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Filipino-Canadian Youths**

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**Between Homes: Displacement and Belonging for Second Generation Filipino-
Canadian Youths**

by

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Abstract: This paper emerges out of a series of focus groups conducted with mostly second-generation Filipino-Canadian youths in Vancouver, Canada. Youths tell stories of their feelings of dislocation in Canada, of the ways in which other Canadians persistently insist on their perpetually immigrant status, and the extent to which they feel stereotyped in Canadian society. They describe a process of coming to identify more and more strongly with Filipino culture. Trips to the Philippines are an important part of this process of identification. Youths describe not only feelings of belonging in the Philippines, but also the concrete organising traditions that they learn in the Philippines and then bring home with them to Canada. I argue that these experiences have the potential to reshape the meaning of Canada as a multicultural home.

Key words: Second generation Filipino youths, belonging, multiculturalism

Introduction

In the spring of 2000 the Ugnayan ng Kabataang Pilipino sa Canada/ Filipino-Canadian Youth Alliance (UKPC/FCYA) in Vancouver began to write a play to enact their community's experiences in Vancouver. The play begins in the Philippines with Rosa graduating from university with a nursing degree, *summa cum laude*. Her mother is a laundry woman, and her father was recently laid off. Experiencing difficulties obtaining work in the Philippines, Rosa takes what she believes to be a promising nursing job in Canada. The recruitment agency has tricked her, and she soon finds herself working as a nanny in a white, middle-class Canadian home. Ashamed, Rosa continues to tell her family in the Philippines that she is working as a nurse in Canada. When Rosa sponsors the migration of her younger brother and sister to Canada three years later, her secret is soon revealed. Most of the rest of the play takes place in their Vancouver apartment, where Rosa speaks of the difficulties of being a Filipino migrant in Canada, and her concerns about, and frustrations with, her younger siblings' efforts to succeed in Canada. Her siblings are showing the effects of their own forced migration; her brother is 'flipping hamburgers' at a fast food restaurant while he makes plans to attend community college. Her younger sister is coping with the violent racism within her high school. When Rosa appeals to her younger brother and sister, citing her own sacrifices, her younger sister replies: "nobody even asked me if I wanted to come. I had friends in the Philippines no matter who I was...I want to go home."¹

The UKPC/FCYA is organised by second and first generation immigrant youths; within the core group of organisers, half were in fact born in Canada. And yet they chose to narrate their community's experiences in Canada from the vantage point of the very recent immigrant, shown first bidding farewell to relatives and friends at the Manila airport, and then struggling within the first years of arrival in Canada. Why does this place and moment of departure loom so large within the imaginations of these second generation Filipino-Canadian youths? It is because those moments of departure and struggle still reverberate throughout their lives, and they continue to feel displaced – not quite at home – within their country of birth. The play is part of their

¹ The young woman who first played this part has indeed returned to the Philippines. The play has been performed an number of times, including performances at the Kalayaan Centre in May 2000, in August 2000 in Winnipeg for the Filipino-Canadian National Consultative Forum, at the Asian Connections conference at the University of British Columbia in November 2000, during Asian Heritage Month in May 2001 and at the National Forum for Filipino Nurses in December 2001.

struggle against a type of forgetfulness, “a corrosive forgetting, codified as assimilation” (Munoz 1995, 78), and an effort to recover a home in the Philippines in order to achieve a sense of belonging.

We have conducted focus groups with a small number (26) of first and second generation Filipino youth to hear their stories of dislocation and home-making.² It is important to hear these stories. The Filipino community in Vancouver is large; excluding those born in the U.K., it was the third largest immigrant community in 1996 (Hiebert; 1999). Echoing a similar academic silence about the Filipino community in the United States, there is very little known about this community in Vancouver.³ In the U.S., some have speculated that this is because assimilation into the American mainstream has been so fast and so successful, prepared by a history of American colonialism in the Philippines: “the Filipino....sets foot on the U.S. continent –she, her body, and sensibility – has been prepared by the thoroughly Americanized culture of the homeland” (San Juan 1991, 118, quoted in Espiritu and Wolf, 2001). And yet, studies of second generation youths in the United States suggest a more complex process that shows both a strong resistance to assimilation and to the costs of their parents’ migration; in particular, high levels of educational success are matched by a rejection of an American identity, relatively low ratings of self esteem, high rates of depression, and persistent thoughts of suicide, particularly among Filipina youth.⁴ It would seem that the costs of not belonging, of a kind of homelessness, are high.

A phrase reoccurred in the focus groups: ‘Made in the Philippines, born in Canada’. It is a phrase literally and jokingly used to refer to children who were conceived in the Philippines before their parents immigrated, and then born in Canada. It is a phrase that seems to stake a claim. These claims keep resurfacing in the lives of many second generation Filipino-Canadian youths, and the facts of Canadian birth and citizenship are persistently renegotiated – remade – in

² We conducted 10 focus groups from spring to fall 2001. The focus groups varied in size, from 4-6 people. There was some overlap in participation (some individuals participated more than once). A total of 26 youths from 14-28 years of age participated. Since the sample was assembled through social networks, we cannot claim any representativeness for the views expressed.

³ Espiritu and Wolf (2001) note the oddity of this silence given that Filipinos constitute the largest Asian-origin immigrant group in the United States.

