

Being Pilipina/Pilipina-American: A Familial *Being* Passed Down from My Lola and Nanay

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is personal. My intent to write the paper was to focus on a familial experience to understand Pilipina/Pilipina-American identity. Theoretically, I rely on Pinayism and Peminism to unite and understand our individual experiences about being Pilipinas. Methodologically, I utilize autoethnography and oral history to combine, my Lola's (grandma), Mom's (nanay), and my own experiences, positionalities, and voices together to speak to a familial and generational flow of Pilipina/Pilipina-American identity within the context of the United States. Throughout my findings, I analyze how Pilipinas and Pilipina-Americans are challenged through phenotype, generational language ability, financial independence and stability, and stereotypical perspectives to understand ourselves and our communities. Lastly, I encourage more Pilipina/Pilipina-American research to strengthen our Peminist Power and investigate the notions of hyphenated identities to further interrogate in-betweenness.

Keywords: Pilipina, Pilipina-American, Identity, Peminism, Pinayism, Pilipina-ness

At Lola's Dinner Table

In 2018, Catriona Gray won the title for Miss Universe. While visiting my Lolo and Lola's (Tagalog for grandpa and grandma) house, we gathered around the small dining room table with my Mom and godsister for dinner. As The Filipino Channel (TFC) played in the background, loud enough for Lolo and Lola to hear as we ate dinner, the news reporter spoke about how Gray represented the Philippines well and slandered Steve Harvey for his previous wrong announcement from the 2015's Miss Universe win with Pia Wurtzbach. At first, we laughed, speaking to Harvey's embarrassment and how he was lucky that another Pilipina won,

so that he could “make up for his mistake,” as Lola said. Then, we spoke about Gray’s outfits, her pearl earrings and Pilipinx sun ear cuff were something that my Mom and I hoped to purchase before my Lolo and Lola’s 60th wedding anniversary party in the beginning of 2019. In the midst of our conversation about Gray and how her presence in media would be beneficial for future Pilipinas, my Lola fiercely expressed, “you know, she’s not even born in Philippines, she not true Pilipino.” Immediately, my godsister and I made direct eye-contact, feeling the tension from our Lola’s statement. As I looked over to my Mom, I realized she was also drawn back from my Lola’s words. With a passive aggressive response, my godsister calmly responded, “well, she seems more Pilipino than me, and I wasn’t born in PI either.” In an awkward silence, we all continued to pass the food around the dinner table and filled our plates with food. When we began to eat, my Mom changed the conversation to the avoid the continued awkward silence.

After dinner, my Mom and I stayed a while longer to visit with my Lolo and Lola, as we often do. Hours later, as soon as we drove home, I looked at my Mom with a shocked face, and said, “Ma! Can you believe what Lola said at dinner?” My Mom and I laughed, as she uttered, “Right?!” We continued our conversation, and I asked, “what do you think Lola meant by Miss Universe not be ‘Pilipina’?” My Mom explained how my Lola and Lolo are very old school, and believe in order to be “Pilipinx,” we needed to practice “Pilipinx” traditions. While I understood what my Mom was telling me, I pushed the topic further, “but how can Lola say that when technically her blood isn’t Pilipino?” Genetically, my Lola comes from a lineage of colonized Pilipinx blood, where her mother was the daughter of a Spaniard who historically colonized the Philippine Islands (PI), and her father was a U.S. American soldier who was deployed to PI (yet another colonial bloodline). As my Mom and I continued to theorize about what my Lola meant, nearly four years later (in 2021), I still think about what my Lola could have meant. Even more so now, as I question what *being Pilipina-American* means to me. As I learn more about who I am as a Pilipina, and what Pilipinx culture may or may not be, I stumble off my words to find a definitive answer. Therefore, I explore what *being Pilipina* means in the contexts of the United States to understand my own intersectional identity through a familial inheritance of identity. First, I

familiarize myself with the historical colonization of the Philippines and Feminist theories that led to Pilipina Feminisms (also known as Pinayism or Peminism). Then, I justify my methodological approach as an autoethnographic oral history to speak to how my family characterizes Pilipina/Pilipina-American identities. Lastly, in my analysis I attempt to answer my own question—providing myself and my family with a definitive answer of what it means to be Pilipina/Pilipina-American in the United States today.

A Point of Understanding

Pinayism aims to look at the complexity of the intersections where race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, spirituality/religion, educational status, age, place of birth, Diasporic migration, citizenship, and love cross (Allyson Goce Tintiangco-Cubales).

In the establishment of feminist theories, practices, and scholarship, the original intent was to provide awareness, understanding, and platforms for women to fight against the marginalization of hegemonic, patriarchal, and colonial oppression (Littlejohn, & Foss, 2009). However, Carrillo Rowe (2010) critically, furthered feminist theories to critique the power dynamic within feminist work, reiterating that racial and ethnical realities created borders even amongst feminists. In looking to Ghabra and Calafell (2018) for hopeful allyship and mentorship, I also experienced and continue to experience the whiteness that perpetuates and marginalizes already existing oppression of women of color (Calvente, Calafell, & Chavez, 2020). Therefore, while I do not discredit feminist epistemologies, I specify my scope to utilize Pinayism, Pinay Power, Peminism, and Pinay-Mestiza consciousness, all of which takes bits and parts of feminism and women of color feminism to particularly validate Pilipina/Pilipina-American feminists, experiences, and identities. In doing so, I provide some historical and familial context to Pilipina/Pilipina-American identities to comprehend the importance of Pinayism. Then, define and elaborate the connection between my Lola's, Mom's, and my own experiences as Pilipina/Pilipina-American women to Pinayism.

