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ILOCANO IMMIGRANTS' RENEGOTIATION OF SPACE IN GUMIL HAWAII FICTION (CIRCA 80s)

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Abstract

Migration, transportation, overseas labor, globalization, etc., have spawned complex and overdetermined consequences—among them the unprecedented migration of Filipinos, particularly Ilocanos, to Hawaii. The Philippines' colonial history and neo-colonial realities often figure in the Filipinos' construction of their identity in Hawaii, resulting in their essentialization as unskilled, uneducated, and unassimilable plantation laborers. The decline of the plantation era, however, led to the reconstitution of the Ilocano labor force into the “new plantations” of the tourism industry's hotel and restaurant sectors. The new set-up is nonetheless rooted in what E. San Juan calls the “integration of Filipinos into US society on the basis of inequality and subject[ion] to discrimination due both to their race and nationality.” This study looks at Ilocano immigrant writers' prize-winning short fiction (circa 80s) anthologized in GUMIL Hawaii; how Ilocano immigrant personas negotiate experiences of diaspora, dislocation, marginality, and disempoweredness; and how they create and recuperate a new hybridized space, even as they struggle with exilic life and its neo-colonial realities.

Keywords:

Ilocano-Hawaiian fiction, Filipino diaspora, migrant literature, plantation workers

About the Author

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Migration, transportation, overseas labor, and globalization have spawned complex and overdetermined consequences, among them the dispersal and the dissipation of identity for hundreds of thousands of Filipinos. How do Filipinos negotiate this anxiety of separation from their roots, compounded even more by their relegation to the periphery? Whatever field of endeavor they embark in – whether as plantation laborers of the first to the fourth wave movement, to the professional fields such as teaching, writing, and publishing—Filipinos continue to experience marginalization. They are often essentialized

as unskilled, hot-tempered, untrustworthy immigrants, and often relegated to the lowest positions, a case in point being the experience of Filipino plantation laborers during Hawaii's plantation era. More recently, teaching posts, for example, would be reserved instead for the Japanese even if Filipino teacher applicants are more equipped for the job or speak better English. Such is symptomatic of the essentialization of Filipinos as unskilled, unassimilable laborers; this explains their "subordinate social status" (Agbayani VIII). And in this great migration to Hawaii, the Ilocanos take up a huge number of immigrants more than other ethnic groups in the Philippines. It was the Ilocano group that constituted the majority of Hawaiian plantation laborers that was initially recruited by Hawaii Sugar Plantation Laborers (HSPA) during the plantation era. According to Dean Saranillo, to this date, Filipinos "comprise 23.4% of the settler community and an estimated four thousand settle in Hawaii every year, making Filipinos the fastest growing ethnic group in the island" (134). And out of the total Filipino population in Hawaii, 80% comprise the Ilocano community.

Research yields that in earlier anthologies of Asian-American writing, Ilocano literature in Hawaii had been excluded, nor was there even any mention that such activity of Ilocano writing exists. In the Introduction of the anthology *Charlie Chan is Dead* (1993) edited by Jessica Hagedorn, she speaks of the belated representation of Asian-American writing, particularly of Filipino-American writing. But as one peruses over the titles, one notes the absence of Ilocano-Hawaiian writing. Where does the kind of writing Ilocano writers based in Hawaii fall then if even mere tokenism of their existence is absent? Fact is, Ilocano-Hawaiian writers have been producing in all genres since the early seventies. In 1997, however, the tandem of Oscar Campomanes and N.V.M. Gonzales published an essay titled "Filipino American Literature" (62-102), which is included in the book *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature* edited by King-Kok Cheung. The essay includes a substantial discussion of Ilocano-Hawaiian short fiction. Other than this essay, Ilocano writing in Hawaii has been consigned to invisibility.

What underpins the absence of Ilocano-Hawaiian writing in Asian American anthologies? Tony Schirato posits that "Western culture's explanation of the Orient remains predicated on the discursive reproduction—in novels, travel writing, tourist guides, as well as more overtly political documents—of certain naturalized and racially based hierarchies of power" (44-5). Based on this formulation, one notes a US-centric discourse, an ever present and pervasive discourse that informs other cultural practices. Could this dominant discourse be responsible then for the positioning of Ilocano-Hawaiian writing as outside what is deemed Asian-American writing?

This paper will therefore focus on the experience of Ilocano immigrants in Hawaii, their social formation, and the kind of writing they produce. In order to interrogate the project of the Ilocano negotiation of their experience of immigration and diaspora, the study will focus on one aspect of Ilocano signification—the short fiction (circa early 80s) anthologized in *Dawa* and *Bin-I*. Focusing on ten award-winning short fiction by five Ilocano writers, this paper will problematize how this dynamic and ever changing geopolitical context, and the Ilocano immigrant personae’s experience of dispersal, dislocation, and disempoweredness in the short fiction of GUMIL Hawaii writers, are negotiated to create an “imaginary coherence” that resonates of originary Ilokandia home but in the process rewrites a new, hybridized space. The study uses largely the framework of Stuart Hall on cultural identity and diaspora to construct a reading of the social formation of the Ilocano immigrants and how the personae in the stories attempt to negotiate the experience of diaspora. (Please see the section “Laying down the framework.”)

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Fired by the promise of a much better life, a group of young and audacious Filipino men, majority of which were Ilocanos, packed their bags, sailed off for Hawaii, and braved the unknown. They became the first overseas contract workers in a predominantly sugar and pineapple plantation. This first venture to Hawaii in 1906 paved the way for Filipino migration to Hawaii. The movement fell into four waves of recruitment:

The First Wave, 1906 to 1919, drew more than 29,800, including 24,406 men, 3,056 women and 2,338 children. The Second wave, 1920 to 1929, drew the most with 73,996, including 65,619 men, 5,286 women and 3,091 children. The Third Wave, 1930 to 1934, limited then by the Tidings-Mcduffie (Philippine Independence) Act with a stringent US entry quota against Filipinos, drew 14,760, including 13,488 men, 610 women and 662 children. The Fourth Wave, 1946, coming immediately after World War II, drew 7,361, including 6,000 men, 446 women and 915 children. (Cordova 29)

Despite the harsh and unmitigating condition of plantation life in a foreign land where, according to Cordova, they were literally treated as “indentured first generation Filipino-American workers” (26), the movement to Hawaii was unrelenting. By 1946, in a span of 37 years, a “total of 125, 917 Filipinos were lured to Hawaii under the recruitment

program” (Cordova 29).

The decision to work in the newly-acquired American territory was primarily driven by economic motives, which was of course made imperative by an aggressive and systematic recruitment program that fired the imagination of the Filipinos.

In addition ... to the man in charge of general recruiting, there is one who goes from town to town, showing a movie of life in Hawaii. One scene shows the handing out of checks..., several reels were recently taken on one of the plantations of an annual Harvest Home festival in such a way as to show a maximum number of Filipinos, both in the parade and among the spectators [up close] to make recognition possible—and at a moment of natural exhilaration and pleasure over the spectacle. (Lasker qtd. in *Filipinos in Hawaii* 11)

Hawaii Sugar Plantation Association (HSPA) was unrelenting in its recruitment. Filipinos signed up under voluntary arrangement, despite the long stretch of leave from their country and their families. As mentioned earlier, majority of the workers came from four Ilocano provinces—Ilocos Sur, Ilocos Norte, Abra, and La Union.

At first, it was the five-year contract; later, it was the standard three-year contract. Passage to Hawaii was prepaid and a promise of free travel for those who wished to return after contract was fulfilled was also made to Filipinos after 1915. Depending on the immigrant group, a small amount of travel money was sometime also included. In every case, the promise of paid work and new opportunities in a new land was widely advertised, often with excellent results. (*Filipinos in Hawaii* 9)

While the Filipinos were enticed by the promise of an edenic life in Hawaii, the movement to this American territory was equally spurred on by the increasing difficulty of life in their own towns.

