

Finding an Authentic Filipina Identity in the United States

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Abstract

This paper chronicles and examines the first person narrative of a foreign-born Filipina American's attempt to find an authentic identity in the United States. This essay contributes to the literature on transnational Filipino families by looking more deeply into identity issues faced by one of the authors (Hess) as she reflects back on her migration as a Filipina teenager to the United States. Hess's narrative is discussed in terms of class and racial dynamics and the emotional impact of transnationalism for Filipina/o youth, with special emphasis on mother-daughter dynamics. Some fundamental adjustments that are featured from Hess's personal experience include psychological processes of self-differentiation; separation from key family members; accommodating social change from a collectivist to an individualist pattern; and managing cultural displacement and gender role expectations. By viewing the complexities of identity through one woman's eyes, a nuanced and more intimate view of identity issues during migration emerges and thereby this essay may enhance empathy and understanding for other women in similar circumstances.

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Immigrants of Philippine descent who come to the United States routinely adapt to new personal and cultural challenges while trying to preserve some part of their original sense of identity (Picart 2004; Strobel 1997). Basic existential questions can be expected as this migratory transition occurs: How can I be true to myself on a psychological, familial and social level? How do I balance and accommodate my place of origin and my new home and national identity? What part of me must I leave behind and what do I bring with me to sustain my integrity? How do I embrace new cultural phenomena as I sustain my development and create my future? How do I manage oppressive forces, both from my past and within my present world? Who am I now

as I distance from my childhood roots and evolve from being a stranger in a foreign land to being at home in a new world?

METHODOLOGY AND PERSPECTIVE

In this essay, selected themes and first-person statements from an oral presentation given by one of the authors (Donabelle Hess) will highlight some of the experiences and inside perspectives gained as she moved from the Philippines to the United States as a teenager with a single mom, leaving her estranged father and siblings behind. This single-subject study, while limited to one person's perspective, allows for a more detailed telling of a story. As such, Hess's narrative contributes to other

literature on qualitative research on the lives and emotions of Filipino youth and young adults (Espiritu 2003; Furman, Kelly and Nelson 2005; Lee 1991; Siegel 1999; Strobel 1997).

The story is told now, years later, from Hess's point of view as a Filipina woman who is in the midst of her doctoral education in the social sciences, with the interactive feedback from the second author (Tim Davidson), one of Hess's professors when she completed her Master's degree. One of the challenges of this joint authorship revolves around telling the story-Hess's story-within an academic context, with a white male co-author with the privileges of gender, race, and institutional influence while striving for the authenticity of the first-person narrative from a woman of color. To achieve this objective, the authors initially discussed the storyline, wrote separately, edited each other's contributions and achieved consensus on the meanings of the script, with the first author maintaining final right of approval. The narrative, itself, is the original reflection of the first author, with only minor editorial adjustments. We tried to be conscious of and to transcend traditional dynamics of power and privilege that are embedded in our relationship as co-authors based on our differing roles and backgrounds.

Another unique dimension of this study involves the first author telling her story (a snap shot, more personal account of things) and then later on, examining the story from the vantage point of a social scientist (more of a longitudinal, reflective account). The first-person narrative to follow was presented by Hess at the Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS) 11th Biennial National Conference in 2006.

Now, in this writing, the narrator has also become her own analyst, with the new hermeneutic caught up in both the original impressions of childhood and adolescence and subsequent culturally-influenced reflections as a formally-educated young adult. The first person observer is observed by herself (and co-author); such a methodology of case study adds to the layered understandings typical of phenomenological analysis, wherein the valued first-person expression is followed by further reflection and analytic keys that emerge from the lived experience (Schutz 1967:71-83).

There also is a compelling sub-theme in this essay regarding the first author's reality of ongoing identity-negotiation, even as the script for this essay has been written and revised. In the words of Furman, Kelly and Nelson, Hess illustrates someone who is "betwixt and between" her legacy and her destiny, and like many other people of diasporas, where "ethnic or linguistic mixing" is common, her personal identity is predicated on continuous, emergent "complex cultural blendings" (2005:43). An important part of the first-person narrative in this study, for example, involves the close relationship between Hess and her mother. Since telling her story in 2006, Hess now is not only the daughter to her mother but also is a mother herself, experiencing a unique close relationship with her own daughter. The "complex blendings" of cultural identities that will emerge as first, second and third generation females of Filipina heritage live their lives is certainly likely to give truth to the point that "We are engaged in a continual process of identity construction and character formation involving each of us alone and in relationship to others." (Furman et al. 2005:120).

