

Memories of  
PHILIPPINE DIASPORA IN CONTEMPORARY ART  
Overdevelopment:



**PLUG IN EDITIONS**

**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,  
IRVINE ART GALLERY**

**Edited by Wayne Baerwaldt**



Carlos Villa,  
*Artist's Feet*

## MEMORIES OF MEMORIES

Catherine Lord, Yong Soon Min

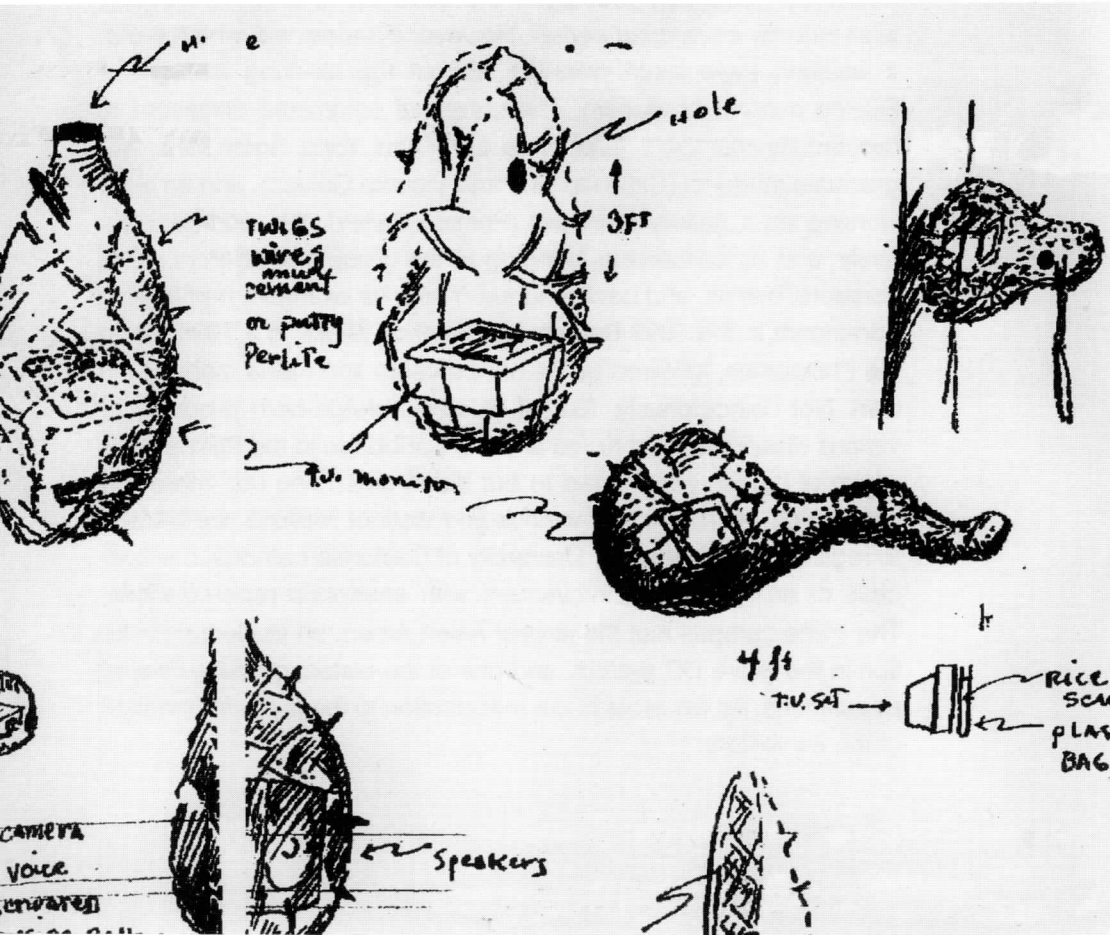
In 1898, when the United States took over from Spain as the Philippines' colonial masters, we managed the voyage to the New World without having to leave tropical waters. We became intimates of Hollywood; felt the pulse of the mighty automobile beneath our feet; inspected the New World species in the form of Yankee administrators as closely as they inspected us; learnt a new tongue; and set our gaze upon the sacrosanct ideals of a Jeffersonian democracy while being deprived of our own. Of all the groups immigrating here, only the Filipinos' voyage takes on the added dimension of pure nostalgia. True children of the electronic age, objects of America's Asiatic thrust, we know all about America even before we come. Remembering the future, we arrive here, strangers in a familiar land, revisiting places we had never set foot on, renewing friendships that had never begun.

— Luis H. Francia

*Memories of Overdevelopment: Philippine Diaspora in Contemporary Visual Art* – that rolling stone, or snowball, or calabash, or donut or maybe even yoyo – was sparked in the spring of 1995, in the Studio Art Department of the University of California at Irvine, by a small, week-long, powerful exhibition of work by Filipino artists in California, curated by two graduate students. None of us can remember exactly how two faculty members and the art gallery were persuaded to get on the bandwagon and to expand the show to an international level in a year's time, without the traditional and doubtless necessary resources like advance funding, or suitable lead time for a planning period. However it happened, which it did, it wouldn't have been possible without the far-flung network of Filipino cultural producers. The curatorial committee consisted of two faculty members (Catherine Lord and Yong Soon Min), two graduate students (Cirilo Domine and Vicente Golveo), and an artist working as a gallery manager (Pamela Bailey). We worked informally, and by consensus, bringing to the group our different skills, contacts, biases, and backgrounds. Yong, for example, had been a participant in the 1993 Baguio Arts Festival. Cirilo, in a 1995 trip to the Philippines, followed up on her contacts and made many of his own. Not coincidentally, four of us were foreign-born products of various diasporas (add Korea and the Caribbean to the Philippines), which of course contributed to but didn't determine our interest in working on *Memories*. For various and distinct reasons, we wanted to register, on a particular University of California campus, the success of an anticolonial movement with enormous repercussions. The Irvine campus has the largest Asian American student population in the entire UC system, and one of the fastest growing Filipino populations. As we wrote in our introduction to the Irvine incarnation of the exhibition:

[1998] marks the centennial of the Philippine revolution against three centuries of Spanish rule, as well as the fiftieth anniversary of the Philippine independence from the United States. It is, clearly, a year to reflect on the legacy of colonialism that initiated the massive and prolonged dispersion of Filipinos throughout the world. Currently, an estimated 2,000 Filipinos leave daily for overseas contract work alone, making diasporic history and experience central to Philippine constructions of identity.

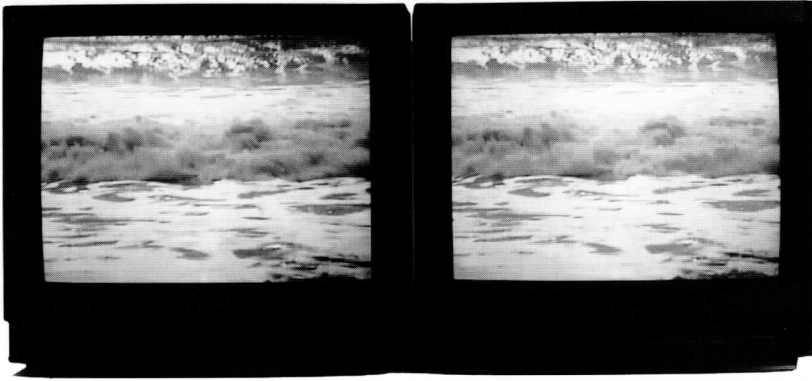
Santiago Bose, proposal for *Charlatan's Garden*, detail



We weren't, however, as interested in celebration, or in a survey of work that happened to be made by artists who were Filipino, as we were in the effects of cultural dislocation and reinvention on the production of contemporary art. Our working metaphor in developing *Memories* tended more toward the idea of a global reunion, a gathering that could take into account both material circumstance and necessary fiction, a gathering that could register history, borders, memory, invention, and loss. We were disinclined to render tribute to minority assimilation into a larger culture, and had far more invested in evoking a process of ongoing exchange, of migration and return, of loss and reappropriation, of dislocation and resistance. We wanted to make visible both art produced in the context of overseas communities established by immigrants, guest workers, refugees, and exiles, and art produced in the Philippines — art produced out of a process of exchange, out of a two-way conversation, continuing and continuous, between overseas communities and their homelands.

We felt that this process could not and should not be left to the realm of the visual, and to this end, the initial exhibition of *Memories* from March 6 to April 13, 1996, was accompanied by a multidisciplinary symposium as well as a program of readings by novelist, scriptwriter and essayist Jessica Hagedorn and film presentations by critic, curator, and film maker Nick Deocampo. These events brought together not only the Filipino population of the Irvine campus, but to our surprise, given the exigencies of geographic removals, interested students, scholars, and artists from around North America. The showing of the exhibition at the Sweeney Art Gallery at UC Riverside from January 15 to March 2, 1997, was accompanied by a similar symposium.

Not surprisingly, the work shown in *Memories* accommodates itself to many media. Indeed, in many ways it makes havoc of static notions of the "traditional" and "non-traditional," as well as conven-



Lani Maestro, *A Voice Remembers Nothing*, video installation

tional definitions of abstraction and figuration. After all, relation to place and relation to material cannot help but have a complex and often paradoxical articulation in diasporic art. Too, the political agendas are open to coding and re-coding, depending on the location of maker and audience. In general, rather than imposing notions of political identity or expectations for universally legible political content, we leaned toward work that spoke to issues of migration and displacement obliquely, poetically, often with humour, always with formal invention.

As our curatorial meetings proceeded, we gradually recognized that one particular work – Carlos Villa's *Artist's Feet* (1979), a pair of small shoes cast out of paper and covered in feathers – had become the conceptual and emotional pivot of *Memories*. Prefiguring the other works in the exhibition by almost 20 years, Villa's piece links flight and fancy, dispossession and reclamation in one compact metaphor made tangible without apparent weight or effort. It is true that other, more obvious threads of Philippine life and Diaspora – the incontrovertible burdens of Marcos and the Catholic church, the monstrous oppression of the work force – weave in and





## **MEMORIES OF OVERDEVELOPMENT: PHILIPPINE DIASPORA IN CONTEMPORARY ART**

**Excerpts from the Symposium Sessions: “Filipinos?”  
University of California, Irvine. March 8, 1996**

*This panel of cultural producers presents multiple perspectives on the various locations and translations of identities, questioning whose histories and which histories are brought to bear in the relationships among Filipinos in the Diaspora – from Manila to Winnipeg to Los Angeles and beyond.*

RICK BONUS is a PhD. candidate in the graduate program in Communication at the University of California, San Diego. He is currently working on his dissertation, entitled “Locating Filipino Americans: Ethnicity and the Politics of Space in Southern California.” He also teaches at UCSD’s Department of Ethnic Studies.

SANTIAGO BOSE is a visual artist working in installation, sculpture,



drawing and printmaking. He was born in Baguio City, Philippines in 1949. He studied at the University of Philippines and at the Printmakers Workshop in New York. He is based in Baguio, Philippines. Bose's work has been exhibited throughout the United States and Asia. He was an artist-in-residence at Queensland Art College and a Visiting Research Fellow at Southern Cross University in Australia. He has served as President of the Baguio Arts Guild in the Philippines.

YEN LE ESPIRITU, associate professor of ethnic studies at the University of California at San Diego, has written on ethnicity, immigration, and intergroup relations. Originally from Vietnam, she is the author of *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities*, *Filipino American Lives*, and *Labor, Laws, and Love: A Gender Lens on Asian American Lives* (forthcoming).

MARLON FUENTES is a photographer, conceptual artist, and filmmaker. He was born in the Philippines in 1954. He received his Bachelors degree from University of Philippines, left the Philippines in 1975, and now resides in Southern California. He has exhibited his work throughout the United States, recently in a travelling exhibition called *Asia/America: Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art*. His film, *Bontoc Eulogy*, is about a Filipino Igorot native who travels to the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis.