Before the multi-layered history of colonization in the Philippines (PI), Torres (1987) disclosed that indigenous, “women [in PI] were regarded as equal to men and received protection from the laws of their society” (p. 312). Partnership, respectability, and collectivity were indigenous values in PI, which were tainted by Spanish colonization in the early 1500s (Paik, Choe, & Witenstein, 2016). In fact, as Tuck and Yang (2012) mentioned that, “*internal colonialism*, [refers to] the biopolitical and geopolitical management of people, land, flora and fauna with the ‘domestic’ borders of the imperial nation” (p. 4). More specifically, Aguila (2015) explained how, “there is barely any information about the pre-colonial [PI] past, [because] records do not go that far back...[since] Spanish colonizers burned all traces of the ‘pagan’ [specific pre-colonial traditions in PI] culture,” echoing the impact of Spanish colonization (p. 72). For nearly three hundred years, Spanish colonization haunted PI and its indigeneity, also labelling PI’s people as “Filipinos,” which in itself creates complexities. In fact, the difference between “Filipina” and “Pilipina” is a linguistical difference between colonized and native language use. The term “Filipina” recognizes the letter “F”, which Pilipinos do not. In Pilipino culture and language, our alphabet does not recognize the letter “F,” instead we use “ph” or “p” to stimulate the Anglo-English “F” phonetic sound (Nadal, 2004; de Jesús, 2005). Thus, the difference between “Filipino” and “Pilipino” reiterates the impact of colonization in PI amongst people, language, and identity.

Unsurprisingly, Spanish blood runs through my Lola’s veins and thus in mines, as well. The legend in Pilipina/Pilipina-American culture is that in order to recognize and trace familial connections paternally and maternally, the child carries both names—the maternal last name becomes the child’s middle name, and the paternal last name becomes the child’s last/surname (Posadas, 1999). Inevitably when my Lola married, she became Gloria Barnes Tolentino, but before marriage she was Gloria Cortez Barnes. Through names, then, Pilipina/Pilipina-Americans create their family trees and connections. My Lola’s mother was a Dominga, her mother before her was Amador, and her mother’s father was Phillipe. According to my Lola, Phillipe was the “original” Spaniard in her lineage that was asked to join the Spanish inquisition, because of his ability to speak Spanish and Tagalog (most common dialect in PI). After Phillipe

Being Pilipina/Pilipina-American

settled in PI, he brought his family, where his daughter extended the familial lineage that my Lola, Mom, and I belong to and sustain. Furthermore, through my Lola's maternal genetic line, we maintain colonial Pilipina/Pilipina-American blood through four generations of *insulares*—Spanish-born Pilipinas/os/xs in PI (Aguila, 2015). Significantly, after learning that my Lola carries a Spanish lineage in our family, I wonder if her Spanish colonization influences the matriarchal roles in our family. Throughout this paper, I also challenge the historical notion that Spanish colonization happened through a masculine influence. In fact, my familial history contradicts the dominant narratives of how U.S. Americans define Pilipina culture and identity that is said to uphold a patriarchal role rather than a matriarchal portrayal. Thus, reiterating the complexities of colonization and its impact on the Pilipina/Pilipina-American identity.

Additionally, however, “Barnes” interrogates the same colonial blood in our veins. In the late 1890s, toward the conclusion of the Spanish-American war, PI (along with Guåhan and Puerto Rico) were sold to the United States, in part to grant “peace” (Posada, 1999; Paik et al, 2016). Then, when the United States and Japan became enemies during World War II, in the mid-1940s, the Japanese invasion of PI further imperialized and colonized communities and people in PI. With the constant colonization of PI, the question of identity lingered in Pilipina/o/x-ness. Especially towards the early 1950s, when PI slowly broke away from their colonial forces. Furthermore, Aguila (2105) describes that because of the constant colonization in PI, Pilipina/Pilipina-Americans began to classify as a diaspora identity, arguing that home—while a physical land base island—was never given back to the indigenous communities and people of PI. As Halualani (2008) noted about diaspora identity:

Diaspora is a historical and social formation that must be thoroughly traced in its specific context, considering cultural politics, economic consequences, legalities, and global conditions...[Additionally, in terms of] identity and power structures of the cultural group of focus and should be relational in insight, which requires a dialogical analysis of the movements between space as well as their functions (p. 6).

By 1946, PI began to govern itself, facing its fourth wave of immigration to the United States (Posada, 1999; Paik, Choe, & Witenstein, 2016). With Asians and Pacific Islanders (API) immigration growing in the United States by the late 1960s, API communities became the second largest immigration group to the United States (Maramba, 2008). Although, as Pilipinxs immigrated to the United States, Ocampo (2013) argued that, “colonialism might affect assimilation outcomes” (p. 427) as a diaspora identity further impacted Pacific Islander communities (Halualani, 2008).

Therefore, as Pilipina/Pilipina-American immigrant women transitioned to the United States, and more first-/second-/future U.S.-born Pilipinas are naturalized, our identities are yet again changed due to immigration leading towards feelings of a diaspora identity. Consequently then, I argue that Pinayism and Peminism are conceptual frameworks to describe the constant imperialism, colonialism, and bi/multiculturalism forced upon Pilipina/Pilipina-American positionalities, experiences, and identities. de Jesús (2005) defines Pinayism and Peminism, as:

Peminism describes Filipina American consciousness, theory, and culture, with the *p* signifying *Pinay* or *Philipina*, terms used in referring to ourselves as American-born [P]ilipinas.

...despite the difference in terminology, each form describes [P]ilipina American struggles against racism, sexism, imperialism, and homophobia and struggles for decolonization, consciousness, and liberation. *Peminism* thereby signifies the assertion of specifically [P]ilipina American subjectivity. (p. 5, emphasis in original)

In alignment with these definitions, I allude to three stories: (1) my Lola’s story (a Spanish/American, PI born, Pilipina-immigrant), (2) my Mom’s story (a first-generation, U.S.-born, diasporic Pilipina-American), and (3) my story (a first-generation higher education academic, U.S.-born Pilipina-American) as Pinay-Mestiza consciousness, theories of the flesh, and in-betweenness of Pilipina/Pilipina-American identities (Anzaldúa, 2012). In essence, I use an auto/ethnographic oral tradition approach to provide a platform for my family to speak to who we are as Pilipina/Pilipina-American identities, voices, and stories, of Pinayism and Peminism. Importantly, I also make our stories personal, and in doing so remember that “it’s all political” (Arriola, 2014, p. 324).