The frustration of the Revolution of 1896, and the American conquest at the turn of the century, had asserted the movement for agrarian revolution in the Philippines. It is no accident that, as peasant exploitation intensified with the tying of the Philippine agricultural system to the world capitalist system, the lure of Hawaii became more and more irresistible to those Filipinos who had only a bleak future to look forward to in the Philippines. (*Filipinos in Hawaii* 12-3)

One, therefore, can see that the first wave of workers to Hawaii was among the least educated members of the working class. Since there were no unions then in the earlier recruitment years that would help them with labor issues and concerns, the contract between the elite planters and the Filipino sakadas was practically one-sided—a negotiation or arrangement that was solely drafted by the planter-employers. Thus, the plantation was practically run like a fiefdom:

The Haoles [whites] were in management positions regardless of education and experience, the Spanish and Portuguese were the lunas or work supervisors, the Japanese were employed in shop and technical jobs. Invariably, the Filipinos were in the lowest positions and were kept as unskilled laborers for most of their lives. They performed the hardest task of planting, weeding, cultivating, cutting, hauling, loading, and fluming for very low pay. (Cordova 31; *Filipinos in Hawaii* 13)

The Filipinos lived and worked under stark conditions. They had to deal with prejudicial attitudes from their white employers who viewed them as no more than mere economic commodities. “Although they were spared flagrant beatings and physical abuse, their suffering, nevertheless, had perpetuated psychological damages, at least within two generations of Filipino-Americans, thus intensifying their sense of inferiority and self-esteem” (Cordova 30). The odds have always been stacked against them. This is what the Filipino laborers have struggled to change and overcome. In the 1920s, even if the Hawaii Sugar Plantation Association (HSPA) was no longer aggressively recruiting Filipino plantation laborers, a huge number of Filipinos, majority of which were Ilocanos, continued to arrive in Hawaii even if this meant mortgaging the little properties and lands they had to cover airfare which costed seventy dollars in the 1920s.

THE FOUNDING OF GUMIL-HAWAII: WRITING IN DIASPORA

On January 16, 1971, an association of Ilocano writers called Gunglo Dagiti Mannurat nga Ilocano iti Hawaii was founded by Pacita Salude, an Ilocana originally hailing from Ilocos Norte. GUMIL Hawaii is a “recognized branch of GUMIL-Filipinas, the nationwide association of Ilocano writers in the Philippines” (Lorente 1). The Preamble of GUMIL-Hawaii which contains its vision and objectives asserts the “burning desire to form a writers’ association in order to study and learn the most effective ways and means of perpetuating and communicating the Ilocano dialect, to develop and sharpen those with

writing talent so that their works might be recognized, printed, published and preserved for posterity” (Saludes 134). Since its founding, the association has regularly produced anthologies of prize-winning entries of different genres.

While GUMIL-Hawaii is driven by a vision to preserve the Ilocano language and culture through Ilocano literature (Saludes XIII; Albalos 119), I would say that it is through this venue that the Ilocanos could be afforded yet the opportunity to disabuse prejudices and demeaning stereotypes leveled at them. Filipinos, particularly the Ilocanos (since they comprised a huge number of plantation laborers) were referred to as uneducated plantation laborers.

Roman Cariaga’s master’s thesis *The Filipinos in Hawaii* published in 1937 profiles some of the great achievements of Filipinos in Hawaii. Jonathan Okamura posits that the “biographical sketches and accompanying photographs contradict the predominant stereotype of the uneducated, unskilled, unmarried, and unpredictable Filipino plantation field laborer widely prevalent in Hawaii throughout the pre-World War II period” (42). He asserts further that this “intractable ignorance” and the racism and discrimination which the Ilocano laborers endured was what Cariaga, in his thesis, and the Filipino community were resisting and contesting through the production of the book *The Filipinos in Hawaii* (Okamura 53), an anthology of biographical sketches of successful Ilocanos who had made it in Hawaii.

Several decades after Cariaga had published *The Filipinos in Hawaii*, GUMIL Hawaii replicated this project by coming up with a similar one, a biographical anthology of Ilocano achievers in Hawaii. This compilation of biographical sketches of successful Ilocanos in Hawaii is the first anthology published by GUMIL Hawaii two years after its inception. In the Foreword of the anthology entitled *Dagiti Pagawadan a Filipino iti Hawaii*, Reverend Juan Dahilig remarks that the anthology is taking the first “bold step to demonstrate the rightful place of the Ilocano dialect in the United States of America in particular” (VII). George Ariyoshi, Acting Governor of Hawaii, sharply reads this undertaking as a declaration to the world of the “unique gifts and cultural richness of the Filipino people ... to acquaint many of our citizens with the positive contribution of Filipino Americans here, and ... contribute to a sense of identity and serve as an inspiration to members of our Filipino community” (Ariyoshi III).

The founding of GUMIL-Hawaii as an association of Ilocano writers, and their project of putting together for its seminal publication profiles of selected Ilocano personalities who had made it big in Hawaii, was not just a venue to preserve the Ilocano language and culture, but a deliberate effort at constructing an Ilocano representation

that attempts to overturn Ilocano stereotypes that have stigmatized them and rendered them invisible. The “institutional invisibility” which Filipinos, particularly Ilocanos, have been experiencing had pushed them to form an enclave that would attempt to reverse racist attitudes and work towards their erasure. Still, while there were achievements by Filipinos they were regarded as marginal, placements of responsibilities were mere tokens, and avenues of equal opportunities were “stubbornly heavy [with] layers of encrusted institutional racism” (Umali 24).

Another instance of Filipino and Ilocano victimization is their erasure in the history of the United States. Through almost peonage-like labor, Filipinos who were part of the Asian population have largely contributed to the building and shaping of the economy of Hawaii and the US Mainland. It is through their backbreaking labor that Hawaii, a US territory, has become during the plantation era a multinational state. Little is known, however, of the Asians in the building of America: “many existing history books give Asian-Americans only passing notice—or overlook them entirely” (Takaki 9). According to Takaki, the epical proportions of *The Uprooted*, an American history book, had “completely left out the ‘uprooted’ from lands across the Pacific Ocean and the great migrations from Asia that also helped to make the American people” (10).

Moreover, when Jessica Hagedorn, a third generation Filipino-American immigrant, put together an anthology of Asian-American literature which came out in 1993, Ilocano literature was excluded from what is defined as Asian-American literature or writing. In Hagedorn’s Introduction, there was even no mention that such writing exists, considering that GUMIL Hawaii has been publishing and in existence since the early seventies. In her Introduction to the Asian-American anthology Hagedorn writes: “In the 30 years I have lived in America, I never really thought I would see the literary landscape change, splitting off into so many challenging and liberating directions. As the first anthology of Asian American fiction by a commercial publisher in this country, *Charlie Chan is Dead* proudly presents 48 writers” (XXVIII). The literary landscape changed, all right, but where is Ilocano literature classified? The question one asks is, why Ilocano writings are excluded from the Asian-American anthology? Where does Hagedorn base her set of definitions of Asian-American literature? What is representative of Asian-American writing?

While the Asians have been essentialized as the Other of the West, the effort by some Filipino-American intellectuals, among them Jessica Hagedorn, to put together an anthology of Asian-American writing is a political move. And although Hagedorn explains that the process of putting together an Asian-American anthology would inevitably lead to the exclusion of other writings, such inclusionary measures or yardstick is still

implicitly informed by the dichotomy between the West and the East. The process of canon construction of Asian-American literature “demonstrates the very active processes of inclusion and exclusion associated with the maintenance of hegemonic” (Patajo-Legasto 39) Western literary practices. The implicit paradigm that is operational here is one that is

responsible in the reproduction of the Orient, a reproduction based on an initial distinction (West/Orient) and the value (positive/negative) associated with it. The Orient becomes accessible to the West precisely because the West invests resources in acquiring knowledge (details about institutions, languages, religions, history, customs) and telling stories (novels, dramas, scientific treatises, anthropological works, business and brochures) about the Oriental object. (Schirato 46).

Hagedorn and other Filipino-American writers are coming from a system of knowledge about the Orient, and what is supposedly “an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness” (Said qtd. in Schirato 46).

Therefore, consigned to institutional invisibility, GUMIL Hawaii constructs a venue in the effort of self-representation. Using the Ilocano language, Ilocanos tell of their narratives, songs, and histories. The assertion of an identity, but which is always under erasure by American hegemony, has led them to found GUMIL Hawaii, an enclave that attempts to dispel the legacy of the “spectre of institutional invisibility” (Tiongson 1-14).

The great migration of Filipinos to Hawaii (where a large majority is comprised of Ilocanos) as indentured laborers has essentialized them as servile, unintelligent, exploitable, and unskilled domestic helpers. But the fact is, HSPA which supervised the recruitment of Filipino workers to Hawaii, stipulated of the need for workers who are used to manual labor and not too citified: “We want unskilled laborers for the plantations. They wouldn’t be too unhappy to do manual work in the plantation, ten hours a day. So, give us rural people to work on the plantation” (Alcantara 28).

