

# The Sapin Sapin Generation

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No one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting-points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind. . . . Yet just as human beings make their own history, they also make their own cultures and ethnic identities.

– Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 336

[A] sticky rice cake from the Philippines, [sapin sapin] originated in a northern province called Abra. The name came from the word sapin which means sheets or layer[, which] is also the main characteristic of this rice cake[:] its vibrant multi coloured layers (sic). It is made out of steamed glutinous rice flour served with latik and/or toasted coconut. Usually it is made with 3 to 4 layers which have a slight variation in taste and texture[.] [T]he purple layer usually consists of purple yam[;] the orange layer has a hint of aniseed; the white layer contains young coconut meat and [the] green [layer] is flavoured with pandan.

– “Sapin Sapin” in Ang Sarap, a website of Filipino dishes (Figure 1)<sup>1</sup>

## A Generation Steamed in Difference



Figure 1. Sapin Sapin Dessert

In their robust study of the second generation in America, Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut found that immigrant children who come to the United States before age 12 and United States-born children of immigrants constitute the fastest-growing segment of the country’s total population of children under 18 years of age (ch. 2).<sup>2</sup> Unlike their immigrant parents who maintain ties to their native land, immigrant offspring are expected to integrate into and adapt to a society (i.e. American society) different from that of their parents (i.e. Philippine society). The experiences of this generation show that the process of “growing up American” can range from smooth transition to traumatic confrontation, depending on personal characteristics and the social context (ch. 2).<sup>3</sup> According to Kevin Nadal’s handbook on Filipino American psychology, these

individuals are often taught the cultural values, language, and customs of their parents' home countries, while learning the values and norms of being American (7). Marco Garrido, furthermore, finds that the ethnic identity formation of second-generation Filipinos, is contingent upon the multiple factors of (1) nativity (whether or not they were born in the US); (2) naturalization; (3) gender; (4) class background; (5) English fluency; (6) the presence of racial discrimination; (7) exposure to adversarial subcultures (e.g. inner-city); and (8) the lack of economic opportunities (178). Although assimilation is the purported standard concept in many immigrant studies, uniform and straightforward adaptation is only one of many outcomes, because the process of adaptation is subject to too many contingencies and contexts (Portes and Rumbaut, ch. 3).<sup>4</sup> The assimilation of the children of immigrants is not fixed but occurs in varying degrees, is dependent on different contexts, and differs from that of their immigrant parents. Evaluating the heterogeneity and variability of this group brings understanding not only of the breadth and complexity of its identity formation but of the ramifications of immigration in general.

### **Filipinos on Guam**

As one of the largest ethnic communities on Guam, Filipinos have an extensive and complex history with the island.<sup>5</sup> Filipinos through the years have contributed in significant ways to the island's cultural, economic and social development through their involvement in the technical fields, construction trades, professions, and local community efforts. This involvement is displayed in various mediums, including *Bayanihan*, a local publication insert that occasionally accompanies issues of the *Pacific Daily News* and documents community activities; poetry about the struggles of Filipino youth in the local slam poetry movement; *Mga Dayo: Resident Aliens*, a locally-filmed movie about three Filipina immigrants on Guam submitted to the 2012 Cinemalaya Film Festival; productions from the plethora of regional and professional Filipino organizations; and academic research by Filipina scholars. The history of Filipinos on Guam is thus a valuable component of the history of Guam. Without it, the island's history is incomplete, lacking a large dimension of the richness and diversity that defines present-day Guam culture.<sup>6</sup>

There unfortunately has not been a comparable amount of scholarly publication considering this sizeable and influential population. Inquiring with the Micronesian Area Research Center, Guam Humanities Council, and local scholars, I have been unable to obtain any scholarly publications about Filipina experience on Guam or any local publications on the issue of Filipino/a identity on Guam.<sup>7</sup> A cursory reading of Guam's canonical historiography<sup>8</sup> reveals discussion on Filipinos being predominantly limited to alien workers, catechists, convicts, soldiers, and migrants. My research bears out Bruce Campbell's assertion in his 1987 work, "The Filipino Community of Guam (1945-1975)," that the Filipino community on Guam is an understudied area, lacking adequate resource materials to provide an accurate portrayal of historical events between Filipino and Guamanian communities (2).

### **Like Sapin Sapin**

Because the second generation of Filipinos on Guam has yet to be analyzed, I attempt to theorize a conceptual model of this generation's identity formation. My model is furthermore gendered, focusing specifically on Filipina identity formation, as second-generation females have

been found to have a more problematic psychological profile in their socialization into distinct gender roles, struggling to adhere to their parents' language and ambitions in a different context (Portes and Rumbaut, ch. 8). I find the metaphor of *sapin sapin* engagingly productive for the task.