Being Pilipina/Pilipina-American

[P]ilipino [and, I argue Pilipina/Pilipina-American] identity is not a hegemonic concept controlled by a few. Rather, it is shaped through a dialogical process where our understanding of our own history is continually reevaluated and exclusionary moves are contested
(Noelle Lesile Dela Cruz).

A Point of Coming Together

In operating from an autoethnographic approach, I navigate our familial Pilipina identity in alliance with my Mom's and Lola's oral histories. First, I divulge in the tradition of oral history in relationship to indigenous practices that speak to our Pilipina-ness. Then, I express the importance of combining my story in relationship with my Lola's and Mom's to highlight the generational identity of *being Pilipina/Pilipina-American*. Lastly, I share our individual familial roles that influence our familial definition of our Pilipina-ness. For the purposes of oral history, Sorenson (2012) explains how native and indigenous communities use storytelling (a form of oral tradition) to gather different generations of family members to pass down and inherit familial histories. The family histories traditionally given and passed from one generation to another echoes indigenous practices long before researchers identified qualitative methods. Arguably, oral history is an indigenous practice of tradition rather than of research. Nevertheless, Stewart and Brown (2017) express the emotional charge stemming from oral histories producing invaluable components for families and research. While the conflicting practice of comparing personal experience to historical or phenomenal research may be unsettling, my Lola provided an oral history unique to the Pilipina identity (De Nardi, 2015). For instance, throughout my familial history, oral traditions and practices are exhibited through the women, with the expectations that the women in our family carry our family history and traditions. Therefore, my Lola's and Mom's oral history reiterates a Pilipina tradition to continue and further instill our Pilipina/Pilipina-American identities, especially for our future family members.

Nevertheless, in combination with my Lola and Mom's oral histories, I also rely on autoethnography to incorporate a different layer of Pilipina identity. Wall (2006) explained that:

Many feminist writers now advocate for research that starts with one's own experience (Ellis, 2004). In contrast to the dominant, objective, competitive, logical male point of view, feminist researchers "emphasize the subjective, empathetic, process-oriented, and inclusive sides of social life" (p.3, as cited in Neuman, 1994, p.72).

As an autoethnographer, I intertwined my Lola's and Mom's stories of Pilipina-ness with my own to construct a definitive, personal, familial, and generational definition of *being Pilipina*. I emphasize Wall's (2006) sentiment that, "if a researcher's voice is omitted from a text, the writing is reduced to a mere summary and interpretation of works of others, with nothing new added" (p.3, as cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). My ability to critically and academically mix my Lola's and Mom's concepts of Pilipina/Pilipina-American identity with scholarly research creates a platform between indigenous and dominant disciplines to add something new. Additionally, Eguchi (2015) justifies that, "[a]utoethnography serves [as] a political and intellectual move to call out the taken-for-granted idea and to diversify voices in the academy" (p. 29). Furthermore, Anzaldúa (2012) and Calafell (2013) explain how women of color in academia demonstrate a duality that many women of color scholars experience due to their cultural and familial expectations, as well as their academic, higher education, and careers. Therefore, my journey into higher education encourages research that often relates to myself, what many academics refer to as "Me-Search," leading me to hold the responsibility to bring my two worlds together. Nevertheless, Eguchi and Collier (2018) argue, "it [autoethnography] is a research praxis that manifests the ways two different embodiments of critical consciousness might together call attention to, if not disrupt, the dominant structures and operations of the academy" (p. 51). While a novice scholar myself, I commit to engaging in methods that decolonize colonized customs. Oral history and autoethnography provide practices to allow my Lola's, my Mom's and my voice(s) to be heard, in a way that would otherwise be suppressed. For me, a Pilipina woman to earn the academic standing to share a platform

Being Pilipina/Pilipina-American

for past Pilipina women to speak about their own identities through their own words, is something I hope future Pilipinas do for themselves and their families.

Thus, the interweaving of my Lola's and Mom's oral histories through an autoethnographic vantage point provide three generational narratives of being Pilipina as a U.S. immigrant and U.S. born Pilipinas. Anzaldúa's (2012) theory of the flesh and Calafell's (2013) sentiments for women of color as archives provides validity and significance to mine. My Mom's and my Lola's stories as women of color exemplifies that our very beings are sufficient proof. As women of color, Anzaldúa (2012) explains the complexities of her identity because of her cultural expectations and perceived immigrant status, similar to how my Mom and Lola conceptualize their identities as a Pilipina immigrant and first-generation Pilipina-American. My Lola's mix of Spanish blood, Pilipina tradition, and U.S. immigration all contribute to her Pilipina-ness, in ways that only her words can explain. Inevitably, my Lola's identity influences my Mom's and my own Pilipina-ness to face the complexities of deconstructing U.S. American concepts of the oppressing definition of being a Pilipina. Our words, through autoethnography and oral histories, explain Pilipina-ness from Pilipinas. To decolonize the U.S. American interpretation of the Pilipina identity, we (Pilipinas) should and need to speak for ourselves to maintain and prosper in an authentic, personal, and familial understanding of Pilipina identity. As Boylorn (2008) explained, "autoethnography allows marginalized voice to speak for itself," and that is exactly what I hope to do (p. 414).