DOROTHY FUJITA RONY is an assistant professor in Asian American Studies at UC Irvine, and will be receiving her doctorate in American Studies from Yale University this spring. Her dissertation is entitled, "You Got to Move Like Hell: Trans-Pacific Colonialism and Filipina/o Seattle, 1919-1941."

THEO GONZALVES served as editor of *Liwanag 2: A Journal of Pilipino American Literature and Graphic Expression* (1995). His musical

works have been featured at the Asian American Jazz Festival and as original musical scores for independent film. He is currently a graduate student in the doctoral program in Comparative Culture at the University of California at Irvine.

**JESSICA HAGEDORN**, poet, multimedia artist, screenwriter, and novelist, was born and raised in the Philippines and moved to the U.S. in her teens. *Dogeaters*, her first novel, was nominated for the 1990 National Book Award. *Danger and Beauty*, a collection of selected poetry and short fiction from earlier works and previously unpublished material was published in 1993. She edited an anthology of contemporary Asian American fiction entitled *Charlie Chan is Dead*. Hagedorn was at UCI as the 1996 Regents Lecturer for the Department of Studio Art.

**RUSSELL LEONG** is a third-generation Chinese American born in San Francisco. He received his MFA in Film from UCLA. His book of poetry, *The Country of Dreams and Dust* (1993), won PEN's Josephine Miles Literature Award. Leong is editor of *Amerasia Journal* (UCLA Asian American Studies Center,) *Moving the Image: Independent Asian Pacific American Media Arts* (Visual Communications and UCLA AASC, 1991) and *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay & Lesbian Experience* (Routledge, 1995).

**LISA LOWE** teaches Asian American and Comparative Literature at UC San Diego. She is the author of *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

**LANI MAESTRO** is a visual artist working with mixed-media and installation. She was born in Manila, Philippines. She emigrated to Canada in 1982 and currently lives in Montreal. Maestro's work has been seen widely in Canada and internationally. She received her BFA in 1977 from the University of the Philippines and her MFA from Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in 1988. A solo exhibition of

her work recently opened at Art in General in New York City accompanied by a catalogue that includes essays by Caroline Forché, Roma Carvajal and Stephen Horne. She is co-publisher of *Burning Editions*, a publication of artist bookworks and catalogues.

**MARYROSE COBARRUBIAS MENDOZA** was born in Manila, Philippines. She emigrated to Southern California in 1970. She attended California State University/Los Angeles and Otis/Parsons and graduated with an MFA in Painting from the Claremont Graduate School. Her work has been exhibited widely in the Los Angeles area. Ms Mendoza is currently teaching at Citrus College and the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts.

**CELINE SALAZAR PARREÑAS** works in film and video towards articulating Pilipina feminisms in Diaspora. A UCLA Film and Television MFA candidate in Film Production and Directing, her films include *Mahal Means Love & Expensive* (1994), *Her Uprooting Plants Her* (1995) and *Super Flip* (1996). As founder of SINEGANG, an organization of Pilipina/os in Filmmaking & Theatre, she continues to program forums dedicated to engaging Pilipina/o American art and culture for social change.

**VICENTE L. RAFAEL** teaches at the University of California, San Diego. He is the author of *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993) and the editor of *Discrepant Histories: Translocal Essays in Filipino Cultures*. He is currently at work on Filipino nationalist formation from the late nineteenth through the twentieth century.

**ROLAND B. TOLENTINO** is a Fulbright grantee, presently in the PhD. Film, Literature and Culture program of the University of Southern California. He has curated film and video modules for Filipino American cultural organizations in Los Angeles and San Francisco.

He is also a fictionist writing in Pilipino, whose first anthology of short stories, *Ali\*bang+bang atbp.Kwento*, was released last year. He is presently working on Lino Brocka's films for his dissertation project, using these films as tropes to analyze cinema, cultural politics, and transnationalism in the Philippines.

**MAURO FERIA TUMBOCON, JR.**, a physician by profession, has been writing about cinema, theater and television for the past 12 years. Also the founding chair of KRITIKA, an interdisciplinary critics group in the Philippines, he is currently the Festival Director of SINE! Sine! Filipino American Film & Video Festival, based in San Francisco.

**ANATALIO UBALDE** has a Masters degree in City Planning from the University of California at Berkeley. As an undergraduate, he received his Bachelors degree in Architecture, with a minor in Social and Cultural Factors in Environmental Design. His professional work and scholarship have focused on the Filipino built environment. Current projects include a book entitled *Filipino American Architecture, Design, and Planning Issues*.

**CARLOS VILLA** is a visual artist working in mixed media, performance, and installation. He was born 1936 in San Francisco, California, received his BFA from San Francisco Art Institute and his MFA from Mills College. He lived in Virginia, Louisiana, Korea, Los Angeles, and New York before moving to Northern California where he currently resides. For over 25 years, his artistic, community, and educational work has centered on articulating the experiences of being a Filipino in America and fostering a culturally inclusive art history. He has exhibited both locally and nationally in galleries and museums, including the Whitney Museum in New York, the de Young Museum and Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco, and the National Collection of Fine Art in Washington D.C. He has been teaching at the San Francisco Art Institute since 1970.

**Yong Soon:** This symposium was developed from an interest in creating a mutual context for the artwork in the exhibition, scholarship and other creative and critical endeavors in the cultural arena. This involved the theme of the history and the experience of Diaspora, in particular the Philippine Diaspora. An impetus for holding this event this year was to mark the centennial of the revolutionary movement to liberate Philippines from 300 years of Spanish Rule, as well as 50 years of independence from the U.S. Or in these more colourful terms that I read somewhere — “Philippines has spent 300 years in the convent and 50 years in Hollywood.” Also of note, this year marks the centennial of the martyrdom of Jose Rizal, the father of Philippine literature.

At a performance I attended recently at Highways, a premiere Santa Monica venue for performance art, I was struck by the reverberations of the diasporic theme in another powerful work by an Irish duo based in London who call themselves “Desperate Optimists.” It was a richly layered work about the Irish Diaspora and its associated issues of identity.

One deceptively simple question still occurs to me, which was repeated twice during this performance. What’s the difference between staying and leaving? This I think is a question negotiated by people on either side of the various diasporic experiences, whether from a place of origin or from a new place. And its considerations have spanned a rich cultural discourse and production, some of which we are here to engage in today with the presentations of our distinguished speakers....

**VICENTE RAFAEL:**

One of the things I thought I would do is spend about five minutes

just saying a little bit about how we came to organize this panel. And in some way setting the stage for the papers you're going to hear today and for the discussion that hopefully will ensue later. And by setting the stage, I don't mean putting restraints on what people can say or not say, but simply indicating some of what I think are the larger contexts for talking about Philippines in a kind of diasporic vein . . . , some of the more important things that I think are at stake in having an event like this — an event which is obviously multimedia, multicultural, multi-disciplinary, multi-everything, particularly when we live under the shadow of CCRI. That is the California Civil Rights Initiative, which of course, as many of you know, is the initiative to outlaw affirmative action. And I think this is the immediate local political context which we need to keep in mind as these discussions unfold. When Yong Soon and I were trying to figure out how to organize this panel, we were trying to come up with a clever title. And clever titles are a dime-a-dozen, as those of you who go to conferences know, those kilometric titles that go on forever and tend to be descriptive and obscure. We decided to go for a certain kind of elegance and simplicity and smart-ass kind of nonchalance — “Filipino?”, question mark. I was tempted to add an exclamation point there too, but at any rate, the question of the title is something likely to be addressed in about three minutes. One of the things I am hoping will happen in this panel, as well as in all the exhibits, is perhaps the possibility of putting forward the category and whatever the term “Filipino” attaches itself to. Whether it's Filipino American, whether it's Filipino migrant, whether it's Filipino overseas contract worker — whatever that term “Filipino National” attaches itself to. That term, “Filipino,” which is in some way determined, brings us all together here in some form or another. That term will come under question; it will come into play as it were. I'd like to at least attempt to come to grips with the strategic implications, the tactical uses to which this term has been put to use for a variety of interests, as well as the ways in which that term can also be fruitfully destabilized.

I think there is a tendency, for instance, to sort of assume that we know what Filipino is, or at least we know what it should be — what it should sound like, what it should feel like, what it should taste like. And there is a tendency to settle for a certain kind of commonsense notion of “Filipino-ness,” which I think in the end works against our interests. So my suggestion is to try and complexify what the notion of Filipino might be. Hence the question mark after the word “Filipino.”

It is very interesting because I see these Filipino cookies that Yong Soon sent. Some of you may have seen these cookies. They are all made in Spain, and I actually have a Spanish student who came in with them and said, “Oh yes, I remember those cookies. We used to put them one on each finger and eat them.” And I thought, this is really interesting. After about 350 years of colonization, the only memory that the average Spaniard has of Filipinos is that they are a kind of cookie. And they call them Filipinos when obviously they are



small, they're brown, and they're sweet. Oh, and they're white inside too. Okay, there we go, Asian Pacific Oreos! Ha, ha! There's an undertone of racism that goes on, a kind of degrading commodification of national identity, blah, blah, blah, and all that stuff that is implied in these cookies. And in their consumption, lest we slide too easily into thinking that we know better so that we can distance ourselves from that.

I want to alert you as to how the question of ethnicity as identity is in fact rampantly commodified, particularly in the United States of America. Here's an example: most of you

know *Philippine News*. On the back of the *Philippine News* is a wonderful, interesting ad for La Solidaridad, the celebration of the Revolution, brought to you by AT&T. What does it mean when the revolutionary heritage is brought to you by a corporate logo? AT&T and MCI are in fact some of the most active promoters of what you might call multiculturalism and ties between Filipino Americans and the Philippines. These are questions worth discussing.

And this brings me to my final point which is actually three points. How can we think of this notion of Filipino Diaspora? What are the larger contexts and the larger stakes we are thinking about, the conjunction of this term Filipino with Diaspora. Let me suggest just three contexts. First of all, we can think of this in terms of what I might call migratory localism. There is a context of migratory localisms at work here. For example, hometown organizations by Filipino migrants get reproduced and replicated in ceaseless numbers — wherever they go in the United States, wherever they go in Canada, in various other parts of the world. This is true with OCW's [overseas contract workers]; this is true with just about anybody, not just hometown organizations but also religious groups. There's no sense in which these localisms add up to a whole, much less a national identity. And yet they persist and we need to account for this persistence.

One way in which we can do so, I think, is to see these multi-layered migratory localisms in terms of the relentless globalization of capital that's going on right now, a globalization of capital that demands fresh sources of labour both skilled and unskilled, of which the Philippines has lots and lots. And in the way in which these fresh numbers, fresh amounts of labour tend to be increasingly feminized. We need to ask about that.

The second context I am thinking about concerning the conjunction of Filipino and Diaspora has to do with conflictual nationalisms.



Conflictual nationalisms. What exists whenever the notion of Filipino is played out is not just one notion of ethnicity of Filipino, but multiple, plural notions of Filipinos, which all point to complex histories, what I call conflictual nationalisms. Not just one nationalism but many kinds of nationalisms. And this is understandable once again against the backdrop of what I think is still largely unresolved colonial history on one hand and on the other hand, continuing struggles over decolonization.

Yong Soon has mentioned the fact that we are celebrating the centennial of the Philippine Revolution of '98. We're also celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of independence from the United States in 1946 and also the tenth anniversary of the EDSA revolt of 1986. What is curious about all these revolts, if you look at their history, is that they have done all kinds of interesting things. They've released all kinds of radical energies and pointed to the possibility for all kinds of social changes. However, historically, each and every one of these revolutions has led to the same thing: the restoration of the social hierarchy. Each and every one of these revolutions has led to the same thing: the emergence of yet another elite group. So what you get in the Philippines is the ironic situation of the revolution leading not to democratization but in fact to deeper, ever deeper forms of inequality. Ever deeper and deeper forms of non-democracy. Again this is something to think about.

