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Overcoming Panethnicity: Filipino-American Identity in a Globalized Culture

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Faculty Adviser: Dr. Brian Coffey

Essay completed in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Global Honors, University of Washington, Tacoma

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Introduction/Abstract

The ways in which individuals define themselves can heavily influence the way in which that person acts and behaves. Additionally, the ways in which society defines groups of individuals can have a lasting effect on these groups and society as a whole. Filipino-Americans have struggled to create a unique and visible social identity within the United States. Whether it be from their early colonial experiences in America to their more recent status as a 'minority within a minority', these groups of individuals are caught in a constantly expanding and increasingly complex identity crisis (Cordova, 1983; Revilla 1997; San Juan 1998). However, due to the effects of globalization and the increased application of technologies such as the internet, new avenues of self-representation have opened up, allowing for the creation of more individualistic and transnational identities that are currently challenging the conventional notions of formation and representation. In this paper, I will look at the history and development of Asian American identity, specifically that of Filipino-Americans and the ways in which it is being formed today. This will be achieved in several stages. First, I will explain the concept of the term 'Asian American' and the formation of Filipino-American identity through the lens of panethnicity. Then, I will provide a brief history of Filipino-Americans, highlighting aspects of their individual and community development, primarily using the Washington State and Seattle area as a means of illustration. Finally, through preliminary research, I will examine the modern state of Asian American and Filipino-American identity formation by interviewing several Filipino-Americans and how contemporary media phenomenon are influencing their creation of transnational identities

Defining Asian Americans

The term 'Asian American', while commonly used today, is actually a more recent concept than most people are led to believe. This term rose in popularity during the 1960s as a means of convenient definition during which American interactions with Asia were becoming more prevalent (Campomanes, 1992). Rachel Rubin & Jeffery Melnick (2007) describe that 'Asian American' was used as an "organizing tool to facilitate discussions about issues of racism in the United States and issues of global politics in Asian countries, such as the recognition of China, the Vietnam War, the presence of American military rule in South Korea, and so forth" (p. 223). These increased political and economic discussions required for a simple term to be created in order to convey these larger complex topics which in turn, resulted in the grouping of a large collection of American citizens. In other words, the concept of defining an Asian American identity did not stem from any physical, geographic or racial origin, but rather from a social construct of ethnic domination and hegemony (Omi & Winant, 1994; Bonus 2000; Winant, 2001). These socially made constructs, while not deliberately ill of intent, would later spark discussions of Asian American definition within the United States.

Rubin & Melnick (2007) continue by stating that while "there are certainly cultural as well as environmental similarities among various Asian nations, lumping together the dozens of group identities with origins on the huge continent can obscure much more than it explains" (p. 224). This is where the primary issue of Asian American identity comes into play. Having been involuntarily placed within a rather large pool of ethnic and cultural histories and backgrounds, Asian Americans have been inclined to adopt a new identity in

which they have seemingly been disconnected from. This identity however, is not so easily established. Andrew Barlow (2003) states that while this formation of identity was produced in the context of domination and discrimination, the “values and institutions that give an ethnic group its coherence, however, are constructed by the subjugated group, not by those who oppress them” (p. 20). This, in some ways, has granted the freedom for Asian Americans to choose their own identity, but has also led to an internal and ongoing struggle of having to define exactly what an Asian American is, how it should be defined and whether or not it should be challenged.

What quickly arose was what could be called a collective, or pan-Asian consciousness. Yen Le Espiritu (1992) explains that during the late 1960s, in order to build stronger political unity, many Asian Americans, most of which were college students, embraced their common fate on the basis of similar experiences in the United States. In the coming decades, these groups would use their common experiences as Asians in America as a foundation for achieving similar political, economic and social goals (Omatsu, 1994). This would include things such as better access to education, civil rights protection, and fair political visibility. “In other words, the pan-Asian concept, originally imposed by non-Asians, became a symbol of pride and a rallying point for mass mobilization by later generations” (Espiritu, 1992, p. 20). This does not however, address the problem of having to construct and develop an internal sense of identity within this large pan-Asian consciousness. Espiritu makes note of this by saying that the task of bridging the class, ethnic and generational divides between Asians in the United States belongs solely to Asian Americans. She says that “outsiders may have drawn the pan-Asian boundary, but it will be Asian Americans who design the content within the boundary” (Espiritu, 1992, p. 176).