Finally, to understand the importance of our (Lola's, Mom's, and my) roles, I divulge in our family unspoken matriarchy. Originally, my Lolo and Lola are the first in their families to immigrate to the United States in 1970 (my Lolo) and 1971 (my Lola, uncles, and aunt). Since my Lolo and Lola were the first (in their families) to gain citizenship in the United States, their families looked to them as role models, doing something that so many of their family members dreamt of doing. As my Lolo and Lola began to live the "American Dream," and contribute to their families back in PI—as any respectable Pilipinxs would—they continue to hold an unspoken hierarchy in their families. In 1975, my Mom became the first U.S. born Pilipina in our family, solidifying our newly Pilipina-American identities.

According to countless family members, my Mom became the “favorite.” While my Mom speculates the favoritism from being the youngest in the family, her U.S. naturalization, inevitably, influences the unspoken familial hierarchy. Me, being a similar image to my Mom—in terms of attitude, appearance, and family-oriented traits—I inherited her positionality within the family. Therefore, the oral history that centers my Lola’s, Mom’s, and my stories place a special importance to our familial definition of Pilipina identity within our own context, while also facing the complexities of U.S. American conceptualizations of being Pilipina (Ocampo, 2014). Thus, through an autoethnographic oral history approach, I use my academic platform to elevate how Pilipina/Pilipina-Americans speak about ourselves and our own identities.

At Lola’s House Again

In reference to Biersdorfer’s (2018) steps to recording family history, I replicate the five steps to prepare an interview with my Lola and Mom. Importantly, while I reference an interview setting, the terms interview and oral history are used interchangeably. First, I create the questions that I asked my Lola and Mom—which I also print a physical copy to make notes on during our conversation—and send them to my Mom, so that her and my Lola can prepare and think about the questions and their responses. Additionally, I explain to my Mom that she may need to translate questions for my Lola, on the off chance that my Lola does not understand them in English. The interview questions are listed at the end of the article, in Appendix A. In terms of setting, my Mom and I meet my Lola at her house where she is comfortable. Lola spends much of her time in the living room watching TFC, playing solitaire at the dining table, and cooking in the kitchen. While my Lola maintains her daily activities and schedule, my Mom sat on the couch in the living room, and I am across from my Lola in the kitchen sitting on one of the bar stools eagerly watching her cook our Pilipinx dishes. Eventually, Lola is ready, and we all gather at the same dining table that started our conversation (about Miss Universe from 2018) about Pilipina identity and being born in PI. Even though I have not conducted an interview with my Lola before, this setting was not new for us, and having my Mom there is also familiar. Our familial

Being Pilipina/Pilipina-American

tradition is that stories and conversations are passed down through the women (Lola, Mom, and me), the only difference this time is that we record our conversation for the first time. When I think of the sounds that may interrupt our interview—the television with TFC going or the kitchen stove fan that attempts to eliminate the steam from her cooking—I worry that my Lola will be difficult to hear. I think about finding a microphone that attach to her clothing, so that I do not have to worry. Although, I question whether the microphone will be comfortable for her. My Lola says, “there’s no need.” While I planned to sit and converse with my Mom and Lola (like normal), Lola tells us that her show (on TFC) is on. Interestingly and importantly, as we sat and respond to the questions together, my Mom and Lola continue smaller conversations about the questions after Lola’s show is done and during commercials. In hopes to catch everything we talk about, I go back and forth to recording, concluding our conversation in fragments that mimic our mundane daily exchanges.

After we record, I spend months away from the recordings, but think about our conversation in the meantime. I thought about how my Lola’s earliest memories are from the Japanese invasion in PI or how she is living proof of what happens to colonized education systems and its effects on the mind. As I become busy with my academic life, I ask a transcriber to create the English transcriptions from our oral history. Nearly a year later, once the paper is accepted to a national conference, I meet a Pilipina, Tagalog-literate friend, Angela (gelay) Labador. gelay graciously transcribed my Lola’s and Mom’s oral history—a gift that I am eternally grateful for; and because of gelay’s part, my Lola’s stories live on. Significantly, the importance of having my Mom and Lola’s words directly represented in our native tongue reiterates the criticality of Pilipinas speaking for them/ourselves. Unfortunately, my Mom and I are not fluent in Tagalog. I understand bits and pieces of a conversation in Tagalog, but my Mom can read and speak in Tagalog. At a younger age, my Lola was able to read, write, and speak in Tagalog. Although with her old age, my Lola has lost her ability to write in Tagalog and smoothly translate from English to Tagalog. Therefore, the interlacing of my Mom and Lola’s Tagalog native tongue becomes more critical, as throughout our familial generations, we have lost our literacy. As Pilipina/Pilipina-Americans, our

lineage to read, write, understand, and speak Tagalog, in itself, represents the complexities of U.S. American influence on our identities. My Mom and Lola (as many other Pilipinas) deserve to be heard in their native language and original words. The beauty of my Mom and Lola speaking English and Tagalog is critical to embody throughout the interview, as their bilingualism represents one part of our familial Pilipina/Pilipina-American identities.

After this paper was accepted to the National Communication Association annual conference in 2021, I searched for meaningful journals to further the possibilities of this paper. In a google search, I stumbled upon the Pacific Asia Inquiry, where I feel welcome; where I feel my work in alliance with other Pacific Islanders. As my Lola lays in her hospital bed, I ask her if she remembers our conversation. I play a portion of our conversation, thinking how grateful I am to have a living piece of her with me always, and she is surprised when she hears her own voice. Her smile signals to me that she remembers, as she asks me, “so what did you do with that one?” With a small smirk across my face, I explain to her that I try to push the paper forward, toward publication. Nonverbally, I can see that she understands me, as she lifts her head in my direction and says, “so, I will be famous, yeah?” I giggle, and respond, “I’ll try and make you famous, but no promises, Lola.” My Lola replies, “okay, good,” as she lays back to close her eyes to rest. Inevitably, my Lola and Mom’s oral histories that intertwines with my autoethnographic approach means more to my Lola, Mom, and me than an essay. The interview represents a part of my Lola that she is willing to share, and my Mom’s input only strengthens our stories. The connections that I make explain the duality I serve as a scholar of color. Although, the combination of everything is a legacy that will outlive my Lola and mirrors her memory.