Such HSPA specifications had bred prejudicial images of Filipinos, particularly of Ilocanos. They have persisted, progressing into something very unflattering, hounding to this day third and fourth generation Ilocano immigrants. This construction of Ilocanos has marginalized and consigned them to the periphery. How then can this marginalization and essentialism of the Ilocanos be repositioned and reversed? How can this marginality be recuperated to achieve an Ilocano sense of agency? This project of recuperation will be made possible through the use of the Stuart Hall’s framework. Stuart Hall talks about this notion of “cultural identity and diaspora” in connection to Jamaican experience, but this

paper appropriates his framework to theorize an understanding of the social formation of Ilocanos in Hawaii. Stuart Hall's theory then is deployed to the short fiction anthologized in *Bin-I* and *Dawa*, circa early eighties, by Ilocano writers belonging to GUMIL Hawaii.

LAYING DOWN THE FRAMEWORK

Stuart Hall defines cultural identity in two ways. The first definition is grounded on a shared culture. After colonized countries have attained their independence, one phenomenon that came out as a result of postcolonialism was a huge wave of migration. People from colonized countries started to migrate to imperial heartlands, ultimately to find better job opportunities. In turn, the experience of enforced diaspora or separation from the mother country has yielded fragmentation and dislocation.

Diasporic peoples experience nostalgia for the originary Motherland. The image of the Motherland, therefore, serves to anchor diverse experiences. It is positioned at the center of diverse cultural identities. This common culture and common past which the dispersed people dream of provides a single point of reference. As Hall points out: the Motherland is a signifier of "common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us as 'one people' with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath shifting divisions and vicissitudes of an actual history" (Hall 393).

Therefore, the image of the Motherland, which is associated with a common past, provides an "imaginary coherence" amidst the experience of dispersal and fragmentation. The act of linking the present diasporic condition of the immigrant with the originary allows for coherence and integration. Situating the Motherland as the center amidst diverse experiences, values, and relationships serves as a panacea, a salve for brokenness that heals severed and forgotten connections. It enables the reconstruction of a fragmented identity into a one, stable cultural identity. Hall posits that the Motherland enshrined at the center "restores an imaginary fullness and plenitude, to set against the broken rubric of our past. They are resources of resistance and identity with which to confront the fragmented and pathological ways in which that experience has been reconstructed within the dominant regimes ... of the West" (394).

The first sense definition of cultural identity, however, essentializes identity. It assumes that the past is recoverable, something that can be retrieved in its pure pristine state—that once the past is recovered, one can in turn "find a sense of ourselves into eternity" (Hall 394). This definition assumes that identity is unproblematic, fixed, and

stable, portraying the individual as a rational, conscious actor who could understand the basis for his or her action. The subject is assumed to be constituted by overdetermined signifying practices which are culturally specific.

The second sense definition of “cultural identity” posits a different view at looking at the term. While it recognizes points of similarity in the experience of the dispersed subjects, there are deep and significant differences that constitute the person or subject. This is so because history intervenes in the constitution of a subject. Contrary to the common notion, history is not linear, stable, coherent, fixed, and unproblematic. Instead, according to Hall, histories have “real material and symbolic effects” (395). In talking about the Jamaican experience, Hall opines that “we cannot speak for very long with any exactness about one’s experience, one’s identity, without acknowledging its other side—the rupture and discontinuities which constitute precisely the Caribbean’s uniqueness” (395). In other words, while some Third world countries have a common history of colonization, the process of negotiating their colonial experience differs from each other, notwithstanding the overdetermined factors that come in, in the constitution of a subject, of a nation. The constitution of a subject, race, or nation is characterized by a constant but disjunctive, discontinuous, and fractal flow. The past continues to have its mark, but it is not the fixed, factual past that will be discovered or retrieved, as subscribed by traditional historians. Instead, the dispersed subject’s relationship to the past, to his Motherland, is a relationship that is likened to that of a “Mother and a child after the break” (Hall 395) when the child through speech begins to be socialized into his or her role in society.

In order to understand what Hall posits as the dispersed subject’s relationship with his past and with his Motherland, a brief explanation of Lacan is necessary. According to Jacques Lacan, who reworks the theory of Freud, a child gets the notion of the “I” from six months to eighteen months in three consecutive stages. This is called the mirror stage (Sarup 8). Lacan contends that initially, the “child does not merely desire contact with the mother and her care; it wishes, perhaps unconsciously, to be the complement of what is lacking in her, the phallus” (Sarup 8). The father, who symbolizes the Law, intervenes in the child’s unconscious desire to be one with the mother. The father’s intervention “deprives the child of the object of its desire [the mother]” (Sarup 9). In the process of intervention, the father symbolically castrates the child by separating him or her from the mother. It is also at this point of repression of the child’s real desire that he or she gets socialized into the world and learns the language. On separation, the child’s real desire, the mother, is replaced by the child’s appropriation of the language; as the child learns the language, socialization begins—he or she gets initiated into different, sometimes conflicting

roles or subject positions awaiting him or her in the society. This oneness with the mother which the child experienced before the entrance of the father is severed forever. The subject can only go back to this originary relationship in a form of “memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth.”

Hall, on the other hand, appropriates Lacan’s theory of self and identity by positing that this originary past can only be visited and constructed through “memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth” (395), and not in the recovery of it in its pure, factual, unadulterated form. This connection with the past happens only within the realm of the imaginary. This satisfaction, and therefore ensuing coherence that one achieves through an evocation of the past, is imaginary. Hall argues that cultural identity is “not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture. It is not some universal and transcendental spirit inside us in which history has made no fundamental mark. It is not a once-and-for-all. It is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute Return” (395). Moreover, cultural identity is not an “essence but a positioning that is reconstructed by some point of suture or rupture within the discourses of history and culture” (395).

What is strategic about this dual definition of cultural identity is its capability of simultaneous operation. The first definition functions to ground a continuity with the past—a utopian past which renders an imaginary coherence, integration, and stability to ruptured identities as a result of enforced dispersal, where subjects, race, and nations are directly “cut off from direct access to their past” (Hall 397). The second definition of cultural identity foregrounds the category of “difference,” precisely the element inscribed in the cultural identity of fragmented subjects, rendering them unique. Ironically, it is this element which makes subjects unique that affords them agency.

Now, how does this play of difference functions in the foregrounding of Hall’s definition of identity? Jacques Derrida, a French poststructuralist critic, spells the concept “difference” with an “a” so that it is spelled “differance.” Such spelling gives the concept a defamiliarization effect which calls attention to its foregrounded meaning. Hall quotes Christopher Norris in explaining “differance”:

[Difference] remains suspended between the two French verbs “to differ” and “to defer” (postpone), both of which contribute to its textual force but neither of which can fully capture its meaning. Language depends on difference, as Saussure showed ... the structure of distinctive prepositions which make up its basic economy. Where Derrida breaks new ground ... is in the extent to which “differ” shades into “defer” ... the idea that meaning is always deferred, perhaps to this point of an endless supplementarity, by the play of signification. (397)

If meaning is always deferred, always giving us the slip, then this dismantles the essentialist notion of identity which assumes it is fixed, coherent, consistent, stable, and unproblematic. Moreover, this binary scheme of constructing meaning is destabilized once and for all.

Toril Moi asserts that our culture is heavily imbricated in binary oppositions. Dichotomies like man vis a vis woman, original vis a vis translation, white vis a vis black or non-white, etc., are caught in a hierarchical play of meanings (125). She argues that in the struggle for hierarchy, an inevitable silencing or death happens where the weak are silenced, or worse, experience metaphorical death. Further, in this binary scheme, the underlying paradigm is male/female, positive/negative, white/black—where valuation is given to the first side of the tandem. The second categories in the binary oppositions (women, blacks, colonized, minority culture, etc.) are relegated to the powerless instance or position and deemed negative, inferior, other (Moi 125). If fixed binaries that stabilize meaning and representation are subverted by the poststructuralist definition of difference, then meaning becomes provisional. “Without relations of difference, no representation could occur. What is constituted within representation is always open to being deferred, staggered, serialized” (Hall 397). If production of meaning depends on the endless deferment of meaning, then these “traces” of signification happen in the juncture of difference. Meaning, therefore, is always repositioned, contingent, and arbitrary.

Now, the study brings in Edward Said’s *Orientalism* to give a clearer picture and understanding of Stuart Hall’s framework on cultural identity and diaspora. According to Said, the colonized were “constructed as different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West.... [As a result the West] had the power to make us see and experience ourselves as Other” (Said 235, Schirato 46). This discourse, according to Schirato, who quotes Said, is a way through which “violence is perpetuated against various groups, both in terms of its authorization/legitimization of overt political practices ... and in terms of perpetuating Orientalist attitudes” (46).

