.”

Rowena wears a name badge so that others can perhaps see both a reflection of themselves as well as the potential of their own futures; and she does this not in a self-aggrandizing way. For she was once a young Asian American student who needed role models herself. There were none.

The Harm of American Schooling

“I was disillusioned about school because I didn’t get the support or connection from some of my teachers in high school,” Rowena says, blinking as images of the past come to her. She was in Honors and AP classes for all subjects, a school athlete and part of the in-crowd who partied well and yet disliked schooling. She found it hard to appreciate it. It was her senior year AP English teacher who left that very deep wound in her perception of both self and the purpose of education. “All of my friends in all the honors and AP classes, we were a bit more social, not ‘behaving’ as we should be,” she explains hand gesturing air quotes. “We were designated as the underachievers as the group, so she didn’t really prioritize us. Our grades were still ok, but you could tell that she had a negative attitude towards us.” The wound became real for her as the school year came to a close, as she explains:

Because I was an “underachiever” and I did not behave like her expectations of this [ideal of an] “AP track student,” she actually began to exclude me in a lot of the senior activities happening that year. You know [how] you get on the bus and you go out and you do the big graduation activities. [On] this one trip [to] Magic Mountain, she wouldn’t let me on the bus. All of my friends were on that bus. She actually separated me and I ended up on another bus... it just really soured me like this person, this educator... had already made specific assumptions about me – with the other students who she perceived weren’t gonna make it—and therefore I wasn’t somebody to include.

For Rowena, this teacher's divide and conquer tactics shook her image of schooling and sense of self. "I didn't get the support or connection. When you have teachers like that, it doesn't make you enjoy learning. When you have experiences like that as a learner, it marks you for a while... I was disillusioned." This, coming from a self-identified Filipino immigrant child of the 1.5 generation aching to become a good student, become accepted; perhaps in the eyes of this white teacher: *become American*.

American Settlement: Heartbreak and Horizons

Rowena immigrated from the Philippines with her mother, father, and younger brother when she was 5 years old, leaving two younger sisters behind whose travel they could not yet afford. Her parents were petitioned to leave for the U.S. during the time of Dictator Ferdinand Marcos' presidency and luckily were permitted to leave shortly after Martial Law was declared. Relatives already in Los Angeles waited for their arrival and assisted the family in their search for apartment housing. Rowena remembers the feeling of family separation until her two younger sisters were able to join them a year later.

They first lived off of Wilshire, about 10 minutes west of Downtown LA, until Rowena reached the 3rd grade. "The public school was very diverse: I had Filipino friends, Korean friends, Chinese friends, African American friends, Mexican friends. This was LA in the late 70s," she describes. By the early 80s under the Reagan years, her extended family began moving to the burbs—Cerritos, in particular. "My relatives said, 'Hey there's a lot of Filipinos here. You should think

about living here.” Cerritos is the hometown in her heart. She draws out the demographic landscape, “Cerritos was also very diverse, but there was a large percentage of European Americans that were still living there [at the time]. There were some schools in the specific ethnic enclaves because Cerritos used to be a farming community like many communities in California.” Cerritos was mainly known for its production of dairy. During her walks to and from school, the smell of cows stays with her, “We could smell everything. The smell was so strong.” Rowena returns to the demographics, describing how segregated the city was:

The Mexican farming community developed their own enclave in one part of the city, [with] their [own] public school inside. And then there was a Portuguese farming community and they had their own area, too. If I showed you a map, the whole Artesia area which was a neighboring small city that bordered, crossed over to Cerritos—that was all Portuguese Americans.

She recalls the Reagan era in effect as she observed white flight in action, at which time European American families moved out to Orange County or out of state, “with integration happening in the public schools,” she clarifies. “By the time I got to high school, there were students coming from Compton, Lynwood” – these cities which call to mind the image of Black communities – “[they were] bussing into my high school for a couple of years. It was very diverse, but when we moved to Cerritos, I noticed that there was a dominant group of other kids. That’s when I think my racial—you know, I had a couple of years of internalized racism.”

The “otherness” she refers to is whiteness: the culture of being white or wanting to be white. “You want to be like the white girls. To be more accepted. To be popular. To be noticed and taken seriously,” she defines, because being anything else

left you in the dark. She laughs remembering how she used to even kick it with a crew of *cholas* in junior high, but here in high school, something changed. The physical campus space was marked by bodies of various cultures. She separates her hands and spreads her fingers across the table top, laying out an imagined aerial view of the campus: “[There] were the athletes... the surfer group... the punk or alternative crowd... and they interacted and convened in the same physical space and were the people who were invited to the parties.” Rowena walks me through her journey of group identification:

I stopped hanging out with Filipinos, and instead I started hanging out with the athletes, which were predominantly white or African American. I was then hanging out with the punkers, and then with the surfers, which is a very white culture. I [began] dating a surfer guy. I was just in surf culture. Blonde hair, blue eye culture and all the other Asian Americans in that group were trying to be white. I was dating a Japanese American who wanted to be white. The group was all Asian American: Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Filipino Americans, all into surfer culture [but] they only wanted to date white women.

When Rowena partnered with one of them, she felt the noticeable change, “Oh look, he's dating a Filipina,” they remarked.

At the same time, however, the Filipino community was quite strong. There were parties and social events where families and youth gathered, making their presence known. She wanted nothing to do with them. She stopped attending the DJ parties. She hated going to the festivals, with the task to dress up in traditional attire “which later [I realize] is colonial garment,” she spells out. “It upset me because I didn’t want to be Filipino. And that’s internalized racism. You want to be more like another culture, because you perceive that there’s more acceptance there. And the Filipino culture is less than.” In this moment, Rowena is leaving that which she is—

her Filipinoness. She instead finds herself seeking a certain kind of acceptance to the point of bleaching her hair, “it ended up being kind of a light brown,” she describes, “and that was the extent of any superficial changing.”

Heartbroken about school, Rowena didn’t immediately enroll at Cal State Long Beach as planned. Instead, she took up assembly work at a toy manufacturing company and some classes here and there at the local community college, Cyprus. By the early 90s, she transferred to UC Irvine majoring in English and found herself in a whole new mix, “I ended up with a very diverse peer group in the English major: first to go to college, most of us transfer students. We were meeting in the upper division classes and it was great because a few of them were more political.” She mentions a good friend, Yvette, who bore the history of a dysfunctional and abusive family environment, being orphaned with two siblings, and experiencing the foster care system. Today, she works in the legal system as a judge. Friends like Yvette gave her a window to different kinds of struggle marginalized students had gone through and were trying to mend through education.

Also on campus was her older sister, involved with the Filipino Club, just as her brother was simultaneously in the Filipino student club at UCLA. Rowena also had friends who were actively involved so she was privy to the PCNs (Pilipino Culture Nights) and other social events but while this all was good and dandy, Rowena’s eyes were opening elsewhere, “My consciousness-raising was happening in my courses.” She was enthralled, “It was the first time I was exposed to ethnic American literature.” There was a story to read, literature that was never divulged,

now in the palms of her hands. Here, an exposure to familiar stories that felt like her own, across racial and ethnic lines. During her junior year, she had the privilege of having really strong professors who covered British, Native American, and Asian American literature. She admires, “They were both knowledgeable about their areas but they really focused the content on literatures that spoke to colonial histories and internalized colonization.” She flips through her hair as she thinks. She blinks harder when she thinks. “That’s when I was angered.” Her chest rises:

When you get educated and you understand the history and emotionally you are moved by it—that’s when you know you’re politicized. You’re in a rage that this is a history that’s been denied to you because it’s not introduced in the mainstream, in high school, in middle school, in your history books; and that it’s still ongoing. [We are dealing with the] Consequences.

Her words sit with me as I scan the walls of her office, taking note of a 24 x 36 framing of a poster of the 2010 publication, *Asian American Studies: Discourses and Pedagogies*, with an image of San Francisco’s I-Hotel.

Senior year at UCI kept her on her toes as she began thinking more deeply about feminism through a French Literature professor who covered feminist theory. More important was the way in which this professor modelled differently the meaning of education, as Rowena thinks back to the 90s, “When there would be issues happening on campus, she would take the class out.” Mind you, UC Irvine’s campus was consciously built with limited space – narrow walkways, and the admin building far from the main quad – to prevent any mass congregations of agitated students. No matter, “Our French lit professor would take us out and she would participate; it was a powerful model for me.” Her understanding of feminism developed as she

witnessed this woman offer time, reflection, and respect to the social conditions in which her students were living. Rowena remembers the noise, the news, and the nearness of it all. “In my last semester, the LA uprising happened. You know, the riots? I had two friends in my cohort group; their families were directly impacted because they were Korean. Their family businesses were—” She collapses her arms on the table to signal their demise. “My hometown has a large Korean community and Mexican American community, and there were a lot of conversations during that time. Early 90s, you had affirmative action debates happening actively in Los Angeles. And I’m in [it].” She breathes. Here in these courses is where she discovered for herself an analysis of the internalized racism and what it meant in relation to her own life.

By graduation, Rowena was politicized at several levels, around ethnic studies, around feminist theory with professors who were engaged not just in the classroom with their lectures, but who made relevant connections to her world. “In ethnic American lit, you are doing colonial/post-colonial; you have the critical race stuff coming in, you talk about the intersection of class. For the women writers, it’s also the intersection of gender oppression in their communities,” Rowena wraps up with excitement thinking about how her “anger” was birthed. Knowledge and rage together found a home inside her that would ache to speak.

The Airplane Incident

The intersecting oppressions of race and gender are very real to her. It is something “to be API (Asian/Pacific Islander) and a woman,” Rowena notes, “There

[are] expectations that you pretty much [do] not oppose anything. You [don't] want any conflict and you [are] a nice person." Additionally, she's experienced the inappropriate judgments made by others as they would approach her, with her "really, really long hair up to [her] thigh" and say things like, "We know that Asian women know different things... sexually." Bleh. The taste is still sour in her mouth. In one particular incident some years after grad school, she was travelling and overheard a disturbing conversation between two white men, as she tells it:

I was sitting there, and they actually were having a discussion about Asian stewardesses... It really bothered me because they were [stereotyping] and so I said to myself: should I make a decision to say something to them right now?... because they don't know me and I don't know them. Or, should I just keep my mouth shut and just deboard?

She first wrestles with the other stereotype: that as Asian women, we are not to speak.

We remain passive, submissive, allow anything and everything to blow over us. She changes course:

So I said something because it was really pissing me off. It was so long ago [but] I [still] remember the feeling of discomfort and then anger. This is upsetting me, because they're essentially perpetuating stereotypes and sexualizing, you know? If I'm recalling correctly, the discussion the two men were having involved comparing female flight attendants on Asian airlines to white stewardesses on the plane [we were on]. I did say something.

The two men were taken aback and said nothing. Apparently, they couldn't respond.

"I felt good because at least I felt like I expressed something: *that* was not acceptable.

I was able to verbalize it before I left the plane."

Changing Directions

Rowena's voice turned up a notch as she entered grad school at UC Santa Barbara. With its strong curricula in Asian American Studies and Women's Studies,

she entered a PhD program “focus[ing] on American literature [with] an emphasis on Ethnic American literature” and an interest in Feminist Studies. She approached this terminal degree thinking about her favorite undergraduate courses and professors and their modeling of education. The way they made meaning out of their work encouraged her to consider her own path. If she was becoming politicized, how can she participate? If she is to become an educator, how can she participate in, she specifies, “these decolonizing acts? How am I gonna participate in educating around these histories [where there are] these consequences we need to still address on an ongoing basis?”

She knew this work wasn't just for Filipinos but for Native Americans, indigenous people, Latinos, and African Americans as she was really engaged in education “as a tool to address a lot of those issues and that's what I was focused on when I started grad school in Santa Barbara.” Rowena worked hard in her first 2 years, lining up her ducks in a row: completing her coursework, refining her knowledge, pedagogy and research skills, “I felt like I took all of the steps needed to really position myself well for a research institution... I had done everything I was supposed to do. My grades were really good. I was already presenting at conferences, working on small publications,” but then came the qualifying exams. And here, her voice—that voice that was silenced beneath the glare of her white senior year English teacher, that voice that spoke back to two white men oversexualizing Asian women, that voice which had been encouraged and empowered through ethnic studies and feminist studies—it broke.

“I had a negative experience, which is painful still. Not as painful as it used to be. It probably took me about 5 years to emotionally get over it, because it changed the direction for me in terms of my roles in education,” Rowena begins. Two white Americanist professors on her committee provided some difficult feedback particularly with one of her research papers—not the one articulating feminist theory, or the one surveying Ethnic American women writers, but the one covering 19th century American literature. They recommended she “take additional courses” outside of the program with professors with whom she never worked; “like, additional units to [improve] my writing because they felt that I needed to have a more academic style.” Her voice here, challenged and disrupted. Her vision of education again, challenged and disrupted, made narrow and small. Her work now felt small. “I was so upset... It was devastating,” she mourns. She approached her academic mentors who were faculty of color. While her African American professor strongly advocated for her, ironically, her Asian Americanist professor (who also taught Women’s Studies) did not. “She essentially told me that, you know, I just needed to do what they wanted me to do, and this hurdle would pass, and go ahead and just take the additional classes.” This did not align with Rowena’s hopes as a scholar, as she recounts, “At that point, I had been working so hard that I felt like I couldn’t compromise my principles. It would be compromising my integrity, or what I thought was fair if I went ahead and just did what they wanted me to do.” Rowena felt certain in her heart that buckling under this pressure was not the answer, “I was being held to different standards than the white graduate... students; that if I have a

combination of a more personal voice mixed in with the academic voice, that should be fine.” But she felt the box tighten around her being. “Adopting a voice that wasn’t necessarily my own,” was really what was going on, and what Rowena found entirely problematic. It countered her vision of education as a medium through which we can be heard, through self-determination, which should be honored. She made the decision to complete her exams, leave the program with her master’s degree. The intensity of it all remained heavy on her chest for years with the hanging notion that, “Basically, you’re a minority. You got in as a minority, you know, fellow. You’re not at that level we expect you to be.” Being racialized, gendered, and spiritually broken during her grad program burned her image of the PhD as worthy of her time. The “not being at that level we expect you to be” as a marginalized person in the academy, a marginalized person in America, is a memory that runs through her veins. Her mother has this story. Her father has this story. And she was a daughter quite attuned to these tragedies to the collective soul as she witnessed these stories unfold.

The Soul Wound of Marginalization

This wound would cut open in department stores. “I noticed that when I would go shopping with my mom, she would have a hard time sometimes with some of the sales people because of her accent. The feeling that I had being with her and seeing how other people treated her made me angry.” The rage we feel as ethnic studies scholars today we know begins much earlier than our college years. Rowena was a young girl seeing her mother belittled, “They either ignored her, or they would [would ask], ‘What is it that you’re *really* wanting?’ It was a negative [approach]. It

wasn't like customer service for somebody asking about products or where certain things are." It was condescending, rude, and xenophobic as Rowena saw it. As a child, how do you help your mother in ugly moments like these? How do you use language to articulate the injustice here?

The wound would burn in the workplace. Rowena's mother was employed as a nurse, connecting with other Filipina nurses having trouble at the hospital. As a junior in high school, Rowena began helping her mother speak back through literacy, "I started writing the complaint letters for her and her groups." Addressed to the supervisor or director, these letters would outline unfair practices. One complaint called for reasonable vacation time or leave time; and the second complaint was concerned with the culture of discrimination in which supervisors or directors would allow other employees to make racist comments, "You're in America. You're in the United States. Why don't you speak English?" English and literature become the focus of Rowena's academic interest, and the need for English assistance intensifies.

It happened in her father's workplace, too. An electrical engineer, he worked for the same company since the day they first immigrated to America. In fact, he ended up retiring from there as well. She noticed her father carry more stress than her mother. His personality was such that he took everything in and never made himself visibly angry until it was too much to hold. He was very reserved. Through the years, however, he would sometimes come home disgruntled, venting to her mother in tagalog. Rowena was aware, "I know they [were trying] to hide it, but I would listen sometimes because I could still understand tagalog. I would listen to their

conversations... I knew they were experiencing something growing up.” But then it became too much. By the time she reached high school, his rage needed an outlet. Her father would return home from work venting—now to his children, in English. It was time to write a complaint.

“He had these experiences, which prevented him from promotions. A white engineer was promoted before him. He was passed up three times.” So Rowena put those English literacy skills to work and began writing those letters on his behalf. “It wasn’t until I was in college and the company was downsizing, that he became Chief Engineer,” Rowena looks up astounded still. Her father had been working for nearly 15 years until he was recognized. Until he was seen. Until he was heard.

New Moves, New Challenges

Rowena’s personal and immigrant family life hurdles propel her to “take it to the streets” but not quite visibly at first. In fact, it begins underground. And on campus. After leaving her doctorate program at UC Santa Barbara, Rowena moved up north with her spouse (at the time) who had a job waiting for him in Cupertino. Ah, the Bay Area—a hotbed of activism. Rowena first began teaching part-time as an English instructor across multiple campuses: Foothill College, Evergreen College, and College of Notre Dame, in courses such as freshman and senior level composition, critical thinking, and a master’s course in Ethnic American literature. The following year in the summer of 1996, she started teaching at De Anza. She was team-teaching an American Cultures course with an ESL instructor and after only a year of working at the community college, she was hired to join the English

Department and teach Ethnic American Literature. It was an exciting time as the campus had a division with an ethnic studies component with other faculty covering Asian American, Native American, and Chicano studies. Rowena was all about it! She felt the warm welcome by faculty of color and progressive faculty... though “the numbers weren’t very big,” she reveals. “They were just so excited that there was another person of color joining the faculty ranks that was interested in doing this kind of work.”

She was recruited to join several campus efforts, “not even having tenure yet,” she points out. She was on the steering committee for the formation of an interdisciplinary studies program (which later became their Learning in Community studies program); the Multicultural Staff Association (MSA), a district-wide governing body that had a seat at the Chancellor’s table and were trying to re-energize their organization. With a supportive tenure committee and academic mentors, she had people encouraging her to implement the kind of curriculum she thought would be meaningful. She had people with whom she could discuss “being an educator of color in an institution that still was not friendly at that time.” Rowena found a renewed energy and sense of self around education in a collective—though a small slice of the largely cold educational landscape she had entered. The hostility showed up in the classroom, as she recalls:

get[ting] push back for addressing political themes or multicultural perspectives. Just by virtue of being a woman [firstly], not really considered an authority figure in the classroom. I notice that if you are a woman of color, you will get challenged more in the classroom because you don’t fit the stereotypes of what an authority should be – a college professor. It’s interesting because at a community college, you have the varying age in

students and so you would really get challenged a lot by older, white males, older white women.

Another form of hostility she experienced was with immigrant students holding previous degrees and apparently a solid background in “the canon.” They would take issue with her teaching perspective. In her teaching of British literature, she would focus on colonialism and gender, the power hierarchy embedded in the culture of the stories or the text. Likewise with early American literature, she would bring students to consider how a racist, patriarchal, dehumanizing voice and perspective is used in its description of indigenous communities. As a result, European and sometimes even Asian immigrants with a “classical understanding” of the literature would reject her alternative lens.

Rowena felt violated from classroom exchanges to faculty encounters. For instance, there was the racist tokenizing. As recent as 2004, during her time as a Department Chair, a dean was in her office giving a tour to international visitors. She tells me dumbfounded, as she shares:

He introduced me as ‘Rowena Tomaneng and she’s from the Philippines.’ And then my counterpart who’s Chinese American, he introduced her as being from China. I was born in the Philippines [practically raised in the States], and she was born in Long Beach or SoCal. [It was] like ‘Let’s do the tour of the campus and I’m gonna show you how diverse we are, and I’m gonna show you this person from the Philippines, this person from China, and this counsellor from Vietnam.’”

How exhausting it was to stand there as a museum piece for this dean’s exhibit. Standing there as a fixed object, without any other history than the one this dean projects. It was sickening.

Then there were committee meetings where she was to sit at the table and offer her perspective, yes? So long as you're sitting next to other faculty – even white male institutional leaders – who've previously expressed their support of your work, right? Not so much. She found that even if they had praised her for her programming or curriculum, if she noticeably spoke out, they suddenly disappeared in the room. They no longer stood beside her, “because they don't expect Asian people to speak,” she spells out. She witnessed this at one meeting in which a white man and a white woman were presenting curriculum around ROPs (Regional Occupational Programs) and military courses, suggesting how much critical thinking such courses involved. Rowena chimed in, “I disagree. There's not much critical thinking in the curriculum so I can't support [this] as a member representing the English Department focused on critical thinking.” She saw their discomfort. It read through their bodies. It was heard through their change in vocal tone. Rowena relives the incident, “When I took a strong position, the white faculty member actually stood up from his chair from the conference table and started howling, like bellowing... like a bully.” Major contradictions emerged for Rowena amidst these micro-aggressions. She learned that “if you speak up too much, you're like [the] angry person of color; you're not respected. If you don't speak up, then you're not participating, you're not engaged.”

Being a woman of color in academia with some traumatic experiences will arm you with rage. The only way to stand her ground in the face of this hostility was to embrace her rage. “When I was a faculty member, I was just in your face,” recalls Rowena. While she had people entering her space expressing support, she often had

folks make it clear that they weren't interested in working with her because they were scared that she was "too strong [or] had [particular] expectations." Rowena needed to find a way to connect with others who knew this rage.

Radicalizing from Below

To keep her spirit intact through these dehumanizing occurrences, Rowena continued building with others. It was necessary for her survival. Thank goodness she began building early on. Introduced to a core group of progressive faculty, mostly women—white women and women of color—already tenured in the institution, Rowena saw their battles to diversify the institution and push for a Women's Studies program. "This core group," she calls up, "had already been working on bridging white women and women of color in the workplace, and trying to develop ally relationships." She locates this setting in the mid-90s, and notes that they already had been doing some work prior to Rowena's arrival. When she was hired, they noticed her energy and passion around issues that affected them all, "So they brought me into their work, as [part of] another generation of women of color in education continuing [what] they [had] established." She opens up her hands in front of her as she tells this story, perhaps gesturing the acceptance of this responsibility. I see her palms up, fingers cupped, and my eyes follow the movement of her forearms and elbows till I'm drawn to a nearby bookshelf, where a 4x6 framed copy of the *Bridge* poem by Donna Kate Rushin (1981) sits. A part of it reads: "I've had enough / I'm sick of seeing and touching / Both sides of things / Sick of being the damn bridge for everybody...I must be the bridge to nowhere / But my true self / And then / I will be useful."

Rowena had reached a point where she had had enough of having to explain herself, her worth, her perspective to others. She was ready to huddle in with other women of color who had their own stories of this kind of strain and pain. Her voice lassos me back in.

“It wasn’t part of the mainstream governance. We did our campus organizing [out of sight] as faculty, and we met in the summer and we met throughout the academic year,” she explains. Simply called Women’s Allies, the group worked underground, “We set goals. We planned strategies. We built off who had better relations in this area or this person or this person, so that we could advance an equity agenda for our students and for our campus.” I sit across from her, imagining the possibilities of this kind of circular learning, the dreaming together with vigour and enthusiasm and I exhale, “That’s hard core.” Rowena responds with nostalgia,:

It was so good. I learned so much from everybody. All of these women were such powerful women of color and the white allies that were part of the group. They had experience being radicalized in the late 60s and in the 70s, the women’s movement, advocating for LGBT issues. It was these women who really continued to shape me and deepen my thinking, showed me models of practice within the institution, employing strategies together and assessing our outcomes.

Behind her, a huge bookcase is lined with white viewbinders labeled with years and policies and grants and acronyms I can’t remember. All this work documented and packaged in ways palatable for the institution, but critically shaped by her underground work. Multiple images of Frida Kahlo adorn her wall.