Times of *Being* Pilipina/Pilipina-American

From my Lola’s earliest memories, she remembers how her family was displaced during the Japanese invasion in PI, especially considering her father’s lineage.

Being Pilipina/Pilipina-American

Lola: Oh, yeah. It's a scary. My dad is scared because somebody might know that he's an American and they might report, so we moved. We leave that place, we moved where we live in Singalong.

Me: Singalong?

Lola: Until the American came.

Me: The Americans?

In conversation with my Lola, she explains the danger stemming from her father's Americanness, as if his ties to the United States were separate from the colonial history of PI. Growing up, I heard about "Americanos," but when my Lola speaks about Americanos, she never refers to them in a way that she is also one of them. For example, while in conversation she recognizes the danger of her father being Americano during Japanese invasion, but never refers to herself being in danger for being a child of an Americano (or being Americano herself). Therefore, again, my Lola exhibits this distance from herself and her U.S. American identity as a form of survival. At a young age, my Lola separates herself and did not consider herself to be "American," even with a father who was identified as American from his neighbors and Pilipino invaders. Additionally, my Lola thinks about her livelihood in terms of time in the United States and PI.

Lola: What's the next thing?

Me: The next one is how do you see yourself as a Pilipina? Or what makes you Pilipino or Pilipina? For you.

Lola: What makes me Pilipina?

Me: Mmm-hmm (affirmative).

Lola: Eh *'di 'yung ano, 'yung citizenship namin*. The citizenship. Pilipino citizenship.

Mom: Because she was born in Philippines, because that's what she was originally born in Philippines.

Lola: Yeah, but then I come here, of course, the status was different, I become U.S. citizen. but I stay more than 50 years here. In the Philippines, I stay only 35 years.

Me: Mmm-hmm (affirmative).

Mom: So, you've been longer here [in the U.S.].

Lola: Longer stay here [the U.S.].

Me: So, do you consider yourself more American or?

Lola: But still Pilipina, of course that's your native land.

Furthermore, my Lola relates Pilipina-ness to native land, in the same way that she criticizes Miss Universe 2018 (Gray) for not being "Pilipina." Similar to the conclusion that Halualani (2008) made about Tongans in the U.S. and their connection to Tonga, my Lola speaks to an indigenous connection of land that validates her Pilipina-ness. In a diasporic relationship, identity is connected to land where the individual may or may not be physically present on their native land (Halualani, 2008; Kinefuchi, 2010). Additionally, my Lola refers to citizenship as being Pilipina regardless of how much time she spent in and out of PI. In our conversation, I saw the confusion and hesitation my Lola exhibited when she said, "Longer I stay here." Although, without skipping a beat, she affirms that, "But still Pilipina, of course, that's your native land." Hess and Davidson (2010) explain the contradicts that Pilipinas/os/xs have with being, "torn between the lure of the American way of life and the maintenance of my own [Pilipina/o/x] culture" (p. 50). The same trend continues as I question my relationship to my Pilipina-ness without having ever visited or step foot on the islands of the Philippines.

Although, the constant in-betweenness continues to trouble Pilipinas even in im/migration. When my Lola immigrated to the United States in 1971, she was forced to identify as one of the following classifications: (1) white, (2) Black, or (3) Other on her immigration card. Physically, my Lola has a lighter phenotype, which arguably privileges her as white-passing. Therefore, to assert her Pilipina-ness she relies on language to passive aggressively reclaim her Pilipina identity.

Lola: That's how we call them. The color is *morena*.

Me: Oh, okay.

Lola: *Nung nandito sa amerika, nakakatawa. Sabi, sabi sa akin, sabi sa akin, anong kulay ko? Sabi ko, ivory.*

Me: You're called ivory?

Mom: So, she said in the US-

Lola: In the US, when I come here-

Being Pilipina/Pilipina-American

Mom: When she came here, they would ask her what is the color of her skin?

Lola: ... what is your color? I said ivory. *Ang ibig kong sabihin ano, 'yung complexion. 'Di ko malaman kung white, eh 'di ivory sinabi ko. Tawa sila nang tawa. Natawa.*

Mom: So, her description of her color is ivory. When she first came to the US.

Lola: I don't forget that.

Mom: So, they laughed at her.

Lola: They laugh at me and then they say no, you just natural color instead of ivory. Natural. Ivory (laughter). I said, they are the same, like ivory and natural is the same.

Mom: Probably because when they first came here, and I'm just trying to think back in time, when they first came, you know, the race and the color is usually white, Black or other. I don't think they had-

Me: On what, like the immigration cards?

Mom: Just in general. Like, you know your physical description of yourself, right?

Me: Like on our IDs, right? It's like, now it's just hair and eyes, right? I don't know if they have skin tone on it.

Mom: But before, even like your racial description like they would ask-

Me: White, black and other?

Mom: I don't think there was anything other, like now you can choose Pilipino or Asian, a deeper description of ourselves. Back then I don't think it was, I think it was white or black or other. I don't, I don't think there was a description. and that's why she thought ivory would be the answer. they were laughing at her, she didn't, she remembered that, and they told her you're natural.

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Lola: I am American citizen, but still, I am Pilipino.

Me: Did you ever like...did you ever run into somebody who didn't think you were Pilipino?

Lola: Ooh, well sometimes if I saw some Pilipino or I talked to them, and then, "Oh, you're a Pilipina?" "Yeah, I'm a Pilipina." I always introduce myself.

Mom: But based on features, I think they, they don't realize she's Pilipino, based on her features?

Me: Like what features?

Mom: Like, she's what, lighter skinned, different hair.

Lola: Yeah. Sometimes they think I'm a Chinese. "Are you a Chinese? No, I'm Pilipino."

Me: Who were the people that, do you remember who the people were that thought you were Chinese?