The second sense definition of cultural identity can give us a frame and methodology by which Orientalist attitudes, which have inured to become common sense, can be dismantled after all. As Hall points out, such framework can be deployed in the project of reversing and recuperating the “ways in which Black people experience, positioned and subjected to the dominant regimes” (Hall 395).

Finally, substantiating Hall’s theory of cultural identity and diaspora is Trinh Minh-Ha’s theory of “Inappropriate Other.” Third World peoples, the non-White, or the colonized have been relegated to the margins for they are viewed as Other. Like Hall,

Minh-Ha posits marginality as a “sliding” positionality, therefore recuperable. It is not a fixed essence. Given this definition, Minh-Ha puts into question the binary schemes center/margin, outside/inside. She questions the measure or the scale that defines the perimeter that divides center and margin, inside and outside. She problematizes the questionable character of the scale that valorizes boundaries by pointing out its arbitrariness:

[T]he moment the insider steps out from the inside, she is no longer a mere insider (and vice versa). She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Like the outsider, she steps back and records what never occurs to her the insider as being worth or in need of recording. But unlike the outsider, she also resorts to non-explicative, nontotalizing strategies that suspend meaning and resist closure. (217-8)

The subject is therefore invested with an irreducible aspect “not quite the Same, not quite the Other. She stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. Undercutting the inside/outside opposition, her intervention is necessarily that of both a deceptive insider and a deceptive outsider” (Minh-Ha 218). Such fluidity, positing an image of an indeterminable frontier, deconstructs fixed notions that have been responsible for the oppression of the Other and the continued domination by the West. Thus, the Other becomes the “Inappropriate Other/Same who moves about with always two/four gestures: that of affirming ‘I am like you’ while persisting in her difference; and that of reminding ‘I am different’ while unsettling every definition of otherness” (Minh-Ha 218). The category of indeterminacy can be used to substantiate Hall’s and Derrida’s frameworks for the project of theorizing the social formation of the Ilocano immigrant personae in the short stories under study. The seemingly commonsensical notions, assumptions, schema, and paradigms from which meanings are drawn are demolished: “there no longer is a position of authority from which one can definitely judge the verisimilitude value of the representation” (Minh-Ha 216).

ANALYSIS OF THE SHORT FICTION

The First Moment of Reading

My analysis takes a two-moment reading. First, it will look into how Ilocano writers based in Hawaii, through the characters or personae in their short fiction,

construct or recreate an “imaginary coherence” in their experience of dispersal and the ensuing dislocation and displacement. To do this I will employ in my analysis Hall’s first sense definition of cultural identity. Although there are advantages of using the first sense definition of cultural identity, as discussed in the framework section of this paper, the poststructuralist critique of the assumptions of identity and other categories such as history, past, representation, etc., also expose their limitations and narrowness. In this regard, the second moment of reading which employs Hall’s second sense definition of cultural identity is meant to recuperate what could be the unique (in the category of difference) identity of Ilocanos; substantiating Hall’s framework is Minh-Ha’s *Inappropriate Other/Same* (in the category of indeterminacy).

The first set of award-winning short fiction from *Bin-I* and *Dawa* (“The Heaven of Nana Sela,” “Uncle Angelo’s Return to Hawaii,” “The Story of the Patani Plant, Water, and a Gentle Wind,” and “Lakay Saulo, His Hut and the Rain”) looks into the lives of oldtimers. The term “old timers” refers to men who started working in Hawaii as young, single plantation laborers and have now retired. Tata Joaquin, Uncle Angelo, and Lakay Saulo are old timers for they had left for Hawaii as young, single men, continuing to work at the plantations until their retirement. On the other hand, Nana Sela, another character in “The Heaven of Nana Sela,” is an old woman, a grandmother who migrates to Hawaii to join her son. These stories problematize their crisis and how they try to negotiate this exilic experience.

“The Heaven of Nana Sela” (“*Ti Langit ni Nana Sela*”) is about a grandmother who has been in Hawaii for three years. She lives with her son, daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren whom she babysits. Throughout the story she is gripped with an unmitigating nostalgia (*iliv*) and a yearning to return home to her hometown (*purok*) in the Philippines. She asks her son Manuel a couple of times to allow her to go home, but each time she is rebuffed. Manuel has reasons for not allowing her to go home just yet.

This displacement that Nana Sela feels is intensified by her inarticulateness. Her inability to speak and understand English cuts her from belonging to the place. It intensifies her isolation, incarcerating her all the more in this paradise-like Hawaii. It is her inability to speak and understand English that Manuel uses to explain why he cannot allow her to go home alone, without his and his wife accompanying her.

Nana Sela, however, attempts to dispel this dislocation by prefiguring in her mind, in her imagination, a homeland which she revisits each time she is in the middle of housework, in the privacy of her room, or when she is alone. When her son’s adamance finally sinks in, she tries to negotiate this yearning for home by constructing a fictive home.

Thus in an interior monologue she rationalizes that Hawaii and the Philippines have much in common anyway, recognizing the presence of many fellow Ilocanos. She observes that vegetable products found in Hawaii are also raised and produced in the Philippines, so she resolves to make Hawaii a more habitable place by constructing a vegetable garden, planting vegetables (eggplant, camote tops, etc.) that are also found in the Philippines. The vegetable garden approximates her Ilokandia *shrang-ila*. The act of reconstructing a vegetable garden is a creative expression that attempts to sublimate the literal and figural paralysis that Nana Sela feels.

Finally, Nana Sela's friendship with Nana Clara is valuable because like her, she is also an Ilocana. Nana Clara is a signifier of an Ilokandia past. Nana Sela looks forward to Sunday masses because she could meet up with her townsmate friend, Nana Clara. Their friendship grounded on their hometown ties (*kailyan* or *kababayan*) renders an imaginary coherence to the figural and literal inarticulateness, isolation, and alienation that Nana Sela is experiencing in edenic Hawaii.

The central character in the story "Uncle Angel's Return to Hawaii" ("*Idi Nagbalik Hawaii ni Uncle Angelo*") is an old man who also experiences nostalgia.

Uncle Angelo had worked in Hawaii for a long time. After retirement, he returns to the Philippines to marry. Auntie Lorenda, the girl he marries is not a young bride. She is able to bear a child though, but she does not make it at childbirth and dies. The baby survives, but when the baby was a year old he gets sick and eventually dies. Uncle Angelo almost goes crazy with grief. Recovery is slow, so Uncle Angelo decides to visit Hawaii in order to forget his pains. He stays in Hawaii for several months but is possessed by nostalgia, so he eventually decides to go home to the Philippines.

After almost a lifetime of working in Hawaii as plantation laborers, a dominant thought occupying the minds of laborers is going home to the Philippines to marry and forge a family. Uncle Angelo fulfills this dream of putting up a family, except that it ends up short-lived for his wife dies in childbirth, and his child who initially survives dies shortly after. Angelo's grief is intense. Staying in the Philippines becomes too painful for it reminds him of his loss. He decides to visit Hawaii to forget, but the heart does not forget. Instead of finding temporary reprieve in paradise-like Hawaii, the tenuous equilibrium is unsettled more by the fast-paced bustling metropolis that initially greets him from the airport. He is not prepared for this.

Thus, even at the onset, a rift sets in and begins to wear down Uncle Angelo's already fragile sensibilities. But as he stays longer in Hawaii, the sense of equanimity he tries hard to negotiate gets badly eroded. Despite being with relatives of his own flesh

and blood, despite their frequent appeals to think of settling permanently with them in Hawaii, as he has no immediate family to return to anyway, Angelo would not hear of it. Even at the onset of his visit, he makes it clear to his relatives that his sojourn in Hawaii is temporary (*diak nga rangta ti agnaed ditoy*). He tells them that his dire wish is to equitably divide his property among the relatives of his wife in the Philippines, and spend the rest of his life and die there. “I don’t want to die here” is Angelo’s pronouncement (“*Diak kayat a ditoy ti pakatayak*”).

Ten years pass since Angelo’s leaving Hawaii, and he flies again to Hawaii to get temporary reprieve from sorrow and the wrangling relatives who never seem to be happy with the amount he allots for them from his retirement pay as a plantation laborer. But though he is in Hawaii and practically tension-free, he could not snugly settle in. His thoughts are constantly with the people he has left behind. His thoughts are single-mindedly directed towards home. Nostalgia grips him, throwing Angelo’s nephew in panic. By way of easing this sadness, Angelo’s nephew brings him to Aala Park, a haven of old Filipino men and women. In Aala Park he meets with other oldies and bonds with them, recreating with them a semblance of home. But this frequent trip to the park is short lived. He explains to his nephew that constant exposure to the oldies depresses him as he is reminded mercilessly of his near death. Ensnared once again in the four walls of the house, Angelo tries to distract his homesickness by puttering around the house. He takes on tasks that he had been doing back home in his farm—cutting firewood and tending a vegetable garden.