The third context for thinking about Philippines in the Diaspora is something that I would like to call minority cosmopolitanisms, and I think this is pretty much represented in this panel. Filipinos, especially in the United States, if they are at all a legible, comprehensible sociological category, they exist as part of a larger web of minority groups – African Americans, Chicanos, Latinos, Native Americans, so forth and so on. There is a strategic importance in asserting, on the one hand, minority differences (Lisa Lowe has again and again fruitfully pointed out both minority differences as well as minority

A8 Winnipeg Free Press, Tuesday, February 27, 1996

The Diversity Page

# Hard work, family loyalty drive Filipino-Canadians

*Diverse community enriches all aspects of life in the province*

**B**ACK IN the summer of 1978, a friend and I decided to enter a coffee shop to quench our thirst and our curiosity about the sort of job the teacup reader could see in store for us in the city.

It had been more than a year since I left teaching on a northern reservation to live a normal family life together with my husband and our children. We had not had a normal life since leaving the Philippines in 1974. We had to leave our oldest son behind for two years and our youngest, who was born here, was now one year old. During this time, I taught in the north while my husband worked here in the city.

The teacup reader was quick and straight to the point. "No problem," she said. "There are lots of garment companies around."

I wonder if she would have said there are homes in need of nannies had that year been in the late 1980s?

If you were to look at groups of Filipino immigrants by occupational classes — thousands of garment workers brought in by the



Spectrum  
**Rosalinda Cantiveros**

Manitoba government in the late '60s and early '70s, and the domestic workers or live-in caregivers who today number some 90,000 Filipinas all across Canada — it could easily tempt many to stereotype Filipinos, especially the women, into these specific categories in the labor market. It might falsely lead to suspicion that these immigrants are here as sources of cheap labor for jobs no one wants.

This kind of narrow thinking serves as blinders. It prevents the mind understanding more than meets the eye or causes it to receive information through a prism where facts become distorted or interpreted in the light of one's own cultural biases. Consequently, Filipinos and other immigrants become suspects and scapegoats for all of society's malaise.

Those with this frame of mind may fail to recognize the diversity among and the contributions of the estimated 40,000 members of the Filipino-Canadian community in enriching the social, political, economic and cultural aspects of life in Winnipeg and Manitoba.

I wonder if they would take as a source of pride, not only for Filipinos but for Winnipeggers and Manitobans alike, the achievements of Winnipeg, North MP Dr. Rey Pagtakhan, who has just been appointed parliamentary secretary to the prime minister, or Ma Anne Dionisio, the Canadian Miss Saigon?

**A**GAIN, WESTERNERS who value their own individuality may find it difficult to understand some Filipino immigrants or workers taking on two or three jobs.

Would it make them conclude Filipinos are pathetically cash-hungry workaholics taking away jobs from them?

But those who ask with an open mind would understand that in the Filipino value system, filial piety is a matter of ethics and honor, and obligations to the family are

of the highest importance. They cannot be broken by distance or marriage of a family member. Thus, a relative would go to any length of sacrifice for the family.

In the same manner, Filipinos working very hard at low-paying jobs may appear to be the stereotype of the willing victim of exploitation and a source of cheap labor. But then again, there are those who would appreciate how quick these Filipino immigrant professionals are to adopt the Canadian value of respect for the dignity of labor and to see these low-paying, entry-level jobs as opportunities and challenges upon which to build a future for themselves and their children.

It is their way of contributing to building the nation, which in the Filipino scheme of things is the utmost extension of family kinship.

Rosalinda Natividad Cantiveros is editor-in-chief of *The Filipino Journal* in Winnipeg.

*Spectrum*, published each Tuesday, is a column that examines the diverse viewpoints of all Manitobans. To participate, call editor Gerald Flood, 697-7231.

alliances across differing borders). For sure, racism has changed, has evolved; it manifests itself in all kinds of rather ingenious and very nuanced ways but still continues to exercise the same kind of violent, exclusionary effects. In that sense, these minority alliances continue to be very important and I think that one can think of this conference, the constitution of this panel for example, as an example of minority cosmopolitanisms in action. Clearly what is at stake in thinking about Filipino is not just gaining a sense of ownership over a particular national identity, but rather seeing Filipino as an occasion, a wonderful excuse to talk about connections with other minority groups, with other kinds of communities for the mobilization



## RICK BONUS:

We think of the interpretive precinct of this symposium's panel on Pilipinos. But what I want to do is to highlight some perspectives on Pilipino American experience, a project that's taking forever to finish. And that project is basically concerned with Pilipino Americans in Southern California, and the politics of space and ethnicity. This is about fieldwork — researching and interviewing mainly first-generation immigrants to America. The fieldwork is more than a handful of rich points of analysis, but what I want to do here is to talk about these three big points among many about Pilipino American identities, which I hope also to present to the members and the audience for discussion later on.

I am going to start with two jokes or anecdotes and use them as points of discussion for the two points I'm going to advertise later on. Among Pilipino American communities in Washington, California, are so called Pilipino old-timers. There is a dated but very popular joke that goes like this: Everytime someone asks an old-timer, "Are you Pilipino?", his answer would be, "No, I'm not Pilipino, I'm Ilocano." Or Bisaya. It's a story that's familiar to Filipino American communities here in Southern California too, although it is more often articulated in another form: "No, I'm not Pilipino," or "No, I'm not Filipino anymore; I am an American now." Or sometimes it is said in Tagalog, which is extremely funny:

*"Pilipino Ka?"*

*"Hindi."*

*"Ikaw? Pilipino ka ba."*

And it goes on. We hear these lines mentioned particularly by second and third-generation Filipinos and also first-generation immigrants who have gained formal citizenship, and therefore acquired some currency in attempting to "pass," as some would say.

I'm not trying to mock these people in any way. I think we can read and interpret these gestures in many different ways. But what strikes me as most interesting about these stories and what I thought would be an appropriate thing to talk about in this panel, is how these kinds of articulations of Filipino-ness in America resonate with what Stuart Hall calls "constructions of identities that come from some place or constructions of identities that come from some history that are at the same time perpetually in dialogue with selves and with others."

There's a way in which we can read these one-liners as denials or renunciations of Filipino-ness. For some Filipinos these would constitute treason or betrayal of one's homeland. Or, as one Filipino American gay man told me, these things are only said by "prete, prete people." "Prete" being the code word for pretentious. Or as one Filipino American newspaper publisher says, "There's a lot of plastic people lurking around here. They fake their accents, they bleach their skin, they have their noses and their asses fixed, boob jobs too and penile enlargements.... Look at my secretary, she's got blond hair and coloured contacts. Pilipino yan." She's Pilipina. "They're so silly, but I can see through them, these brown skins can never hide from me."

But I think that there are other ways to read these so-called denials, particularly in light of what we hope to interrogate in this panel regarding the question of Pilipino identities. I want instead to focus on two specific aspects of these jokes to highlight some understanding of how Pilipino American identities in these cases are particularly in "position" (again from Stuart Hall) in relation to homeland history and contemporary American racial politics.

What I first want to talk about is how one can recognize certain connections to regional politics from the homeland being re-articulated in the new place. There's a strong sense I think in which the jokes, the one-liners about not being Pilipino but Ilocano, or Bisaya, can

also be considered serious statements about what it means for them to be identified as Pilipinos here in America. He or she is not really someone who is more Pilipino or less Pilipino than what one had in mind when one asked. He or she is a Pilipino coming from a position of both similarity and difference at the same time. In other words, there is a sense that one is sure that the person came from the Philippines or has roots in the same homeland, but in addition to that, one is also reminded about the particularity of the Pilipino-ness, in this instance, the particularity of regional identity that is different from other regional identities in the Philippines. What we see here is an articulation of an important notion regarding the desire to resist some form of homogenization, specifically in the American context. One of my respondents said, "Oh, of course, you're never asked in the Philippines if you are Pilipino and if the question of where you're from is asked, I often times think that what they're really saying is, 'Are you Tagalog?' 'From which part of Manila?' Or 'I'm an Ilocano.'" "

This strikes me as particularly interesting because as someone who was born and raised in Manila, there is this mostly unnamed and unacknowledged privileging of Tagalogs as the Philippine center, and representative of Pilipino-ness, which in this case, in the American context, is very flatly resisted. Carried over to America, such resistance gains currency and potency even in or in spite of it being a joke. Because, I think that more than these statements being articulations of resistance to homogenization in the Philippine context — that of being lumped into one rubric known as Filipino — we can also read them aptly as resistance to homogenization in the American context, that is, being lumped into one category known as Pilipino American.

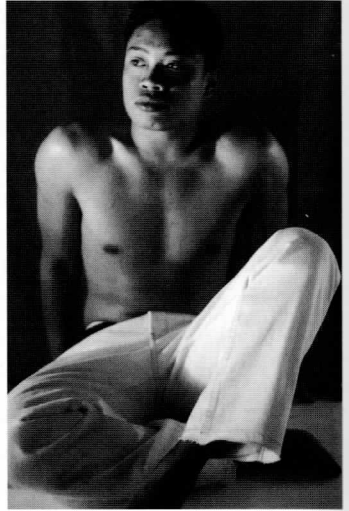
So what we see here is more than hometown cultural pride, which it looks like on the surface. It is a very meaningful gesture of making known what is excluded even while facing the risk of sounding

exclusionary. That is why it's probably articulated with a smile, like a joke. Underneath these gestures we know it was not the Tagalogs who made up the first waves of Pilipino immigration to the U.S., but the Ilocanos and the Bisayans who became Pilipinos once they crossed the borders. These gestures, I think reveal to us the strong sense of regional citizenship that is historically rooted in the homeland and is now surfacing in a new settlement as part of the processes of negotiation, not only of Pilipino-ness but even more so, Pilipino American-ness.

The other point I wanted to raise, the second and last point, is that especially with the statement, "No, I'm not Filipino, I'm American," one can see how a particular denial of Filipino-ness on the surface is also an insistence of claiming inclusion in the category "American." This is yet another instance of resisting homogenization, if what is called or what can be called "American" is forcefully interrogated. This claim to American-ness can indeed be read as a strategy of inclusion or incorporation that is otherwise not easily made available to these people. Inclusion is understood here as something not synonymous with assimilation. As one second-generation informant said to me, "I have a lot of pride in my Filipino background. My parents are both Filipino, but I was born here and I have all the right to be a part of this country. For others to keep insisting that I am Filipino more often sounds like I am not American. I am an American too."

What we also hear being articulated here is the notion of citizenship that demands an adjustment on the part of the dominant category and not the other way around. Citizenship is not what is expected in order to be assimilated, that is, it is not standards to which immigrants or non-whites need conform in order to gain inclusion into the American rubric. What is forced here is an attempt to subvert or reconstruct what American means and not necessarily what Filipino means *per se*.

I am reminded of one Asian American scholar who said metaphorically, "We cannot be forever treated like guests in this house in America. Because as guests we can never move furniture around. Or even discard a house and build another one." There's an acute sense in these statements that in as much as there's a lot of interrogating and negotiating of the meanings and identities of Filipino-ness, there's also a lot of rambling and questioning from the other side, from the side of the category known as "American." And I think there's a strong argument to be made here. Especially when talking about Filipinos in the Diaspora, of Filipinos coming to America in this instance, negotiations about identity or ethnicity are fought, although unequally on the terrains of both Filipino-ness and American-ness. Here, we are reminded that the process of identification, which we know is never absolutely stable, is subject to the play of history and the play of difference between selves and others. In these cases, the play of difference is asserted from the perspective of the Filipino American as an affirmation in the face of denial. These are kinds of articulations that are sometimes interpreted as exclusionary but are revelatory of the negotiations that take place when one's ethnicity or identity is interrogated, particularly in diasporic communities of Filipinos and Americans.



#### THEO GONZALVES:

I want to structure my comments around two concepts. These two concepts are courage and culture. And I want to begin by attempting to understand the panel title, "Filipinos?" by responding to it in



a way with this other term, "Happy?!" So if I could augment the title of this panel so it is not just "Filipinos?" but "Filipinos?! Happy?!" And I'll get into that in a minute.

