

# The Ethics of Living in Diaspora in Filipino American Literature

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**Abstract** The contemporary phenomenon of globalization or the transnational circuiting of goods, information, capital, people, among others, has engendered untold and radical consequences on the people's way of life, one of which is diaspora. Migration and diaspora have enabled people to settle in different parts of the world for various reasons. While the opening up of countries, like Japan, Korea, Singapore, Europe, Canada, and Australia, etc., has offered more job openings and choices for Filipinos, our colonial and neocolonial relations with the US render the latter as the classic destination for a large number of Filipino immigrants. Filipino American narratives and discourses revolve around assimilationist aspirations, border crossings, departures and returns, and the construction of "home." They written from diasporic realities and consciousness. This diasporic identity and consciousness is not limited to the oscillation of subjects in transnational spaces but is formed and produced by US hegemonic norms, racialized immigration laws and policies, and the discourse of "white ideal," rendering a diasporic subjectivity that is dialectically complex. Though the "American dream" or "desire to be white" can be elusive, it remains an overarching mythos and aspiration for Filipinos and Filipino American immigrants. The chasing of the "desire to be white" and/or "middle class" status (read as American dream) is contingent on a US citizenship, its award of which is underpinned by adherence to US's regulatory norms. But while the compelled character of regulatory ideals that Filipino immigrant subjects are constrained to abide and identify with renders closer to the realization of the "American dream," subjects are never totally constituted and that resistance against these norms and standards is possible. Thus, by its diasporic circumstance and condition, Filipino American literature, as demonstrated by selected texts, consciously or unconsciously write from an "ambivalent" position and subjectivity which can be recuperated to serve as a site for questioning the constitutive power of

the American dream and the ensuing Filipino American immigrant's realization of what is right and principled.

**Key words** Filipino American diasporic literature; ethics of diaspora; diasporic consciousness; Filipino American subjectivity

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## Introduction

Filipino American diasporic writing will never take on a triumphalist, carefree stance as history and the hard life of the country the Filipino immigrants have left behind and the challenges confronted by the immigrants in America, the receiving country, will continually hound its writing. The Filipino American authors will never be freed from the summons and responsibility of looking back to their Mother country and blissfully settling in America. Memories of home will continue to chafe the much-beleaguered Filipino immigrant- writer, opening up a Filipino American

diasporic consciousness that is decidedly stricken by an ethical sensibility. This is the ethical diasporic consciousness from which s/he writes.

In Nie Zhenzhao's ethical conceptualization, he points out that the subject of ethics is informed by historical, contextual, and material forces and determinations rendering a fuller understanding of ethical decisions made by people and why such decisions are made. Thus, following Nie's formulation, it is imperative to locate the intrications or intersections of Filipino-American immigrant subject to its present site and space, vis-a-vis memories and conditions of home in this globalized situation.

### **Laying Down the Context**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized as an unprecedented movement of vast number of people around the globe- some are driven to leave their homelands due to war, political oppression, natural disasters, famine, economic crises. Other people set out to seek better lives for themselves and their families and choose their destinations. Globalization has allowed untold opportunities and prospects of travel and possibilities of improving lives-materially and economically. The transnational circuiting of goods, services, information, capital, and people has engendered radical consequences on contemporary condition, one of which is migration and diaspora, and the Filipinos are not exempted from this phenomenon, bringing them to different destinations and parts of the globe.

For many Filipinos, the circumstances of departure are largely and mainly driven by the dismal and lamentable living conditions in the Philippines, such that the difficult decision of working abroad or taking the leap of settling in and forging a new life overseas may be the only option that could alleviate such present oppressive set up and conditions. Given this colonial and neocolonial "special relationship" between the Philippines and the US, the classic destination of Filipinos is America. Consequently, the legacies of American colonialism in the Philippines have had overarching consequences on the dynamics of positioning, such as how the Filipino immigrants are positioned in the US and their corresponding subjectivity and positioning of themselves in the receiving country. This dynamics of positioning is a consequence of a neocolonial, racialized discourse that has generally and largely rendered the Filipino-American immigrants in a liminal position. Thus, given this dynamics, the hyphenated Filipino- American identity is fraught with contradiction and ambiguity in the struggle for self -representation and determination in the US. The question is, how does one understand this ambiguity and contradiction that characterize Filipino- American subjectivity?