As the campus diversified by the early 2000s, the group came above ground with the arrival of a new, progressive college president. They started presenting their

organizing model at conferences such as NCORE: the National Conference for Race and Ethnicity, attended by those working as counselors or in Student Affairs interested in increasing access and success for students of color.

At the same time, Rowena continued team teaching on campus in the Learning in Communities (LinC) program with like-minded professors whose curriculum focused on social movements: a progressive white male sociologist who looked at deconstructing capitalism; and a mixed-race AAPI male political scientist who taught grassroots organizing models. Together, these two colleagues had a history of their own involvement in social movements from as early as the 60s and 70s: doing anti-racist work, exposing environmental issues and doing anti-war campaigns. These were her people—“people who had her back” outside of her department who facilitated their own professional development, staying current in social justice issues while staying current in the discipline. They did programming on campuses: one-day conferences on white privilege or diversity issues in the institution or teach-ins post-9/11 on anti-war campaigns. While her colleagues had her back, her students inspired her.

Branching Out with Students and Community

While Rowena had been so heavily focused on changing the campus climate, uplifting curriculum and programming particularly with a women of color or even Pan Asian perspective, she had not yet examined the world through a critical Filipin@ lens. Sure, advising the Filipino club on campus was nice, but it would take more for Rowena to dive in. Luckily, a progressive student leader named Les

suggested inviting immigrant rights organizers for De Anza's annual May 1st (International Workers' Day) programming. They turned out to be a handful of Filipinos in the midst of establishing FOCUS (Filipino Community Support). The early 2000s is when Rowena joined their efforts, as the timing was ideal. Oh, the excitement and the timing—working with the Filipino club, going on sabbatical, thinking about revitalizing the Filipino studies curriculum on campus, “and I [meet] these people who are organizing the community... perfect. I [can] connect the campus to the community.” There began a mutually giving relationship in which FOCUS members would come to campus and work with Rowena's Filipino students, and she would volunteer with their community events.

At the time, FOCUS was a dream, a vision, folks working together at a grassroots level. With her sabbatical around the corner, Rowena offered to help start their non-profit. She got to work. During sabbatical, she did fund and resource development for an entire year to get FOCUS off its feet. Again, her writing skills were put to work, but also re-worked, as she reveals, “I attended funder's workshops to meet these big foundations so that I could learn how to write grants or to speak that world, to ask for money.” She secured a grant from a foundation in San Francisco, for a worker's organizing project for intercultural communication. It gave her the chance to facilitate trainings for immigrant workers in San Jose on how to communicate their conditions through “public speaking, and how to write—how to document bad practices, [through] press releases, things like that on your experience... even computer literacy as part of the training.”

Her involvement moved from behind-the-scenes grant writing to direct organizing across multiple projects through the 2000s. She campaigned against the unjust deportation of the Cuevas family, whose children had no clue about their undocumented status until after graduating high school but were nonetheless deported with their parents to the Philippines—a country they had never quite known. She helped establish the Critical Filipina/o Studies Collective with other Bay Area Pin@y scholar activists (grad students and practitioners alike) in higher education. With the group, she participated in panel presentations during academic conferences tied to their collective research. Though an administrator, she “still wanted a foot in the door in terms of higher ed scholarship in addition to the teaching.” It’s important to stay relevant not just to the world of education, but also the community as she describes, “we wanted to hold forums and do research so that we could give it back to the community so that they could utilize it to strengthen their capacity.” She applied her knowledge as an organizer for the Custodio Campaign, in which an unarmed family – a single Pinay mother and her three sons – were racially profiled and beaten by eight San Jose police officers, while two others observed. During the time their case was drawn out for two years, Rowena collaborated with local organizations to raise approximately \$1000 for the family’s legal fees.

A Custodio Campaign event happened to be the first local gathering I attended as a newcomer to San Jose. It was March 2009. I was looking for community, for other critically involved Pin@ys in the area with whom I could build, after having spent the two previous years doing youth work and completing my master’s degree in

San Francisco. FOCUS invited me here at the site of Silicon Valley Debug, a space for local media and organizing. And through the work of FOCUS, Rowena and I came to meet for the first time here. In honor of International Women’s Day the event was entitled, “Two Year Wait – A Woman’s Pursuit of Justice.” One of the emcees of the evening, Dennis, would years later become my life partner. At that moment, I watched him being advised by Rowena. Together, they were lining up spoken word and hip hop artists before the family’s mother, Marilou Custodio, would share her story. FOCUS linked her struggle “with the larger struggle of Filipinas in the U.S. and globally.” They highlighted:

The brutality imposed on Marilou Custodio reminds us of the brutality imposed on Filipina migrant workers in the Middle East by their employers. Marilou’s story reminds us of the brutality imposed on Filipinas by the U.S. military as in the case of Nicole. Marilou’s story reminds us of the brutality against Filipinas imposed by Gloria Macapagal Arroyo’s Regime in the Philippines as in the recent abduction of Melissa Roxas, a U.S. Citizen doing Human Rights work in the Philippines.ⁱ

They pushed for justice within the court system and raised \$1000 for the family’s legal fees that evening.

Translating Life Experience to Pedagogy

Her first year being introduced to a community college population as an educator was complete culture shock, “You really don’t know what the needs are of community college students unless you are actually here and teaching. For example, I had to do some staff development work around—how do you even teach basic reading strategies?” She was forced to pull back from everything she learned in grad school teaching UC freshmen. We don’t throw prompt questions at them, urge them

to add a Works Cited page, wait till they submit, grade it in ten minutes max, then hand it back. Essentially, we don't leave them to their own devices. The population of underprepared students in her classroom didn't her thoughts on ho to refine their writing; they needed her to *teach* them, "Like, how do you form a paragraph?" Most college instructors might find this foolish. For Rowena, it's all part of "access work," as she calls it. Teaching adults how to form a paragraph was Rowena's window into the learning journeys of those who enter community college. As an educator, Rowena's job was to open up possibilities for them to succeed, particularly in the field of English literacy (and eventually critical literacy). It required a certain quality of patience and know-how cultivated during those days she spent drafting labor complaints on behalf of her parents who were suffocating in the work place. Her ability to start at ground zero with her students is an example of how we hold up the dignity of our students by allowing them the space to be wherever they are in life, while providing the resources needed to move forward.

From Rage to Restoration

Our sessions in her office are dwindling down to the last one scheduled. I take a moment to sit at a tree-covered bench at the center of campus, gathering myself before meeting with her. My hot pink pants are nearly unzipped all the way along my side, held up only by a belt, and covered by my long gray cotton blouse. With all this bloating, my belly protrudes, and so I share with Rowena upon greeting her on this day, "Mateo is gonna be a kuya (older brother)." She smiles with me and I feel her own glow light up the room. She also has great news: she has just started her first

year at the University of San Francisco, pursuing an Ed.D. in International and Multicultural Education, with a concentration in Human Rights. She's holding it down on two different ends of the educational spectrum: overseeing high-level administration at one campus, while being a first year student with her head in the books at another. Quite refreshing for her actually, "I was thinking even with all of the crap that happened in grad school, I just loved being in grad school. I love the material. I love the dialogue." Excited to connect with a new crop of AAPI or multi-ethnic community of educators and practitioners, she begins to center herself by reflecting on her original purpose, her drive.

What comes up for her is that rage that simmered inside, as she discloses, "I'm having to review [that] anger around racism and sexism and multiple oppressions from so long ago. I'm coming from a lot of change." Suddenly I remember sitting in a FOCUS meeting with her, a retreat in particular that took place February 2009 in the living room of another member. She was leading discussion. I sat on the carpet, looking up to her as she sat at a small table typing away notes while spitting the facts of all the pressing issues hurting our people in the homeland (the Philippines). She spoke with much conviction, and yes a certain degree of anger. She was organizing. There was an urgency she couldn't ignore.

I shake myself back into this moment and ask, "So your anger looked different before?" She nods vehemently and tells me, "When I started teaching, I had a level of intensity, and it was a drive rooted in anger," which was often met with disagreement

and silence. Only in hindsight can she see that anger for what it was—a part of her journey, which carried also with it:

[t]hat sense of loss, of mourning; the mourning you experience in the decolonizing process. I feel like I've always been at that place of hope, [but] I've gotten tired. Burning out with that struggle, I feel like I am back to this place where I have a lot of generosity for those who disagree[d] with [my] direction.

She speaks of this different anger with a glimmer in her eye. I imagine her memory bank scanning the spectrum of emotions she has harboured and the actions she has taken over the course of her work in the past 20 years. I imagine her putting that kind of anger to rest in some way. “I think when we started doing this, you know, talking? I was not that generous [*she is cracking up*]. Even a few months ago!” I think about her as a first year student in the program, now reading and reflecting—“And the writing!” she interjects my thoughts. “I’m writing all of this stuff down and it’s helping me metabolize all of these feelings that are kind of unsettled.” Her eyes widen as she talks about her Race, Culture, and Ethnicity class where the readings require her to think about the concepts in relation to her own identity and experience. It has given her the space to write about her own praxis here at De Anza both as an instructor as well as someone in a leadership role trying to bring a model, “More recently, a model of care and empathy,” she clarifies, “in the curriculum, [and] into faculty development.” There is a different way of being for Rowena these days. She’s shifted from that sense of urgency and rage, to taking a breath and embracing time to reflect.

Together, we discuss the shared understanding of how the majority of our educational pathway is a colonial model, a model of industrialization in schooling. For faculty of color, we have learned to navigate that terrain while being triggered by unresolved issues from our histories that closes us up, makes us rigid, makes us hard. When we're met with troublesome encounters along the educational pathway, we erect walls around us for protection. She chimes in, "Racism, sexism, homophobia, whatever—it really places you in this hostile, angry place where you can't even have dialogue with a person who is an ally, even a woman of color ally." But for the past seven weeks at USF, Rowena has been taking down those walls. Opening up these books again, sitting in her space and letting her stories flow from her wrist and onto the page—it has tempered her. Those walls torn down have opened up her world while bringing her back to her roots. What is it that she stands on, that holds her up and carries her to keep going? Her family.

My Family is My Ground

At the end of the day, Rowena's critical engagement in higher education is made possible by the strength of her family, both immediate and extended. She shares, "I was really immersed and doing an okay job in balancing the community and the responsibilities on campus and even when my son was born in 2004. He came to everything, you know like Mateo goes with you?" Yes, I recall little Felix in his stroller while Dennis and I were just dating. He came to all of the anti-war rallies. He came to the immigrant rights rallies. He would come to the forums. He would come to the testimonial events. All of this activity she would not have been able to do, she

notes, “without having my partner who is also an academic and progressively-minded [person], [with the] same politics, supporting me at home.” Home is everything. You need a home to hold you through all of this work.

She walks me to her desk, opens the bottom right-hand side drawer and pulls out a half-sheet of paper. One side is covered in brush strokes of every color in every direction. The other side contains young Felix’s writing. He was five years old when he gifted this to her. It reads: “Dear Momy [sic]: from your sweetheart you are the best momy [sic] in the world.” Then his drawing of an eye with lashes, followed by a heart, followed by the letter “U” ultimately spells out, I love you. She laughs at first, “This is really important to me. It grounds me, reminds me I’m grounded in a strong family environment and because I have that background, then I feel like I want to model the care that I got growing up.” This kind of care wasn’t just something she received as the child of immigrant parents; it was also a care she heard stories about concerning the work of her grandparents.

At home in her family room, she describes, “is an old photo taken in the Philippines of my *lolo* (grandfather) and *lola* (grandmother) on my mom’s side.” On one of her big bookshelves, it sits protected in a wooden frame next to a photo of her parents and her as a young girl. She loves this photo. She cherishes this photo so much that tears fall thinking about all the reasons why. I sit with her in silence as she sniffs, sucks her teeth, and shakes her head. I feel something deep and chilling in this space. She finds her words, “How I wish that I had more time with them.” During her early childhood in the Philippines, her grandparents were in Mindoro, far from where

she was growing up with her father's side. When she initially immigrated, her family didn't have the luxury to afford traveling back and forth to the Philippines to visit them. But there were stories, as she tells me:

I had these stories from my mom about how my [she breathes in] *lolo* was such an amazing person [catches her breath] in the community and the village and how he [she sobs] sacrificed some of the needs of his own family because he really felt like it was more important to help somebody else that needed it. He comes from a faith-healing tradition.

I ask, "Like *hilot*?" She nods, "Yes, and my mother has it." *Hilot* is an ancient Filipino art of healing. My own paternal grandmother practices this. It is something that is traditionally passed down within families, across generations. Customarily, a person must be selected by an elder to learn the art, practice it, and use it for good. Some call it "just massage" while others recognize it as a form of "magic." In my experience, it is out of this world. Rowena recalls:

People used to come to my house when they weren't feeling well and she would put her hands on them and then they would feel a lot better. When I had major physical pain, I always went to my mom. She would just have her hands on me and it would really generate a lot of energy and heat.

I think about how I've been drawn to the movement of her hands through our conversations over the course of the last two years. I knew there was something there, a magnetic type of energy, like that which is felt through the body work of a *manghihilot* (hilot practitioner). In this instance however, Rowena isn't feeling particularly powerful. Instead, the air around us in her office has cooled down. The chill I feel is actually this sense of great loss. Rowena did not get to experience her *lolo*'s presence and magnetic energy for too long. At around fifty years old or so, he and her lola finally arrived in the States to join Rowena and her family, but was soon

after diagnosed with emphysema. She mourns today. I stay with her through this moment of grief. It explains why she holds so dearly this practice of care. “This is my ancestry,” Rowena concludes.

Gratitude to Rowena

Allow us to travel back to the APAHE Conference where Rowena offers me a seat at the table in this packed room of professionals in higher education; here, where she introduces me to student leader, Josephine. I bear in mind now some of the hardships that have shaped the person she is today: helping her parents fight work discrimination, holding onto her dignity through the heart-breaking experience of her doctoral qualifying exams, teaching adults how to form a paragraph after having taught at a leading research university, organizing in the community while raising a child. Each of these trials required her to bounce back with resilience. Deep within, she had to source from another kind of power. I want to say this power is a form of *hilot*. Her offering this seat, her introducing me and building network, is this form of care important in her role in higher education. As she sometimes refers to all this as “access work,” we remember all those times she and her family had been denied access. So today’s practice of wearing her name badge is a physical manifestation and an expression of the ways in which Rowena transcends all those walls—walls of denied access, and walls that she herself built up with unbridled rage. Her name badge today is the full, warm embrace of self and community. It is a demonstration of the meaning of education, in which her name points to her family lineage and stories; and her job title points to the form through which she carries their wisdom forward. It

is a symbol on her chest to disrupt the ivory tower as we know it—her Pinay name, *Rowena Magdalena Tomaneng*; positioned above her title, *Associate VP of the Office of Instruction*.

CHAPTER VIII

PORTRAIT OF LIZA ERPELO

The air is cooler than I'd like, the sun is nowhere, and I'm swimming in fog this spring morning on my drive up the Bay Area peninsula. Back home in San Jose, the sun is shining. Back home-home in San Diego, the sun is actually warm. My sarcasm speaks. I grew up spoiled in regular sunshine and I miss it already as I walk, ducking the heavy clouds sweeping across this parking lot at Skyline College. This is my destination today. Situated upon a hill, a foggy hill, where its other side is the coastline of the Pacific Ocean, this community college is a place where Filipin@ and Filipin@ American students who make up 20% of the campus population,²⁵ can find possibilities of growth and support as they embark on higher education. The college uniquely houses the Kababayan Community, which offers a team of educators and counselors available to guide young Pin@ys not just academically, but emotionally and spiritually—that is, they take care of the spirit, morale, and intellectual well being of their students. Today, I have the privilege of getting to know one of the main advisors, Liza Erpelo.

My disdain for the dreary weather is suddenly disrupted as I recall: Liza is also from San Diego. In fact, we grew up in the same hood, Paradise Hills; went to the same high school, Morse (though years apart); and are children of Navy dads. So this feeling of removedness—my San Diego soul in this relentless gray of the Bay—

²⁵ <http://www.skylinecollege.edu/kababayan/>

diminishes as I approach her office. In a way, visiting her might feel quite like visiting home.

“Come on in!” she greets warmly as I step in. Her office is inviting. San Francisco Giants baseball team regalia, pictures of her family, and keepsakes from students adorn every corner. It’s a happy place. She stands up from behind her desk in her comfy t-shirt and denim shorts and we exchange a hug. I feel warm already. We’ve known of each other mostly through mutual acquaintances in the community, though we’ve never had the chance to really hang together. I appreciate this chance. She turns back to her desk where there lies a ukelele to lend a co-worker, and a bag of final papers to grade. On the floor is a big, colorful, façade of a toy house, “My co-worker gave it to me, for Aubrey. She’s been trying to conceive for years and even thought of adoption, but then just accepted maybe it’s not meant to be. So I told her, ‘Hey, I’m only borrowing this until you get pregnant.’” The thought saddens us for a brief moment. As it so happens, we are both pregnant. Liza is four months along; I am four weeks along; and these are our second babies. The coincidence is uncanny as her first births are also three months apart. “Every time you get pregnant, I get pregnant three months after!” I laugh. Our worlds are closer than we think.

It's her office hours and our time together is limited, "Folks [students and colleagues] might come in and out. They got bills to pay with grant money. I got fifteen candidates to interview for two open positions; that's coming up. The list goes on and on." But still, she smiles. I admire her easy-goingness. "I've been doing this for too long," she jokes.

Who is Liza Erpelo?

Born Liza Marie Suyat Erpelo, she is a 39-year-old professor of English, "Well, that's what I say depending on who I'm speaking to, but really first and foremost an advisor, because of all the students that we work with. I'm one of several co-advisors in the Kababayan [Community] program." Her role does not just entail helping students increase English proficiency for college success and eventual transfer to a four-year university. She is a mentor who opens her door to these young folk, sees their highs and lows and embraces them—wherever they're at. She reveals, "They come to me, if they don't feel like they can go to their counselors, if they want to check in about something... something they know that they can talk to me about, like 'how am I gonna talk to my parents [about] issues [around] sexuality?' Sometimes I find myself counseling, I'm there to talk. Even before I had [my own] kids, I took care of my students: whether it's checking in with them [or] if I have left over food at home, I bring it in, feed them and everything. That's like the Filipino way—you feed folks, that's what you do."

Liza has been at Skyline College since 2002. Kababayan was founded some years before she arrived, went dormant for a short while and then started up again in

2003. A full decade now, this woman has seen the program grow for Filipin@ students, educators and the campus community as a whole. But her work wasn't always Filipin@-centric or focused on ethnic identity formation and community building. Nor did she see herself as a teacher at first. She was a skilled writer in high school, who – through the encouragement of her 10th grade English teacher, Mrs. Hammond – enrolled in community college writing courses early on and eventually got her Bachelor's in English at San Diego State University. With that under her belt, she went on to get an M.A. in Literature, which allowed her to begin lecturing a bit, and then a second M.A. in Composition in order to teach post-secondary reading and writing. But there's a story between the two degrees.

“I was part of the Faculty/Student Mentorship program [while I was pursuing my M.A. in Literature] at San Diego State. I was a tutor coordinator-- that was the position. So this is a program that follows immediately after Step to College, where folks work with high school students where they could take some courses that will help count towards college. I was tutoring a student Math, of all things. I couldn't feel more removed as an English major [or a] Literature grad student. And this student needed help in Algebra. I looked down at the paper and for some reason immediately remembered: FOIL – first, outside, inside, last. I was so excited to show the student the formula. The student got it, and presented it back to me.”

That transaction, that process, that ability to teach something and see her student be at a new place with new information blew her away, and she thought: “THIS is what I wanna do. I wanna teach.” She intentionally sought her second M.A.

at San Francisco State University, as it gave students the opportunity to assemble their own Master's program. She had already come a long way as a student and was ready to take the next leap to become an educator.

The Birth of an Education

From a very young age, Liza could remember how much her parents instilled education. She was the eldest, the *ate*, with 2 younger sisters. Her navy dad had this little blue suitcase he would open up and show his ribbons, medals, certificates, and all scholastic awards he garnered as a student in the Philippines. Liza would gaze at them and think, "Yes, I want to be like my dad. I want to get all these awards, too." So she worked really hard through school to make both her parents proud. "And of course, they expected me to go to UCSD and take up medicine so that I would be a nurse, or engineer, or even join the military." Typical Filipin@ story. But of course, she took another route.

"I purposefully only applied to CSU schools, and USC, for their strong literature emphasis. I brushed it off each time my dad asked how my UCSD application was coming along, or if I heard anything," Liza shrugs, pursing her lips:

Once I got into State, I took all my required courses and waited till the last minute to declare English [as my major]. I even waited till my junior year of college to reveal to my parents that I was taking English. My mom said, "Really? I thought you were taking up Spanish!"

But it was English and literature that fed the soul of this bibliophile who eventually learned she had a story to tell, and a story to write. Eventually, her parents ended up being okay that she pursued another route, "As long as you finish college," they

agreed. Let's take note however that Liza finished her Bachelor's in four straight years, which is not heard too often nowadays. She made it possible by filling up her course load every semester, and taking summer school every year. She loved and loves learning. Learning, I've witnessed through her storytelling, is about the journey to understanding and appreciating love across multiple levels.

The Catholic Conversation

“The Catholic conversation! Omigod. That's so funny!” she laughs when I ask her to repeat the story. I'm thinking about how religion in our families – more specifically, Catholicism in our Filipin@ families – is indoctrinated; how we deconstruct this learning of a religion born out of colonialism, and what we do with that information being the educators and parents we are in our own lives. It so happens, both of our families attended mass at the most Filipin@-dense church in our neighborhood, St. Michael's. We must have passed one another on a Sunday, or Christmas or Easter at least once back in the day. Had to. By college, however she was forced to reconsider the role of Catholicism in her life. In her second year at San Diego State, at around nineteen or twenty years old, she was confronted with the dilemmas of her Catholic upbringing.

I had just started taking a lot of writing classes for my [English] major. I was taking a class in Women's Studies [while taking another] class on ‘the Bible as literature’; taking a look at the bible from a secular point. Between learning about Women's rights and looking at the bible from this perspective, I kind of realized that a lot of what I had learned about Catholicism and religion was very opposite to what I actually believed in and it seemed almost hypocritical for me to say that I was a Catholic when I didn't believe in the, you know, women were not allowed to do so many things, their stance on gays and lesbians, and it just didn't make sense to me. So, one day I wrote about this

for my literature class. I wrote about how I didn't see it anymore; how hypocritical Catholicism was to me, to what my core beliefs were. It was a journal assignment that I had to do. You know, a free-write you turn in; you get comments on it and they give it back to you and everything. And I had written it on my home computer, and it was like a really old computer, dot matrix printer, so slow, half an hour to print a page. So I hit print, and I went to go take a shower 'cuz you could do that! You can go do your thing and come back and it would still be printing!

We share a hearty laugh reminiscing for a brief moment what it was like to work on school projects with those machines throughout the 90s. Liza softens, regains composure, and continues:

So I come back and my dad was standing at the printer reading my stuff. And he had never read any of my stuff before and he [was probably like] oh what is she writing? And it just went downhill from there. We just got into this whole like argument you know about religion. We had been raised strictly Catholic. I went to Catholic school even, for a couple of years. I did all the sacraments, except for confirmation. It was kinda hard for me to explain.

From that point on, she viewed herself as a spiritual person—not necessarily religious. It became a contention between her and her parents for a while. They spoke nothing of it. As a dutiful daughter, however, even after she had moved up to the Bay Area, she would attend church with her parents during her visits in San Diego. “I would just go through the motions,” Liza remembers, “once or twice a year. But now it's at a point where they don't push it on us anymore. And that's the thing of our generation, it's just different for us.”