⁴ The figures are startling. Drawing upon interviews with 808 Filipino youth in San Diego, conducted as part of a longitudinal study (Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study), Espiritu and Wolf report that in 1992 59% of the sample identified as Filipino-American and 31% as Filipino. Only 5% identified as American. Only 3 years later, drawing upon essentially the same sample of youths, 55% now identified as Filipino and 37% as Filipino American. Half of those who identified as Filipino American in 1992 now identified as Filipino. Surveys of teens in San Diego high schools indicate that Filipina female students report high levels of suicidal ideation (46%) and alarming rates of reported actual suicide attempts (23 %), the highest of any ethnic group surveyed (cited in Espiritu and Wolf, 2001 178).

relation to the Philippines. Filipino youth are negotiating multiple homelands in an effort to belong. These negotiations, in turn, carry the potential to change Canada as a multicultural home.

Hauntings of Dislocation

If it was their parents who were forced to migrate from the Philippines, these experiences nonetheless resonate within their children's lives. Hirsch coins the term 'postmemory' to describe the force of parents' memories of trauma on their children's lives. Postmemories are "experiences that they 'remember' only as the stories and images with which they grew up, but that are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right" (1999, 8). "Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" (Hirsch 1997, 22). Sugg (2003) extends this argument to the children of exiles from Cuba, conceiving postmemories of the wounds of exile as a "generational legacy" that cause children to identify intensely with both these wounds and Cuba as a homeland.

Close to Sugg's use of postmemory, Filipino youths also heard stories of their parents' struggles with racism and deskilling in Canada. Charlene recounts that, "I think I heard more from my dad that he didn't like it very much ...He [said] that he experienced a little bit of depression, or maybe a lot, for the first year...[He] said it was really cold, not just weather-wise but, you know, nobody talks to you, nobody really helps you out....it was hard for him to adjust to that." Clara remembers: "I think that it was easier for me than for my parents." Her mother "would come home and she would say something about what a co-worker said to her. She was really offended...So I remember things like that. It was easier for me at school" (Focus Group 6). Even though these youth are 'second generation' immigrants, they lived their parents' adjustments first hand, with their parents' stories of their first years of arrival, along with ones that parents brought home daily of experiences and frustrations at work. Clara assesses her own experiences in relation to those of her parents. We might ask what it means for a child to enter into this type of calculus, of weighing her parents' difficulties against her own. It is a burden of sorts.

The 'cascade' of trauma from one generation to the next may also work through silences and evasions. Rather than stories "so powerful, so monumental", sometimes it is the absence of such stories that generates a search for family memories in order to piece together a coherent family narrative and reclaim lost status. May tells of her parents and aunts who immigrated in the 1970s:

I didn't care too much about my parents' experience until much later in my life, about six or seven years ago....[My parents and aunts] were mostly professionals when they came. I think that this is a common experience for many of us who [were born here or] came over at a young age. You go through twenty years from the 70s to 90s. Integration. Growing up here. Hearing very little about your parents' experiences unless you really probe...I didn't know where my parents were from until I started asking...

Charlene spoke of scrutinising family pictures as a way of assessing, and collecting concrete evidence of, her parents' experience of migration: "[My mother] said that it was okay, that at least she had a big support system. Because I do look at pictures of her [when she first arrived in Canada] and ...[she is] always with a bunch of other nurses." Monica tells that "I know my mom worked in an office [in the Philippines] because there's pictures. Like really old pictures, with her answering the phone and things like this. And I know that she went to business college because she has this business college ring." Of her father, "he didn't really tell me what his jobs were [in the Philippines]" and she was continuously frustrated by his reluctance to elaborate on his reasons for leaving the Philippines (Focus Group 4, March 31, 2001). Hirsch (1997) argues that photographs are a particularly potent source of postmemory because they are "perched on the edge between memory and postmemory" (22), they both bring back the past and are visual evidence of the irretrievability of the past, they teeter poignantly between memory and forgetting. As children's eyes wander across photographs and fasten onto stories from before they were born, they learn things about their parents and the Philippines that allow them to reassess their parents' and their own worth, and they thus work with these images and stories in creative ways to forge a new sense of self in the present out of the resources of the past. For example, they learn that the father they know as a school maintenance worker was also a mechanical engineer, a Zamboni driver, a teacher, a security guard a civil engineer. They thus get a concrete measure of their parents' deskilling.⁵ Recovering their parents' lives in the Philippines can be one way of seeing their immigrant parents and themselves in a new light.

Photographs entered into the focus group narratives in another way, as documentary evidence that they can never belong in white Canadian society. Reflecting on her eight years of ice skating, Melissa says, "It's funny, because you had these group pictures of who is in your

⁵ These examples are drawn directly from the focus groups. The sample of second generation youth is too small to draw meaningful generalisations but there are some suggestive patterns. All of the mothers had paid employment and experienced relatively little downward occupational mobility, principally because six of the twelve could practice their profession of nursing when they immigrated to Canada. (The situation has now changed and many professional nurses from the Philippines now enter Canada through the Live-in Caregiver Program. The process of deskilling is thus now a greater problem.) The situation was a little different for their fathers, half of whom experienced downward occupational mobility (of the type already described) or retired after immigrating to Canada.

