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**Yen Le Espiritu,
Homebound**

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Cabalquinto's masterly attainment of those ideals—and that in a borrowed tongue.

Moon over Magarao represents a lifetime's work of poetry, and a fine summation it is, deserving a high place in the library of Filipino poetry in English and the emergent discourse of Filipino-American literature.

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Yen Le Espiritu, **Homebound: Filipino-American Lives across Cultures, Communities, and Countries**. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2003. 271 pages.

The Filipinos' long history with the United States and the desire to know more about Filipinos who left for the U.S. is perhaps the reason behind the abundance of literature on Filipino-Americans. Much of the literature has focused on history, identity, and decolonization. While this book also provides a background on the history of emigration to the U.S., it differs from previous literature in its exploration of the ways by which Filipino-Americans in San Diego, California, have made a home for themselves "amid constant dislocation, migration, and endless assault" (21). Drawing from in-depth interviews of both first- and second-generation Filipino-Americans in San Diego, as well as statistical data, Espiritu's book tells of how these Filipino-Americans manage to transcend boundaries and create homes across countries and cultures. The book then, while situating homemaking within the context of history and the social, political, and economic order of the U.S., also looks at Filipino-Americans as active agents and shapers of identity and the home.

Espiritu utilizes transnationalism in her discussion of homemaking; that is, despite the idea of permanence behind each settlement in the U.S., constructions of home and identity are intrinsically linked to the

memory of the country of origin and to family ties. Immigrants of color do not quite "fit in" U.S. society. Colonization, U.S. imperialism, and the Americanization of the Philippines have constructed a "gendered" and "racialized" people. Such racialization followed the immigrants to the United States, where they have been accepted only insofar as they remain subordinate. This is reflected in the nature of the Filipino-American community in San Diego. Many of the early settlers were members of the Navy. Regardless of educational background, these Filipinos were relegated to lower positions or to domestic service work in the Navy, which also meant being segregated to the poorer areas in San Diego. And while post-1965 immigrants have included mostly health-care professionals who have been able to reside in middle class neighborhoods, "differential inclusion" has prevailed. Espiritu then argues that transnationalism has become a form of resistance against the dominant order and the racial categories imposed by U.S. society on Filipino-Americans.

Espiritu defines home as not just a "physical place . . . but also a concept and desire" (10). The title of the book itself signifies the transnational aspects of home, suggesting both the restrictions of a physical place and perhaps the permanence of settlement in the US, as well as a journey home. It is in this construction of home that Filipino-Americans make use of transnational capital to push away borders, challenge institutions, laws, and practices that racialize them, and rise above the homelessness they experience in the form of the lack of political, economic, and social power.

Throughout the book Espiritu shows how actual and symbolic transnational activities emerge in the immigrants' homemaking strategies. Actual transnational activities consist of visits to the home country, remittances, and plans of retirement in the Philippines. When immigrants visit or send money to relatives in the Philippines, for instance, they are given a big welcome or heaped with admiration for "making it" in the U.S. This allows them to reclaim a status denied them as Filipino-Americans. Espiritu notes that the process may inadvertently reinforce the notion of U.S. superiority and fire the desire of those still in the Philippines to migrate.

More evident among the immigrants is symbolic transnationalism—the memorialization of the homeland, “invented traditions,” and the reproduction of culture. *Espiritu* associates community-building with homemaking. In forming ties with other Filipino-Americans, and in the staging of culture through organizational activities, Filipino-Americans recreate a part of the Philippines. Even though Filipino-Americans have become increasingly divided geographically and along class lines especially after 1965, they still consider the bond they have with one another and their organizations as important in helping them secure a place in U.S. society. Symbolic transnationalism is most manifest, however, in the relationship between parents and daughters. For Filipino-Americans, one way of rising above subjugation is through the assertion of “moral superiority,” which entails maintaining the traditional family system and restricting daughters’ relations with men. Filipino women are given the responsibility of “holding the cultural line . . . and marking cultural difference” (172). Hence, their actions are severely regulated, much more so than those of the men, so that they may be differentiated from American women who are conceived as “immoral.” *Espiritu* warns, though, that the assertion of cultural superiority reinforces patriarchy in its promotion of the “ideal” Filipina and its control of women’s sexual activities.

One of the merits of the book is *Espiritu*’s assertion that immigration should not be seen as a problem. Attempts to document the lives of immigrants have usually centered on the management of ethnic relations, accommodation issues, abuse, and the like, and rightly so for these are indeed important issues attendant to immigration. However, *Espiritu* says that immigration should be conceptualized “not as a site for assessing the acceptability of the immigrants, but as a site for critiquing state claims of liberal democracy and cultural inclusion” (218). *Espiritu* states that focusing on immigration as a problem masks the host country’s complicity in bringing in immigrants and stereotypes immigrants as calculating. Migration of Filipinos to the U.S., for instance, is linked to U.S. policies beginning at the time of colonization. Such policies—in education, recruitment—made Filipinos want to go to America, where they found that they remained racialized and gendered,

with very little power. This challenges the claims of the U.S. as an open and multicultural society. Espiritu does not extend the argument further, but she shows that, far from being liabilities, Filipino-Americans actively work within the space they are given. This has been especially true for second-generation Filipino-Americans who have constructed identities that look to both the United States (their home) and the Philippines (their symbolic home).

Espiritu's discussion of homemaking and identity construction in the light of the immigrants' hopes, aspirations, and experiences, while not totally disregarding structure, is very timely now that more and more Filipinos are scattered across the globe. Locating the self at the core of the immigration process is especially relevant in understanding how migrants try to make sense of what it means to be Filipinos outside of the Philippines or Filipinos by ethnicity.

In terms of style, the book incorporates lengthy excerpts from interviews, as well as immigrant narratives, which vividly illustrate the claims made. In its attempt to discuss a variety of topics (family relationships, household labor arrangements), however, Espiritu's book becomes merely a community study similar to previous literature on Filipino-Americans, and she loses focus on what I think is the main theme, that is, homemaking as resistance. Nevertheless, the book offers fresh insights into the lives of an excessively studied group of people and is a most welcome addition to diaspora literature. Scholars on the diaspora can further explore Espiritu's ideas on resistance and immigration, applying these to other diasporic peoples around the world. Filipino readers might gain sympathy or admiration for friends and relatives in the U.S. upon learning of the struggles of Filipino-Americans in making a home for themselves in a country that has not made them feel "at home."

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