Lola: When somebody meet me, sometimes like *'yung mga amerikano*, you know, you like Chinese, maybe because of the complexion.

Whether my Lola realizes it or not, when people label her as "ivory," they also challenge her Pilipina-ness, which she subconsciously recognizes as she reasserts herself by speaking in her native tongue. Essentially, her white-passing phenotype translates as "ivory," because of her light skinned-ness, but she is not white. Ironically, the academy refers to "ivory" in a way to describe privilege (Matias, Walker, & del Hierro, 2019), and while my Lola did not notice the reference to ivory, again her Pilipina-ness is interrogated by the dominant conception of how Pilipinx are categorized in the United States. While Pilipinas/os/xs describe them/ourselves as "morena," my Lola's immigration to the United States did not allow her to stay true to her Pilipina-ness. Inevitably, she was forced to be "ivory," which I argue reiterates the ideals of assimilation and erasure to be more palatable to a white audience. However, in some incidents, my Lola boldly confronts individuals by saying, "No, I'm Pilipino!" or by strategically and explicitly introducing herself in Tagalog. Nonetheless, in several incidents, I see how my Lola is marginalized in ways that she may not recognize, being coerced to fit in a U.S. conceptualized Pilipinx identity. However, how might the same challenge be presented in future generations, especially, as the influx of Pilipinx-Americans (being either: second-gen or later U.S. born or continuing immigrants) continues to increase within the United States?

Being Pilipina/Pilipina-American

Throughout our conversation, a rising theme of language becomes an important identifier of Pilipina-ness. Beautifully, my Lola and Mom engage in conversations in Tagalog and while my Mom questions how much I understand, language reiterates connectivity to culture. In some cases, my Lola uses language in our family to instill her Pilipina-ness and transfer Pilipina-ness. However, I argue that the use of English and Tagalog interchangeably throughout our conversation establishes how Pilipina-American identities are forged within the United States for second-gen and later generations.

Me: What about language?

Lola: The language? Well, the language is, it's almost Pilipino-

Me: Cause a lot of the, a lot of my generation doesn't know Tagalog, right?

Lola: I talk to them in Pilipino-

Mom: Especially when she's mad.

Lola: Yeah. (laughter) That's how they learn the Pilipino, because I never answer them. They talk to me in English, I talk to them in Pilipino.

Me: You did that with all the grandkids? Or your kids?

Lola: The grandkids the same, like Katreena and...

Mom: I think it was, when you guys were younger, it was more easier for us to talk to you guys in Tagalog, but to instill it, it was very difficult.

Me: What do you mean instill it? Like, to –

Mom: So, we would talk to you guys in Tagalog, like little, like, we would give you guys certain words. But then you guys, as you got older, it was difficult to continue instilling those, you know, the language and the words because many of the times, because you guys were learning English and with school, it was very difficult to continue with the language.

While my Mom highlights the difficulties of transferring language throughout my generation (me, my siblings, and cousins), she also importantly notes the in-betweenness of being Pilipina-American. As generations of Pilipina-Americans become integrated within the United

States, we are faced with, “[t]he struggle to keep my foot in both communities [which is] emotionally, and at times, physically exhausting” (Hess, & Davidson, 2010, p. 52). My mom justifies the same exhaustion, when she says, “as you got older, it was difficult to continue instilling those...because you were learning English with school.” Essentially, the “American Dream” of providing a good education for Pilipina-Americans overshadows the importance of Pilipina-ness. While I understand the same struggle as being a Pilipina-American myself, another important factor of Pilipina-ness was economic stability in terms of finances. My Lola explains the importance of independence through financial means and made no excuse to ensure that her legacy understood and embodied the same understanding and action of financial stability.

Lola: You know my mom? And Lolo don't want me to work, just want to stay home, do the household, and my mom said, "No, you have to go to work. It is better you are working also, because," well no, she cannot save for a long time if you depend on him, it's not good. So, if you have work and he had work, when you're retired you have your own, he has his own-

Mom: So, instead of depending on him.

Lola: You have to save.

Me: That was Lola Rufina [my Lola's mother; or great grandmother]?

Lola: Oh, yeah. She said you have to save money for your own, so that when you don't have money, at least you have money.

Mom: You don't always depend on the husband.

Lola: That's why I transfer it to your mom and tell your mom, you know, you have to work. You're smart, you can get the good work.

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Lola: I said to your mom, Paul [my biological father] is, yeah, Paul is getting high money, for the realty, but when there is no people buying house, then you don't have any more money. But if you work in the company that was stable, at least you have a small amount. That's why I am comparing to your mom, then it's up to your mom.

Being Pilipina/Pilipina-American

Mom: But she also said, look at her and Lolo. When she had retired, they were-

Me: They had a whole separate bank account-

Lola: Well yeah-

Mom: And not just, cause when they retired, it was Lola's medical benefits that they were using, and Lola had told me that don't depend on your husband because you have to worry about your retirement and your medical benefits. It's better if there's two of you than just one of you. And so, she said that at that time, she was going to help, that's how you and PJ were going to Lola's house, and they were babysitting-

Me: Oh, yeah.

Mom: Cause I don't know if you remember that.

Me: Yeah, cause I used to sing on their couch all the time.

Mom: So, so, Lolo and Lola were retired, and Lola said, you go look for a job, and I'll watch PJ and Pauline until you, you know, stabilize yourself. So, that's why I ended up going to work is because she advised me, don't depend on your husband, you have to get a job and work on your own-

Lola: You know-

Mom: ... 'cause I was still young then.

Lola: You know your Lola Betty? Didn't listen to my mom. Listen to her husband.

Mom: But see, that's a lot of the Barnes' advice, if you look at like, all of my cousins, and even Auntie Gigi, the Barnes' female are always like head of your household and very strong and independent. Like, if you see Auntie Maryann, Auntie Joanne, Auntie Irene even, you know, like you don't know much of Auntie Irene and Uncle Leo, but Auntie Irene and she has to work, too, to help support her family. Auntie Berna, she was big on that. Auntie Gigi and I, amongst the female in our family. But if you look at the Barnes' family, just in general with the Barnes' family, that is something that like, Lola said, from Lola Rufina, it carries on with the kids. That's like, the advice.

