

## My Story: America is in the Heart? The Philippines is in the Heart?

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Where does the Filipino/Filipino-American heart lie?

I spent a little over three months, from August 28 to December 4, 2005, in New York and California, trying to seek answers to that basic question.

Actually, the official wording of my Fulbright research problematique was “Identity Construction and Nation Formation in Filipino-American Theater” and my aim was to explore notions of Filipino-hood and nation of Filipinos in the diaspora, particularly those in the USA; and eventually to compare these with perceptions of Filipinos in the Philippines about identity and nation as these are articulated also through theater and other cultural practices. The other part of my grant involved giving public lectures at UCLA (the University of California-Los Angeles) and CAL (UC-Berkeley)—sharing my own insights about Filipino Identity; Philippine History and Culture, particularly theater practice and theater history in the Philippines; the nature and context of women studies and postcolonial studies also in the Philippines.

To return to the question— Where does the Filipino/Filipino-American heart lie?

How do first, second, third generation Filipinos (many of whom are American citizens) look at their lives in America? How much or how little of the Philippines is still part of their daily lives in America? And how do Philippine cultural practices like theater, dance, musical performances, martial arts, games, and other socio-cultural “rituals” relate to/impact on their hybrid lives in America?

The terms “Filipinos in America” and “Filipino-Americans” may have different signifieds: the earliest immigrants (starting 1903) who came to America as agricultural workers and still bear the deep scars of overt racism; those new immigrants (*mga bagong salta*) who still feel lost; people who have accepted their being here and/or their becoming Americans and yet are still looking for roots; those looking at their homeland with the nostalgic lenses of their grandparents or parents; those homogenized by American white society who look at Asia through “white” orientalist eyes; those for whom “being Filipino” is just a matter of explaining their black hair, eyes and dark skin.

I attempted to seek deeper answers (i.e., beyond the more palpable representations of Filipino/Filipino-American experiences in America) to the questions posed earlier from the theater practitioners of Ma -Yi theater in Manhattan, New York; and the cultural leaders of Kayamanan ng Lahi, FilAm ARTS and other cultural workers in Los Angeles; Filipino/Filipino-American university students and faculty colleagues at UCLA; and other Filipinos/Filipino-Americans in New York and California whom I met in the course of watching plays; participating in church services, cultural events, community socials; going to sports events and private gatherings.

Where Filipinos and Filipino-Americans congregate as a community, how much or how little of the “homeland” is inscribed in their discourse? What vestiges of older Philippine cultural formations (i.e., pre-colonial and Spanish colonial periods, “peacetime”/pre-war, post-war, 60s-80s, post-Edsa) are still part of