

Migrant Returns »

MANILA, DEVELOPMENT, AND TRANSNATIONAL CONNECTIVITY

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Migrant Returns» Manila, Development,
and Transnational Connectivity

ERIC J. PIDO

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Cover art: A real estate agent presents a sample two-bedroom condominium at the
Avida sales pavilion in Mandaluyong City, Manila, 2013. (REUTERS/Cheryl Ravelo)

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Abbreviations

BPO

Business process outsourcing

BSP

Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas

CALABARZON

Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon region

CBD

Central business district

CREBA

Chamber of Real Estate and Builders' Associations Inc.

DOT

Department of Tourism

IMF

International Monetary Fund

MRT

Manila Rapid Transit

NCR

National Capital Region

OFW

Overseas Filipino Worker

PEZA

Philippine Economic Zone Authority

PLDT

Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company

PRA

Philippine Retirement Authority

PRAMA

Philippine Retirement Authority Members Association Inc.

PRI

Philippine Retirement Incorporated

SEZ

Special Economic Zone

SRRV

Special Resident Retiree's Visa

TEZ

Tourism Economic Zones

TFC

The Filipino Channel

Preface

I can vividly remember my mother and father arguing after a phone call from the Philippines when I was an adolescent. They each took shifts pacing back and forth between the kitchen and dining room, while the other huddled over the tile countertop. My parents were anxiously trying to come to a decision about the family estate that my paternal grandfather left my father after he passed away just weeks before. *Estate* is too generous a term. Rather, the property constituted a meager lot of land that directly faced the Panay Gulf in Hinigaran, a small municipality almost precisely at the center of the province of Negros Occidental. Even today, dozens of fishermen arrive on the beaches each morning, dragging their battered *bangkas* through the sand, to sell their daily catch. The same boats that inspired my father to dream about worlds across the ocean, over half a century ago, remain. Although small, my father's land was precious.

This book brings shape to the meaning of property and the lived materiality suturing migration together with home. That brief, yet anxiety-filled conversation would linger on in my mind for over a decade, and the questions it produced would result in the pages of this book. What if my parents kept the land? Who would tend to it while we were away? Would they live in the Philippines for part of the year, far away from their children here in the United States? And what of those families who had taken up living on my father's land? After decades of living there, raising their children, and sharing a life, what would become of them?

Little did I know at the time that many of these questions were set in motion by the Immigration Act of 1965. This legislation, which enabled tens of thousands of Filipinos, including my parents, to emigrate to the United States, produced a pivotal moment in U.S. immigration history. Along with transforming the demographics of American society, it reinvigorated the

colonial relationship between the United States and the Philippines by re-institutionalizing a gateway through which a network of Filipino migrants could make their way into the United States and settle in the postcolonial metropole. This gateway was the mechanism that would later produce the *balikbayan* subject. These subsequent economies of travel and remittances were possible only because the balikbayans who migrated to the United States after 1965 were largely composed of two distinct groups: one group that was uniquely skilled and educated, so that they were viewed as a desirable pool of migrants who could fill various labor gaps throughout the U.S. economy, and another group able to immigrate to the United States regardless of their lack of skills and education owing to stipulations within the act that allowed family members to be reunited with family who had already settled in various parts of the United States (Hing 1993; Choy 2003). In fact, the majority of the migrants who entered the United States through the Immigration Act of 1965 were permitted to immigrate through the family reunification provision. Subsequently, the wave of Filipino immigration after 1965 produced a dual chain of migration to the United States (Liu, Ong, and Rosenstein 1991). Yet while Filipinos were one of the largest immigrant groups to migrate to the United States as a result of this particular legislation, only a small handful of literature discusses the specific impact of this key legislation on the Filipino Americans who continue to create a number of vibrant ethnic spaces throughout the larger U.S. landscape.

These daily negotiations and the impossibility of finding a balance are reminiscent of perhaps the most influential scholar in the overlapping fields of ethnic and racial studies. At the turn of the twentieth century, W. E. B. Du Bois (2008) put words to the veil that masked the lives and culture of black folk. Du Bois argued that the experiences of African Americans in the United States were made entirely invisible to the eyes of the dominant culture surrounding them. Simultaneously, and in an intensely ambivalent fashion, this veil also provided African Americans with some ability to conceal themselves, in a sense, from the larger white society. Paul Gilroy would later describe Du Bois's analogy as the distinct sociality "swathed within the folds of the veil of colour" (1993, 123). Invisibility, which has often been understood in Filipino American literature as a negative consequence of imperialist amnesia and cultural aphasia, might also be understood as a generative force. It also enables and facilitates the transnational routes of Filipino migration between the Philippines and the United States, continually linking Filipinos in the United States with their immediate and

extended families in the Philippines. This project stands on the shoulders of early works by Benito M. Vergara (2009), Rick Bonus (2000), and Martin Manalansan (2003) as an attempt to make sense of the invisibility both imposed on and employed by Filipinos in the United States and how this invisibility manifests itself into the spaces that Filipinos throughout the diaspora inhabit. It seeks to articulate an analytic of the veil as a tool to understand and convey the ambivalent experiences of Filipino transnationalism.

I rely on the work of Inderpal Grewal (2005) in seeking to move beyond what she regards as a prevailing discourse within cultural and ethnic studies that views migration and immigration solely through the frame of the United States as an imperialist nation-state. Rather, like Grewal, I too am exploring how the idea of America has “produced many kinds of agency and diverse subjects” for Filipinos and trying to make sense of how this idea functions “as a discourse of neoliberalism making possible struggles for rights through consumerists’ practices and imaginaries that came to be used both inside and outside the territorial boundaries of the United States” (2). The metaphor of the veil forces readers of different backgrounds to suspend a U.S.-centric framework when viewing Filipinos in the United States and, instead, complicates traditional and fictitious binaries such as those imposed between American and immigrant, colonizer and colonized, and oppressed and oppressor.

What tends to be overlooked in the literature on race and diaspora are those immigrant communities, like balikbayans, who are able to imagine, in a very real sense, a return to their homeland. Yet while this return is possible and continuously present, by the very act of settling abroad in the United States, balikbayans are transformed and are at once local and foreign to the Philippines. Their status as U.S. citizens provides them with an ambivalent recognition among Filipinos in the Philippines. Balikbayans no longer simply return to the Philippines, a sentiment made apparent by one of the many balikbayans I interviewed for this book: “Coming back here is not like coming home. Things are very different.” The uniqueness of balikbayans is in the manner in which they carry the weight of the obligations and indebtedness of the balikbayan economy on their shoulders when they return. In this way, balikbayans are exiled through the transformation of not only themselves but the very idea of home and homeland as well.

Much like the subject and approach of this text, my gratitude stretches both near and far, and across many geographic and temporal lines. As for

many children of immigrants, the practice and language of academia did not come naturally for me. Moments of intellectual clarity or writing acumen were not always apparent, and if it were not for the immense thoughtfulness of mentors who intervened throughout my life, in both fleeting and sustained ways, I would not always have known that I could one day write a book. And so I cannot be more sincere when I say thank you to Julie Silianoff for calling me a writer in the eighth grade.

At the University of California at Berkeley, first and foremost, I am grateful to Catherine Ceniza Choy for her gentle and steadfast guidance. While it is never easy to give an equal measure of encouragement and criticism, her thoughtful feedback and brilliance throughout the years continue to provide me with direction and assurance. I am also indebted to a number of faculty and graduate students in the Department of Regional and City Planning for providing an intellectual home away from ethnic studies and nurturing my curiosity around space and place. I especially want to thank Teresa Caldeira for her book *City of Walls*, which inspired an entire chapter in this book, and for her guidance throughout the early formulation of this work. And I am also grateful to Ananya Roy for creating an intellectual community of graduate students around her course *The City*, making herself available for hours after class each week to facilitate a discussion with us, and, of course, for the immense inspiration she provided after reading each draft of my work. Last, I will always be thankful to that community of graduate students, who are now colleagues, for the immensely generative conversations and collegiality that was so pivotal for me during that particular moment: Reem Alissa, Yael Allweil, Guatam Bhan, Jia-Ching Chen, Mona Damluji, Alexander Schafran Fukuma, Joseph Godlewski, Mike Gonzales, Sylvia Nam, and Carmen Rojas.