ORIGINAL FIRST-PERSON NARRATIVE

The excerpts that follow are from Hess's oral presentation in 2006 at FANHS and provide the basis for the discussion that ensues. Even though all of the material of this narrative will not be distilled, the script is presented in its original, relatively-unmodified format because it represents, after thoughtful consideration, Hess's first public declaration of her attempt to define her identity as a Filipina woman in the United States.

(1) Early Challenges To My Cultural Identity:

America is known to many as the land of endless opportunities and the nation of multicultural diversity. Many, perhaps most, immigrants have moved to this country in search of the "American dream." My family is no different. My family immigrated to America from the Philippines in search of a better life. Nonetheless, the struggle for a better life in a country other than your own can be quite difficult.

Many immigrants who come to this land are faced with the challenges of conforming to the dominant culture while upholding their own. Efforts to assimilate to the dominant culture at the same time as maintaining one's traditional values and customs can be quite difficult. Many immigrants, who strive to integrate both cultures, do not feel they belong with either. Stereotypical assumptions, gender discrimination, cultural conflict, class differentiation, and socioeconomic battles are part of the struggle of

belonging. Faced by emotional, social, and psychological difficulties foreign-born Americans often struggle to find their sense of cultural identity.

I am no different – I am a foreign-born American who moved to this country in the beginning of my adolescent life. My struggle to conform to my host society and the maintenance of my traditional Filipino values is the core of my journey to the discovery of my sense of self.

(2) An Irreconcilable Family Conflict Between My Mother And Father:

My mother came from a destitute family and lived in the probinsiya. She grew up in a world of hardship, enduring the life of oppression, sexism, and classism. My father¹, who came from a prominent and affluent family, married my mother despite his family's wishes.

The disparate backgrounds of my mother and father made seeing eye-to-eye a struggle. My father's wealthier and arrogant upbringing cultivated a sense of superiority and gender discrimination. Because of the class differences, my mother suffered psychologically; her pain permeated my essence. I was torn between my father and mother; their struggles tainted my mind, their battles left me troubled about my own identity and unsure of my own sense of belonging.

(3) My Psychological Bond With My Mother, With Cultural Undertones:

As a child growing up in the Philippines, everyone told me that

¹ *Probinsiya*: part of country or a region that is distant from the capital or major cities, it is the "countryside."

I looked and acted like my mother. My mother and I were seen as one. My mother and I are very close—and our closeness began when I was born. I think that is the reason why my mother felt so close to me: we can share the same experiences, can cry the same tears, and feel the same heartaches.

I learned to be passive and submissive because my father and his family told me so. They ridiculed my mother's upbringing and instilled in me that I was less than them because I came from a poor and "less worthy" woman. I was acculturated into a family that belittled lower-class women, taught me to be ashamed of myself, and undermined my confidence. For many years, my mother and I not only put up with my father's chauvinistic behavior, abetted by my mother's in-laws, but we also bore the relentless criticisms of my father's family. My father's family thought less of me because they saw my mother in me.

Throughout my adolescent life, I struggled to find my sense of self. I did not know who I was. I did not know what I was going to be. Further, I did not know where my life was headed. Life as I knew it was simple—you finish school, get married, have children, serve your husband, and bestow your entire life for your family.

There were no choices. Life was set up accordingly, and as a young Filipina woman, everything I do is for my family, utang na

loob, as my mother says. I had no voice because I was taught not to speak. I had no intellect because I was taught not to reason. And I had no identity because I was taught that I was my mother.

(4) The Impact Of My Mother's Decision To Leave The Philippines:

Moving to a foreign country was no easy task, especially knowing that I had to leave the only family I had ever known – good or bad, they represented the culture that personified me, the heritage that portrayed me, and the country that is me.

(5) My Growing Sense Of Individualism:

Most Filipino parents work hard and sacrifice much for their children, just as my mother did for us. Consequently, the children love and respect their elders and are obliged to take care of them in their old age. The Filipino way of life encompasses a tradition that encourages collectivity. Family comes first and each member is obligated to the family.

The norms and values of the Filipino culture epitomize great respect for hierarchy and authority, elder orientation, and family allegiance. The emphasis on family loyalty is quite strong. As much an economic necessity as it is a cultural tradition, many Filipinos rely on the family for love, support, and refuge. Family is the

² *Utang na loob*: a Filipino axiom or proverb that means "owing gratitude" or "indebted."

source of one's personal identity; it is the focus of one's primary duty and obligation.