The preparation of the *sapin sapin* dessert mirrors the identity formation of the *Sapin Sapin* generation. Characterized by its distinctive layers of color, the *sapin sapin* dessert, translated literally as "layers" in Filipino language, contains a layer of *ube*, among others. Like the *ube* poured out on the bottom of the pan, Filipino roots are the foundation upon which the *Sapin Sapin* generation bases its identity. Each layer of flavor is separately steamed one at a time so that it will remain intact, just as each layer of culture and contexts is developed and solidified as an integral part of the *Sapin Sapin* generation's identity. In the end, the solid, glutinous cake is flipped so that the *ube* layer lies on top and the layers lie beneath it. In the same way, though the *Sapin Sapin* generation may appear only Filipino, other layers exist beneath the surface and add additional 'flavors' to their identity. The process of 'flipping' and placing the *ube* layer at the top of the dessert is also metaphoric for the process of 'Filipino-izing': though once a pejorative racial slur, "flip" has been adopted as an empowering word of identity for Filipino Americans, described by Begoña Simal González in her essay on Filipino American narratives (40). By "flipping" their identity, the *Sapin Sapin* generation places value and importance on their Filipino cultural roots by placing this '*ube*' of who they are 'at the top' in their identity formation.

This theorizing of a *Sapin Sapin* identity differs from current models of identity formation by prominent postcolonial theorists Homi Bhabha and Albert Wendt. The narratives of the *Sapin Sapin* generation incorporate some of Bhabha's concept of hybridity in that in them one can see the negotiating of cultural powers across a range of transhistorical sites (9) and in that they produce a new type. I argue, however, that this concept alone is insufficient in describing identity formation.<sup>9</sup> First, as Albert Wendt argues in "Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body," the idea of hybridity "still smacks of the racist colonial" by devaluing difference in favor of acculturation. Second, as articulated by Peruvemba S. Jaya in his autoethnographical exploration of identity, this concept of hybridity, negotiation, and in-betweenness is in conflict with a model of diversity and culturalism, which in contrast celebrates difference – the peripheral losing its devaluation as peripheral and being celebrated alongside the dominant – as just an important part of the process of subjectivity, both equally participating in creating negotiated spaces and territories (759). While Bhabha's hybridity suggests that the separate identities coalesce and lose distinction and Wendt suggests that they "blend," the syncretic layering model argues that although combining to form a new type of creature, the constituent identities remain distinct and distinguishable.

This sense of the diverse and the different is apparent in the works of Filipinas on Guam, who are determined to maintain aspects of their Filipino culture while laboring to understand their position also as Guamanians and Americans. The personal narratives I examine in the next pages, although told in a variety of modes of expression, display intersections and commonalities that are productive when analyzed alongside one another: the songs and writing of Alpha Caser Espina, the dissertation preface of Vivian Loyola Dames, and the documentary film project of Bernadette Provido Schumann. The diversity of these narratives attests to the accomplishments of the *Sapin Sapin* generation in a wide range of fields, such as popular culture, academia, the arts, and community outreach.<sup>10</sup> Bringing the works of these second-generation Filipinas on Guam as artist, scholar-activist, and historical filmmaker to the fore for analysis attests to the

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involvement of the *Sapin Sapin* generation in multiple fields and disciplines, as opposed to the more typical portrayals of the Filipina as domestic worker, housewife, or entertainer. Moreover, the involvedness of these particular subjects supports my assertion that the *Sapin Sapin* generation is cognizant and appreciative of the different cultures that constitute their identity and, as a result, translate this increased competency into community involvement and political action in the island that has become home.

### **Home is a “Hope for Life”**



Figure 2. Alpha Caser Espina

Home, or more aptly the lack of it, is an important grounding notion in the studies of diaspora subjects. Many works depict the emotional distress associated with being “unhomed,” described by Bhabha as “not to be homeless, [but not] easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres” (9). To be unhomed, further explained by critical theorist Lois Tyson, is a feeling of being caught between cultures and arrested in a psychological limbo, not feeling at home because you are not at home in yourself: “your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee” (421).

Unhomedness is a concept that Alpha Caser Espina, a local public school teacher, singer-songwriter, producer, and author of children’s storybooks, has contemplated in her songs and stories (Figure 2).<sup>11</sup> A child of a transnational family, her parents moved from the Philippines to Guam in the 1960s for her father’s job opportunity, and she was left in the Philippines with her grandmother. She met her parents and four siblings born and raised on Guam for the first time at age ten and continued to go back and forth between Guam and the Philippines until eventually settling on Guam at the age of eleven.<sup>12</sup> Through adolescence and into adulthood, she experienced the difficulties of locating her home between Guam and the Philippines and reconciling the Filipino culture she was taught with the culture of Guam in which she grew up. She turned to music to assuage her struggles and produced and released six albums of original songs that express her thoughts on love, loss, family, friendship, and her Christian faith.