For Filipino-Americans, this can be seen as an additionally difficult task. While Asian Americans can be seen as a minority within the United States, Filipino-Americans can be seen as a minority within this minority (San Juan, 1998). Being seen as doubly marginalized, Filipino-Americans are oppressed by both the dominant majority group, and further marginalized within the Asian American minority in which they were assigned (Chang & Kwan, 2009; Wu 2002; Okamura, 1998). It is due to this marginalization that Filipino immigrants to the United States are often overshadowed by the majority Asian groups such as the Chinese or Japanese. If one were to look more historically, one could even argue that Filipinos have fared more similarly to Blacks, Latinos, and Native-Americans due to their treatment in society (Wagner, 1973; Ocampo 2014). Early hegemonic efforts such as the Philippine American Collegiate Endeavor (PACE) were made to distance Filipino-Americans from this grouping, but they were overshadowed the larger pan-Asian movement (Madea, 2012). This notion of being overshadowed additionally marginalizes Filipino-Americans because it only further disassociates them from the pan-Asian community. Rick Bonus elaborates on this notion in an interview...

This is as much a question of identity as it is a question of power. Many Filipino-Americans here in Seattle, for example, resist being identified as Asian Americans not only because they realize how "different" we are from Asians in many ways, but also they know that Filipino-Americans turn into a minority when included within the larger group of Asian Americans. In other words, they don't see the benefits of being part of this larger group. As a matter of fact, they see themselves losing out because their histories are marginalized and their power is minimized (Tiongson, 2006, p. 166).

However, this internal struggle for creating a distinctive Filipino-American identity is nothing new and not necessarily unique to Filipinos (Espiritu, 1996). This phenomenon has been ongoing for almost a century. Their status as a marginalized minority and their institutionally blurred experiences within the United States have had a greatly inhibiting effect on their development, both as individuals and as a whole.

History of Filipino-American Identity Development

While the physical Filipino presence in the United States dates back further, the development of Asian American and Filipino-American identity usually begins around the beginning of the 20th century. Unlike many others within the pan-Asian grouping, Filipinos have the distinction of being the only groups of immigrants to come from an American colony. The three primary Asian immigrant groups who provided necessary inexpensive labor for a majority of the American west coast were the Chinese, Japanese and Filipinos (Okamura, 1998; Takaki, 1989). These immigrants, originally classified as “Orientals” were welcomed as hard workers, but soon faced discrimination, prejudice and abuse due to the economic threats of the 1930s (Frazier, 2006). Filipinos specifically, were an attractive choice for inexpensive labor because of their unusual status as American nationals. Without the need for having to go through United States immigration policies, they were a much cheaper and easier resource to bring into the country (Melendy, 1997; Chin 2001). Seeing as the Philippines was an American colony from 1898 to 1946, some Filipinos were also pre-Americanized and already had a firm grasp on the English language. For example, during the 1920s, about 45,000 Filipinos migrated to the United States. Most of these immigrants would find employment in the western continental states of California,

Washington and Alaska, usually for agricultural work. Because most of their work was seasonal, they would move from one agricultural community to another to keep up with their low wage jobs (Tyner, 2007). However, despite playing a vital role in west coast development, these individuals have been seen as the unsung workers of American labor, essentially being absent from American history (Kim, 1989).