Nonetheless, growing up in a culturally diverse community after we came to the United States, I began to wonder if the emphasis on collectivism was right for me. I wanted to think for myself and express individuality. Furthermore, I wanted to give back to my kin on the basis of my personal gratitude toward my family, not because it is a culturally determined obligation to do so. The struggles between my traditional Filipino familial values and the dominant American culture began to burden me. I was torn between the lure of the American way of life and the maintenance of my own culture.

(6) Facing Post-immigration Gender Bias In My Family Of Origin:

My father and his family regarded my brothers highly because they would carry the legacy and the name of my father, whereas I would lose my last name when I got married. Furthermore, my brothers, although they were nice and treated me kindly, as males were encouraged to take on "many positive challenges from which [I] was discouraged" (Ponton 1997:107).

In addition, my father persuaded my brothers to participate in various math and science competitions at school. I, on the contrary, was encouraged to take sewing and cooking classes. Moreover, I was sent to a Catholic school for girls, because my father thought that I did not need

to be academically challenged. At the time, I did not understand the reasons for their actions. I was just a child longing to be loved and accepted.

My family did encourage my generation to go to school; however, many of the girls in the family were directed toward a profession related to the health care field. My mother has yearned for me to go to medical school, and as a good daughter I was willing to live her dreams. Nonetheless, after years of schooling I have found my true interest outside of medicine. My family's reluctance to accept my career choice in education only made matters worse. My family's distorted image of what is deemed to be a prestigious profession (medicine) perpetuates the "stereotypes about Asian 'whiz kids'", which I did not want to be labeled as (Bennett 2003:157). I did not and do not want to fall prey to the model minority myth, which presents a cultural conflict in schools, just because I did not live up to the stereotypes.

(7) Formal Education And My Experience Of Familial-cultural Separation:

My family discouraging me from pursuing a profession unrelated to the health care field motivated me to attain my dream as a teacher. Individuals cannot control how others will respond to their actions – and I definitely could not control my family. I maximized my power, believed in myself, and factored out my

family's reactions to my decision. It is with this spirit of self-empowerment that I was able to overcome it all. I cannot change my family's belief about what they regard as a prestigious profession; I can only accept their opinion as culturally biased and be content with my own decision.

My career choice in education led me to immerse myself in school. As I studied more and more, I realized that school was starting to change me. Education has broadened my views and provided me a better understanding of the world, of my family, and of myself. Influenced by the education system in Western society and tainted by my family's perceptions, I began to wonder if perhaps my choice to integrate both cultures might be perceived as being a "sell-out" to my family or even the Filipino community. Some of my Filipino friends and family, particularly my grandparents, perceive that my educational attainment has made me 'too Americanized'.

(8) The Effect Of Skin Tone And English Usage On My Close Relationships:

While trying to establish my cultural identity in the United States, my accent and the color of my skin became major issues. I was about thirteen years old when I moved to this country, young enough to gain fluency in English, but also old enough to have a pronounced Filipino accent. Many of my cousins, who were born and raised in America,

made fun of my accent, saying I sounded 'fobby' I began to see my family in America just as non-accepting of me as my family in the Philippines. Not only was I confronted with my accent in my family, I also had to face the same criticisms in school.

As a result, the "acquisition of the English language" with perfect fluency became my top priority (Bennett 2003:157). The negative judgments I received from my family and peers at school prompted me to learn the English language quickly. Instead of conformity to the dominant culture, I perceived my fluency and competency in the English language as empowering because it brought "with it an increased sense of self-determination" (Mohr 1999:205)

Like Henderson and Olasiji write, my "dark skin and [my] faulty English set... [me] apart from" my family and my school peers (1995:192). It became more and more important for me to value who I am and not worry about what others say or think about me. The criticisms about my color and accent only made me a stronger person and provided me with a sense of self-empowerment. I began to embrace my skin color and see my proficiency in the English language as a way to help me integrate being Filipino into being American.

When I first moved here, my cousins teased me because of my too Filipino characteristics. Now I am perceived as being too Americanized.

(9) Resisting Family And Cultural Expectations In My Interracial Marriage:

A major identity crisis arose within my family when, as a young woman, I became seriously involved with a non-Filipino man. My husband is German-American. Our interracial relationship created family problems that were almost too hard to bear. Many of my Filipino friends questioned my allegiance to the Filipino community and reminded me that I was a true Pinay. Most of my paternal family believes that I should have married within my race so that our bloodline would survive. My grandparents told me that it was up to me and the rest of my siblings that we keep the true Filipino Aquino bloodline.