### **Mimicry as a Neocolonial Discourse**

Neocolonial discourse remains entrenched and efficient way of disciplining the immigrant subject. It replicates the ideological rhetoric of “civilizing mission” through the apparatus of the White Ideal mimicry that was once deployed by the colonial project (in this case, both Spain and the US during their respective regimes). Thus, the apparatus of mimicry “emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” (Bhabha). Of note, however, is the contradictory effects of mimicry: first, given the aspiration of immigrant subject of mimicking the white ideal; and second, mimicry’s “elusive” character as it is “constructed around an ambivalent space” (Ibid.). The ambivalent space refers to the immigrants’ identity, culture, difference, and their discrepant histories that may impede or negate the success of the colonizing mission. In the same way, the regulation and discipline of the immigrant subject through the neocolonial discourse is interfered by the ambivalent space. What comes out in the process, is an incomplete, “impartial presence.” Said says, “within that conflictual economy of colonial discourse ... is the tension between the synchronic panoptical vision of domination - the demand for identity, stasis - and the counter pressure of the diachrony of history - change, difference” (Bhabha quoting Said), which renders the incomplete accommodation of the neo-colonial discourse. Now, while mimicry is an effective strategy of containment, this distorted, impartial presence renders a space for recuperation.

The desire for assimilation and the vaunted green card that is dangled at the immigrants by the neo-colonial discourse compels them to cultivate the model minority subjectivity. But there are slippages. While the Filipino American immigrant subject desires or aspires the white ideal, and copying it in the process, America’s neo-colonial project of producing a “reformed, recognizable Other,” has yielded “*a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (Bhabha). This subject of difference or impartial presence ruptures the neo-colonial discourse and opens up not only memories of home and the looking back but engenders the ethics of diasporic sensibility, consciousness, and responsibility.

### **The Discourse of Delay Within the Globalized Condition**

In this accelerated, highly globalized condition we are in, there is hardly any room for slowing down, for savoring and reflecting on things. There is no place for meandering lines as the cargoes must reach their destinations on time to restock the shelves, so to speak. The contemporary absorption with capitalism is deep. The

question is, how can people decelerate to allow a moment for a reorientation and a rethinking of one's bearings?

Jaimey Hamilton, an art critic uses the notion of conceptual "delay" to help us come to some decisions and solutions to contemporary predicaments. She uses the metaphor of the seas to explain the analogy of delay. She says that the watery elements like the oceans and seas in their "consistent thwarting of human progress" (Hamilton's Lecture 2015), can be a geo-poetic and geo-aesthetic imaginary that have the potential to delay us. The ocean's vastness can be seen as a space of waiting, boredom, and futility. She says that when Captain Ahab in the novel *Moby Dick* sails the world in search of the whale that destroyed his leg, out of the expanse of the ocean's nowhere-ness, he asks his men if they see anything, the men answer, "nothing, nothing." But Hamilton posits that in this space of nothingness and boredom, and "futilitarianism" (a useful futility) is the potential for the emergence of an "in between," a "middle passage" and a "becoming" (Hamilton). It is the "in between" and its potential for recuperation that can aid in the attainment of some perspective that is often passed over by the constant motion of globalization. In the Filipino American texts that I will be reading, this crucial, disorienting moment of delay allows the Filipino-American protagonists to stop, rethink, and to take stock of themselves, in turn, coming to an understanding of a Filipino-American diasporic subjectivity and identity that is informed by an ethical sense and sensibility.