Just as every sentence begins with a single letter, this book began with a single page that I wrote as a fellow at what is now called the Institute for the Study of Societal Issues. I have no idea who or where I would be without the financial and emotional support provided by the institute and the intellectual giants who created that tiny, yet powerful, space. Each week, I relied on the commitment of my colleagues to diligently read my work, provide me with clarity, and share with me a remarkable enthusiasm that enabled me to completely and wholeheartedly pursue my ideas and work. To my colleagues, Becky Alexander, Emily Gleason, Juan Herrera, Sarah Lopez, Carmen Martinez-Calderon, Nathan McClintock, Tamera Lee Stover, and Nicol U: your courage and brilliance continue to awe me as much today as

all those years ago. None of this would have been possible without David Minkus and Deborah Lustig, who vetted countless pages of our work, provided the tangible feedback so rare at Berkeley, and sustained us with food and laughter each week for two entire years. And last, but most significantly, I am completely indebted to Christine Trost for providing me with the opportunity to be a research fellow at the institute and continuing to offer me her guidance and compassion as a fellow. I am only sorry that she will never completely know just how much her mentorship taught me.

In addition to graduate school, where the majority of this work solidified, a host of generous souls have helped to move this project forward in various ways by reading drafts, giving professional advice, or transforming my perspective. At the University of Washington, I am indebted to two of my Filipino colleagues and mentors. Much of this book was written as an imaginary conversation with Vicente Rafael and Rick Bonus. Their pioneering work provided me with a language that allowed me to connect both sides of the Pacific. I am especially grateful to Vince for continuing to champion my work and intellectual curiosity. I am also immensely thankful to Susan Kemp for her constant encouragement, incomparable kindness, and keen insightfulness in introducing me to both Doreen Massey and Rick. And I will be forever grateful to Tony Ishisaka for making a home for me in his office and providing a foundation for me as both a scholar and a person.

In Ithaca, I will always be thankful to the Sociology Department at Ithaca College for the space and resources provided to me, but especially to Sue-Jae Gage for the warmth she provided not only to me but also to my colleagues Hollie Kulago and Jeffreen Hayes. I continue to be inspired by the indomitable presence of all three of you. Thank you, Alicia Swords, for your friendship, and Rebecca Plante, for your tireless mentorship and generosity of spirit. And I will always be filled with utmost gratitude to Razack Karriem, Clement Lai, and Kelly Fong (and Mochi) for your genius and camaraderie but, most of all, for providing me with constant sustenance and a warm home away from Aura.

In reference to the vibrant collegiality among Filipino American scholars, I once overheard a colleague in Asian American studies joke that “the Filipino tide lifts all boats.” Indeed. Throughout the years I have been indebted to the (now) generations of very visible Filipino and Filipino American studies scholars. Along with those I have already mentioned: thanks to Theo Gonzalves and Rick Baldoz for their generosity in giving

advice and laughter. To Jody Blanco, Lieba Faier, Vernadette Vicuna Gonzalez, Roderick Labrador, Dawn Bohulano Mabalon, Victor Mendoza, Anthony Ocampo, and Robyn Rodriguez, I am so grateful for your constant willingness to share wisdom, read and comment on drafts, and offer patient responses during panels. Oliver Wang's work on mobile DJs in Daly City provided the scholarly foundation for moving beyond the geographic boundaries of the Bay Area. In my department at San Francisco State, it has been an incredible honor to work alongside and be a witness to the incomparable influence of my colleagues Daniel Phil Gonzales and Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales. And finally, I owe a great deal to Martin Manalansan. When I began reading about Filipinos in the United States in college, the number of books I could collect barely filled half of a single bookshelf. Now the products of this work could fill an entire bookcase, and its influence stretches across disciplines and epistemologies. Traces of Martin's influence, his inexhaustible generosity and immeasurable guidance, can be found in almost all of the work that has come out of the field in the last two decades. For this especially, I am truly grateful.

At San Francisco State University, I cannot thank my colleagues enough for welcoming both me and my work to the department. I am so grateful to Grace J. Yoo, Lauren Chew, Lorraine Dong, and Amy Sueyoshi for helping me navigate through the early stage of my academic career. Ben Kobashigawa, Isabelle Thuy Pelaud, Christen Sasaki, Valerie Soe, and Wesley Ueunten, your kindness toward me and ceaseless commitment to challenge every shape and form of authority and power will always figure as my intellectual and ethical compass. I am especially thankful to Jonathan H. X. Lee for his giving spirit and his constant willingness to share so much of what he knows and has with me. And, finally, to my brilliant friend Anantha Sudhakar: thanks for the hours of writing together, the perfectly worded insights, laughter, and lovely meals.

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In closing, I want to thank my numerous family members in both the

United States and the Philippines, most recently for offering up rooms to rest, chauffeuring me to interviews, helping me to navigate through Manila, and providing Aura and me with food again and again during months of fieldwork in the Philippines; for this I will always be thankful. And to my immediate family: my sister, Lynn; my brothers, Eviner and Erwin; and, most of all, my parents, Elmer and Juliet. Literally thousands of their insights and exchanges throughout my life have shaped how I see the world, my community, and myself; so much of this can be found strewn as fragments throughout this book. Finally, I will never be grateful enough to Aura Abing, for every moment and every thing. This book is for you.

Introduction » An Ethnography of Return

The PRA [Philippine Retirement Authority] should find ways to boost the growth of the booming retirement industry in the Philippines. [The world's] graying population is rapidly increasing. . . . The Philippines is in a very good position to take advantage of this potential. . . . As one of the flagship projects of the Philippine government, I want [the] PRA to boost its efforts to develop and promote the Philippines as a retirement haven and contribute to the increase of foreign investments. —Former Philippine president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo

In 2007 the former president of the Philippines, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, made an appearance at the unveiling of three colossal retirement villages in the Batangas region, a large province just eighty kilometers south of the country's capital region, Metro Manila (see figure I.1). The mere mention of these multimillion-dollar property ventures, christened with names like the Imperial Silvertown, Chateau Evercrest Retirement Project, and Batulao Monte Grande, evokes a particular retirement fantasy. The manner in which the word *retirement* proliferates in the vast inventory of brochures and websites produced by the Philippine Retirement Authority (PRA), and the global campaigns initiated to sell such developments, tends to evoke a particular meaning of return for its consumers: one that is simultaneously foreign and local. They can certainly expect to experience a wide range of amenities, all of which are now commonplace to tourism throughout the globe. Yet while retirement in the Philippines has often been associated with non-Filipinos, the way these villages cater to localized aspirations at-



FIGURE 1.1 Former Philippine president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo with Philippine Retirement Authority chair Edgar Aglipay and guests in Batangas in 2007. Courtesy of the Philippine Retirement Authority.

tached to the ideals of retirement makes these developments unique. Each of the retirement hubs also includes churches, schools, clinics, and even entire hospitals. These resources collectively enable consumers not only to retire in the traditional sense but also to reside with the possibility of starting a business, having more children, and raising them in the Philippines. “Retiring in the Philippines,” suggests Jerry, a former police officer in San Francisco who has already contributed a significant portion of his 401(k) to a property in one of the retirement villages, “is like having a second chance at living life.”

Maligned both by ongoing accusations of corruption and by a national economy mired in debt, the former president touted the importance of capitalizing on aspirations to retire in the Philippines. Macapagal-Arroyo is certain that the materialization of these aspirations will pave the way for the future development of the country. Raising her voice in exuberant conviction, she extolled this opportunity to the handful of press and dignitaries

present: “I want [the] PRA to boost its efforts to develop and promote the Philippines as a retirement haven and contribute to the increase of foreign investments” (quoted in Pelovello 2008).