But Hawaii, as other cities, is not a place for the old. The modern, urban kind of lifestyle is the ingredients that advances isolation and loneliness. It is unfriendly, hostile, and petrifying—it could freeze the soul. Despite attempts on the part of Angelo and his relatives to make his stay as comfortable as can be, the body and the soul cannot take the bashings of city life. After some time the isolation takes a toll on him and he falls ill. This fragility is compounded by his present state of mind: he has returned to Hawaii as a broken old man with defenses that have been too frayed by an earlier crisis.

Angelo is torn between loyalty to his relatives in Hawaii and loyalty to the relatives of his wife in the Philippines. He soon realizes the hunger for warmth, for the comfortable routine that the body would eventually settle in—the simple but sluggish kind of existence that is found back home. It is what feeds the soul. Angelo decides to take the next flight back to the Philippines.

“The Story of the Patani Plant, Water, and the Gentle Wind” (“*Ti Mula, Ti Danum Ken ti Angin*”) again unfolds from the eyes of an old man who used to work in a sugarcane

plantation until his retirement a few years before. Tata Joaquin has been a widower for so many years. His wife passed away when their only child, Perla, was only six years old. Since then he has singlehandedly raised his daughter and taken care of their needs. But for some time after his retirement, with much free time, loneliness begins to creep in. His daughter is now working. While she is out working, he is on his own for most part of the day. Nursing back pains and the fear of getting old slap him cold. The need for a wife intensifies. Some three months ago he had returned to the Philippines for a visit and had met Mercedes. He proposed marriage and she accepted. But he had to first inform his daughter about his plan. Marooned by cowardice and the fear of an untoward reaction from Perla, he delays his plan of marriage. When he finally musters the courage to raise the subject, Perla outrightly disapproves of it and threatens to leave if her father insists. Despite his daughter's stout objection, Tata Joaquin pushes through with the marriage. He flies home to the Philippines and marries Mercedes, then flies back to Hawaii with his wife. Perla, who is willful like her father, leaves home but after several months comes back upon realizing the folly of her ways.

Going back to that part of the story when after Tata Joaquin's retirement, he finds himself suddenly feeling old and idle yet with so much free time in his hands, pining for home and a wife he approximates the image of Ilokandia by tending a vegetable garden. He particularly tends with care and patience a *patani* plant—a marker of his Ilokandia home. The *patani* bean signifies fertility, lushness, and reproductive capacity. Ironically, though, it mercilessly reminds him of his current state as old, inactive, and unproductive—the opposite of the *patani* beans. In meticulously caring for his vegetable garden, particularly his *patani* plant, Tata Joaquin notes of the plants' needs: the life-giving heat of the sun, the whiff of a gentle breeze, and more importantly, the right amount of water to fight parchness (“*nabun-ag danto, nakunnana ti nakem na, ta saan laeng ti darang ti init ken lailo ti angina ti kasapulan ti mula no di pay met kangrunaan ti danum*”). The *patani* plant is not only a signifier of his Ilokandia home, but he is the *patani* plant who needs the sun's heat, and water—the sap of life. As the sun, breeze, and water are the basic needs of a plant, are not the life-producing warmth of a woman and her loving care the basic needs of a man?

While working on his vegetable patch that renders an imaginary order, meaning, and coherence to his metaphorical impotence, he attempts to crush this impotence by introducing the presence of a woman in his life. The adamant refusal of his daughter for him to get a wife does not deter him from this desire to complete a family. He goes home to the Philippines to marry Mercedes. The presence of Mercedes in his home in Hawaii will complete this aspiration. After some time, the daughter returns home to ask for forgiveness.

Tata Joaquin is successful in putting together a family. At long last, the Philippines is transplanted to Hawaii; his Ilokandia home is relocated to Hawaii.

The last story of this first set is entitled “Old Man Saulo, His Hut and the Rain” (“*Lakay Saulo, Ti Abong Abong, Ken ti Sangasudo nga Arbis*”). Very disillusioned and bitter, Lakay Saulo runs away from Dan-aw Asin, the community he has lived in for the longest time, and begins to settle in an uninhabited land called Red Cliff (*Nalabaga a Turod*). Lakay Saulo is an unfortunate man who has only known sadness and misery in his life. First, his young wife runs off with another man. Later, he is asked to leave the plantation housing because the laborers’ barracks will be razed down to give way to development and progress. This tears his heart for he has lived there since he was a young plantation laborer in 1915. After being coerced to leave the plantation quarters, he does not find a home. He then decides to leave Danaw-Asin, which for him is a signifier of sin.

Despite the unfortunate trend of events, the old man does not go home to the Philippines. It has been a long time. He has left the Philippines as a young man and has been in Hawaii for most of his life. Ironically, he is now a stranger to both his Motherland and Hawaii. He likens himself to a leaf. Subject to the whims of nature, the leaf is plucked out from its branch. Rootless, it is then blown off to nowhere. It dries up, withers, and soon dies. Like a plucked out leaf, the old man is neither here nor there, for he never feels belonged to the community at Danaw-Asin. He is a fugitive running away from his past. Moreover, he is neither from Hawaii nor the Philippines. He is without roots. At eighty-five—enfeebled and infirm, and more importantly, houseless—a sense of weariness and helplessness engulf him. This sense of isolation and alienation are rendered physical when he stumbles onto Red Cliff, an uninhabited land which he later on decides to finally settle in.

As Lakay Saulo begins to construct a sense of home in this unexplored, unpeopled territory, he senses a new life for him. He shapes the frontier and wields it to his liking. He reconstructs a parcel of Red Cliff based on his imaginary of Hawaii in the earlier years of the plantation era—virgin, uncharted, unspoiled by the intrusive hands of modernization. On the other, in this boundless frontier, he fashions it to also look like the Ilokandia of his memory. He begins to grow vegetables of all kinds: camote, squash, string beans, etc. Soon he gets back his usual vigor. Red Cliff is transformed into a citadel, a stronghold against the depraved kind of life in Dan-aw Asin. His present habitation not only becomes his defense against the onslaughts of modernization, which had uprooted him from his plantation house, but also a possible link with his past. Here he is reconnected to the originary Motherland, and his ruptured sense of identity (illustrated in his earlier fugitive condition) begins to heal.

The next three stories (“Karma,” “Adrift in the Night,” “The Tang of Yesterday’s Rain”) look outwards. They problematize immigrants’ dealings and relationships with society, entailing their work, their relationship with employers (implied or explicit) and neighbors, and finally, how they negotiate with diaspora, dislocation, and disempowerment.

“Karma” (“*Adda Supapak ti Tunggal Biddut*”) revolves around the working conditions of Filipinos in a construction site. It speaks of the differences and divisiveness among ethnic groups, like Filipinos vis a vis Koreans. The Korean architect of the ongoing construction fabricates stories and lies to put the Filipinos in bad light. The sad thing is that the owner of the construction services, Mr. Gaston, though a Filipino is predisposed to listen to the stories of the Korean. Mang Rogel, the foreman-supervisor of the construction project, keeps his cool. In the end, he vindicates the Ilocano group of workers when Mr. Gaston realizes his mistake. He realizes his error and asks for forgiveness, but Mang Rogel tenders his resignation and surrenders the key of the pick-up truck he drives for his service. Mr. Gaston loses a good, dependable man.

The Ilocanos, representing the Filipinos, have always been an embattled ethnic group. In the work area they are relegated to the lowest positions and essentialized as unskilled, untrustworthy, and volatile laborers. These stereotypes have caused their marginalization, and the Ilocano immigrants have worked hard at negating these homogenizing labels. In the story, the Ilocano construction workers negotiate this disempowerment by forming groups on the basis of hometown ties (*kailyan* or *kababayan*). This system of grouping establishes two things: strength that comes from the support each member lends to the other, and the establishment of a bond or cohesiveness that Ilocanos employ to survive in Hawaii.

The Ilocano community that is established from this kind of group formation is reminiscent of the Philippine concept of *bayanihan* or cooperation. This affords a powerful panacea from a sense of emasculation that happens in the workplace. Forming a community characterized by *kapatiran* approximates ties of brotherhood. “It is reminiscent of barrio support control system that extends family and kinship alliances” (Teodoro 49). In this case, the *kapatiran* grouping enables not only a kind of bonding among the Ilocano construction workers, so that they can draw strength from the presence of each other, but a connection with their Motherland, so that they can gain strength and inspiration to fight racism and American hegemony. They emerge solid, unified, and one.