Liza points to “us” as 2nd generation Pin@ys growing up in the States. We were experiencing this colonial learning of Catholicism differently. This right vs. wrong, good vs. evil, black/white thinking is something we cannot settle with. Doing so would require us to divide ourselves among others, which counters the work we're

doing to find inclusion. Also, by being Pin@ys, navigating the American landscape as brown folk with immigrant parents, we already are straddling borders of culture, so why not that of religion/spirituality? Why must we follow the doctrine? Why must we remain in one box? Or be on one side... of anything?

Gender Lines Blurred Inside and Out

I actually met Liza years ago, at the 2006 Filipino American National Historical (FANHS) Conference in Honolulu, Hawaii. I was there accompanying youth from the Philippine-American Youth Organization (PAYO) based in San Diego. She was there accompanying youth from the Philippine Youth Coalition (PYC) based in Daly City (she was on the Board of Directors for Liwanag Kultural Center, under which PYC-San Mateo County was housed). We exchanged nods like, “Wassup! California in the house!” Upon hearing we were from San Diego, she exclaimed, “I went to Morse! Paradise Hills!” Our hood was the city’s Pin@y hub.

Liza rocked short-cropped hair, a buttoned up shirt with a tie, a vest, slacks, the whole butch deal and I instinctively thought she was lesbian. No, I *naïvely* thought she was lesbian. The assumption riding through in my body as I surveyed *her* body was the product of lifelong colonial conditioning of the mind, holding strict definitions of what it is to be male, female, straight, or gay. There is no spectrum in the colonized mind, the limited ignorant mind. I was 24, still learning. As I had already spent years silencing my own queer experiences from youthhood, stuffing the memories in some dark air-tight box and pretending they weren’t there anymore, I therefore spent years denying the existence of a queer spectrum. These feelings aren’t

allowed to be there, said a voice in my head. I am never to fall in love with another female body, the voice urged. Am I gay or straight? I must choose. In speaking with Liza ten years later, she teaches me, reminds me: there is no reason to choose, nor is it necessary to have to identify one's gender or sexuality for another's sake. Through reflection (inward questioning) and action (speaking and listening to Liza), I widen my own critical consciousness; what Paulo Freire teaches us is conscientization, or conscientização. Liza's embodiment of gender and sexuality tells the colonized mind to sit down. For her, this is how it is:

Well, I mean, growing up, I was very tomboyish. Didn't like Barbies, didn't like any of that stuff. In fact, my dad taught me how to throw a football, play basketball and all that stuff. It just never appealed to me. And then I think I remember I cut my hair really short when I was maybe in the sixth grade... when I [reached] high school, there was no question. I was just like, you know I wanted to date boys and all that stuff and grow through [the whole dating experience]. But [during that time], I actually became friends with my manager when I was working at the McDonald's in Paradise Hills, at the two-story McDonald's.

That two-story McDonald's on the corner of Paradise Valley Road and Woodman was the spot. Junior high and high school youth would gather, pick up a quick meal, head on upstairs and kick it. It felt like a luxury, that second story; a getaway from the nonsense on the street with a meal we could afford and share with our friends.

Working there as a teen was quite noteworthy. So here's Liza working at this McDonald's for two years, building a relationship with her Pin@y manager along the way:

She was a little older than I was, but I became really good friends with her. We kinda looked similar so everybody thought we were sisters. She had two older brothers. She never had any sisters, so she kind of adopted me as a sister. And we spent so much time together and my parents were worried that

I was lesbian. And um, and I didn't even see it as that. Honestly, I was in my own world. I was like seventeen years old. Like, here's this older person who's showering all this attention on me. Like literally spoiling me, giving me whatever I wanted. And honestly, I didn't think anything of it, I just thought it was cool. She would bring me lunch and stuff, and everybody around me was seeing it as something else—which I didn't see at all. I just saw this as a friendship. And the more that I was kind of getting pressured about that, it kinda made me ... I, I, I told her, I called her and told her that I didn't wanna be friends anymore. And that was part of it—that pressure basically. And I'm pretty sure I broke her heart. It was a dick move what I did. When I think about it.

She breaks open my earlier naïve assumption of her strictly lesbian identity. It forces me to ask: why is my mind so quick to identify *for* her anyway? Secondly, she walks me through this experience, a queer experience nonetheless; one she navigates in the way she must at the time, communicating to her manager, “You know, we can't. We can't, I'm starting college.” I made up a bullshit excuse. And I was dating some guy at the time.” I can see remorse in Liza's eyes, in the way the air in her chest softens. It's often full when she's storytelling, especially when we're sharing moments. But in this moment, she remembers that her manager probably fell in love with her. And perhaps her heart is breaking for her, too.

The “dick move” Liza made by calling the friendship quits is interesting to note as it does two things: (1) it illustrates the fear she experienced buckling under societal pressure to have to answer, to have to identify; and (2) it responds to the colonized consciousness, “No, I am not lesbian. Not in the strict sense of the word. Think again.” So here is one way in which Liza came to understand gender and sexuality in the body. What of the mind? What awakened her critical consciousness around the topic?

In her first or second year as an SDSU English major, she enrolled in an advanced rhetoric class “like this big hot shot, oh look at me; I’m qualified for this, shoot, I’m a take this class,” she describes. She didn’t know the class would blow everything she knew about gender out of the water. The course material had a strong focus on sexuality, something she wasn’t initially aware of upon enrollment. Her professor was a “blonde-haired queer south African male of all things,” she retorts. And yet it is he who later introduces her to reading the works of renown Pin@y writer Jessica Hagedorn. This course, however, placed in her lap the kind of literature that generates new theory and makes a student hungry for more learning as she retells with excitement:

So imagine this, I was like 19, 20 years old, reading this stuff. And I didn’t understand half the stuff I was reading: *Epistemology of the Closet* by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Story of the Eye* by Georges Bataille; *Close to the Knives* by David Wojnarowicz. All of these books had to do with sexuality. And while I was reading [these] books, I would take the B line [trolley] to Hillcrest to go to the bookstores there to try to learn more about queer theory. This was before the internet, so what you would do back in the day was you’d go to all these bookstores. So I spent all my time there.

Liza’s drive to dig up such literature wasn’t just about feeding a new interest. As one of the younger students and the only person of color in the class, she was also eager to impress her professor and prove to herself that she belonged as an English major. In fact, she had not yet revealed to her parents exactly what she was majoring in. They were clueless of her trajectory. They only knew she was attending school, and for them at the time, that was enough. For Liza, she needed to prove that she was making the right decision about her college career path. So this need to prove, coupled with

this new awareness around the complexity of sexuality kept Liza on her toes. She found herself revealing pieces of her truth in a final paper:

I remember actually writing about, to me, the moment that I knew that I was different. And that was the first time that I had actually spoken it in words. It was after being in this class for a semester. I always knew there was something different about me, more than just being a tomboy, there's something else. And so being able to see that like on paper... And this was even before I met Jeremy.

Liza has been with the love of her life, Jeremy, since 1994. She tells me this story in her office on this one fine day in June 2013, following a watershed moment in history: the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which defines marriage “between a man and a woman”, had been officially struck down by the Supreme Court. Our progressive, connected circles had been holding our breath around this “decision day” and it was here, a step forward in the long battle for marriage equality and LGBTQ rights in general. Before exchanging stories about how we each met our husbands, we first observe how fortunate are kids are to grow up in an era with a bit more room to breathe. They watch us hang with and care for our relationships across the spectrum—with straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, cisgendered, queerfolk and couples alike. It is becoming normalized, a departure from what was “normal” growing up in the 70s-90s.

We come to thinking about how our life partnerships stretch the boundaries. I take pause, sucking my teeth, being careful in my approach to the subject matter. Because our identities are personal. Because love is personal. Liza unabashedly shares:

There's that whole understanding that both of us have that sexuality's very fluid. There's no real like, *umph* [she draws a line with her hand across the desk], these are the defined boundaries. You can't like [say], this is what's gay, this is what's straight, this is what's masculine, this is what's feminine. I think we both had that understanding from the very beginning. Cuz he saw me for who I was. I mean: look at me. I'm freakin' wearing jean shorts, and like [a] t-shirt—I mean *this* is the norm. This is what he saw me in everyday.

Liza lays out for us a glimpse of the spectrum. They're mutual appreciation for and acceptance of their non-conforming gender expressions creates a nest of nurturing love, even now as they build their family. With the coming of their second child, raising boys vs. girls became a topic of discussion. Jeremy expressed that in case they should have a boy, he wasn't particularly excited about having to deal with the "bro code," an informal system of standards society directly or indirectly enforces concerning the ways in which boys should be raised in support of patriarchy.

The idea didn't sit well in his body as Liza describes:

One of things that we were worried about in having a boy was like the whole decision whether or not to circumcise, 'cause he is circumcised but there's all this stuff about whether it's necessary and stuff. It was like one of our big concerns. I feel like, I feel—no, I don't feel, I know. He's always been more in touch with his feminine side than anything else. He used to be a big macho football player and stuff but he's always been—even in joking with me, he'll be in touch with it. He's never been with the whole hyper macho kinda like, "Oh I'm macho!" kinda thing. So I think he [will be] relieved [if] he doesn't have to deal with that. I think he'd be a great father to a son, but I think he [will be] kinda relieved [if] he [doesn't] have to worry about that. I guess he would know more about that 'cause he's a man himself, that masculine posturing that they have to do.

As a couple they connect with the experience of society's demanding expectations of rigid gender roles. Through their connection, we find that Jeremy is "more in touch with his feminine side," matching up nicely with her inclination to embody the masculine. They can hold these two compatible differences together. Together they

can spot an attractive person in public and quip, “Oh he cute... or she cute,” and either or both of them will agree with a light heart and sincerity, regardless of gender. As products of colonial education, however, sometimes we go back to those strict boxes and lines because we’re supposed to, right? Liza recalls an instance of this:

I remember the first time, maybe we had been dating for like 2 or 3 weeks, and I actually made the effort to like get dressed up and everything. I was wearing lipstick and stuff—[I’m giggling with her] so I remember I gave him a kiss and then out of the corner of my eye, I saw him like wipe his mouth [in disgust], and I thought, Oh thank *God*, I don’t ever have to wear lipstick again! And that’s how I kinda knew that he would accept me for what I am. I didn’t have to like dress up or I didn’t have to look a certain way. I just could be who I was. And he would accept me for who I was. This was like in the early weeks of us dating... 1994.

As soon as she says 1994, I’m brought to an image in my mind: a photo of her and Jeremy she once shared on Facebook. They flank (someone suited up as Looney Tunes character) Sylvester the Cat at Six Flags Magic Mountain theme park in sunny Southern California. Sure enough, there she is, thumbs in the pockets of her knee-cropped denim shorts, loose dark blue tank top, white sneakers and hair tied back; he, on the other side in a similar stance, with plaid knee-cropped shorts, a more fitted tank top, black combat boots and a fade (haircut). It’s a cute photo. The early years. Happy, giddy, sweet. Liza offers her gender non-conforming love story, while knowing full well that she doesn’t nor has ever had many friends whose relationships “pass as straight” and also “stretch what that means.” She is able to have a relationship outside of the gendered boxes set up by colonialism. It is a relationship based on something else; it is a love that is non-hierarchical, non-imperialist, and thus radical. Her consciousness-raising happens through gender, perhaps as early as Liza

could remember. But something, somewhere else is brewing. A Filipino American consciousness that she would come to find for herself, not through folks, but through books.

Not Filipino Quite Yet... Until the Books Found Me

Building community with others looked so different for Liza in the mid-90s. It wasn't about ethnic identity formation at all. Her cultural self surrounded the rise of the internet, the nostalgia of local book stores, the fascination with animation. Folks who dug the same thing were not Filipino. At that point in her life she saw herself as an outsider as she thinks back:

I kinda separated myself in the Filipino community in the plastic sense cuz I was alienated by the groups on campus. SDSU, yes, AB Samahan [Filipino American campus organization]. Like literally the moment I stepped on campus, I did not feel welcome by them. So I didn't have anything to do with "Filipino" [centered activities] for like 2 years. And that was around the time I had met [Jerry]. I had actually started meeting up with folks, computer folks. BBS Chatroom—that's actually how we met. So talk about the most diverse, people from all over San Diego county, definitely a lot more open-minded. A lot more technologically savvy. I hung out with those folks. So at that point too I was starting to become a little more, trying to figure out who I was, as a person, as a woman. So these are folks, not just Jeremy, a lot of the folks in this community, I could have these open conversations and not worry about being judged. So I don't think I coulda had these same conversations had I been hanging out with the Filipino American—if I had hung out with the AB Samahan folks? There's no way.

The experience of alienation from Filipin@ collegiate organizations resonates with me. In 1999, I was the chair of the club at my community college, particularly interested in the fight for Filipino World War II Veterans Benefits. We would often attend rallies in Los Angeles, encounter students from other campuses doing the same, and while you'd imagine solidarity, there was more often times an awkward

energy of competition and comparison. It was disillusioning and disheartening; a gross, unfortunate experience many Pin@ys can recall during this era of considerable growth among Filipin@ collegiate organizations and collectives throughout the U.S. We, though in different places and phases in our lives having not yet crossed paths, were in search for a new kind of relation that wasn't based on domination. "How do we learn this?" we each wondered.

I would spend time at students meetings just stumped by the nonsense—that which I later learned to be merely the reproduction of coloniality in our very own communities. People whom we thought were ready build movements together, turned out to be more driven by the need to one-up one another, prove who was a better or more popular civic leader, community organizer, student president, dancer, singer, fashionista, academic, artist—you name it. And they remained largely ignorant to various forms of violence we commit particularly to queer folk, women, Pin@ys with darker-skin, or those with different abilities. The violence was felt in the form of jokes or even subconscious ostracizing. Within our marginalized community trying to organize to be heard, there were so many instances of silencing and of recolonizing each other. Why all this drama?

Liza on the other hand gave it no time. In her particular corner, discussions of gender and sexuality were not welcome at home nor with other Filipin@s too bent on the ethnic tip, but they were easily entertained among her diverse group of friends. Luckily though, there was one – just one – other Pinay in her group. And those intersecting positions of both race and gender which they shared would be something

that helped their friendship flourish. They could commiserate on being Pinay and the burden of the double standard,²⁶ as Liza tells:

When we met each other, we were like, “Omigod.” We associated ourselves with this thing but like we were both from the heart, we’re both Pinay. We’re still in touch till this day. For the longest time, we were each other’s excuse [for galavanting, lol]. So I would say, “Oh I’m over at Desiree’s house!” And she would be like, “Oh I’m at Liza’s house!” But most of the time, I’d be out with Jeremy while she was out with whoever her boyfriend was. So we were each other’s alibi because we both grew up in strict Filipino households. She had 2 older brothers, [she was] the only girl, but if we said that we were with we were each other, it was cool. She was my one “Filipino community.”

Active in her studies while hanging with her crew (who were booklovers anyway), Liza sifted through mounds of material touching on all the aspects of her identity. Taking women’s studies classes, and classes on literature by people of color, Liza was “just eating up whatever [she] could find” feeling blessed by the availability of such courses at San Diego State at the time (and are thankfully still offered). Writing about her identity from the standpoint as a woman and person of color opened more doors, as she touches back:

Being able to see that like on paper [was transformative]. After going through that, I started going into Filipino American studies and I was like “Holy crap, there’s so much more out there to read and study!” Then I started to accept that [Pin@y] part of myself; okay, this is what I gotta get into. Okay, there’s queer theory and feminist studies, and then there’s this whole stuff, stuff you couldn’t just find in card catalogues! Anything that said Filipino in it, I had to get a copy of it.

²⁶ The double standard in Filipino families sees that boys and girls have different expectations, such that girls’ bodies and lives are much more policed than those of boys. Typically, girls will have curfews, are to hang out in public in groups (rather than alone or with just one other person), should not be romantically involved until they finish college, etc. None of these rules apply to boys.

She talks fast-paced. Her eyes sparkle in remembering her personal discovery of Filipin@ history and literature. I am with it. I mention being in the basements of San Diego's Downtown library myself, and coming upon a thin seventeen-paged book with a dusty old makeshift jacket titled, "Anti-Filipino riots of the 1930s." But it was treasure, my doorway into more and more records of our existence in the United States. In the digging, we became anthropologists of sorts. And we knew the answers to our questions of identity and self would be found maybe somewhere in the next page, or the next book. We just had to keep excavating, and eventually see how we can go about writing ourselves into history.

Even as Liza ventured through Filipin@ literature and Filipin@ American history, however, she still "flew solo." In all her reading, studying, and writing of her senior thesis project at SDSU, her advisors were both older Chinese men who thankfully supported her research interests whole-heartedly. "I was the expert at the time," she notes. They were her allies. And there Liza birthed her work in Filipin@ American studies.

Storytelling (and Seeing our Stories) as a Political Act

This morning in her office at Skyline College, I've brought us cups of hot chocolate and glazed donuts to share. Liza beams in her gray Giants tee. My eyes move to cute pictures nearby of her family also adorned in Giants gear. She's bought season tickets, and she's eager to find out the next game she can make it with little Aubrey and her husband. We talk about feeling the movement in our bellies, the magic of those moments, taking up yoga, and strategies for an "easy birth." On her

desk lies EJR David's *Brown Skin, White Minds: Filipino -/ American Postcolonial Psychology*, a new book she's introducing into her course. "I'm changing two books. I need to teach a memoir, so I'm teaching also Vangie Buell's book: *Twenty-Five Chickens and a Pig for a Bride*. So the whole question overarching question I'm gonna ask this semester is: What informs your identity?" Ooh, it's a good one. She lays out more:

So we're gonna start with *Children of the Sun*, even if they're not Filipino, there's some of the concepts they can relate to like growing up in poverty, growing up in gangs, but that whole White skin mentality. And with [EJR David's] book, give them the tools to kind of talk about the concepts. We're doing an oral history project and the question behind this unit is basically: how do psychological influences inform your identity? So not just your own psychology, but from your family, your community, how do they inform how you identify? The history, how does history inform your identity? And then go into Vangie's book about how her own history informed her identity.

It's an exciting project to explore these guiding questions as a community college student. It's an exciting journey to facilitate as an instructor in a classroom of fresh new faces. To get to the question of what informs their identity, they'll have to sit with a family member and talk story. Some of us are lucky, having someone in our family who openly offers stories that give us but a glimpse of the generations before. Often however, our parents are quite busy staying afloat as immigrants in a new world. The work hustle takes them from us second generation Pin@ys, and we return the sacrifice by going to school as they wish. But when do we get to hear stories?

"I didn't know my dad was an engineering major in college," Liza starts as we discuss the loss of cultural, historical connection within our own families. Only recently has she begun asking, just as her students have been assigned. But for her,

this ain't no assignment. It's a life question. What are their stories? We need them. They're a part of us. Liza's father came to the U.S. through the Navy, retired from the Navy, and that was it. Where was the rest? Liza wanted to peel the layers and began by asking why he didn't finish school. He attended St. Louis University in Baguio (coincidentally where my mother also attended), but along the way arrived at the realization that even with a college degree, he'd have no better future for himself and no better opportunities for his family, than if he joined the U.S. Navy. Liza elucidates:

So my dad knew that if he joined the navy, he could bring his family. Basically he was the one who brought his brothers over. So he joined the navy, got his citizenship, brought my grandmother over, and then between the two of them, they petitioned the rest of the family. No wonder he kept pushing engineering. It just was not for me but I had no idea he had that background. You know, why didn't you stay and stick it out? And he was like, "At the time, that was what I needed to do." So [that was] late 60s, early 70s; we're talking pre-Martial Law, during Marcos. He eventually came over '71. And I was born in '73.

We learn the tough decisions our parents make to leave dreams and pursue different ones for the benefit of their loved ones. It's called sacrifice. We think about the urgency of such decisions made especially in the moments before a nation watches their president sign a proclamation to become dictator in the midst of social and political unrest.

As for Liza's mother, she spent her entire work life as a certified nursing assistant. Only now did she learn her mother actually holds a degree in medical technology, "Didn't know that. Didn't know that," sighs Liza, dumbfounded. She now works as a CNA in the Veterans Hospital in Chula Vista (where my mother and

stepfather, and many Filipin@ families have recently settled in the southern tip of San Diego County).

I remember that when she came over to Hawaii, she worked in the canneries, I wanna say Dole canneries. And then when we moved to Alaska, she worked as housekeeper for the officers' quarters. When we moved to Rhode Island, she worked in electronics, assembly work. And it wasn't until we moved back to California that she went back into the medical profession. [By that time] I was already sixteen and in the ninth grade. So she had already been out of her profession for sixteen years. She has a bachelor's degree. Started working as a nursing assistant. Unless she went back to school, she would never be a nurse. So, she's been a CNA to this day, and she'll be retiring soon. But it's hard work, being a CNA is hard work! Back breaking work.

I let that frustration sit between us, as I think about a current Caregiver's Project taking place throughout the Bay Area where a coalition of community organizations, including San Francisco's Community Center, is leading a campaign for labor rights particularly for domestic workers of Filipin@ descent. Liza recognizes the landscape, "Oh [her mom's coworkers] have always been Filipino. Always. I think that's part of the reason why she does it because there is that camaraderie; they can speak *tagalog* in the workplace cuz there's some places you can't do that." Through all this backbreaking work, her mother never says a word about where she initially hoped to go. Liza as of late has really wanted to talk about it, "but like how do you have this conversation? 'Cause I always talk to my parents about surface stuff. We never get into deep conversations. And we happened to be at Red Robin at Plaza Bonita, getting burgers," we laugh thinking about this mall we used to gallivant around as teens back in the day. It is her father who responds to all of Liza's inquiries. Her mother stays reticent, as Liza only knows her mother to be since she can remember, "She doesn't really talk about herself. All the stories I know about her, I learned from her sisters,

my aunties.” The only thing her mom talked to her about? “What I wasn’t supposed to be doing. What I shouldn’t be doing,” Liza chuckles.

I share with her the peculiar observation of our parents never being the ones to tell us stories. It is our more often our grandparents, uncles or aunties. The stories our parents do tell are not quite about themselves, but about others or things supposedly outside themselves; and this habit have transferred to us. As Liza notices:

I think that’s where I feel uncomfortable. Especially when people ask me, can you write something? Like a bio about yourself? And I don’t like writing about myself. It’s kinda that whole like enforced modesty I guess. You don’t talk about yourself.

I hear her. I know this practice of self-silencing; a practice of *hiya* (shame or shaming) in our culture. Nonetheless, I find it awesome that even so, she changes gears from dutiful daughter to college professor and encourages her students to tell their stories. In sitting with her around this question, I come away with some clarity: our parents’ immigrant generation came over with this shared silence. Our generation is about the telling. Our generation is about the writing and recording, lest we continue to drag out this historical amnesia. Not that our parents’ knew precisely that their silence meant something special would be lost along the way. Liza makes the distinction:

Maybe they didn’t see the significance in their stories that we see. We’re kinda coming at it from an academic perspective. I mean they lived the history. We’re reading it from textbooks, we’re watching movies about it; but they lived through Martial Law, they lived through coming over here. We read about [for instance]: were they accepted by other folks when they immigrated? Were there experiences of racism? And they *lived* it. And maybe that’s why they don’t talk about it. Maybe they don’t think we should talk about it. Maybe they don’t think it’s a big deal.

We're seeing the reclamation of self and community when we bring the stories to light. It becomes our job to tell them, as they simply had to endure. As I ask more about Liza's mom's experience of downward mobility, she shoots back:

So there's *that*—we have the vocabulary. They don't. When you say downward mobility, I understand that, but for them, that's "we're just gonna put food on the table, whatever it takes" 'cause by the time we got to Hawaii, she had a daughter. By the time we got to – you know after that, she had 2 daughters. So she's not gonna look for a job in medical technology if there's a job right there, even if it's cleaning up officers' quarters, you know, it's still gonna feed the kids, keep them with the babysitter or whatever.