The country’s reputation for violence and corruption, however, continues to hinder the Philippine tourism industry’s attempts to lure travelers to visit, let alone retire in, the Philippines. Unsettling tales of crime, malfeasance, disorder, and inaccessibility—the same tropes that generally shape the discourse of travel throughout cities in the Global South—have had a particularly detrimental effect on tourism in the Philippines. They have also dogged the national economy for decades. However, newer patterns of migration and economic alignment are enabling tourism and, by extension, retirement in the Philippines to be reimagined.

The reintroduction of capital throughout the Global South, precipitated by new modes of global mobility, has produced a vast rearrangement of economic ties among countries: the renewing of competition for resources among former Old World adversaries, the rise of newer ones, and the re-fashioning of global connectivity via a set of increasingly complex and unpredictable channels. As a result, the traditional logics around the primacy of the United States and western Europe as the universal end point for settlement and professional ambition have come into serious question. Likewise, the accumulation of finance capital created by these trends has expanded the consumer classes throughout Asia, including those living in countries traditionally seen as marginal to consumptive behavior (see Hoang 2015). The purchase of luxuries, however, necessitates the desire to protect and maintain what one has acquired. As such, the global increase in consumption has brought with it new forms of social exclusion and the need to reinforce older systems of social segregation (see Caldeira 2000). Contemporary urban development throughout the Global South over the last three decades has been increasingly shaped by the logic of this dialectic.

The convergence of these concurrent social and economic processes has reinvigorated specific sectors within larger economies, namely, the production of amenities for leisure and entertainment aimed at local populations. This brings us back to the former Philippine president’s attendance at the unveiling in Batangas. The PRA projects that the country’s flagship retirement villages alone, like those in Batangas, will contribute up to \$44 billion to the country’s economy in the coming years (Mollman 2007).¹ The PRA is the latest in a line of governmental entities throughout the region looking to exploit the potential for capital that is increasingly being produced by

shifting trends in local consumerism. To keep pace with other retirement hubs throughout Southeast Asia, PRA executives have been exploring alternatives to advertising to prospective clients in Japan, Korea, and Europe, instead relying on an older strategy to confront the most pressing obstacles to economic development in the Philippines; they continue to depend on the country's most important and unique resource: Filipinos living abroad.

For the Philippines, what constitutes the local immediately comes into question in relation to Filipinos living abroad who are not returning to the Philippines. These *balikbayans* constitute one of the largest tourist populations visiting the Philippines. The Department of Tourism in the Philippines officially defines the term *balikbayan* in two distinct ways. First, there are "Philippine nationals who are temporarily residing abroad," a group primarily composed of laboring bodies exported by the Philippine government as Overseas Filipino Workers. Then there is the more privileged cohort of Filipinos "who acquired foreign citizenship and permanent status abroad" and who are generally referred to as *balikbayans* within the local vernacular. This latter group of former Philippine citizens functions as the focal point of this project.

For the former president, the retirement industry occupies a critical place in her plan for developing the country's economy; balikbayans have become an integral component within this larger plan. As Arroyo's speech poignantly intimates, an increasing number of balikbayans are purchasing property in their homeland as a second home or in hopes of future repatriation. This figure is so vast that a number of PRA executives optimistically project that the Philippines will become home to almost one million retirees by 2015 (Mollman 2007). As the cover of the *Balikbayan* travel magazine conveys, once executives and developers began to grasp the immense economic potential posed by linking balikbayans to the retirement industry, a dynamic shift took place in the Philippine economy. Multinational property developers operating in the Philippines no longer catered exclusively to foreign nationals. New government agencies were constructed. As previously mentioned, the maintenance of an elite consumer class usually depends on the construction of amenities and services focused around and enabled by the security system and the further segregation of wealth from poverty. Together with private developers, immense resources of the state are being deployed to build networks that will support a vast infrastructure of elite residential complexes and retirement villages throughout the country specifically catering to Filipinos living abroad. Spurred on by

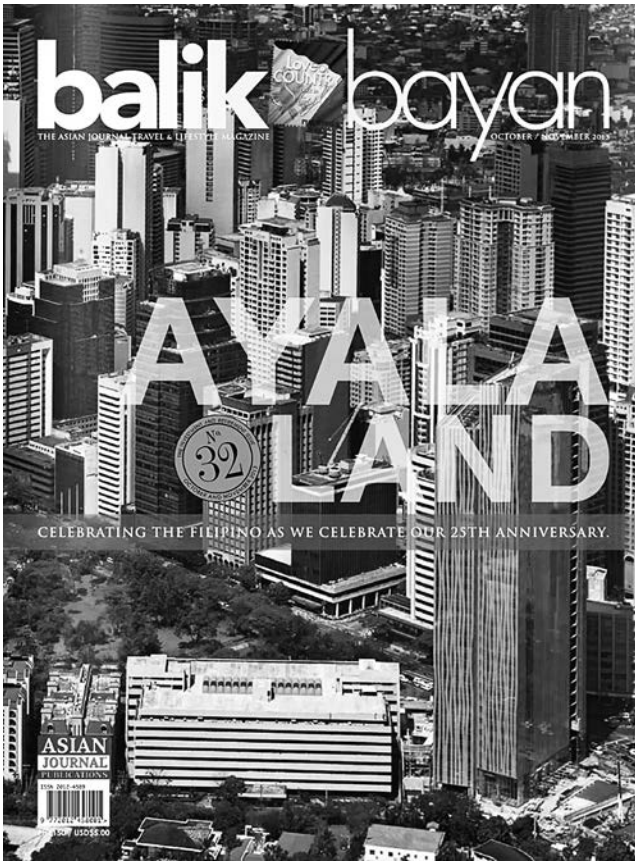


FIGURE I.2
Balikbayan is a
“bi-monthly travel
and lifestyle journal
for balikbayans and
Filipino expats from
the USA and other
parts of the world”
published by *Asian
Journal*.

government incentives, real estate corporations are continuing to design elaborate and innovative strategies to generate capital from balikbayans and their investments. The immense effort directed toward this redirection of economic policy and development has finally made the dream of an elite lifestyle a distinct possibility for returning Filipino migrants.

Migrant Returns examines how balikbayans have come to play a central role in the development of the Philippine economy, their negotiation of this new role, and the ambivalence produced by it. This book addresses two interrelated questions, which delve into larger concerns regarding the political, economic, and affective tracings of global migration. The first illuminates conceptualizations around contemporary globalization by examining the manner in which the Philippine government utilizes balikbayans to sustain the country’s foothold within the global economy. Second, this

work engages debates around the processes through which globalization occurs. I argue that a depiction of the colossal urban transformation accompanying the return of balikbayans conveys the very materiality of transnational connectivity between Filipino Americans in the United States and the Philippines.

The multiscaled nature of this dynamic is explored through an examination of the actions and discourses of three interrelated groups of social actors: the Philippine state, the various real estate corporations and realtors composing the transnational real estate industry between the Philippines and the United States, and Filipino returnees themselves. At times, the actions and discourses presented by these three social actors are initiated by distinct and even conflicting motivations and goals. In other instances, however, they complement one another or overlap. The impact of this interaction on the urban landscape of the Philippines illuminates new ways of conceptualizing global migration.

Migration, the movement of human beings from one geographically delimited space to another, is propelled in part by the imperatives of capitalism. Karl Marx famously described the workings of capitalism as that intractable process in which “all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and men at last are forced to face with sober sense the real conditions of their lives and their relations with their fellow men” (Marx 1978, 25). Because our contemporary social reality is constituted by the exchange of money and the logic of finance, everything is transformed into values, and, as Marx suggests, human relationships have been replaced with “object relationships.” There is nothing that articulates this image more vividly than migration. Movement—departure, diaspora, exile, settlement, and return, all in search of capital—comes to define the very identities of those who migrate, and “as individuals express their life, so they are” (Schmitt 1987, 8).

At the same time, migration is equally driven by the force of migrant desire, or what Arjun Appadurai (1996) calls the “work of the imagination.” This work, an imaginative laboring, drives innovation: designs, formulas, knowledge systems, images, and patterns. The outcome, the labor of the imagination, draws together these intensities into entire systems of culture and meaning: art and literature, architecture and environmental design, forms of urbanism, technologies, and media communications. It also forms the trajectory of migration’s many circuits and networks. All of those sin-

gularities, multiplicities, objects, and experiences—which are provisional, fluid, and stable—merge together into an infrastructure of a functional tandem that configures our social reality. The conjunction of these systems is sometimes complicit with the logic of capitalism. But, in other moments, these systems, including those constituting migrations, may also operate alongside and outside the circuits of the global economy. It is critical to this analysis that both individuals and communities continue to be placed at the center of this imaginative laboring.