Espina’s song, “Hope for Life,” written for at-risk students in Guam Theatrical Productions, begins with a paradoxical perception of home that underlies a cultural identity crisis:

There is a place I call my home  
It is there where I learned to laugh and learned to cry  
I call it my own, I am never alone

Though tears may sometimes fall from my eyes (Espina, "Hope for Life" 1-4)

Home is described as "there," instead of here, and is longed for but also owned (1-3). Home being described as a place "where I learned to laugh and learned to cry," furthermore indicates the conflicting emotions of happiness and sadness that are evoked by its memory (2). Feelings of nostalgia are both expressed and repressed. There is also the assertion of ownership and agency as she proclaims, "I call it my own" (3). She does not wait for ownership to be given or granted; she claims it for herself. On the other hand, simultaneous feelings of displacement and assertions of belonging question the confidence of the home voice, as the songwriter admits that although she is "never alone," she still feels sadness (3-4). Bhabha describes this displacement as divided and disorienting, because the borders between home and world become confused and the private and public converge (9). Rocio G. Davis puts it another way, describing a confusion that results as inner and outer landscapes collide and memories crash at the problematic intersections of national and emotional affiliations and at the tense meeting of place and self (10). Espina's inner landscape of displacement conflicts with an outer landscape of ostensible belonging, wherein she is reunited with her parents and siblings. Her memory of home is convoluted as she labors to feel at home in a new place that is legally and societally expected to be her home. The result is a problematic articulation of her relationship with the place she is in both physically and metaphorically. Examined creatively and productively through song, this contradictory expression of home captures the tension of the unhomed *Sapin Sapin* generation.



Figure 3. Vivian Loyola Dames (center) hosting her weekly radio show, *Beyond the Fence*

In the preface of her dissertation, Vivian Loyola Dames also discusses feeling of unhomedness in the convoluted politics of identity entrenched in the issue of American citizenship and national identity for Guam's indigenous people (Figure 3).<sup>13</sup> She defines herself as "a native Filipina, naturalized U.S. citizen and life-long Guam resident. I am not Chamorro, as legally defined. Thus, Guam is my home but not my ancestral homeland" (Dames 1). She ponders the risks of discrimination and disenfranchisement because she is a non-Chamorro boldly discussing a politically-charged issue. She deftly confronts questions of authenticity and belonging:

What does it mean when I am told that I am not a 'real' Filipina or that I am not a real 'Guamanian' because I am not 'Chamorro'? Why not focus, as some have

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suggested, on ‘my people,’ meaning Filipinos in Guam instead? Why, I wonder, am I told that I cannot claim the people of Guam as ‘my people’? If I am an American why do I, like many in Guam, frequently make distinctions between Them (in the States) and Us (in Guam)? Are we not all Americans, regardless of where we reside? Why do I find it difficult to claim Americans as ‘my people’ even though I am a citizen of this nation? . . . Where is my voice in the cacophony of cultural and political voices seeking to be heard? (Dames 2)

Her questions clearly elucidate the impediments that second-generation Filipinas encounter when trying to position themselves within Guam society and display the various elements that must be considered and reconciled when contemplating this distinct identity. She describes the tensions related to being Filipina, and not Chamorro, in Guam and not having a sense of belonging fully to either cultural group. Identity politics in this unincorporated territory renders Dames an unhomed subject, not at home in her native identity as a Filipina raised in Guam and challenged to negotiate what it means to say one 'belongs' to a people – of the Philippines, Guam, or America.

Cognizant of the differences between the cultures of their parents and the society in which they live and being confronted with various choices of values and beliefs, members of the Filipino second generation often question their position as both Americans and Filipinos. Dames’s text portrays the second-generation Filipina’s position of ambiguity and inauthenticity, not feeling wholly or truly Filipina, Guamanian, or American, because none of these terms fully depict her situation. These cultural designations are problematic for both second and third generation Filipinas on Guam – born Filipina, but raised Guamanian; Guamanian, but part of the indigenous Chamorro people; American, but not entitled to the same rights as Americans on the mainland. It is within this ambiguous position that Filipinas on Guam attempt to come to an understanding of who they are. For Dames, articulating her position was productive not only for herself, but also for the dialogue she maintains with the Chamorro people who are embroiled in their own political status discussions.



Figure 4. Bernadette “Bernie” Provido Schumann

Encountering difficulty locating her place in history because of the ambiguous status of the *Sapin Sapin* generation, Bernadette Provido Schumann was inspired to produce *Under the American Sun*, a documentary film project that recounts the journey of Filipino immigrants from the Iloilo Province to Camp Roxas, a World War II military reconstruction effort in Agat, Guam (Figure 4).<sup>14</sup> According to a personal interview with Schumann, the project is an attempt to properly document Camp Roxas as a pivotal event in the history of Guam and to pay tribute to the work of Filipino immigrants in the aftermath of World War II.<sup>15</sup> The arrival and settlement of these immigrant workers laid the foundation for four generations of Ilonggos to become Filipino-Americans in the Guam community, prompting Schumann to refer to Camp Roxas as “the Ellis Island of Guam” (“Film Production”). The film project is Schumann’s personal means of coming to appreciate who she is and where she is because of her ancestors’ efforts.