From a Filipino standpoint, individuals would immigrate to the United States, to follow 'the American Dream', escape economic turmoil in their home country and pursue higher education. While most Filipinos were seen as sojourners, traveling to wherever work was available, some would settle down and eventually create small communities in their respective areas (Melendy, 1977). Being a region known for its job opportunities and higher educational institutions, Washington State was seen as an attractive location for Filipino immigrants (Fujita-Rony, 2003). In the Puget Sound for example, Dorothy Cordova (2009) mentions that while there was an increase in discrimination due to the arrival of new faces, "early Filipino communities flourished because they were connected through kinship, Philippine regional ties, churches, organizations, and lodges. An active social life included people from different cities, towns, and rural areas" (p. 19). These Filipino immigrants would also go on to form some of the first Asian American labor unions and community organizations to combat abuse, discrimination and low wages (Cordova, 1983; Melendy, 1997). Doug Chin (2001) also mentions that for Filipino immigrants, "their destination in Seattle was the International District, where they could find some solace, familiar faces, and diversion from the laborious journey ahead" (p. 48). These groups of early Filipino immigrants, later to become what is known as the "manong" generation would soon set the stage for the greater formation of Filipino-American identity.

The story of the “manongs” has been most exemplified in Carlos Bulosan's (1973) novel *America Is in the Heart*, which is usually seen as the portrait of the first generation of Filipinos in America (Lott, 2006; Takaki, 1989; Campomanes, 1992; San Juan 2009). This novel describes Bulosan’s experiences with discrimination as he traveled around the American West after migrating from the Philippines around the 1930s. He openly speaks of his search for employment, the discrimination he faced and the ways in which he confronted these difficulties. However, despite being one of the earliest depictions of the Filipino-American experience, Dorothy Fujita-Rony (2007) argues that like “many fictionalized narratives that come to represent the whole of an experience, Bulosan’s novel is powerful and dramatic, and it represents a deeply problematic record for historical use because of its particular blend of fact and elaboration (p. 7).” This problematic record does not necessarily come from Bulosan’s experiences, but rather the constant interpretations and reinterpretations of the narrative. Having essentially one person represent an entire generation of Filipino-Americans can obscure the actual experience completely and raise further questions of historical accuracy. (San Juan, 1998; Campomanes, 1992) This has led to later generations of Filipino-Americans to have an ambiguous definition of their American roots.

However, as Peter Jamero (2006) writes, scholars have “completely ignored the experiences and contributions of a significant group of Filipino-Americans -- the Bridge Generation, the sons and daughters of the pioneer manongs” (p. 2). This group of Filipinos are arguably the most important generation when it comes to discovering, if anything, an existing Filipino-American identity because it describes the first generation of Filipinos who were fully born and raised in the United States. Juanita Lott (2006) explains that this

second generation of Filipino-Americans “spanned a birth period lasting from the Depression through the post-World War II affluence. They grew up loved by their extended families as they navigated growing up as racial minorities in the United States in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s” (p. 58). These individuals and their subsequent children were also the first generation to partake in the first Asian American panethnic movement. This movement would not only alter the state of Filipino-Americans, but it would also have lasting effects in their homeland as well. This can be heavily attributed to the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act, which allowed Asians to more easily immigrate to the United States. Jonathon Okamura (1998) notes that in the first 5 years that this immigration law was passed, “more than 7,300 Filipino doctors, surgeons, engineers and scientists were granted entry as professionally skilled workers needed in the United States along with teachers and accountants, resulting in a “brain drain” from the Philippines. However after changes in the law in 1976, the great majority of Filipino immigrants have been admitted under the family reunification provisions” (p. 42). Through the combination of American-born Filipinos and the constant newly arrived immigrants (many of whom arrived for family reunification), the Filipino-American community quickly built a strong connection with the Philippine homeland, despite some not actually having been there themselves.