This book is a multisite ethnography of the transformations produced by a system of imaginative laboring that has taken place for decades. The culmination of this labor is deriving a distinct form of return migration. This migration is changing the economic region of Metro Manila in ways both material and affective. While conservative estimates suggest that 2.5 million Filipino migrants have permanently returned to the Philippines over the past fifteen years, this number fails to capture the exact size of this “graying population” who continually make their way back to the Philippines each year outside of formal, governmentally regulated channels or without the explicit intent of staying for good.² Having settled somewhere abroad for several decades, these Filipinos find their way back to their homeland in various configurations. Until the mid-2000s, Filipino emigrants looking to retire in the Philippines constituted less than 10 percent of visitors to the country. Since then, however, boosted by incentives to invest in residential property coupled with the country’s ever-redeveloping urban landscape, that number has been steadily rising.

Repeated Turning

This book seeks to disentangle what Anna Tsing (2005) calls the “sticky materiality” produced by globalized capital from the imaginative laboring that animates it. It attempts to embody that which has become objectified through capitalism by articulating the subjectivity constituted by return, returning, and returns. Because of the general emphasis on the capitalist imperative within scholarship and popular discourse, so clearly depicted by the images invoked above, our understanding of migration tends to frame movement around binaries: core and periphery, receiver and sender, capitalist enterprise and exploited labor. Subsequently, a critique of migration is often attentive only to locating and singling out those scripts, both con-

spicuous and hidden, that are in direct opposition to the capitalist and universalizing entrapments of modernity. Thus, there remains only one version shaping the narrative of migration, capital, and resistance to it.

Yet, as we already know, there are many narratives to history. This book explicitly addresses this multiplicity; it is an ethnography of multiple modernities. Migration, often the paintbrush of a particular modernity, is constituted by bodies, objects, practices, and ideas *in motion*. And through this very movement, each of these entities continues to change. In this way, migration is also a metric, one that measures both space and time. It charts the “staging of modernity” both in terms of location and also as a demarcation separating what is ahead from that which was left behind (see Mitchell 2000). Yet, because of the simplistic binary that continues to enclose our conception and critique of globalization, *home* is situated, epistemically, as the counterpoint of modernity. It remains stationary. Home is a point of origin, fixed and unmediated by time or space. It remains that which is left behind.

The *return to home*, then, is usually understood, at best, as a mere fantasy or as practices of nostalgia. In this way, it is usually formed by the narrative of longing but never fully realized in practice. At worst, return is characteristically considered to be evidence of the very failure to become modern. Those who do in fact return might as well have never left. Yet, if globalization continually seeks to unify time, space, and everything in between within a trajectory of persistent modernity, how can it then be the case that home remains still?

Inderpal Grewal (2005) employs the phrase “transnational connectivities” to emphasize the manner in which governmentality, which she describes as the culmination of “subjects, technologies, and ethnical practices,” permeates and becomes fused within transnational networks and connections.³ From this vantage point, home is a constantly shifting archive, attempting to grapple onto and capture multiple imaginaries, aspirations, and social formations (Schein 1999). In this way, home is less a geographically delimited and physical space. Rather, more accurately, it is a *process* containing a set of connectivities, which continue to traverse the globe and vacillate between places.

Benito M. Vergara’s (2009) work on Filipinos who have settled in Daly City, California, describes the daily connections maintained by Filipinos with their homeland. To make sense of the imaginative laboring produced by these connectivities, Vergara employs the term “repeated turning.”

Borrowing from the sense of obligation evoked within Khachig Tölölyan's (1996) conception of diaspora, Vergara (2009, 4) argues that "whether manifested as political activism, assertions of ethnic pride, nostalgia, consumerism, or just vague remembering, the repeated turning is obliquely opposed to the narrative of assimilation. The tension between this remembrance and the demands of citizenship in the new homeland, the obligations in different directions, constitute a predicament for the Filipino immigrant."⁴ Return, here, is crucially envisaged as moments of perpetual occurrence. The case of Filipinos physically returning to their homeland, understood through a process of repeated turning, poignantly demonstrates how often the act of returning performed by migrants is simply a manifestation of much longer and more extensive processes as opposed to a single event or stage.

Migrant Returns can be interpreted as the continuation of Vergara's seminal examination of the transnational subjectivity constructed by particular flows of migrations to the United States after 1965. Because of this structural moment in the economic and political history of the United States, a fundamentally different kind of skilled and educated labor was selectively integrated into the country's labor market. Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin (2001) explain how contemporary forms of "splintering urbanism" are built on the foundation laid by previous technologies, urban policies, and settlement, which produced "pathways" under which newer capacities formed. Moments of intensive immigration, especially those occurring immediately after 1965, are paramount to conceiving the ways in which migration, and return in particular, constructed contemporary pathways for material and affective investments in the Philippine economy.⁵

By situating the concept of return through a theoretical framing of repeated turning, I am imploring my audience to continuously interrogate the idea of migration, semantically, conceptually, and in terms of scale. From 2006 to 2010, I followed a particular cohort of Filipino women and men who, for various reasons, were returning to their homeland to purchase property, secure their physical possessions and investments in the Philippines, or oversee the building of their homes on property they had already bought. A significant portion of this work is concerned with the way in which these women and men articulate their experiences of return, their narratives of interacting with Filipinos who were once seen as compatriots but who have become "different." These stories—conveyed in numerous ways: ubiquitous jokes, exasperated tirades, shameful confessions, and idle

gossip—construct a vital archive for challenging fundamental assumptions around migration, globalization, and modalities of power.

Apart from a handful of scholars, including Vergara, the steadily growing literature on Filipinos has devoted less attention to this generation of Filipinos who migrated and settled in the United States after 1965. This is partially due to the institutionalized effects of racializing Asian Americans as model minorities during this period. The homogenization of this particular cohort of Filipinos, some of whom were highly educated and skilled and just as many of whom were not, has been internalized by much of the critical scholarly research on people of color in the United States.⁶ As a result, the Filipino immigrants who eventually found their way into one of the many suburban neighborhoods in various parts of the United States have become emulsified into a singular, middle-class population that does not readily fit into the counterhegemonic and postcolonial discourse emerging alongside the literatures related to ethnic and Asian American studies. Rather than engaging alternatives to this racializing discourse, the recent scholarship on contemporary flows of Filipino migration between the Philippines and the United States after 1965 has been primarily concerned with a critical examination of the gendered division of labor among the working class from the Philippines.⁷

Yet a critical examination of the American middle class often embodied by immigrants who arrived after 1965 presents multiple points to intervene within discourses on globalization and the prevailing shadow of American imperialism. It reveals the manner in which fundamental notions of neoliberalism were imposed on migrating bodies of Asian immigrants as they settled in the United States as a direct result of economic imperatives to fill labor shortages in the U.S. labor market. Just as importantly, it disrupts the spatial-temporal notion that modernity began beyond the boundaries of the Philippines. On the contrary, several Philippine scholars have carefully described how colonial education and the inculcation of the English language had, after only a generation, successfully produced copies of Americans who were sometimes “more American than Americans” (San Juan 1998). One of the fundamental “structures of feeling” produced in the United States and relayed throughout its various colonial metropolises, especially in the Philippines, was the ideal of being middle class and, in particular, the ideology of “classlessness” it evoked and enabled.⁸ Before stepping foot in the United States, through the manner in which these ideologies were forcibly incorporated within Philippine society, Filipinos

had already acquired the tools to navigate American society. The confluence of culture, colonial education, the English language, Hollywood films, and American commodities had constructed a map to aid this navigation, and the pursuit of the middle class became the compass (see, for example, Capino 2010).