The struggle to keep my foot in both communities has been emotionally, and at times, physically exhausting. Yet, I believe that my ethnic background should not dictate with whom I will be intimate, or be friends.

(10) Positively Endorsing My Bicultural Identity:

I made the choice to see my acceptance of the dominant culture, while upholding my own past, as a development of my biculturalism. I have re-negotiated my cultural identity to accommodate what I believe is important. I have

come to terms with what it means to be a foreign born Filipino-American. My quest for an authentic sense of cultural identity has finally come full term. I am at peace with my self-definition as being bi-cultural.

FILIPINA/O MIGRATION AND IDENTITY ISSUES

The indigenous people of the Philippines have endured many cultural and ethnic influences as a result of commerce or military expansion, notably from Spain, China, Japan, Malaysia and the United States. As a result, many Filipinos today find themselves negotiating their personal identity-culturally, racially, and as global citizens-whether they stay in the Philippines or migrate to another country (Bacho 1997; Espiritu 2003; Lott 2006; Melendy 1977; Okamura 1998; Parrenas 2005; Revilla 1997; Strobel 1999).

(1) *Class And Racial Dynamics*

Ong (1999) emphasizes that an immigrant's search for opportunities is, itself, a form of identity construction through global economics, with class and poverty playing a key role in whether a person benefits from (or pays the price for) capital development, adding that racial hierarchies determine much in whether or not economic capital will convert into social capital. Wealthier families, like Hess's paternal side, could have exercised more "flexibility" in "dispersing and localizing" its members so that the links and the loyalty to the motherland might have remained viable and supportive (Ong 1999:127) but in Hess and her mother's case divorce and economic struggle cast their relation to the Philippines more in terms of

³ *Fobby*: A derogatory term used by Asian-Americans to describe recent Asian immigrants; derived from the word "FOB," someone who is "Fresh Off the Boat."

⁴ *Pinay*: a colloquial and familiar term for Filipino women.

alienation and broken ties, making it more difficult to celebrate their transnational "hybridity" (Ong 1999:11).

Based on the wide distribution of Filipino migration with multiple waves of diasporas and a long colonial history, Strobel (1996) describes a panethnic consciousness among many post-1965 Filipino Americans like Hess. When adjusting to global dispersion in whatever locale they find themselves, Mendoza (2002) suggests that Filipino transnationals are more likely to experience some crisis of the self (1) due to a sense of personal defeat as a result of their migration, or (2) suffering more generally due to cultural malaise. Hess's narrative suggests that she and her mother were trying to be proactive in achieving an adaptive fit in the United States, balancing their newly minted American status with left-over traditional Filipino mores and perspectives. As a young teenager, Hess' panethnic consciousness does not seem very pronounced; images of how others perceive her cultural identity seem to be thrust upon her (1) in terms of Asian stereotypes from the public in general, and (2) periodically family members would undermine her cultural identity development by contending that she was either too American or not Filipino enough.

Every culture seems to have traditions of racial and ethnic discrimination and bias. In coming to the United States as a Filipina young woman, adjustments have to be made to new sets of prejudice. Basic realities for an adolescent, like the way she speaks, the color of her skin, or the decisions she makes on dating and marriage, can be experienced as assaults on her evolving sense of identity. Espiritu's (2003) interviews of Filipino Americans reflect similar experiences to

Hess's; immigrants describe how they were confronted with their own unique brand of domestic racism (i.e. similar to but different from the pronounced white racism toward Black and Latino Americans) and many lived their lives with two levels of awareness-through symbolic and literal ties to the Philippines and with new patterns of racial and ethnic self-construction in the United States. Hess's formal higher education on race relations and social justice has proven to be one way she has externalized the dominant narratives of racism in the United States and thereby given her a way to understand and to solve some of the personal pain that other Filipina women might simply internalize and endure.

(2) *Emotional Impact Of Transnationalism On Filipina/O Youth*

Wolf asserts that "socio-economic statistics that paint a 'model minority' picture of [comfortably assimilated] Filipino immigrants...do not capture or portray the painful and problematic processes that occur in the lives of many children of those immigrants." (1997:475) Hess's story shows how such distress can be internalized and how considerable effort is required to manage and overcome that pain. In a study of Filipino American immigrants, Alegado (1994) identifies a lack of self-respect and self-love among many young people from the Philippines, noting particularly the tendency for newly-arrived youth not to feel very emotionally or culturally connected to the community in their new place of residence and therefore to be adrift as they try to establish a sense of belonging. With teenage Filipina girls, Wolf's studies point to a profound

“emotional transnationalism” wherein the girls (1) are caught between “differing codes, cultures, ideologies and goals,” and (2) frequently experience “greater parental control over their movements, bodies and sexualities than their brothers.” (1997:459).