As my Lola and Mom so bluntly illustrate, being a Pilipina-American is being financially independent from their partner, to ensure that there is

always a “Plan B.” My Lola states, “You know your Lola Betty? Didn’t listen to my mom. Listen to her husband.” My Lola Betty was my biological father’s mother, my paternal grandmother, and while I loved her dearly, she fell into co-dependency heavily with her husband and then after his passing, with my Uncle John. The co-dependency left my Uncle John in years of financial stress, from my recollection. Even until this very day, his co-dependency transfers to his sister which generationally disrupts the financial stability and independence that my Lola refers to when she made the comment about my Lola Betty. Additionally, when we (My Mom, siblings, and I) fell victims to domestic violence, the tradition of being financially independent came to our rescue. Without hesitation, my Mom knew that our first step from separating from my biological father was to physically leave the situation and gain some type of economic support. Inevitably, financial stability reiterates Cruz’s (2015) point about “politics of survival” (p. 24). Essentially, having some type of economic support empowers people (specifically women), which I also claim to embody Pinayism. Lastly, I question if financial independence stems from the influence of Spanish colonization, especially since my Lola Rufina (of whom is a decent of Spaniard ancestry) is the one to ensure the passing of the tradition. Although, throughout my research, indigenous Pilipina traditions value women as equals to men, where monetary stability is instilled in parenthood rather than based on gender norms or roles (Torres, 1987).

Nevertheless, as Pilipina-American-ness is undeniably a growing trend of immigration (Maramba, 2008), there are two important factors to consider: a generational difference and a consistent reminder of the importance of family. First, in terms of generational difference, we see an in-betweenness and unsure-ness in Pilipina-Americans, because of lost history or familial knowledge and having to accommodate a biculturalism of Pilipina-ness and American-ness (Maramba, 2008; Hess, & Davidson, 2010; Jordan, 2016).

Me: Okay. Last question. What advice do you want to leave your grandchildren about being Pilipino?

Lola: What advice? What do I say, what advice... *ano magandang* advice? Pilipino... well, over here, you know, you cannot, you cannot

Being Pilipina/Pilipina-American

force, *'yung dito kasi, hindi mo mapipilit ang bata*, not in the Philippines, when our parents tell us do this, you follow right away, advice of the parents. but here, no. It's up for the kids to decide, *'di ba?* You cannot force them, it's up to them. yeah.

Mom: So, in Philippines, the true tradition is that the parents are followed.

Lola: Very strict there. Yeah, it is the decision of the parents, not the decision of the kids. But here, no, you cannot do that.

Mom: But I think that's also what the generation, because-

Lola: They have their own freedom to choose. For example, you want to take accountant, your parents don't like it, parents don't want you to be an accountant. You know, in the Philippines, the parents, the kids follow the parents' advice, but here no.

Mom: So, if you wanted to be a doctor or a lawyer, or whatever-

Lola: It's up to them.

The contrast that my Lola experienced as a child in PI is something that she does not expect from her children in the United States. While my Lola does hope that her children and grandchildren follow Pilipinx traditions, she also recognizes that she cannot force Pilipinx-ness onto following generations.

Me: What are some traits, so like, do you want us to speak Tagalog? Do you want us to always be dressed in, what are Pilipino traditions that you want us-?

Lola: Well, thing-

Mom: So, she expects Christmas and Thanksgiving on the family gatherings, that all the grandchildren be present.

Lola: Mmm-hmmm (affirmative). Yeah, that's the to *ano...*

Mom: And then-

Lola: Get together.

Mom: ... church, she would like her grandkids to go to church.

Lola: Yeah, but it's hard to follow because-

Mom: So, that's what she means mom, is what is it-

Lola: I want them to grow as a Catholic, but they don't like it, or maybe they want their own. So, it's up to them.

Me: Mmm-hmm (affirmative). Is there anything else?

Mom: But that's what her question is. What do you want for your grandkids as a Pilipino? Like, when you're raising your kids, what do you want for your grandkids?

Lola: Oh, for my grandkids? Well, I tell them about Pilipino, but it's up to them if they want to be Pilipino.

While my Mom was highly suggestive in explaining what traits my Lola would like to see carried out to my generation, her thought is not out of context. According to Ignacio (2000) the, “stereotype [of Pilipina-Americans, especially immigrant Pilipina-Americans] was constructed: that of the Maria Clara, of the proper, marriage-minded, [P]ilipino Catholic woman with ‘good morals’ [speaking to submissiveness and obedience]” (p. 558). Inevitably, Pilipina-Americans—regardless if we might be second-, third-, etc. generation—unfortunately, bear the constant burden of being fetishized and misconstrued of being only homemakers, good housewives, submissive, obedient, “viable” child carriers, and “American” hungry—referring to the stereotype that Pilipina woman explicitly look for white-cis-men to marry for U.S. citizenship or money.

On the other hand, family and community is something that truly connects Pilipinas/os/xs to Pilipina/o/x-ness (Posada, 1999; de Jesús, 2005; Maramba, 2008; Hess, & Davidson, 2010; Aguila, 2015). The family unit is an indigenous tradition that sustains, maintains, and continues through Pilipinas/os/xs and generations of Pilipina/o/x-Americans. In fact, my family is proof that community is everything in Pilipino/a/x culture. My Lolo immigrated to the United States with two individuals that I know as my other Lolos, my Mom's godparents even. My Lola's family and friends throughout Daly City provided her a 23-year-long career with the clothing company Levi's. Uniquely, my Lolo and Lola connect their community to one of my cousin's friends from his Pilipino club Tinkling performance at Santa Clara University.