The refusal, then, to view nostalgia as simply an enactment of longing for an imagined past disrupts lingering notions that conceive of migrant identities being dependent on place. My use of *homeland* is not confined to the geographic limitations of the Philippine nation-state but more specifically refers to a spatial-temporal *process*. When im/migrants imagine their homelands, as Appadurai's (1996) conceptions of scapes shows, these images and visions are constantly mediated and distilled not only through memories, which are also contingent and changing, but through a vast array of communicative technologies and global media relayed from place to place. Here I am expanding on Ien Ang's (1994) interpretation of Paul Gilroy's (1993) *Black Atlantic*. Ang argues that "the experience of migration brings with it a shift in perspective. . . . [F]or the migrant it is no longer 'where you're from,' but 'where you're at' which forms the point of anchorage" (1994, 10). Nostalgia, in this way, performed through a litany of religious practices, parties and festivals, phone calls and e-mails, and foodways, is not in reference to an exact moment or place. Nostalgia is an anchor providing moments of assurance as immigrants navigate between places.

Finally, this framework contrasts with much of the scholarship on return migration, which often relies on traditional conceptions of migration as being produced through particular "cycles" or resulting from a set of "stages."⁹ Because of the dominant economic reasoning used to explain the processes of globalization and migration discussed previously, return migration is just another iteration of global market forces producing supply and demand, and push and pull. Rather, I argue that return, whether voluntary, forced, or generational, is also governed by the thrust of imaginative laboring. The flow of migration, its destinations and pit stops, may follow the larger circuits of economic imperatives, but the materialization through which this motion takes shape is the result of migrants' drives: their desires, aspirations, and dreams for themselves and their families, and the possibility of other futures. In the chapters that follow, I chart the traces of these transnational connectivities as they materialize throughout the landscape and built environment of Manila.

Imagining the Global-Modern

The idea of a global economy elicits another kind of paradoxical imaginary: one that is all encompassing and yet ever expanding. Often, even those who write about the global economy have a difficult time articulating its boundaries and the very processes enabling its colossal machinery. One dominant logic informing the language of globalization suggests that mandates necessitated by irrepressible market forces compel those at the helm of multinational corporations and developed nation-states to yield to and unify under its demands lest they fall to the wayside or be trampled beneath its weight. This rhetoric, and the kind of scholarship it elicits, is continually challenged by the task of giving equal attention to the ways in which globalization affects the everyday lives of individuals. Yet, through this very formula, this faceless multitude has become irrelevant. They are understood to be powerless in determining how the global economy evolves, and their choices, actions, and resistance are inevitably reappropriated and reintegrated into the global market.

We, however, are constantly reminded that communities, as marginalized as they may be, continue to shape and even determine, at times, the direction in which the larger global economy moves. These communities and the transnational convergence of their specific practices—socioeconomic, political, and cultural—produce the very interventions that confront, reshape, enable, or become consumed by the global economy and the processes of globalization. Decades of migrating and returning Filipinos and the cumulative capital that they bring and reinvest provide one example. I am focusing on how the return of Filipino immigrants to the Philippines after 1965 and the decades of remittances, both financial and social, have enabled the production of what I call the *balikbayan economy*, the transnational circulation of diasporic labor and capital between the United States and the Philippines. While the vast majority of the literature on international migration examines labor flows and settlement into various receiving countries, I employ the idiom of *migrant return* to convey the complex process through which many immigrants maintain ties with their homelands and eventually travel back either to visit or to resettle.

These *returns* have not only reconfigured the physical and economic landscape of the migrants' homeland but also impacted larger processes of globalization. In the example above, Arroyo's presence at the unveiling of the retirement villages conveys the often-indistinguishable relationship

between the public and the private spheres in the Philippines, what executives in the PRA calls the “twin strategy” or “triangular relations” (Toyota and Xiang 2012). It illustrates a moment in which governmental leaders, corporate executives, and business owners (triangular relations) unite in an attempt to exploit the capital returns of balikbayans. Meanwhile, what becomes apparent is that balikbayans, in many ways, continue to complicate and even resist assumed market-oriented logics. Such contradictions are endemic in “actually existing neoliberalism”; when applied to specific places, like the Philippines, these practices are often “contested, negotiated, and adapted . . . with oftentimes uncanny collusions with political, economic, and social formations” (Ortega 2012).¹⁰

The intersection between property development and structural adjustment programs features prominently throughout the development of Southeast Asian economies. Metro Manila has become a paramount example of debt financing in the Global South. As the Philippines and a host of other developing economies ceaselessly borrow from global lending institutions as a means of improving their credit portfolios and enhancing their relationships with trading partners in the rest of the world, property development figures as an integral mechanism through which governments can stabilize their local economies. Through a vast network of building projects, such as dams, roads and highways, and commercial districts, all of which are financed through debt, foreign investments continue to increase, and local governments “partner” with private entities as a means of exploiting these fleeting moments of financial boom.¹¹

The hundreds of corporate investors, transnational real estate brokers, and government officials present during Arroyo’s speech in Batangas attest to the significant role that property development performs in developing national and global economies. The input of foreign investments, critically fueled by decades of remittances sent by Filipinos working abroad, enabled the Philippine economy to offset losses created by an equal number of years of borrowing. Over a period of time, this relative stability sustained a foundation to grow property markets around the country’s most vibrant urban centers (see Rimmer and Dick 2009). When the Asian region suffered a severe economic crisis in 1997, this embedded pattern of debt financing, coupled with flows of remittances, sheltered the Philippines from collapse (see de Dios and Hutchcroft 2003).

The concept of the *balikbayan economy* introduces a rubric for analyzing the spatial-temporal patterns of migration and investment that have

characterized the rapidly transforming National Capital Region of the Philippines. I use the term *spatial-temporal* as a way of connecting these patterns to historical moments of colonialism and neocolonialism, specifically the period when the United States formally colonized the Philippines, that explain why and how balikbayans are emerging as a key component in developing the Philippine economy. The pervasive manner in which the Philippines was reconstructed as a colonized subject of U.S. imperialism produced not only persistent configurations of economic and military dependence but also, perhaps more significantly, fantasies of achieving a particular kind of American modernity (see Tadiar 2004).

These fantasies, and the imaginative labor they performed, generated waves of emigration from the Philippines. From a total population of approximately 100 million people, 2013 government statistics indicate more than 10 million Filipinos were working overseas. Of these, more than 1.2 million were classified as “irregular,” either working on tourist visas or laboring as undocumented residents overseas, while more than 4.2 million were “temporary,” commonly referred to OFWs. At the other end of the spectrum, 4.9 million permanent emigrants were settled in different parts of the world (Commission on Filipinos Overseas 2013). This latter figure includes balikbayans living permanently in places like the United States but not the generations of Filipino Americans who have been residing in the United States since the early part of the twentieth century. The number of Filipinos emigrating to the United States surged after the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (also known as the Hart–Celler Act). Since then, the number of Filipinos residing in the United States has officially risen to more than 3.4 million, the largest group of permanent Filipino emigrants residing outside of the Philippines.¹²

After decades of living in the United States and accumulating a limited amount of wealth there, many of these Filipinos are visiting and returning to their homeland. The tourism and retirement industries are devoting more and more resources to ensure that a significant portion of these balikbayans will invest in the country’s property market. Yet tales of crime and corruption, along with larger aspirations to achieve modernity, are standing in the way of these returns. For instance, Edgar Aglipay, the previous chairman of the PRA, discussed the hindrances constraining the growth of both tourism and retirement in the Philippines. He stated that media reports continually portrayed the Philippines as a crime-laden, chaotic, and dirty country teeming with kidnappers. “We have a bit of a problem

here, because of perception,' he explained to members of the Philippine media. 'It's the negative impression. That's our biggest concern in trade missions abroad, the common question is how safe is the Philippines. More often than not the doubters have never been to the country.' These 'negative impressions,' the Philippine Retirement Agency (PRA) general manager Fernando Z. Francisco agreed, 'have hampered efforts to get investors and retirees to visit'" (Alave 2007). These problems, which encouraged the initial generations of Filipinos to leave the Philippines and settle abroad, especially after 1965, have now become the obstacles inhibiting Filipinos from actively investing in a return to their homeland. Now that this "graying" generation is facing retirement and, contrary to images of model minority successes, continuing to struggle economically in the United States, a triad of government agents, multinational corporations, and financial institutions is attempting to capitalize on a particular moment of crisis. These entities have coalesced and are investing significant resources to convince balikbayans to overcome their long-held reservations around permanently returning to their homeland and to decide to purchase property in order to retire in the Philippines.