In “Adrift in the Night” (“*Ti Nalnawan a Biahe*”), Isagani and his wife Rozinni are evicted from their housing by the company Isagani works for. The plantation housing

has to go to give way to a better business venture. The couple are left helpless for they are not given ample time to look for temporary lodgings. Adrift in the night, their situation worsened by the breaking down of their car, Rozinni gives birth in a barn.

The situation of Isagani and Rozinni, adrift in the night and with nowhere else to go, illustrates displacement and dislocation to the extreme. Driven out of the housing without prior notice, and taken by surprise, they are powerless to counter the directive. Isagani appeals to the humane side of the president of the company, explaining that his wife could give birth any time. His appeal falls on deaf ears. The president, a native Hawaiian, explains instead the project's great potential and that nothing can be done about their plight.

The couple is thrown into a dilemma. They are alienated by modernization, development, and progress. Moreover, Isagani is threatened of losing his job if he does not vacate the housing immediately. He is not given any option. Since work is hard to come by as he is just a carpenter, he is forced to abide by the rules of a faceless and heartless dominant order.

Isagani and Rozinni experience literal dislocation caused by the inhuman hand of civilization. Their literal dislocation is deepened by psychological dislocation—the metaphorical exposure and helplessness caused by being thrown outdoors, the anguish of not being able to find lodgings in the dead of night, and the fear and trauma for both wife and baby.

Stranded and terrified and Rozinni breaking into labor, man and wife find reprieve in God. Praying to a more powerful, transcendent being for help in crisis is juxtaposed with the facelessness and dehumanized character of modernization. In the rushed, fast-paced, impersonal face of city life, the act of praying and believing in a higher, transcendent being is no longer part of the people's lifestyle. The bustle of life in the US negates the act of praying, reflection, and slowing down. Praying has been replaced by the concerns of earning money. Praying and the belief in the transcendental are practices associated with more conservative, traditional societies like the Philippines. Filipinos have not lost their belief in the power of prayer. Pushed to extreme, Isagani and his wife call on to their God. Call it religion or superstition, invoking the power of prayer, as Isagani does, produces a magical effect. The dislocation is given temporary reprieve. A calming is felt and Rozinni gives birth. A measure of peace is felt by the couple by their invoking a practice, a rubric, of the past.

In "The Tang of Yesterday's Rain" ("*Naapgad ti Arbis di Kalman*"), Manuel, who has been in Hawaii for two years, finalizes plans to go to the Philippines for a visit. He will fly

in three days time. However, as of late, he has been getting brusque treatment from Lucy, his older sister. Manuel is clueless as to why his sister is giving him the cold shoulder treatment. As the story progresses he learns after an ugly confrontation with Lucy that he has to pay his sister back for his studies and trip to Hawaii, which she had sponsored. He cancels his trip to the Philippines and gives the little savings he has reserved for the trip home to his sister as initial payment for his debt.

Manuel's two year sojourn in Hawaii is made bearable by the hope that he is going to return home for a vacation someday. There is always a looking back to his hometown ("Do fishes in Pandan River still abound? What could my friends be doing now? Has my girlfriend changed, is she more beautiful?") These thoughts and images of home are often revisited. His desire to go home remains strong and unflagging.

His memories of home excite him and give him a sense of moorings in his literal displacement. This dislocation, however, is transformed into symbolic homelessness with the severance of brother-sister ties over money matters. Manuel is asked by his sister to find another place to stay after his return from the Philippines. Manuel is stunned by what he hears. He tries to make his sister see reason: "I thought you were helping me because I am your brother, and that we are family?" His sister, in turn, responds: "There are no blood ties here. This is Hawaii." (*Awan kinabsattan ditoy. Hawaii detoy.*) This ugly exchange severs completely the bond between brother and sister.

After the violent confrontation when Lucy reveals to Manuel her true intentions and motivations, he flounces off to his room. Sapped by the violence of the exchange, he lies on his bed and wonders where he can take temporary lodgings. This marks the beginning of his literal homelessness and isolation. This literal dislocation is deepened and brought to a different level by the severance of ties between siblings. While his first sense of displacement (away from the Philippines) is mitigated by the presence of a family in Hawaii (he lives with his sister and her family), Lucy's coming out into the open and bluntly confessing her purpose for helping out Manuel completely ruptures the bonds of the family. Thus, family ties broken, Manuel experiences both literal and symbolic homelessness and dislocation.

Another level of dislocation is experienced by Lucy. Her denigration of the importance of family bonds, an important Filipino value, is supplanted by so-called modern, Western values such as individuality, practicality, efficiency, functionalism, etc. — perceived as mercenary alongside the Filipino values that Manuel espouses. Lucy reasons that in Hawaii, there is no place for sentimentality, brotherhood, kinship, and hometown ties — values that Manuel keeps.

Lucy serves as a foil to Manuel. Lucy, who has been in Hawaii far longer than Manuel, has been corrupted by modern, Western ideologies. Manuel, on the other hand, who is severed from his sister because of differences in ideology is initiated into the corrupting influence of modernization and civilization. Although the story ends with a scene where Manuel is left wondering where he could find temporary lodgings, we see that he is going to clutch on to his Filipino values, much more so this time that he is plunged into crisis. It is precisely their differences that cut family ties, and it will be these traditional values that he learned from home which he will need to fiercely hold on to as he negotiates his literal and symbolic dislocation and isolation. He will continue to construct in his imaginary pictures of his Motherland. The devotion and care that he offers to his girlfriend back home is the same devotion that he accords to his Motherland through his keeping intact the traditional Filipino family values. He is going to sail through this crisis.

The next two stories “The Shell Pickers” and “Love is Sweeter the Second Time” focus on marital, filial, and neighborly relationships. Such relationships, like in the earlier stories discussed, are contingent with temporal space and time.

In the story “Love is Sweeter the Second Time” (“*Lumangto Met ti Nalanglay nga Ayat*”), Lorelie’s miscarriage paralyzes her. The doctors pronounce, though, that she could walk again given there’s therapy, exercise, and support from the family. But it seems that being up on her feet again is far from happening because since her miscarriage, she has been confined and strapped to her chair. Each day she watches the transformation of her husband, Leo, who grows colder and distant by the day. He is not only distant towards her but treats her brusquely. His ministrations on her are carried out grudgingly. Lorelie suspects that he is seeing someone for he is practically out nights and weekends where he is expected to be with her, given her condition. Lorelie quietly nurses the pain.

Lorelie’s pain is deep. She is in a double bind—she experiences miscarriage, loses her child, becomes incapacitated as a result, and is unable to fulfill her wifely obligations. Because of these unfortunate events, her husband’s eyes stray. Any self-respecting woman would go crazy with this situation, but Lorelie is made of a tougher kind. She tries to negotiate this literal and metaphorical paralysis by constructing pictures and images of home, drawing strength from her memories of family and home.

Somehow, despite her brokenness, this imaginary of family and the Ilokandia home gives her an easing sense of wholeness. After some time when she realizes that the moral and physical support she needs (patience, therapy, etc.) will not come from her husband, she announces to him her plan to visit home where she can recuperate properly. She loathes to leave her husband, as she loves him so much, but her resolve to go home to the

Philippines, she realizes, might bring her healing. In the Philippines she will not only be able to walk again (a literal healing), but her homecoming could recharge her completely too—an emotional and psychic healing. This reconnection with home speaks of the possibility of wholeness, a panacea to the brokenness she is strapped to.

In Lorelie's mind, in her imaginary, the visit would also reconnect her to her family, townsmates, friends, memories, and practices of home; it would refuel her being, give her a sense of wholeness once again. She would then be ready to take up the fight of winning back a philandering husband. These thoughts alone give her strength and resolve to get well. In the meantime, Leo witnesses an incident in the park as he awaits his lover. He realizes the grave injustice and pain he has caused his wife. He goes home hurriedly and cries for forgiveness.

In "The Seaweed Pickers" ("*Dagiti Agpipidut ti Limo*"), Manang Consuelo, a widow, tries to fend for the needs of a family of four by gathering seaweeds and selling them off to Filipino buyers and a few Japanese and Chinese stores. This challenge of picking seaweeds as a source of income is compounded by her problem with her two teenage children. They have given her only headache and unnecessary worry.