Lola: Yeah, they follow the Pilipino customs, not mostly American customs.

Mom: And then the family gatherings. The importance of family gatherings.

Being Pilipina/Pilipina-American

Lola: Yeah.

Mom: Prioritizing family gatherings, and then how to raise the kids. So, like, not just you know, you as her granddaughter, her grandchildren, she's also concerned about the great-grandchildren and how they're raised. so, she would like those family traditions to go on.

Me: Okay.

Mom: So, like, when we get together on Thanksgiving and Christmas, the expectation amongst the, on the children, is that-

Me: They have their kids, and then they bring...

Mom: Yeah. So, those are like the family traditions that, as a Pilipino family, she wants to carry on.

Thus, while Pilipinas and Pilipina-Americans are challenged through phenotype, longevity in the United States in comparison to PI, generational language ability, financial independence and stability, and stereotypical perspectives, we are also the strength of ourselves and our communities. Of course, like every community (and family) there is competition (de Jesús, 2005), but regardless of the ins and outs, we are Pilipinas who embody Pilipina-ness despite our marginalities.

A Point of Concluding

To reemphasize, the purpose of this paper is personal, speaking to my family rather than a general audience of Pilipnas/os/xs. Secondly, as Maramba (2008) wrote, “[a]lthough literature addressing the lives of [P]ilipina American college students [and in general Pilipinas] is virtually non-existent, there exists literature about children of immigrant families and women of color that help support their experience and merit further investigation” (p. 344). In essence, Pilipina scholarship, researchers, and publications are limited, and generally Pilipino/a/x studies is already scarce, making the research process difficult. While I emphasize the need for Pilipinos/as/xs in higher education generally, I claim that we are minorities within the minority. Meaning, that while we are a minority population with the United States, I also feel we are fewer in comparison to other larger minority groups (such as African-American/Blacks,

Latina/o/x, and Asian/Asian-American), which hinders Pilipina/o/x scholarship as well.

At the beginning of this paper, my goal was to provide a familial definition of Pilipina/Pilipina-American. Therefore, to provide a rationale: *being* Pilipina/Pilipina-American is navigating who we are as a community and as individuals by ripping back the layers of colonization that damages everything that we are and try to be, regardless of how many categories of in-betweenness we fit and cannot fit into. While the fluidity of identity is nothing new to the Othered and marginalized body, there is a hope that through feminists, critical, and decolonial epistemologies, theories, and methods that we use our voices to speak for ourselves. While individuality is considerably a Eurocentric mindset, we cannot ignore the hyphenation in identities throughout several communities and people. When we hyphenate who we are, we unintentionally and intentionally recognize our biculturalism, intersectionalities, and dualities. In essence, to hyphenate our identities is to *be* something more. Thus, *being* Pilipina/Pilipina-American (and any other hyphenated identities) is *being* and living within the hyphenation, not separate, but as one *being*.

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In the process of publishing this paper, my Lola fell ill and lays on her death bed as I type these words. To say that completing this manuscript was hard is an understatement. As I got older, my Lola spent more time narrating her life to me and poured her memories into countless conversations with me. I was fortunate to learn so much about her. For three months, I cared for my Lola—lifting her, feeding her, changing her, bathing her, playing with her, making her laugh, and watching her smile—all things that she has done for me endlessly. I can never get those moments back, but I can continue to make my Lola proud and ensure her legacy lives beyond her. *Mahal kita, Lola.* Until we meet again.



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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Understanding/establishing the context of being Pilipina

- 1) What are some of your earliest memories you have of growing up in the Philippines (PI)?
- 2) Tell me about the friends you had growing up in PI.
 - a. What about your neighbors?
 - b. People you knew? What did you all do together?
- 3) How do you know someone is Pilipino?
 - a. What physical features do they have that make them Pilipino?
 - b. What name might they have?
 - c. Do they speak a certain way or a specific language?
 - d. Is there something that they do that may make it seem like they're Pilipino?
- 4) Do you think there is anything or anyone that can determine whether a person is Pilipino or not?

Understanding/establishing any/if there was a Change in Pilipina-ness

- 1) Tell me about PI and where you grew up.
 - a. What are some of the memories you have of the province you grew up in?
 - b. Will you tell me about the school or schools you attended?
 - c. What was the atmosphere like?
 - d. What was your house like?
- 2) Tell me about the immigration process into the U.S.
 - a. What was it like traveling with five children?
 - b. Was there anything that you needed to do in order to prepare for the trip?
 - c. What was it like once you landed in the U.S.?
 - d. When did you immigrate to the U.S.? Year? Month?
- 3) When you came to the U.S., did you see any similarities between how you lived in PI and how you lived in the U.S. (specifically Daly City, San Francisco)?
- 4) Did you feel you were surrounded by Pilipino culture and people being in Daly City?
- 5) What things were really different from PI to Daly City?

Understanding/establishing self-identification of being Pilipina

- 1) Do you think you're Pilipina?
 - a. How do you see yourself as a Pilipina?
 - b. What makes you Pilipina?
- 2) Was there ever a time in your life where you did not feel Pilipina?
 - a. Would you be willing to tell me what happened to make you feel not Pilipina?
- 3) Have you ever experienced a time when someone didn't recognize you as a Pilipina?
 - a. Would you be willing to tell me what happened?
 - b. Why didn't they think you were Pilipina?
 - c. How did you handle that situation?

Transitioning Pilipinx Identity to Future Generations:

1. Do you think your grandchildren practice Pilipino traditions? How does that make you feel?
 - a. What traditions? Clothes? Food? Language? Gatherings?
 - b. What are some things that you see your grandchildren do that represents Pilipino culture?
2. What are some traits that you would hope your grandchildren carry on?
 - a. How would you want them to carry those traditions?
3. If there is one thing you hope your grandchildren carry on about being Pilipino, what would it be?
 - a. What advice would you leave with your grandchildren about being Pilipino?