Building toward a Modern Economy

In attempting to define and articulate what exactly constitutes *the modern*, whether it is the modern world, modernity, or even the postmodern, we would only force ourselves to trudge through an endless and arguably pointless debate (see Mitchell 2000). And yet we instinctively return to this question because the term has become ubiquitous. We find it conditioning every facet of our social world. It becomes either a standard to which we aspire or a distinction separating us from what we hope to have left behind. The irony of the modern is that in the moment when we feel that we have broached the threshold into modernity, we find ourselves desiring through constant technological innovation and the pervasive anxiety induced by thoughts of insecurity to become modern once again.¹⁵ The modern may be many things, perhaps endlessly, but it is certainly elusive. The following chapters in this book provide a cartography mapping the eventual intersections of two simultaneously operating modernities. Balikbayans, launched toward the United States by aspirations originally precipitated through decades of American coloniality and education, left a homeland that was also enacting its own fantasies of modernity.

Not unlike Casablanca beginning in the 1940s (see Rabinow 1989) or Brasília during the late 1950s (see Holston 1989), Metro Manila began its march toward modernity in the 1960s when Ferdinand Marcos instituted a series of public projects throughout the city in hopes of aligning the Philippines with other developing nation-states that were outwardly aspiring to Western democratic rule. From the late 1960s to his removal in 1986, the Marcos administration oversaw the construction of a number of landmarks in the capital city. These urban designs played a crucial role in attracting foreign investment and, more importantly, providing evidence that the country merited economic restructuring by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. For example, this period saw the creation of Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, the main artery of transit cutting across almost the entire region.

Marcos's wife, Imelda, was arguably equally influential. Her aspirations to a certain modernity were also made visible through her numerous contributions to the architectural landscape, including the multimillion-dollar Cultural Center Complex, the Philippine National Convention Center, and the National Film Center, all built on reclaimed land on the edge of Manila Bay. The construction of the Cultural Center alone spanned almost two decades (1966–1982). Replicating the same modernist framework of urban renewal occurring throughout the rest of developing world, Marcos's mandate for a "New Society" resulted in the state-administrated removal of thousands of "squatters" from informal settlements (Shatkin 2004).

These imperatives led to the creation of the Metropolitan Manila Commission in 1975, which would oversee the first coherent master plan for Metro Manila. For the first time since American colonial rule, Metro Manila provided a master city plan entitled *Metropolitan Manila: Towards a City of Man* (Marcos 1985). Not only did this plan oversee the construction of Epifanio de los Santos Avenue but also the Manila South and North Expressways and the light rail transit system, which would produce the "vector of speed" that would lend itself to further separating the privileged and mobile elite by elevating them above the widespread poverty below.¹⁴ And, similar to what would become characteristic of neoliberal urban governance, the city's renewal was made possible only through a complexly interweaving system of payoffs that ultimately contributed to bankrupting the country (Hackworth 2006). The misuse of public funds to commence building these grandiose plans caused a number of projects to stall or fail

permanently owing to financial mismanagement or outright fraud (Manapat 1991).

Another implementation that set Marcos apart from his predecessors was the creation of the Housing Settlement and Regulatory Commission, the precursor to the Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board. While previous leaders imposed their rule through proxies at the local level who would give preferential treatment to specific contracts in which these leaders had a vested interest, Marcos implemented one central governmental authority for land use management, zoning decisions, and the approval of building permits. The commission was the first centralized governmental institution to possess exclusive jurisdiction over local decisions concerning land use in Metro Manila.

The commission's early failures represent many of the hurdles created by the entrenched culture of land ownership in the Philippines. The commission had agreed that there was a need for land reform and enacted the Urban Land Reform Programme of 1979, which clearly stipulated that property development in Metro Manila needed to fall in line with government plans and, as such, real estate purchases needed to be registered with and approved by the government. A tide of opposition rose among the landholding elite, and a number of real estate contractors and owners, as well as business owners, protested that the government regulation mandated by the commission would lead the Philippine economy into collapse (Connell 1999, 420). In response, Marcos intervened and decided to redirect and focus land reform on "depressed areas," namely, those affected by "squatters," which amounted to only 1.1 percent of Metro Manila's total land area (Van Naerssen, Ligthart, and Zapanta 1996).

This political response was intended less to remove impoverished populations from "borrowed land" than to divert internal migration away from Metro Manila toward the peripheries and decrease urban cramming. In time, because of the spatial constraints created by overuse and crowding, government incentives to develop the semiperiphery of Metro Manila during the 1970s and 1980s led to the influx of manufacturing and middle- and lower-class settlements throughout the flood regions of Pasig and Marikina to the northeast and Valenzuela and Caloocan to the northwest. Situated on either side of the Pasig and Marikina Rivers, in particularly low-lying zones, these lands tend to experience ongoing damage and a weakening of soil foundation due to the rivers' recurrent flooding. Un-

surprisingly, these regions tend to be disproportionately occupied by the urban poor and informal settlements.

While various microlevel policies either stalled or failed, the larger interventions that Marcos made in the planning of the region were vastly more significant to the economic development of the Philippines. The massive consolidation and centralization of Marcos's authority led to implementations that defined the economic and political borders of what has largely become Metro Manila today. In addition, the regulation of land use and development directly precipitated the creation and industrialization of the CALABARZON (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon) region, which provided for the expansion of economic activities like production, importation, and exportation. This produced a massive influx of internal migrants from the provinces, which continues to define the character of urban settlement in Luzon, the largest island within the archipelago, today.

The establishment of the CALABARZON economic zone is significant. The region, less a political subdivision than a geoeconomic site designated specifically as an agro-industrial growth zone, showcases the country's fundamentally neoliberal design. Early policies that had diverted industrial building projects away from Metro Manila were redirected toward the region. The following chapter will discuss how Marcos continued to rely on a strategy of "debt-driven growth," in which a large portion of the debt was reinvested in the industrial growth in CALABARZON. Ironically, even though Marcos's administration was directly responsible for leading the country into a prolonged economic crisis, subsequent administrations relied on the same strategies. The CALABARZON region continues to function as the country's base for industrial development and the focal point for launching many of the country's export-oriented economic policies.

The downfall of President Marcos and the inauguration of Corazon Aquino as the president of the Philippines in 1986 formally marked the restoration of democratic institutions in the country. This restoration was made official through the ratification of the Philippine Constitution in 1987 and the enactment of the "new" local government autonomy code in 1991. These laws effectively institutionalized political decentralization in the country. The Congress was restored, as were the regional levels of government—from the provinces to the *barangays*—and, with them, political autonomy was restored at each level. These changes had decisive effects on the management of urban planning in Metro Manila. While much of the Philippine populace, as well as various social movements that had been

deeply influenced by the people power movement in 1986, had believed that the regime change and introduction of the Aquino administration would lead to a transformation of the oligarchic structure of Philippine politics, the enactment of the autonomy code essentially restored the governing power of the old guard of Filipino elites.

Beginning already during Aquino's administration, the state began to adopt a policy of economic liberalization, which was a drastic shift away from the state-centered governance of the Marcos regime. Under intense pressure from international lending corporations to make good on debt repayments, the Aquino administration decided against playing an active role in repairing and maintaining various sectors of Philippine society, which had been in dire need of attention (Bello 2005). One of these sectors was urban planning and the implementation of various improvements to the city's deteriorating urban fabric. Instead, Aquino hoped that privatizing the urban development of Metro Manila would cause foreign and domestic investors to jump at the opportunity to fund new projects for the sake of capital gain. Such an incentive would also allow local bureaucrats, property developers, and the landed elite to work together and support each other in building highly profitable developments.