While we imagine the harsh conditions of our parents' work and name multiple forms of discrimination, we know they don't even see it in the same light, "For us, we're like that's bullshit. We don't put up with that. But for them, they think it's supposed to be that way: you take it and then you bring home the money. You support the family. So we definitely have a different lens," Liza clarifies.

We see [this other] significance in their story and in their struggle, "But for them, they're just like, no you gotta do what you gotta do," we concur. For our parents, it's about the very basic need to survive. And why talk about it? They survived, *yun lang* (simple as that). And yet we take up a political stance from the stories that tell us about a shared unjust, unheard history. Something our parents just wouldn't necessarily jive with, as Liza expounds:

[Being political] has such a negative connotation! "Activist" is like a troublemaker, the rebel rouser, someone who causes problems and especially with the older Filipino generation, when they think activist, they think *aktibista*. It's the negative connotation that rubs off on you when you're a kid. They'd just think okay, people power, and maybe not have a good association with it.

When Liza came to the Bay Area, however, the notion of being political had a completely different quality. It was simply “improving quality of life” for self and others. The walls around her office illuminate this quality of “being political.” A framed image by local artist and friend Mike Luat shows a large yellow fist raised amidst a silhouette of picketers against a red backdrop. In it, signs read: *Edukasyon para sa lahat* (education for all). Another is a large photo captured by San Diego-raised, San Francisco resident (now her brother-in-law) Leo Docuyan: black and white text blurred all around, centered on a textbook definition of “revolution.” A pair of male and female *eskrima* (Filipin@ martial) artists is illustrated in another corner. Facing her desk is an oversized poster adorned with birthday wishes from students who refer to her as their “favorite teacher,” “2nd mama,” and “best counselor.” Her bookshelves are filled with Filipino American literature as well as Asian American literature. It’s all part of her politics. To see the stories, be with them, share them, hear them, encourage the writing and telling of them. An *aktibista* in her own light.

Moments of Breath through the Work

On a late July morning, I arrive in Liza’s office to find her working at her computer, nodding to the sounds of slow jam mixes from the 90s. I reminisce. These melodies take me back to growing up in our hood, Paradise Hills, Southeast San Diego. “Omigoodness, *this* song!” I exclaim, torn-up over the amount of recorded music I’ve lost over the years. Without hesitation, she finds a flash drive in her desk drawer on which to upload so that I can have a copy. She totally gets it. Slow jams are ways to share the good times. Slow jams are gold. They’re like ON switches for the

body to find its pulse again. Slow jams were our therapy. Through unrequited love, through heartbreak, and through all the highs of new love, slow jams were like bible verses that helped make sense of everything. I think about her work at Skyline, with her academic brain and her Pin@y soul and her pregnant belly, what forms of therapy help her stay intact? The grind can feel like we're pulled in every direction as she describes what it's been like this past week:

I get up at six o'clock, try to get here before eight o'clock. I need to get all my stuff to photocopy; I need to get all my class lists and everything. And by the time I get home, by like five-thirty, I'm just exhausted. Jeremy would pick up Aubrey from day-care and she would come in and we'd just turn on the TV in my bedroom, sit there and watch TV together. I'd just lie there for like an hour. Cuz I couldn't even get up and do anything. That was like my whole last week.

So what keeps Liza going in spite of the struggle? What helps her step away from everything so that she can reboot? How does she find moments of breath through the work? For Liza, it's first about knowing that we can't do it all. We just can't. For women of color in academia, sometimes it takes a lot of practice to learn to say "no" or to simply ask for help, as she shares:

I've gotten better about reaching out and getting help or saying no, which you know it's been like 13 years in the making basically. When I first started teaching, I was like, I'ma do everything by myself. I'ma do this. I'ma do that. See how many assistants I have in class? Yeah, I was more than happy to have them in there. So that's part of it. Coming to grips with like, you know what? I can't do this by myself. Even stuff at home, I hate asking Jeremy to get the laundry for me but if I can't bend over and pick up something off the floor, he understands. He gets it. And I have to stop feeling bad about it. And that's my way of kind of coping with it.

There's also the practice of stepping back from the daily grind to see two things: her purpose in this work, and the fruits of her labor. It's a cycle, really. She sees the

bigger picture, is motivated by it, feels good about the process of a project, sees how she and her students grow from it, and that life cycle again brings her back to her purpose. She considers how this works, “Why am I doing this new curriculum when I’m gonna go on maternity leave in like nine weeks?” She chuckles at herself and then digs up her own answer:

It has to do with the fact that we want to improve the program; we want students to succeed and this is the way to do it. How do we make it better? Even though it’s a lot of work, I love it. Trying to make it better but then it’s like okay: new reading, let’s try to incorporate concepts from before; oh it’s not gonna work, let’s try this. I mean that for me is what keeps teaching exciting, that freedom to kind of innovate. We’ve been doing this for 10 years. Now I’m starting to see the fruits of our labor.

The fruit of their labor, the real treat, is witnessing the youth with whom they work with, blossom. She met her current teaching assistant Emmy as a high school student participating in PYC (Pilipino Youth Coalition), while she was helping to organize *Liwanag*. Liza made sure to look after her when she entered Skyline. Emmy struggled some, not doing very well even in Liza’s class. While Liza went on maternity leave during her first pregnancy, Emmy retook the course with another colleague-instructor and came back into the fold. Liza shares with joy:

And now here she is, she’s my supplemental instruction leader. She teaches her own class on Fridays to students who opted to take an accelerated path of my course. And she gets paid to do it. And she wants to become an English teacher. And it’s like, that’s why I do what I do. When I see that.

They say it takes a village. The Kababayan program stands on a firm foundation of dedicated faculty who take this practice of looking out for one another seriously. And because they do, they get to be part of these memorable transformations.

Building the Pipeline

A big white poster board in her office from a leadership retreat says, “What does being a leader in the Kababayan Learning Community mean to you?” In various colored ink, people have written: “to make an impact in everyone’s lives; with great power, comes great responsibility; to make a difference; to spread the light; to represent the Filipino journey an discovery.” These answers reflect Liza’s sense of purpose in the classroom as she tells me how she had to figure out her teaching situation throughout this second pregnancy. It was important that she shared news of her pregnancy with one class in particular at the beginning of the semester because she knew that building a relationship early on would benefit them in the long run as she explains:

I really want to establish this relationship with them before I leave because I’ll be back by Finals [and then] hopefully be back to teach [the] 100 [course] next semester and I wanna be able to work with them. I know I’ll be missing six weeks, but it’s like okay. It’s an investment that I have to make and that I wanna make.

Seeing one student in one class through one phase is cool, but seeing them across as much of their community college journey as possible is both the goal and the reward. She is inspired to build a pipeline. And then beams as she looks back at the pipeline that’s been built. She gives the example of one student whose siblings she taught years ago, “When he told me his last name I was like, wait a minute! Then I looked at his face and said, oh you look just like them.” I trip out at how she’s been in the game long enough to see families come through. She smiles and tells me:

Oh yeah, what’s funny is this year, I have a set of twins, a pair of sisters, and I have two mother and son combinations. Not one, but two! The son is in the

early class, the mother's in the later class. They didn't wanna be in the same class which I think is funny, but they both wanted to take my class. And I had the husband, the father, years ago. So it cracks me up when I think about it. And then in my PCN class, I have a mother and son in there. The mother is our house manager, and the son is our public relations person. It's funny. So total family affair!

What I also see is an intergenerational learning that gets to happen in these communal spaces. How often do we see families enrolling in a college course together? There is something powerful in their classrooms that invites them all to sign up. Here, where families can share stories with each other as well as the next generation perhaps more openly than they typically would in other settings, perhaps even in their own homes. Here, where a consciousness is unlocked through a caring Filipin@ American Studies curriculum, cutting across generations, and bringing families together.

Gratitude to Liza

I sit down with Liza in this warm office, while the cold air of late August wraps around the building and slices through campus. In my chair across from her, I feel the comfortable place at which we've arrived after having had many conversations through the summer. I now drop in like a friend catching up.

Liza is now 30 weeks pregnant! She aches from the pains of her belly stretching. Occasionally, the baby's foot or back kicks and sweeps up against the walls of her belly. It's like this baby is clamoring to be let loose already. I giggle in excitement as I rub my belly, at eighteen weeks. I enjoy this, but I'm also nervous. "I am too!" admits Liza. "By the end of this month, everything's gonna be so different. Omigod, I'm gonna have kidzzz—plural!" I automatically echo her, "Plural!" She

asks me if I've thought about it yet—what it's going to be like to have two children. We chat about the idea of purchasing a double stroller. “We're trying to get grandma to buy it,” she laughs, because we both know how baby gadgets and gear have become a monstrous industry not so easy on the wallet. We sigh together. “But yeah, it's plural. We're gonna have girls. You're gonna have boys!” she points.

Despite the dreary weather that awaits me outside after this last conversation, I'm happy to share space with Liza. Her office is always filled with light, because she's there. There to be an ear and shoulder for students, to exchange ideas with colleagues, to build leadership skills among young adults, to play slow jams and talk Southeast San Diego with me. I'm glad to have had the chance to trace our histories together, from growing up through the 80s and 90s as Navy daughters in Paradise Hills, to our current work through the 2000s in the Bay as mother-scholars in community. All the gray outside ain't got nothing on the sunshine in here. Visiting her will always feel like home. Deep bows of gratitude for this sanctuary you've graciously provided, Liza.

CHAPTER IX

PORTRAIT OF SARITA SEE

I sit in the back seat of my grandfather's roomy new Honda Accord this sunny midday. Mateo sleeps in his car seat next to me, while my mother drives. So kind is she to borrow Grandpa's car and accompany me on this one and a half hour drive northeast from our hometown San Diego to visit the class of Professor Sarita See, new faculty member at University of California, Riverside. My mother drops me off at the curb, taking her *apo* (grandchild) Mateo on a little date while I find my way through campus. My last and only visit here was two years ago, when UCR was the site of the first Critical Ethnic Studies Conference in March 2011. A buzzing excitement filled the air that day as folks shuffled from session to session. I was eight months pregnant with Mateo, presenting on the theoretical foundation for this research project. Today, I'm six months pregnant with Dante, doing the research I set out to do.

The heat envelops me the same as it did then. Whether March 2011 or October 2013, I'm greeted with an 83-degree inland heat, intensifying the heat already stuffed in my ever-tightening clothes as a baby kicks inside. The Box Spring Mountains stand visibly in the distance from this sprawling campus where foot traffic is quiet this Thursday afternoon. I reach the door of her new classroom in the Department of Media & Culture Studies and find Sarita with her twenty students, rearranging tables from rows to a U-shape. I take a seat in the back corner as they watch and discuss two clips: the original version of *West Side Story*; followed by

“WESTSIDESTROY,” a remake by performance artist Dennis Somera in which he cleverly narrates U.S. colonization of Puerto Rico over the original film and soundtrack.

Sarita distills reception theory for the class. I take notes, like a good student should, only to find that her lesson is one that is about life. It is about lived experience. It is about something she’s had to come to grips with as a person of color coming of age, and a woman of color in the academy. Today, we’re discussing it as reception theory. Sarita invites thoughts, “How does Somera make it more interactive using himself as a vehicle, so that another audience can ask him his interpretation, too?” She elaborates:

It’s not just about what we have in common, but also what we *don’t* have in common, what we cannot have in common. What is not said, left unsaid, are all these things that make up these characters in the movie. So Dennis Somera makes that which is not said explicit. And that’s the point of the MCS Department here. We *need* to know these histories and contexts. Without them, we’re just gonna keep on using the kinds of stories that are relating these dominant narratives.

Sarita gives an example about the hypergenderedness in the film: boy meets girl, boy gets into fight, etc. “We see this story over and over again. How can we use our tools to change this?” She then passes the mic to two students to provide concluding thoughts around today’s discussion for the rest of the class. They take ownership of the material by relating it to their lives: this misconception that “cultures should not mix” or “interracial relationships cannot work because of the gap.” They are left with only deeper questions, “What are these different interpretations?” Sarita ends with a

final one on which to marinate: “As creative artists and writers, how can we *change* this?”

Sarita’s life work, I come to learn, is about creating change. In modes of thinking, writing, envisioning, organizing, and teaching in the academy, change has been a constant motivator. It’s kept her grounded, thoughtful, connected, and inspired. What does that look like? Let’s begin with where she is today.

It’s Taken Me a Long Time to Say This: Who Is Sarita See?

Maria Sarita Echavez See is a 44-year-old professor of Media and Cultural Studies at UC Riverside, though I should note that our conversations began when she was teaching American Literature and Asian American Studies at UC Davis, just a semester prior. Already, we note change in her move across interdisciplinary fields, as well as from one university to another; as circumstances will tell us, it’s time to move on when our bodies call for new environments in which we can thrive better. So in the beginning, back at Davis, I had the chance to sit with her a couple of times in her architect home. I began with an introductory question, “What do you do?” and Sarita replied, shifting in her seat:

So, [these] two things are gonna sound really basic: but I teach and I write. Yeah. And I guess behind those two words, it's just taken a very long time to feel like I can confidently say that: I'm a teacher. I'm a writer. Because it felt like it took so long, it was so painful, to learn how to do those things.

I breathe that in for a moment, because so much lies underneath this sharing. And truthfully, I’m still settling in.

I had arrived a little before our scheduled 9:30 am meeting, so that I could use the restroom after a 1 hour, forty-seven minute drive. It was bearable, with little spouts of traffic, but a bit nerve wrecking in my partner's 1997 Toyota Corolla teetering along. To add, the doctor just confirmed I was 4 weeks pregnant. It's that time when any move or decision becomes extra thoughtful because another being is counting on you to bring them into the world safe and sound 9 months later. In this breathing space, Sarita's home offers safety and soundness indeed. Developed in the 1970s with community building in mind, homes here are positioned close to one another, separated by minimal fencing and hedges, and have no front yard. Instead, a park area lies at the center of the complex; complete with a child care center and pool. Sarita's home in particular is one of a kind. Literally. Designed by an architect who renovated it five times while living in it for thirty years, its beauty remains. The different window arrangements are extraordinary; one room is warmed by light coming in through twenty little windows, each with a window sill, positioned in a grid like fashion to allow in as much sun as one grand window. Sliding wooden doors connect the bathroom to the living room as well as to another bedroom. The tile flooring radiates warm dark green hues with red tones, reminiscent of a casita in the Southwest or even in Spain. Arched doorways invite you to explore. A perfect setting for this exploration together: into the nuggets of wisdom, which both inform and come out of Sarita's work. Here, she unloads the weight of those once troublesome words, "I teach. And I write":

One thing about academia I found is that there's, especially in some of the fields that I work in like literary criticism, there's this kind of fetishizing of

how ideas come along and who is an author and who can write and who has the best or most original ideas. And I think that can be very fetishized and I think I really kind of bought into that and in some ways, still buy into that subconsciously. So I think I had a very narrow idea of who can produce really, really brilliant ideas. It's a very fixed notion and a very individuated notion also of who is capable, "ca-pa-ble" of having ideas. In some ways, it's actually very racialized. Like who *can*, who's capable of having a mind, and who's just a body, and how those 2 things are very separated.

I sip decaf coffee served in charming white tableware as she unpacks this some more.

I'm split by the image of her as a young academic working this out for herself, and the image of me bumping up against this personal question over and over again.

Today. Am I read as capable in the academy? As having a brain, *the* brains, required to teach and write? She answers my thoughts on the spot:

In the writing of a dissertation for example, we're not really trained for it, to approach it as a craft—something that actually involves your mind and body. The act of writing comes, for me, through a combination of long periods of being alone, [of making] things really dialogical at many points in order for me to grow, to develop. It just took me a long time. I couldn't understand. Doesn't always have to be this, you know, you're alone, on some island [speaking in a dreamy voice] and because you're a genius [she laughs] or you have some special relationship with a muse that strikes you, like lighting—that's what I mean by fetishize, just this very narrow concept. There are just many, many components to what writing and teaching are, to just see those as an approach; that there's a method to it, that it's a practice... we've learn[ed] to come at the concept of race in some ways really misdirected, attach[ing] race to certain peoples as opposed to race as truly a belief system in which people are not just simply divided according to complexion or something phenotypical, but [as] really part of the western divide [with its] belief in the separation of mind from body; and [seeing] how that geographically gets distributed around the world so that whole *zones* of people get consigned to: who's primitive and who's civilized. And that comes down along mind and body.

I nibble on her Trader Joe's butter almond cookies after another sip of decaf. Sarita unlocks an understanding of how *she* has been consigned to having a body—no mind, simply because of one's [mis]perception of her race. This kind of misperception

occurs in the everyday. It is “normal.” We experience this splitting of ourselves by others well before we enter the academy.

A Global Mixed Pinay’s Introduction to Race

Sarita thinks about her own introduction to the concept of race through three distinct moments, which have each occurred on a different continent: Australia, Europe, and North America. As the daughter of Singapore’s first diplomat (who met and married her Pinay mother in the U.S.), Sarita was born in New York, moved back to her father’s country where her brother was born, then lived in several other countries as an “embassy brat,” wherever her father was called to work: Malaysia, Australia, Germany, and Switzerland. Growing up in former British colonies, part of the commonwealth, she attended English language international schools along with, “a pretty elite international school type of demographic.”

In Australia, Sarita was enrolled from first through fifth grade in a catholic school where she could count the number of non-Australians on one hand: her, her brother, two Spanish girls, and one Aboriginal girl. Aside from the girls from Spain (who passed as white), they were the only people of color on campus. Australia’s sizeable Asian population as we know it today didn’t exist until the late 80s and 90s. This is the 1970s, “when Australia still had an official white supremacist policy: it’s called White Australia.” I think she’s joking so I laugh. She laughs with me, but she’s dead serious, “That was the official stance of the Australian government! To be White! White Australia.”

So here's Sarita and her brother attending practically an all-white school and the first thing she notices is how differently the Aboriginal girl is treated. The girl is visibly isolated, "she seemed to just be her own unit, not connected to anybody and that was—I didn't know what to do with that as a child." Sarita also remembers also playing games amongst her group of friends, "Who's gonna be the princess and who's gonna be the prince?" and always being casted as a prince, always casted in the role of a boy. It strikes her now. "Was that racial?" she pulls from her gut, "that my assigned gender would be a little boy? I just remember saying to my parents, 'I hate Australia' and only knowing now that it was about race. But I had no way of articulating that."

Soon her family moves to Germany. It's cold. She's fourteen and she's walking down the street with a family friend who is about the same age, visiting from Singapore. Her friend, though Eurasian, looks identifiably East Asian. In the downtown area of Bahn, they stroll through the pedestrian zone of the main market place and spot a German woman behaving randomly. She may have been mentally ill. Sarita and her friend giggle as the fourteen-year-olds they are. The German woman walks up, calls Sarita "Japanisch Schwein" (Japanese pig) and spits squarely in her face. "And I never—" begins Sarita as she laughs. But again, she's dead serious, "get[ting] spat on and called something like that at the same time, that was pretty traumatic."

By the time her family moved to Switzerland, Sarita went on to attend college at UC Berkeley. There, she had a lot of Singaporean friends. In fact, she belonged to a

Singaporean club. In a new setting with new intellectual tools, she was coming to new understandings about her mixed heritage, “Half of me was learning to identify as Asian American [while] the other half identified as an international Singaporean student.” People often asked if she “spoke Chinese.” At one point she made it known, “You know, I’m not full Chinese. I’m actually half Filipino.” It did not bode well. One of her friends, a “so-called full Chinese-Singaporean,” could was clearly dismayed. “The look of horror across [his] face. He just looked—horrified.” Her mouth and eyes open, illustrating his utter repulsion. She considers:

Yeah, I mean part of it is the way I look. Never, people never think I'm Filipina. People think I'm Korean, Chinese, East Asian, and I am part East Asian. But that look of horror was terrible. So part of what is hard to—what I really don't often talk about is that experience of being mixed race, very specific to Singapore. In the United States, I'm not considered mixed at all. Among Asian Americans, I'm considered mixed ethnicity. In Singapore, I am considered two races because of the racial categories there. In Germany and Australia, I'm just: Asian, oriental, foreign. And in the Philippines, I'm just some kind of light-complected foreigner, very privileged, which I am coming from the first world, America and everything.

What Sarita is sharing with me, different than what other narrators have shared, is this perspective of the global mixed Pinay experience. The many worlds she must traverse to be read, understood, and heard have their own unique hills and valleys, but race is there.

Suddenly, I’m jolted back to a small memory of visiting her class at UC Davis in the spring. In a large lecture room, 80 students sit in rows of seats fixed to carpet flooring. Sarita stands front and center: hair down, glasses at the tip of her nose, sporting khaki cargo capris, a solid dark blue cotton blouse, and a white jade bracelet on her left hand. She plays a film clip of American writer Sigrid Nunez, who was also

born in New York and holds multiple heritages: German and Chinese-Panamanian. In the clip, Nunez discusses the act of writing or telling from memory, “As you remember, *you* make a story out of it. Might be all wrong; might not correspond to the way others remember it. Still, how you remember it and how you tell it to yourself is the story of your life. You don’t have to be a memoirist to do that, it’s there.” This is about self-determination, and holding and honoring the power to claim. From this, Sarita furthers the discussion with the politics of names. Sarita shares her whole name, Maria Sarita Echavez See, and reveals that she puts out her mother’s maiden name as often as she can to help her hold onto her Filipino heritage. Through this reading with Nunez, race can be a secret wrapped up in the mystery of a person’s name. Race can be the interiority of a person, different than when we think of race as this externalized, physically visible thing. “Maria Sarita Echavez” is the Filipino (Spanish-influenced) marker she makes visible, so as to honor and *be* honored as Pinay. It is part of her being, her humanness. Even if this marker is damning in particular contexts. Let’s embrace this complexity for a moment.

Intersectionality theory tells us that women of color are too often already classed as less than, and evidence (including her testimonies) points us to the ways in which women of color indeed experience these second-class positions. But what if a woman of color actually comes from a privileged background, from a family whose class position is distinctively higher on the social ladder? And what does that look like?

There is Class, and yet Something More

To be truthful, I am fooled. Sitting in her airy living room, I am stunned by the fine furniture – the patinated corner bookcase cabinet with its form and age, the ornately carved piano belonging to her partner’s grandfather from Ireland. They liven up the space, along with her well-groomed and slender female greyhound, Lady, who is now cuddling comfortably on the floor next to my feet (she must know I’m pregnant). I am seeing all of these as objects; they read “class.” I am hearing about her father, Singapore’s first diplomat, and I’m thinking “class.” Class: this social construction that, through Sarita’s story, I am both exploring and trying to take apart in my conditioned mind. I am clouded by *misperception*, the very thing she challenges in her work. Yes, there is class. But Sarita’s storytelling urges me to take down that category which is serving as a divider in my head. Her UC Davis lecture cycles back to me. She had asked:

What are the implications of Sigrid Nunez’s story for the construction of history? It’s that there are multiple ways to reconstruct history so that we can hear the voice that is often not heard, [often] silenced. The silver lining is that it’s never too late to piece together the history of your parents that is there. Trying to use the pieces, the fragments of material life in order to invent history. Literature begins then where history fails.

Literature is Sarita’s work. In her living room, Sarita recounts her story through conversation and together, we write her history from fragments left of memory. And it is this rewriting which brings me to a powerful clarity so that I can break through this stubborn category of class, as we visit her family’s movement around the globe.