class. Da, da, da, da, who's chocolate sprinkle? And we're just looking back. And, it's like, alriiiighty then." Of her twelve years of ballet, Ethel says, "Who do you see in ballet? Not Filipinos. Try to fit in there. White tights and everything" (Focus Group 2). Youth spoke of the many ways that they are haunted by this sense of exclusion in their daily lives, of never really belonging. These stories move around what is now a common argument in cultural studies: legal citizenship is not equivalent to cultural citizenship and racialised immigrants are perpetually produced as cultural outsiders. In Lowe's words, "the Asian immigrant – at odds with the cultural, racial, and linguistic forms of the [American] nation – emerges in a site that defers and displaces the temporality of assimilation" (1996a, 6). Many of the youths' stories have a familiar ring, and it is this very familiarity and banality that demands that they be repeated.⁶

Youths spoke of the many ways that white Canadians persistently insist upon their perpetually immigrant status. Teachers treat grade school children born in Canada as small ambassadors of 'their' nation, assumed to be the Philippines. As May tells it:

I remember growing up, [when I was] in elementary school. This is when Aquino went through People Power. Or when the people ousted Marcos and Aquino came into power. It was big international news. I remember sitting at my desk and my teacher asking me about it. I was eight years old then. I don't really care. Why would she expect that I would have an opinion about it? Even in university, one of my TAs told me that I understood and spoke English really well. You are the authority on people of colour issues. (Focus group 10, August 26, 2001)

Another common experience is to have their Canadian birthright explicitly denied by white Canadians. The following is representative of a conversation that came up in five of the focus groups.

Monica: "Where are you from?" "Vancouver, Winnipeg, okay." Like you know, it's still not the answer they are looking for.

Charlene: Like, [I answer:] "Montreal." "No really." "What do you want, like [I'm from] Maple Ridge?" [Laughter.]

Monica: Well, I got into almost an argument with one of my clients. This was like a few years back. She was born in Grace Hospital in Winnipeg, and I thought I was also born in Grace Hospital. But then I found out later when I told my mom this story that I'm not. But anyway, I go, "Oh, I was also born in that hospital." And she goes, "Oh, you mean

⁶ There is some familiarity to these stories in relation to other diasporic communities. Catherine Sugg (2003), for example, writes of the 'suspended migration' of second-generation Cuban-Americans, caught between cultural memories of a Cuban homeland and life in the United States.

the name, not Winnipeg.” And I go, “Yeah, I was born in Winnipeg’s Grace Hospital.” She just assumed that I meant the hospital, like I was born in Grace Hospital Philippines or something. “No, you know, in that hospital in Winnipeg.” We almost had an argument about it. I was more hot-tempered [then]. I’m like, “What are you talking about? I WAS BORN IN GRACE HOSPITAL.” [Laughter.] (Focus group 4, March 31, 2001)

This assumption was naturalised in an amusing but telling way when Vicki was doing her practicum as a student teacher:

What’s funny is the school I am in is predominantly Caucasian or white...We were talking about rocks. And where they come from and stuff. And all of a sudden, the hand goes up. “Well, where do you come from?” And automatically...oh, okay, these are little kids. And usually if someone came up to me, say another white person, [I’d say] “Well, I was born here, so I am Canadian.” And then they are, like, “Oh”. And then they take offence to it. Then I say [to the kids], “Well, my parents are from the Philippines. But I was born here. I am Filipino.” So the kids were amazed. “Oh, so you are Filipino.” And they would say, “My mom went to the Philippines!” And all these hands go up. “My mom’s nanny or my nanny is a Filipino.” (Focus group 6)

What these statements indicate is that identification as Filipino or with the Philippines is not only a choice; it also emerges out of a process of being continuously read as a recently arrived outsider.⁷ As Ong (1997) notes, immigrants do not arrive as “ready-made ethnics”. Ethnic identification is a sense of belonging that emerges in relation to a complex weave of state and non-state, institutionalised and everyday cultural practices. This captured in a vivid way in Maricel’s account of eating lunch at work. The conversation turns around her use of a knife, and itself plays on the ‘knife edge’ of interest in cultural plurality and casting Filipinos as primitive.

Maricel: Because it’s funny, I prepare my food at work. There’s this big guy at work. He’s lived in Vancouver all of his life. He says, “You just don’t use a knife, do you?” He goes, “Let me wash a knife.” I would say, “No, no, it’s okay.” And then someone else in the staff room who has known me for ages goes, “Oh, she doesn’t use a knife.” He said, “What do you mean? She is eating meat.” They said, “No, you don’t understand. It is not in her culture. She doesn’t know how to use a knife.” He said, “Are you serious?” I said, “Yeah, actually I don’t really know how to eat with a knife.”...He said, “I want to see this.” So, he’s watching me eat my meat and rice with spoon and fork. He goes,

⁷ Elaine Chang (1994), writing about her experiences growing up as a Korean-Canadian, makes the explicit argument that her capacity to construct her identity always has been conditioned by how she was read. The persistent construction of Asians as outsiders within the nation has been conceived as part of the process through which the culturally dominant create the nation as home – in other words, as part of a home-making project of white Canadians.

“Incredible! I just don’t get it.” And then I have to explain this thing about knives and make up a story about how it’s in our culture how we are forbidden to have knives.

Monica: Great, you’re contributing to the mis-education of this man! (Focus Group 6)

We thus witness the invention of a cultural story in an effort to save face. Canadians might consider more generally how their daily practices make such cultural productions a necessary survival strategy.