Here I want to talk about that first vision, of that first term, courage. I think it is a courageous act to bring Filipinos in a room together. To laugh, okay. Some of the histories have been mentioned so far in terms of revolutions and occupations; in terms of ways in which labour is feminized and gendered; in terms of the ways that people come to the United States. We've talked about ways in which Filipinos end up forgetting much of their history, reconstructing much of their history; as Edgar [Dormitorio] pointed out earlier, students are fumbling around in the dark for their identities.

I think to convene this kind of conference is ultimately an act of courage. Forgive the humanistic impulse and the modernistic impulse and all that entails. It is a courageous act to bring people together in the face of all our bad memories. The conference organizers also couldn't have known that we would be organizing this conference in the midst of Pat Buchanan's rise in the Republican Party or the middle of Proposition 187, or CCRI. So, in a sense, I want to say that the organization of this panel, the organization of the symposium, is a coincidence but also itself an act of courage in the face of all this. I want to take that to heart because I also teach Asian American courses and what I end up presenting to my students is hopefully informed by the acts of courage that I take from all of you. So I want to discuss courage in that way.

To make a transition to the other term, culture, I want to talk about a *Los Angeles Times* article that ran in January 26, 1996. The title is, "Filipinos Happy with Life in U.S., but Lack United Voice." So I'm glad that we have this in the *L.A. Times* to remind us that we're happy. Bobby McFerrin wrote, "Don't Worry, Be Happy." And we have Connie Kong, *Times* staff writer to give us this prescient arti-

cle. I suggest you all take a look at it. I'll read some excerpts. It is really quite an involved essay but I want to read from some of it:

An unprecedented public opinion poll of Filipinos in Southern California paints a picture of a vibrant and confident community of people satisfied with where they live and work but groping to define their cultural identity and to turn their growing numbers into political influence. The finding showed the predominantly white collar workers imbued with old-fashioned Filipino values on the family, education and hard work. Although 85% of those surveyed are foreign-born, virtually all think they speak English well.



She goes on: "And immigrants say they want to become U.S. citizens as quickly as they can qualify." One more paragraph: "Filipinos whose homeland was once a U.S. territory idolized American culture, feel secure about their finances and say they encounter somewhat less discrimination here than Asians as a whole." That's what the *Los Angeles Times* poll found. And I urge you all to take a look at this because the people who did the interview are a who's who of people in the Filipino community in Southern California....

LISA LOWE:

The agenda that Vince [Vicente Rafael] set for the discussion around diasporas is really large. It involves thinking about over three centuries of colonialism, and then immigration, and racial

action within the United States, and now the current exploitation of workers within the global re-structuring of capitalism.

What I 'd like to do is just bite off a small part of that and talk about immigration and racialization in relation to citizenship. And then try to make some comments on the ramifications of culture, and how the contradictions of citizenship and racialization and exploitation erupt in culture and emerge in cultural forms. When we look at Filipino, or as Oscar Campomanes would say, U.S./Filipino cultural forms like Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart* and Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*, what looks like realism or naturalism or what looks like Western eurocentric postmodernism isn't, because of this long history of material contradiction that has to do with colonialism and racism and labour exploitation.

I also want to connect what I'm saying about this concept of contradiction with what's been said already by Rick [Bonus] and Theo [Gonzalves] and Dorothy [Fujita Rony]. Rick's notion of, "I'm not Filipino, I'm American," and all the kinds of bodily alterations that go into creating Americanness and cultural enfranchisement suggest to me that citizenship is a form of drag, in which one drags as an American and at the same time the body is in contradiction with that drag. I was also thinking about Theo's juxtaposition of happiness and joy, which suggests that cultural assimilation — the contentment of being a citizen and being a member of the cultural and political terrain — is happiness. But joy is that bodily comportment that's in contradiction with happiness. Or as the title of the whole conference, *Memories of Overdevelopment*, suggests, our joy is that long historical sedimentation of overdevelopment, exploitation, colonization.

In the period from 1850 to World War II not just Filipinos but Asians of many different kinds entered the United States primarily as labour and since 1965 also as capital. By that I mean capital investment but also the use of trained, skilled Asian professionals as a lower

cost investment in national industries. That's a form of capital. Asians have been invited to join a nation, the U.S. nation, along this economic axis, while the state has simultaneously distinguished Asian immigrants along racial and citizenship lines, and accordingly, distanced Asian Americans even as citizens from the terrain of national culture. In light of the importance of American national culture informing citizens of the nation, this distance has created the conditions for the emergence of Asian American cultures as alternative cultural sites and the place where contradictions of immigrant history are read, performed, and critiqued.

My remarks on Filipino American or U.S./Filipino cultural forms as alternatives to national cultural forms consider the sites of immigration and citizenship, or the bar from citizenship, as places for the emergence of subjects and practices that are not exhausted by the narrative of American citizenship. And by that, I mean, not exhausted by the neat, developmental trajectory of coming from the homeland and assimilating into the American nation.

Culture is the terrain in which the individual speaks itself as a member of the contemporary national collectivity, but culture is also a mediation of history and the site to which the past returns and is remembered, however fragmented, imperfect or disavowed, the *Memories of Overdevelopment*. Through that remembering, that recomposition, new forms of subjectivity and community are thought and signified. Cultural forms may not be inherently political if we think of the political sphere as that of political representation or changes in the state. Indeed, culture has been traditionally burdened as the site to resolve what political forms the state cannot take up. But the contradictions that produce cultural differences are taken up by oppositional practices and oppositional communities and heightened by alternative cultural practices. These cultural forms and practices, therefore, do not offer havens for resolution but rather often eloquent descriptions of the ways in which

the law, labour exploitation, racialization and gendering work to prohibit alternatives.

Some cultural forms succeed in making it possible to live and inhabit alternatives. The encounter with prohibitions helps us to imagine what we have yet still to live. As Dorothy has been telling us, historically and materially, Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Asian Indian, and Filipino immigrants have played absolutely crucial roles in the building and sustaining of America, and particularly the American economy, through the recruitment of Asian immigrants as labourers.

At certain times the immigrants are fundamental to the construction of the nation as the simulacrum of wholeness in which the model minority is incorporated. Yet the project of imagining the nation as homogenous requires the Orientalist construction of cultures and geographies from which Asian immigrants come as fundamentally foreign origins, antipathetic to the modern American society that discovers, welcomes and domesticates them. What this amounts to then is a national memory that haunts the conception of the Asian American and the Asian immigrant, persisting beyond the repeal of actual laws prohibiting Asians from citizenship. And of course the repeal of these laws occurred between 1943 and 1952, but before that time, since 1790, all non-whites were barred from citizenship. In the case of Filipinos, with the 1934 Act the category of American national as colonized Filipino was converted to alien and illegible citizen. And that continued from 1934 to 1952.

And so then, national memory. This is amplified of course by the imperialist wars in Asia and the occupation of the Philippines by the United States in the first part the twentieth century. The Asian is always seen as immigrant, as the foreigner within, even when born in the U.S. and the descendant of the generations born here before.

Near to this idea is the notion of immigrant inclusion, stories of the Asian immigrant turning from foreign strangeness to assimilation and citizenship; we in turn have to produce cultural integration and its symbolization on a national political terrain. But these same narratives are driven by the repetition and the return of episodes in



which the Asian American even as citizen continues to be located outside the cultural and racial boundaries of the nation. And Bulosan's *America is in the Heart* is a perfect example of this, a novel of formation in which the protagonist moves from the Philippines to the United States and becomes a labour organizer. It doesn't resolve any assimilation to the United States but instead is punctuated by the steady and tireless rhythm of another crew of Filipino agricultural workers going off and being incarcerated or brutalized or the subject of violent racism. This is what I mean by the repetition and return of episodes.

Rather than attesting to the absorption of cultural differences into the universality of the national political sphere as the model minority stereotype dictates, Asian immigrants are at odds with cultural, racial, and linguistic forms. The nation emerges in a site, as Vince Rafael has written eloquently, that defers and displaces the temporality of assimilation. There is another temporality and its return and its repetition is placed at the boundary of the nation that defers the developmental trajectory of assimilation.

This distance from the national culture then constitutes Filipino Americans or U.S. Filipinos or Asian American cultures generally as alternative formations that produce cultural expressions that are materially and aesthetically at odds with the resolution of the citizen to the nation. Rather than expressing a "failed" integration of Asians

into the American cultural sphere, what this distance does is to preserve Asian American culture as an alternative site, as an oppositional site where this palimpsest of lost memories, "Memories of Overdevelopment," are reinvented and histories fractured and retraced with the unlike varieties of silence emerging articulately.

So what I'd like to do is to stress the contradiction of Asian immigration, which at different moments in the last 150 years of Asian entry into the U.S. has placed Asians within the U.S. nation-state in its workplaces and its markets but linguistically, culturally, and racially marked Asians as foreign and outside the national group. Under these contradictions, the late nineteenth-century Chinese immigrants labored in mining, agricultural and road construction but were excluded from citizenship and political participation. The contradiction of immigration and citizenship took a different but consistently resonant form during World War II when U.S.-born Japanese Americans who were normally recognized as citizens and hence included in the U.S. military were dispossessed of freedoms and properties explicitly given to citizens and officially condemned as "racial enemies" and interned in camps throughout the western United States.

Philippine immigration after the period of U.S. colonization animates a very specific and different kind of contradiction but a commensurate one. For Filipino immigrants modes of capitalist incorporation and acculturation into American life begin not at the moment of immigration, as Oscar Campomanes has written. He talks about Filipino/Americanization as a process that begins with colonization and continues through immigration and racialization in the United States. I also want to mention the work of Eleanor Holoraguey, who is a graduate student at UCSD and who is also working on this juncture as well. For Filipino immigrants then, these modes of capitalist incorporation and acculturation begin not at the moment of immigration but extend back to the homeland already

deeply affected by U.S. influences and modes of social organization and capital extraction. The situation then for Filipino immigrants foregrounds the ways in which Asian Americans immigrating from previously colonized sites (and these would include South Koreans, South Vietnamese, and others) are not formed as racialized minorities exclusively within the U.S. but are simultaneously determined by colonialism and capitalist investment in Asia. So these different contradictions that I have just mentioned, extending from 1850 to the present, expressed distinct yet continuous genealogies of the racialization of Asian Americans – the Chinese alien/non-citizen, the American citizen of Japanese descent as racial enemy, and the American citizen of Filipino descent first as simultaneously immigrant and colonized national, then after 1934 reverting back to alien status, which is then repealed in 1952. And the point of course is that even when Asian immigrants are granted official enfranchisement and become citizens, it is still a form of drag. It is not a full enfranchisement on the political terrain in terms of property rights, in terms of cultural participation and membership in dominant American culture. To cut to the chase, this material contradiction in terms of labour exploitation and the barring from citizenship creates a culture that is a terrain in which this contradiction gets expressed and invested in cultural forms. I've already mentioned Bulosan as being a kind of novel of formation or build-up, rather than one resolving in the traditional way with the reconciliation of the individual to the social order of the nation. It is characterized in this insistent, halting repetitive documentation of racial discrimination and labour exploitation. So you have a cultural form that on the one hand is responding to a mandate to assimilate to the demands of the national culture but is always in contradiction with it and not resolving with it.





And we could talk about Jessica [Hagedorn's] *Dogeaters* also in this way. But I see *Dogeaters* as a very important disruption of historiography and historical narratives in which the development of the nation is the protagonist of the narrative. And the complex formal features and the "Memories of Overdevelopment" that are in *Dogeaters* are a form of interrogation of the historical narrative of a national institution.

#### YEN LE ESPIRITU:

I want to preface my comments by saying that I am one of those Filipinos by persuasion that Vince Rafael mentioned at the beginning of the panel. In two sentences. One, I'm a Vietnamese American who came to the U.S. in 1975 and married a Filipino American, raising two Pan Asian children. And so that has informed my work in terms of looking at Pan Asian ethnicity – how we construct an Asian American identity among ourselves – and my interest in gender – looking at relations between Asian American men and women. Because when we talk about gender within the Asian American community, we either talk about relations between Asian women and white men or relations between white feminists and Asian American feminists. And the Asian American men don't quite get into the picture and so this is dedicated to my husband, whom I brought into the picture . . . .