Another widower, Ka Conrado, comes into her life and confesses his love for her. He offers her marriage. She could have easily accepted Ka Conrado's suit, except that facts of her family's situation complicate things. Marrying a non-employee of the coconut plantation where her husband used to work before his death would mean the eviction of her family from the housing and termination of their housing benefit. What makes the situation worse is that Ka Conrado, a seaweed picker like her, is just renting an apartment outside the plantation. Accepting Conrado's proposal would make life more difficult for her and her family. The story leaves the readers with an ambivalent ending. The exilic sensibility that grips Manang Consuelo is caused by her struggle in Hawaii—the death of her husband seven years ago that has left her with three small children to singlehandedly care for.

The sea, as a source of income, breeds competition among the shell pickers. Once, she figures in a fight because she is accused of trespassing boundaries. A group of shell pickers constantly harasses her. She feels a sense of unbelonging and her source of livelihood is also constantly threatened.

Another disjuncture that Consuelo battles with concerns her two teenage children. She laments over the Americanized ways of Darius and Chona and the disintegration of Filipino family values. They have become wayward kids. Manang Consuelo tries to negotiate the sources of her dislocation by harking back to organic Filipino values

associated with Maria Clara. She tries to make up for this loss among the youth and her teenage children by constructing a fictive, organic past when Maria Clara values were still enshrined in a Filipino family.

Consuelo, bogged down and pressed on all sides by this sense of dislocation, may be in the midst of fellow Filipinos but does not feel a sense of community with them. In her multiple dislocation, her consolation is looking back to a fictive homeland that temporarily gives her a sense of moorings. On the other hand Ka Conrado, an Ilocano like her, who has kept intact his Filipino values can help Consuelo negotiate this exilic sensibility and displacement.

The last two stories share a similar setting and theme. Both deal with the remote world of the lepers—remote because they are thrown and tucked away from the society, from the daily grind of living, where they are soon forgotten by their family and the rest of the world. Ironically, though, the problem of the afflicted is very real and needs perennial attention of the government.

The dominant mood of the stories “The World of Salome Alegre” (“*Ti Nagkaysa a Lubong ni Salome Alegre*”) and “Father Vidal Ciriaco and the World of the Leper Colony” (“*Ni Padre Vidal Ciriaco Iti Lubong ti Agkukutel*”) is unrelenting despair. The residents of Kawalao Colony and Marakeke Colony are in deep bitterness over their fate. All sort of ethnic groups are here—Ilocano, Filipino, Samoan, Portuguese, Japanese, etc. They are all leveled by their incurable sickness, awaiting the erosion of the parts of their body and their eventual death. The government has forgotten them for they too fear this ailment. In both of these stories, hope and life come back slowly to the victims by the presence of priests who, despite the bad treatment they get from the lepers, do not relent from drawing them out of disbelief and despair.

In “The World of Salve Alegre,” the figure of stronghold that slowly leads the main character, Salve Alegre, out of wretchedness is Father Ziechzen, a German missionary. Their long and frequent conversations finally enlighten her, nourishing her soul. Substantiating these spiritual encounters with the priest is Salve’s frequent recollection of her past. She talks to the priest about her happy past when she was a dancer back home. As a dancer, she was young, supple, healthy, and had a lithe and beautiful body. Her beauty shone through. Remembering these thoughts sustained her.

In “Father Vidal Ciriaco and the World of the Leper Colony,” it is an Ilocano priest, Father Vidal, who serves as the fortress of the residents of Makarere Colony. The diverse ethnic groups are at first hostile towards Father Vidal. They have no interest in the salvation of their souls, much more the upkeep of their bodies—they believe that their fate

anyway is eventual death. The colony is a depraved, dysfunctional hell hole.

At first the victims resent the presence of Father Vidal. He is spat at, ignored, physically and verbally attacked. But he does not give up on them, and eventually he is able to penetrate their hard defenses. Soon he is teaching them songs and ways to be productive like handicraft, needlework, and gardening. More importantly, they learn to pray again.

Father Vidal believes the importance of the environment in the upkeep of a person's being. So he starts supervising the construction of a well, then progresses to the construction of a chapel where the residents can go to for meditation and solace. He spearheads the plotting of a vegetable garden where they plant vegetables of all kinds: pechay, tomatoes, potatoes, cabbage, carrots, etc. He introduces the value of *bayanihan*. Soon the terrain is transformed from a brown, lifeless expanse, into a greenery of trees, plants, and vegetables.

The sense of alienation, brokenness, and darkness that the lepers are deep into is slowly healed as their lives begin to take meaning again, and it is through the leadership and charisma of the Ilocano priest. In transforming the people and the place, Father Vidal invokes his training as a priest—as a spiritual master with deeply ingrained Filipino values, and a deep love and belief in the goodness of humanity.

The Second Moment of Reading

The first moment of reading functions to ground a continuity with the past. It valorizes invoking a fictive originary Motherland and signifiers associated with it in order to attain a sense of coherence in the immigrants' experience of diaspora. This notion, however, has its limitations. The claims of the first moment of reading assume that the past can be recovered in its original, pristine state, and that once the past and originary Motherland are invoked, the subject begins to achieve an imaginary coherence and wholeness.

The second moment of reading illustrates how the notion of identity is, in fact, contingent on conflicting and overdetermined factors that undercut the claims of Liberal Humanism that identity is fixed, coherent, and unified. The second moment of reading foregrounds the category "difference" as the very element that renders the subject unique, as the latter is caught in the endless play of signification. Meaning, therefore, is deferred.

Since no literary text, or any text for that matter, is autonomous, the analysis of the second moment of reading will be contextualized and drawn from the material facts from which the texts were written.

The central characters in the stories “Uncle Angelo’s Return to Hawaii,” “Lakay Saulo, His Hut, and the Rain,” and “The Story of the Patani Plant, Water and the Gentle Wind” are portrayed as sugarcane and plantation laborers for most part of their lives. They have come to their present state through the rigor, severity, and harshness of plantation existence as they attempt to recuperate the cultural elements of their hometown. The appropriation of these cultural practices to negotiate the environment and life they are in takes on a slightly different form, as their appropriation is contingent and predicated on the times.

During the plantation era in Hawaii, a large majority of young, single, robust men were employed in the vast fields of Hawaii, since those were the specifications set by the plantation owners. Thus the workers that signed up were men that answered to those specifications. Yet even if they had practically grown, matured, and retired in Hawaii, they have not been fully co-opted by the dominant order. In the first place, their objective for leaving the comfort and familiarity of their hometown in order to work in a strange land was goaded by economic motives. Their motives were primarily driven by the desire to earn, save, and return quickly to the Philippines. Assimilation with America was least in their minds.

Their positioning as unskilled laborers with very little education, which predisposed them to unfair labor practices, was repudiated by the existence of labor unions. Even at the onset they were able to establish a union, which had crude beginnings but was institutionalized later on. In fact, workers’ strikes started as early as 1909. There was one also in 1920 which lasted for two months (Kerkvilet 6). Then four years later in 1924, another strike was waged: this big strike by Filipino plantation workers “lasted for five to six months with more than 2,000 plantation workers in 4 islands going on strike “(Kerkvilet 6). It was often noted that the labor union was characterized as militant, astute, and known to make a hard bargain.

The exodus of Filipinos to Hawaii was driven by “self-serving” motives—they did not leave their hometown to help in the expansion of the US economy, but to capitalize on their skills and services in return for pay. They profited too from this business arrangement with the plantation owners. They were completely aware of the power of waging strikes and its consequences—paralyzing plantation operation and causing market crash. Strikes were often employed to prove their point and get their demands.

As mentioned earlier, assimilation was not the objective of the Filipino laborers. In fact, the laborers and their families who came afterwards worked at reconstructing a Filipino community in Hawaii, forming their own social enclaves (Cordova 55). Such

community ties were tightened by frequent organizations of *fiestas* and other celebrations:

Fiestas and national holidays were observed although in Hawaii, these events were celebrated mainly for their social value of bringing Filipinos together. A far greater community-wide emphasis ... was placed on the celebrations of national holidays. They were seen as the most important expression of collective Filipino identity, vis a vis other ethnic groups. (Teodoro 52)

Thus, the workers were autonomous unto themselves, as they got the much-needed support from each other. They approximated the *barrio*-support of the Philippines. When the workers were able to bring their families with them to Hawaii, they maintained clan networks throughout the island where the responsibility of maintaining the networks rests on the mother. The Ilocano community spirit was strengthened by their retention of the native language; for example, the Ilocano language was used in the barracks and plantation houses. The pidgin English they learned was enough to get them by in their work. They have always believed that the “straightest road to assimilation into American society is through the abandonment—or at least, the non encouragement of the immigrants’ native tongue” (Teodoro 56).