Some types of seemingly multicultural inclusion can be extremely isolating. Young women were very familiar with being objectified as ‘Asian woman’, and were particularly wary of men who had learnt a few phrases of Tagalog. Charlene tells that,

A lot of people assume that I am fifteen or sixteen. When the older white men start talking to me in a subtle, but sexual way, it’s really disgusting...I think that what disturbs me also is when white men, or men from other nationalities, start talking to you, hitting on you, in Tagalog. They know that! They know how to do that to you in Tagalog....when they walk down the street, and say, “Oh, maganda!” “How do you know that?! Get away from me!”... Earlier this year, I went out to this store to pick up some lunch. This guy opened the door and let me out. I thanked him. He started to follow me. He said to me, “Oh, are you Filipino?” I thought: “Oh, here we go. Leave me alone.” [May interjects: “You know it’s bad when they ask that.”] I’m clutching my lunch. I’m waiting for the light to turn. I just wanted to walk right then. Eventually he started to tell me that he stayed in Manila for a bit. “Oh, that’s nice.” He said, “You women are so beautiful.” I started walking away really fast and said, “Okay, bye.” I turned and walked the other direction from where my office was to get away from this guy. I walked for ten minutes just to make sure I lost him. (Focus group 10, August 26, 2001).

Tagalog courses taught in Vancouver are apparently full of white men, often involved (or wanting to be involved) with Filipino women. Even a story on mail order brides, written by one youth, Sean, as part of his course work in a publishing programme at Langara College, was reworked to sexualise Asian women (Parlan 2001). He intended his article to be a hard-hitting critique of the economic relations that lead women to market themselves as brides. His article was, however, edited to more fully reflect the perspectives of men who shop for mail order brides. Much space is given to detailing the process of ordering a bride, and relatively little to accounts of women’s experiences and their collective resistance. The cover really tells the whole story. Entitled simply ‘Mail Order Brides’ within the magazine, the article is billed on the cover as: ‘Veiled Propositions: the story of Mail-Order Brides’ and the cover image is of a naked Filipino woman, whose downcast and side-long gaze suggests nothing of active opposition that Sean intended.

Filipino men are not immune to this process of stereotypical sexualisation. As Carlo and Charlene tell it:

Carlo: In a lot of magazines [you see] “are Asian men sexy?” I guess they are becoming more visible.

Charlene: In the last few months, I’ve noticed a lot of Asian magazines directed toward the Asian community have been doing these articles about Asian men....A funny thing happened where this reporter from the Toronto Star called me for an interview...I thought she would have wanted to talk about our organising work in Ugnayan. Then she says “I’m doing this article on Asian men. I noticed that Asian men are not really noticed. Asian women are more in the forefront of articles on Asian people. I just wanted to know if you thought Asian men were attractive or sexy...

Carlo: The King and I, man....It’s a trendy thing....Before it was trendy to have a gay friend, especially if you are living in the West End. Now, it’s the multicultural.⁸ (Focus group 10, August 26, 2001).

If seemingly more benign, exoticism equally breeds a sense of isolation and alienation.

One way of fighting against this isolation is to identify strongly and positively with Filipino culture. At one of the focus groups, a participant, who had moved to Vancouver in 1981 when she was 2 years old, asked two women who were born in Canada: “Do you think that not being born in the Philippines makes you look for those Filipino roots more? I’m thinking, because I was born in the Philippines, I don’t have the strong urge to actively search for those connections” (Focus group 4, March 31, 2001). This is an interesting question, which situates an intense identification with Filipino culture in personal histories of exclusion *within* Canada. In May’s words: “[We identify as Filipinos] because we are forced to in our daily experience...it was to defend ourselves...emotionally and mentally. [We were] arming ourselves to go to school....(Focus group 10, August 26, 2001).

Charlene also describes how her experiences of racism within Canada have led her to embrace a Filipino identity:

I see myself as more Filipino. Because at least I know myself, at least I have a better sense of who I am as a Filipino. No matter what, they’ll always assume that I was not born here anyway. I was born and raised here, I can speak both official languages. I can speak French better than I can speak Tagalog or Illongo.

⁸ For a discussion on the exoticisation of black culture in mainstream popular culture (e.g., Nike, rap music) especially influential among white, middle class male youths, see Sernhede 2000).

Which I wish it wasn't that way all of the time. But, like, that's how it is usually. Like once when I was in high school, there was this incident. This girl had just moved from the Philippines. I was in the tenth grade or eleventh grade, and she was in the eighth grade. She didn't know anybody, so I talked to her right away. And my friends noticed and they said, "Why are you talking to her?" I was, like, "Well, she's Filipino, and she just came here and she doesn't know anybody. I don't want her to feel alone in school." "Oh, you're so different from all of them." "Well, what do you mean?" "You know, all of THEM." And they were pointing to all of the Chinese students on the other side of the cafeteria. "Oh, you are not like all of the black-haired people." Then I figure, what if I wasn't born here or if I never, if I was not put in a group with them when I first came to Maple Ridge? I don't think I would have known them. I'm the only person of colour that they frequently talk to. And if that is what Canadian means, if that's the Canadian attitude, then I don't like that. I'm more confident saying that I'm more Filipino. (Focus Group 4, March 31, 2001).