It was 1965 when Singapore had just become independent, and Sarita’s father was part of “a bunch of very young diplomats being sent to their first appointments

for their newly independent countries.” The United States was his first official assignment and it was there where he met her Filipina mother, in her mid-twenties at the time, who had basically overstayed her visa. Of course, it’s more complicated than this, as Sarita explains:

[My mother] actually went to college for a couple years in Kansas, because my grandfather on my Filipino side got his college degree in Kansas. He actually migrated to the United States in the late 20s from the Visayas, because he met I think the president of Silliman University in Dumaguete. The family story is that the American administrator from Kansas paid for [his] ticket to sail to the United States and apparently set up a job as a houseboy or a house servant for my grandfather when he got to Kansas. So [my grandfather] was working between Silliman University and the University of Kansas. Hence my relationship to the American academy starts from there. It starts there—but not as a place of privilege through which Sarita must uphold some family legacy. Not at all. The old narrative of upper class families rigidly grooming their children to chase prestigious careers is not the case for Sarita. In fact, “and I’m very grateful for this,” she says, clearing her throat, “the fundamental message [my parents] conveyed to me and my brother is that our lives are our lives.” And in this life, Sarita wasn’t going to buy into that category of class. She will tell you as a child, she playfully wanted to be a dancer or a flight attendant, and in the process of applying to college, she had no plan. Neither of her parents finished college in the U.S. Finishing high school in Germany, she merely wanted to get out of dodge, as she laughs, “Honestly, after five years of living in Germany where it rains every year-- I mean this was as big of a plan that I had. I just thought, California is gonna be sunny!”

Without much to go by, Sarita went through a “Guide to Colleges” handbook, and applied as an international student to a number of universities that she “had heard

of, basically”—a couple of ivy league schools, even M.I.T. because of an initial interest in sciences. Not till after arriving in the United States did she realize she would qualify for a green card. And to this day, “I am not a U.S. citizen. I have a green card,” Sarita shares. She got into Berkeley, and by junior year, made the last minute decision to declare English as her major. She tried her hand in the sciences, economics, and political science, but didn’t feel the fit. While English appeared to be the “easiest major, honestly,” it was also her strength. After years of coursework, she knew that much: she was a convincing writer with a story to tell. After graduating in 1991, Sarita took a break from the academic world and taught English in Japan for two years. She was fortunate to then return, complete her Ph.D. in English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, and finish a postdoctoral fellowship for Asian American Literature and Culture at Williams College.

All of this was not an easy, fleeting journey that landed in her lap, per se. Sure, Sarita didn’t have plans. She had no hard map pointing her from one point to the next. Instead, Sarita was guided by something else. I’ll call it intuition. She didn’t know it back then, this thing that was guiding her. She didn’t know it as she became educated primarily by her peers about the Philippine-American War, joining campus-based student movements with connections to previous movements from the 1960s Third World Strike; involving herself with Women of Color organizing, surrounded by great, creative and intellectual role models at the time such as June Jordan, Cherie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldua, Barbara Christina, Elaine Kim, Sauling Wong. She knew

that all of this activity was tied to bigger questions of empire. Sitting across from me, she finally articulates:

Cognitive Map

Sarita's Filipino grandfather's experience as a houseboy and college student in Kansas; her mother's overstaying in a country which insidiously still owns her homeland through imperialist policies; her father's role as Singapore's first diplomat around the globe with his own colonial upbringing—this all resides in her body. Multiple narratives of loss and resilience weave through her and as a teacher, as a writer, she has work to do.

A Child of Empire Fights Back: The Tenure Battle

We began with Sarita thinking about how particular academic fields such as literary criticism often fetishize who can write, who can author, who is capable. We moved to her lived experiences of this same feeling of fetishization where people held narrow ideas of her as “other.” We visited the troubling category of class in her life, this other axis of power intersecting her position as woman of color; and then looked at how personal questions of empire (and really, the challenge to dismantle empire) became this underlying force that drives her continued presence in the academy. But how does this previously discussed fetishization play out for women faculty of color in the academy? Not just from a theoretical standpoint, but through theory in the flesh? And when does it become dangerous?

The academy is very good at sending the message to people of color, women of color: You don't belong here. Many recent publications highlight this truth, most

notably the 2012 600-page book, *Presumed Incompetent* (which I shall touch on in the next chapter). Sarita got that message, loud and clear, in her own battle for tenure. So when she stands in her classroom today talking about creating change in the dominant narrative, for her, it's the narrative we find in literature, those 30 pages assigned to her students on any given day—and it's more. It is also the narrative we find in this history of the academy. "Creating change" on the page through our writing; and creating change in the ivory tower through our physical, critically conscious presence.

Among the many challenges facing faculty of color, it is the tenure battle that frightens me most. In my time as a graduate student, I have witnessed an admirable Filipino American professor refer to himself as "damaged goods" when he was denied tenure. I have seen Pinay mentors go over and beyond, collecting up to four hundred letters of support, in preparation for the nightmare of tenure denial, even at one of the most notably progressive institutions in the U.S. The University of Michigan aimed for this kind of reputation as well when they hired Sarita as an assistant professor in 2002, along with an entire cohort of faculty of color across various disciplines. An environment filled with generous, supportive peers engaging in similar intellectual conversations was the perfect place for Sarita's first job as a professor. That is, until the following years unfolded with a whole string of women of color being denied tenure. And then in 2007-2008, more tenure decisions lay on shaky ground, including Sarita's. Students were watching all of this come down.

Utterly frustrated by the University's inability to support and truly value their women faculty of color, a dedicated group of students gathered, rallied, campaigned and organized, calling attention to these pending decisions from the start of the school year. The ultimate strategy of their campaign was to build up towards a conference in the spring, with prominent speakers, performances, and open forums. The timing of it was such that it would be right around when the decisions from the Dean's office would be publicized, as Sarita explains:

The thought was that everything would be moving towards that [critical time], so that come what may, there would be a huge public spotlight. So it was about trying to do all this behind-the-scenes kind of backdoor lobbying and then at a certain point, it would go public...it was a bifocal strategy. On the one hand, deal with the university culture as it is, which is very secretive, who you know, networking, and that sort of thing; and then on the other hand, [to urge] accountability to the public, and [make] it a larger political issue, which is not just about these individuals, whether or not they retain their jobs, but what are the systemic issues? [To look at]: how can these cases serve in some ways the larger problems, rather than just focusing attention on these individual cases?

The students, especially those in social sciences and anthropology, literally “flipped the script.” They used their academic trainings to gather research on statistics and interviews with women of color faculty and their issues. In a tremendous way, they gradually built a political climate “in which whoever was secretly making these decisions for individual cases, it would make it harder for them to make the bad decisions,” remembers Sarita:

It was like, how can we create the conditions, the environment for these decisions to be made? And also we were thinking of the next cases. Like you create enough uproar, for the next women of color, but all faculty, too; then the next women of color, people of color wouldn't have to suffer the same, or go through the same unjust processes.

It was 2 PM on an autumn afternoon when the first decisions came through from the departmental level. Women's Studies denied tenure to Jayati Lal, an “amazing interdisciplinary sociologist of global feminisms,” sighs Sarita. Women's Studies denied tenure to Andrea Smith, Director of Native American Studies at the time. Then, the English Department denied tenure to two women of color: Maria Sanchez, and Sarita herself. Oddly (and not so oddly) of the four candidates up [for tenure] in the English Department, two were white, and two were women of color. The white candidates went through, and the two women of color were denied, “And I had the same PhD as one of the white candidates,” Sarita contends. There was some hope. Fortunately, Sarita was jointly appointed—while the English Department voted her case down, the Department of American Culture voted her case up.

By 6 PM, the students had already held conference calls with about 20 people, including folks calling in from Hawaii to start organizing the campaign, “I have to say that's because a number of key graduate students already had been trained previous going to grad school in union organizing. University of Michigan has a very, very strong union,” Sarita chuckles. But for Sarita alone, there wasn't much she could do, but really stand in solidarity with the students. You're told nothing about the deliberations, “It's a black box. You're not supposed to know why. It's behind closed doors. Any kind of information needs to be gathered through informal channels.” So Sarita got herself a lawyer, “Because from there, I didn't know!” Nonetheless, the students kept their momentum going.

Publicity online, on campus, continued research and critical dialogue in personal spaces and closed meetings centered on creating the conditions for more favourable outcomes, which would result in a more equitable learning environment, and a more equitable world, really. The focus was not so much about getting a University response through any kind of issued statement, but rather, “creating enough buzz that they [decision makers] would really worry about the reputation of the University of Michigan being besmirched in particular certain departments like Women's Studies, Psychology, Art History, Sociology, English,” recounts Sarita.

As fall turned into spring, the conference was approaching. One invited speaker received a phone call from a senior faculty member friend at University of Michigan, who discouraged participation with a warning, “These cases are a lot more complicated than you think.” On March 15, 2008, their work successfully culminated into the conference they built, “Campus Lockdown: Women of Color Negotiating the Academic Industrial Complex.” Angela Davis Skyped in as a speaker. Fred Moten flew in. Ruthie Gilmore, Piya Chatterjee, and Rosa-Linda Fregoso flew in. Some came for free—no honorarium or compensation for travel expenses. Students managed to raise enough funds to make t-shirts and tote bags, even garnering “theater performance” funding for which a contingent used to actually co-write a play critiquing the Academic Industrial Complex, “And it was hilarious!” Imagine that, “[Nobody was] sleeping, hadn't slept for weeks, and they also wrote a play!”

All of the political movement did shake up the University. The Women's Studies Department hired a consultant. Sarita laughs telling me this:

They hired consultants to interview faculty including women of color assistant professors, trying to trouble shoot what the problem was. Just totally, corporate-culture kind of response. Like, "Oh, we'll hire consultants to come in and interview [speaking softly] and find out wh-what's the issue? What's the problem?" It's like, *because* you guys like *fired two preeminent thinkers*, scholars, and activists [laughing].

The Chair of the English Department revealed to Sarita that a second meeting was held to discuss her case. Apparently, one of the grave concerns of the senior faculty was the credibility of the English Department, should their decision be overturned by upper administration. "So they were just worrying about their own—yeah," Sarita brushes off. And while she finally got tenure in the end, it came with a tremendous price:

I had lost all of my closest colleagues. My intellectual community was destroyed. Almost completely. You need a couple of people to work with. Okay yeah, the University is totally hostile, blah blah blah, which is terrible. But I think the tipping point, especially for somebody like me—they were gone! My community was gone! Close to destroyed. So I think that was the problem. You know just like, the way out is *out*. *Get out*. What're you gonna do? Who're you gonna talk to? And the people who were left standing, including friends, were deeply scarred. The ones that did get tenured are actually deeply scarred. And they were concerned about all these little things: about their teaching, how they can improve it, for *yeeears* after they got tenure, they're still traumatized. It's not as if you get tenure and you're great, you know. They're completely fucked up.

I giggle. Again, she is not playing. Her face, stoic. Her story, raw and unapologetic. It teaches me there is no full breath of air after that, "Hell no," she adds. Her eyes shift to a corner in the room, "From what I've seen, it's the people left with the jobs—they're [the ones left] holding that stuff. That's how the whole system can continue as it is."

The battle for tenure is not a defining moment of one's worth, as we are taught to believe. Like school grades, like citizenship, like employment, the battle for tenure serves as another hurdle set up by the oppressor to fetishize, define, divide, and exclude using the same centuries-old colonial gaze. Sarita is not blind to this. She knows this gaze all too well. I close this segment of her narrative with a transcribed KBOO Community Radio podcast, which aired just a month after Campus Lockdown. Here, Sarita articulates a powerful clarity gained through the collective battle for tenure:

Every Filipino in the American academy has a gift. That gift is the knowledge that education was and is the most powerful weapon of American colonialism in the Philippines. It is that gift that allows me to understand the insidiousness of the tenure system for women of color in the university today. Let me put it plainly: tenure means total and accountability. With tenure, you get to do anything you want. And that begets not freedom but forms of irresponsibility, apathy, and racism that consolidate rather than trouble the relationship between power and knowledge. So what I want to remember is what Fred Moton said at the recent Campus Lockdown Conference here at the University of Michigan: "Don't be safe. Because there is no safety there anyway." And all I have to remember is my own father's and grandfather's attempts at safety. All I have to remember is my Cantonese-speaking father who took a government scholarship as a ticket out of the ghetto, as a ticket to Singapore's elite English-speaking bureaucracy. This was a bureaucracy that would reward him and reward him, yet mark him ultimately as a Chinaman from Chinatown. All I have to do is remember my Filipino grandfather who was houseboy to an American university president in Kansas, in the heartland, in the Midwest, where I now work. This was a system that would reward him and reward him as he worked his way to a Master's Degree at the University of Kansas and then a Master's Degree at the University of Michigan, where I now work. All I have to remember that he insisted to his children, my mother, that the only two things in life that anyone and everyone would desire is to get an education and become an American. Which is really not two things, but one very dangerous thing. So I remember my legacy, the paternalism at the heart of this patrilineal legacy, and in so doing I refuse to do honor to the production of colonial knowledge at the heart of this legacy. I refused to belong to the house of the American university even as I work in it. For I recognize its rewards for what they are. Tenure is nothing but a bribe. A form

of bribery that is, after all is said and done, Benevolent Assimilation in the 21st-century. This is Sarita See and this has been my angry APA minute.²⁷

The Empire Within: Being Split from the Inside

There is a plot twist in all of this. There are many of them, actually, along one's journey in the academy. While "empire" has us thinking in "us vs. them" terms, we begin to see this is a delusion. It's not so clear-cut: who is "us" and who is "them"? Sometimes, the very people you believe will provide solace, comfort, and understanding in the walls of the academy – those who look like you, dwell in the same passions and research interests as you, perceptibly value shared learning like you do – they may be the very people who tear you apart. Fragment you. Having bought into the hierarchical thinking that does us no service. Sarita lets out a hearty laugh, recalling cringe-worthy moments in grad school. Like the time she was at a party at someone's house and a colleague perhaps a year ahead of her asked, "Sarita, you *do* know your theory, don't you?" It baffled her, "Whahahahat?" she re-enacts, adding, "Do you know what you're doing? And have you read everything you're supposed to—I mean, that was the subtext of the question." She slaps her hand on the arm of her chair, then her lap, laughing, because she has another one to share, "Omigod. I remember a conversation with Gayatri Spivak—" I immediately put my

²⁷ KBOO Community Radio (2008, Apr 3). Margaret Cho, Jason Mak from the DisOrient Film Festival, Dengue Fever and Sarita See. *APA Compass*. Podcast retrieved from <http://kboo.fm/node/7282>

coffee down, feeling the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. Sarita sets up the story.

During Sarita's graduate studies at Columbia University, it was standard procedure for students to fill out applications and apply to be enrolled in a seminar—with all of faculty, for all the seminars. Gayatri Spivak, a woman-of-color intellectual pioneer in postcolonial studies, added this extra thing where she would interview students. And here goes Sarita's interview:

So she'd be looking at interviews of students while she's interviewing you. I mean, you can just imagine. Utter fear. How hard it is to go in, knock on her door, you're signing up. You go in and I just remember—I completely frustrated her. Completely. I was just absolutely *not* qualified, in *any* way right, to take her seminar. She just—she came in. Sat down, "Alright! Define capital for me!" And I was like, "I don't know what you're talking about. I'm here to learn." I think I said something like that: I can't do that! I'm here to actually learn. This is a graduate seminar on Marxist Feminist Thought or whatever the hell it was. I really came here to learn, you know. And she said, "I work with Bangladeshi farmers. They can define capitalism for me, and you cannot." And I was just like [laughing incredulously]. And then she went on, on this rant about how she earns, with her teaching, she raises capital with her head, or something like that. I mean, it was just insane. It was insane. I was probably 23, 24 at the time.

Even people whose work we've been following—people we deeply admire and respect for their interventions in the troublesome academy—they too can pick at our intellect, along with our personhood, as they *become* the academy through their actions. This is not uncommon. There are many stories, "pretty vicious stuff" Sarita lets out, thinking about other estimable scholars who had "people crying, breaking down in seminars, leaving the room, and nobody flinching. People just keep going." These kinds of dehumanizing practices are not what we want to continue in our pedagogical craft.

But even when we've managed somewhat to shake it out of our system, it comes right back to challenge us. Fast-forward to her time as an assistant professor, Sarita in so many ways, however subtle, is split wide open by that persistent colonial logic, as she shares:

This whole thing of like, "Who's a lecturer?" This was actually reinforced. One time someone in a supervising position when I was an assistant professor, they were kind of going over the faculty and going, "Who could teach this Intro class that's typically 100 or 200 students?" They were mulling this aloud with me, and they said, "Oh, you know we have this new colleague of ours who has this background as this former preacher." And this new colleague happened to be male, and they were like, "He could do it." And that to me was very telling. It's a preacher in a pulpit addressing a congregation. And I was just like, okay. We're supposed to have come a longer way in terms of feminist approaches to teaching.

Sarita is not that preacher in a pulpit, nor would she like to be, "I think that's another kind of fetishizing, 'Oh, a lecturer is supposed to be one way.' It can't be all the time unidirectional," she argues. But when we are constantly surrounded by these kinds of messages, even from colleagues within our purportedly progressive departments, we think we have to be that preacher in a pulpit. We internalize that colonial gaze, buy into those messages of who can and cannot teach, and fall into believing we can't. And that can be quite the maddening process.

Sarita defines teaching and writing as what she does for a living, but also teaching and writing as "the source of a lot of pain," she nervously chuckles. In terms of teaching, she finds herself wrapped up in such questions as: "Can I lecture or not? Do I have something to say? Who am I to be an authority on this subject?" It took some time to find a sense of stillness, to decide to just work with 2 or 3 things to begin class discussion and let it go from there, "And I still have this problem," Sarita

admits. When she preps for teaching, she'd catch herself starting with "the margins, the footnotes of things, and investigate all of that instead of just sit down, [and just] have trust with the students." She must remind herself that the more important work lies in critically designing the way in which to frame things, to present an idea, and then letting the students run with it in their own creative ways.

This is serious work: to see the ever damaging ways in which the university operates – from lived experience as a student trying to learn, a professor in the classroom cultivating reflexive learning, to a woman faculty of color battling tenure – and to uphold your integrity and dedication towards radically shifting the academic industrial complex. And so you must find your sanity by centering yourself, carefully aligning with others who see your power, and working cohesively in this practice to create change.

Finding Sanity, Collectively and Privately

It was at the University of Michigan where Sarita was introduced for the first time in a substantive way to scholarship by native Pacific Islander and Native American Studies scholars as well as other Ethnic Studies, Women's Studies, Feminist Studies, Queer Studies scholars. She looks up from her comfy chair:

It was just really exhilarating, and we were all trying to figure out what it means to write a book all together, around the same time...It's taken me the past couple of years to be able to look back on those earlier years which were extremely exhilarating and I'm very grateful for because, I have to say, all throughout my being in some form of schooling or education, it's always been some form of peer education, I guess you would call it, that's enabled me to keep going.

Support along the way from people who got your back is key. But it needs to be genuine support. When it's superficial support, it can feel like it erases the struggle that is very real to you. As she was going up for tenure, Sarita was constantly assuring her, "You're a diva. You're gonna get tenure of course." Then there would be the underhanded compliments, "You're not white, so of course you'll get tenure." Why this assumption that she would slide right through to the other side? Little did folks know she was on another hustle, applying to close to forty other jobs, as advised by an senior professor earlier in her career. She told Sarita, "I'm saying this to you now, way before you go up for tenure, but when you do go up for tenure, apply for jobs." Sarita came to learn that the tenure process is similar to the process of applying for "your own job," so it made sense to use that energy towards a job search—scoping other positions available in other places, seeing what's out there. It's an opportunity to consider whether you might want to be somewhere else, given your experience at the current institution. That was good professional advice, which stuck with Sarita, now sticking with me as I move forward. Through this advice, she stayed fresh in the eyes of other institutions interested in her work. It took her to UC Davis. It took her to UCR. And UCR is near and dear to heart, as a site of critical support during her first years as a professor in Michigan.

On a Skype chat in mid-August, I catch up with Sarita to talk about being a Pinay in academia, knowing that she had to find ways to thrive (in the struggle), and how she came to find UCR as the place that could provide that. She starts with the

painful lessons she picked up in those moments she tried going at it alone, as she reveals:

What I've learned is that you can't do it on your own. I can't. What I've seen from some of my friends, when you're in a very, very isolated position, I think it's really hard. You cannot lift as you climb. You know what I mean? You don't need a ton of people, but you do need a handful of people that you can work with you who will be not scared of putting in the hours, doing some work that you know will not get legitimized or get the traditional kinds of credit that are associated with advancing your career, but will allow you to grow and also to actually, ultimately, stay sane. And I think that's the cost benefit to me is it really comes down to people: who can I work with who'll actually do something? Who'll want to do something? And I think for a while now, UC Riverside has been that place for me.

Sarita smiles, happy to be joining the faculty there now, while living in Los Angeles.

What a deal. The city is the home to various community organizations and neighborhoods traditionally associated with Filipino American history. In fact, now, she lives less than a ten-minute drive from historic Filipinotown (also known as P-Town or Pilipinotown). And what history she has with UCR.

As we move the conversation, Sarita shifts in her seat, there in her new place in Los Angeles, in the living room of her partner's home. She had just moved in a week prior. I could almost feel the heat in the room, as I see her position her webcam or laptop screen, wearing a tank top in a room of white walls and empty white bookshelves. There is a new life to build here, and already a foundation on which it stands. Sarita's relationship with UCR began when she participated as one of the core organizers of that first Critical Ethnic Studies Conference in 2011

The kinds of relationships she built to bring her to this project were bound by a critical passion around the vision of ethnic studies.

The core organizers started planning about three years before the conference, as they had no funding. She describes the set up, “There were just 4 of us, sitting around,” she laughs, “Sitting in the cafeteria of the UC Riverside campus.” Her former colleague from University of Michigan, Andrea Smith, was one of the many women of color in particular who had been denied tenure at that university and had landed a position at UCR. Filipino American professor Dylan Rodriguez had just become Chair of Ethnic Studies. “And then Jodi Kim just got tenure at UC Riverside, also in the Ethnic Studies Dept and I had gotten tenure also at UM.” Seeing these changes at UCR, signaled a new direction in the Ethnic Studies Department there. There was some energy to move from perhaps more traditional, more conservative ways of thinking about the purpose of ethnic studies. There were folks eager to assess and then move on from the paradigms of Ethnic Studies that were outdated, irrelevant and no longer working. Sarita zeroes in, “So we decided that this is the moment really organize a very, very big conference. We'd be assessing the state of Ethnic Studies.”

There is a genealogy to note here that will allow us to see how this building with others, finding sanity in collectivity, happens. Years ago, Andrea Smith invited Sarita to co-teach a graduate course that surveyed new scholarship in ethnic studies, “that were challenging identitarian approaches to Ethnic Studies, or just challenging Ethnic Studies in interesting ways, as well as producing new research.” And this is all while her and Andrea Smith are, “basically on tenure death row.” Many of the fifteen to twenty students enrolled were also the graduate student leaders who were organizing the Campus Lockdown Conference. So you have this assembly of people

who see their learning communities and their jobs at stake. The course became a place in which both faculty and students could share space during that dark time, and let the light come through in the form of dialogue around new scholarship.

Treacherous, it was; but also an intellectually incredible time.

Once Sarita and Andrea Smith's jobs were stabilized, along with Dylan's and Jodi's (both who faced their own challenges) at UCR, it was then they decided to put out their call for papers for the first Critical Ethnic Studies Conference. Work like this happens "on the side" or "on top of" your day job. It's work that the university isn't necessarily going to fund. You meet at odd times, whenever you can align schedules, squeeze it in, and agree on a location to meet. In fact, Sarita had to commute all the way from Michigan to California in order to help organize. She was already flying back and forth nearly every week because by that time, Ann Arbor "was so toxic," she needed to get away. But for the conference, she would deplane in Los Angeles, hit the freeway and drive out to Riverside to be physically present as much as possible for: meetings, reading every proposal, drafting the program, copy editing, assembling conference packages and badges, the whole nine yards. We know this work can be downright exhausting, leaving us spiritually broke. We know it as burnout. It's a dance we have to learn in this work of activist-scholarship, or scholarship-activism. Near the end of exhaustion, though, comes that feeling we had been aching to feel.