(3) Emphasis On Filipina Mother-daughter Dynamics As A Result Of Migration

As in Hess's experience, the impact of migration can be hard for Filipina mothers and daughters, in differing ways. Parrenas (2005) notes that a sizeable number of Filipina mothers struggle with their own identity issues as a result of (1) being emotionally and geographically separated from some, if not all, of their children; (2) their new status as primary income earners in the family; (3) cognitive dissonance based on ingrained, biased views of gender within Filipino culture regarding male dominance or perceived superiority; or (4) the emotional conundrum of having migrated to escape restrictive attitudes at home, and meanwhile longing to be back home. When mother and daughter are as emotionally close as Hess and her mother, the mother's struggle can easily be borrowed (even though not clearly understood) by the daughter.

Parrenas also emphasizes that “power clearly lies” with the migrant parent of transnational Filipino families (2001:374) and that “socialized gender norms in the family aggravate the emotional strains of mothers and children” (2001:362) when the mother leaves to work abroad. Still feeling the emotional sting of chauvinistic and elitist patterns in her family of origin, and with Hess' brothers left behind and prospering

in the Philippines with the patriarch, an empathic view indicates how complicated emotional adjustments to parenting must have been for Hess's mother. Parrenas' analysis of Filipina mothers —“one of the largest sources of female labor migrants in the world” (2001:361)—is that they often feel helpless, guilty and full of regret because their departure “ruptures the ideological foundation of the family” (2001:361) inasmuch as “in the Filipino family...the woman as nurturer is a central determinant of the emotional needs and expectations of its members” (2001:362). Based on these perspectives, Hess's mother can be understood in multiple roles: the liberated woman from oppressive circumstances living with uncertainty and hope in her new homeland; the absent, emotionally-complicated mother to Hess's brothers and the emotionally-close, powerful parent with Hess.

Furthermore, in Wolf's analysis of second generation Filipina daughters (like Hess), she finds that the family left behind in the Philippines tends to have a binary emotional impact on the daughter: the family of origin is typically “an extremely magnetic and positive basis of Filipino identity” and can also be the source of a “deep sense of stress and alienation.” (1997:458). This binary impact leaves the teenager with a true developmental crisis at a critical point of identity formation. It is a kind of double bind: the family with its traditional Filipino cultural trappings must be retained in some adaptive fashion to feel complete and, simultaneously, let go for everyday, practical purposes and, perhaps, emotional survival.

SELECTED THEMES REGARDING IDENTITY ADJUSTMENT

A young teenager who emigrates must find some personal sense of agency and internal locus of control if such a major life transition is to seem authentic. In Filipino culture, with its tight social structures and pervasive close interpersonal relationships (Bennett 2003), a girl is often conditioned to suppress her identity during childhood and through early adulthood and then is expected to marry a husband who will tend, once again, to be the dominant personality in her life. As a result, when Filipina girls arrive in the United States, the heavy overlay of family and cultural interdependency makes it hard for some Filipina girls to feel real and bona fide as individuals.

Hess's particular story illustrates four key levels of identity adjustment to her new world on intra-psychic and interpersonal levels: (1) differentiating her "self" from her mother; (2) negotiating the developmental task of separation and attachment from her family of origin; (3) finding a comfortable balance between an individualistic and collectivist worldview; and (4) contending with preconceived gender roles while managing cultural displacement.

(1) *On Self-differentiation*

Siegel explains that routinely "the mother functions as a distant mirror" for the daughter (1999:8). A parallel image of the mother can serve as a source of strength (or as an obstacle) depending on whether or not the mother is reflecting good psychological health and whether the daughter perceives herself as a mere extension of her mother or can find her own sense of self

(connected but not consumed by the mother). In Hess's case, the boundary was not always clear between being "like her mother" versus "being one with her mother." What some in Western cultures might consider an over-identification between mother and daughter fit relatively within the norm while the two were in the Philippines. In addition, Hess's need to self-differentiate from her mother (with whom she has maintained allegiance over the years) was further complicated by her childhood and early adolescent response of vicarious suffering and perceived similarity with her mother as someone of lower distinction and value. As is a common aspiration of immigrant parents, Hess's mother wants her also not simply to reflect her image but to actualize opportunities and be or have "more than" she has accomplished.