Eventually, in order for the state to continue playing a pivotal role in the political economy of Metro Manila and the rest of the Philippines, the administration would continue to adhere to market-oriented policies that disproportionately benefited multinational conglomerates. The expansion of private property holdings throughout the region would play a key role in maintaining these public-private relationships (Ortega 2012). The development of property, which by now had become almost entirely directed by corporate interests, would take center stage within the country's economic policy. These strategies would slowly emerge as the foundation for the balikbayan economy, discussed in the next chapter.

The Modern Balikbayan Landscape

Today Metro Manila continues to "become modern." The most apparent traces are vividly conveyed by Metro Manila's ever-transforming landscape. In malls throughout Metro Manila, along with coffee products sold at Starbucks, Coffee Bean, and Seattle's Best, one can also find organically produced body soap at Lush or red velvet sweets at Tea Cake. Franchises that one would see in an upscale mall or neighborhood in the United States

are finding their way into more and more commercial districts throughout Manila. At the same time, the traditional *sari-sari* stores or *karinderias* that once spilled out onto city sidewalks when I was child are becoming increasingly less visible. Commercial and mall developments have replaced most small businesses or pushed them into less frequented spaces on the fringes. Malls have also become intrinsic to the balikbayan landscape throughout Manila. With little public space left, malls have become not only a space of consumption but one of distinction as well. Here, the French flaneur strolling through the streets and plazas of Paris has been replaced by upper-class Filipinos, with shopping bags and *yayas*, or maids, in tow, strolling through malls and attracting the gazes of all those who can only afford to look and enjoy the air-conditioning.

Malls are fundamental to the daily life of Manileños in a way that is incomprehensible to those socialized in the nuclear and individualized ethics driving the disappearance of communal space in America. In the Philippines, the mall *is* the public. Family members “picnic” together in mall restaurants after a busy workday or on the weekends.¹⁵ Malls throughout the Philippines contain churches, clinics, and even schools. And here, too, the working class is confined to separate minoritizing spaces within the mall, where they are forced to congregate and socialize in dimly lit stairwells. For locals and tourists alike, the mall is a destination rather than a pit stop. Commercial districts and giant malls sprouting around Manila have become not only conduits for foreign investment but also a circuit of cultural exchange that is transforming everyday life in the Philippines. The malls have also become the literal backyards of elite high-rise residential buildings. Consequently, Metro Manila has become a disparate patchwork of residential and business condominiums connected by these commercial districts and malls. Some developers have taken this type of enclave development to the extreme by physically attaching condominium buildings to Manila Rapid Transit (MRT) stations. Most MRT stations are already located adjacent to malls or include a type of swapmeet–mall amalgamation. To transfer from the MRT to the light rail transit line, for instance, one must wander through two separate malls. The acronym CBD, for central business district, a particular conglomeration of residential condominiums, corporate offices, and malls that share the same space, has even become integrated into the Manileño vernacular.

Gavin Shatkin (2008) utilizes the concept of “bypass-implant urbanism” to describe a particular component integral to producing this mo-

dernity. His concept conveys the increasing complicity between large developers and governmental partners through the privatization of urban planning. He argues that “in this context of unusually inert and indifferent government, private developers have been granted considerable power to reengineer cities to create new spaces for production and consumption, and to facilitate the flow of people and capital between these spaces, by ‘bypassing’ the congested arteries of the ‘public city’ and ‘implanting’ new spaces for capital accumulation that are designed for consumerism and export-oriented production” (384). Private investment and development facilitate the movement of capital without having to confront the lack of public infrastructure and the corrupt bureaucracy rampant throughout the Philippines; it not only bypasses it but directly depends on its inadequacy. Metro Manila’s built environment is increasingly being produced by bypass-implant urbanism. As a result, not only are private corporations becoming more responsible for producing public spaces in the Philippines, but the ever-expanding multipurpose enclaves and malls they build, and the hypersegregation these elite developments create, are becoming the public.

These sites have become paradigmatic of the balikbayan landscape, not necessarily because they constitute the places where balikbayans actually resettle, but because these modes of elite lifestyle represent the mobility and affluence that is often assumed to adhere to balikbayans. Balikbayans do not often choose to reside in elite enclaves once they return to Manila. And yet these are being built with balikbayans in mind. The *balikbayan landscape*, I argue, should shift our attention away from individual figures and toward the *practices* producing the changes occurring throughout Metro Manila and other regions in the country. While appearing to exude a particular cosmopolitan modernity, these landscapes are actually emblematic of what Julie Chu (2010) calls the “oscillations between the one and the many of modernity, between its singularizing claims as ideology and its heterogeneous configurations as practice” (6).

Global property development attempts to fix a particular ideology of modernity in place by practicing a particular ideology. Yet, while the exterior and shape of these developments may appear to express a particular modern aesthetic, I take them to signal a much larger coherence between global capitalism and state formation. Likewise, I utilize the balikbayan landscape to conceive of return migration and the subsequent transformation of urban centers throughout the Global South as simultaneously

signaling the ambivalence and precarity produced by the friction of this alignment.

This book brings together an interdisciplinary array of voices articulating a critique of the fraught connection between public and private enterprise that is patterning contemporary approaches to economic development throughout the Global South (Rofel 1999). The balikbayan economy, fusing return migration together with global property development, is a result of the convergence between the public and the private. The manner in which a particular cosmopolitan modernity appears to merge itself into the built environment of Manila is characteristic of this moment of urban expansion and becomes productive of the emergent aspirational class of Asians who are now (re)inhabiting intensely developing spaces throughout the globe. Yet, without the circulation of remittances, visits, purchases, and investments by balikbayans, the Philippines would lack a local consumer class to maintain this array of privileged economies. Rather than continuing to compete for foreign investment from Europe, Asia, and, of course, the United States, the Philippine government was able to turn to a new form of mobile capital, the transnational balikbayan. As such, an immense culmination of energy and capital has been drawn together to expand and even generate new investments from balikbayans. Those returning to the Philippines are also tasked with the responsibility for ensuring its future.

Mapping Returns

The complexity binding these tensions together represents the lived materiality of migration and home. Together, remittances, economic policies, public-private partnerships, and investments are the traces of the imaginative laboring produced by Filipinos living and working abroad and *not* merely the products of economic development. As Lieba Faier (2013, 2) argues, “If we can understand how migrants’ experiences and dreams help articulate urban landscapes, we can better see the cultural resonances and gaps through which these landscapes materialize and attune ourselves to some of the ways that their development depends on the making of gendered transnational subjects.” Mapping the routes of Filipino transnationalism and return *through* the development of real estate properties and the subsequent transformation of the country’s landscape necessitates the study of not only physical traces of movement and change but also the imaginings, fantasies, anxieties, and dreams through which they take shape. The

study of this mobility, both its material and affectual conditions, requires a deep attention to multiple geographies and positions.

By the time I began conducting preliminary research for this book in December 2007, the major platform for Filipino media outside of the Philippines, the Filipino Channel, or TFC as it is popularly known, began reporting on a growing number of home foreclosures affecting Filipino families in the United States. These reports mainly focused on families living in California. I focused my initial research on Filipinos residing in the predominantly Filipino-populated Daly City, just bordering San Francisco. At first, I located families affected by the housing crisis simply through the foreclosure signs dotting lawns throughout the city. In the following months, eager to understand where these families would relocate, I conducted interviews in churches, at family parties, in remittance centers, and, most often, in their homes. As my research expanded, family members, friends, and colleagues grew adamant about introducing me to more and more Filipinos who were struggling amid financial insecurity.

Not all of the Filipinos I spoke with were in the midst of losing their homes, but all were vexed by the question of whether they would continue living in America or move back to their homeland. The conversations happened to break down evenly between men and women, probably because my research focus lent itself to Filipino couples who were on the cusp of retirement, were married and had children, and felt at ease with the idea of moving back to the Philippines. As such, while some subjects were beset by financial insecurity exacerbated by the financial crisis, each fit the stereotypical profile of balikbayans. By the time I met them, each subject had sustained a living that allowed them to reside in America for several decades and had secured enough savings during this time to allow them to live comfortably in the Philippines for the majority of the year but to travel back to the United States periodically. Even though the suburbs adjacent to San Francisco were much more affordable during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Filipinos who were capable of remaining in America and settling there were those who were fortunate enough to find jobs in economically stable industries like the postal service or other state employment sectors and, of course, nursing. Many more Filipinos were forced to return to the Philippines shortly after emigrating to the United States.