But I am Filipino by persuasion in another sense. I teach at UCSD. And as you know UCSD has a large Filipino American student population and students come to my office and some of them are sitting here today. And they always want to know about identity. They want to know, "Am I Filipino?", "Am I American?", "Am I ethnic enough?" And that's the underlying question, "Am I ethnic enough?" I really wanted to have a project that would allow me to look at the construction of ethnicity among second-generation Filipino Americans, but more largely among Asian Americans, and

to get beyond the binarism of Filipino versus American that students often talk about. And it is also a response to the older, immigrant population – the parents with whom I have lengthy conversations and who are not really sure what the children are doing. They are so confused and feel a little hopeless as how to help in developing their children's identity.

I want to give you a little story. I taught a small seminar on identities of children of immigrants and it was comprised of students from Mexico, Vietnam, Ethiopia, all places across the world including Filipino American students. One student shared this story with us. He said he was five, entering kindergarten in the suburbs of Chicago, and he was very happy to be in school, and this little kid came up to him and said, "Are you Chinese?" And he looked at him and said, "No, I'm Chris." And I think this is such a wonderful story because the various panelists have talked about racial marking, and this story tells me how this happens for this young boy who goes to school. All his life until then he was Chris. And then someone said he was Chinese and he didn't even know what that meant. And the other thing is that they got the ethnicity wrong. They didn't ask him whether he was Filipino but rather if he was Chinese or not. And I know among us, we can tell many stories about the many ways that we have been marked and mismarked. I know that students often say, "If you are going to use a racial epithet, at least make it a right one." "Don't call me chink when I am a Filipino, call me a Flip." And so the story has many implications. There is the racialization and the idea that we can't tell amongst ourselves either who we are. But it is also symptomatic of a society that is racialized and yet indifferent and ignorant of racial differences and hybridization, as Lisa Lowe has written about.

Part of the project looked at children of professional immigrants and again, as we talked about, under the 1965 immigration law, professional immigrants came to the U.S. in response to a trend that pre-

ferred highly educated labour. And they tend to live in the suburbs. And what that means for the children is that they have few ethnic networks, they have few ethnic institutions within which to cultivate a sense of identity.

I am not saying that ethnic culture does not exist in these families but rather the way they experience ethnicity is often intermittent and periodic. That is, they say, "Well, on the weekends we go the Filipino American store in National City and we eat Filipino food." "I was Filipino then, but the rest of the time I was American." And again there is a very strict division between what is Filipino and what is American, and I want to think about how mainstream America constructs ethnicity, which then informs the way in which students think about ethnicity.

And I would argue that clearly the U.S. constructs ethnicity to be exotic, foreign, outside of the U.S. So that when we think about ethnicity, when we are trying to describe ourselves, when we are trying to answer that question, "Am I ethnic?", we say, "Well, do we speak that language?", "Can we do Filipino dances?", "Can we cite Filipino history?", "Can we name all the presidents?", and many people will say no.

But we don't talk about the kind ethnicity that is forever constructed and reconstructed and is forced out of domestic conditions that the panelists had talked about. The kind of ethnicity that is forced out of the racialization that we experienced in the U.S. The kind of racialization that Chris experienced when he was five in Chicago.

I want to talk a bit now about the way that immigrant parents think of ethnicity and experience ethnicity and how that differs from the way in which the second generation experiences ethnicity. And the result is what they call generational conflict.

I would argue that in the immigrant population, people are able to draw on their knowledge of an alternative way of life or their social ties to “home.” So when they talk about ethnicity, it is very experiential, it is something very much lived. Whereas for the second generation, ethnicity is largely cognitive, in the sense that when you ask people about



ethnicity, they will say, “Well, I read this wonderful book about Filipino American history,” or “I went to a talk and learned about Filipino American history.” So they really don’t have a sense of talking about being Filipino in the same way that the parents do. So when the parents talk about ethnicity, they say, “Our children know nothing about Filipino culture.” And the children say: “Well, you never taught me, you never sat down and taught me the language.”

But if you think about it, if you live in ethnicity, you don’t think about how to explain it to someone else, how to teach to someone else what is experiential. And the parents often say, “Well, I didn’t know that you didn’t know.” And again there is that idea that ethnicity is something that is in your blood. The parents say, “I had you, you are Filipino, it’s in the blood, you should have it.” And students say, “Well, I don’t have it. How do I get it?” It is that miscommunication that Theo [Gonzalves] talks about that grows out of the idea, “What is ethnicity?” And it comes from the very different contexts in which parents and children are forging their ethnicity.

I want now to talk about affirmative action. When I talk to students, both in formal interviews and in office hours, I see the critical role of institutions such as ethnic studies departments, ethnic clubs, campus affirmative action services, how they play a crucial role in the process of ethnic construction for students. For me that kind of con-

struction occurred when I was at UCLA in the Asian American Studies Department and Russell [Leong] was part of that Asian American construction. These institutions provide a place for Filipino American students but also other students of colour to establish social ties and to discuss their shared experiences. And in so doing they develop a racial ethnic consciousness out of a shared history of racial discrimination in the U.S. It is very much part of the U.S. experience. It allows students of colour to unfold multiple expanded identities as they come to identify their own situations with the collective leads and interests of diverse groups.

And certainly there are material consequences with the abolishment of affirmative action; there is the sense that we would lose the site of the construction of those identities. On the other hand, I see a lot of action in retaliation to the conservative movement in California and the rest of the country.

The students have really come together and are forging a very strong sense of Pan Asianism, as well as the minority cosmopolitanism that Vince [Rafael] talks about.

I want to end by talking a bit about this process of ethnic construction. How do Filipino Americans construct their sense of identity? To echo a bit what Rick [Bonus] had to say earlier, in this process of ethnic construction, young people really do not settle for either nativism – that is being Filipino only – nor assimilation – that is being “American” only. It is really a process of selecting, rejecting and redefining both “ethnic” and “mainstream” notions of being Filipino American. Many young people reject some of the cultural traditions that they deem patriarchal or restrictive and accept and embrace things that are more effective in their lives. But they also reject, as Rick said earlier, the notion that they have to be either Filipino or American; they reject American terminology that doesn't include Filipino identity. And they attempt to forge a sense of Filipino

Americanness which is different from being Filipino and different from being American – a third identity that is neither an extension of the “original” culture or a facsimile of mainstream American culture.

Video Stills from *Perfumed Nightmare*, by Kidlat Tuhimik (top),  
and *BUCKLE*, by Julie Tolentino and Catherine Saalfeld



# The Filipino Journal

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## Pagtakhan: New Parliamentary Secretary to Prime Minister

### Manila Natividad Cantiveros

On February 23, 1996, Dr. Roy Pagtakhan (Liberal, Winnipeg North) was appointed Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister. Pagtakhan's appointment is the highest elected federal Filipino-born politician in the United States has

Pagtakhan, a 7-year veteran of the House of Commons, faced the new challenge. "It is an honour to be chosen Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister. It's a first for my community of Winnipeg North. I will look forward to taking on new responsibility and working with Prime Minister Jean Chrétien in his efforts to ensure that Canada remains vibrant, united and strong into the 21st century."

Parliamentary Secretaries are assistants to Ministers. Their tasks often include working with Ministers with business in the House and on committees,

and representing Ministers at local and national public speaking engagements. Additionally, the PS may offer their respective Minister suggestions for government activities. As PS to the PM, Pagtakhan will work closely with Prime Minister Chrétien, meeting with him more often perhaps even daily.

Pagtakhan's rise through the political ranks began in 1986 when he was first elected to public office as a school trustee. Two years later, he ran in the federal election against 26-year House of Commons veteran MP David Orlikow. Many political observers, including some Liberal party organizers, did not think Pagtakhan stood a chance of defeating Orlikow. But Pagtakhan, always positive about his election bid, proved the skeptics wrong. He defeated Orlikow with over 1,500 votes - a victory that could be described as nothing less than stunning.

"From the first day of the election I thought that I had a winning chance," said Pagtakhan recalling the November 1988 election. "Certainly I had a great

deal of respect for (Orlikow's) 26 years of experience. However, I felt that the people of Winnipeg North wanted change - a strong and caring voice - and that they would give me their support."

Immediately following the election, then Liberal Leader John Turner appointed Pagtakhan as the party's Associate Critic for Health and Welfare. In 1990, the Liberal's new leader Jean Chrétien promoted Pagtakhan to Full Critic for Health. That same year he was elected Vice-Chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health and Welfare, Social Affairs, Seniors and Status of Women.

"The Opposition days involved a lot of hard work," said Pagtakhan. "I remember spending 12-18 hour days trying to learn everything I had to learn about the issues and workings of Parliament. Being on the government side demands no less time and effort."

The Liberals brought their party to a sweeping victory in the 1993 general election. Pagtakhan quadrupled his margin of victory, winning by more than 8,000 votes. This was no easy feat considering



Winnipeg North MP Dr. Roy Pagtakhan (now Parliamentary Secretary to the PM) with PM Jean Chrétien at the 1993 breakfast meeting presentation of Manitoba MP candidates at the Garden City Inn.

his contender was high profile New Democrat MLA, Judy Wasylycia-Leis. But once again, Pagtakhan proved the skeptics wrong, winning the vast majority of the polls.

In the first year of the Chrétien government, Pagtakhan remained as Vice-Chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health. In the fall of 1994, he was promoted to Chairman of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Rights and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Under his Chairmanship, the Committee completed two reports: "Employment Equity: A Commitment to Merit" and "The Grand Design: Achieving the 'Open House' Vision." The second report

relates to the need to renew the National Strategy for the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Toronto Star National Affairs Columnist Carol Goar wrote of Pagtakhan in 1994: "In his six years in Parliament, he has accomplished more than most backbenchers do in an entire career. And he's done it without making deals, trading favors or indulging in political theatrics. In the process, he has become one of the best-liked and most widely respected members in the House. He has chalked up a fair number of successes."

His new promotion is richly deserved.

Prior to entering politics, Dr. Roy Pagtakhan was practicing as a specialist for children's lung diseases. He was Director of the Cystic Fibrosis Centre and Professor of Pediatrics and Child Health at the University of Manitoba Faculty of Medicine.

### Day in the Life of the Canadian Embassy People What's New In Manila (First in a series)

by Emmie Joaquin to Linda Cantiveros

Morning Philippines radio show host toured the Canadian Embassy in Makati during her month-long visit in the Philippines recently

Emmie Joaquin, CKJS



Joaquin met with Canadian Ambassador Stephen Heeny when she visited the Canadian Embassy in Makati. Heeny assumed his Philippine post in 1993.

On January 22, 1996, Emmie arrived at 10 a.m. and left at 6 p.m., spending one day with the Embassy officials and clerks as they went about their regular business.

Please see **MANILA p6**

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**“Filipinos?” Session II: Visualizing the Diaspora  
University of California, Irvine. March 9, 1996**

*These presentations focused on cultural production in the visual arts, film, literature and architecture, exploring various dimensions of the diasporic imaginary.*

**RUSSELL LEONG:**

Let me just begin with a couple of short remarks. I'm going to borrow from friend and mentor N.V.M. Gonzalez. In a 1992 essay called "Even when a mountain speaks," he had this to say about Filipino culture and Diaspora in light of the recent volcanic eruption at Mount Pinatubo after 600 years of dormancy:

One of the chief sources of error in understanding Filipino life and culture is a belief that it is a singular country. We are in fact a country of many nations and a nation of many cultures. We are also people that have yet to tap our folklore and oral tradition. Deeply embedded in these are our many an image of our aspirations. Here too are the durable forms into which have been cast both our despair and hopes as a people.