(2) *On Separation And Attachment*

Migration can add to the underlying anxiety of individuation as people disengage and distance from the security provided by their families and communities. In Hess's case, the identity issues created by physically leaving the Philippines were compounded as she tried to negotiate the internal realities of connecting and disconnecting with her mother who was also dealing with her own adjustments and stress. As Friday puts it, daughters need somehow to "emerge with a sense of ourselves as separate people -still loved by mother, but with a life of our own, that is not hers" (1977:39). Friday adds: A mother's "real fears and needs" are sometimes coupled with "symbiosis with her daughter. Too often, the mother never separated from her mother, and ... she substitutes a bond to her daughter" (Friday 1977:44).

This pattern of intergenerational mother-daughter attachment seems characteristic of many families from the Philippines. In a sense, Hess was doubly tasked—with separating from her motherland and her mother and attaching to a new land and culture while, as a young adult, re-defining her most immediate, important sustained family relationship with her mother.

(3) *On Individualism And Collectivism*

The impact of re-arranging values and priorities, with less of an emphasis on a collectivist world-view, takes more of a toll on the individual and family members than may seem obvious at first sight. For young Filipino immigrants, it may be one of the key variables in understanding a young person's newly developed view of the self and irresolvable conflicts within the family system. The draw of individualism promotes independence and self-expression; whereas, the pull of collectivism fosters interdependence, loyalty to norms and respect for hierarchical roles. As Revilla observes, knowledge of Filipino culture can "foster a sense of pride for young Filipinos" (1997:101) and as Hess demonstrates that knowledge needs somehow to be accommodated in the American setting.

(4) *On Cultural Displacement And Gender Role Expectations*

As Hess's story reveals, in the Philippines, gender determines many social roles and expectations, in the family and workplace. Metaphorical references "to men as *haligi ng tahanan*, 'the pillar of the home', and women as *ilaw ng tahanan*, 'the light of the home'" (Parrenas 2005:57) capture some of the

positive valence of specified roles in the family. In practice, however, many women are relegated to a servile status, with childbearing, childcare and homemaking characterizing not only their duties, but also their sense of personhood. One of the liberating aspects of migration to the United States for some Filipina women entails breaking free of their previous restrictions, and finding new options in education and career development—if there are financial means to pursue some of the available prospects. Even so, a bias in favor of men and limitations on the kind of opportunities a Filipina should consider may often linger as barriers that Filipina women still need to face in the United States. For Hess, subdued but persistent acts of defiance to her family and cultural norms have contributed to her re-definition of the self.

CONCLUSION

As Greene notes, identity formation is a continuous process of "continuity and distinctiveness, recognizable by self and others" (1998:98). D'Andrea and Daniels (1997; 2001) identify multiple ways in which people construct meaning and learn to identify themselves, including many of the developmental factors disclosed in Hess' narrative: economic class background, psychological maturity, ethnic/racial identity, chronological challenges, trauma and stressful situations, family background, location and language differences. As Hess's account reveals, after migration, family bequest, social conditions, and intentional choices about whom to be, all combine to forge a person's ongoing cultural identity.

Many people want to adapt to their new culture enough to feel at home

without wanting necessarily to be totally assimilated into that dominant culture. It is no easy task to evolve from someone you were, to someone you are becoming and not lose yourself in recollections of a past self or in anticipation of a future self for whom you have no clear frame of reference. Hess's case illustrates that the mother-daughter relationship and the daughter's connection to the motherland (even if symbolic and emotionally-charged) can be very significant in terms of identity formation. Hess's story also demonstrates that family of origin and place of origin can be woven together in the individual's coming to terms with identity; her complicated, unfulfilled relationships with the family her mother left behind heavily influence what it means for Hess to be a Filipina woman in the United States.

Hess's search for a Filipina/o identity also prompts the conclusion that moving to a new place does not mean a person has to repudiate her past. Ignacio argues that many Filipina women are already "decentered subjects" and that a "strict dichotomizing between 'U.S.' and 'Filipino' culture marginalizes" these women further, particularly if they are raised in the United States and do not "fit the established model of a 'real Filipina'" (2000:553). Likewise, when migrating from one country to the next, a person's original influences do not have to disappear or be suppressed in order for the individual to continue to grow culturally within her present environment. A migrant's origins and her cultural horizons do not need to be juxtaposed as if they are at odds with one another. In fact, as Hess has done, early cultural perceptions and life experiences can be cast within the new context, and the person's identity shaped in the process.

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