Ethel describes a similar process of conscious self-identification as Filipino:

That's how I used to think. I'm Canadian. Then I started changing my mind: "I'm Filipino." But anyway, right now I see myself as Filipino and I have absolutely no problem saying that. There was a time when I used to have that problem that I'm Filipino...I feel a deeper connection to my roots that I did not have before. I still identify myself as Filipino-Canadian because I have been here all my life. But I connect more strongly with my Filipino identity than my Canadian identity. I don't know if I have...Most of my friends are Filipino...I don't really have ...or maybe at work...actually I don't really have any friends at work. [Laughter.] My friends where I used to work, they were...well, my closest friend was Filipino. You know? That's how I identify myself the most. (Focus Group 2)

This is a process of identification that is both imposed and struggled for. In one focus group, Eda, a 15 year old who immigrated to Canada in 1996 at the age of 10, denied the authenticity of this identification when he stated flatly that "100 percent Filipino is made in the Philippines" (Focus group 5). Eda's statement produced a strong reaction from the four Canadian-born Filipinos in the group, who argued that Filipino is in large part "where I choose to learn my heritage". This nicely states Grossberg's claim that, "[b]elonging is a matter less of identity than of identification, of involvement and investment, of the line of connecting and binding different events together" (2000 154).

When Filipino youth assert that identification is where they choose to learn their heritage, their spatial claim is more than metaphorical. Filipino youths are not only stitching together moments of past and present, but different places. To continue with Grossberg, "[t]o belong – in a different mode --...is also to belong to a different time-space" (2000 154).

Going to the Philippines

Ong (1997) has criticised the ways in which the Latino Cultural Studies Working Group (Flores and Benmayor 1997) has deployed the concept of cultural citizenship: as a set of cultural practices that demand both the right to a distinctive social space for Latino Americans in the United States, and a sense of belonging within the nation. She argues that this notion of cultural citizenship gives the erroneous impression that cultural identification is self-made. For Ong, ideas of belonging and not belonging are produced within complex fields of cultural and economic power. She compares the production of Hong Kong immigrants and Cambodian refugees to the United States; because of their different economic positions, the former, she argues, undergo a process of whitening, the latter a process of darkening. She details how both groups manipulate and negotiate these positions but argues that they cannot stand outside the process of subjectification imposed by the dominant, white American society. Siu (2001) notes that both of these approaches (Ong's and the one she criticises) presume that subject formation takes place within the borders of a single nation-state. It may be that groups attain a capacity for self-production by literally moving outside the nation-state. This is one way of understanding the significance of the Philippines for Filipino-Canadian youth.

Wolf writes about the 'emotional transnationalism' of second generation Filipino-American youth in San Diego. While parents maintain relationships that directly link the United States and the Philippines, their children maintain the links "at the level of emotion, ideologies, and conflicting cultural codes" (2002, 350). The youths who participated in our focus groups certainly held these sentiments: "When I think of the Philippines or see the flag or see a Filipino sticker on their car, it brings this joy. I know it's a bit sappy" (Charlene, focus group 10, August 26, 2001). But they have also made actual trips to the Philippines, which functioned as what Sugg (2003) refers to as 'therapeutic returns'.⁹ Sugg notes with respect to the performance of the one-woman show, *Milk of Amnesia*, by Carmelita Tropicana: "And yet the journey itself [to Cuba] does seem to be necessary to this process of working through her multiple (as opposed to dual) sense of belonging." Filipino-Canadian youths describe the journey to the Philippines as a journey to a space of belonging. Anthony, a 24 year old born at Vancouver General Hospital,

⁹ These therapeutic returns can work very differently, depending on the concrete circumstance of the group in question. Studying Mexican-American teenaged girls living in Los Angeles, Melissa Hyams (2002) describes how visits to relatives in Mexico strengthen their identification with the United States. The visits confirm their national and personal superiority and modernity against the 'backwardness' of their Mexican relatives. As one young woman notably put it: "Same hair, different hairstyle." The Filipino youths that we spoke with tend not to operate within such a polarised frame of modernity and underdevelopment, and visits to the Philippines are rich opportunities for rethinking their own identities and political strategy.

described his year studying at a college in the Philippines as “the happiest time of my life.” Junior, a 21 year old born and raised in Montreal, says simply: “I loved the Philippines” (Focus Group 7). Melissa and Monica describe in more detail the comfort of feeling at home in the Philippines:

Melissa: I went back to the Philippines throughout my life. When I was older I went to the Philippines...it was the same thing: [the recognition] that everyone’s Filipino. It was just weird...So when you get a taste of that, and when you get back, it’s like, “Hold up, I’m different”....To hang out with my mom’s side of the family, which of course is Filipino, it just feels like home. You get used to this spoon and fork, eating with your hands, whatever. (Focus Group 2)

Monica: I have been back to the Philippines three times and it is totally different everywhere you look. It is true. It is all Filipinos. It is such a surreal experience because you are used to looking and seeing all Caucasians or whatever. ...It’s not even about superficial cultural things, but sometimes it is. If you are going to ask for Balut or if you are going to ask for Taho or something like that, they are not going to look at you and say, “What the hell is that?” (Focus Group 2)

In an anthology of writings by young Filipino-Canadians (Ugnayan ng Kabataang Pilipino sa Canada/ Filipino-Canadian Youth Alliance, 2000), Cherrie June Emnance writes:

If I could only have one wish come true, I would wish to be *home*.