What do you call it? Sarita tries to describe:

I don't know if you were there that first night? I didn't know that this was gonna for real happen but that, the buzz, the excitement of that room was unreal and I remember saying to Jodi, we just looked at each other like, we did not know that we are capable of pulling off something like this. We didn't

know we could do something at this scale. Basically, we were saying we didn't know we were as powerful as this! I think for both of us, for me especially, I was just starting to recognize what I'm capable of, and I have to really give props to Andy Smith for pushing us this way. For really insisting that we could do something on that scale, with little to no resources, you know. So, it was really surreal [laughs]. Just really surreal! [Laughing].

I call this spirit. Spirit that brings everyone into the same room, so that being in that same room becomes reminds you of a larger force at play. UCR is a sanctuary in some ways, where Sarita had a handful of people who would be there, look out for her; see to it that she gets to do the kind of work that feeds her soul, work she thinks really matters in the world. As scholar-activists, we know this kind of work goes against the numbing advice we get everyday in the academy: “don't do it.” Sarita breaks down:

The typical professionalizing advice to grad students, assistant professors, everybody is just like, "Oh, don't get sucked in. You're gonna be asked to serve on five-thousand committees, you have a million students, all this stuff. And the thing is I feel like that, while it's true you will find yourself doing double or triple the amount of work that say a white professor, sometimes white male professor will be doing, the thing is that [kind of] professionalizing advice I feel is extremely individuating. You just care about yourself. You. That's it. And I feel like that's so insidious. I think to go down that path is, I think it's colonial. I think that's a very capitalist, colonial type of ideology.

Staying sane in this work must include being able to carve out space together, and create projects with others in the service of others. This always comes back to something bigger than us, a larger purpose. But it's in these spaces of collectivity where colleagues understand exactly what we're going through, and can also point us towards self-care, as Sarita remembers being told, “Hey hey hey, we can take care of this. You go. Don't worry. Things are not gonna fall apart if you take a break.” So

naturally, I wonder what she did on her own time to keep her whole self happy and healthy. She begins by noting our physicality:

For me, it's remembering that we're attached to physical bodies [chuckling]. Working on a computer, we think that it's cerebral work, but it's still physical work that has its affect on your back, your neck, your wrists. [It's about] remembering that there is a physical counterpart to what we do and that we need to do other physical things. I think it was in my first year as assistant professor at Michigan, I was still recovering from finishing the dissertation. I was lucky enough to get a post-doc, but I was still kind of a wreck wreck wreck, physically! So the big treat was to get a gym membership at a gym where there were few university people [chuckling]. I learned how to box. And actually on my Filipino side, my grandfather as well as my granduncle were boxers. Working with a boxing coach was amazing. Just really kind of, that was work. That was very hard work, and it was about learning. And then at the same time I was also doing yoga. This combination of a martial art and yoga was really great for me.

When we come back home to the body, after having sat in a chair or slumped over a computer for hours on end like a machine, we also give our mind a break. It's all connected. No longer glued to the work, our bodies can rejuvenate through a variety of senses to the brain as it moves, kicks, punches, stretches, and leans out. The sweat is good for the body, as the mind rests from the intellectual work. But then, we must also tend to the mind. We can't ignore all the ways it's been assaulted and insulted. All the ways it's been scrutinized and then split from our bodies, crushing our inner compass. In thinking about the ways in which we keep ourselves intact, Sarita interjects for a moment:

You know, I'm sorry, this is just one thing. And this is kind of really personal, but in terms of your question about sanity and all that, finding breath, I have to actually tell you that, um, it was actually, when I was still in Ann Arbor, I actually started psychoanalysis. And that was, I'd never done anything like that before. I'd never done any kind of therapy. But for maybe about two years, it was 4 times a week. This was like serious stuff [chuckling].

I commiserate, sharing how I too, after my first year in grad school, began seeing a therapist because I thought I was losing my mind. I *felt* like I was losing my mind. And I needed a safe place to ride through the whirl of emotions, the weight in my heart, the static in my brain, and the depleted energy in my body. I commiserate because I want her to know that yes, it's serious, but there is no shame. She adds lightly, "You know I was very suspicious of therapy and everything, but I think I was very lucky and I got a very very good referral. So I just wanna let you know. I get the hunch that her sessions in therapy were successful in pulling her out of the dark places academia had for so long her stuffed her into. Working in collectivity with others towards a shared vision of the world is healing. Seeking consolation with someone who can help facilitate the metabolizing of pain in the academy is another kind of healing. But we also just don't want to survive. We want to thrive. How do we do that? How does Sarita do that?"

Advice to Pinays: How to Thrive

Sarita identifies two main reasons she has stayed and thrived in the academy. First, while personal reservations about her ability "generate original thought" stalled her for some time, she eventually found ways to appreciate and find joy in her research process, "which is about being creative and feeling and being powerful in those acts of creativity," she affirms. Secondly, it's the joy of working with students, being part of their journey as they come into their own, "articulating and developing their ideas" over the course of a long project. "I think I have the ear and the heart for the kind of deep listening that the work of advising requires," Sarita senses. She

benefits, too, however. The learning is dynamic, happening both ways. She gets to pick up so much through their projects, keeping “the fire of intellectual curiosity alive” for Sarita. So what would she tell others on this career path? What kinds of practices shall future generations of Pinays in academia carry on so that they, too, can thrive?

“Lift as you climb. Don’t forget where you came from.” Sarita first insists.

Then she considers this idea of academic survival, and urges us to raise the bar on that kind of thinking:

To not to start with: I need to survive. But [instead]: I need to *thrive*. Cuz I think if you start with the bar of I just need to survive, omigod, you might as well stop right there. That's not enough for anybody. There's some very damaged people in academia and I think that choosing that individuating path, [which is] very professional, careerist; I know that's in the name of survival. But, I don't know. There's some very damaged people.

Lastly, Sarita offers the idea of working from a place of abundance. There is this “big lie” that we don’t have the resources to do the kinds of amazing work we want to do. She mimics, “We don't have enough this. We don't have enough that.” However, we must know that we can use the creativity and prowess we already have to navigate the roadblocks towards resources that are already there. Again, it’s in the collectivizing. It will come full circle.

Gratitude to Sarita

Allow us time travel back to that hot summer afternoon at UCR where my mother and Mateo had left me. With the charming 83-degree heat, they’re probably grabbing an ice cream at this time, grandmamma-grandchild-bonding as they should;

they don't often get to with the five-hundred miles that stretch between us on a regular day. From the corner of the classroom, I watch her twenty students listen intently to the guidelines of their upcoming project assignment, as she outlines how they will:

Put together creative work, videos, painting, drawings, and then intercept them with scholarly works that talk about the history, context, and economic conditions so that readers can then bridge the gap. You'll have a ten-minute oral presentation, starting with a short thought-provoking question, image, skit, or activity. Describe your group's theme; contextualize your theme; describe two to three examples of individual pieces; make a compelling and concluding statement. Your group will turn in one whole piece. Everybody's getting the same grade, though you all will be evaluating each other to chime in on that grading. It's a group process. It's about group dynamics.

She directs her students eyes to the screen on which she projects an example: the curatorial statement of a project, which she's co-curating called, "Sea, Land, Air: Migration and Labor." It is a project of the newly launched web-based nonprofit organization, CA+T (Center for Art and Thought) of which she serves as Executive Director. The statement reads:

CA+T's "Sea, Land, Air: Migration and Labor" recognizes the myriad historical processes that influence the movements and experiences of Filipinos around the globe, including the Philippines' multiple histories of colonialism (Spain, the United States, and Japan) and the legacies of displacement that continue to resonate through to the present day... We seek to provide a virtual platform that refuses the limitations of physical space and the segregation of "art" and "scholarship."... We take the Philippines and its diaspora as an exemplary point of departure—rather than arrival—for representing and addressing all kinds of philosophies, histories, traditions, values, and knowledges. We invite you to explore this rich cultural and political work produced by contemporary artists, writers and scholars, and we offer you this

space as a place of shelter, as a place to encounter the growth that comes with the rigors and joys of genuine exchange, critique, and collaboration.²⁸

Students break out into their groups and lively brainstorming ensues. Students actively discuss ideas, taking notes from their conversations in class. Sarita walks around to listen in on the sharing of ideas, offering guidance as needed. I listen to the hum of the classroom. I see how it, too, becomes this space where students can “encounter the growth that comes with the rigors and joys of genuine exchange, critique, and collaboration.” And I sit with that sense of purpose in one’s critically engaged work in the university.

My last and only visit here was two years ago, when UCR was the site of the first Critical Ethnic Studies Conference in March 2011. A buzzing excitement filled the air that day as folks shuffled from session to session. And a new buzz of excitement fills this classroom today. From conference organizing, to classroom teaching, to re-imagining scholarship and art on a digital platform, Sarita values deeply the practice of collaboration. Because through collaboration comes growth. I am thankful for the chance to have shared conversation with Sarita, who along the way provided words of wisdom to help set me on this long, often-winding path. Who collaborated with me in the telling of her story, and through the process, helped facilitate my own growth.

²⁸ <http://www.centerforartandthought.org/work/project/sea-land-air-migration-and-labor>

CHAPTER X

ANALYSIS

Unraveling the Cocoon: Pain + Love = Growth

“...[T]his transition was not about becoming someone better, but about finally allowing herself to become who she’d always been.” – Amy Rubin

I rise to the sound of shades being drawn this early February morning, 2016.

Nearly three years have passed since I last visited Rowena, Ate Leny, Liza, Robyn, Dawn and Sarita. Much has changed across all our lives. Lying next to me are the boys, growing so fast, their sleeping faces are evidence of time quickly passing: Mateo is now four-and-a-half years old; Dante just turned two. At my window, I stand and stretch to be present with the day beginning. Here on the second story of our apartment complex, our window faces into a courtyard lined with trees that spring upward, their branches reaching toward us telling us the seasons as they change. White flower blossoms have appeared. I notice their petals, sprightly and delicate, and imagine them feeling the sun’s touch. Three bees dance among them, seeking nectar and making rounds. I give an inner bow of acknowledgement to this natural state, these small miracles, witnessing the bees follow their truest nature and way of being. Seeing one’s “true nature” might appear to be a simple notion. Yet as of late, it has proven to be the most harrowing mind voyage for me.

It’s been seven months since my youngest sister passed peacefully in her sleep at the tender age of twenty. Some minutes after midnight, her heart stopped beating; her body unable to withstand the chemistry of substances she consumed. I have been

trying to understand this newfangled truth of ours – this truth of her journeying on, of our relationship in a form beyond the physical, of our histories that signal us to this present moment as well as to our futures. Her name – coincidentally or not so coincidentally – is Pinay. Short for: Filipina-Jasmin Nielo Pascasio. We are born from the same womb. Took that similar passage to enter into this world, and now we are apart. In the deep and arduous grieving, I find myself starting from scratch. I go back to basics. I go back to meditation.

Pinay's passing brought on many visits from many butterflies in the days and months that followed that fateful July night. In order to move through the mourning, I had to come to a new understanding of the life cycle—her life, my life, and what it all means. All of this work on Pinay scholarship all these years, in a supposed fight for the spiritual, emotional, intellectual livelihood of Pinays, and I couldn't save my own sister. I couldn't save Pinay. My mind races back to her moments of childhood, adolescence and growth; her moments of suffering that I was able to see and did not see; and I arrive at the universe's (God's) call for her to grow wings and go to greater places already meant for her. Still grieving and adjusting to tend to this other voyage with Pinay, along with the simultaneous inescapable life hustle on earth, I am at the crosswinds—where her transition bumps up against the direction in which (I thought) I was headed. But as we know, the universe always has other plans. I emerge with a lens that gives a gentle glance across our lives as sisters (Pinay and I, as well as the four sisters in between); and unavoidably across the lives of these Pinay scholars: Rowena, Ate Leny, Liza, Robyn, Dawn and Sarita.

Towards Sutured Portraiture

Through the research, I came to see my originally proposed methodology of *embodied* portraiture morph into something slightly different. Initially, I called it *embodied* portraiture to emphasize the process by which I would narrate these women's "flesh blood experiences" (Cameron, 1983), or what Cherie Moraga (1983) might call "theories in the flesh." It was a way to uncover how these women *embody* their histories, and how those histories *embody* knowledge. After all, their "endarkened feminist epistemologies" (Dillard, 2000) illuminate the wealth of wisdom that comes from their *bodies*, as these portraits are:

A place from which to theorize the leadership and [academic/community] realities of [Pin@y scholars] through situating knowledge and action in the cultural spaces out of which they arose" (p. 670)... Are there patterns of epistemology that can help us to decipher the patterns of leadership lives, those situated political struggles and personal passions that lie at the nexus of scholarship and activism?" (p. 671).

But what are these *patterns*? I take pause, thinking further on the necessary task of seeing patterns, understanding now that my role as a portraitist has evolved over time. From a portraitist whose *body* stood inside and with these conversations (actively participating, contributing, and co-constructing their stories), I evolved into a portraitist whose body also stands way outside, from a critical distance in order to tell the story, to show how these *patterns* stitch together, and how these patterns create a quilt of experience.

The work that each of these stories offers is a sort of pedagogy of how to be in conversation with one another around scholarship and activism as Pinays. Their seemingly separate portraits stand *together* more than they stand on their own. They

connect, like a quilt, and my role can be described as the weaver who stitches or sutures these portraits together so that they can talk to each other. Like patches or strewn pieces of fabric, their portraits together give us the landscape. We can hold up this quilt and appreciate it as the backdrop of a larger story. Thus, here is where I move from embodied portraiture to a more appropriately named, *sutured* portraiture.²⁹

As a weaver, sure, I suture together six portraits. But each portrait is also a suturing of the wound, a stitching together of memories of struggle and joy that make up one's current self. In these portraits, I suture together split selves, or what Ate Leny calls, the split-psyche. And this suturing is intellectual work.

We have traveled through six portraits (seven, if we include my own woven through)—each, a story of transformation. The experience of sitting with these women and writing their stories with thoughtful intention have not only been a suturing of their portraits together, but also in some ways a weaving of my cocoon, a chamber for spiritual and intellectual metamorphosis. Here is where we unravel this cocoon.

Metamorphosis: Transformations Through the Weaving

What I found across all conversations with Rowena, Ate Leny, Liza, Dawn, Robyn, and Sarita is that there is a connection, a specific relationship, I have with each of them. Often, the word “we” shows up in my writing. It refers to multiple

²⁹ Sutured portraiture might be imagined as a form of anthologizing to be further theorized, as found in The Santa Cruz Feminist of Color Collective's (2014) essay, “Building on ‘the Edge of Each Other's Battles’: A Feminist of Color Multidimensional Lens.”

we's, depending on the relationship between myself and the person whose story I'm co-writing. We, women faculty of color. We, Pinays. We, of the 2nd generation born of immigrant parents. We, who understand the tightrope we walk between multiple worlds. The use of the "we" is a way of nodding to the deeper link(s) between us, beyond myself as researcher, and them as subject. The use of the "we" gave way to a personal transformation I did not expect to experience.

As I sat with each Pinay scholar-activist with interest and inquiry into *her* life and *her* transformation, I was in effect receiving mentorship, and therefore a mentor. I often walked away from each conversation enlightened with some unforeseen teaching about new directions I could take on this road in the academy. Just as I had gained insight from the life of my baby sister, I gained wisdom from these women who in some ways were like older sisters—older sisters from an academic family, with an academic genealogy.

As we talked, they would interject with words of advice. In a discussion about my master's research, Ate Leny asked, "Have you published it? You should. Find listservs where people are always putting a call out for submissions. Get connected that way." Similarly, in a discussion about her new book, Dawn stopped me in midsentence to say, "Wait—has anyone ever told you about the academic publishing process? Okay, let me tell you about it. Because no one ever told me about it, and I wish I knew." Concerning career moves, Sarita shared, "A senior colleague suggested to me: when you're going up for tenure and you're compiling all your stuff, it's like

you're applying for a job. So, do it—go ahead and apply for other jobs! Apply everywhere. Cover your bases, just in case. Makes total sense.”

Furthermore, by narrating their approach to their work in the institution, they were in essence modeling helpful strategies that I might wish to employ in my own work. I think about Rowena's “going underground” with other women of color faculty, holding summer retreats and building curriculum that met their passions along with the needs of their students. In that story, she models the possibilities of faculty organizing, practicing a sort of civic engagement *within* the institution. On a related note, as Robyn tells me the story of going into the Filipino Community Center, as a *profesora* (professor) and a *kasama* (comrade), with research tools to train caregivers on how to conduct their own research, she models grassroots organizing using tools brought down from the ivory tower.

Lastly, I think about a personal transformation regarding the relationship that grew over time between each storyteller and myself. As each portrait ends with gratitude, I rest my heart on the meaningfulness of our being together through each of our journeys. Being together let us inevitably grow together, even if incrementally. We had the gift of witnessing poignant moments in the here and now, aside from talking about poignant moments from the past. I am especially thinking about Liza and the evolution of her mother-scholarship—that is, the juggling act of being a mother and a scholar or educator—and how I was right there riding with her. As pregnant women in the institution, we had the chance to laugh and lament about that juggling act. That is our bond. We swapped stories and suggestions. Talked about

double-strollers and baby yoga. Liza, who was once “someone to interview,” became a friend. And that metamorphosis from being an acquaintance to being a friend is a blessing indeed.

We also can observe the metamorphosis of each narrator throughout her portrait. Personal and rough encounters with racism, classism, sexism, consciousness-raising, and spiritual renewal are snapshots of lifecycles and rebirths. Through a softened lens (distinct from the penetrating academic gaze), I see each storyteller as a butterfly: a tender being who undergoes strife in an inevitable evolution towards her own beauty. Once a caterpillar, she walked the earth with her many legs, trying to gain footing, evaluate her surroundings and get a hold of her position. A series of experiences wove her into a cocoon in which she rested. Rumination ensued. Hard work ensued. The cocoon was this place of isolation in the writing, in the teaching, in the rat race for tenure. She underwent great pains and growth in her darkness. In moments of clarity, she broke through, grew wings, and took flight with renewed purpose. Her past becomes a place of reference; her pulse, a guide; and her wings carry her to new visions and possibilities in her work. In her everyday. In the trenches of the classroom, out in the community, or in her very home, work’s got to be done and it’s from the body she sources her truth. It is a constant and ever-fluid transformation.

A New Analysis: Fresh but Lasting Impressions

We’re a society of outcomes. We are obsessed with solid solutions and “the final answer.” However, this research does not set out to provide immediate

outcomes or a straightforward analysis of how these portraits map squarely back onto the chart of a conceptual and theoretical framework I provide in the introduction. Instead, this chapter generates three fresh themes for analysis— (a) the disenchantment of empire, (b) resistant socialities, and (c) Pinayist pedagogical praxis – to demonstrate the interconnectedness of these womens’ multiple transformations. I will first describe each of these analytic themes in succession, laying out a roadmap for the reader. I’ll then drift across slices of each of the portraits to mine threads of evidence, as I point back to these analytic themes.

As a portraitist, I must briefly underline the difficulty in this analytic work. In highlighting particular themes, I set myself up to “prove a point” as required by the academy. And I do this by taking data essentially out of context. I slice and dice up portraits in order to prove my points. This is inevitable in the violences of social science research—cutting up narratives and prioritizing “findings.” This exercise is a temporary “submission to colonialism” (Lowe, 1998; p. 163)—brutal and inescapable in the empire within which I write. Nonetheless, portraiture tries to mitigate epistemic violences by doing its best to keep storytellers as “whole” and alive as possible, only to reveal that the life of a Pinay scholar-activist (as a woman of color) isn’t necessarily about wholeness. Her life is *about* maneuvering through the contradictions and the discomfort. It is a life that is always unsettled. We learn to live in that liminal space.

Let us now look at those liminal spaces—these shared instances that connect these portraits to one another—throughout the discussion of each analytic theme. As

Ate Leny insists, “I want the gift of story. Story as medicine for our souls” (Strobel, 2005; p. 17). With our stories as insight, here is how we unfold our wings.

Disenchantment of Empire

“Really,” I’ve recently been asked, “What is this Filipina story coming through (in your research)? What makes it ‘Pinay’?” Big question. Huge question. Rather than reduce these stories to essentialist notions of what is and is not ‘Pinay,’ I share only a handful of the innumerable ways we can point to their stories as distinctively ‘*Pinay*.’

To begin, it is the story of empire (Coloma, 2006; Lowe, 2009; Maese-Cohen, 2010); that is, a story of how these Pinays come to inhabit their paradoxical position within empire (empire, as the place in which the longstanding power of colonialism’s history exists). More specifically, the Pinay scholar-activist’s positionality and predicament being: (born in or) the offspring of a parent born in the “colonized periphery,” the Philippines; who chased labor demands or family reunification under immigration policies pulling them to this “center of colonial power,” the U.S. (Lowe, 2009, p. 108).³⁰ Here she not only sees empire (the power or damage of coloniality), she works to expose it, trouble it, and undo its harm. She is about the disenchantment of empire; she is about seeking and setting up the conditions for decolonization.

³⁰ Lowe reviews and cites Hazel Carby’s unpublished manuscript, “Child of Empire: Racializing Subjects in Post World War II Britain.”

Critical pedagogy researcher Zeus Leonardo (2010) would point this out as an important move, as it holds colonialism, coloniality, and empire:

not just in the negative sense (or as a burden in the Fanonian way) but as [something that] offers a more complex understanding [of] our experiences, our standpoint, our epistemologies [which] are fundamentally filtered through these real histories of colonialism; and so let's talk about colonialism as a place to talk about survival.

Survival however is not the final purpose. Yes, we must be able to breathe. But also, as you will see bits and pieces of people showing how they disenchanted themselves, you will also see the active envisioning and creation of different futurities and selves, over and over again in order to thrive. Allow me to taper down this theme of “disenchanted empire” to make even more specific connections looking at: (a) legacies of empire and bridges for migration (Sassen, 1993), (b) the silence that upholds empire, and (c) anger and its uses (Lorde, 1984) for the Pinay who digs up empire to see the light of liberation.

Looking at Legacies of Empire: Bridges for Migration of Body, Mind, and Soul

Legacies of empire can be mapped through what political economy theorist Saskia Sassen (1993) calls “patterns of linkages” or “bridges for migration.” The word empire “situates [these Pinays and their bodies] in relation to the global history of colonialism and its division of labor (Lowe, 2009). It is the story of how “We didn’t cross the border. The border crossed us.” For Pinays, empire “references the US-controlled school system in the Philippines [itself], which helped to bring [us and] our families over” (Coloma, 2006; p. 644). However, stories of empire are not simply about someone getting on a plane, leaving “the colony” and settling in the U.S. Let's

step back and think bigger, considering what it means to hold legacies of empire—beginning with these bridges of migration—in our bodies and in our memory.

I think of Sarita’s articulation of the biographical as “totally connected to the historical,” as her research interests (of empire) rest deep in the womb of her family birth history: “my father is from Singapore, a former British colony, and my mother is the daughter of a former American and Spanish colony.” And on public radio, she declares:

“All I have to remember is my Cantonese-speaking father who took a government scholarship as a ticket out of the ghetto, as a ticket to Singapore’s elite English-speaking bureaucracy. This was a bureaucracy that would reward him and reward him, yet mark him ultimately as a Chinaman from Chinatown.”

From the field of medicine, we note Rowena and Robyn’s mothers were nurses. Liza learned only recently that her mother actually holds a degree in medical technology. Most Filipino families can easily name a Pinay relative (mother, aunt, godmother) in the medical field. As Filipina historian Catherine Ceniza Choy demonstrates in her book, *Empire of Care* (2003), “foreign-trained nurses [have] constitute[d] a crucial labor supply in the United States.” The Philippines in particular provides *the* largest number of foreign-trained nurses by far. This nursing “migration bridge” both racialized and gendered operated as early as 1904, some years after the U.S. acquired the Philippines as “property.”