This new generation of Filipino-Americans, labeled under the ‘Asian American’ title, would come to embrace their Asian panethnic identity, but not without developing efforts to maintain their uniqueness as Filipino-American (Jamero, 2006; Bonus, 1997). Examples of such efforts would be the creation of advocacy groups, community newspapers, interest organizations, youth groups and PCNs (Pilipino Cultural Nights). PCNs are notable because

they are usually some of the first events in which Filipino youths can learn about and embrace their heritage (Gonzalves, 2010) Espiritu (2003) explains that “every year, thousands of college-age students stage elaborate and sophisticated Pilipino Cultural Nights or PCNs to packed auditoriums of attentive and appreciative young Filipinos. By far, the central organizing activity for many Filipino-American student groups, the PCNs allow young Filipinos to build community, to educate themselves about Philippine/Filipino-American history, and to represent their "culture" through indigenized Philippine dances, music and costumes” (p. 196-197). Theodore S. Gonzalves (2006) expands more on the importance of PCNs in an interview...

There’s more going on than simply entertainment. It is an engagement of history. It is an engagement of Filipino culture. But like I said, it’s a specific and unique form through which Filipino-Americans are attempting to do it either because of the generational silence of their parents, or because of dominant culture’s distortion or omission. It’s not necessarily one or the other. [...] the reason PCNs are so long is because so many of us insist on the comprehensive nature of the presentation. It must include a number of dance suites. It must include these elements, and if it doesn’t, it’s not an accurate portrayal of history (p. 118).

Despite being doubly marginalized within the United States, and despite developing pan-Asian disassociations, many Filipino-Americans continue to embrace their Asian panethnicity. Various factors have contributed to this larger shift. One major factor is the lack of institutional support from schools and organizations. Espiritu (2003) explains that school curriculums largely marginalize the experiences of Filipino-Americans. “No matter

where young Filipinos attend school, whether in underresourced or affluent school districts, they seldom learn about Filipino-Americans or Philippine history in their classes (Espiritu, 2003, p. 193). Since there is no strong representations of Filipinos or Filipino-Americans in history, new generations of Filipinos have eventually become inclined to associate themselves with those whom they are most socially assigned to: the panethnic Asian American. Even during times where Filipinos are mentioned in U.S. history, it is usually in the framework of Western dominance and Filipino subjugation, giving a sense of inferiority to many Filipino youth (Andresen, 2013). It is usually not until their college or early adult years that newer generations of Filipino-Americans are able to fully realize and embrace their Filipino heritage (Kibria, 2004). Another factor would be the lack of obvious geographic location in American society. Filipinos in the United States have been seen as an “invisible ethnic community” due to their lack of outward presence when compared to other Asian ethnic groups. This lack of portrayal further exemplifies their marginalization. It is explained by James Tyner (2007) that the “invisibility” of Filipinos refers to the fact that in addition to being missing from U.S. history and contemporary scholarship, they have also been “excluded from numerous positions of power, and misrepresented (or not represented) in mainstream media, comprising a “silent minority” frequently lumped together with Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indian, Vietnamese, and Cambodian peoples under the rubric Asian or Asian American” (Tyner, 2007, p. 263-264). Tyner suggests that it is because of the ‘sojourner’ nature of earlier generations and their initial fluency in English that they were less prone to cluster in specific areas such as Chinatowns or Little Tokyo’s. This has resulted in a less visible, although not necessarily smaller population of Filipino-

Americans. Even in areas where they are high in population, Filipinos have generally become dispersed among themselves. Dorothy Cordova (2009) mentions that...

“Once close-knit and geographically contained, Filipino-Americans are now spread throughout Puget Sound. Most do not know others outside of their immediate circles. Filipinos once joined lodges or organizations based on regional kinship or employment (usually blue collar), which provided much needed support during more trying times. Now many are only part of their clan or with groups affiliated with a parish or spiritual mission or special interest organizations -- Filipino Chamber of Commerce, Filipino-American Political Action Group of Washington (FAPAGOW), or Filipino-American Student Association (FASA) affiliations.” (p. 99)

It is through these group and student organizations that Filipino-Americans are able to retain their sense of heritage as well as help them become better aware of their roles and identity (Bergano & Bergano-Kinney, 1997). As mentioned, most Filipino-Americans have continued to embrace their pan-Asian roots, joining other Asian Americans as part of a larger social group, although not without abandoning their Filipino identity (Wong, 2013; Johnston, 2013). This identity in itself has become increasingly difficult to define as the Filipino-American identity now consists of multiple ethnic, racial and cultural definitions which have been slowly assimilated from American culture. Over time, Filipino-Americans have since forged an identity that is not necessarily ‘pan-Asian’, but broadly ‘pan-ethnic’, blending together influences from Asian, Pacific Islander, Latino, and African American cultures. These Filipino-Americans now represent themselves more individually by having

multiple identifications, while at the same time, strongly advocating their Filipino background (Lott, 2006).