I was born and raised here in Canada for 22 years now. Everything that I have learned, accomplished, and experienced revolves here. My usual group of friends I hang out with, the usual day of activities I’m used to, and even the stressful life I lead in school and work belongs here in Canada. But I’ve come to the realization that I’m missing one thing in my life...the feeling of ‘home’. I know, it sounds strange that I’ve lived here all my life and yet I still say that I’m missing the feeling of my ‘home’, but it’s true.

I miss the sound of jeepnies beeping for way, roosters crowing in the morning, and even the smell of the thick air. I miss being able to appreciate the simple gifts of life and knowing that when I am ‘home’, who I really am is all that matters to the people I am surrounded by. I can go ‘home’ for two weeks out of three whole years, and still feel like I’ve never left. It’s the greatest feeling knowing that I have family who make me feel like they’ve never left my side, like we’ve never been apart. I miss the feeling of knowing I belong with my family at ‘home’ and being able to express myself freely about how I really feel, rather than being somebody I’m not.

If I could only have one wish come true that would make me genuinely happy, I would wish to be ‘home’ in the Philippines.

One parent told me that Filipino parents like to send their youth back to the Philippines for an extended period of time so that they develop a more realistic impression of this place called home. Listening to Filipino-Canadian youth, one can hear the efforts of parents to manage this return: “ Like, [my parents] would tell us the life in the Philippines and how it’s not easy...I know it’s a hard life in the Philippines. For the people there, they have to work all the time. And it’s not easy to go to school even... You have more options here” (Carlo, Focus group 3, March 30, 2001). Monica expresses the same: “Especially the first time we went to the Philippines when I was nine [my parents said] ‘The way your cousins live in the Philippines, that is how we would have lived. So you should be happy and thankful.’” (Focus group 2) Anthony, as were all of his brothers, was sent back to the Philippines for one year of Bible College, and he tells of his mother’s efforts to control the length and long-term repercussions of this ‘therapeutic return’. There is a struggle between Anthony and his mother about the meaning of the Philippines as a home – as repository for cultural values as opposed to place of domicile.

We planned it before, but it was a decision with my mom. But when I was in the Philippines, I really loved it there and didn’t want to come back here. But my mom said, “no”, I have to come back. What would I have done there? I would have tried to get a job. And it probably would have been really hard. She was afraid that I was going to settle down with a girl there or something. She sent my dad to the Philippines to pick me up. I was there for one month longer the first time, one month longer than my brother. My brother had gone to the States. I was travelling through the Philippines and [then] my dad came back [to the Philippines to retrieve him]. I remember having discussions with my mom. I never planned to stay there. But sometimes...just to scare her....Basically I felt like I was forced back by my mom.” (Focus Group 7)

Anthony, with a degree in information technology from British Columbia Institute for Technology, continued to entertain fantasies of permanent return, but only at the age of retirement. He imagined returning as a fisherman.

It would be wrong to simplify these youths’ experiences of the Philippines to fantasies and desires for a home and belonging, and to Anthony’s kind of nostalgic return as rural fisherman in the future.¹⁰ Their impressions of the Philippines are seasoned by their parents’ commentary, by a critique of the Philippines’ government’s responsibility for their parents’ forced migration, and an understanding that life can be very hard in the Philippines. Asked whether he actually could see himself living the life of the fisherman, Anthony equivocated: “No, not really...their life is probably not that simple.”

¹⁰ This should not imply that Filipino-Canadian youths’ dreams of return are always nostalgic; two of the Canadian-born members of the Youth Alliance are living in the Philippines on a permanent basis.

For many it is not the nation that is sought as home; it is claiming a concrete history of struggle in the Philippines that allows them to re-imagine themselves. This home is a community of resistance, and it is a type of homecoming that can be brought back to Canada, and used to reconfigure Vancouver as a home. May expresses this meaning of the Philippines as home:

It is a sentiment for the people. It is not a sentiment for the state. It could be for the family who brought you here. Or for your grandmother who raised us. When we look back at our history, we try to look back at the people's history. When we learn about that, there is really a strong connection to the Filipino people that we never learn about in Canada. They hardly learn about that in their textbooks in the Philippines. So many years of being colonized and living in poverty. What we really appreciate when we go back is how people really struggle...Collectively, you can really see how people resisted their oppression...Especially for people who grew up not feeling proud about being Filipino. We found something to be proud of and it is incredible. Your self-identification also changes...I don't think it is a romantic sentiment. We also know there are struggles within the Philippines... (Focus group 10, August 26, 2001).

Uncovering this specific, material history of a real, not just imaginary, place becomes an important means of establishing self-worth. In a poem published in the *Ugnayan ng Kabataang Pilipino sa Canada/Filipino-Canadian Youth Alliance* anthology (2000, 25), Christine Mangosing expresses a sense of plural identifications, but also how a recovery of Filipino 'roots' strengthens her resistance to racism and daily hauntings of dislocation in Canada:

I have dark almond shaped eyes
emphasized with a slant
I have naturally black hair
but chemically enhanced
I have a question in mind that I can't seem to decide
if I'm too light or too dark, or if my nose is too wide

I speak confidently in a voice strongly disguised
with words spoken by whom we were colonized
And this same voice that once fumbled with my native tongue
knows not the words of the anthem that should be rightfully sung.
Blood of the Spanish and the Chinese flow through my veins
and Western cultural influence dictate my ways
For I was raised beneath a North American sun
Lacking knowledge of the country where my life begun.