Then there’s the U.S. Armed Forces. Dawn and I are both granddaughters of WWII veterans. We both have marched and advocated for equity compensation for our *veteranos*, as her *lolo* (grandfather) fought in the First Filipino Infantry Regiment;

my *lolo* served as guerilla fighter alongside the U.S. His feet are covered in scars from having raced through the juggle without shoes. Liza and I are both daughters of Navy men. These linkages show the long migration of Filipino men lured into this “land of milk and honey” (economic stability) through U.S. military enlistment, but are also manifestations of the uneven relationship of militarism and warfare between the homeland and the U.S.

Carrying a variety of jobs, simultaneously and/or across time, to stay afloat is all too common for the immigrant family, trying to get comfortable from the “colonized periphery” to “colonial center.” Dawn, also the daughter of farmworkers, was born and raised in Stockton where a “massive stream of Filipinas/os” came as early as 1898 to for work in the fields [and/]or domestic service (Mabalon, 2013; p. 5). We recall Sarita’s grandfather had his stint in domestic work while attending university. Liza’s mother found work across racialized, classed, and gendered labor queues: from pineapple canneries in Hawaii, to military officer’s quarters in Alaska as a houseworker, to the electronic assemblyline in Rhode Island; wherever Liza’s father was stationed next, before spending most of the rest of her life in California as a certified nursing assistant—never quite having the chance to use her medical technology degree to its fullest potential.

Each one of the storytellers trace their family’s bridges for migration—not for the sake of “nostalgia or an expression of loss... but [as] a critical looking back” (Alexander, 2009). This all goes back to their families and ancestors—those in their blood line who walked through the world before them, navigated empire before them.

In looking at how they navigated through the generations, we see the “long brutal encounter with colonial modernity through the memory of the objects, expressions, traces, and... archaeology that condense and allude to this longer history” (Lowe, 1998; p. 162). I disentangle relationships between these Pinay scholar-activists and their parents and grandparents to recognize those things that are passed down—practices of empire that are learned from the colonial power, reiterated in Filipino family culture and childrearing, and then “displaced both clumsily and deliberately in embodied practices” (p. 163).

The Silences that Uphold Empire: Instances of Invalidation

We understand how the practice of silence gets passed from one generation to another. Our job as scholars is to pick apart why these silences are so powerful. I want to talk about silence as a theme that emerges from these portraits in two ways. One is the silence that is practiced in our families: of self-contempt, self-effacement, of grateful servitude and a “*tiisin mo lang*” (“just grin and bear it”) mentality that is tangled up with *hiya* (the feeling of shame or the practice of shaming)—all of this spiritually and emotionally passed down by empire. *We don’t need to talk to one another much—we just get up in the morning and survive. Because surviving is the everyday chore.* These silences are brought on by external forces such as the immigration policy that allowed our family to escape political regime, the job offer that helped us come over, etc. We can name many times we felt forced to learn empire and internalize it, so that a fog thickens before our eyes and we cannot see. But in the silence between self and parents and grandparents lies these questions:

“What happened? Why are you, and why are we silent? Why do I not know your story? It is my story, too.” Parents and grandparents carry this legacy of empire-building, which become part of the contradictions of what is passed down to critically engaged Pinay scholars.

That uncomfortable silence in our families came up in my conversations with Liza. We don’t talk. Not about feelings, or about any kind of truth that might hurt. We avoid confrontation. We are too prideful to be vulnerable. We are fearful of *hiya* (shame). And even in the mundane, in the everyday, as our parents become too preoccupied working, and we become too preoccupied schooling—all of us trying to feel our way through this America—we don’t get to sit and share deeply. Only now as a grown, married woman with two children is Liza learning snippets of facts about her parents’ lives. She visits with aunties who tell her bits and pieces, and is slowly coming around to asking her parents herself. Because it’s time, now that she has demystified empire, now that she has done all the theoretical research and memoir reading to inform her teaching around colonial mentality and the Filipino family.

We have Robyn’s stark realization that her father could not attend her school functions, for fear of ridicule for his slippery English. Robyn kicks herself for having teased his accent as a child and for being hard on him without understanding that his absences were necessary for his spiritual and psychological survival. But as a young Pinay coming-of-age, how would she have known to ask these questions of her father directly? How would she know to say, “Hey, Dad. Let’s sit and talk. Tell me what it’s like for you after having immigrated here all these years. Tell me about the obstacles

you face everyday in the white world.” She would not have known because this is not the practice we are taught. Those are conversations that, if we’re lucky, our parents might have with their peers. Never would they have such conversations with us. As a family, we grin and bear it, till it breaks us open later.

In an essay called “A Letter to Ma” in *This Bridge Called My Back* (1983), Merle Woo tries to unpack the silences between her and her mother. In these silences, she senses the ruptures:

I am your daughter, you are my mother, and we are keeping each other company, and that is [supposed to be] enough... But it is not enough because my life has been formed by your life... Ma, I could never have [found my way political voice] if you had not provided for me the opportunity to be free of the binds that have held you down, and to be in the process of self-affirmation... And while I affirm myself, Ma, I affirm you” (p. 142).

Affirmations help us get through each day. It’s a practice we have to learn and relearn after having internalized that practice of silence for so long. So not only are we not speaking to or checking in with our parents, we’re not checking in with ourselves, not affirming ourselves. “*Tiisin mo lang*” (“just grin and bear it”), remember? That’s how we do. Even to the point we might be holding on to our last breath, and our bodies are failing . Dawn’s constant separation of mind running endless laps on that hamster wheel, forgetting about her body. Her moment in the hospital becomes a violent truth, a shock back into the reality of the necessity to affirm her body and soul’s right to live well through the rat race.

And then there is the Pinay scholar-activists’ experience of *being* silenced—instances of invalidation, points in their lives when they were shut up: by the university, by the church, by society, etc. Told they couldn't speak, shouldn't speak, or

don't know what they're talking about, the silence becomes a form of death. Pivotal confrontations at disparate moments across our lives hit us with experiences that don't sit well in our bodies. This invalidation is the power of coloniality. So in this paradoxical position of empire, I provide a reading of the silences between themselves and their parents, then a reading of their *being* silenced; and how those instances of invalidation across generations or centuries signal to them a different way of being.

We see this in Robyn's struggle to belong as a new faculty member at Rutgers. In a room with "Harvards and Stanfords," she silences her politics in their presence, and then at home, subscribes to the *New Yorker* to become versed in their world. That is, until a friend kicks it to her straight: "We can't make up for over thirty years of this class education. We can't. No amount of reading is gonna get us to where [they] are." The Pinay comes back to her body, her authentic self, the unavoidable aberration to empire.

Ate Leny grew up with a pastor father in the Philippines, only to arrive in the US and get flack from white church folk – that was her experience of disenchantment, of becoming disenchanting through the experience of being silenced. Ate Leny's early days in America greeted her with the most dehumanizing racist, sexist, questions by well-meaning white folk: "How did you learn to speak English so well? Did he buy you from a catalogue? Do you really eat dogs?" (Strobel, 2005, p 18). How painful. How invalidating. Questions like these silence us the very moment they are being asked.

We're reminded of Rowena's harrowing qualifying exams during her doctoral program at UC Santa Barbara, when her Asian Americanist professor—the only woman of color on her committee—advised, “Do what [your other white male Americanist professors] suggest you do [to rectify your paper]. Take more classes. Write in a more academic voice. This hurdle will pass.” Rowena would not allow these two white men to discount her voice and define her worth in the academy. She knew her American literature but wanted to write her own. Being held to different standards than other white students, she refused to compromise her principles and her integrity. But the act of silencing her work would leave traces of trauma for years.

When silence has us interrogating our conditions – the pain and burdens we have carried over time – we might move to anger, as we find in the Pinay story. Through the journey comes a learning of a new truth, a turn to anger, and a reason to be fueled by such anger, as Woo expresses in her letter to her mother: “I carry the anger from my own experience and the anger you couldn't afford to express,” (p. 147). What do we do with this anger? All these forms of silence got these women of color talking back.

The Anger: Digging Up Empire Towards Reconciliation

What emerges across these portraits are points at which these Pinays feel cornered, assaulted, and assessed as incompetent. While this is angering, we don't turn away from it. Doing so means “we turn from insight, saying we will accept only the designs already known, those deadly and safely familiar,” (p.131). Turning away from anger would mean accepting empire, as is. Audre Lorde's (1984) essay, “The

Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism” helps us to see the value in our anger.

Her particular tone of anger stems from racism, as she records:

I have lived with that anger, on that anger, beneath that anger, on top of that anger, ignoring that anger, feeding upon that anger, learning to use that anger... Once I did it in silence, afraid of the weight of that anger. My fear of that anger taught me nothing. Your fear of that anger will teach you nothing, also (p. 124).

In reaching out, she offers solace “to my sisters of Color who like me still tremble their rage under harness,” connecting anger (“rage”) to silence (“under harness”).

Pinays shall take heed as Lorde nods to the power of coalition-building: “When I speak of women of Color, I do not only mean Black women. We are also Asian American, Caribbean, Chicana, Latina, Hispanic, Native American, and we have a right to each of our names,” (p. 127).

Anger leads the Pinay scholar-activist to a sharper analysis, a theoretical prism. “Loaded with information and energy” (p. 127), anger fuels the takedown of empire. It begins with the digging—What are these stories of empire, these projects and products of empire that have brought us to this present moment? The digging is a *method* of thinking and interrogating, which I will later discuss in the last section of this analysis. Important to note for the moment is how the digging can change everything. Through the digging, we discover that “we are not here as women examining racism in a political and social vacuum. We operate in the teeth of [the] system,” of repressive conditions which must be examined and altered to “fashion a world where all our sisters can grow, where our children can love,” (p. 128).

We have Ate Leny who joined her white American husband Cal on his return to the U.S. She initially came as a staunch evangelical, having grown up as the daughter of a Methodist pastor back in San Fernando, Pampanga. All these frames of White Christianity informed her life. All her friends were missionaries. Christianity was her world, until American white folk at church glared at her without the warmth she had hoped, and that world came crushing down. With a “split psyche”—a form of madness—she walked away with a million questions that have ignited all her research and writing around empire. Her work demonstrates how anger fuels analysis. In her book *Babaylan* (Strobel, 2005), she writes how her father is the “epitome of a split psyche visited upon him by the violence of colonialism.” I revisit the moment at her father’s bedside, where she thought deeply about the source of that “primal wounding” they shared. Was it her heavy reading “about patriarchy, capitalist control, gender oppression, or colonialism” or her “recent immersion in indigenous literature and indigenous spirituality that made [her] see this [psychic] split more clearly?” What has empire done to our men? What has empire done to us? What are these wounds, these familiar places of pain that anger me?

There was the moment Liza was caught by her father, producing a college course paper on the problematic, heterosexist role of the Catholic Church. It angered him to see his daughter reduce their religion to this college paper. It angered her to realize the hypocritical nature of identifying as Catholic—a religion which excludes women from positions of power, denies the LGBTQ community all together—whilst existing in a body that troubles the binary of male and female. “It just didn’t make

sense to me,” she resolved. Learning that we have been duped by the teachings of empire can be quite an infuriating experience. But this madness is all part of consciousness-raising. The anger lies right here, in the realization that we carry an added burden of our contradictions—between religion and an emerging feminism like Liza, or the fact that white people ain’t so Christian in their racism with Ate Leny. And this is Pinay praxis—learning how to live with these huge contradictions.

There’s the time when Sarita was in grad school and a male colleague pressed, "Sarita, you *do* know your theory, don't you?" The polarizing sentiment reverberated in her body years later in Michigan when it was suggested that a particular white male preacher-turned-professor would be perfect for an Intro class with 200 students. These two comments fetishize who is of intellect (of the mind), and who is not. Evidently, we are not. Empire dissects our bodies. Sarita’s mere presence in academic spaces as a Pinay scholar in some ways becomes an act of rebellion, raising hell on this stale colonized (mis)perception of who can read, write, and teach. This is especially true, when we don’t do what is expected of us. Remember, we were “allowed” into the academy. We must play the part of the forever-grateful woman of color taking up space here, right? Be docile. Don’t ask questions about unfair labor practices. Count your blessings. You made it. The split psyche is real.

We can see how the spiritual and emotional legacies of empire – silence and anger – engage Pinay scholar-activists, as Woo (1983) expresses, “I feel now that I can begin to put our lives in a larger framework. The outlines for us are time and blood, [and] today, there is breath.” (p. 147). So part of this Pinay story is finding that

breath, in the process of coming to understand the interrelatedness of our colonized experiences with people we care about, especially family. Through our conversations, Pinay scholar-activists find themselves reconciling their relationships with people dear to them, whom they didn't get a chance to exchange a heart-to-heart. Distracted by the capitalistic urgency to survive in the colonial center, exchanging heart-to-hearts would have been (regarded as) a waste of time. Oftentimes, we take our anger to spaces where it can be received, understood, and engaged—where we can build with others to survive.

Resistant Socialities

When Pinay scholar-activists are fired up, they need a place where such anger can be transformed into “intentions that [can] affect the organization of power,” (Lugones, 2003, p. 15). Intentions such as these “need a sociality in order to move. That is, the formation of those intentions is social... Enacting resistance as social and worldly requires an interactive understanding of intentions,” (p. 15). In this war in the university, Pinays participate in making a “university within the university” as a way to contend with the contradictions of empire. For how do we exist within the belly of the beast? Especially when coloniality collides? The creation and being part of resistant socialities helps to tap into that very deep and powerful well of shared experience and vision.

Like critical educational researcher Cindy Cruz who uses this understanding of resistant socialities in her research of LGBTQ youth practices and small acts of resistance (Cruz, 2013, pg. 4), I draw from African American History scholar Robin

D. G. Kelley to think about how Pinay scholar-activists work through their “daily confrontations, evasive actions, and stifled thoughts” (Kelley, 1993) with others. What strategies of resistance do they carry out, like other subjugated communities, “to negotiate the continuous scrutiny and containment by the powerful, (Cruz, 2013, pg. 3)?” These are vital questions as research shows us that:

Building networks is crucial to professional success in academia... these [stories] suggest that allies are also essential for individual well-being and the work of making the campus climate more hospitable for women faculty of color... The position brings with it the heavy burden of needing to serve a specific community without becoming overwhelmed by the demands for one’s time and attention,” (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; p. 9).

We recall how Robyn, after so many instances of invalidation in the ivory tower, finds a sense of community with another woman of color who is black and Puerto Rican. They connect and commiserate, “Just to be able to feel like we’re not crazy,” and eventually apply for funding to support a space for themselves, as she stressed:

It was about building community, you know. I couldn’t be alone. Because when you choose for instance to do a topic related to your background, when you choose to do methods that are already considered marginal in your field, when you choose to continue to do—I mean there were so many things that I chose that were always butting against the system [clapping her hands with each word.] How was I gonna survive myself? I had to build community with like-minded people.

Similarly, Rowena, during her early years of teaching at De Anza, connected with a women-faculty-of-color group at De Anza called Women’s Allies, made up of mentors who had been radicalized in the late 60s and in the 70s and deepened her thinking, so that together they could work to advance an equity agenda for their students. That work on campus she would later learn to translate in the streets with

the Silicon Valley-based grassroots organization FOCUS (Filipino Community Support).

When Ate Leny was doing her M.A., she would organize regular *kapihans* (conversations over coffee) every quarter with Pinoy scholars around the Bay Area. We can get caught up in the scholarship of the ivory tower and forget the scholarship we still need to build from within our own community. These *kapihans* were sites of critical reflection where they got to sit together and question Western norms of scholarship. That practice gave her the tools to further the sharing of knowledge about our Filipino Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP) through the establishment of the Center for Babaylan Studies.

Dawn shakes her head in amusement, recalling that moment in the Laundromat: two single graduate student Pinays, arranging their clothes and thinking about Dawn's next steps. Her best friend Allyson was teasing her about being too scared to go for a Ph.D. This is how they roll. This is how they push each other. We need our sisters to push us, to have our backs like this when we're questioning our abilities, talents, and strengths along this road in the academy. Dawn was assured by Allyson that she wouldn't be going after this PhD alone, that Dawn had a village who would help raise her up should she fall. Being that it was the mid-90s, a special point in time in which Pin@ys were pursuing advanced degrees in considerable numbers, there was a growing influence to build with another on campus and in the academic world; a "golden period" their generation holds in high regard. It would be an

experience from which she could source some inspiration in her later establishment of Stockton's Little Manila Foundation.

Sarita's co-coordination of the Critical Ethnic Studies Conference comes to mind. Once her and her colleagues' jobs were stabilized, they went to work "on the side" or "on top of" their day jobs to put out a call for papers. To build a conference that would be meaningful to their collective interrogation of empire, they met at odd times with Sarita flying back and forth from toxic Ann Arbor to sunny SoCal. Together, they realized how capable they were of pulling off something at such a tremendous scale, "Basically, we were saying we didn't know we were as powerful as this!" Sarita exclaims.

Strength in numbers. Strength in our resistant socialities. And how powerful it is when we not only gather in numbers for a shared purpose, but when we see to it that those numbers grow, such as the case with Liza and the Kababayan Community at Skyline College. She recognized as a new faculty member that the program needed to be revived, and that revival would help ensure her own survival in the game. Organizing closely with a dedicated team of educators and counselors, they brought it back to life and get to see siblings of former students also come through and benefit from the pipeline.

Working in education, an arm of the state, can be quite the precarious job as we push back on the powers that be. As each of these Pinay scholar-activists use alternative ways to talk about their experiences in the world, they find themselves through their thinking, writing, and teaching with others, "because if you don't find it,

then all you get is what the hegemony gives you” (Cruz, 2016b). They establish and join “free spaces in which to articulate grievances and dreams...places that enable them to take back their bodies, to recuperate, to be together,” (Kelley, 1993, p. 84). All these portraits describe this practice of being with others, of “sustain[ing] bonds of community mutual support networks, and a collectivist ethos that shaped” their political struggle (p. 83). They created spaces within and outside the parameters of power, why it looks different in their classrooms, or in their books, or with the people from whom they find solace. It is this Pinay’s understanding of her work that recognizes a “peopled sense” of the world (Lugones, 2010).

A Pinayist Pedagogical Praxis: What it Looks Like

I wrestle with an assertion a Filipino professor once made during my Master’s training in Asian American Studies at SFSU. He shared, “Someone asked me: What is all this talk about colonialism? Why do Filipino scholars keep talking about colonialism? Are we saying that by virtue of being Filipino, we’re fucked?” Throughout my academic journey, this comment has stuck with me. It is a powerful comment because it is a foreclosure of agency or any possibility to *do* or *be* something else. It is a linear way of seeing a beginning and an end. These Pinayist practitioners turn their back on this foreclosure. All of their instances of silence, invalidation, anger, and indignation could have easily forced the Pinay scholar-activist to turn away from her work all together. Instead, she recharted her own path with others, linking historiographies of pain and resilience—all of it:

critical to the opening of a horizon of possibility, as it alludes to the desire for another order, an alternative order. [Our dialogues] inhabit the present as a time of always already disenchanting emancipatory projects, [while] striv[ing] to create another time, a simultaneous conditional present in which anticolonial fury has not been exhausted and decolonization is still possible: this conditional present temporality reckons with the failures of emancipation [such as our families immigrating for a better life, or our attempt to supposedly free our minds while in the prison of the university] yet revisits the time of anticolonial possibility without determining its final course or outcome” (Lowe, 2009; p. 111).

The Pinay scholar-activist leaves it open with room to build. As such, I now extend the work of Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales who birthed the theory of Pinayism in 1995 (Tintiangco-Cubales, 2005). We begin by understanding the how the basic formula of Pinayism practice, “Pain + Love = Growth,” aims to:

engage the complexities... to understand how Pinay identities, perspectives, multiple subjectivities, negotiation of contradictions, and transformative resistance are birthed. [It is] a critical cultural production of... engaged scholarship that expresses Pinay perspectives and counternarratives... and a critical pedagogy of the teaching and learning of Pinay studies and the mentoring and reproduction of social justice educators (Tintiangco-Cubales, 2007).

I build on her theoretical groundwork to show how the particular practices of these six women are in fact Pinayism in motion. As Pinayism advises, “Pain + Love = Growth,” we indeed witness how exhuming the truths of empire brings pain; and how the “excavation of our honesties” (Lorde, 1984), allows us to approach such pain with love. From this, we grow.

Social scientists want to know: how do we observe this growth born of pain and love? Practitioners want to know: what are the *actual* practices of disenchantment of empire? These practices of using their anger to fuel a digging up of stories gone silent for too long, these practices of reconciliation and learning to live in great

contradictions, I refer to as Pinayist pedagogical praxis. According to education/ethnic studies scholars Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales and Jocyl Sacramento (2009) who have recently published Pinayist curriculum for teachers in the classroom, it is “a praxis asserting a transformative and transgressive agency that combines theory, practice, and personal reflection... connecting the global and local to the personal issues and stories, “ (p. 179).

The work of Pinay scholar-activists in this study is Pinayist praxis in the sense that their mode of inquiry itself is a process of decolonizing or deimperializing which holds a vision that not only sees the “trace of world historical encounter both enabled and disavowed by the Empire,” (Lowe, 2009, p. 109), it centers it. Their scholarship is *about* this centering in “a radical politic” so that their “act[s] of testifying to the daily contradictions of living as women of color in the U.S.” remain key (Cruz, 2016a). As each of them “struggle to create the conditions necessary so that a new generation may not be disciplined by the same racial [classist, and heterosexist] violence” (Lowe, 2009, p. 109) of empire, they gather with others as “active subjectivities” (Lugones, 2010) in resistant socialities to think through and document their lived realities and untold histories. By doing so, they create other imaginings of what life could be, transforming their world. This seemingly myopic study of six extraordinary individuals aims to show all the texture unseen through general findings, as they show us this shared method of thinking and of interrogating.

An example comes from Robyn whose early civic engagement work as a high school student began with the question: “What books are out there about Filipinos?”

My teachers didn't know about it; certainly people in the community didn't know. They didn't have an answer to that.” Robyn was hit with the troubling realization that there is no history taught of Pinays and Pinoys, that “official knowledge” apparently doesn't mean or include Pinay histories and herstories. This realization radicalized Robyn, moving her toward a search for answers; and the creation of alternative histories/herstories and other spaces of knowledge.

Since Liza she has begun demystifying empire as a college student, she has noticed through all the movement—settling and resettling into different homes and schools and jobs throughout the U.S.--Liza's parents have largely kept silent. All Liza heard growing up was, “Do this. Do that. Don't get into trouble.” What are their stories? Interestingly enough, Liza now stays put in California, teaching a book like, *Brown Skin, White Minds* (David, 2013) to counter this silence after having helped to revitalize a dormant community college service-learning program aimed at and building both the individual and collective voice through writing, performance, and mentorship.

With Ate Leny looking at her father, she knew one thing for sure: “I want to be whole and spend the rest of my life feeling whole” (Strobel, 2010; p. 24). And biblical verses would not be the only rules to live by, the sole form of wisdom and teaching in her life. She would source another wisdom springing from within, gathered in dreams, and in communion with others. She would write her own bibles of sorts, producing words across pages that pay reverence to her being. And she would help build an organization that embraces forms of spirituality, calling the

wisdom of her ancestors who were all there before any missionary ever spoke to her father and changed him (and changed her family).