This is a phenomenon that has been ongoing. However, with the coming of newer generations of Filipino-Americans, these notions may have the possibility to change. With the continuing effects of globalization, Asian Americans and subsequently, Filipino-Americans have gained a wider access to other forms of media and representation from which they can better embrace and develop their identity (Tyner, 2009). Having already been marginalized by society, and already having adopted multiple identifications, Filipino-Americans now have the opportunity to look further outward and build an identity that is both distinctive and increasingly transnational.

Building Outward Identity

In the realm of scholarly literature, a large amount of dialogue has been dedicated to highlighting the personal accounts of Filipino-Americans and how they have developed their identity over time. This is primarily due to the constantly changing definition of identity and the ways in which it has become adopted. Many of these personal accounts include the memoirs of immigrated Filipino workers, the newly assigned pan-Asians of the 1960s, and Filipinos who were born and raised in the United States. For example in her book, *Filipino-American Lives*, Yen Le Espiritu (1995) recounts the memoirs of 14 Filipino-Americans and their early experiences in the United States. Additionally, Peter Jamero (2011) chronicles the stories of the aforementioned “bridge generation”, and how they built community and solidarity as marginalized citizens. Also notable is the work of Emily Noelle Ignacio (2005) and her recorded accounts of Filipinos, global community formation

and the Internet. While there has been an ongoing amount of research done on the historical implications of Filipino-American identity, very little has been explored concerning the formation of the most recent generation and the effects that globalization has had upon them. (Lott, 2006) This generation, consisting of both heavily Americanized Filipinos and newly arrived immigrants, has been raised in an increasingly digitized and heavily interconnected world that has what I argue, the widest access to opportunities for which they can discover and develop and their own identities. Given that the representation of Filipino-American identity is becoming more and more individualistic, these accounts are becoming increasingly essential to tracking how this identity is being developed. Here, I offer three diverse accounts of how Filipino-Americans are developing themselves in the currently globalizing and digitized world.

Building Identity at Home

With the increased access to global media, many American-born Filipinos are beginning to further question what type of identity they wish to adopt. This has created what has been described as a type of 'cultural limbo' for many Filipino-American youth. According to Lakandiwa M. de Leon (2004), these youths "do not feel connected to the culture of their ancestral homeland, and at the same time they find themselves excluded from the culture and history of their host society... Although parents may push their children to adopt and embrace the American system, culture and norms, Filipino American youth find themselves caught between their parents' immigrant dreams and the American realities of race and racism"(p. 193-194). Such is the example of Mae Angela. Mae is an American-born Filipino

currently pursuing a minor in Asian Studies. Because of her interest in Asian and Filipino history, she had a lot to say as a Filipino-American.

When asked whether or not Filipinos were Asian or Pacific Islander, she says that it is hard to really define Filipinos as one or the other because the Philippines is an island nation on the Pacific, but most history books and her peers define them as Asian. As such, Mae strongly advocates herself as distinctly Filipino-American. She says that “I grew up in a Filipino household due to my parents being immigrants from the Philippines, so my life at home always had a heavy influence of what my parents were accustomed to”. She said that she frequently thought about these things while growing up “because when my friends would talk about the privileges their parents allowed them to have, they were much different than mine. I always told them that my parents were old fashioned because my parents had different beliefs in what was necessary to life.”