The impetus of her project was to write on behalf of her ailing father and the other immigrant workers of Camp Roxas and to redeem their place – as well as her own place – within American history, Guam history, and Philippine history:

It was important for us to connect back to why my dad really came here and to understand his plight as an immigrant. All those other people that also became his friends eventually. I think it’s important to document because that part of history is not documented. This story is about my father. This story is really many stories. This story is about how things go unnamed. How stories go untold. (*Under the American Sun*)

Schumann relates the distress of being unhomed, to being “unnamed,” and “untold,” prompting her to document a place for herself in a community and history that had largely forgotten her.

Schumann’s search for place is indicative of the invisibility of the *Sapin Sapin* generation’s ambiguous status. In her chronicle of Filipino American lives across cultures, communities, and countries, Yen Le Espiritu affirms that the institutional invisibility of Filipino Americans is a testament to their ambiguous status as the “foreigner within” and is connected to historical amnesia and self-erasure (14). This invisibility is particularly salient in the experiences of Filipinas who “are clearly ‘not home,’ because they are not white and male” (Espiritu 14). The *Sapin Sapin* generation is thus subjected to the invisibility of being both Filipino and female.

Sociologist Diane L. Wolf aptly uses the concept of “emotional transnationalism” to highlight the multiple discourses circulating and competing in the emotional minds of children of Filipino immigrants (283). The experiences of Espina, Dames, and Schumann attest to the emotional distress of feeling unhomed in multiple contexts, cultures, and affiliations on Guam, a distress that can be overcome through courageous examination of the layers that comprise one’s place in a culture and how those interact to form the self.

### **Redefining Home**

It is understandable that the unhomed would spend a large part of their life searching for home. González finds that the diasporic nostalgia for an idealized homeland is the most pervasive characteristic in Filipino American narrative (40). She describes this nostalgia as a search and the searcher as a “wandering Filipina” (42). Indeed, the tone of Espina’s “Hope for Life” is that of a Filipina wandering in a place that is not home, but who is ultimately determined to construct a home that is not spatially bound and instead built upon familiar values. As the song progresses, the songwriter actively responds to her perceived displacement by envisioning a metaphysical place rooted in family and community relationships:

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I have a place of hope and I hope for life  
My family and my home is where I long to be  
So when you think of trust and love in a family – just think of me (Espina, “Hope for Life” 5-7)

By constructing an idea of home based on “family,” “trust,” and “love,” the songwriter expresses a value in *kapwa*, the core value of the Filipino identity in which there is a unity of the self and others, resulting in a shared identity and an inner self created in relation to others (Nadal, *Handbook* 50). Filipina writer Marianne Villanueva describes this building of a new home as the construction of an internal landscape that shapes and drives moods, counteracts despondency, and inspires: “We situate ourselves in this internal landscape; we are at the heart of our own stories. The very act of writing is a way of creating this inner space, so essential to our well-being. . . . It is what helps us survive” (11-12). Home is thus redefined as both a private space and a larger geographic place of belonging, such as a community, village, city, and country (Espiritu 2). It is no longer a physical place but a concept and desire that can be visited through the imagination (Espiritu 10). In response to enforced “unhomedness,” the *Sapin Sapin* generation articulates a sense of home by recreating and re-membering a homeland and building on communal ties.

Reconstructing home and community becomes an empowering act that allows the *Sapin Sapin* generation to transcend feelings of unhomedness. Espina’s song “We Are the Land” was written and performed for the Guam Council on the Arts and Humanities Agency, which supports and promotes the local culture through music, arts, and literature. In the song, Espina expresses feelings of belonging and pride in constructing a community and new home on Guam:

I’m proud of our island of Guam  
It’s all that we have to hang on  
Preserve it for us – for in God we trust  
Hold on to our culture and make it last  
We are the people – and we are the land  
For better, for worse – we go hand in hand  
We are the future of this wondrous land  
When we work together – united we stand (Espina, “We Are the Land” 5-12)

As a local artist and Guam resident, Espina esteems Guam as “our island” and embraces the arts and culture as “our culture,” recognizing the need for preservation and perpetuation (1-4). In reference to past feelings of loss or abandonment, she describes the island as “all that we have to hang on” (2). She is invested in preserving the culture of the island and shows her involvement creatively. She goes on to describe herself as integrated into a community that constitutes “the people,” “the land,” and “the future,” creating for herself an imagined community and constructing a home of fulfillment and belonging (9-11).