Concurrently, I had already noticed that a considerable number of Filipino Americans throughout the Bay Area were practicing real estate as an alternative source of income. While conducting research on real estate and

homeownership among Filipino Americans (see Pido 2012), I noticed that several of the realtors I interviewed were consultants for and even contracted with real estate corporations in the Philippines, such as Ayala Land, Megaworld, and other major multinational land developers. Many of these realtors operated temporary booths at major Filipino events like the annual Pistahan festival in San Francisco, handing out flyers next to flat-screen monitors projecting dynamic and colorful images of new developments being built in the Philippines. During my conversations with these realtors, I identified a unique intersection between the housing crisis disproportionately affecting Filipinos in California and the upswing of property investments by Filipino Americans hoping to take advantage of a property boom in the Philippines in the years following the crisis that culminated in 2008. The housing crisis indirectly produced an impetus for many of these Filipinos to retire in the Philippines.

Thus, the research that culminated in this book eventually took place in cities in the United States and the Philippines between June 2008 and January 2011. I followed families moving out of their homes, mainly in Daly City, and met them again as they began the process of resettling throughout neighborhoods and subdivisions in different parts of the larger Metro Manila region. Over the course of living in Manila during this period, for months at a time, I also interviewed a host of Filipinos working for various real estate companies in the city. Their economic backgrounds were diverse. Some were executives for major real estate corporations, who were privileged enough to own units in the most elite and newly built neighborhoods in the city. Many more were poor and were obligated to finance their own expenses, including the costs for traveling each time a potential buyer was interested in seeing a property. Very few of these employees had an office; most floated from mall to mall, handing out glossy flyers with their name and cell phone number stapled to each handout. The economic diversity also determined how I communicated. Both executives and those realtors who were fortunate to work as full-time employees for a firm were often university graduates and preferred to speak to an American in English since it gave them the appearance of being more professional. In contrast, contracted employees, those who floated between multiple agencies without any guaranteed salary, preferred to speak in a mix of Tagalog and English, or Taglish.

The American intellectual preoccupation with and investment in perceiving the Philippines as endemic to U.S. imperialism is not lost on most

Filipinos. They are key to understanding the material impact of return migration to the Philippines in a tangible way and resisting the temptation to disembodied processes within globalization and relegating the desires of immigrants purely to a logic of market capitalism.

Organization of the Book

By tracing the transnational flow of economic and affective labor between the United States and the Philippines, my aim is to intervene in the discourse on globalization and migration and to illustrate the instrumental role of the imagination and its centrality in dictating the continual reshaping of capitalist modernities. Part I utilizes the concept of the balikbayan economy as an analytical tool to conceptualize migration as a process of connectivity rather than a unidirectional movement. In this first part, I outline the architecture of the balikbayan economy and situate its emergence within the larger history of economic development in the Philippines.

Part II illustrates the affective production of imaginative laboring by embodying processes of return. It starts with an examination of the contemporary transnational circulation of real estate development capital and the agents who facilitate these flows (chapter 3). Then my analysis shifts away from the political-economic relationship between the state and multinational corporations to examine the ambivalence and anxieties produced when migrants return to the Philippines (chapters 4 and 5). The final chapters discuss the economic and affective production of exceptional spaces through special retirement zones (chapter 6 and the conclusion), and the ways in which these various returns often sustain and intensify social inequalities within the Philippines (epilogue). This book examines how the logic of movement is not simply governed by attempts to capitalize on economic returns but equally through the active imagining constituted by those migrants who are *actually* returning as well.

Introduction

- 1 All amounts are U.S. dollars unless otherwise indicated.
- 2 Graziano Battistella (2004) explains that the Philippines Overseas Employment Administration maintains records only on *balik-mangagaw*, or “rehires.” These are contracted Filipino laborers who have had their contracts renewed. This creates limitations in calculating a more accurate figure for the actual number of Filipinos who return either temporarily or permanently.
- 3 For Grewal (2005), space is more of a set of logics than a physical place. This fundamental reconceptualization provides an analytical means to move away from U.S.-centered discourses within cultural and ethnic studies and shift toward the examination of processes of imperialism and governmentality. “America” becomes understood as an *idea* that “produced many kinds of agency and diverse subjects as a discourse of neoliberalism making possible struggles for rights through consumerists’ practices and imaginaries that came to be used both inside and outside the territorial boundaries of the United States” (2).
- 4 Vergara (2009, 14–15) pays particular attention to Tölölyan’s quote, “It makes more sense to think of diasporan or diasporic existence as not necessarily involving a physical return but rather a re-turn, a repeated turning to the concept and/or the reality of the homeland and other diasporan kin through memory, written and visual texts, travel, gifts and assistance.”
- 5 Here I am thinking of Lieba Faier’s (2013) use of “affective investments” as a conceptual tool for understanding the dialectical process occurring between larger state projects of economic development and the everyday laboring of individual migrants working overseas.
- 6 The Filipinos were, on the one hand, uniquely skilled and educated so that they were viewed as a desirable pool of migrants who could fill various labor gaps throughout the U.S. economy; on the other hand, many of these migrants were also capable of immigrating to the United States regardless of their lack of skills and education owing to stipulations within the act that allowed family members to be reunited with family who had already settled in various parts of the United

States (Hing 1993; Choy 2003). In fact, the majority of migrants who immigrated to the United States through the Immigration Act of 1965 were permitted to migrate through the family reunification provision. Subsequently, the wave of Filipino immigration after 1965 produced a dual chain of migration to the United States (Liu 1991).

- 7 This literature will be further elaborated in chapter 6.
- 8 According to Robert Seguin's (2001) interpretation of this American amalgamation of classlessness, the middle class in America is both an ideology and a performance: "The middle-class, in this way, becomes accessible to a wide range of individuals as long as they possess certain signifiers of cultural capital . . . a social-semantic structure capable of a range of investments, and supporting a range of practices and beliefs" (3–4). See Pido (2012).
- 9 Gmelch (1980), one of the first scholars to analyze return migration, situates contemporary forms of return migration within patterns of European migration before the turn of the twentieth century. He defined return migration as "the movement of emigrants back to their homelands to resettle" (135). Recently, more scholars, especially in the field of anthropology, have complicated and even contested the characterization of return as a final point within patterns of migration. See, for example, Long and Oxfeld (2004) and Markowitz and Stefansson (2004). Few scholars have explored return migration using an ethnographic approach, but see Smith (2002) and Xiang et al. (2013).
- 10 Arnisson Andre C. Ortega (2012) examines the case of suburban developments in Canlubang as a means to illustrate occurrences of "actually existing neoliberalism." He is relying on Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore's (2002) particular conceptualization of neoliberal policies and projects, which attempts to explain how the role of city government diminishes and becomes replaced by public-private relations and market-oriented development.
- 11 For more on these public-private partnerships, see Hackworth (2006) and Ortega (2016) in relation to city planning in the Philippines.
- 12 The official number is from the U.S. Census, but other reports list up to 4 million. See *Fact Sheet: U.S. Bilateral Relations with the Philippines* (April 28, 2014), U.S. Department of State. These calculations do not include the significant numbers of undocumented Filipinos living in the United States.
- 13 For a philosophical treatment of the emergence of the idea of the modern and modernity, see Latour (1993).
- 14 For a discussion on the cultural significance of Manila's highways, see Tadiar (2004). Virilio (2006) uses the metaphor of "vectors" to argue that contemporary technologies have redefined geographic spaces and normal time to the detriment of human rights and well-being.
- 15 Some Filipinos literally picnic at the mall. In the concrete pavilion adjacent to SM Mall of Asia, one of the largest malls in the country, families often lay picnic blankets on the cement floor and eat together.