### **Ethical Literary Dimension**

Coming from an ethical literary dimension, Nie Zhenzhao states that the function of literature is the presentation of a "historically contingent ethics and morality..." (Ross). He states further that ethical literary criticism "grounds itself on certain historical context or ethical environment of [the] literature produced, and sees the contemporary value of literature as its historical value [is] rediscovered" (Shang). In turn, "reading literature helps human beings reap moral enlightenment, and thus make better ethical choices" (Ross). Thus, framed from the broader lens of historical context, literature rendered in artful presentation brings into focus ethical choices for one's "enlightenment and education" (Shang). In other words, "literature is fundamentally an art of ethics" (Yang). For instance, the discourse and goal of attaining the American "green card" predispose or render on the Filipino immigrant a sense of forgetfulness as the desire is an assimilation with the host country, America. However, Filipino-American writing doesn't allow the erasure of memory. The Filipino-American writer writes from an ethical perspective. The writer jolts back the immigrant from straying too far and becoming oblivious to the call and the

pressures of home. The ethics of literature aims to “move readers to virtuous action” (Ross).

Moreover, Nie Zhenzhao points out that the “overarching aim of ethical literary criticism is to uncover ethical factors that bring literature into existence and the ethical elements that affect characters and events in literary works. It seeks to illuminate issues concerning the events, the characters and their actions from an ethical perspective, and to make ethical evaluation accordingly” (Ross; Yang). Such ethical responsibility is embodied by Gunglo Dagiti Mannurat iti Ilocano ti Hawaii (GUMIL Hawaii), a community-based association of Ilocano writers based in Hawaii. The Association was organized in the early 1970s, with the objective of preserving the Ilocano language, culture, history, and identity whose identity is constantly threatened by the systematic erasure of neocolonial discourses and norms. GUMIL Hawaii writing is informed by the responsibility and commitment to provide some sort of guide for some forgetful, straying Filipino/Ilocano American immigrants. This association of Ilocano writers write from an ethical perspective. But this study looks at two Filipino-American diasporic texts: (a poem “Confessions of a Green Card Holder” by Fatima Lim-Wilson and a short story, “Something’s Gotta Give” by Bataan Faigao). It coaxes an ethical reading following Nie Zhenzhao’s formulation.

### **Ethical Reading of Filipino American Texts**

The poem, “Confessions of a Green Card Holder” by Fatima Lim -Wilson essays a moment in the life of a Filipino-American green card holder. The protagonist can either be a male or a female immigrant. Laying down the dramatic situation of the poem, the persona green card holder, buys apples for a dollar a dozen, as well as two bottles of wine for a dollar in a local store in America. As the persona gets his loose change, a penny rolls down the counter. At this point, he debates whether to get down on the floor to retrieve the penny or leave it. This juncture whether to get down on the floor to look for the penny or just leave it is crucial as it causes the persona to rethink his/her action causing this brief stream of consciousness. First, he remembers the letters of back home, especially relating of mothers boiling bones for their family’s next meal and a father, carving his son. Thus, the grim letters about home delays and puts into perspective this careless dismissal of the penny’s little value and compels the immigrant to get down on his knees to look for it. The interior monologue yields in the persona the realization of the penny’s buying power and its value for his people in Tondo. In the end, the persona is left with two thoughts: first, where to store his apples to keep them fresh, and second, with the

wine the persona bought, he wonders who to celebrate the wine with and what to celebrate about.

The Green card is officially known as a permanent resident card issued to the immigrant after a month or two in the US.<sup>1</sup> This signifies a change in status giving the immigrant some privileges accorded to a legal resident. The issuance of a green card opens up opportunities for legitimate work. The persona in the poem is a green card holder. One's identity practically rests on the green card; it defines the holder; it is a step away from that vaunted naturalization, and therefore, once naturalized, more rights is accorded to the US citizen. It is important to note that immigrants may also be denied the US citizenship as deemed fit by the Immigration officers, thus, the immigrant is expected to live an exemplary life, to take on a "model minority" behavior in order to be awarded the US citizenship in due time. Lisa Lowe posits that the "life conditions, choices, and expressions of Asian Americans have been significantly determined by the US state through the apparatus of immigration laws and policies, through the enfranchisements denied or extended to immigrant individuals and communities, and through the processes of naturalization and citizenship" (Immigrant Acts). Thus, one notes the extensive power of the US, legislating or emending immigrations laws and policies as it sees fit.