Through the song, she addresses this “imagined community,” theorized by Benedict Anderson as drawing members into a hypnotic confirmation of solidarity of a single community, embracing characters, author, and readers to press on in the present (27). This sense of community has been transplanted into her new island home, “to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations . . . [arousing] deep attachments” (Anderson 4). By referring to all the people of Guam as one community, one people, and one land, she promotes unity and incites all Guam’s people in one present, collective goal to preserve an island culture in which they all are invested.



By forming this imagined community, she effectively encompasses herself and others in a process of meaning-making within revised shared context.

By being able to bring together different people and reconcile her ideas of home, Espina exhibits what intercultural communication theorist Muneo Yoshikawa terms the “double-swing state,” wherein in-betweenness is positively portrayed as a transcendence of the binary where neither side is excluded or combined (143). She is able to mediate between people of different cultures and call them into action as one community. Cross-cultural adaptation is enhanced by the dynamic and dialogical interaction and interplay between the different, yet complimentary, realities and individuals are able to accept and draw nourishment from the different cultures (Yoshikawa 143-147). Espina builds home and finds fulfillment by creating a cross-cultural community, in which she, too, can invest her emotions and energies.

Similarly, Schumann acts as a mediator, going between the Camp Roxas generation of the past and the audience of the present-day generation. In the *Under the American Sun* documentary, a tearful Schumann explains that it is gratifying for her to be able to tell the story her father is unable to tell and to connect him with others from the Camp Roxas generation. She also creates an imagined community of those who lived through Camp Roxas and those who remain affected by it. Through the film project, Schumann is able to re-member a history that has gone largely undocumented in Guam’s canonical historiography. She states that the fragility of her father is the fragility of history and poignantly asks, “Who is my family and who am I? What is history if it abandons us?” (*Under the American Sun*).

Her sentiment of speaking against silences is not uncommon among other members of the second generation. In her scathing denunciation of the silence of the United States government regarding the contributions of Filipinos to American history, second-generation Filipina poet, lecturer, and professor Emily Porcincula Lawsin exclaims:

Our feet can no longer be bound  
Our eyes cannot be taped.  
Yell your prayers as poems!  
Scream the names of the dead out loud!  
*For I cannot take any more moments of silence*  
Because silence has already taken too much  
From me. (xxiii, emphasis hers)

Like Lawsin, Schumann recognizes that the story of Camp Roxas is a collective story that remains significant to the Filipino American community on Guam and nationally, and she counteracts the silence through *Under the American Sun*. Moreover, Schumann recognizes that this immigrant Filipino history is an indispensable part of the history of Guam and its people. She enables the Camp Roxas generation to retell their stories through film in order to rebuild their community and insert themselves into, and thereby take ownership of, the local and national histories. Her involvement enables her to also become a member of this community, as she is able to work alongside them in the collective goal of historical recognition. Counteracting silence thus becomes a way to articulate a community, and thus articulate a home and place of belonging.

Conscious of the different components and diverse definitions that comprise her sense of self, Dames describes herself as being an “outsider within” – “local,” “of Guam,” and “one of Us [according to a Chamorro],” even though she is a “Filipina . . . who speaks American English sadly devoid of a *Pinoy* accent” (17, emphasis hers). Although her “outsider within” status at the intersections of social work, political science, and scholarship-activism places her in a conflicted

position, this unique position also equips her with a richer perspective to examine the complexities of Guam-US relations (17). Dames comes to adopt Guam as her people, as the island adopts her as “one of Us,” and she sees herself as part “of” a larger island community that transcends ethnic background.

Dames creates home by recreating herself as something new through transcending ethnic categories and considering herself as representative of the Other: “I am not Chamorro but I am *of* Guam” (Dames 17, 14). As described by Maria P. P. Root, in *Filipino Americans: Transformation and Identity*, Dames’s overlapping and simultaneous identities necessitate the re-visioning of identity, nationalism, and authenticity. In response to this ambiguity, she challenges dichotomous paradigms (Root xiv). Dames purposefully inserts herself within Guam’s political discourse and claims a shared cultural and generational identity with those whom she shared childhood and adolescence with on Guam in the 1950s to 1960s (14). She acknowledges the benefits of her uniquely “steamed” identity (referencing the *sapin sapin* metaphor) in evaluating her social contexts and in engaging actively in the political aspirations of her island home. Rather than remaining impeded by inadequate labels, Dames resists the fixedness of these categories altogether: “Within this conceptualization, my being a woman, Filipina, Guamanian, American, Catholic, social worker, academic, and activist are all narrativized processes, not fixed categories” (4). These social identities are not merely combined in an additive way and her sense of self is more than a series of identity categories strung together. She admits that woman + Filipina + Guamanian + social worker + academic + activist cannot totalize her personhood and instead posits herself as a different being that encompasses all these different identities.<sup>16</sup> These different identity categories instead interact with one another to create something new and, in turn, influence constructions of the core sense of self.