As a young child, Mae Angela once believed that her standard of living was similar to her peers, but as she grew up she soon began to realize her differences in traditions and lifestyles. She continued, “I was raised Filipino, but I was encouraged to live an American lifestyle when in front of non-Filipinos so I could fit in.” Once she was given more opportunities to learn about her heritage, she began to slowly embrace them. Initially, she considered herself more part of the Asian community, being a part of her Asian American club in high school, but eventually took a leadership position as part of her Filipino American Student Association in college. Because of these influences growing up, Mae Angela adopted a distinct interest in Asian culture saying that “I love Korean and Japanese pop culture as well such as their music and animation. I grew up with many Asian friends

who were fans of these, so it was easy for me to become influenced by these so we could discuss what we liked and disliked. I also have a strong interest in Asian culture, so learning about other Asian “stuff” is a hobby to me.” Furthermore, her interest even led her to a one-month study abroad in China. She also expressed her high interest in Filipino culture, but on a more general level; not necessarily pop culture or media specific.

Mae Angela continued by describing some of her Asian-American role models: “My favorite Asian American role models would be Wong Fu Productions and JK Films; Asian American film groups with a heavy influence on YouTube. I like them because they are able to show that the Asian minority can become successful just by sharing their stories and being able to create videos that are relatable specifically towards Asian Americans.” Considering herself both as an Asian- and Filipino-American, she believes that having a distinct Filipino-American identity is important because of their growing population in the United States. “Since the U.S. is so diverse and Filipinos are one of the fastest growing Asian populations, especially in the workforce, it’s important for us to have some representation in the U.S.’s history”. When asked how Filipino-Americans should approach their identity in the future, she said “Identity shouldn’t be based purely on what race or ethnic group you belong to, so you shouldn’t act upon it. Instead, you should focus on teaching others about their culture so they can help their peers become more aware of your culture.”

The Filipino Channel: Kwento natin ito (“This is our story”)

Arguably one of the major contributing factors that have helped influence the formation of many overseas Filipinos has been the worldwide premium television network, The Filipino Channel, also known as TFC. This network, originally launched in 1994,

features programming specifically targeted toward Filipinos living outside their home country. Since a majority of their programming is spoken in Tagalog, one of the country's primary languages, their viewership consists largely of Filipinos who were born and raised in the Philippines. One example of such viewership is Evelyn, a Philippine-born woman currently living in the United States.

Immigrating to the United States in the early 1980s, this mother of two American-born children has been living in the Seattle area for a large portion of her life. Due to already having an established family connection in the area, she was encouraged to move to the United States due to the country's good economy. It was because to this strong family connection that she felt right at home when she came to the Seattle region. While she did not experience any direct racism or discrimination, most likely due to being in an area already highly populated by Filipinos, she did have trouble explaining and conveying herself with her, at the time, heavy accent. Her symbolic love for both the United States and the Philippines is primarily why she considers herself jointly Filipino and American, but she believes she maintains her Filipino background through her birth and the traditions that she carried over.

As a frequent viewer of The Filipino Channel, she says that she enjoys the network because of the "unique sense of humor that only Filipinos understand." She admits however, that what may be funny or amusing for Filipinos, may be offensive to others. As such, she usually keeps these jokes between other Filipinos and those who watch TFC. The programs that she watches consist mostly of variety shows, talk shows and at times, news reports to keep her updated with current events, developments and the 'Filipino lifestyle'.

Evelyn says that watching The Filipino Channel partially makes her feel at home, but because many of her family and friends live in the United States, she now considers America her home as well. She says that “...personally, I believe that a person is molded through his family, friends and people in which he is associated with, which makes me 50% American and 50% Filipino; because of my association with both.” In the future, she says that eventually there will be better ways of connecting with each other. As such, she expects that over time television channels such as The Filipino Channel will become less relevant because there will be other ways of communicating with each other, giving examples such as Skype and YouTube.

When Evelyn grows older, she would like to spend more of her time in the Philippines. When asked what advice she would give to Filipinos living and growing up in America, she said “We all come from one Creator, God. Follow his will and you will not get lost. Visit all nations but do not forget the Philippines because it is where your ancestors used to live.”