The persona is faced with two problems: 1) where to store the apples to keep them fresh, and 2) what to celebrate the wine with and who to celebrate it with. The persona's problem is in sharp contrast to another thought running in his/her head: the extreme poverty back home in Tondo, and the value of a penny which could yield much in peso currency, which is allegorically likened to the "multiplication of fish and loaves." Thus, the US penny that is changed into peso can feed a family back home in Tondo.<sup>2</sup>

The problem/conflict of the persona reveals the subjectivity of the persona. Subjectivity is a term most commonly used as an explanation for that which influences, informs, and biases people's judgments about truth or reality (Sethi, Janum ). It is a central philosophical concept related to the person's consciousness, agency, personhood, reality, and truth which is variously defined by sources" ("Subjectivity"). Also, the category subjectivity is a collection of the perceptions, experiences, expectations, personal or cultural understanding, and beliefs specific

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1 "In order to apply for a Green Card, you must be eligible under one of the categories listed below: through family, employment, special immigrant, through refugee or asylee status, etc." US Citizenship and Immigration Services. <https://www.uscis.gov/greencard/eligibility-categories>. Accessed 20 April 2019.

2 Tondo is a district in Manila.

to a person.<sup>1</sup> Finally, subjectivity is the person's internalization and identification of ways of a particular locale, undercut by the past, by memories, vis-a-vis pressures of the host country.

The persona's subjectivity is shaped by his having settled in America for some time now, long enough to have been granted the green card, and in turn, enjoying its privileges. He has taken on the American ways, concerns, and angst, as evidenced in his primary problem of where to keep or store the apples to keep them fresh, and secondly, who to drink the wine with and what to celebrate. For the persona, the wine is not just a drink to accompany meals but has its social function. Moreover, the sense of wastefulness or the "throwing away culture" that America is known for, as evidenced in the line "at the back of the store are baskets of scraps half a day old which a whole village would steal, even kill for," referring to his community in Tondo. The persona seems to have already imbibed this wastefulness, as demonstrated in his/her momentary hesitation to retrieve the penny, as it is ascribed little value, anyway. The persona's pseudo problems are in stark contrast to the grinding poverty back home. While the persona demonstrates middle class subjectivity and concerns and may have already imbibed some of the values of America, this American subjectivity, however, is not fully internalized as he stops, looks back and remembers his family back home in Tondo. This diasporic ambivalence allows him to oscillate between America and Tondo, rethinking in turn, his/her values. The question is what prevents the persona from completely turning into an "American."

### **Alienation: One Possible Consequence of Diasporic Identity, Consciousness, and Pressures of Diaspora**

While the persona may now be experiencing relative ease and some comfortability in America, and whose condition is perhaps considered middle class as compared to life back home in Tondo or the Philippines, such price of securing a green card is loneliness. Here, the persona has no one to enjoy the wine with or finds no reason to celebrate. The lack of "wholeness" or the persona's experience of fragmentation and gnawing loneliness primarily emanates from his dislocation from home, a dislocatory condition. This alienation is the lack or absence of a community, amidst diasporic pressures. The racialized immigration laws can withhold the granting of a green card or a US citizenship, and therefore, an exemplary behavior is expected of the Filipino American green card holder. The long hours of work, for example,

<sup>1</sup> A subject is an individual who possesses conscious experiences, such as perspectives, feelings, beliefs, and desires.



that the green card holder persona has to put in (necessary for sending remittance to folks back home) can probably be one reason that has prevented the immigrant persona from finding friends or connecting with fellow Filipinos. These are some material realities that plague the immigrant persona. Moreover, this alienation and the chafing discomfort that he feels intermittently, especially when it is provoked (here, it is the penny's small value in America but has much value for his community in Tondo) is weighed down by the ever-present awareness of poverty back home, which ultimately, does not allow the persona to forget his past and be careless with money. Thus, this alienation is the experience of unsettlement that will always gnaw at his diasporic being, consciousness, and identity, and will never allow the persona to rest and to forget memories of home.