In this description of herself, Dames creates community by choosing to focus on the process of *sapin sapin* production. She also, however, focuses on the product, but not on its parts as much as on its newness. Her *sapin sapin* identity is not the *ube*, coconut, aniseed, or steamed rice but all together an entirely new creation – indeed as Susan R. Jones, Yoolee C. Kim, and Kristan C. Skendall argue, new multiple social identities negotiated through time, place, power and privilege. This ability to effectively navigate within and among different layers of identity and transform meanings through community is what at base characterizes the *Sapin Sapin* generation.

Garrido maintains that many in the second generation find their place in America through the symbolic and emotional labor or navigation of ethnic and racial identification, a process that intensifies during adolescence when a growing ethnic awareness is marked by feelings of insufficiency and inauthenticity (178). As they come of age in America, this *sapin sapin* generation is confronted with racial designations that attempt to classify who they are, to relegate them to this layer or that layer of what comprises their identity. They grapple with cultural ascriptions and deem them applicable or inapplicable to their sense of self. In resistance, they construct ethnicity by assessing internal identifications against external designations, drawing and reevaluating boundaries, and participating in “ethnic activities,” such as organizations, activism, and visiting the homeland (Garrido 178). In this way they negotiate community through new designations and the redrawing of boundaries. Identifying as a Filipina on Guam and elsewhere involves this active process of differentiating, reconciling, and transforming the diverse definitions of self within one’s contexts and community. It involves, as Espiritu argues, a critical inheriting, modifying, and inventing of cultural traditions, as well as an active contesting and constructing of racial meanings (199).

### **At Home in Syncretic Layers**

The struggle with unhomedness is most evidently portrayed in Espina's musical storybook, *Sirena*, an adaptation of Guam's legend of Sirena, the mermaid. In her adaptation, she appropriates this local legend to express her feelings of displacement and yearning for belonging and ultimately depicts fulfillment in being part of two different worlds. Sirena is depicted as a young woman with an unusual love for the sea, who enjoys being in the ocean more than at home on land with her mother and village community (Espina, *Sirena* 2, 7). Because of Sirena's inability to meet familial expectations, Tan Maria, Sirena's mother, inflicts a curse on her to be turned into a fish (4, 7-10). Sirena's godmother, however, lays claim on Sirena's body and wellbeing, as is the cultural tradition in both Guam and the Philippines, and begs the spirits to alter the curse: "SO BE IT DONE WHAT MARIA HAS SAID BUT RETURN TO ME THE PART-FROM [sic] HER WAIST TO HER HEAD!" (13).<sup>17</sup> The bottom half of Sirena's body is consequently transformed into a fish and the top half remains human.

Though intended to be a children's story, Espina specifically presents the complex themes of alienation, displacement, longing, and cultural/familial expectations in the experiences of her young female protagonist. All of these themes are recurrent issues of the *Sapin Sapin* generation. By choosing to adapt this particular Guam legend, Espina is able to explore these issues in her own life through narrative.<sup>18</sup> Rooted in her lived, felt experiences, Espina's *Sirena* narrative is a cognitive and communicative strategy for navigating the gaps in her own everyday experience between the expected and reality (20). Espina translates being caught between cultures in the "storyworld" of a young girl who is caught between her love for the ocean and her love for her family on land.

Although she does not feel at home on land and instead escapes to the sea, Sirena weeps in confusion when she realizes she "will never be able to walk on land again" and must remain in the sea (Espina, *Sirena* 15). Sirena thus only finds fulfillment in being able to *move between* both land and sea, *between* mother and godmother, and is unhappy when completely resigned to one or the other. In a parallel comparison, the *Sapin Sapin* generation also finds fulfillment in being able to *move between* the different cultures but also feels a sense of displacement at belonging wholly to neither. Ownership of Sirena's body is split between two competing factions, with neither being able to exact complete control, just as different allegiances compete within the *Sapin Sapin* generation. The result, a layered being, a mermaid, maintains characteristics of both land and sea but is unable to fully inhabit either one. Her experience is instead a unique combination of land- and sea-dwelling. The depiction of Sirena's syncretic layering is similarly a manifestation of the syncretic layering of the *Sapin Sapin* generation that maintains aspects of Filipino, Guamanian, and American cultures, which cannot be subsumed under one cultural designation, and whose owners navigate within the intersections of these multiple cultures. *Sirena* depicts "a subject that inhabits the rim of an 'in-between' reality," creating a discursive image of being at the crossroads of history and literature, between home and the world (Bhabha 13).