Sarita reconciles her place in the academic industrial complex by hailing the memory of her father's journey through empire, adding, "All I have to do is remember my Filipino grandfather who was houseboy to an American university president in Kansas, in the heartland, in the Midwest, where I now work... So I remember my legacy, the paternalism at the heart of this patrilineal legacy," she lays claim as a Pinay. It is a legacy, Sociology and Education Professor Roland Coloma would agree, which employs "techniques of imperialist patriarchal masculinity that privilege [white, Christian, straight] men and perpetuate their power" (Coloma, 2006; p. 648). Sarita See eloquently says, "I refuse to do honor to the production of colonial knowledge at the heart of this legacy. I refuse to belong to the house of the American university even as I work in it."

All these moves these people make help to remediate not just their story, but the story of their parents and grandparents from here in the U.S. back to the Philippines. There is a pedagogy here, a way of life that people have chosen, committing themselves to these moves. These scholars are the scholars they are because they saw their parents and grandparents navigating Empire. In this revisioning of practices and pedagogies, we find a way of flipping this story of our family lest we be complicit with the story of imperialism. Furthermore, their productive pedagogies shape those with whom they build, as Tintiango-Cubales clarifies:

Pinayist educators use their role as teachers to reproduce people who choose to participate in transformational resistance. They resist reproductive theory suggesting that education produces workers to help maintain the capitalist economy. Instead, Pinayist educators create communities of social justice in the classroom. Their pedagogy provides a counterhegemonic, student-centered, and culturally relevant teaching and learning experience that utilizes love, holistic health, and community to humanize the teacher, student, and Pinay, (185).

The “individual and communal process of decolonization, humanization, self-determination, and relationship building, ultimately moving toward liberation” (Tintiangco-Cubales & Sacramento, 2009; p. 179), are manifested through the techniques of education and writing to “create another terrain of possibility” (Lowe, 2009: p. 109).

The double work and double-consciousness we must perform in the academy is something to which Dawn can also attest. In one moment, she was writing her dissertation, knowing everything about her specialized topic; then told in the next moment, “You're teaching History of the United States to 80 students in 2 weeks.” “Fuck I don't know even know what caused the Civil War. I gotta teach this shit? Omigod,” she easily broke. The Pinay in academia has to know all the rules in order to break them. She has to know her U.S. History, in order to teach an alternative Ethnic Studies. She has to prove herself as an authority of dominant histories while she hones her craft in the writing and teaching of marginalized histories. She's got to be equipped with the content. Because she will always be questioned, this Pinay.

Rowena's maternal grandparents come to mind when asked what inspires her work. She wishes she had more time with them. In their struggle to settle in the U.S., her family didn't have the means to afford traveling back and forth to the Philippines

to visit them. She holds stories, which she heard even before meeting them as a child, that they were amazingly generous people in their village town, especially to those who were in great need. By the time they reunited in the U.S., her grandfather only in his 50s was already sick and passed soon after. Their memories together are few, but the stories she carries of them powerfully link her to the faith-healing traditions in her maternal bloodline. A gift of *hilot* (healing touch) she's experienced being freed from ailment by her mother's hands. A gift which translates into a kind of legacy bridge-work she brings to her students and faculty on campus. With Rowena's qualifying exams that could have broken her completely. Rowena knew she was being held to different standards. Today, she helps to set and shape standards at De Anza College. Rowena flips this, unapologetically wearing her name badge, which reads: "Associate Vice President." In some ways scarred by the stringent pipeline of work that forced her mother to accept nursing assistant jobs across varied medical facilities, Rowena takes part in *developing* a pipeline for young folk at the community college. The badge on her shirt beneath her golden brown face says to younger Pinays and Asian American women, "I see you. I'm here to connect with in this space."

By working with a peopled sense of the world, these Pinays are not just agents of social change. In fact, I'd like to shift the notion of agency – often read as "single authorship, individual responsibility, and individual accountability" – and move towards the notion of "active subjectivity" (Lugones, 2003), whereby the creation of resistant socialities and "tactical strategic stances" (p. 211) of these women of color construct liberatory possibilities.

Flutter By and Fly On

The anecdotes here are small samples from which we can draw further analysis. Like small petals in a garden of flowers from which we can draw nectar. Bit by bit, the taste merely points us to the next flower, so that we can see the abundant garden that is here. As an academic, sitting with these stories and writing them as I did was quite the emotional, spiritual journey. What does it mean to honor the experiences as “data” in the world of research? Shall I be discounted if I do not triangulate, calculate; line up all my ducks in a row as to depict a reliable study? Such questions set up an internal chaos—that cocoon—which paralyzed the writing for many years. While I had to reconcile my position in the system of academia, I eventually had to come to the understanding that ultimately, as humans on this earth, we can become imprisoned by our own suffering. To write this in a way I was led to write it, I had to be willing to pardon myself, be gentle with myself, and to unfold these wings on their own time. I hope you were able to ride with the rhythm, the beat felt through the storytelling of each person, as we fluttered across and touched down on conversations about our fluidity. It was an analytical process for which I am grateful as it allowed me to see aspects of myself in return. We fly on.

CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSION

A Meditation on Storytelling as Freedom

In this quest for knowledge, I've found myself bumping up against the perceived un-disciplinarity of my research questions. I'm not looking for fault in educational spaces on which I can improve. I'm looking for examples of love. I'm not looking for gaps in practice. I'm looking for what makes people whole. I've felt my own spirit feel a dismemberment through the academic route, as I: wrote a standpoint piece, which included the coming out of my queerness; got pregnant in 2011, and then again in 2013, belly round and full as I taught courses and continued plugging away; and experienced the passing of my youngest sister, Pinay. Eight years is a world of change in one's life. So there's no way to capture it all at once. No way to tell fully all of one's story. So I offer this capsule of fragmented stories from these six women, whose stories allowed me to see my own, whose stories I hope allowed you to see your own.

In the practice of meditation, it is believed that you clear your mind by ridding any and all thoughts that enter. This is false. Meditation is about seeing what is there, all those trains of thought that enter, park, and maybe settle in for a bit. We see them as they are, and as much as possible hold no judgment or attachment to them; we just let them come and go, and return to our breath. This concluding chapter serves as a meditation, a look into all those thought trains I could not hop on and ride through the course of this research. Below is an offering to other Pinay scholars, Filipino families,

educators (both K-12 and university), scholars in interdisciplinary fields, and other agents of social change in our communities. I discuss some limitations of this work, ultimately pointing to a variety of ways this research can be taken up for projects that will further our wellbeing. I consider ideas I could not flesh out and areas that need further review, so as to participate in the re-imagining of how we might see this research in a new light.

No prescription, No Formula: Becoming a Pinay Scholar-Activist

I imagine a young Pinay sifting through catalogues or online databases for research that speaks about us, by us, and for us. I imagine her seeing herself in such research, finding validation, and resting on that warmth. I worry, however, that she will look at these names, or any Pinay scholar-activist's name in publications across bookshelves and bibliographies, and wonder how she too can follow their footsteps, step-by-step. While it is exciting to see the possibilities of one's future grow wider, through the modeling of those who came before us, we must be careful to note that it is our unique and individual stories which help to design our futures—much more powerfully than the story of any other Pinay could.

These six women sourced from and operationalized a feminist pedagogy of living their life in the world, which is dialectic. It can never be prescribed. It is a way of being, a way of seeing each moment unfold in their lives and responding to it using the wisdom built from personal experience. May each reader resist the capitalist, colonialist practice of taking this research as a final product, a “how-to” manual, on

becoming a Pinay scholar-activist. May each reader honor these stories as powerful relics of how we live out our truths in the service of making a better world.

Soul Wound and the Healing Process (*Hilot*)

These Pinay scholar-activists in higher education draw from not only their lived experiences of pain and joy, but from the wounds of their ancestors, which together help to fashion their distinctive practices. I think about the work of Dr. Eduardo Duran (2010), which addresses, “Transgenerational Trauma, Soul Wounding and Effects on Families and Communities,” as it pertains to Native American communities. A talk he delivered to a room full of non-Native American health care practitioners is a poignant moment of learning about the wounds that already exist in our bodies before we were conscious of them. Education becomes a place of tending to the wounds, where critical, careful pedagogy serves as a form of healing. Healing, in Filipino, is often referred to as *hilot*.

Only briefly was I able to discuss *hilot*, as a healing practice taken up by chosen members in our families. It is a healing practice of directing and manipulating energies of the body to restore equilibrium, very different than the kind of linear, western-based scientific knowledges which diagnose and treat health problems. *Hilot* focuses on care, rather than treatment. It is an appropriate metaphor that speaks to using that inner seeing for the purpose of an inner hearing. It’s the skill to look for fragments, all the small parts, to find answers towards a new balance, a wholeness, a wellness given the density of social toxins (Duncan-Andrade, 2009) in our air.

Extensions of this research would allow me to more congruently discuss this concept both as a practice, but also as a meaningful metaphor for our work in the academy and community, in relationships with others, and in the relationships we cultivate with ourselves.

Stories as Life, Living, and Life-Giving.

Stories herein continue to live in between the lines. They are not pages we read, close up, and put away. Lugones (1992) uses the term, “animates.” The stories shared here are not contained by the text. They go beyond the work of the text. They live because we take lessons from them to make sense of the paths we’re walking. They give us life, because we find connection and breath. Reading their words is like a moment of inhaling and exhaling together. This research can be extended in the field of literary theory to think further about how these stories as archival text perform as subject.

Coalition-Building, Coalitional Consciousness

I think about coalition-building and coalitional consciousness days after world pop star Beyonce premiered her music video and performed at the Superbowl 50 Halftime show her newly released (and apparently) controversial single, “Formation”—an ode to the Black Power Movement and “all things Black” (Jouelzy, 2016). Public critique has shown us how white folk still can’t stomach the truth of the black experience, and other people or women of color will quickly throw Beyonce under the bus for her wealth and “exploitation” in this empire. I connect with women

of color scholar-activists who speak on this supposed controversy with words that anchor our perspective on women of color experience as a whole, which I argue include the Pinays in this study. Youtube personality Jouelzy asserts:

She will always be considered polarizing simply because she is a woman of color [a Pinay], who carefully controls her image [and research] that is always an ode to her roots. The things they [discuss in their work], things they [do in their work] might be so specific to the collective experience of women of color [Pinays], that of course not everyone will get it, but it is sincere; and they use their platform to acknowledge their people and their roots often overlooked. Within this is its own sets of ills, issues, and isms... [There is a] significance of cultural markers that mean something to *us*. They might not mean something to everybody because of course we say, “No to the monolith,” but we can say that ... it is so hard to be [a woman of color] and woke; it is exhausting, to be a part of the struggle as an individual and then to work in coalition with others to do better as a whole for all of us... While we tirelessly work to make a change with our integrity, trying to balance that with paying bills, and wanting, desiring, deserving to get to a place of financial comfort via our work, even when our work is for the community (Jouelzy, 2016).

Never will I equate the Black experience with the Filipino experience, but instead recognize that all oppression is connected—its source, as well as its material, psychological and spiritual effects on peoples throughout. None of us are untouched by empire. So we do the work on multiple levels to disenchant this empire. And we do this in coalition.

Their disenchantment is about participating in what philosopher Maria Lugones (2010) terms “decolonial feminisms,” which is a “particular geopolitical and academic conceptualization” that works to bridge our understanding of teachings from coloniality theorists and U.S. Third World queer women of color theorists and experiences (Lorde, 2007). For María Lugones, “decolonial feminisms” names a coalition of thinkers also interested in bridging this gap (Maese-Cohen, 2010).

Decolonial feminisms is a frame that helps us to see our coalitional, decolonizing poitics, which Pérez (2010) says:

[m]ust produce new understandings from culturally and politically or ideologically different frameworks of what gets to count as knowledge, how being is understood, both individual and collective. Therefore a decolonizing politics must introduce, engage, and circulate previously unseen marginalized and stigmatized notions of “spirituality,” “philosophy,” “gender,” “sexuality,” “art,” or any other category of knowledge and existence. As it simultaneously advances political, economic, social, and cultural struggles for greater democracy, I would also argue that a decolonizing politics resides in an embodied practice rooted in lived and liveable worldviews or philosophies and is therefore in decolonizing relationship to our own bodies and to each other as well as to the natural world. It is therefore evident in our thought, scholarship, and interactions with each other, and it is critical and transformative not only of the racialization, ethnocentrism, and classism of Eurocentric capitalist and imperialist cultures, but also of patriarchal heteronormativity as central highly normalized forms of domination that historically precede these and fundamentally structure the logic of colonization and its aftermath up to the present (p. 123).

Seeing and identifying as a women of color allows this coalitional thinking. Several instances throughout these portraits come to mind when I think about coalitional consciousness and decolonial feminisms. Robyn’s early experiences demonstrating to expose the poor working conditions of immigrant women in Los Angeles sweatshops is one of them. Ate Leny’s deep consideration of our relationship to the earth, beyond these human-bound social categories. It’s beyond the social. It’s global, perhaps planetary. These categories and labels aren’t able to tell us everything. I am looking for a word to describe this explosion of consciousness here, to think about the outward connections being made. There can be a deeper look at how Pinays continue to support these movements, as I sense an omission here.

Being a Woman of Color in the University is a Public Health Issue

This might be startling for some who cannot identify with this assertion. I assert, nonetheless. The stories these Pinay scholar-activists could not be told without the experiences of pain as well as the feelings of pain. It is central. I imagine pain as an analytical frame to understand the connection between Ate Leny's car accident, Dawn's time in the hospital, Robyn's catharsis around her relationship with her father, Sarita's visit to her psychotherapist.

All of the pain says so much about what the university demands of us, and what we end up sacrificing. We need to confront this pain more, to metabolize it, as Audre Lorde (2007) highlights:

Pain is an event, an experience that must be recognized, named, and then used in some way in order for the experience to change, to be transformed into something else, strength or knowledge or action. Suffering, on the other hand, is the nightmare of reliving unscrutinized and unmetabolized pain. When I live through pain without recognizing it, self-consciously, I rob myself of the power that can come from using that pain, the power to find some movement beyond it. I condemn myself to reliving that pain over and over and over whenever something close triggers it. And that is suffering, a seemingly inescapable cycle (p. 171).

We end suffering by being honest about what hurts us. We eradicate suffering by seeing the truth of the pain, and identifying it as real. These women work from and through their wounds, and the wounding does not reside with only these six women. There are thousands who work in universities across the U.S.

In fact, I was recently invited to join "Binders Full of Women of Color in Academia," a Facebook group amassing nearly a thousand members from across the nation who post daily, questions, thoughts, images, or videos that reflect

our shared experiences. By naming our pain, we connect. We virtually high-five. The coalitional-building advances in this digital spaces. Thankfully, we also have been graced with the much-needed 2012 publication, *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia*, which in many ways is a report of our pain and methods of survival, as it notes:

Within academic culture and its masculine bent, there is no easy way to articulate or deal with the emotional, the psychic, or the spiritual. The [narrators here] have developed resources for naming their wounds and healing them, including friendship, alliances, and poetry” (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; p. 7).

Further research would tie this dissertation project to similar research and explore more about what it means to: investigate our pain from our lived realities; to see our multiple wounds cut from our intersectionalities, our positions of privilege and subjugation; to see all of it as historical trauma in the master's house (Lorde, 2007); all the while cultivating social and emotional learning to collectively construct new pathways of wellbeing.

It Takes a Village

As I close this research project thinking about all the directions it can continue to grow—in fields that care for healing, storytelling, anthologizing, consciousness-raising, coalition-building, and public health—I then think about where all of this can land and who it can potentially help. This work can serve schools, informing teachers and student affairs practitioners (i.e., academic counselors) of critical pedagogical practices that are about reaching and relating without essentializing. This research can serve the wider community, sharing with

students and families the multiple pathways to and through academia.

Interdisciplinary fields related to critical diversity studies can make use of this work, as it contributes to the literature on the educational pipeline for students from marginalized communities, Filipin@ Americans in education, coloniality, and declonial feminist methodologies.

Compassion is the Answer. Always.

The humility in all this is connecting with previously held beliefs about schooling, with a righteous, clenched spirit in this “fight for equitable education.” I began this dissertation project as anti-racist, anti-patriarchy, anti-war; but I am tired. I am reimagining being *for* love, *for* compassion, *for* understanding—being ‘oppositional-oppositional’ ain’t the way. That kind of walling up leaves symptoms on the body. To bring the walls down, we learn to accept. Accepting is about seeing what is true, as Oakland-based meditation teacher Spring Washam might say, “We’re on earth and people got to live out their shit. I don’t want to be here to judge, but to witness and take in the bigger teaching at work here.”

In this gesturing towards the operationalization of love as “a political technology” (Sandoval, 2000), I also see love as a response that is much more sustainable. It’s compassion. The point is to make room for all our different human responses that come from a deeper conditioning, from histories of pain that have shaped our perceptions. New shifts of consciousness are about solutions based on love, not fault. Not problem-seeking, but as Lawrence-Lightfoot calls the “search for goodness.” It’s the kind of compassion, which holds this research project as a living,

breathing document, much like the work we do. It will take new paths, just as our lives do. This 11-chapter dissertation is not meant to serve as an end-all, be-all silver bullet to the answer of equitable education. It is meant to be (yet another) opening to these critical ideas to be explored throughout life.

Appendix I

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

University of California, Santa Cruz

*Portraits of Decolonizing Praxis:
How the Lives of Critically Engaged Pinay Scholars Inform Their Work*

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of this research study is to learn more about how Filipina American scholars draw from their lived experiences as sources of knowledge; how personally transformative moments in their lives are used as places of wisdom to inform their understandings of race, class, gender, and/or sexuality, and ultimately their work at an institution of higher education in the United States. The researcher, Melissa-Ann Nievera-Lozano, is a doctoral student at the University of California, Santa Cruz conducting research for a PhD in education. You are being asked to participate in this study because:

1. You identify as Filipina American.
2. You attended school in the United States (K-12 and/or university).
3. You now serve as a professor or professional at an institution of higher education in the United States.
4. You can state that events in your life concerning questions of race, class, gender, and/or sexuality inform your work (research, scholarship, curriculum, pedagogy, policymaking, community-building, etc).

B. PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

- You will be interviewed for 30 to 90 minutes at a time, over the course of approximately 6 months (May – Oct 2013).
- The interview will take place at a time and (quiet) location most convenient for you.
- The researcher may contact you later to clarify your interview answers via email.
- The researcher will visit your classroom 2 – 3 times over the course of approximately 6 months (May – Oct 2013).

- Total time commitment will be approximately 6 to 18 hours (May – Oct 2013).
- Your statements will be recorded on digital media to ensure accuracy.
- You will be given the chance to review and edit the electronic recordings and/or transcripts prior to researcher's submission of this dissertation project.

C. RISKS

There is a risk of loss of privacy, as your true name will be used in any published reports of this oral history project. There is a risk of discomfort or anxiety due to the nature of interview questions regarding your relationship to others or your work; you may answer only those questions you choose to answer, and can stop participation in the research at any time.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

There is no guarantee of confidentiality. Remaining data on transcripts will be used for future research exploring questions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and academia.

E. DIRECT BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefits to participants in this study.

F. COSTS

The only cost to you will be transportation, if you so choose/suggest to meet the researcher at a distant site of your choice.

G. COMPENSATION

As part of your voluntary participation, you will be offered transportation to and from the interview site, as well as food (lunch, dinner, or coffee and snacks) at the time of your interview.

H. ALTERNATIVES

The alternative is not to participate in this research study.

I. QUESTIONS

You have spoken with Melissa-Ann Nievera-Lozano about this study and have had your questions answered. If you have any further questions about the study, you may contact the researcher by email at mnniever@ucsc.edu or phone, (619) 254-0239. You may also contact either one of the researcher's dissertation committee members: advisor, Dr. Cindy Cruz at ccruz3@ucsc.edu; or Dr. Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales at aticu@sfsu.edu.

J. CONSENT

You agree that you meet the criteria listed in Section A of this consent form. You have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to participate in this research study, or to withdraw your participation at any point, without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate in this research study will have no influence on your present or future status at University of California, Santa Cruz.

Signature _____

Date: _____

Research Participant

Signature _____

Date: _____

Researcher

Appendix II

Interview Questions

Occupation

- What do you do for a living?
- Where do you work?
- How long have you been working here?
- How did you come upon this line of work?
- Was this the “original plan”? Have you always imagined this as your career?
- What makes it meaningful?
- Would you say that your work is political?

Immigration

- Do you draw from your family history to inform your work?
- Tell me how your family came over.
- When? How?
- What memories do you have of your family immigrating to, settling in, navigating in America?
- What did it feel like to be Filipino, or to be the child of Filipino immigrant parents, while attending school in the United States?

School & Identity

- Tell me about your schooling experience, and how you began to realize your “place” in this society...
- According to race, class, gender, sexuality, or the intersections of each/any/all
- Describe specific moments of coming to know the significance/complexity of your positionality.
- How did this map out to your college experience
- And into your academic career?
- When/how did you become politicized?
- How do these connect to your work in community?

Significance

- How did these experiences make you feel?
- How do transformative moments in your life history shape your teaching practices?
- How do you practice reflexive teaching and how does it work?
- What continues to push you in your position today?
- What is your life goal(s) in/through all of this, ultimately?
- How does your work contribute to the larger political project of equitable, decolonizing education?

Appendix III

Recruiting Materials:

Email Text and Telephone Script

Hello Ate Leny,

I hope this email finds you in good spirits.

Now in the 5th year of my PhD program in Education at UCSC, I am collecting data for my dissertation, tentatively titled: “Portraits of Decolonizing Praxis: How the Lives of Critically Engaged Pinay Scholars Inform Their Work.”

I am interested in collecting the life histories of Filipina American scholars whose work involves questioning structures of power (having a critique of power) and offering something *different*—what I am calling *responsive scholarship*. Even more, I want to explore how such Filipino American scholars draw from their lived experiences as sources of knowledge; how personally transformative moments in their lives are used as places of wisdom to inform their understandings of race, class, gender, and/or sexual identity, and ultimately their scholarship.

I believe your work in Babaylan Studies and decolonizing education is a kind of spiritual scholarship that is a *responsive scholarship*. And your writing shares a personal narrative that is openly woven throughout your work. Thus, I would love to have you as one of six participants in my study.

Using the methodology of portraiture, having you as a participant would require me to make a handful of visits to sit with you for an hour or so, over the course of a couple of months. I would travel to wherever you are (i.e., Sonoma State, your home, etc.)—wherever is most convenient for you and quiet enough to capture your voice on audio equipment. I would ask you a series of questions and listen to your stories of: immigration history, schooling, family, coming of age, community, coming to consciousness, and scholarship. I would also request to sit in some of your classes to possibly witness how these understandings evolve in your classroom.

I would work around your schedule accordingly, starting this spring. Would you be interested in participating in my dissertation research?

Feel free to email me here or chat with me directly on my cell phone at 619.254.0239. Thank you for considering spending time with me as I work to eventually be where you are.

Warm Regards,
Melissa

--

Melissa-Ann Nievera
Ph.D. Candidate, Social and Cultural Context of Education
UCSC Dept. of Education

The learning process is something you can incite, literally incite, like a riot.
- Audre Lorde

Appendix IV

Data Collection and Analysis

Conceptual Construct	Data to be collected	Data Analysis
Physical and abstract artifacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analytic memos of visits with Pin@y faculty. • Interviews with Pin@y Faculty. • Documents associated with personal life histories: journals, poetry, photos, letters, fliers • Documents associated with academic work: lesson plans, published works (journal articles or books), fliers • Observation of at least one classroom experience • Observation of events which bridge their academic and community work (i.e., service-learning project, grassroots organizing meeting, book release, etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of epistemological relationships to race/class/gender/sexuality (coloniality) from personal life histories. • Identification of pedagogies/teaching practices. • Identification of participation in critical engagement with community/society. • Once identified, analyze analytic memos and interviews to articulate how these relationships developed throughout their life histories inform their pedagogies. • Develop a portrait for each participant based on these themes.

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