The intellectualism of the past, being uncomfortable with the indigenous, overlooked this resource entirely, favouring instead what was being offered from outside. But stranded by the types of fortune about the world in uncounted numbers, Filipino women have their own poignant story to tell. It is about Sunday morning reunions in Rome, say, or in a park in Hong Kong or Singapore. These are a generation of college graduates, school teachers, and health service workers modified and redesigned by a harsh national economy in the homeland into nannies and domestics. They are replacements to the stoop labour, and blue collar workers of the '20s and '30s, mostly fast men, fast aging and still romantic about America in their hearts.

The new breed must fend for themselves in unlikely places like Britain and Angola. To their story too, must be added that of their sisters in Japan. All of this is lahar spewed out of the explosions of imperialisms. We hear moans now and again from those who happen to be right where the ashes have fallen after vaulting miles into the skies and leaving massive cloud banks that block the setting sun and provide spectacular sunsets for Santa Monica.

I want to paraphrase what N.V.M. Gonzalez has said in order to begin our dialogue this afternoon. We can say after all that the Filipino and Asian Diaspora has truly spewed out of the explosions of imperialisms and that we as artists are the ashes from these various explosions of war, violence and colonization. Some of us, like Jessica Hagedorn, were born in Asia and drifted to the Americas, while others, like Carlos Villa, were born here. But wherever we were born, there or here, we are touched by fire and heat. Our visions and words are formed by love and anger, by history and necessity, and a lot of impatience.

The stellar group of visual and literary artists and scholars in *Memories of Overdevelopment* will help trace and illuminate these explosions of imperialisms and drifts of the Diaspora, imaging the past, imagining the future and reinventing the present. The achievements of these artists are luminous and numerous and are detailed elsewhere in this book.

Today I think we see some very good examples, by Marlon [Fuentes], Santiago [Bose] and Lani Maestro of what I call subversive memory and subversive speaking. Richard Delgado, a Chicano lawyer, calls it "counter-story-telling." "Stories, parables, chronicles and narratives are powerful means for destroying mind-set, the bundle of presuppositions and received wisdoms and shared understandings against the background of which legal and political discourse take place. Stories told by underdogs are frequently ironic or satiric; a rude word for humour is 'humus' – to bring low, down to earth."

Along with the tradition of storytelling in black culture, there exists the Spanish tradition of the picaresque novel or story, which tells of humble folk critiquing the pompous and powerful folk and bringing them down to more human levels. And so this afternoon will be a combination of dialogue and critique and counter-storytelling.

#### JESSICA HAGEDORN:

When I was thinking of today's panel, lots of things occurred to me. Among them – Rico Reyes was telling me something about an infamous drag queen in San Diego who calls herself Miss Diaspora. So I was thinking about all this and I thought I would retell little excerpts from an essay called "Imaginary Homelands" by Salman Rushdie. And I'll tell it as myself and steal from it and add little things and share it with you. It is close to the story of why I am a writer, why I still live here, why I write what I write.



And hopefully it is visual.

So this is called "Imaginary Homelands."

Salman Rushdie as Pinay. Manila, Bombay. An old photograph in a cheap frame hangs on a wall of the room where I work. It's a picture dating from 1955 of a house into which at the time of its taking I had not yet been born. That's a lie.

The house is rather peculiar. A three storey gabled affair with tiled roofs and round towers and two corners each wearing a pointy tiled hat. The past is a foreign country, goes the famous opening sentence of Bienvenido Santos's novel *The Day the Dancers Came*. They do things differently there, but the photograph tells me to invert this idea. It reminds me that it's my presence that is foreign and that the past is home, albeit a lost home and a lost city in the midst of a lost time.

A few years ago, I revisited Manila, which is my lost city, after an absence of something like half my life. Shortly after arrival, acting on an impulse, I opened the telephone directory and looked for my father's name. And amazingly there it was, his name, our old address – 4461 Old Santa Mesa. The unchanged telephone number, as if we had never gone away to the unmentionable country across the border. It was an eerie discovery. I felt as if I were being claimed or informed that the facts of my faraway life were illusions and this continuity was the reality.

Then I went to visit the house in the photograph and stood outside it, neither daring or wishing to announce myself to its new owners. I didn't want to see how they ruined the house. I was overwhelmed. The photograph had naturally been taken in black and white and my memory, feeding on such images as this, had begun to see my child-

hood in the same way — monochromatically. The colours of my history had seeped out of my mind's eye. My other two eyes were assaulted by colours, by the vividness of the red tiles, the yellow-edged green of cactus leaves, the brilliance of bougainvillea creeper.

It is probably not too romantic to say that this was when my novel *Dogeaters* was really born — when I realized how much I wanted to restore the past to myself, not in the faded grays of old family albums and snapshots, but whole in Cinemascope and glorious Technicolor.

Some might say that Manila is built by foreigners upon reclaimed land. I who had been away so long that I almost qualified for the title of foreigner was gripped by the conviction that I too had a city and a history to reclaim. Maybe that writers in my position, exiles or immigrants, expatriates are haunted by a sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt.

But if we do look back, we must do so in a knowledge that gives rise to profound uncertainties — that our physical alienation from the Philippines almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost. Then we will create, in short, fictions, not actual cities or villages but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Philippines of the mind.

Writing my book in New York, looking out the window, out to the city scene, totally unlike the ones I was imagining unto paper, I was constantly plagued by this problem, which went against my original and I suppose Proustian ambition to unlock the gates of lost time so the past reappeared as if it actually had been unaffected by the distortions of memory. What I was actually doing was a novel of memory and about memory. So that my Philippines was just that, my Philippines, a version, no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions.



I tried to make it as imaginatively true as I could. But imagination is simultaneously honourable and suspect. And I knew that my Philippines may only be one to which I – who am no longer what I was and who by quitting Manila never became what I perhaps was meant to be – was, let us say, willing to admit I belonged.

This is why I made my narrator Rio suspect in her narration. Her mistakes are the mistakes of a fallible memory compounded by quirks of character and of circumstance, and her vision is fragmentary. It may be that when the Philippine writer who writes from outside the Philippines tries to reflect that world, she is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been lost. But there is a paradox here. The broken mirror may actually be as valuable as the one which is supposed to be unflawed.

I spent many months simply trying to recall as much of the Manila of the 1950s and '60s as I could. I was genuinely amazed by how much came back to me. I found myself remembering what clothes people had worn on certain days, school scenes, and whole passages of Manila dialogue verbatim. Or so it seemed. I even remembered advertisements, film posters, the neon Aristocrat sign on Dewey Boulevard, toothpaste ads for Colgate.

Old songs came back to me from nowhere. Black-and-white Tagalog movies like *Mumbo Jumbo*, starring Dolphy as a voodoo doll with a blackened face. I knew that I had tapped a rich scene, but the point I want to make is that of course I am not gifted with total recall. And it was precisely the partial nature of these memories, their fragmentation, that made them so evocative for me. But let me go further. The broken glass is not merely a mirror of nostalgia.

It is also, I believe, a useful tool with which to work in the present.

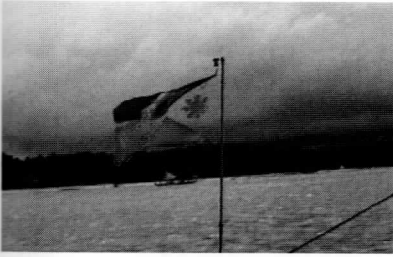
In *Dogeaters* my narrator Rio uses the metaphor of a cinema screen to discuss this business of perception:

Suppose yourself in a large cinema sitting at first in the back row and gradually moving up until your nose is almost pressed against the screen, gradually the stars' faces dissolve into dancing grain, tiny details assume grotesque proportions.

It becomes clear that the illusion itself is reality. So literature can, and perhaps must, give the lie to official facts.

But is this a proper function of those of us who write and make art outside the Philippines? Or are we just dilettantes in such affairs because we are not involved in their day to day unfolding, because when we speak out we take no risks with our personal safety? What right do we have to speak at all? My answer is very simple. Literature is self-validating. That is, a book is not justified by its author's worthiness to write it but by the quality of what has been written. There are terrible books that rise directly out of experience and extraordinary, imaginative feats dealing with things which the author has been obliged to approach from the outside. Literature is not in the business of copyrighting certain things for certain groups. And as for risk, the real risk of any artist is taken in the work, in pushing the work to the limits of what is possible and attempting to increase the sum of what is possible and what is possible to think.

Books become good when they go to this edge and risk falling over it, when they endanger the artist by reason of what she has or has not artistically dared. Let me override it once, the faintly defensive note that has crept into these last few remarks. I am almost over.



The Pinoy/Pinay writer looking back to the Philippines does so through guilt-tinted spectacles. I am of course, once more talking about myself. I am speaking now for those of us who emigrated and I suspect that there are times when the move seems wrong to us all — when we seem to ourselves post-Lapsarian men and women.

We're the Pinays who have crossed the black water, we are Muslims who eat pork, Catholics who don't attend mass. And as a result, as my use of the Christian notion of the Fall indicates, we are now partly of the West.

Our identities at once plural and spatial, sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures and other times we feel that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy.

I've never lectured before. To be a Filipina writer in this society is to face everyday problems of definition. What does it mean to be Filipino outside the Philippines? How can culture be preserved without becoming ossified? How should we discuss the need for change within ourselves and our community without seeming to play into the hands of our racial enemies? What are the consequences, both spiritual and practical, of refusing to make any concessions to any Western ideas and practices? What are the consequences of embracing those ideas and practices and turning away from the ones that came here with us? These questions are all a single existential question of how we are to live in the world.

Art is a passion of the mind. And the imagination works best when it is most free. Western writers have always felt free to be eclectic in their selection of themes, setting, form. Western visual artists have

in this century been happily raiding the visual storehouses of Africa, Asia and the Philippines. I am sure we must grant ourselves an equal freedom. There is a beautiful image in Saul Bellow's novel *The Dean's December*. The central character, the Dean, hears a dog barking wildly somewhere. He imagines the dog's protest against the limit of dog experience. "For God's sake," the dog is saying, "Open the universe a little more." And of course Bellows is not really talking about dogs, or not only about dogs. I have a feeling that the dog's rage and its desire are also mine, ours, everyone's. For God's sake, open the universe a little more.

1982. Salman Rushdie.

#### CARLOS VILLA:

I have some slides I want to show. This work was done during a couple of years when I had gone through a lot of changes myself and all of a sudden I had to go into the studio. Recently I kicked the walls out in my studio and reaffirmed myself as an artist doing other things than being in the studio. I extended my studio.

This is a door. Most of the pieces that I have been doing have to do with the size of a door because a door is a passageway, the door has a perfect size that we are used to in terms of scale. This piece is called *My Uncle's Dream*. I hung this door in a particular way so that the wind moves. I thought of my uncles or my father or aunts thinking about coming to America at a certain time when they were young teenagers.

This is a piece I have in the gallery right now [at UC Irvine]. It is called *American Immigration Policy*. White wall, a doorway.

This piece is called *My father walking up Kearny Street for the First Time*. I've never really used words before, but I've started using



words because I feel they are very pertinent. From one side, a three-quarter view, you can see:

Self Loathe  
Pressing  
Orient

The hats were picked particularly because those are the straw hats that my father and my uncles wore. In the middle is a tiny gold plaque and inscribed in invitational script is the word "Desire." It is made of feathers, hat and gesso and it was exactly the way my father and my uncles had to go through life at a certain time. On the other side it says "Pressure" and "Silence."

This is a piece called *Hundreds of Manongs*.

Fresh off the boat  
Right hand to pocket  
Claim exclusion  
masturbating tricks  
Filipinos come quick  
nothing lasts  
life is cheap  
hundreds of manongs.

There is a hat used by a lot of my uncles and there are some dance tickets in there.

Hard on  
loverboy  
dreams  
small painting  
hat  
poet's ground.

Lots of times Pinoys went to dance halls and they styled and they dressed, and it was the only place where they could be real poets. This is where they went. There is a small plaque up above the small collage picture of a dance hall entrance and it says "Void" on it.