Like Sirena, Espina inhabits the rim and lives within multiple cultural crossroads. Inhabiting this rim is neither straightforward nor easy and requires constant reconciliation. Nedim Karakayali explains this tension between duality and diversity in the lives of the second generation thus: "Children of immigrants are not migrants, and yet, throughout their lifetime, they migrate between numerous milieux" (336). Instead of simply melting into one culture or

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surrendering to hybridity, they embrace the diversity that constitutes their sense of self (337). Instead of simply becoming a fish or mermaid, Sirena is both. Sirena is a *sapin sapin* creature: instead of being hybridized, her separate parts are distinct and together form a unique being. Instead of being only Filipina, only Guamanian, or only American, Espina illustrates that it is possible to live as all of them. She experiences a “multi-inclusion,” defined by Kara Somerville as the ability of those in the second generation to sift through and merge multiple affiliations and emotional attachments to people, places, and traditions from different countries (28). Renowned cultural theorist Stuart Hall remarks that these identities are not defined by essence or purity but by a necessary heterogeneity and diversity: “a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference. . . . [These identities] are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (235). Espina’s experience, as expressed through the story of Sirena, is marked by a diversity that is both transformative and empowering. She finds herself at once at home and abroad in her syncretized layers and finds belonging in being of different worlds.

Schumann’s work, unlike Espina’s, focuses on the continuing *ube* influence on her identity, locating her personal history within the history of the community.<sup>19</sup> According to Filipina author and poet Leny Mendoza Strobel, to tell one’s story is “to allow the fragments of consciousness to be sutured and healed so that the Filipino story can be told in its wholeness” (70). As a family endeavor, Schumann’s work bridges the generational gap between herself and her father. It is symbolic in its attempt to unearth the silences and portray the lives of Filipinos and Filipinas who contributed to the social development of the island that many eventually came to call home. More importantly, her retelling incorporates her own narrative, portraying Camp Roxas from her perspective and documenting its personal significance to her. Her narrative is indicative of the *Sapin Sapin* generation’s reference to the Filipino roots of their immigrant parents in their construction of self. She recognizes the value of her father’s experiences in understanding her own identity and acknowledges that she is unable to effectively position herself within history without considering how her family came to Guam and became American citizens. While Schumann is Guamanian, she realizes that her construction of self requires acknowledging the *ube* as foundational, which she does by exploring the history of Camp Roxas. She transforms the Camp Roxas story by contributing her narrative and knowledge, so that it is not exclusively the story of those who experienced it, but it is also the story of those who, like her, continue to be affected by it generations later. Her narrative displays a layering of knowledge, as she relates her father’s experience to her own construction of self.

The narratives of the *Sapin Sapin* generation essentially display (1) the multiplicities inherent in their identity formation and (2) the creation of a new identity comprised of the different, yet interacting facets of Filipina, Guamanian, American, and woman that inform and transform their experiences as songwriter-author, scholar-activist, and historical filmmaker on Guam. Their narratives describe the various ways each woman locates herself within the periphery of Guam’s community and, more importantly, attest to each woman’s ability to transform an oppressive position into a liberating, creative, and productive one. Espiritu asserts that “in the end, for many second-generation Filipino Americans, *here* is home – at least for now. They have claimed this space; it is theirs” (204, my emphasis). Each woman as a member of the *Sapin Sapin* generation engages *with* and *in* the community, while coming to an understanding of who she is *within* it.

### **Diverse Flavors, Distinct Identities**

Espina's writing, Dames's scholarship-activism, and Schumann's historical filmmaking are exemplary of the symbolic and emotional labor, navigation, negotiation of ethnic and racial identification.<sup>20</sup> Their narratives are a form of enacting change, which Strobel finds is a common reaction for second-generation Filipinos to bridge the generational gap and re-discover and re-construct an ethnic/cultural identity (42). Like the *sapin sapin* dessert's distinct layers of color and flavoring, their work and their life is characterized by 'layers' that remain distinct, yet interact to create an entirely new identity. These multiple social identities, according to Jones, Kim, and Skendall, make it possible for them to live multiple, layered identities that simultaneously experience oppression and privilege and are negotiated depending on the time, the place, and the influence of power and privilege (715). The integration of these different facets is predicated on the Filipino culture and values of the immigrant parents, revealing a back-and-forth between social identities and a Filipino core – symbolized by the core *ube* layer in the *sapin sapin* dessert (Jones, Kim, Skendall 716).<sup>21</sup>

The three women's stories enact a defense against a threat of homogeneity and uniformity and express a need to distinguish themselves ethnically (Garrido 180). Moreover, they express a need to shift from mainstream binaries (e.g. American, Asian American, and Filipino-American) towards an affirmation of the differences inherent in their identities (Portes and Rumbaut, ch. 7).<sup>22</sup> In sum, the *Sapin Sapin* generation, like the dessert after which it is named, locates its identity not in the losses of assimilation but in the celebration of the layers of their various ethnic identities and cultures overlaid. They recognize the value in each of the different facets of their identity and integrate and reconcile them into a working conception of self. They celebrate each of their distinct identities integrated and interacting together in the same way that the different flavors of the *sapin sapin* dessert are enjoyed together in a bite of diverse and unique flavors.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Image source: "Sapin Sapin"; *Ang Sarap*

<sup>2</sup> In the absence of page numbers in an electronic version of this text, I reference stable chapters, as per Modern Language Association formatting.