### **The Ethical Consciousness**

The persona's act of re-negotiation of space is not quite apparent in the poem, but the fact that s/he oscillates between America (as the new home) and the Philippines/Tondo as both his past and present, remembering or keeping in mind the sad, sad letters of home (grinding poverty and of a father going crazed due to hunger), opens up the diasporic consciousness of the persona. It opens up a "middle passage" that is shot through and informed by an ethical stance. This ethical consciousness enables the persona to be materially grounded on the realities of both spaces and allow him or her to make ethical choices and decisions. This is good and even a desirable condition as it prevents the total cooptation of the immigrant persona into the corporatist system and ideology that is the US (desire for the American dream, for example). More crucially, this diasporic, ethical consciousness has the potential of planting a critical grounding in the persona, thus, allowing a critical understanding of his diasporic values that are informed by his experiences and positioning, vis-à-vis the discourses, practices, regulatory norms, and sets of ideology deployed by the US hegemon, stopping his total cooptation into the vaunted American dream and white ideal.

This ethical sensibility is also illustrated in the another Filipino American character. In the story, Manong, the protagonist, makes difficult ethical choices.

### **To Be Human or to Be an Animal?**

"Something's Gotta Give" by Bataan Faigao, takes us to Manong's life in New York City as a billboard painter. When the story begins, Manong was working on the giant face of Marilyn Monroe, which he was commissioned to do. Up on the rafters and suspended by scaffoldings, he meticulously works on her pouting lips,

sleepy eyes, and mole to capture the face of this American iconic figure. Manong started as a sugar plantation laborer in Hawaii but knocked up a hapa-haole or half-white woman, so he had to escape to San Francisco or risk imprisonment. In the 1930s, roughly around the time Manong arrived in Hawaii, the anti-miscegenation law<sup>1</sup> prevented Asians from dealing or marrying white women, otherwise, they get thrown into jail. In San Francisco, he worked as a dockhand but wanted more, compelling him to move to NYC, where he was finally able to land a job as a billboard artist. After several years of being trapped in a work in New York which is not much to his liking, he finally settled in a job as a billboard artist which he liked and had stayed on for a good ten years now when the story begins.

Living with Manong for a couple of months now is Beverly, a white woman, who, bedraggled and badly beaten up, stumbled into Mabuhay restaurant one day. Mabuhay restaurant is a diner owned and managed by another Filipino immigrant, with other Filipino immigrants and other ethnicities as restaurant crew. Beverly was running away from this big burly of a Marine man. Manong and the rest of the restaurant crew came to her rescue and were able to stave off the marine from finishing the girl. Manong brought her home and took care of her and practically adopted her, taking her into his life. Beverly, however, was deep into drugs.

Manong, on the other hand had fallen deeply and hopelessly in love with the white woman, who was always half-dazed, half-conscious due to drugs that she injects on herself. Everyone from his small group of friends knew his feelings for Beverly. Once he and Isidro (another Filipino) got into a fight, as the latter pushed

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1 In the United States, anti-miscegenation laws (also known as miscegenation laws) were state laws passed by individual states to prohibit interracial marriage and interracial sex. Anti-miscegenation laws were a part of American law in some States since before the United States was established and remained so until ruled unconstitutional in 1967 by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Loving v. Virginia*. The term miscegenation was first used in 1863, during the American Civil War, by American journalists to discredit the abolitionist movement by stirring up debate over the prospect of interracial marriage after the abolition of slavery. In those of the original Thirteen Colonies that became states and enacted such laws, they were enacted as state law in the early 18th century; a century or more after the complete racialization of slavery. Typically defining miscegenation as a felony, these laws prohibited the solemnization of weddings between persons of different races and prohibited the officiating of such ceremonies. Sometimes, the individuals attempting to marry would not be held guilty of miscegenation itself, but felony charges of adultery or fornication would be brought against them instead. All anti-miscegenation laws banned the marriage of whites and non-white groups, primarily blacks, but often also Native Americans and Asians. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-miscegenation\\_laws\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-miscegenation_laws_in_the_United_States). Accessed April 17, 2019.

Manong to have sex with Beverly. He said, “it is no big deal to fuck a whore especially if you are paying her rent” (Faigao 60). This remark incensed Manong and “decked [Isidro] right off” (Ibid.).