I am not trying to tell you this is authentic or anything. These are my own impressions of relatives, uncles. And when I say uncles, I mean extended families. Because we had maybe one woman for every 30 men. So I could remember when we had dinner, there would be a lot of people I did not know but I would call them uncle and they liked to be called uncle also. And the only recreation was to go to the dance hall and become poets.

Silk Rewards

Jealousy (Another pastime of Pinoys at that time)

Self Loathe.

I use "self-loathing" a lot of times because a lot of times my uncles were made to feel that way. This is dedicated to my uncle Guillermo Fernandez. He died in the Agnew State Hospital in 1949. It's a piece hung askew, a diamond with the words written on it:

Upstair desires

Intrigue

Pressure

Madness

Uncertainty

He was my favourite uncle and he went insane. He went to a graveyard and his hair turned from jet-black to grey in one night. And he got committed to the hospital. And so these words were with me for a long time.

This is called *Basement Apartment*.

Dark  
 Familiar  
 Basement apartment inside  
 Alien sound

There was a bar down the corner from where we lived and there was shouting. And I could remember the terror that was passed from my mother and father, because it was a time when being brown didn't mean "sticking around." And so it was like they didn't tell me anything but I could sure feel it. That was the basement apartment.

*Bahala Na*. This is dedicated to the International Hotel in 1976. The Bahala Na Hotel, 1976.

Bahala na dreams  
 hotel  
 nowhere  
 hallways  
 the words are fresh paint  
 in old walls  
 vindication  
 empowerment  
 passes to indifference.

It was just an observation, a dedication.

This is called *Future Plans*. And it is about the later years, images of my uncle after a certain period of my time. I remember this hat. It was kind of like a Rex Harrison hat. All of these old Pinoy wore these funny hats. They would be dressed and pressed, and they had these hats on.

Selling dust on cellophane  
Halls smell of Vicks and adobo  
The prodigal sage  
All dressed and ready  
Tell stories  
Nothing survives.  
Future plans.

Here's another piece. Everyone has been talking about Diaspora,  
and for me it's all about words.

Isleston From Watsonville  
Cebu to Fresno  
Los Angeles from Baguio  
Colma to Fairbanks  
San Jose to Delano  
Seattle to Stockton  
Baguio to Frisco  
Robert's Island from Delano  
Stockton from Pangasina  
Watsonville to Honolulu  
Ilocos to Imperial Valley  
Frisco to Sacramento  
Union City to Pescadero  
Chinatown to Chinatown  
Hill Street to King Street  
Kearny Street to South El Dorado

I call this piece *Uncles Went*.

## CELINE PARREÑAS:

When I am directing a scene in a movie and it is always a war, I always try to come up with a line of poetry or two that I like and it is usually from Jeff Tagami or Jessica Hagedorn. Last night I was thinking about this panel and how I was going to talk about being a Pilipina, Peminist, Pilmmaker obsessed with fucking and getting fucked, and fucking back and in many different arenas. And I'm going to use a phrase for this little talk, from Jessica. "Homesick," she says, "Blame it on *Rambo*, *Platoon*, and *Gidget Goes Hawaiian*". (These are all films shot in the Philippines.)



This is a three-minute montage of my next film which I am thinking about calling *Apocaflips, Now*. So please be patient. It is kind of naked, a film in its underwear.

My memory of Manila is very gendered and sexualized. And my films call for a retelling of monolith narratives of family, immigration and Third World Diaspora in very gendered, feminized ways, so as to precisely identify the different experiences of women as they go through this.

Within a three-day notice, my family comes to the United States about ten years ago to flee my father's firing squad death in Marcos-era Philippines. His death sentence mimics that of Jose Rizal's, the Philippine National Hero who was executed by the Spanish with his back to the bums, blindfolded and bound. Rizal turned to face the rain of bullets with the spattering of his own insurgent blood.

And during hundreds of years of foreign occupation, Rizal's refusal to die a cowardly death continues to give confidence to the defiant

Filipinos. In my father's authoritative narrative, describing the fast and fleeting moments of our familial flight, the catalyst of an unjust subpoena for rumour-mongering self-elevates him to this national hero stature within my family. This bravery and unquestioned heroism is reserved for men. And my father names the terms of telling for our family story.

But for the women, my father's exile and our familial escape free us from his drunken beatings. In the pivotal moment of our planting here in this country, new family terms on new ground, my mother threatens to call 911 between her loud cries, my sisters stand in defiance and my brother even threatens to hit the man. Since my father would be jailed for battery, he no longer beats her nor us.

Similarly, where are the women in Philippine American history? Although women did constitute a mere 10 % of the early immigrant population in the '20s and the '30s, a male majority does not excuse the absence of women's experiences in our history. Though a Pilipina presence in the United States dates from the 1760s, there are no narratives of our lives except as we support men. We are noted for cooking for the agricultural workers in northern California or serving them through sex and dancing.

Filipina women's lives are not insignificant. To understand our identity and our true wealth as a community or a nation, we must look at the lives of these women, or whoever has been deemed not worth looking at. Their experiences are important because they occupy intersectional positions that include all factors of race, class, gender and sexuality – all factors in the construction of power and privilege in this country.

Historically, Filipina women in the U.S. and in the Catholic homelands in the Diaspora are highly race-sexualized so that First World men can consume them. And this is evidenced by the masses of sex tourists from the U.S., Europe, Northeast Asia, as well as by



local men who use women as a rite of passage to their manhood. And this is also institutionalized in the military – sexual slavery during the time that the Clark Air Force Base has been in the Philippines and also with the Japanese comfort women in World War II. And in the U.S., women also confront these racial-sexualized projections on their

identities exemplified in mail-order brides, and so on, and films like *Platoon*, etc.

So, First World men look at fetishized Asian women to fulfill their dominant and delusional male fantasies of power, recreating the colonizer experience through women's bodies. And this role is assigned to a particularly powerless socio-economic group of women, so as to excuse injustices such as the rape of the 12 year-old Okinawan schoolgirl by American soldiers, the executions of the maid Flor Contemplacion in Singapore, and the rising number of badly treated low-wage or illegal immigrant workers here in the U.S. as well as in Saudi Arabia. Of the 60,000 Filipina Japayukis who annually go from the Philippines to Japan to dance, thousands have disappeared. They say, "If you sing, you can go to heaven, but if you can dance, you go to Japan."

There is a particular kind of language and aesthetics that comes out of this intersectional culture. It is this work that can reveal our futures, and transform, even save our lives, as Sherrie Moraga says.

In *Apocaflips, Now*, my UCLA thesis film, I am trying to appropriate editing strategies that are employed in war movies such as *Apocalypse, Now*, which was shot in the Philippines over a period of a few years. And when you think about that, the film crew said, "We can go the Philippines and hire cheap labour, including prostitutes." The film describes this white male self-discovery in the

brown jungle, in the brown animal jungle of his mind, and it's at the expense of Filipino labour and Filipino land, as the filmmakers bombed the entire place with our own helicopters. And this is all about self-aggrandizing multi-million dollar Hollywood films.

But my film is about the madness of a single Filipina woman, a maid in San Francisco who also works at a cafe called "Your Neo Indigenous Queen." Most of the people in the film are people who actually work as valets and maids, who work at McDonalds – these are the people that keep that city running.

Her man, Porma, is the king of Filipino male posturing; he epitomizes infidelity and patriarchy and I try to strip him. I think there is a lot of power in stripping a man and showing his penis in its flaccid state and revealing that what is protected so much by patriarchy is really nothing.

I do think it is very beautiful when the main collaborators in the film are all Filipino. I think that is very rare. Rianne Estrada from DIWA designed the film and the photographer is a young Filipino American – there are hardly any Filipino directors in photography – whose name is Poncho Gonzalez. And most of the crew was Filipino or other people of colour. This was incredibly powerful, and at the same time, I think people of colour have this ability to make incredibly beautiful things out of nothing – with no money and trash. And again, I want to point to this process because I think that people still have a very hard time with women telling them what to do or making a film where the woman is given more importance. Even in my own imaginative vision of this woman, it was very hard for me to give her importance and at first I gave too much importance to the male character. I actually had to reshoot four more days to try to recover the woman in the film who was the main person. I think this happened because men are traditionally the rightful tellers of history and also the vessels of history. And that is really hard to get away from.



But I do identify myself with an unstoppable movement of women of colour who are very bad, who talk about things that we are not supposed to – who even talk about infidelity, talk about owning ourselves, instead of being owned, talk about pleasure, claiming pleasure and claiming entitlement. I am trying to come up with a word to try to describe this. I think that Chicana artists have done it in terms of talking about a feminist nationalist art when they talk about a "*pocha*" culture. And I don't know how to say it in Taglish and I am trying to figure out a way to do it.

Since I don't have a word, I'll end this talk with a quotation from a very bad-ass Filipina filmmaker named Vina Cabrera Sud, who says, "I am an animal who eats, sleeps, fucks, and fights voraciously. I assume a good woman does it gently and in missionary position. To deny our instinct for self-protection is to slam the door in all desires to create a lustless, cookie-baking June Cleaver in drag, combination of Stepford-wife/Virgin Mary. In reality, we seem

more like exhausted, overworked, protective, hungry women and mothers who cling to our children, protect them and ourselves with a sledgehammer." So as we move on to this next century, I hope that we are moving boldly towards a new face of America which to me is female, so very female and so very brown.



#### SANTIAGO BOSE:

Good ^fternoon. I am from the Philippines but I call myself a cultural drifter because I believe that history is not linear but empirical. And in Filipino mythologies, Bernardo Carpio and Lamang, we weave in and out of time and space. Lamang dies and comes



out of the sea alive again to avenge on the hiddens. And also Bernardo Carpio goes into the mountains and comes out re-energized. So I draw from points in history as inspiration for my works. I believe that despite the differences in Filipino culture, all Filipino houses are mine and I feel comfortable in all of them . . .

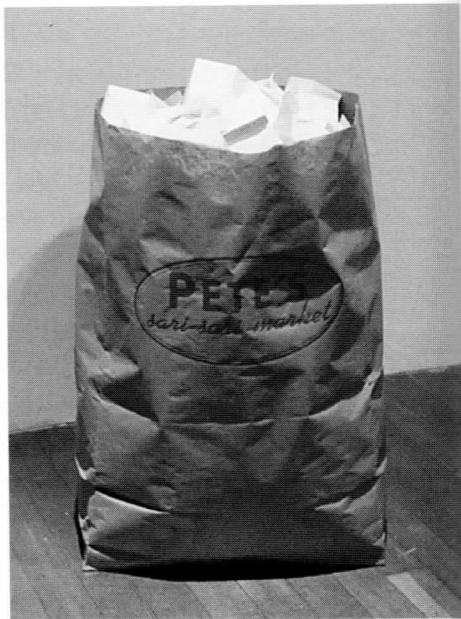
**Russell Leong:** Maryrose Mendoza who will be talking about her work in relation to metaphoric and personal connections.

### MARYROSE MENDOZA:

I try to create an experience that is close to the way we feel when we look at things that are not art or do not announce themselves as art. I am interested in how the sublime resonates in what we think is ordinary.

Objects of consumer banality are a visual dictionary for me to utilize and construct my art. I appreciate common objects and everyday practices for their metaphoric and aesthetic parallels to human experiences.

I acknowledge that these cultural products are my identification with all that is Western, all that is me. Since immigrating to the West at a very young age, my feelings of difference and similarity exist in a hybrid of known and unknown cultural exchanges between the little I know about my country of origin and what I actually experience in this country. I choose to



explore those objects that make my life connected as well as disconnected to humanity.

I transform and redefine personal experiences through re-presentations of cultural icons and practices. The objects I make are infused with non-physical, personalized interpretations of these socially charged objects. Working this source material has led me to discover intimations of issues of family, childhood and socialization.

The simultaneity of visual art seems to correspond to the way I think and absorb life. My process of working is not a clear linear progression. It is more like a singular statement that expands upon reflection into a multitude of thoughts. — *June, 1997*

#### **QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD:**

**Audience member:** My question has to do with labour exportation of Southeast Asian women, specifically of Thai and Filipino women. I often wonder what the impact is on the community and Filipina women living in America.