<sup>3</sup> Portes and Rumbaut consider the history of the immigrant first generation, the pace of acculturation among parents and children, cultural and economic barriers, and family and community resources the most decisive factors that affect the adaptation of the second generation (ch. 3).

<sup>4</sup> Recent models of Filipino acculturation demonstrate the evolution of immigration studies away from facile, unidirectional descriptions of Filipino immigrants simply losing their Filipino customs and beliefs as they adopt American ones. Instead these models are multidirectional, multivariable, generational, and even integrate aspects of the Filipino culture. Del Prado and Church's ESFA, Nadal's Pilipino Identity Development Model, and Tuason et al.'s qualitative study of the Filipino-American hyphenated identity are examples of frameworks that describe (1) the intricacies of Filipino identity, subject to a variety of social, cultural, and generational factors and (2) the predisposition of those in the second generation to maintain and recognize both Filipino and American aspects of their identities.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce Campbell's seminal work describes the ethnobotanical and linguistic evidence showing the historical relationships, shared ancestry, and cultural affinity between Guam and the Philippines, which Campbell terms "historical and cultural consanguinity" (3, 7).

<sup>6</sup> Documenting Filipino history in Guam and the ways in which it has shaped the island culturally, politically, and economically is, according to Guam Humanities Council executive director Kimberlee Kihleng, pivotal in understanding the richness and diversity of Guam, as well as greater America (1).

<sup>7</sup> In conducting preliminary discussions on this topic, I found that although there was great scholarly interest in this area of study, there was also concern over the availability of primary texts.

<sup>8</sup> While identifying Guam's "official" history remains a problematic and highly politicized enterprise, I refer to the following publications that are typically associated with Guam's canonical historiography: *Destiny's Landfall: A History of Guam* by Robert F. Rogers, *A Complete History of Guam* by Paul Carano and Pedro C. Sanchez, and *Guahan Guam: The History of Our Island* by Pedro C. Sanchez.

<sup>9</sup> Linda McDowell in her work in feminist geography cautions that there are connotations of inferiority and impurity inherent in Bhabha's term and that it has been criticized as a disembodied and ungendered approach (211-13). McDowell instead advocates a positive political choice of identity with a more inclusive notion because new identities are beyond current descriptions (212-13).

<sup>10</sup> I acknowledge that these narratives alone are not an exhaustive representation of second-generation Filipinas on Guam, but in addition to the fact that narratives were difficult to obtain, admittedly it was a conscious decision to select these particular narratives of educated second-generation Filipinas involved in local community efforts to highlight the multirootedness of the *Sapin Sapin* generation.

<sup>11</sup> Image source: Personal photograph by Cid Caser; 14 Aug. 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Espina immigrated before adolescence (age 12), making her a member of the second generation, according to Portes and Rumbaut's operational definition, and more specifically of the 1.5 generation, according to Nadal (*Handbook*).

<sup>13</sup> Image source: *KPRG Public Radio Guam*

<sup>14</sup> Image source: "Film Production"; *Under the American Sun: Camp Roxas Film Project*.

<sup>15</sup> Also see the Guam Humanities Council's *A Journey Home: Camp Roxas and Filipino American History in Guam*.

<sup>16</sup> I combine Dames's different identity categories as modeled by Jones, Kim, and Skendall.

<sup>17</sup> I reproduce the lines in all capital letters, as it appears in the original text.

<sup>18</sup> Narrative theorist David Herman describes such narratives as conveying the experience of living through a "storyworld-in-flux," highlighting the pressure of events on real or imagined consciousness affected by the occurrences at issue (xvi).

<sup>19</sup> Strobel refers to this as finding the relationship between the self, nation, and narration (70).

<sup>20</sup> I again refer to Garrido's concept of symbolic and emotional labor previously described in my contextualization of the second generation. Espina, Dames, and Schumann thus engage in Stage 6 of Nadal's Pilipino American Identity Model, "Incorporation," which encompasses the development of a positive and comfortable identity that respects other cultural and racial heritages and expresses an interest in the social justices of all people ("Pilipino American" 59).

<sup>21</sup> *Ube*, in Filipino language, refers to the root of the purple yam. The *Sapin Sapin* generation builds upon the *Ube* generation, adding additional layers of culture and identity to the foundation of their parents' cultural roots in the same way additional layers of flavor are added to *ube* flavor in the *sapin sapin* dessert.

<sup>22</sup> Garrido recognizes that ethnic identification for the second generation, whose dominant point of reference is American cultural norms, can be problematic as they must choose whether to distinguish their ethnic identity or downplay it (177). Relative to the first generation, the process of ethnic self-identification of second-generation children is more complex and often entails the juggling of competing allegiances and attachments (Portes and Rumbaut, ch. 7).

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