Manong was desperately in love with Beverly but could not confess this hapless and hopeless love for her. This craven feeling could be due to his position in America: first, as an ethnic, Filipino minority in the US, he can only do so much. Though this episode with Beverly is a more recent event in his life as a citizen of America, probably in the 1950s, the anti-miscegenation law (which was implemented strongly in the 1930s but has been outlawed in some states in the 1950s)<sup>1</sup> prohibiting Asians, like Filipinos from dealing and most importantly, from marrying white women, this practice, nonetheless, persists even after its being questioned and outlawed in the 50s when the story unfolds. One recalls that Manong left Hawaii in the 1930s for getting a hapa-Haole or half-white girl pregnant. The anti-miscegenation law was much enforced then or the jail for him. After he left Hawaii, finding a stable job was difficult. For years, he did odd jobs. It took several years before he got a job he liked in New York. Since then, he had been behaving well, living a model minority existence.

Secondly, Manong’s white idealization of Marilyn Monroe is conflated with what he feels for Beverly- that is, to yield in to this desire for her would be a desecration of the white ideal. Once, Manong dreamt of making out with Marilyn Monroe but this dream unsettled him, leaving him with a strange feeling of “desecrating the white goddess” ( Faigao 56).

### **Moment of Delay and Disorientation**

While doing the finishing touches of the giant face of Marilyn Monroe, Manong experienced a dizzy spell. The sudden jerk he made caused the bucket of paint to spill over, splattering on Marilyn’s giant face. One hundred fifty above ground and suspended by scaffoldings, he tried to regain his balance, his equanimity, and shock from this near death. Manong was literally suspended on air and the dizzy spell

1 The constitutionality of anti-miscegenation laws only began to be widely called into question after World War II. In 1948, the California Supreme Court in *Perez v. Sharp* ruled that the Californian anti-miscegenation statute violated the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution and was therefore unconstitutional. This was the first time since Reconstruction that a state court declared an anti-miscegenation law unconstitutional, and California was the first state since Ohio in 1887 to repeal its anti-miscegenation law. As a result, during the 1950s, anti-miscegenation laws were repealed or overturned in state after state, except in the South. Nonetheless, in the 1950s, the repeal of anti-miscegenation laws was still a controversial issue in the U.S., even among supporters of racial integration. See “Anti miscegenation law”.

caused him to momentarily suspend work on the painting. From his perch, 150 feet above ground, he looks down at the perpetually busy Broadway Street, indifferent to Manong's near death. His life flashes before him. He thinks of his journey from one state to the other for various reasons and finally finds himself in New York. He becomes a billboard painter in New York City, and he thinks he has come full circle, but could not confess his love for Beverly as this could have changed the dynamics of their relationship.

The disorienting effect of the giant face of Marilyn, that fills up his vision renders him dizzy. This momentary disorientation causing a dizzy spell has allegorically opened up an understanding of this fascination and desire of the white ideal as demonstrated in the meticulous care he works on Marilyn's billboard sign, this dream of making out with her, and by extension, this despairing love for Beverly, which remains undisclosed. The paint that runs down Marilyn's giant face, marring it in turn, can be allegorically read as a jolting out from this white ideal syndrome. Meantime, Manong's desperate and real love for the totally-messed up Beverly is encapsulated in this poignant song which a blind man along Broadway croons, accompanied by his blues guitar:

Got me a woman, yeah  
 got me the blues  
 Got me a white woman,  
 got me the blues, yeah  
 Got me the white woman  
 blues...

Manong could have easily taken advantage of Beverly who was always half-conscious or totally out of it, but he didn't. Moreover, as Beverly is much indebted to Manong for saving her from her abusive lover and for taking her out from the streets, and both are aware of this arrangement, Manong could have easily insinuated or bluntly sought sexual favor from her, but he didn't. For Nie Zhenzhao, the decision to transcend the "animal" in human beings and allow the reasoning man to prevail is what makes human beings different from animals, otherwise, man and animal remain essentially similar, just like Adam and Eve before they ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge. The fair reasoning and deliberation of Manong's actions prevented the baser instinct from winning over reason.