But now I find, as I strive to revive
the ROOTS I have once denied
Genuine pride in the Filipino that's me
and greater insight into my identity

So here I stand, reverberating my RHYMES

with the intention to share through my words
 How I've struggled to reach the point where being
 Filipino and Canadian merge

And in gaining knowledge of my Filipino peoples' past and present reality
 I strengthen my RESISTANCE
 to oppressive racial persistence
 and find my place in global society.

Returning to Canada

Christine's reference to global society may not be quite specific enough in the sense that it misses the very concrete connections that are being forged between particular geographies and histories. The UKPC/FCYA now see their struggle in Canada as part of the struggle in the Philippines. Crossing national boundaries has brought their struggle against racism in Canada into a larger history of resistance. This alters the geographical reach of the activities of the UKPC/FCYA to include struggles within the Philippines, for example, an extended Oust Estrada campaign. On the face of it, it may seem odd that Canadian-born citizens who have made a few periodic visits to the Philippines should work so hard on a campaign in another country. But such a campaign is seen to be part of their history in Canada. Feeling the pressure of their parents' forced migration from the Philippines within their daily lives, they understand the political and economic relations within the Philippines to be part of, not only their history, but their daily existence.¹¹

And it is not simply that the geographical reach of the UKPC/FCYA has expanded; members learn directly from organising traditions in the Philippines. Every year the Alliance now sends youth to the Philippines to learn from organisations there. Representations to the Philippines from youth groups from North America have increased substantially in recent years

¹¹ There are interesting parallels to an argument that Lisa Lowe makes about the way in which some Korean-Americans interpreted the Los Angeles uprising in April 1992, in particular, the interpretation that is placed on these events in the Korean-American documentary film, *Sa-I-Gu*. The title, which means 4.29 or April 29, embeds the Los Angeles uprising firmly within Korean national history because it follows "after the manner of naming other events in Korean history --- 3.1 (sam-il) for March 1, 1919, when massive protests against Japanese colonial rule began in Korea; 6.25 (yook-i-o) or June 25, 1950, when the Korean War began; and 4.19 (sa-il-ku), or April 19, 1960, when the first student movement in the world to overthrow a government began in South Korea. The ironic similarity between 4.19 and 4.29 does not escape most Korean Americans" (Kim 1993, 216). Lowe argues that this allusion to Korean nationalism through the naming of the film is "not a direct transference of Korean nationalism but a discontinuous rearticulation of it that includes the crucial consideration of the racialization of Korean immigrants in the United States as workers of color" (1996b, 423). This subtle mapping of continuities and discontinuities, which involves a partial folding of one geography into another, are acts of translation and articulation that respect the particularities of history and geography.

so as to attract the interest and curiosity of organisations in the Philippines.¹² The theatre project with which we began is in fact an outgrowth of one such visit; the project was directly shaped through a guide to doing theatre among the masses, brought home from the Philippines. But, importantly, the theatre project was a synthesis of experiences in Canada and the Philippines. The play was partially centered around a confrontation between a Filipino and white youth at Van Tech high school, which led to the Filipino student being slashed in September 1999. Despite documentation of graffiti at the school stating that “All Flips Must Die”, testimonies from girls that rocks had been thrown at them when trying to board the bus, the fact that 25 youths were refusing to go to school for fears of their safety, and representations from Filipino parents, the Alliance was frustrated by the reluctance of the Vancouver School Board to publicly name the incidents as racist. The play is an application of a community organising technique learnt in the Philippines to try to give voice to a sense of despair and frustration as youths in Canada. In other words, if the methodology is Filipino, the content is distinctly Canadian.

And how might such cultural practices enter into a process of revisioning Canada as a home? In contrast to the Philippines as repository of sentiment and a political space in which to draw strength and learn specific oppositional tactics, Canada was typically represented as a liberal state from which to claim rights, not a particularly ‘home-like’ image. As Carlo put it:

When you are saying you are Canadian, it is like a defence mechanism. [In reaction to] when people think you can’t speak English, or whatever. “Where are you from?” “Well, I’m Canadian. I know as much about it as you do, of this country or whatever. I am just as smart as you are.” It is just someone assuming things about you and you want to prove them wrong.

Charlene continues:

That is how I use the fact I was born here...I let them know I have just as much of a right to be here...I was born here and I use that to assert myself as an individual here...for our community, we use that because you brought us here because you want our labour. Give us what we deserve. When I see Canadian people who are waving the Canadian flag, I feel detached on a certain level regarding patriotism.” (Focus group 10, August 26, 2001).