The Mediating Contra-flow

As globalization continues to blur the lines between nations and cultures, an important phenomenon to pay attention to is the global flow of media and how it influences national and cultural identity. Daya Kishan Thussu (2012) mentions that while small nations may keep their media influence within their national borders; larger nations such as the United States have a flow of media that is global both in its reach and appeal. While this may not do much for helping the identity Filipinos already living in the United States, already being heavily exposed to American media, what is more notable is the developing

contra-flow of media coming from countries such as Japan and Korea. Thussu says that nationality “scarcely matters in this market-oriented media ecology, as producers view the audience principally as consumers and not as citizens. This shift from a state-centric and national view of media to one defined by consumer interest and transnational markets has been a key factor in the expansion and acceleration of media flows...” (p. 352). These contra-flows give the opportunity for Filipino-Americans to formulate their identity without having to be limited to a singular perspective. One individual who is taking advantage of these opportunities is Gian, a college student born in the Philippines and currently studying in the United States.

Being raised in an upper-middle class income family in Metro Manila (the country’s capital region), Gian was educated in a private school his entire life in the Philippines. There, the television shows and movies he watched were primarily American and Japanese, either subtitled or redubbed in his native language. Since moving to the United States in 2008, he now considers himself Filipino-American because despite being raised with a Filipino heritage and culture, he has become accustomed to American life.

When asked whether or not Filipinos were Asian or Pacific Islander, he strongly answered that they were Asian. He said that “If the Philippines are considered Pacific Islanders then other nations that are an archipelago in the Pacific, Japan and Indonesia for example, are Pacific Islanders too”. He also cited the Philippines being a part of ASEAN (The Association of Southeast Asian Nations). Furthermore, Gian mentioned that Filipinos were part of a nation that is very westernized, but are very ‘Asian’ in their cultural background.

Having lived in the United States for 6 years, he says he keeps his Filipino roots through family orientation, “I grew up in an extended home and I love how there’s so many of us in the house and that’s what I think that keeps me Filipino. Family bonding is very important to me.” He says that one of the biggest influences that America has had on him was easier access to leisure, especially the diversity in cuisine.

Since his move from the Philippines, Gian has exposed himself to a wide range of global media through television and the Internet. Some examples include African and European music, although primarily, he has gravitated toward different types of Japanese, Korean, American and Filipino media. He says that all these types of media have their own distinct traits: he enjoys Japanese media for their animations, Korean media for their music, American media for their movies and TV series, and Filipino media for the ‘feeling of being from the motherland’. Gian also noted that he mostly enjoyed classic versions of Filipino media such as Original Pinoy Music (OPM) and movies/television from the 1970s-90s.

When asked the difference between being Filipino and Filipino-American, Gian answered “the only difference is the experience in general. Filipinos lack the experience of being in America and Filipino-Americans lack the experience of being in the Philippines. It’s just more of experience basically”. He defined a Filipino-American as someone who has a background in both the lifestyle and culture. As such, he tries to approach all persons equally, while acknowledging their roots and background. Gian made a final statement, saying that the “Philippines needs to get better in the next few decades so that all the immigrants all of the world should return to the mother country! Mabuhay!”

Overcoming Panethnicity

Through my experience writing this paper, I have found that despite an increase in Filipino-American studies, there is still much exploration needed to more completely encapsulate the experiences and self-representations of Filipino-Americans. I have found that this marginalized group continues to be excluded from discussions of identity, globalization and the media representation with most contemporary literature and new studies still being viewed as part of the larger pan-Asian consciousness. This has resulted in a rather narrow outlook of the topic and does not give much opportunity for innovative or original research. However, as individual self-representation continues to grow stronger and new avenues Filipino identity are currently being discovered, I would urge the scholarly community to pay attention to the ongoing phenomena that are affecting Filipino and Filipino-American youth today. While the question of identity is certainly not limited to a single racial or cultural group, it is quite possible that these phenomena may possibly serve as the foundation for discovering a new transnational identity in the coming years.

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