This great and heroic restraint that Manong put out comes from this essential goodness, which includes "sympathy, sociability, justice, and benevolence" (Jincai).

These come from the higher faculties of human beings. If Manong were allowed to stay in Hawaii he would have probably married the white girl or would have done his part as a father of the child the white girl was carrying, except that the anti-miscegenation law, a much-racialized and discriminatory law against Asian minority immigrants in the 1930s, forced him to flee to another state. His act of inviting Beverly into his apartment and getting her out of the streets (though he could not take her out of drugs) is a selfless act and even exposing himself to further trouble. The burly and abusive Marine lover of Beverly issues a threat of retaliation against Manong for daring to go up against this white dominant figure. Indeed, the man came back to challenge Manong, ending in a fight in an alley that badly injured him. Manong's actions and decisions come from being an essentially good man, an ethical man who would do what is proper and right. His journey from Hawaii as a plantation labor, to San Francisco as a dockhand, and finally settling in New York City as a billboard artist had given him ample learning and lessons on what is right, just, and ethical. Someone who knows how to use arnis or kali cannot be a cad. Like the rest of the martial arts (karate, taekwondo, aikido, etc.), arnis<sup>1</sup> is informed by a gentleman fighter's code; that one's knowledge of martial arts is not used to bully or to attack people but for defense. He used his skill of arnis to bring down a bad man.

While Manong is a Filipino American living in New York and has been given a break through his talent as a billboard painter, he is not going to mess up this good life by getting into trouble. We see here that his actions and decisions are not only grounded on what is expected of an ethnic, minority immigrant but is essentially grounded on ethics, or the right thing to do. First, he accepts the challenge of the burly Marine lover of Beverly to fight him because this man is abusive and disrespectful of women and should be put in his place. Manong cannot allow this to happen to the girl or to anyone who is in an aggravated position. Secondly, he cannot confess his love for Beverly because it would be taking advantage of her situation and her helplessness. Beverly could have probably said yes but this could not have been the kind of love Manong wanted. Thus, he suffered silently. His decisions are calibrated by his past experiences as an immigrant and later as Filipino American citizen, yet such decision is essentially informed by an ethical dimension that is shaped by a diasporic consciousness.

## Conclusion

The global phenomenon of diaspora will continue and will probably take on new

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1 Arnis also known as Kali or Eskrima, is the national sport and martial art of the Philippines. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arnis>. Accessed 17 April 2019.

trajectories, forms, and consequences. More and more people will move and settle elsewhere, where they can find better jobs, better living conditions. The Filipinos will continue to disperse away but their ties with the home country will keep them grounded. According to Hall, the Motherland is a signifier of a desirable past, a past which can only be retrieved through memory. The image of the Motherland, therefore, serves to anchor diverse experiences. It is positioned at the center of diverse cultural identities...beneath shifting divisions and vicissitudes of an actual history,” lending the dispersed immigrants an “imaginary coherence” (Hall 393). Affixing the Motherland as the center amidst diverse experiences, values, and relationships serves as a panacea, a salve for brokenness for dislocatory condition of the immigrants. It is a balm that heals severed and forgotten connections. Hall posits that the Motherland enshrined at the center “restores an imaginary fullness and plenitude, to set against the broken rubric of our past. The originary and the familiar serve as resources of resistance and identity with which to confront the fragmented and pathological ways in which Filipino American experience has been reconstructed within the dominant regimes... of the West” (Hall 394).

However, the Motherland not only serves as a wellspring or a fountainhead for dislocatory condition but is recuperated and refunctioned as a strategic site or signifier from which to confront racialized, discriminatory neo colonial practices and discourse in the US. The commonality signified in the Motherland renders the Filipino-American immigrant with strength and a strategic reference point. But more importantly, what gives the Filipino American immigrant subjectivity and identity some grounding are the ties with the Motherland that is shot through with responsibility and the ethics of remembering. Filipino American writing writes from this resolve; it will not allow the Filipino immigrant to forget.

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