But the types of mappings that they are practicing in their daily lives, of folding the history of the Philippines into their daily lives in Canada, insisting on the continuities and connections (and not just the discontinuities and ruptures) between Canada and the Philippines,

¹² This comment was made by the National Vice-Chair of ANAKBAYAN, which is the national comprehensive youth organisation in the Philippines, when visiting Canada in July 2001 to attend the first national conference of Filipino-Canadian youths, held in Toronto. Roughly 90 youths attended from across Canada.

also exceed this liberal reading of the state as guarantor of rights. This has some implications for re-imagining multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is tied up with Canadian nationalism in important and complex ways. Mitchell (2001, 57) argues that it is “doubly inscribed: it is inherently nationalist in purpose and orientation, and it is also clearly based on a proceduralist model of liberalism that privileges British philosophy and culture as the nationalist norm”¹³ proceduralist model of liberalism, which is inherently individualist and envisions an endlessly expanding inclusion of groups within liberal democracy through the types of rights discourse deployed by Carlos and Charlene. But Carlos and Charlene also articulate an understanding that access to rights in Canada is unequal (Razack 1998), and UKPC/FCYA echoes a larger critique that multiculturalism reinforces the cultural hegemony of Anglo Canadians if ethnic groups are simply ‘tolerated’ in relation to the cultural norm (Hage 1998) and the specific histories of particular groups are effectively elided within a pluralist society. The consequence of the latter is that multiculturalism can level as much as protect difference. And as Mitchell argues, immigrant groups do not necessarily embrace the fundamental principle of individualism that underlies the federalist multicultural model. Mitchell develops this argument in relation to affluent Chinese immigrant parents in the suburb of Richmond, Vancouver, who have entered into a conversation with Canadian parents about the goals and ideals of their children’s education. Chinese immigrant parents have been strong supporters of ‘traditional’ schools in Richmond, arguing that these schools teach an ethical code that will better equip their children for a competitive global society. They see this as more important than a focus on creativity, and the child’s rights to individuality. Mitchell argues that this debate throws the idea of “an implicitly ‘national’ education program in question” (68), as Chinese immigrant parents frame the needs of their children in terms of global rather than national citizenship. Assessing the progressive potential of these parents’ actions, Mitchell asks:

Rather than through the ‘generous’ inclusion of outside groups into a hegemonic nation-state project, how can the project itself be reformulated from the ‘bottom up’? How can multiculturalism be given teeth through a reconstitution of the project ‘from below’? How can national responsibilities articulate with global ones and vice versa?

These are large questions that gesture toward a different model of multiculturalism than a pluralistic blending and celebration of the diversity of cultures *within* Canada. Mitchell notes that the political demands of the Richmond Chinese Canadian parents are not necessarily progressive

¹³ Mitchell is drawing on the analysis of Charles Taylor (1994), in which he interprets the conflicts over the Meech Lake Accord as, in part, a clash between two different variants of liberalism.

because they have the potential to “leapfrog from [the nation-state] directly into the netherworld of global capitalism” (71). The political and cultural activities of Filipino-Canadian youth suggest a different, mediating, geographical imagination in relation to multiculturalism – one that works between the nation and the netherworld of global capitalism. This entails tracing the specific histories of connection between Canada and other nations. This geography of connectivity ruptures the national boundedness of the multicultural project in Canada. To be fully multi-cultural, Canadians must appreciate the specificity of connections and the complexity of identifications and attachments held by many Canadian citizens. This offers a way of re-imagining Canada, and not just Filipino youth. It is not just the peculiarity of these Filipino children of immigrants to find themselves in and between nations; it is the situation of our nation to be so.

An important irony to note in relation to Charlene’s and Carlo’s disavowal of attachment to Canada is that they nonetheless exercise their civic duty of public participation, likely more fully than the majority of Canadians, through their activities at the UKPC/FCYA. Operating in what Holston (1995) has called “the spaces of insurgent citizenship,” the youth alliance introduces new ideas and new practices that potentially change the meaning of Canada as a home and, by bringing organising traditions from the Philippines to Canada, the UKPC/FCYA blurs some of the distinctiveness of national boundaries. In quite another context, Mike Davis has argued that the large Mexican/Central American working class in Los Angeles “may yet reshape the American labor movement” (2000, 144); “new wave campaigns have overwhelmed employers with an innovative tactical repertoire that has included guerrilla theatre and film, public art,...”(147), some of which have been imported from other national contexts (Houston and Pulido, 2002). “To be Latino in the United States,” argues Davis, “is...to participate in a unique process of cultural syncretism that may become a transformative template for the whole society” (15). Without resorting to Davis’s hyperbole, we want to suggest that second-generation Filipino-Canadians’ efforts to find a home in Canada may hold the promise of transforming it, not only by tracing ongoing histories of connection between the Philippines and Canada, but by transforming the practice of politics and claims to belonging within Canada today.

A close study of the identification of Filipino-Canadian youths also suggests fresh ways of conceiving identity formation. I am sympathetic to Zizek’s recent complaint (2002, 545) that:

postcolonial studies tends to translate [postcoloniality] into the multicultural problematic of the colonized minorities’ rights to narrate their victimizing experience, of the power mechanisms that repress otherness, so that, at the end of the day, we learn that the root of postcolonial exploitation is our intolerance

toward the Other, and, furthermore, that this intolerance itself is rooted in our intolerance toward the 'Stranger in Ourselves,' in our inability to confront what we repressed in and of ourselves.

Filipino youth are narrating more than their victimisation and their process of identity-formation exceeds the tight, recursive circuit of identification between colonized and colonizer. And while their identification as Filipino emerges in relation to processes of exclusion within Canada, it is not contained by them. It involves a specific engagement with the reverberating effects of imperialism across the generations. If second-generation Filipino-Canadian youths are not exactly 'at home in the world', their world exceeds Canada in ways that they mobilise in order to claim the right of belonging.

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