**Lisa Lowe:** Gabriela and Gabriela USA are working diligently against sexual exploitation through mail orders, and against battery and violence. I think if you hook up with them, it would be a good way of not feeling disempowered and terrified, but taking a stand.

**Yen Le Espiritu:** I think it is difficult to balance the sense of pessimism with what one can do. And I want to relay a story. I am teaching ethnic studies and this involves responding to representation, in this case the sexualization of Asian women. Certainly that has a negative impact on our self-image. I am raising two daughters and I am vigilant about what images they see. But I also think it is important to give them some sense of intelligence, so that they know how to respond to these images in a way that is positive.

My daughter got a Barbie doll for her fifth birthday. She was very much in love with it even though it was typically blonde, built and everything. She asked me, "Do you like it?" and I said, "Well, it's fine, but it doesn't look like us." And I think that is very problematic with us. She has different images of women in terms of constructing who she is. But her response was, "But mommy, she shouldn't look like us because we are special." This gives me a sense of hope that my daughters respond to these images but not always in the way we imagine. There is a sense of optimism.

**Lisa Lowe:** This is a feminist issue and an international feminist issue. But because the exploitation of women's bodies implicates militarism, imperialism and war, and because the exploitation of women's labour involves the global restructuring of capitalism, this is also an issue that demands an anti-capitalist and anti-militarist stance and not only a feminist one.

**Vicente Rafael:** Part of the issue, especially in the Philippines, has to do with the fact that feminism is also connected to issues of national subject formation. The question of whether Filipinos think of themselves as juridical subjects before the law is connected to feminism because feminism involves the question of rights. And you can't extract rights unless there is a silent notion that somehow you are entitled to them. I don't think this notion of the juridical subject is quite settled in the Philippines, precisely because the Philippines as a nation-state historically is a very weak notion. You have to remember this. You can't have juridical subjects unless you have ways of enforcing laws and guaranteeing rights. If you begin with that, you can see how feminism in fact has encountered all these problems. Women have no right to control their own bodies. Birth control is illegal in the Philippines. I think there has to be a massive, sustained campaign against the Catholic hierarchy. Someone has to put Cardinal Sin in his place. Catholicism, which historically has played

an important role in mobilizing people in the Philippines for progressive and anticolonial causes, also needs to remember that it is also the biggest stumbling blocks to the creation of any kind of vibrant feminism. Divorce is still illegal. Again it is very difficult to form women as juridical subjects. It is even very difficult to raise these issues in the Philippines because the media and academic institutions are dominated by the patriarchal notion that men know better than women, that women only make a lot of noise and you don't have to take them seriously.

These are the kinds of questions, issues, problems that need to be raised alongside the set of concerns about the importation of women through slavery or exploitation as prostitutes.

**Rick Bonus:** I don't think this problem is contained in addressing only the issue of rights because, as you said, these are necessarily bound in the discourse of the state. But as Lisa Lowe was saying, culture is the site that can take up and address issues, and an important one in the anti-racist and feminist stance.

**Lisa Lowe:** And women are so often located in culture.

**Vicente Rafael:** But the thing is, we can't ignore the state because we do so at our own peril. You've got to come to terms with it and the church....

**Marlon Fuentes:** Do you see riding the ethnic band wagon as a continuum toward more progressive and revolutionary ideas? How do cultural workers, artists, and academics strategically and tactically bridge that gap? What is the everyday connection of the family who goes to "SIPAs events" to the theory of [Fredric] Jameson? How do you bridge that?

**Theo Gonzalves:** That's interesting. One of SIPA's events juxtaposed against Jamesonian theory. I think neither seems to be a revolu-

tionary impulse. Jamesonian theory might be a revolutionary impulse within academic circles and might give us something to talk about in conferences and published articles but we should not delude ourselves in thinking that the trappings of these activities will lead anywhere beyond those events during that day. I think it is important in my own work to consider culture as a staging area, as a place both to work out certain ideas, but also to heighten contradictions. And to take from these conflicts and contradictions a sense of strength. There is no guarantee that what we do today will lead to a revolution. And we shouldn't privilege the notion that revolution is on the way, and that we can relax today. Those ideas end up romanticizing what a revolution could be and also deprecate our sense of our daily lives.

**Rick Bonus:** I think it is necessary to be critical about the separation between culture and politics. A revolutionary gesture isn't only something that you do in Washington D.C. with fists up in the air. So I think revolutionary gestures can be anything – not that every gesture is revolutionary, but we should do away with having politics on top and culture on the bottom and seeing the two as separate.

**Lisa Lowe:** I also wanted to make a distinction between commodified culture – these ethnic-smorgasbord-multicultural projects – and culture in a broader sense – how we live, how we congregate, who we imagine we are, how we practice ourselves in our communities, what we think politics is if the revolution isn't going to be next week. What we do locally in order to bring survival to more people and better distribution of resources and so forth. And that takes place in culture.

**Yen Le Espiritu:** I also think we shouldn't be so hard on identity politics; we shouldn't be engaged in political binarism, where this act is more important than that. I take my students wherever they are and many times they are at first only interested in what being Filipino means. Many times that is where they begin. And who is to tell how they are going to end up?

**Oliver Mateo:** There has been talk about the male and female genders but where does the gay Filipino or the gay Asian male fit into that category? In the Philippines gays are seen as entertainment, yet in the family they are a threat. So how does that play along and how is that issue being addressed?

**Vicente Rafael:** There is in fact a whole lot of scholarship going on around that topic. Martin Manalansan right now is writing on the topic of gay Filipino American immigrants in New York. Finela Canel, I think, is writing something about gay beauty contests and the performance of certain notions of beauty. Mark Johnson is also writing something about this. These are all in the dissertation stage right now. Some of them have been published as articles. But the scholarship is growing and it is also becoming more sophisticated. There had been some early scholarship, rudimentary scholarship written mostly by straight American scholars, but I think it is getting more complicated. This is where anthropology is concerned. But there is also a lot going on in the arts. There is interest, there is activity, there is excitement around this issue.

**Audience member:** I was an undergrad during the Reagan era and I was walking around thinking, "This can't be happening." Now with affirmative action on the line, we are thinking, "Oh no, this can't possibly be happening." How should we empower ourselves against these initiatives that are coming out? How should we position that in our minds?

**Lani Maestro:** I think we have to work from within and I think it will be interesting to look at marginalization and then subvert it — to try to understand difference in a new way or a new light. We can construct an identity from within as opposed to acting from a defensive position. And I think some might find this hokey, but the spiritual realm is really important — to identify certain identities that have been entrenched both psychologically and emotionally. And how we can

work from within that to try to establish an identity that is for us – that is really about our weirdness, eccentricities, those things outside of the normal – and how we can embrace the abnormality. And I think the more we come to that difference and that strangeness, the more we are centered within ourselves. And that is an empowering space, so you don't worry about the other stuff that is imposed on you from the outside.

**Audience member:** I have a problem with terms like "Diaspora" and "postcolonial." It seems there is a contradiction in the word "Diaspora." One the one hand, it almost seems like a dispersion of some kind of primordial cultural identity. But on the other hand, Yen Le Espiritu also says that Filipino Americans are unique, which implies that there is a kind of homogeneity that exists in the Diaspora. So why do you use the term "Diaspora" and what is the commonality of this term and "postcoloniality?" And what does decolonization mean in relation to that discourse?

**Theo Gonzalves:** I'd like to try to answer that. It depends on one's political and social locations. One can respond to it as an intellectual – and you can treat terms such as "Diaspora" and "postcolonial" as intellectual categories and work over the particularities of the logic as to whether or not there are inherent contradictions within those specific terms. I think we move into very messy terrain in terms of politics, especially post-industrial California politics, when young students call each other Pinoys and Flips and throw parties or shows and call each other cultural nationalists and wear T-shirts that show the U.S. as the devil or a colonizer. They are not necessarily engaging with the terms of "Diaspora" and "postcolonial" as intellectual categories but are really trying to reframe a discourse where they haven't been able to insert themselves with any great presence. In that sense this is more of a personal, political discourse. And the stakes are much different from these being merely intellectual categories that can be worked out rationally. I would think that any cate-



gory of identity should start from the idea of pollution, of compromise; that any kind of identity is really found in half-steps, fragmentary moments, incomplete definitions; that if we call ourselves Filipinos, that this definition is tentative. And it resists the formulization of what intellectual rationality can supposedly afford us. And so, that informs my idea of Filipino American cultures and identities. It is informed outside of the intellectual construction.

**Lisa Lowe:** Well, I talked about immigration and racialization in relation to citizenship and I didn't use the terms "Diaspora" and "postcolonial." And again with Theo, these are conversations that are about political stakes and ways in which people want to frame themselves in order to be oppositional and critical. If you don't identify with those terms, that's fine, but it is not as if they are in themselves corrupting.

**Rick Bonus:** I think we can interpret those gestures in many ways. There are the numerous advantages people gain in building bridges across ethnic groups and/or along gender lines, class lines, when dealing with common issues, common stakes. But it is not one or the other all the time or both of them all the time. I think identity formation, as all of us have talked about, is a continuing process of inclusion as well as exclusion. We redefine ourselves as Filipino in relation to what is not Filipino, or redefine ourselves as American in relation to not American. And we are in constant negotiation over what those identities mean.

The discussions above continued in 1997 at UC Riverside and later, in Winnipeg on July 28, 1997, with Santiago Bose, Maryrose Mendoza, Paul Robles, Joseph Santarromana, Cirilo Domine, Maribeth Relano, Wayne Baerwaldt, Linda Cantiveros and Eliza Buenaventura.



## PLAYING CARDS

Vicente Golveo



Hiwang Mahinhin



Kariñosang Daliri



Kariñosang Kamay



Tadyak ng Aso



Brasong Ahas



Ikot ng Bida



Kulimlim na Babae



Tusok ng Taksil (I)



Tusok na Baliw



Puit sa Paraiso



Malambing na Kamay



Hawak ng Afamista



Pandangong Pusa



Kamay ni Kleopatra



Kapa ng Atsing



Binting Bakal (I)



Binting Bakal (II)



Brasong Ahas



Binting Bakal (III)



Tusok ng Taksil (II)



Shinaolin !



Tusok sa Pekpek



Likodgenic !



Bali Wala



## THE CARDS

<b>Hiwang Mahinhin</b>	Flirty Slice
<b>Karnosang Daliri</b>	Caring Fingers
<b>Brasong Ahas</b>	Snake's Arms
<b>Ikot ng Bida</b>	Superhero's Turn
<b>Karinosang Kamay</b>	Caring Hands
<b>Tadyak ng Aso</b>	Doggy Kick
<b>Kulimlim na Babae</b>	Shady Lady
<b>Tusok ng Taksil (I)</b>	Stab of Betrayal (I)
<b>Tusok na Baliw</b>	Faggot's Stab
<b>Puit sa Paraiso</b>	Ass to Paradise
<b>Pandango ng Pusa</b>	Kitty's Dance
<b>Kamay ni Kleopatra</b>	Cleopatra's Hands
<b>Malambing na Kamay</b>	Affectionate Hand
<b>Hawak ng Afamista</b>	Snow Queen's Hold
<b>Kapa ng Atsing</b>	Faggot's Cape
<b>Binting Bakal (I)</b>	Thighs of Steel (I)
<b>Binting Bakal (II)</b>	Thighs of Steel (II)
<b>Brasong Ahas</b>	Snake's Arms
<b>Shinaolin!</b>	Shinaolin!
<b>Tusok sa Pekpek</b>	Stab in the Crotch
<b>Binting Bakal (II)</b>	Thighs of Steel (II)
<b>Tusok ng Taksil (II)</b>	Stab of Betrayal (II)
<b>Likodgenic!</b>	Pretty from the Back
<b>Bali Wala</b>	Like Nothing