The oldtimers Uncle Angelo, Lakay Saulo, and Tata Joaquin in the stories are retired plantation laborers. They are testimonies of a plantation era. They are shown to have survived the rigor, harshness, and exacting life in the plantations despite their little education and knowledge of English. Now, focusing on the individual lives of these characters as discussed in the earlier section of the paper, the problems they confront with are eventually resolved when they use the same survival strategies that made them survivors of the plantation era.

For instance, when Tata Joaquin believes that nothing would make him happier in his retirement years than getting married to a Filipina. Since he has opted to settle permanently in Hawaii with his daughter, an element that would complete the picture of contentment (that is, if he could not go home) is at least to marry preferably an Ilocano like himself. This assumption reiterates the insular characteristic of the Ilocanos. Recall that it was the hometown ties that helped them through their sojourn in Hawaii. This *kailyan* or *kababayan* ties, expanding to kinship ties, saw them through.

The importance of *kailyan* ties is also illustrated in “The Heaven of Nana Sela.” Here, Nana Sela is able to last in Hawaii despite fierce nostalgia for home through her friendship with a *kailyan*. She happens to sit near an old lady during one Sunday mass and thinks

she is a *kailyan*. After mass, Nana Sela asks the old lady if she is from the Philippines, and when the latter answers yes Nana Sela is filled with happiness. After the initial question of where in the Philippines one comes from, other questions follow, “questions delicately seeking out common acquaintances, should it turn out that the other came from the same hometown” (Teodoro 51). In a strange place such as Hawaii, one’s hometown ties are important. “[O]ne’s townmates formed a significant other one could trust, depend on or in whom one could find the links of kinship that bond people in the Philippines to each other” (Teodoro 51).

The importance of expanded kinship is also illustrated in “Karma.” This time, the story is set in Hawaii of more recent times. In construction work, one observes competition and rivalry between and among ethnic groups or countries. In the story the Korean architect, for example, would fabricate stories against Filipinos to smear their names and block future jobs. Despite their being embattled in the work site, the Filipino workers under the leadership of Rogel hold on to each other for support, loyalty, and alliance. Stories go around that Mang Rogel, the Ilocano foreman of the construction project, does not know how to read construction maps and that he is slackening in his job. However, the workers under him—Ilocanos like him—stand by his side. Their support and loyalty extend to a group strike or a group resignation if Rogel is unfairly terminated from the project.

This *kababayan* alliance is illustrated in “Karma” when Mang Rogel forms an alliance of construction workers on the basis of *kailyan* or *kababayan*. Since construction projects are often negotiated with a foreman, he brings in his own set of construction workers formed through hometown alliance. The alliance is also invested with a bargaining power. It was this kind of alliance that laborers often invoked in their negotiations with plantation life in Hawaii.

What this analysis wishes to foreground is that while Ilocanos are marginalized by essentializing constructs, their very condition and position is precisely what they recuperate to negotiate their marginalization. Thus, the alliances which they formed work towards their favor in two ways: first, it affords the laborers the kind of support they need in a strange circumstance marked by unfamiliar working policies and conditions. Second, the alliances serve as a mode of resistance against total domination and cooptation as they enable a modicum of autonomy on the part of the Filipino laborers. For example, this insularity—interpreted by the other ethnic groups and the US as bigotry, narrowness, and parochialism—is recuperated as a Filipino survival strategy.

Since the aim of the US during the plantation era is to achieve highly efficient production, the Filipino workers were educated to a new work condition and a new way

of life which was alien to what they were used to in their *barrios*. *Barrio* life then was slow and characterized by self-regulated pace of farm life. But their transplantation to Hawaii threw them into a different working condition. They were programmed to work under a regulated schedule, to learn the use of industrial machinery, and to abide by plantation policies. They endured backbreaking labor demanded by a plantation field.

The exacting life of a plantation system is negotiated by the strength of their culture. The institutionalized labor unions, the kinship networks, and the *kababayan* or *kailyan* are some cultural elements of back home that are appropriated by the laborers as tactical and survival strategies. The excuses made to throw get-togethers among themselves strengthened alliances. These are the kinds of support systems that are recuperated by the Filipinos to become the source of their strength and creative resistance against extinction and cooptation.

As repeatedly discussed in the paper, Filipinos (in this case, Ilocanos) are often essentialized as docile, subservient, and often in deference to the white hegemony. However, in the stories "Karma," "Adrift in the Night," and "Lakay Saulo, His Hut and the Rain," the main characters show the opposite of these labels. They are shown experiencing tension and conflict not only with themselves but with the dominant order: Mang Rogel, Isagani, and Lakay Saulo are forced to emerge from their relatively peaceful existence, but not necessarily contented, when their source of living, sense of equilibrium, and their families' sense of security are threatened by the imposition of unfair, hegemonic white practices.

The characters have different ways of showing their defiance against the dominant order: Isagani confronts the president of the company and tells him to his face that what he is doing is an infraction of the workers' rights; Mang Rogel shows a more subtle defiance by tendering his resignation to prove a point; and Lakay Saulo, a first generation immigrant, shows a quiet kind of subversion by snubbing the invitation of the Commission for the 75th anniversary of Filipino Immigration to Hawaii.

One glimpses the edgy character of the central figures in these stories, and this can be disquieting, at least to the dominant order, because one can read something lurking in their placid, seemingly passive exterior. Yet, in as much as the characters are still constituted by the dominant paradigm, this fact alongside their position at the border has to be considered. The specificities by which they negotiate their environment, marginalization, and the ever-noisy, ever-authoritative American hegemony, vis a vis the peripheral position of Filipinos, is the juncture in which the dialogue takes place. This is where the immigrant is not quite there or here. Thus the idea of a unitary identity is exploded.

Father Vidal in “Father Vidal Ciriaco and the World of the Lepers” can be read as a quintessential image of the subversion of Filipino representation by the dominant US paradigm. Even at the onset, the character of Father Vidal upsets the usual stereotypes of Filipinos as compliant, docile, submissive, unintelligent, etc. Here is one character who is intelligent, critical, bold, and subversive.

Father Vidal, who is seen dealing with and talking to the youth, is accused of fomenting insurrection against the government. He is picked and thrown into prison for a year. After his release, he asks to be assigned at Makarere Colony where he can do missionary work. In this multicultural colony, Father Vidal’s presence is seen by the lepers as unnecessary and even absurd. They reject him, but Father Vidal does not give up until he is able to penetrate their hardened exterior. He does not work singlehandedly, though; he seeks the help of the government. Coming from a marginal condition as an Ilocano, and coming from an “unplace” like Makarere Colony, he drafts a letter to the government outlining the condition of the residents and demanding for provisions. The government’s non-acknowledgement of his letter does not stop him. He continues to bug them until he gets the government’s attention. Father Vidal takes up the cudgel for the victims, and even faces the government to give voice to the voiceless.

Eventually, the bold and charismatic leadership of this man transforms the hellhole into a habitable place, an act that required navigating diverse nationalities and ethnic cultures. In transforming the bedlamite, he invokes *bayanihan* or the Filipino way of showing cooperation. In recreating the place, he acknowledges the importance of other cultures. He understands that exclusivity has no room in that place and puts together the energy and resources of the ethnicities and nationalities in the improvement of Makarere. In the synergy of these different cultures, Father Vidal recreates not only the place but recreates himself as well. He belongs nowhere and everywhere.

The character of Father Ciriaco shatters the unflattering essentialist stereotypes of Filipinos. His creative transformation of the place and his self-transformation illustrate two things: that identity is fluid and contingent on the specificities of the environment, the dynamics of the moment, and the survival strategies to be employed. Thus, identity is a contingency, ambivalent, provisional, and eternally repositioned.

CONCLUSION

Ilocano-Hawaiian writing leaves us with the impression that somehow a large part of their life has been left behind. The writings are gripped with nostalgia, for something

that used to be and what can no longer be recovered, perhaps except in memory. There is always a going back, a returning. It is clear that the sensibility of Ilocano-Hawaiian remains smelling of home, even if they are all elsewhere in Hawaii.

The writings take on a tone of fierceness, a veiled rage, for they are underwritten by our history, a history that continues in Hawaii. The diasporic writing is an attempt at negotiating their historical specificity, their individual and collective conditions as a consequence of living under the shadows of US neocolonial structures and hegemony.

Ilocano-Hawaiian writing can be a venue yet for crafting a space for Ilocano immigrants, a survival strategy that can be employed to recuperate this dislocation, displacement, and disempoweredness—a condition which will continue to haunt them as they have decided to cross the borders between Ilokandia home and Hawaii.

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